

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Greece

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World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) is the largest global network of organisations dedicated to ending torture, combating impunity, and protecting human rights defenders. Working with 200 member organisations in over 90 countries, OMCT provides support to victims and safeguards those at risk. It is part of the European Union's Human Rights Defenders Mechanism (ProtectDefenders.eu) and the United Against Torture Consortium. OMCT also provides a comprehensive and holistic system of support and protection for human rights defenders.

Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), founded in 1993, monitors, publishes, lobbies, and litigates on human and minority rights and anti-discrimination issues in Greece and in the Balkans region. It also monitors Greek and, when opportunity arises, Balkan media for stereotypes and hate speech. It issues press releases and prepares (usually jointly with other NGOs) detailed annual reports. It has been submitting parallel reports and communications to the UN Treaty Bodies; applications and third party interventions to the ECtHR; communications on the execution of ECtHR judgments to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. It also publishes specialized reports on ill-treatment and on ethno-national, ethno-linguistic, religious and immigrant communities, in Greece and in other Balkan countries. It operates a [website](#), a specialized [website on racist crimes](#) in Greece, and a [Facebook page](#) covering human rights issues and comprehensive and comparable presentations of minorities in the Balkan region.

Introduction

1. This submission has been prepared jointly by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) for the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Greece considered at the 53rd session of the UPR Working Group in 2026. The report covers the period from 2023 to 2026 and examines the government of Greece's compliance with its international human rights obligations, especially in relation to the right to defend human rights and the treatment of migrants' right defenders, presenting the persecution of Panayote Dimitras as an illustrative case.

2. During the third cycle of the UPR in 2021,¹ Greece presented a legal and institutional framework for human rights protection, focusing on anti - discrimination, migration management, and justice reforms. However, the main concerns related to civic space and harassment of human rights defenders that were raised within the third UPR cycle period², in particular by UN Committee against Torture³ and UN Special Procedures⁴ remain valid. There is no positive tendency observed in this sphere, on the contrary, the cases described below illustrate how legal proceedings are used to discourage defending rights of migrants.

3. This report draws on comprehensive desk research, monitoring and interviews held with Panayote Dimitras in 2023- 2026. Panayote Dimitras is the co-founder and spokesperson of the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) - an NGO engaged in the protection of human and minority rights and the fight against discrimination in Greece, and a member of OMCT's SOS Torture Network.

General Context

4. Greece's position at the southeastern border of the European Union has made it a primary entry point for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers crossing from Turkey and North Africa. As of mid-2025 it hosts more than 160,000 refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people.⁵

¹ Human Rights Council, National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21, Greece, Report A/HRC/WG.6/39/GRC/1, 11 August 2021, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/WG.6/39/GRC/1>

² Human Rights Council, Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Compilation on Greece, 12 August 2021, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/WG.6/39/GRC/2>, para 26; Human Rights Council Forty-ninth session, Universal Periodic Review, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Greece, 6 January 2022, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/49/5>

³ UN Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations on the seventh periodic report of Greece, CAT/C/GRC/CO/7, 2 September 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/concluding-observations/catcgrco7-concluding-observations-seventh-periodic-report-greece>

⁴ UN Special Procedures, Letter to the Greek authorities, 31 March 2021, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26314>, UN Special Procedures, Greece: Rights violations against asylum-seekers at Turkey-Greece border must stop, 23 March 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/03/greece-rights-violations-against-asylum-seekers-turkey-greece-border-must?LangID=E&NewsID=25736>

⁵ HIAS, Refugees in Greece: What You Need to Know, December 29, 2025, <https://hias.org/news/refugees-greece-what-you-need-know/>

Arrivals have grown sharply throughout the review period: in 2023, 41,561 refugees and migrants arrived by sea and 7,160 by land, representing a 159% increase compared to 2022, while the number of people reported dead or missing — 799 — more than doubled compared to the previous year, largely due to the devastating Pylos shipwreck of June 2023.⁶ In 2024, 62,119 irregular arrivals were recorded, a further 14.2% increase, with at least 125 people reported dead or missing at sea.⁷

