



Human Rights Watch Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in advance of its review on Greece

July 2016

Introduction

This memorandum, submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (the Committee) ahead of its upcoming review of Greece, highlights areas of concern Human Rights Watch hopes will inform the Committee's consideration of the Greek government's ("the government") compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ("the Convention"). It contains information on Greece's treatment of migrants and asylum seekers that is inconsistent with the Convention, and proposes issues that Committee members may wish to raise with the government.

Human Rights Watch has closely monitored the human rights situation in Greece and, in particular, the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers over the past eight years. As part of this work, we have documented violations against refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, including unaccompanied migrant children, and have produced reports and other documents describing our research findings. For fuller analyses, please see the Human Rights Watch reports [Refugee "Hotspots" Unsafe, Unsanitary](#) (May 2016); [First Turkey Deportations Riddled With Abuse](#) (April 2016); [Asylum Seekers Locked Up](#) (April 2016); [Humanitarian Crisis at Athens Port](#) (March 2016); [Attacks on Boats Risk Migrant Lives](#) (October 2015); [Chaos, Insecurity in Registration Center](#) (October 2015); [Humanitarian Crisis on the Islands](#) (July 2015); [Unwelcome Guests: Greek Police Abuses of Migrants in Athens](#) (June 2013); [Turned Away: Summary Returns of Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Adult Asylum Seekers from Italy to Greece](#) (January 2013); [Hate on the Streets: Xenophobic Violence in Greece](#) (July 2012); [The EU's Dirty Hands: Frontex Involvement in Ill-Treatment of Migrant Detainees in Greece](#) (September 2011); [No Refuge: Migrants in Greece](#) (November 2009); [Left to Survive: Systematic Failure to Protect Unaccompanied Migrant Children in Greece](#) (December 2008); and [Stuck in a Revolving Door: Iraqis and Other Asylum Seekers and Migrants at the Greece/Turkey Entrance to the European Union](#) (November 2008).

We welcome the opportunity to provide information to the Committee ahead of its review of Greece's compliance with the Convention. We recommend that the Committee members ask the Greek government to provide information that demonstrates how its legal and policy reforms have contributed to concrete improvements in the treatment of migrants generally, as well as asylum seekers, unaccompanied migrant children, and other vulnerable groups.

We do not underestimate the challenges Greece faces in light of the unprecedented numbers of migrants and asylum seekers due to the refugee crisis, but we strongly believe that continued attention and sustained pressure on the government by the UN and other rights bodies are crucial to ensure that the rights of migrants and asylum seekers are fully respected.

Treatment of Migrants and Asylum Seekers in the Context of the Refugee Crisis

Since the beginning of the 2015 refugee crisis Human Rights Watch has interviewed hundreds of asylum seekers and migrants on the Greek Aegean islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos, as well as in mainland Greece, including in Northern Greece and the Attica region.

Human Rights Watch has found that thousands of asylum seekers and migrants in the country face appalling reception and detention conditions. Human Rights Watch has also found that the already broken asylum and reception system has further deteriorated as a consequence of the exceptional number of arrivals in Greece and of the closure of borders with northern neighboring countries. According to data by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), some 56,000 asylum seekers and migrants are currently stranded in Greece, including some 8,700 in the Aegean islands. Poor government organization, scarce resources, as well as lack of information and services, anxiety, and fear about the new European Union-Turkey agreement that went into effect on March 20, 2016, are contributing to insecurity and suffering. A key aim of the EU-Turkey agreement is to reject as inadmissible to the asylum procedure almost all asylum applications from people arriving in the Greek islands on the grounds that Turkey is a safe country for refugees and asylum seekers, and to enable swift deportations back there.

Since the migration agreement between the EU and Turkey went into effect, the vast majority of asylum seekers and migrants that arrived on the Greek islands have been restricted to the islands, often held in the “hotspots.” Asylum seekers who arrived before March 20 and those admitted to the Greek asylum system following admissibility interviews conducted on the Greek islands are living either in reception facilities in continental Greece, or in informal sites and other informal facilities.

Abusive Deportations Under the EU-Turkey Agreement

On April 4, 2016, Greek authorities deported a first group of 66 people from the Greek island of Chios to Turkey under the EU-Turkey agreement. In research conducted on the island of Chios on April 7 and 8, Human Rights Watch found that this first round of EU-sanctioned deportations under the EU-Turkey agreement, was rushed, chaotic, and violated the rights of those deported.

