

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# GREECE: AUTHORITIES MUST ENSURE THAT PUBLIC SPENDING IN HEALTH CARE IN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT EFFECTIVELY RESPONDS TO THE CRISIS

In May 2020, a [study published](#) on the COVID-19 Health System Response Monitor platform, (a platform published by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the European Commission and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies) published data on how much additional money countries in Europe were spending on their health systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. As expected, there was a huge variation in spending across countries. However, statistics regarding Greece were concerning. Greece only spent an additional \$26 per person on health (Lithuania, which was the highest, reported spent an additional \$386). The additional funding amounted to 1.9% of Greece's total government expenditure on health, which is lower than the European average of 3%. As the study highlights, "There is no right amount of health spending to combat COVID-19" – the amount of additional funding required varies according to the prior state of the health system, the needs of the country and scale of the crisis, and other sources of financing (such as international financial assistance). For example, in the case of Greece, the study highlights how government spending was supplemented by private donations to health care. However, this early data is an indication of how governments are prioritizing health systems at this crucial time and a reminder for governments to assess their additional spending on their health systems.

Greece's public health system has already been weakened by a decade of austerity measures, following the economic crisis that started in 2008. In April 2020, Amnesty International published a report – "[Resuscitation Required](#)" – on the impact of austerity measures on the health system in Greece. Based on comprehensive desk-research and interviews with over 210 people – including those using the public health system, health workers, public health experts, and government representatives – this report found that the austerity measures have eroded the accessibility and affordability of health care in Greece, with many people finding it harder to afford health care and access the public health system when they need to, increased the burden on health workers, and that the impact of these measures continued a decade after many of them were introduced. Given the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the report highlighted the need to urgently support and resource Greece's health and social sectors at this key moment. While currently Greece appears to have had more success in containing the pandemic than other countries in Europe, it is crucial for the government of Greece to adequately resource its health system.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a health, economic and social crisis, and its impacts may resonate for months and years to come. Now, more than ever, there is a need to ensure that the public health system in Greece is adequately resourced and able to respond to this challenge. Necessary investments in health care, the social sector, and people's livelihoods at this time should be the foundation of recovery from this crisis. Greece has ratified a range of international and regional human rights law treaties that require the right to health to be respected, protected and fulfilled. The government has an obligation to put in place measures to protect people's health and livelihoods during this crisis. It further has an obligation to progressively realise the right to health, and to make sure that all persons can access their right to health, as well as other human rights, free from discrimination.

Amnesty International is calling on the Government of Greece, as a matter of urgency, to:

- o Conduct an urgent assessment of its fiscal and administrative capacity to effectively respond to the pandemic including in terms of health care, social security and essential infrastructure like emergency accommodation and access to water and sanitation for people who are homeless and living in inadequate housing to help protect them from COVID-19.
- o Ensure that public spending in key sectors in the COVID-19 context like healthcare and social security is adjusted and adequate to effectively respond to the crisis and protect human rights.
- o As part of its efforts to use the maximum available resources for fulfilling the right to health, immediately request assistance from the international community for where it sees gaps or may be unable to guarantee necessary protections.