

CYPRUS 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The government of the Republic of Cyprus is the only internationally recognized government on the island, but since 1974 the northern third of Cyprus has been administered by Turkish Cypriots. This area proclaimed itself the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” in 1983. The United States does not recognize the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus,” nor does any country other than Turkey. A substantial number of Turkish troops remain on the island. A buffer zone, or “Green Line,” patrolled by a UN Peacekeeping Force, separates the two sides. This report is divided into two parts: the Republic of Cyprus, and the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

The Republic of Cyprus is a constitutional republic and multiparty presidential democracy. On May 30, voters elected 56 representatives to the 80-seat Vouli Antiprosopon (House of Representatives) in free and fair elections. The remaining seats are designated for Turkish Cypriots and are left vacant. In 2018 voters re-elected President Nicos Anastasiades in free and fair elections.

Police enforce the law. Police report to the Ministry of Justice and Public Order. The president appoints the chief of police. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: substantial interference with the freedom of association of nongovernmental organizations; refoulement of asylum seekers; mistreatment of asylum seekers, including extended arbitrary detention and harsh detention conditions; serious acts of government corruption; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national and ethnic minority groups.

The government took steps to identify, investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed human rights abuses and acts of corruption.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibit such practices. There were reports that police at times engaged in abusive tactics and degrading treatment, sometimes to enforce measures adopted by the government to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

According to press reports and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), members of ethnic and racial minorities were more likely to be subjected to such treatment.

On February 13, police in Nicosia dispersed an anticorruption and antilockdown protest using a water cannon and tear gas. The police action resulted in several injuries among the 300 to 400 protesters and at least 10 arrests. The police water cannon injured a demonstrator's eye, requiring emergency surgery. While then justice minister Yioltis stated that police did not have orders to use force to break up the gathering (which had been banned for violating COVID-19 restrictions), critics pointed out that police arrived prepared to do so, equipped with riot gear and prepositioning a water-cannon vehicle. A police spokesperson stated police used force only after demonstrators ignored warnings to disperse and threw rocks and other objects at officers. The ruling Democratic Rally party (DISY) released a statement saying the police action appeared excessively violent, and the attorney general consented to a criminal investigation by the Independent Authority Investigating Complaints against the Police. The Independent Authority recommended on October 14 that the attorney general pursue criminal prosecution and disciplinary action against police officers involved in the incident. The

ombudsman concurred with the recommendation. The main opposition party, the Progressive Party of Working People, and some members of parliament called upon the minister of justice and chief of police to resign.

The most recent report of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), published in 2018, on the country's prison and detention centers noted persistent, credible allegations of police mistreatment of detainees, including allegations of physical and sexual abuse.

The ombudsman, who also acts as the country's national preventive mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture, reported it was investigating complaints from citizens of verbal, discriminative, and degrading treatment by police. Unlike in previous years, the ombudsman did not receive any complaints of mistreatment and discriminatory and degrading behavior, including complaints of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, from inmates in detention centers and the Cyprus Prisons Department (CPD), the country's only prison. The ombudsman reported that complaints received in 2020 regarding prisoner abuse at the CPD were still under investigation. The ombudsman noted continued improvement overall in the treatment of prisoners and detainees in the CPD and in detention centers.

Impunity was not a significant problem in the security forces.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

As in previous years, some prison and detention centers, including detention centers for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants pending deportation, were overcrowded.

Physical Conditions: Overcrowding remained a problem in the CPD. The prison's capacity is 543; the maximum number of inmates held during the year was 793. In its 2018 report, the CPT noted that in Blocks 1, 2, 5, and 8 of the CPD, many cells did not have toilets, and prisoners lacked reliable access to toilets at night. Overcrowding was not a problem in the area holding female inmates or in the open prison, a section for prisoners allowed to work outside the prison and visit family on some weekends.

Prison authorities held juvenile pretrial detainees in cells separate from convicted juveniles, but the two groups shared the same grounds in their daily activities under the supervision of prison staff. Authorities reportedly held migrants detained on deportation orders together with detainees charged with criminal offenses in nearly all police stations. Such detentions at police stations were limited to a maximum of 48 hours except in cases when the Mennoyia Immigration Detention Center for undocumented migrants was full. The ombudsman noted that at times authorities detained undocumented migrants for longer than 24 hours, which the ombudsman asserted was improper treatment of detainees.