Human Rights Watch spoke with 12 friends and one relative of 19 Afghans who were deported from Chios on that day. Based on those interviews and text messages exchanged between those interviewed and the deportees, Human Rights Watch documented an array of irregularities and violations. The authorities did not inform people that they were going to be deported, did not tell them where they were being taken, and did not allow some of them to take their personal possessions. The deportation from Chios was carried out by Greek police with “escort officers”

from the EU external borders agency, Frontex. The Greek government and Frontex said that most of the deportees, including from the island of Lesbos, were from Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Afghanistan, and that none of the people returned to Turkey had wanted to seek asylum in Greece.

Greek and EU officials repeatedly claimed that all of the people deported from Chios and Lesbos had not wished to seek asylum in Greece. But, according to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, 13 of the deportees from Chios had expressed such a desire, 11 from Afghanistan, and 2 from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The number who wanted to seek asylum may actually have been greater. During our research at the VIAL detention camp, we found that many detainees lacked adequate information about seeking asylum in Greece and were unable to access legal aid. They also were not informed about the reason for their detention or their right to challenge it.

The deportations from Chios began around midday on April 3, when Greek police at the VIAL detention facility took dozens of people to the main building where police and Frontex register new arrivals, and where the Greek asylum service is located. The authorities separated the 66 people they had identified for return, witnesses told Human Rights Watch. They said that the police had called people on the false pretext that they were to be registered, including for asylum.

The police took the deportees to an abandoned factory in Chios called Tabakika, which served as the registration center for new arrivals on the island before the VIAL facility opened in February 2016. A person who visited the factory that night told Human Rights Watch that he saw people sitting or sleeping on the concrete floor, some with mats.

Between 15 and 20 of the people in Tabakika – Afghans and two people from the Democratic Republic of Congo – told the visitor that the police had taken them from VIAL without allowing them to gather their personal belongings: backpacks, clothes, and in some cases their mobile phones and documents. Human Rights Watch observed eight of the bags that people had left behind in VIAL.

These deficiencies raise doubts that asylum seekers who arrived in Greece after the EU-Turkey deal came into effect on March 20, including those deported on April 4, have had a fair chance to request protection.

Reception and Detention Conditions on the Islands

In research conducted in April and May 2016, on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, and Samos, Human Rights Watch found that thousands of migrants and asylum seekers living in the so-called refugee “hotspots” face appalling detention and reception conditions. Human Rights Watch found the detention facilities on all three islands to be severely overcrowded, with

significant shortages of basic shelter and unsanitary, unhygienic conditions. Long lines for poor quality food, mismanagement, and lack of information contribute to a chaotic and volatile atmosphere in the three hotspots.

Camps on the islands began operating as open reception and registration centers for the hundreds of thousands of people who had reached the islands since early 2015 but they were converted suddenly to prison-like camps on March 20, 2016, when the deal between the EU and Turkey came into effect. Asylum seekers and migrants who have arrived since then are automatically detained by Greek authorities, with help from the EU's border agency, Frontex, and forbidden to leave the camps. On April 2, the Greek parliament adopted a law that allows blanket "restriction of movement" on new arrivals inside closed facilities at border entry points – such as the islands – for up to 25 days during reception and identification.

UNHCR and several nongovernmental aid agencies suspended many of their activities when the hotspots were converted into detention centers, though UNHCR continues to monitor conditions and provide limited services.

During our visit in May, Human Rights Watch found Moria and Vathi to be strictly closed. The authorities only allowed asylum seekers to go in and out if they had been detained for more than 25 days. But we found that police had not issued the necessary documentation to allow some people who had been detained for more than 25 days in either place to go in and out. The police in VIAL allow everyone to come and go, in what appears to be an ad hoc and informal decision to ease the tensions. The vast majority of asylum seekers are unable to leave the islands.

Under Greek and international law, all detainees, including irregular migrants and asylum seekers, must be informed, in a language they understand, of the reasons for their detention and their rights and have a right to challenge their detention. Under Greek law those detained in connection with immigration or asylum laws also have a right to legal aid. Despite this, none of the people interviewed by Human Rights Watch in these facilities in May 2016 had been given a detention order or were informed about the reason for their detention.

While to our knowledge, no formal step has been taken to officially transform the hotspots into open facilities, there are recent indications since our visit in May that local authorities including the police have made efforts to increase flexibility of movement in and out of the hotspots, allowing most asylum seekers and migrants to leave and re-enter the hotspot facilities as soon as their individual registration process is finalized, on the condition they remain on the Islands.

