

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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GREECE: FINES FOR OVER 60 REFUSING COMPULSORY VACCINATION LIKELY TO DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECT THE POOREST

Amnesty International is concerned about the punitive and discriminatory nature of a fine of 100 Euro per month which will be imposed on people over 60 if they do not comply with compulsory vaccination for COVID-19, following the adoption of a legal provision by the Greek Parliament last week. Such a heavy fine is likely to disproportionately affect the poorest members of society for whom paying 100 Euro a month would be completely unaffordable. Consequently, such a sanction could act as a disproportionate restriction on people's right to freely consent to vaccines.

Amnesty International urges the Greek authorities to rethink this response and find other ways of increasing vaccine take up. This means the authorities ensure that they exhaust all other options such as targeted public health information on the benefits of COVID-19 vaccines and countering misinformation, as well as making sure that everybody can readily access health services including those in the most marginalized situations, whilst strengthening the national health system both in terms of quality and inclusivity.

According to a November 2021 Report by the Hellenic Statistical Authority, 28,9 % of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2020 which is among the highest among EU countries; and 28.2% of those over 65 faced material deprivation.

Amnesty International notes that for all medical interventions, including vaccination, States must ensure that individuals can exercise their right to free and informed consent. In this context, the authorities must provide accurate and comprehensive information, accessible to all people, on the necessity and effectiveness of vaccination, in line with the right to information as an integral part of the right to health and the key role it plays in safeguarding public health.

Compulsory vaccination programmes should be the very last resort, following the exhaustion of all other alternatives, whilst also ensuring that restriction of the exercise of rights must be done on the basis of necessity and proportionality, and should be targeted and limited in time.

Measures for mandatory implementation of medical procedures that do not meet these conditions can violate human rights and be discriminatory on social or ethnic grounds. In particular, as in this case, the imposition of a heavy fine as a sanction for non-compliance with a mandatory medical act will likely disproportionately affect the poorest and most marginalized members of Greek society

BACKGROUND

On 1st December 2021, the Greek Parliament passed a law that includes a provision (Article 24 of Law 4865/2021) that makes the COVID-19 vaccination compulsory for all people over 60 that live or are habitually resident in Greece. Individuals not complying with the obligation of compulsory vaccination will be handed an administrative fine of 100 Euro per month. Individuals exempted include those who have been tested positive for COVID-19 for a period of 180 days since the day they became ill; and people who have proven health reasons - such as serious cases of autism and epilepsy - that prevent them from being vaccinated as provided in a Joint Ministerial Decision of 13 August 2021.