

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL ORAL STATEMENT TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE ON THE OCCASION OF THE REVIEW OF GREECE

21 October 2024

AI Index: EUR 25/8633/2024

-CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY-

Honorable Committee members,

Amnesty International welcomes the opportunity to engage with the Committee ahead of its review of Greece. Despite its obligations under the Covenant, human rights violations in Greece persist in relation to issues such as the treatment of aliens, freedom of assembly and freedom of association, non-discrimination, the right to fair trial and freedom of religion and belief.ⁱ

There are continued reports of unlawful forced returns ('pushbacks') and other abuses against refugees and migrants at Greece's borders and concerns exist about the authorities' failure to conduct effective investigations.ⁱⁱ Survivors of a shipwreck in June 2023, in which more than 600 people died, blamed the Greek authorities for causing the incident and reported shortcomings in rescue efforts.ⁱⁱⁱ While the domestic investigation into the actions of the authorities has been pending for over a year, the rapid arrest and prosecution of nine survivors of the shipwreck raised fair trial concerns. They were accused of causing the shipwreck and other charges but were acquitted in May 2024.^{iv}

On the Aegean islands, reception conditions of asylum-seekers have become more restrictive as open camps have been replaced with EU-funded "Closed Controlled Access Centres" (CCAC). Amnesty International's research published in July 2024 documented how people seeking asylum in one of these centres on the island of Samos are held in conditions amounting to systematic and unlawful deprivation of their liberty, as a result of a law allowing for "restrictions of freedom" in the centre, and faced serious shortcomings in the provision of medical services and running water.^v Meanwhile, human rights defenders continue to face criminalization for their work with refugees and migrants.^{vi}

Reports of unnecessary and excessive use of force by police against protestors and journalists, including police misusing less lethal weapons persisted during the period under review while simultaneously several provisions in the legislation regulating protests introduced in 2020 remain a cause of concern as they constitute an unjustified interference with the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.^{vii}

In a positive step in February 2024, the Greek Parliament passed a law legalizing same-sex marriage, although failure to address some further gaps in the legal framework leaves LGBTI persons, including transgender people and their children at ongoing risk of discrimination.^{viii}

Finally, persistent violations of Greece's obligations towards conscientious objectors to military service remain unaddressed including the punitive and discriminatory alternative civilian service and concerns about the procedure to obtain conscientious objector status.^{ix}

Amnesty International calls on the Greek authorities to:

1. Immediately halt all violations of human rights, including unlawful forced returns and other illegal practices during migration operations at borders and urgently carry out effective and independent investigations into all these cases.
2. Repeal the legislation allowing for "restrictions of freedom", and halt any practice resulting in people being de facto detained in the CCAC in the absence of legal basis and refrain from introducing any such practice in the future.
3. Halt the criminalization of individuals and groups working with refugees and migrants.
4. Amend legislation on public outdoor assemblies and bring it in line with Greece's obligations under international human rights law.

5. Amend legislation on legal recognition of gender identity to ensure transgender people's and their children's right to privacy and their well-being.

6. Transfer the procedure of examination of applications for conscientious objector status under the full control of civilian authorities, by a panel with a wholly civilian composition.

ⁱ Greece: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee, 142nd session, 14 October-7 November, Ahead of the examination of Greece's State party's report, 16 September 2024, Index Number: EUR 25/8525/2024.

ⁱⁱ For details see: Amnesty International, Greece: Violence, lies, and pushbacks – Refugees and migrants still denied safety and asylum at Europe's borders, 23 June 2021, Index Number: EUR 25/4307/2021, at: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/4307/2021/en/; GNCHR, Recording Mechanism of incidents of informal forced returns, Annual Report 2022, December 2023, www.nchr.gr/images/pdf/RecMechanism/Annual_Report_2022_compressed_1.pdf, and GNCHR, Recording Mechanism of incidents of informal forced returns, Interim Report, January 2023, www.nchr.gr/images/pdf/nea_epikairothta/deltia_tupou/2023/Interim_Report_Mechanism_en.pdf; Amnesty International and others, Joint NGO Statement: No monitoring of fundamental rights violations in Greece without independent and effective mechanisms, 21 June 2023, www.amnesty.eu/news/joint-ngo-statement-no-monitoring-of-fundamental-rights-violations-in-greece-without-independent-and-effective-mechanisms/.

ⁱⁱⁱ Greece: 6 Months On, No Justice for Pylos Shipwreck, 14 December 2023, Index Number: EUR 25/7518/2023, www.amnesty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/12dec-Embargoed-AI-HRW-Pylos-Briefing-EUR_2575182023eng.pdf.

^{iv} Greece: Trial of Pylos shipwreck survivors must not be a shield in the investigation of the alleged responsibilities of the Greek authorities', Joint Press Release, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, 17 May 2024, <https://bit/4hzmzMC>

^v Amnesty International, Greece: Samos: "We feel in prison on the island": Unlawful detention and sub-standard conditions in an EU-funded refugee centre, 30 July 2024, Index Number: EUR 25/8356/2024, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/8356/2024/en/.

^{vi} Amnesty International, Annual Report 2023/2024, Human Rights in Greece, www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/western-central-and-south-eastern-europe/greece/.

^{vii} Amnesty International, Greece: Freedom of Assembly at Risk and Unlawful Use of Force in the Era of COVID-19 Index Number: EUR 25/4399/2021), 14 July 2021, <https://bit.ly/3EMKfFy>; Amnesty International, Under Protected and Over restricted - The State of the Right to Protest in 21 European Countries, July 2024, Index Number: EUR 01/8199/2024, <https://bit.ly/3Tcqhwy>.

^{viii} Amnesty International, Greece: Marriage equality bill is an emblematic step but further changes are required to ensure true equality for LGBTQI+ persons, Index Number: EUR 25/7656/2024, 1 February 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/7656/2024/en/>;

^{ix} Greece: Give Charis Vasileiou and Nikolas Stefanidis a Fair Examination of Their Grounds for Conscientious Objection under an Amended Legislative Framework in Line with International Law and Standards, March 2022, Index Number: EUR 25/5374/2022, <https://bit.ly/3ASLmpn>; Amnesty International, Annual Report 2023/2024.