Human Rights Watch heard consistent accounts from camp residents in all three locations of the police's routine failure to protect people during frequent incidents of violence. Camp residents said fights occurred daily, particularly in the food lines, with no police intervention.

Despite a police order that directs all police working with refugees and migrants to ensure protection and security for women and children, the centers on Chios and Samos have no segregated sections for single women, family groups, or women with children. Human Rights Watch observed unaccompanied children and families living in common areas at Moria. Moria has sections for children and families, but they are not large enough to accommodate all the women and children in the center.

Women reported frequent sexual harassment in all three hotspots. “The men get drunk and try to enter our tent every night,” said a 19-year-old single woman from Eritrea living in Vathi. “We went to the police and asked to be taken to a separate part of the camp from the men who try to abuse us, but the police refused to help us. We fled our country for exactly this reason, and here in this camp we are afraid to leave our tent.” Women in the Moria hotspot on Lesbos and VIAL hotspot on Chios spoke of similar problems and expressed deep concerns about their and their children’s safety.

Women also described being sexually harassed routinely, particularly when going to and from or while using the camp bathrooms. In Moria, Human Rights Watch observed a large number of men loitering next to the women’s latrine. Women in VIAL also described a lack of privacy at the women’s showers. Bathrooms and showers do not have doors with working locks and/or adequate lighting, as per international standards on protection and prevention of gender-based violence.

Women and girls said they feel particularly exposed to the threat of sexual violence during episodes of fighting between other migrants/asylum-seekers in the centers. In VIAL, a 23-year-old single Afghan woman said: “Yesterday there was a fight between Sunni and Shia Afghans. One Afghan came and threatened me and said, ‘I will come back at night and rape you.’ I feel insecure here. They [the police] haven’t taken any measures to protect us. Another time, they [the men fighting] hit me on the head and I went to report it [to the police] and no one would listen to me.”

Children in the hotspots are also exposed to violence and abuse. “Some days you don’t get food,” a 16-year-old unaccompanied Afghan boy in the Moria center said. “There are long lines for food and fighting often happens. The police just watch when the fights break out.” This boy, a young-looking 16-year-old, was separated from his 17-year-old brother who had been segregated in the high-security section in Moria for unaccompanied boys. “I have an ID with my age on it, but the doctor here said I was not a minor.”

All three hotspots were overcrowded and in all three many people were sleeping on the ground in small tents or makeshift shelters constructed of blankets, plastic sheeting, and scraps of fencing, cardboard, and other building materials. According to one of the camp administrators at Moria, Spyros Kourtis, at the time of the Human Rights Watch visit on May 9, about 4,000 people were living in the camp. He said that it had a 700-bed capacity.

Everyone interviewed said the food was of poor quality and that there was not enough. A 36-year-old Syrian woman with two small children in Vathi said: “We have to line up a long time for food, and the food is very bad, not suitable for children, no milk.”

Residents at all locations described shortages of soap, shampoo, and detergent. Some said they were given one bar of soap and one bottle of shampoo upon arrival, but nothing since. During the visit to VIAL, the water was cut off. VIAL has no hot water.

People in all locations also said health care was inadequate. Health care in the hotspots is provided mainly by nongovernmental organizations, including Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World), Praksis, the Hellenic Red Cross, Medical Intervention, Boat Refugee Foundation, as well as the Greek army. Other groups, like Médecins sans Frontières, pulled out of the hotspots when they were converted into prison-like facilities on March 20.

Detention of Unaccompanied Migrant Children

Asylum-seeking and migrant children who are unaccompanied are often detained much longer than adults or children traveling with their families while authorities search for shelter facilities for them. A lack of shelter space has led to the prolonged detention of children in police station cells, pre-removal centers, and hotspots on the islands.

On visits to two police stations and two detention centers in northern Greece, northwest Greece, and the Attica region from June 26 to July 3, Human Rights Watch researchers spoke with children as young as 14 who had been detained for lengthy periods of time and who described unsanitary, overcrowded conditions and lack of access to information or services such as counseling and legal aid.

Children described poor, unhygienic conditions, including dirty blankets and bugs. At a police station in northern Greece, children said a broken shower drain was causing water to flood their cell and described using their own clothes to block the water.