5. The Greek government's approach to migration during this period has been characterised by a hardening of policy of border security and deterrence rather than protection. The practice of pushbacks — the summary, extrajudicial return of migrants and asylum seekers to Turkey without any individual assessment — accompanied by other human rights violations and abuses has been extensively documented throughout this period and constitutes one of the most serious and persistent human rights violations at Greece's borders. According to the Aegean Boat Report 2023, approximately 25,855 people were illegally pushed back by Greek authorities.⁸ UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, have urged Greece to take steps to ensure a transparent and impartial investigation into allegations of violations of the principles of non-refoulement and non-discrimination and of the right to life involving Greek law enforcement personnel.⁹ In January 2025, the European Court of Human Rights delivered a landmark ruling, unanimously confirming Greece's systematic practice of pushbacks of third-country nationals from the Evros region back to Turkey.¹⁰

6. Accountability at the national level for these violations has remained almost entirely absent. The Greek National Transparency Authority made no public investigations or recommendations on pushbacks in 2024, while Frontex's Fundamental Rights Officer recommended in 2022 and 2023 to suspend the agency's operations in Greece due to strong indications of persisting fundamental rights violations of a serious nature.¹¹

7. It should also be noted that people on the move that managed to reach Greece also face particular challenges. Since their regularisation takes time, in the meantime, they are exposed to different forms of exploitation (including economical). Even when they obtain the official

⁶ ECRE, AIDA Country Report on Greece – 2023 Update, 25 June, 2024, <https://ecre.org/aida-country-report-on-greece-2023-update/>

⁷ ECRE, AIDA Country Report on Greece – Update on 2024, 18 September, 2025 <https://ecre.org/aida-country-report-on-greece-update-on-2024/>

⁸ Aegean Boat Report, Yearly Archives 2023, <https://aegeanboatreport.com/2023/>

⁹ UN Special Procedures, Greece: UN experts call for safe, impartial border policies and practices, 23 August 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/08/greece-un-experts-call-safe-impartial-border-policies-and-practices>

¹⁰ ECtHR, A.R.E. v Greece, Application no. 15783/12, Judgement, 7 January 2025, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/?i=001-243431>; ECtHR, G.R.J. v Greece, Application no. 15067/21, Judgement, 3 December 2024, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/?i=001-243431>

¹¹ Frontex, 2023 Annual Report of the Frontex Fundamental Rights Officer of Frontex, 2024, https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/FRO_Reports/The_Fundamental_Rights_Officer_Annual_Report_2023.pdf

documents, they may face difficulties finding work, decent accommodation, etc., which affects their psychosocial wellbeing and mental health to a great extent. Moreover, beneficiaries of asylum continue to face administrative barriers even after recognition. For example, facing delays in issuing or renewing residence permits or circular requirements that prevent many from obtaining tax or social security numbers, limiting their access to work and healthcare, and ultimately the ability to exercise their rights.¹² In 2026 the Ministry of Migration and Asylum decided to reexamine thousands of asylum cases to assess whether the asylum status should be maintained. Following this review, the government has announced plans to withdraw over 1,000 asylum permits by mid-2026, representing an unprecedented number of revocations.¹³

8. Against this backdrop, Greece has also witnessed a marked deterioration in the rule of law and democratic standards affecting civil society more broadly. The persistent rule of law challenges stemming from state interference with media freedom, state-ordered surveillance of journalists, and a hostile environment for human rights defenders are observed.¹⁴ The European Commission's annual Rule of Law Reports for 2023, 2024, and 2025 have consistently flagged concerns about civic space in Greece, highlighting smear campaigns targeting individuals defending human rights, cumbersome NGO registration procedures, and undue pressure on journalists.¹⁵ The Greek National Commission for Human Rights has itself repeatedly highlighted the need to protect human rights defenders and to ensure an enabling environment for civil society organizations, noting in 2024 the deterioration of the situation of human rights defenders in Greece, particularly those active in the field of asylum and migration.¹⁶

9. As alerted by the Observatory, including in a statement from September 2025¹⁷, Greek civil society organisations, and migrants' rights organisations in particular, have been under pressure from public authorities. On the one hand, authorities have developed an extremely hostile narrative towards these organisations, labelling them as 'political opponents' who 'endanger the sovereignty of the State', reinforced by defamatory press articles repeating this narrative. On the other hand, authorities have developed an increasingly restrictive regulatory framework targeting these organisations.