The ombudsman reported that it had not received complaints from prisoners related to overcrowding or the failure to separate prisoners at the CPD. The ombudsmans's office did, however, launch an investigation into these problems in 2020. The investigation continued at year's end.

In response to the March 2020 *CPT Statement of Principles Relating to the Treatment of Persons Deprived of their Liberty* in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government amended the prison law in April 2020 to reduce the prison population. Some prisoners received early release, were shifted to the open prison, or were allowed to serve the remainder of their sentence under electronic surveillance (bracelet) at home.

During the year the ombudsman inspected Aradippou police station and Mennoyia Immigration Detention Center for undocumented migrants. During the inspection of Aradippou police station, the ombudsman found one person had been detained for deportation from November 2020 to March. At the ombudsman's recommendation, the detainee was transferred to Mennoyia Immigration Detention Center. Full reports on the inspections of Aradippou police station and Mennoyia Immigration Detention Center were pending at year's end.

The NGOs Cyprus Refugee Council and CARITAS reported satisfactory physical conditions at the Mennoyia Immigration Detention Center for undocumented migrants. Unlike in previous years, the NGO Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism (KISA) was unable to visit the Mennoyia center because the Ministry of Interior deregistered KISA in December 2020 (see section 2.b., Freedom of Association).

Approximately 51 percent of prisoners in the CPD were non-Cypriots convicted mainly of immigration-related crimes, such as illegal entry and possession of counterfeit documents. Unlike some Cypriot prisoners, foreign prisoners without a temporary residence permit were not permitted to leave the prison to work, spend weekends with family, or apply for parole.

Administration: Authorities generally conducted investigations into credible allegations of mistreatment. In 2018 the CPT raised concerns that insufficient resources as well as personal ties between accused police officers and investigators (most of whom were former police officers) weakened investigations into allegations of police abuse.

The ombudsman conducted regular visits to the CPD and detention centers to assess whether conditions and treatment of prisoners and detainees met national and international standards and regulations. In September 2020 the ombudsman launched an investigation into the overall treatment of prisoners and detainees and the physical conditions at the CPD. The ombudsman's office visited the CPD several times to inspect the living quarters of prisoners and detainees and conducted confidential interviews with inmates. The ombudsman's investigation continued at year's end.

Detention centers lacked facilities for religious observance. Religious representatives were permitted to visit inmates.

During the year the ombudsman launched an investigation into the possibility of censorship of complaints submitted to her office by prisoners and detainees at the CPD and at Mennoyia Immigration Detention Center. The ombudsman also investigated a complaint submitted by relatives of a CPD detainee that he was locked in his cell for a long period of time and relatives could not contact him. Both investigations continued at year's end.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted visits to prison and detention centers by independent human rights observers, and unrestricted and unannounced visits occurred during the year. Prison officials from other EU countries and diplomats stationed in the country visited the prisons during the year. According to the Ministry of Justice, representatives of the ombudsman, the

Cyprus Red Cross, and the Cyprus Refugee Council visited the Mennoyia Immigration Detention Center multiple times during the year. Representatives of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency visited Paphos Police Detention Center and representatives of the Cyprus Refugee Council visited Lakatamia Police Detention Center.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires judicially issued arrest warrants, and authorities respected this requirement. Authorities may not detain a person for more than one day unless a court grants an extension. Most periods of investigative detention did not exceed 10 days before the filing of formal charges. Authorities promptly informed detainees of the charges against them in a language they could understand. The attorney general made efforts to minimize pretrial detention, especially in cases of serious crimes.

There is a functioning system of bail. The government claimed the right to deport foreign nationals for specified reasons of public interest, regardless of whether criminal charges had been filed against them or they had been convicted of a crime.

Detainees generally had access to an attorney. The law permits detainees to speak to their attorney at any time, including before and during interrogation by police. In 2018 the CPT reported that police officers regularly prevented detainees from contacting a lawyer until they had given a written statement, and the bar association reported that lawyers were not permitted to be present during police interviews.