The detention of unaccompanied children due to a shortage of sufficient and adequate accommodation is a chronic problem in Greece; a 2008 Human Rights Watch report called the routine detention of unaccompanied children “a fundamental dysfunction at the heart of the...Greek immigration and social welfare systems.” Human Rights Watch continued to document the detention of children in closed facilities on Greek islands in 2015 and 2016.

According to the National Center for Social Solidarity (EKKA), the government authority responsible for managing the placement of unaccompanied children in shelters, there are only 641 spaces for unaccompanied children in the entire country. As of July 18, all facilities were full, and 1,394 requests for placement were pending. EKKA received more than twice the number of requests for transfers of unaccompanied children to shelters in the first quarter of 2016 than in

the first quarter of 2015. According to UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, more than 60,300 children have reached Greece by sea since the beginning of 2016, 38 percent of total sea arrivals. There are no reliable statistics on how many of these children are unaccompanied.

According to EKKA, as of July 11 an estimated 25 children were locked in police stations awaiting transfer. Hundreds of other unaccompanied children, EKKA reported, were held in special sections of large detention centers, including on the Greek islands. However, at the time of a May 2016 visit to the Moria hotspot on Lesbos Human Rights Watch observed unaccompanied children living with adults in common areas because the section for unaccompanied children was not large enough to accommodate the number of unaccompanied children being held there.

Under a Greek law adopted in April 2016, unaccompanied children can be detained pending referral to a dedicated reception facility for a maximum of 25 days, though detention can be prolonged by a further 20 days if the child cannot be transferred to such a facility due to exceptional circumstances, such as a large number of arrivals of unaccompanied children. This law improves upon the previous framework, which provided no clear time limit, but does not provide the necessary safeguards to prevent unjustified prolonged detention. According to police records at a station Human Rights Watch visited, five children had been in police custody in excess of 25 days and two had been in custody more than 45 days.

Recommendations

The real economic crisis, the unfair and inadequate EU system (Dublin Regulation) for allocating responsibilities for examining asylum claims, and the unprecedented numbers of migrants and asylum seekers pose serious challenges for Greece but do not relieve it of its obligation to protect vulnerable groups, including women, children, and people with disabilities, and to ensure that all migrants and asylum seekers in the country are treated in a humane and rights-respecting way.

Greece's treatment of asylum seekers and migrants remains insufficient across the board. The government keeps migrants and asylum seekers in appalling and inhuman conditions and has failed to offer acceptable reception conditions. The Greek government is not providing minimum standards for meeting the needs of specific groups such as women, unaccompanied and other children, and people with disabilities who by any standards, should be among the first to benefit from specialized protection and care.

In particular, the Committee should raise the following specific points regarding the treatment of asylum seekers and migrants and urge the Greek government to:

- Suspend deportations under the EU-Turkey agreement of March 20, 2016, until effective safeguards are in place to guarantee the right to seek asylum and to challenge deportations;

- Convert the hotspot facilities on Greek islands into open camps with appropriate services and security measures;
- Take appropriate measures to ensure that no one who has indicated an intent to seek asylum will be detained in facilities on the islands absent evidence that the detention is necessary and for a legitimate purpose or reason, such as that the person presents a specific and individualized security threat;
- Refrain from detaining asylum seekers and members of particularly vulnerable groups, such as children, migrants with disabilities and victims of trafficking or gender-based violence;
- Create alternatives to detention, including open reception centers for asylum seekers, and provide suitable accommodation on the islands for particularly vulnerable asylum seekers, including children, people with disabilities, survivors of torture, and victims of trafficking or gender-based violence; The authorities should not detain people in overcrowded and unsanitary facilities.
- Until hotspots are converted into open centers, improve detention conditions on the islands, including by taking immediate steps to ensure the security and protection of women and children in the hotspots as well as all other residents. Women traveling alone and unaccompanied children should have separate, secure sleeping areas, and families should be provided with secure sleeping, toilet, and bathing facilities separate from those for single men.
- Ensure adequate reception conditions and provision of services, including shelter, toilets, food, and access to basic healthcare as well as enough interpreters, human resources, and technical capacity to support people, identify their vulnerabilities, and process their asylum claims more quickly;
- Take measures to mitigate risks for female migrants and asylum seekers (especially those traveling without adult male family members), including providing separate, secure shelter and facilities, making female staff and female interpreters available and screening for gender-based violence, including domestic abuse;
- Expedite processing of asylum claims of families with children, unaccompanied children, , people with disabilities, survivors of torture, victims of trafficking and gender-based violence and other vulnerable groups on the islands, and avoid detaining children, in line with recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child;
- Immediately adopt a policy of not detaining migrant and asylum seeking children, until such time as legislative reform is enacted; and
- Ensure sufficient capacity in shelters for unaccompanied migrant and asylum-seeking children to minimize detention time pending transfer to shelters.