¹² Refugee Support Aegean and Stiftung Pro Asyl. Recognised Refugees in Greece 2025. Beneficiaries of international protection in Greece. Access to documents and socio-economic rights, 7 April 2025. <https://rsaegean.org/en/recognised-refugees-in-greece-2025/>

¹³ Greek City Times, Greece Revokes Thousands of Asylum Applications After Review, 5 March, 2026, <https://greekcitytimes.com/2026/03/05/greece-revokes-thousands-of-asylum-applications-after-review/>

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025 - Greece (Events of 2024), 16 January 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/greece>

¹⁵ European Commission, Annual Rule of Law Cycle, Rule of Law reports, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/annual-rule-law-cycle_en

¹⁶ GNCHR Statement on Human Rights Defenders Working on Migration and Refugee Issues, 22 April 2024, <https://www.nchr.gr/ta-nea-mas/1743-dilosi-eeda-gia-tous-yperaspistes-anthropinon-dikaiomaton-pou-drastiriopoiyntai-sto-prosfygiko-metanasteftiko.html>

¹⁷ The Observatory, Greece: Government systematic constraints and politically motivated accusations against migrants rights NGOs must end! 25 September 2025 <https://preview.mailerlite.com/y2w5k4w1t0>

The NGO Registry, introduced in 2020 by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, established a mandatory registration system as a prerequisite for any organization wishing to operate in reception facilities or engage with public authorities. The introduction of these cumbersome registration procedures led to a drastic decrease in NGOs operating in the Aegean islands and prevented many of those previously carrying out search and rescue operations from taking to the sea.¹⁸ Despite five years of sustained recommendations from the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and UN Special Procedures to reform this framework, the Greek government has moved in the opposite direction, progressively tightening conditions rather than relaxing them. At the same time, Greek authorities have threatened to remove NGOs from the official registry of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum¹⁹, in ways that undermine the operational capacities of organisations legitimately challenging government migration policies through legal channels, such as by assisting migrants and asylum seekers. According to media reports,²⁰ the government's plans to remove NGOs working on migration from the official registry if they oppose state migration policies, challenge decisions, such as detention, asylum suspensions, or misuse funds. While deregistration would not force NGOs to close, it would block their access to state facilities hosting people on the move.

Treatment of Migrants' Rights Defenders

10. The period under review has been characterised by an intensifying pattern of pressure against human rights defenders working on migration in Greece, combining criminal prosecution, administrative harassment, smear campaigns, and restrictive regulation. In March 2023, CIVICUS, the global civil society monitor, downgraded civic space in Greece from "narrowed" to "obstructed" on account of the repeated targeting of civil society and activists working with refugees and asylum seekers, disproportionate responses to protests, and continuous legal harassment and surveillance of journalists.²¹ The same pattern has been highlighted in the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders following her visit to Greece in June 2022, stating that human rights defenders promoting and protecting the rights of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees in the country, including human rights lawyers, humanitarian workers, volunteers and journalists, have been subjected to smear campaigns, a changing regulatory environment, threats and attacks and the misuse of criminal law against them to a shocking degree.²²

¹⁸ Council of Europe - Commissioner for Human Rights, Memorandum on migration and border control, following the Commissioner's visit to Greece from 3 to 7 February 2025, 17 April 2025,

<https://rm.coe.int/memorandum-on-greece-on-migration-and-border-control-following-visit-t/1680b5a661>

¹⁹ Refugee Support Aegean, The unlawful suspension of access to asylum in Greece must be immediately withdrawn, 16 July 2025 <https://rsaegean.org/en/withdraw-the-unlawful-suspension-access-asylum-greece-2025/>

²⁰ Kathimerin: Greek Newspaper, Greece to tighten rules on NGOs, 21 August, 2025,

<https://www.ekathimerini.com/politics/1278552/greece-to-tighten-rules-on-ngos/>

²¹ CIVICUS Monitor, Greece, n.d.,

<https://monitor.civicus.org/country/greece/>

²² Human Rights Council, Visit to Greece - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, Report A/HRC/52/29/Add.1, 2 March 2023,