In criminal cases the state provides indigent detainees with an attorney. To qualify for free legal aid, however, detainees first require a court decision confirming their financial need. The Republic of Cyprus Bar Association prohibits lawyers from

doing work pro bono. NGOs complained that this had a significant impact on their ability to take the government to court and hold officials accountable for the treatment of vulnerable populations, including asylum seekers.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) described the Pournara reception center as a “de facto detention center” for asylum seekers. Pournara was designed to accommodate new arrivals for 72 hours while they undergo medical, security, and vulnerability screenings before relocation to more permanent housing. A steady daily inflow of 20-30 new asylum seekers in January coupled with the minister of interior’s de facto non-exit policy (allegedly instituted to mitigate COVID-19 spread, but which UNHCR claimed was not legal) had caused the camp’s population to triple since mid-November 2020. UNHCR reported 1,503 migrants in the center as of January 13, greatly exceeding the center’s maximum capacity of approximately 1,000. Approximately 630 migrants were housed in the main camp and the remainder in quarantine areas that had tents without floors.

On January 11, a brawl between two groups of asylum seekers again brought media attention to the rapidly deteriorating conditions at Pournara. The fighting reportedly erupted regarding noise complaints between a group of Syrians and a group of migrants from African countries. Approximately three-quarters of the asylum seekers in the center were African and one quarter were Syrian. A total of 35 persons were injured and 24 required medical attention at the hospital. Migrants reportedly threw stones, used metal bars as weapons, and caused damage to the center and to police cars used to break up the fight. Speaking to local media on January 13, UNHCR Cyprus representative Katja Saha observed that “overcrowded conditions at the center and the ensuing pressure on the existing infrastructure, in conjunction with the uncertainty regarding when and under what conditions they would be able to exit the center, had enflamed tensions.”

According to a government official, approximately 100 migrants were camped outside the fence at Pournara as of January 19. Those outside the perimeter were limited to using nonsegregated chemical toilets and had no access to running water or electricity. The official reported the situation was “worse than ever” and deteriorating daily. Personnel at the center were stretched to their limits, and the camp had run out of space. According to NGO and government contacts, the

minister of interior was adamant asylum seekers not leave the camp, even if they had completed the required quarantine period and secured outside accommodation. On January 20, the commissioner for children's rights sent a letter to the ministers of interior, health, and education asserting that the decision to hold asylum seekers in Pournara indefinitely infringed upon fundamental freedoms and the basic rights of children and vulnerable individuals. The letter asserted the government was using Pournara as a detention center, in violation of Cyprus's international obligations to protect asylum seekers, children, and unaccompanied minors.

In October the ombudsman reported that many of its 2020 recommendations for improvements at Pournara and Kofinou Reception and Accommodation Center for Applications for International Protection were implemented during the year. Exit restrictions were lifted, the number of social welfare employees working at the center increased, residents with vulnerabilities were transferred to accommodations outside the center, adequate electricity service was installed, tents were replaced with prefabricated housing units, and problems with medical supplies and services were resolved.

Government officials reported average daily arrivals at the Pournara reception center grew as high as 80 late in the year, and by mid-December the number of residents at the center exceeded 2,500. Of those, 287 were unaccompanied minors age 15 and older. Media reported a brawl involving an estimated 300 migrants broke out in Pournara the night of December 2. Camp officials called police to intervene and stop the fighting. Seven migrants were reportedly treated at the camp for mild injuries. On December 13, the House of Representatives Human Rights Committee visited Pournara reception center and members of the committee voiced their concern about the inhuman conditions at the center caused by overcrowding. Committee members also expressed concerns regarding the lack of schooling for minors or protections for vulnerable women at the center and called for faster processing of asylum seekers from countries in conflict. In addition to Syrians arriving by boat either directly to the Republic of Cyprus or north of the buffer zone and then crossing into the Republic of Cyprus, many irregular migrants from African countries flew via Turkey into Ercan airport in the Turkish Cypriot-controlled north and then made their way through the buffer zone, into Republic of Cyprus-controlled territory to seek asylum, assisted by smugglers on both sides.

