

5 workers killed in massive biscuit factory explosion in Greece

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Five workers were killed in a massive explosion and fire in the early hours of Monday morning at the Violanta biscuit factory near the town of Trikala in Thessaly, central Greece. Eight workers managed to escape with their lives, with six hospitalised with minor injuries. A firefighter was also taken to hospital.

The shockwaves from the explosion were so powerful that part of the building and its roof collapsed. The blast was heard up to 8 kilometres away in Trikala itself and in nearby villages. The ensuing blaze burned for hours as firefighters battled to control it, while relatives of the trapped workers gathered outside.

Three bodies were recovered after 9 a.m., a fourth shortly after, while the charred remains of the final victim were not found amid the wreckage until late afternoon.

The five dead were identified as Vasiliki Skambardoni, 42, a mother of two; Elena Katsarou, 45, mother of a 13-year-old; Stavroula Boukova, a mother of three; Anastasia Nasiou; and Agapi Bounova, whose identity was confirmed by DNA testing.

Violanta operates two production structures at the site. The explosion originated in the central section of an older factory building, located next to a newer and larger modern production unit that was not affected. Although the destroyed structure was a single building, the force of the blast effectively tore it in two, collapsing a wall and bringing down the roof.

The explosion occurred just before 4 a.m., during the night shift when 13 workers were on site. That there were not more fatalities was purely a matter of chance: normally around 30 workers are present during the night shift. Eighteen workers had been given the morning off to attend a company event—an annual New Year’s cake celebration—that had continued late into Sunday night.

The blast occurred on the production line where industrial ovens are located, with preliminary indications that a gas leak may have triggered it. *To Vima (The Tribune)* reported: “While there were no liquefied gas storage tanks in the destroyed building, officials have not ruled out a leak of propane, ammonia, or another flammable gas.”

On Tuesday afternoon, the factory owner and two company officials—a shift manager and security technician—were arrested.

They will appear before a prosecutor on Wednesday. Among the charges are manslaughter by negligence, multiple counts of grievous bodily harm and arson by negligence.

Workplace accidents occur with increasing frequency in Greece. According to figures compiled by the Federation of Technical Company Trade Unions (OSETEE), 630 workers lost their lives at work between 2022 and 2025. Of these, 201 deaths occurred in the previous year alone, up from 150 in 2024.

These figures are far higher than government data, which is disproportionately low due to underreporting of workplace accidents by an estimated 30 to 40 percent. According to the latest figures released by the Greek Statistical Service (ELSTAT), there were 51 work-related fatalities in 2023—only a fraction of the 179 recorded by OSETEE.

Because ELSTAT’s data feeds into Eurostat’s EU-wide statistics, the conservative New Democracy (ND) government has cynically used these figures to present Greece as a model of workplace safety. In a social media post four days ago, Deputy Labour Minister Kostas Karagounis falsely claimed that Greece ranks fourth in the European Union (EU) in terms of the lowest number of workplace accidents.

The surge in workplace deaths and injuries is the consequence of brutal austerity and the systematic assault on working conditions imposed for well over a decade by successive governments on the Greek working class, at the behest of the EU and International Monetary Fund (IMF) following the 2008 financial crisis.

Last year, a new labour law made Greece the first country in the EU to legalise a 13-hour working day, formalising the reality faced by many workers holding two or more jobs simply to make ends meet. With fatigue a major cause of workplace accidents, this legislation will only increase their frequency.

Long, hard hours are not unique to Greece but part of a global pattern in which profit-driven speedups, understaffing and the rollback of safety regulations transform workplaces into death traps—as seen in recent industrial disasters worldwide, from postal facilities in the United States to plantations and factories in Sri Lanka.

Demonstrating how little workers’ lives are valued by the Greek ruling class, many reports in the corporate media have

framed the explosion as a tragedy for Greek “entrepreneurship.” The dominant narrative is that the disaster has damaged Violanta’s “success story” image of an emerging biscuit manufacturer pioneering the adoption of green technologies at one of its factories in Larissa.