11. The misuse of criminal law has been the most visible and damaging tool deployed against migrants' rights defenders. Loose and broadly interpreted anti-smuggling provisions — which, unlike the standard set by the Palermo Protocol, do not require proof of financial gain as an element of the offence — have enabled prosecutions of individuals for activities that constitute humanitarian assistance or legitimate human rights work. In 2023 alone, at least 31 people in Greece faced judicial proceedings for acting in solidarity with migrants, according to monitoring by PICUM.²³ The consequences of such proceedings extend well beyond their legal outcome: whether accused are acquitted or not, trials carry heavy consequences for their finances, personal lives, and psychological wellbeing.²⁴ The most emblematic of these cases is that of 24 humanitarian workers from the organisation Emergency Response Centre International, who were targeted with misdemeanour charges, including espionage and forgery, in connection with their 2018 search and rescue activities in the Aegean Sea. Described in a European Parliament report as "the largest case of criminalization of solidarity in Europe," the felony trial began in December 2025, with defendants facing potential sentences of up to 20 years in prison — seven years after the events in question and despite the defendants having already been acquitted of misdemeanour charges in the same case in 2024.²⁵ On 15 January 2026, the 24 accused rescuers and volunteers were finally acquitted by the criminal court.²⁶ Beyond individual prosecutions, defenders have faced a range of other forms of harassment and retaliation. Individuals and organisations working on migrants' and refugees' have reportedly faced harassment and stigmatisation, including smear campaigns and negative public statements by government officials portraying them as "undermining national interests" or "obstructing governmental work". Journalists who counter the government's narrative on the management of migration flows are often under pressure and lack access to mainstream media outlets.²⁷

13. The regulatory framework governing civil society organizations has functioned as a parallel mechanism of control and exclusion. The mandatory NGO Registry, in place since 2020, has imposed complex, costly, and intrusive requirements that disproportionately burden smaller organizations. Failure to register on the Registry bars NGOs from seeking state or EU funding and from performing any activity inside facilities managed by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, while the registration process involves complex, costly, and intrusive documentation

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/52/29/Add.1>

²³ INFOMIGRANTS, Criminal charges against migrant rights defenders rising, NGO finds, 9 April, 2024, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/56336/criminal-charges-against-migrant-rights-defenders-rising-ngo-finds>

²⁴ INFOMIGRANTS, Criminal charges against migrant rights defenders rising, NGO finds, 9 April, 2024, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/56336/criminal-charges-against-migrant-rights-defenders-rising-ngo-finds>

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2026 - Greece , 4 February, 2026,

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/greece>

²⁶ HIAS, ERCI Case: Acquittal of Volunteers and Rescuers – A Victory for the Rule of Law and Solidarity, 15 January, 2026, <https://hias.org/statements/erci-case-acquittal-volunteers-and-rescuers-victory-rule-law-and-solidarity/>

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023 - Greece , 20 January, 2023,

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/greece>

requirements including personal data of members and staff.²⁸ The government has shown no willingness to reform this framework in response to sustained international criticism; on the contrary, legislative developments in late 2025 and early 2026 have dramatically escalated its severity. A bill on "Promotion of legal migration policies, integration of Directive (EU) 2024/1233 on a single application procedure for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State, amendments to the Immigration Code and other provisions"²⁹ introduced in January 2026, would make membership in an NGO an aggravating factor for several existing offences, imposing a minimum of ten years in prison and a €50,000 fine for NGO members found guilty of facilitating irregular entry in or exit from the country, and would allow the Migration Minister to remove an organization from the official registry based solely on a criminal prosecution against a member — without a conviction.³⁰

14. The most recent situation of persecution of a migrants' rights defender is the transnational persecution of Tommy Olsen, a Norwegian human rights defender and founder of the NGO Aegean Boat Report. On 16 March 2026, Tommy Olsen was arrested by the Norwegian police in Tromsø in execution of a European arrest warrant (EAW) following an investigation initiated in 2022 by the Greek authorities. On the same day, the Byretten City Court ruled that Mr Olsen would be extradited to Greece, and he was remanded in custody in Tromsø prison. His defence lawyer appealed the extradition ruling and his detention to the Hålogaland Court of Appeals and on 20 March 2026, Mr Olsen was released, but he still faces extradition. Olsen's appeals trial against the EAW is scheduled for 21 April 2026. If extradited to Greece, Mr Olsen could face prolonged pretrial detention of up to 18 months, as well as a potential prison sentence of up to 15 years, on charges that constitute a reprisal for his legitimate human rights activities.³¹