On December 21, after a surge in COVID-19 cases at Pournara, the government transferred 585 asylum seekers deemed to be close contacts of positive cases to the new Limnes reception center, which opened in early November. An additional 100 were transferred from Pournara to Limnes the following week after testing positive. According to UNCHR, Limnes was not equipped to receive large numbers and lacked basic facilities. Limnes lacked medical personnel and medication to treat symptomatic COVID-positive individuals. Asylum seekers were reportedly housed in unheated, prefabricated units and slept on beds without mattresses or on the floor.

The ombudsman reported some cases of authorities detaining migrants and asylum seekers, allegedly for the purpose of deportation, for extended periods despite there being no prospect they would actually be deported, either because their country of origin refused to accept them or the detainees refused to consent to the issuance of travel documents by their country of origin. The ombudsman reported that in those cases, detention did not exceed the maximum 18 months permitted by law for the execution of a deportation order. The ombudsman reported authorities did not implement her past recommendation to examine alternatives to detention depending on the personal circumstances of detainees. A considerable number of detainees at the Mennoyia Immigration Detention Center were awaiting a decision on their request for international protection or for adjudication of their appeals against the rejection of their asylum applications. As in previous years, KISA stated that authorities continued to provide only limited information to detainees concerning the status of their cases.

Unlike in some previous years, the ombudsman and NGOs did not encounter cases of detainees deported before final adjudication of their asylum applications. An NGO reported, however, that instead of deporting detainees before final adjudication of their cases, immigration authorities pressured them to sign a voluntary return consent by threatening them with indefinite detention.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law and constitution provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Defendants enjoy the right to a presumption of innocence. Officials informed defendants promptly and in detail of the charges against them. The constitution provides for fair and public trials without undue delay, and defendants have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner. Authorities provide an attorney for defendants who are unable to afford one and allow defendants adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense. Authorities provide free interpretation as necessary through all stages of the trial. Defendants have the right to confront prosecution or plaintiff witnesses and present evidence or witnesses on their behalf. Criminal defendants enjoy the right not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt. Defendants have the right to appeal. As in past years, the Cyprus Bar Association reported that chronic court delays, particularly in civil trials, impaired the right to a fair trial. Trial delays were common and partially caused by lengthy legal procedures, which created a larger workload for the courts.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals and organizations can seek civil remedies for human rights abuses through domestic courts. Individuals can appeal cases involving alleged human rights abuses by the state to the European Court of Human Rights once they have exhausted all avenues of appeal in domestic courts.

Property Seizure and Restitution

According to the law, the minister of interior is the guardian of the properties of Turkish Cypriots who have not had permanent residence in the government-controlled area since 1974. Ownership remains with the original owner, but the sale or transfer of Turkish Cypriot property under the guardianship of the minister requires the approval of the government. The minister has the authority to return

properties to Turkish Cypriot applicants after examining the circumstances of each case. Owners can appeal the minister's decisions to the Administrative Court.

Unlike in previous years, Turkish Cypriots did not file court cases seeking to reclaim properties located in the government-controlled area. On January 27, Nicosia District Court issued a ruling rejecting the petition of a Turkish Cypriot property owner to sell her property to a third party. The minister acting as guardian had denied the owner consent to sell the property to a third party because the owner was residing in property in the Turkish Cypriot-administered area that belonged to displaced Greek Cypriots. In rejecting the petition, the Court noted the Turkish Cypriot owner did not specify nor describe the property she wished to sell.

On June 9, the Republic of Cyprus was accepted as an observer to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The Department of State's Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act report to Congress, released publicly on July 29, 2020, can be found on the Department's website at:

<https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law and constitution prohibit such actions, but there was one report that the government did not fully respect these prohibitions.

In December 2020, then minister of justice Emily Yiolitis filed a complaint with the chief of police that unknown persons had created a fake Twitter account using her name and picture. In December 2020 police, using a court-issued search warrant, confiscated and searched electronic devices from the home of activist Niki Zarou on suspicion that she created the parody Twitter account. On January 29, the Supreme Court ruled the lower court had exceeded its authority and cancelled the warrant. Zarou filed a civil lawsuit in March asserting that the attorney general and Yiolitis violated her constitutional rights.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and

Other Media

The law provides for freedom of expression, including for the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for the media.