Discriminatory and Abusive Police Stops

Human Rights Watch research has found that Greek police rely heavily on overly broad powers to stop people, require them to provide proof of their identity, and hold them for long periods, amounting to unjustified deprivation of liberty, without any reasonable and individualized

suspicion of criminal wrongdoing. These powers have been used in a discriminatory manner to target persons based on their race or perceived nationality or ethnicity.

Under Presidential Decree 141/1991 (P.D. 141/1991), the police have the authority to stop anyone on suspicion that a crime has been or might be committed, and to conduct searches of persons, bags, vehicles, and public spaces for preventive purposes. In areas designated by the police as “suspicious public areas,” officers may conduct stops and searches without any grounds. The police may take people to a police station if they do not have proof of their identity, have identity documents the police believe require further verification of their legal records, or, because of the place, time, and circumstances, as well as their behavior, create suspicion that they have committed or intend to commit an offense.

These powers, combined with orders to target specific social groups, have enabled repetitive, unjustified stops of migrants and asylum seekers.

In February and April 2013, Human Rights Watch interviewed forty-four people who had been subjected to at least one stop since the launch of anti-immigrant Operation Xenios Zeus, in August 2012. Thirty-five of them had a legal right to be in Greece at the time of the stops because they were registered asylum seekers, legal foreign residents, or Greeks of foreign origin.

Many told Human Rights Watch they felt they were stopped because of their physical characteristics and gave disturbing accounts of clear targeting on the basis of race or ethnicity. We heard twelve accounts of identity checks where people described being stopped explicitly based on physical appearance, including two cases where people were not stopped themselves but witnessed what they felt was a discriminatory stop.

People interviewed said that police officers regularly harassed them, stopping them without any specific suspicion of wrongdoing and conducted intrusive searches. The police beat and yelled at the people they stopped, and held them for long periods.

International human rights bodies have criticized Greece over the years for not acknowledging that police ill-treatment is a serious problem and have repeatedly recommended setting up a credible, independent, and effective police complaints mechanism to investigate allegations of abuse. The Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection created an office in 2011 to address complaints of police misconduct, but the office is not yet operational and has a limited mandate, able to rule only on the admissibility of the complaints. Admissible cases will be transferred to the relevant disciplinary bodies of the security forces for further investigation, raising concerns about the independence of such investigations.

The end of anti-immigrant Operation Xenios Zeus in early February 2015, shortly after the then newly-elected government of Alexis Tsipras came into power, was a positive step. A key tactic of Operation Xenios Zeus, a police operation launched in early August 2012 and aimed at cracking

down on irregular immigration and crime in Athens, was the use of police powers to conduct identity checks to verify the legal status of individuals presumed to be irregular migrants. Identity checks for the purposes of immigration control, such as those conducted on a massive scale during the ongoing Operation Xenios Zeus, are not prescribed explicitly in law.

Human Rights Watch doesn't have any current information on identity checks since the end of Operation Xenios Zeus, but the broad police powers of P.D. 141/1991 continue to leave far too much discretion generally, in the absence of clear and detailed guidance, to police officers when it comes to choosing whom to stop for an identity check, and leaves far too much room for abuse of power.

It is a basic precept of law, well-established in international human rights jurisprudence, that laws must be sufficiently clear and well defined to limit the scope for arbitrary action and interpretation by law enforcement and judicial authorities. Legal precision is also important so that people know what conduct is prohibited and can regulate their behavior accordingly.

Recommendations

We hope to see the Committee take these findings into account when discussing Greece's report. In particular, we recommend that the Committee raise the following specific points regarding police stop-and-search powers:

- Request information on the steps taken to ensure that all measures to identify irregular migrants during police operations are conducted in full compliance with national and international law prohibiting discrimination, including discriminatory ethnic profiling, ill-treatment, and arbitrary deprivation of liberty;
- Request information on disciplinary and/or criminal investigations into law enforcement officials for allegations of ill-treatment of migrants in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016, and the number of cases in which sanctions have been imposed as well as the nature of these sanctions.