Persecution of Panayote Dimitras

15. Panayote Dimitras is the co-founder and spokesperson of the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), a leading human rights organisation active since 1993 in documenting racism, discrimination, and violations of the rights of migrants, asylum seekers, and minorities in

²⁸ UN SR Human Rights Defenders, Greece: analysis of the new law on migration and its impact on HRDs supporting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, 24 February 2026, <https://srdefenders.org/greece-analysis-of-the-new-law-on-migration-and-its-impact-on-hrds-supporting-migrants-refugees-and-asylum-seekers/>

²⁹ Hellenic Parliament, ΣΧΕΔΙΟ ΝΟΜΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟΥ ΜΕΤΑΝΑΣΤΕΥΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΣΥΛΟΥ ΜΕ ΤΙΤΛΟ «Προώθηση πολιτικών νόμιμης μετανάστευσης, ενσωμάτωση της Οδηγίας (ΕΕ) 2024/1233 σχετικά με ενιαία διαδικασία υποβολής αίτησης για τη χορήγηση στους υπηκόους τρίτων χωρών, ενιαίας άδειας διαμονής και εργασίας στην επικράτεια κράτους μέλους και σχετικά με κοινό σύνολο δικαιωμάτων για τους εργαζομένους από τρίτες χώρες που διαμένουν νομίμως σε κράτος μέλος, τροποποιήσεις του Κώδικα Μετανάστευσης και άλλες διατάξεις», 23 January 2026, <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/c8827c35-4399-4fbb-8ea6-aebdc768f4f7/13185348.pdf>

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, Greek Immigration Bill Demonizes Civil Society, 29 January 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/01/29/greek-immigration-bill-demonizes-civil-society>

³¹ FIDH, Aegean Boat Report founder, Tommy Olsen, arrested in Norway, following an arrest warrant issued by the Greek authorities, 31 March 2026, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/norway-greece-aegean-boat-report-founder-tommy-olsen-arrested-in>

Greece. Over the past ten years, Dimitras has faced continuous episodes of judicial harassment as well as vicious smear campaigns deliberately aimed at discrediting him and his work.³² The period covered by this report represents an acute escalation of this pattern, with multiple simultaneous proceedings across different courts and prosecutorial bodies — a volume and complexity of legal pressure that, taken together, constitutes a sustained campaign of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). What makes this pattern particularly striking is that the majority of proceedings against Dimitras have arisen as retaliatory complaints filed by individuals — politicians, public officials, a musician, and a police officer — whom Dimitras himself had reported to authorities for racist, homophobic, or otherwise discriminatory conduct.

16. The most serious proceedings stem from charges brought in late 2022 at the Court of Kos. Dimitras was indicted for alerting authorities about the arrival of migrants on the Greek islands of Kos and Farmakonisi in July 2021, having sent emails to the Hellenic Police, the Hellenic Coast Guard, the Greek migration authorities, the UNHCR, and the Greek Ombudsman listing the migrants' names and locations so that they could claim asylum.³³ The charges — “forming or joining a criminal organisation for profit to facilitate the entry of third-country nationals” — reframed this act of notification to authorities as a criminal conspiracy. On 24 January 2023, Dimitras was served a Judicial Council decision banning him from carrying out any of GHM's activities, from travelling outside the country, requiring him to report to police twice per month, and imposing a bail of 10,000 euros.³⁴ While the ban on conducting GHM activities was subsequently reversed, the criminal case remained pending as of early 2026, with Dimitras still under a travel ban.³⁵

17. Simultaneously, Dimitras was subjected to a parallel financial investigation. In May 2023, media³⁶ reported that the Anti-Money Laundering Authority had ordered the freezing of all assets of Dimitras following an investigation into his activities — the first Dimitras had heard of such an investigation, as he had not been served with any report or official notification prior to the media publication.³⁷ According to the media reports the authorities' investigation indicated that Mr Dimitras had received EU funding to support human rights work and

³² OMCT, Greece: Continued judicial harassment of migrants' rights defender Panayote Dimitras, 15 August 2024, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/greece-continued-judicial-harassment-of-migrants-rights-defender-panayote-dimitras>

³³ Human Rights Watch, Greece: Migrant Rights Defenders Face Charges, 26 January 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/26/greece-migrant-rights-defenders-face-charges>