According to Violanta’s website, company sales nearly doubled from just under €25 million in 2019 to almost €45 million in 2024. Over the same period, gross profit rose by nearly 60 percent to €14.6 million. Much of this growth has come from expanded exports, with Violanta products now sold in 6,500 retail outlets internationally.

The rise in profitability is directly linked to Greece’s “business-friendly” framework, which enables the extraction of surplus value from the working class through intensified exploitation, low wages and systematic disregard for safety.

Violanta’s CEO, Konstantinos Tziortziotis, openly acknowledged this fact in a 2022 interview, when he ruled out establishing a factory in the United States. He complained that “you can’t find workers easily [there], primarily at a manageable cost. It’s not possible to make money on investments like this over there.”

Reports have already emerged that the factory in Trikala was unsafe, with a catastrophic incident, even a possible explosion, waiting to happen.

Speaking to *Proto Thema (Lead Story)*, Dimitris Armagos, president of the Labour Centre of Trikala—the local branch of the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE)—stated that during the summer his union had participated in an inspection of the factory alongside the Labour Inspectorate.

“During our visit, we identified issues and made specific observations, mainly concerning the emergency exits and the system for detecting possible LPG gas leaks used in the ovens.” Armagos went on to absolve his union of responsibility for failing to alert workers about these dangers, stating, “We documented and pointed out the problems we identified at that time. Beyond that, I do not know what happened.”

Trikala is located only around 97 kilometres from the site of the February 28, 2023 Tempi Valley train crash, which claimed the lives of 57 mostly young people, and triggered protests even larger than those against EU-backed austerity. Large-scale protests are expected again next month to mark the third anniversary of the disaster, which was caused by privatisation and cost-cutting imposed on an already antiquated rail network.

Protests began in Trikala on Monday evening following the factory deaths. A 24-hour strike called by various trade unions comprising the Labor Centre of Trikala was held on Tuesday under the slogan: “No more dead workers on the altar of profits.” Among those participating were workers in various sectors, including from food industry factories.

Hundreds of residents, among them workers including a delegation of high school teachers, attended a march and rally in Trikala’s Riga Feraiou central square Tuesday. Among the banners displayed were: “Enough is enough! No other dead

workers on the altar of profit,” “They talk about profits and losses, we talk about human lives,” and “It’s not a tragedy, it’s a crime of the employer.” Among the most chanted slogans as they marched were: “Profits steeped in workers’ blood” and “They talk about profit and losses, we talk about human lives!”

The Labor Centre of Larissa called a rally for Tuesday evening in Larissa, the regional capital of Thessaly and Greece’s fifth-largest city, with a municipal population of over 164,000.

In its statement the GSEE declared: “It is not acceptable, in the year 2026, for workers to lose their lives at work. Human life cannot and should not be treated as ‘collateral damage’ of the production process.”

This is nauseating. It was precisely the collaboration of the GSEE and the public sector federation ADEDY with austerity-imposing governments of every political stripe that produced the conditions in which such tragedies occur. In Greece today, employers can essentially do what they want—and get away with it.

Like an arsonist returning to the scene of a crime, Alexis Tsipras, Greece’s former prime minister and ex-leader of the pseudo-left Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left), asked on Facebook in response to the Trikala deaths: “Until when will we mourn people who lose their lives simply trying to make a living?”

The dire state of workplace safety today is inseparable from the betrayal of Tsipras and his rotten party. Syriza was swept into power with a landslide in January 2015 on an anti-austerity platform, only to junk it within weeks. Following the July 2015 referendum—in which workers overwhelmingly rejected a third austerity package—Syriza swiftly agreed to a new austerity programme with the EU and IMF.

Over the next four years, Syriza imposed austerity measures even more savage than those implemented by previous social democratic and New Democracy administrations. The party privatised Greece’s railway network, gutting safety standards and paving the way for the Tempi disaster.



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