The Committee should also urge the Greek government to:

- Develop a national strategy on combating racial discrimination by law enforcement officials that sets out concrete measures and a timetable for implementation;
- Reform current stop and search powers and adopt clear and binding guidelines for law enforcement officers with respect to identity checks to require an individualized suspicion of wrongdoing, including the permissible grounds for conducting a stop, a pat-down, and search of personal belongings, and for taking a person to a police station for further verification of their documents;
- Develop and coordinate strategies for minimizing police abuse and harassment against vulnerable groups;

- Issue clear guidance to police officers on the use of force, clarifying the prohibition on unjustified force, and ensure diligent and independent investigation for all complaints of police abuse and hold anyone found responsible to account, including by improving human rights training, and establishing an independent complaints mechanism.

Xenophobic Violence

In recent years, Greece has seen an alarming surge in xenophobic attacks on migrants and asylum seekers, with gangs of Greeks chasing down and attacking migrants and asylum seekers, particularly in downtown Athens. Human Rights Watch interviewed 59 people who experienced or escaped a xenophobic incident, including 51 serious attacks, between August 2009 and May 2012. The Racist Violence Recording Network, an umbrella of Greek nongovernmental organizations, coordinated by the UNHCR and the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, recorded 484 racist incidents between October 2011 and the end of 2015.

Human Rights Watch research found that the vast majority of the victims of xenophobic attacks had little chance to see justice done. We found that attackers were rarely arrested and police inaction was the rule. Many victims did not report attacks to the police because of lack of trust and the police themselves actively discouraged many victims from filing complaints. The police told the victims it was not worth filing a complaint because they cannot recognize the assailants, that they should fight back themselves, or, in the case of undocumented migrants, that they could be detained and deported. Those who insisted faced a 100 Euro fee to file an official complaint. In addition, the failure of the police and prosecutors to investigate properly and collect evidence on the racist motivation of a crime made it harder for courts to apply penalty enhancements.

The Greek government has taken some positive steps in the past four years, including establishing specialized police units and offices within the police to tackle racist violence and appointing a special hate crimes prosecutor in Athens and Thessaloniki. The government also introduced measures granting humanitarian visas to undocumented victims and witnesses of certain crimes, including hate crimes. A 2014 anti-racism law increased minimum penalties for hate crimes and improved the scope and application of racist motivation as an aggravating circumstance. But the new law failed to remove significant obstacles to effective investigation and prosecution of hate crimes.

More recently, during the 2015 refugee crisis, the Greek population has been largely generous and welcoming to asylum seekers and migrants, with incidents of xenophobic attacks taking place on a rather spontaneous and isolated basis, despite the challenges posed by the large numbers of asylum seekers and migrants since the beginning of 2015, particularly on the islands. However, according to reports by the media and non-governmental organizations from early July, residents have attacked and intimidated asylum seekers, migrants, and international aid workers on Leros Island, which shelters about 690 of the approximately 56,000 migrants that

are currently in Greece. Similar reports have emerged from other Greek islands, including Lesbos. It appears that reports of uncontrolled fights inside the camps have created fertile ground for far-right extremism and anti-immigrant rhetoric among the local population. Information from the islands suggests that the police have failed to take adequate steps to prevent and punish xenophobic violence.

Recommendations

The Committee should:

- Request information on concrete steps and strategy to improve state response to racist violence, and address racism and xenophobia particularly in the context of the refugee crisis.

The Committee should also urge the Greek government to:

- Launch a public campaign on the island hotspots and refugee camps in the mainland to encourage reporting of hate crimes, including racist and xenophobic violence, particularly among migrants and asylum seekers;
- Ensure that each police station on the islands has at least one officer, or a group of officers, with advanced specialized training in hate crimes, including racist and xenophobic violence, as well as experience with investigating extremist activities;
- Develop and disseminate specific guidelines for police working in the refugee context, including on the islands, for the investigation of hate crimes, including racist and xenophobic violence;
- Ensure appropriate training, including through inclusion of special seminars in continuing professional education courses, for prosecutors and judges in national and European anti-racism legislation, and in particular the aggravating circumstance of racial motivation in the commission of a crime;
- Require prosecutors to investigate bias as a possible motive in a crime and to present any evidence of bias to the court. Courts should be also required to consider evidence of bias motivation, and to explain the reasons for applying or not applying a penalty enhancement for bias crimes.