³⁴ Humanists International, Greece: humanist barred from human rights work, 21 February 2023, <https://humanists.international/2023/02/greece-humanist-barred-from-human-rights-work/>

³⁵ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2026 - Greece, 4 February 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/greece>

³⁶ Kathimerini, Anti-Money Laundering Authority orders freezing of NGO head's assets, 31 May 2023, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/1212343/anti-money-laundering-authority-orders-freezing-of-ngo-heads-assets/>

³⁷ Humanists International, Humanist Panayote Dimitras faces judicial harassment and smear campaigns in an apparent attempt to prevent his work to defend human rights in Greece, 08 September, 2023, <https://humanists.international/case-of-concern/panayote-dimitras/>

allegedly used it for other purposes — a characterisation Dimitras firmly denied.³⁸ Particularly, Dimitras stated that the only EU funds his organization receives, as published on the European Commission’s website³⁹, are for the fight against hate speech and characterised these claims as unfounded “slander.”⁴⁰ The accusation of fund misusing, between 2010 and 2015, concerned the private donations to the Communication and Political Research Society (a non-profit research organisation that manages human rights NGOs like GHM and Minority Rights Group - Greece that Mr. Dimitras was leading), amounting to 178.666,80 Euros, and not the EU funding.⁴¹ The account freeze was initially ordered for nine months and then renewed for a further nine months in February 2024 and remained effective despite repeated requests from Dimitras and his wife, Nafsika Papanikolatu, to terminate it.⁴² In May 2024, both were summoned and questioned in connection with this investigation — a development the Observatory (OMCT-FIDH) described as an extension of the harassment to Dimitras's immediate family and a violation of the EU's Anti-SLAPP Directive.

18. Beyond these principal proceedings, Dimitras faced a continuous stream of retaliatory criminal and civil cases arising from his own complaints against individuals for discriminatory conduct. In 2018, Mr Dimitras filed a complaint against then mayor - Christos Kalyviotis, accusing him of making statements equating refugees with criminals. Authorities dismissed that complaint in 2019. Kalyviotis subsequently filed a counter - complaint, leading to a preliminary investigation in 2020. In February 2024, Dimitras was informed of a civil lawsuit filed by Kalyviotis on similar grounds, with 90 days granted to submit his defense before a hearing is scheduled.⁴³ On 17 April 2024, the Athens Three-Member Misdemeanours Court acquitted Panayote Dimitras after five years of legal proceedings. He had been charged with false accusation and aggravated defamation for reporting alleged racist remarks by a public official.⁴⁴

³⁸ Fair Trials, Panayote Dimitras: Fair Trials denounces continuing harassment of human rights defenders, 07 June 2023, <https://www.fairtrials.org/articles/news/panayote-dimitras-fair-trials-denounces-continuing-harassment/>

³⁹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Countering illegal hate speech online, 7th evaluation of the Code of Conduct, 16 November 2022,

https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/5dcc2a40-785d-43f0-b806-f065386395de_en

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, Greece: Smear Campaign Against Rights Activist, 19 January 2023,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/19/greece-smear-campaign-against-rights-activist>

⁴¹ FIDH, Greece: Continued judicial harassment of migrants’ rights defender Panayote Dimitras, 14 August 2024, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/greece/greece-continued-judicial-harassment-of-migrants-rights-defender>

⁴² OMCT, Greece: Continued judicial harassment of migrants’ rights defender Panayote Dimitras, 15 August 2024, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/greece-continued-judicial-harassment-of-migrants-rights-defender-panayote-dimitras>

⁴³ OMCT, Greece: continued judicial harassment against migrants’ rights defender Panayote Dimitras, 23 January 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/greece-continued-judicial-harassment-against-migrants-rights-defender-panayote-dimitras>

⁴⁴ OMCT, Greece: Conviction of Gregory Vallianatos, co-founder of Greek Helsinki Monitor, 8 August 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/greece-conviction-of-gregory-vallianatos-co-founder-of-greek-helsinki-monitor>

19. In February 2023, in another similar case, the Three-Member Misdemeanours Court of Athens granted Panayote's appeal and dropped charges of "false accusation" and "aggravated defamation" filed against him by musician and actor Yannis Zouganelis. The proceedings were related a complaint filed in December 2018 by Mr. Dimitras against Mr. Zouganelis following racist comments against Greece-based migrants in a statement he made on TV on 19 December 2018.⁴⁵

20. On 16 June 2023, the Athens Court of Appeal acquitted Dimitras and his GHM colleague Andrea Gilbert on charges of "false accusation" stemming from a complaint they had filed in April 2017 against the Metropolitan Bishop of Piraeus for public incitement to hatred.⁴⁶ On 15 February 2022 the Three-Member Misdemeanours Court of Athens had sentenced them to a twelve-month prison sentence suspended for three years on the charge of "false accusation" (Article 229 of the Criminal Code of Greece).⁴⁷

21. On 8 June 2023, a further case was dropped when the Three-Member Misdemeanours Court of Athens dismissed charges brought against Dimitras by a police officer after Dimitras had reported the officer for making a homophobic statement. On 13 March 2024, the same court put an end to yet another prosecution under charges of "false accusation" and "aggravated defamation" resulting from a complaint filed by Kostas Katsikis, then a Member of Parliament for the extreme-right party Independent Greeks, after Dimitras had reported him in November 2017 for a racist, homophobic, and transphobic speech delivered during a parliamentary debate.⁴⁸ On 17 April 2024, the Three-Member Misdemeanours Court of Athens acquitted Dimitras after five years of proceedings on charges of "false accusation" and "aggravated defamation" brought by a public official against whom Dimitras had filed a complaint for racist statements.⁴⁹

19. While these acquittals and dismissals are welcome, one civil case resulted in a ruling against Dimitras. Following a complaint Dimitras had filed in 2021 against extreme-right leader Failos Kranidiotis after the latter published a tweet calling all refugees "illegal plunderers" — a tweet subsequently removed by Twitter for hateful content — Kranidiotis filed a civil lawsuit against

⁴⁵ OMCT, Greece: Acquittal of migrants' rights defender Panayote Dimitras, 6 May 2024, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/greece-acquittal-of-migrants-rights-defender-panayote-dimitras>

⁴⁶ OMCT, Greece: Acquittal of migrants' rights defender Panayote Dimitras, 6 May 2024, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/greece-acquittal-of-migrants-rights-defender-panayote-dimitras>

⁴⁷ OMCT, Greece: Sentencing of GHM members Panayote Dimitras and Andrea Gilbert, 11 March 2022 <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/sentencing-of-ghm-members-panayote-dimitras-and-andrea-gilbert>

⁴⁸ FIDH, Greece: Continued judicial harassment against migrants' rights defender Panayote Dimitras, 23 January 2025, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/greece-continued-judicial-harassment-against-migrants-rights-defender>

⁴⁹ OMCT, Greece: Acquittal of migrants' rights defender Panayote Dimitras, 6 May 2024, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/greece-acquittal-of-migrants-rights-defender-panayote-dimitras>

Dimitras demanding 120,000 euros in moral damages.⁵⁰ The prosecution dismissed the underlying hate speech complaint filed by Mr Dimitras against Kranidiotis as unfounded; Kranidiotis responded by suing Dimitras for defamation and insult. The courts rejected the defamation claim but upheld the insult charge. On 22 January 2026, the Athens Three-Member Appeals Court rejected Dimitras's appeal, ordering him to pay monetary compensation of 5,318.58 euros to Kranidiotis and to publish a summary of the court's decision on his social media.⁵¹

20. The Dimitras case has attracted sustained condemnation from a wide range of international human rights bodies. Concern has been formally expressed by the European Parliament in its February 2024 resolution on the rule of law and media freedom in Greece⁵², the UN Human Rights Committee in its November 2024 Concluding Observations,⁵³ and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its December 2024 Concluding Observations.⁵⁴

21. The campaign of proceedings against Panayote Dimitras that has continued unabated for over a decade — and has escalated rather than diminished during the period under review — underscores that it is not a series of isolated incidents but a structural pattern of state-enabled harassment directed at one of Greece's most prominent defenders of migrants' rights.

22. These cases are particularly illustrative of the broader pattern of harassment faced by migrants' rights defenders in Greece. They demonstrate how individuals engaged in legitimate human rights work are systematically targeted and subjected to a range of reprisals, including surveillance, judicial harassment, smear campaigns, entry bans, and expulsion from the country. Such practices are further exacerbated by the conduct of Greek investigative authorities, which have repeatedly leaked information concerning alleged criminal investigations to the media.⁵⁵ As documented by the Observatory in its 2021 report "Europe:

⁵⁰ FIDH, Greece: Continued judicial harassment against migrants' rights defender Panayote Dimitras, 23 January 2025, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/greece-continued-judicial-harassment-against-migrants-rights-defender>

⁵¹ OMCT, Greece: Continued judicial harassment against migrants' rights defender Panayote Dimitras, 26 February 2026, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/greece-continued-judicial-harassment-against-migrants-rights-defender-panayote-dimitras-2>

⁵² European Commission, Resolution on the rule of law and media freedom in Greece, 2024/2502(RSP), 7 February 2024,

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0069_EN.html

⁵³ Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Greece, Report CCPR/C/GRC/CO/3, 28 November 2024, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4067637?v=pdf>

⁵⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding observations on the combined twenty-third and twenty-fourth periodic reports of Greece, Report CERD/C/GRC/CO/23-24, 24 December 2024, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/232/04/pdf/g2423204.pdf>

⁵⁵ Greece: Ongoing crackdown on migrants' rights defenders as pushbacks of people on the move continue, 28 January 2021. <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/greece-ongoing-crackdown-on-migrants-rights-defenders-as-pushbacks-of-people-on-the-move-continue>

Open Season on Solidarity”⁵⁶ these leaks contribute to a climate of fear and intimidation, creating a chilling effect that discourages others from engaging in migrants’ rights advocacy. Taken together, these cases underscore the need to situate individual incidents within the wider context of the shrinking civic space for migrants’ rights defenders in Greece, before turning to concrete recommendations to address these systemic concerns.

Recommendations

22. In light of the above, we call on States to recommend to the government of Greece to:

- Adopt comprehensive legislation establishing clear legal protections for human rights defenders, including lawyers, humanitarian workers, journalists, and civil society actors working in the field of migration and asylum, ensuring that the provision of humanitarian assistance and legitimate human rights monitoring activities cannot be prosecuted as criminal offences under anti-smuggling or related provisions of the Migration Code.
- Repeal the provisions of the 2026 Law on the Promotion of Legal Migration Policies that designate membership in a registered NGO as an aggravating circumstance for offences under Articles 24 and 25 of the Migration Code, and reform the NGO Registry framework to bring it into conformity with international standards on freedom of association, in line with the repeated recommendations of the Council of Europe, the UN Human Rights Committee, and UN Special Procedures.
- Immediately cease all judicial proceedings against human rights defender Panayote Dimitras that appear to constitute strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), lift all remaining restrictive measures imposed on him including the travel ban, conduct an effective and impartial investigation into the pattern of harassment to which he has been subjected, and provide him with adequate reparation in accordance with Greece's obligations under international human rights law. Ensure an adequate and timely transposition and implementation of the European Anti-SLAPP Directive⁵⁷, due to be transposed by member states into national law by 7 May 2026.
- Ensure prompt, impartial, thorough, and transparent investigations into all reported attacks, threats, acts of intimidation, and judicial harassment directed against human rights defenders, and guarantee that perpetrators — including public officials — are

⁵⁶ Europe: Open Season on Solidarity. A study on the patterns of criminalisation of solidarity through the voices of migrants’ rights defenders, November 2021. https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/Europe-Open-Season-on-Solidarity_2021-11-15-150546_kuut.pdf

⁵⁷ Directive 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings (‘Strategic lawsuits against public participation’) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=OJ:L_202401069

held accountable in accordance with the rule of law and Greece's international obligations.

- Ensure a safe and enabling environment for all human rights defenders to carry out their legitimate activities free from intimidation, reprisals, harassment, or undue legal and administrative restrictions, in full conformity with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and Greece's international human rights obligations.
- Take legislative and judicial training measures to ensure that courts at all levels apply and give full effect to Greece's international human rights obligations when adjudicating cases involving human rights defenders, including the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights, so as to prevent the misuse of criminal law to suppress legitimate human rights activity.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive legal pathway for the regularisation and social integration of migrants and asylum seekers residing in Greece, including access to documentation, employment, housing, healthcare, and education, recognising that the absence of regular status perpetuates conditions of vulnerability, exploitation, and social exclusion incompatible with Greece's obligations under international human rights law.