Freedom of Expression: The law criminalizes incitement to hatred and violence based on race, color, religion, genealogical origin, national or ethnic origin, or sexual orientation. Such acts are punishable by up to five years' imprisonment, a fine of up to 10,000 euros (\$11,500), or both.

Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction.

The law penalizes the use of geographical names and toponyms in the country other than those included in the gazetteer the government presented at the 1987 Fifth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. According to the law, anyone who publishes, imports, distributes, or sells maps, books, or any other documents in print or digital form that contain geographical names and toponyms on the island other than those permitted, commits an offense punishable by up to three years in prison, a fine of up to 50,000 euros (\$57,500), or both.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority.

The law criminalizes the use of computer systems to incite and promote racism, xenophobia, prejudice, racial discrimination, hate speech, and violence. Such acts are punishable by up to five years' imprisonment, a fine of up to 35,000 euros (\$40,250), or both.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The law provides the government the right to deny entry to visitors who declare the

intention to stay at a hotel in the area under Turkish Cypriot administration not originally owned by Turkish Cypriots. Pursuant to this law, the government maintains a policy of preventing visiting foreign academics and artistic groups from attending conferences or performing in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots if they make such a declaration. There were no reports of foreign academics being denied entry during the year.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provide for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected the freedom of assembly but limited freedom of association.

Freedom of Association

In December 2020 the government removed NGO KISA from the registry of associations and froze its bank accounts because KISA had not submitted audited accounts and had not convened a general assembly within the two-month timeframe required by an August 2020 amendment to the law governing NGOs. The General Registrar of Associations rejected KISA's request for an extension, stating it did not have the authority to grant extensions and that discretionary extensions would violate the principle of equal treatment. While KISA was not alone in facing this compliance enforcement – approximately 2,400 mostly defunct and inactive associations were similarly deregistered – human rights defenders asserted the Ministry of Interior was particularly inflexible on KISA's appeals for a deadline extension given the contentious history between KISA and the ministry. International human rights watchdogs, including the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights and Amnesty International, criticized the move. On March 31, five UN Human Rights Office special rapporteurs issued a joint communication addressed to the government expressing grave concern regarding the deteriorating environment for civil society organizations, citing the 2020 amendment to the Law on Associations and the deregistration of KISA. Noting Minister of Interior Nicos Nouris's earlier potentially defamatory accusations against KISA, the rapporteurs suggested the NGO had been targeted for its work supporting migrants and combating racial discrimination and xenophobia. Calling the suspension or dissolution of an association the severest form of restriction on

freedom of association, the rapporteurs asserted such action should only be taken when a flagrant violation of law results in clear and imminent danger to the public. On June 10, the Administrative Court rejected KISA's appeal to reverse its delisting.

Citing its deregistration as a legal NGO – and despite KISA's assertions it was registered as a not-for-profit company and could continue to operate legally – authorities denied KISA access to migrant reception centers. At year's end KISA's bank account remained frozen, negatively impacting its capacity to operate, implement EU-funded projects, provide services to migrants and refugees, and advocate for their rights. KISA laid off its employees, relying on volunteers to continue limited operations, and, at year's end faced eviction for being unable to pay rent and utilities for its premises. Citing the presence of a KISA representative, Minister of Interior Nouris refused to appear before the House of Representatives Human Rights Committee on September 20 to discuss the treatment of a pregnant Syrian asylum seeker and her family (see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees). The ombudsman turned down a Council of Europe recommendation to include KISA in a national campaign against hate speech saying KISA was not recognized by the government.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The law provides for freedom of internal movement within government-controlled areas, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

In-country Movement: The government imposed restrictions on some movements through crossing points to the areas administered by Turkish Cypriots to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and these restrictions were applied equally to all. Buffer Zone checkpoints reopened on June 4 with a tiered testing procedure for crossing, which was the first time routine crossings had been possible since the

checkpoints closed in March 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Media outlets reported more than 1.2 million crossings during the year.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government did not restrict Greek Cypriots from traveling to the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned foreigners against spending the night at Greek Cypriot-owned properties occupied by Turkish Cypriots or Turkish citizens, gambling in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, or buying or developing property there. Authorities at ports of entry occasionally denied admission to nonresidents who listed hotels in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots as their intended place of residence during their visit. NGOs reported the government prohibited recognized non-Cypriot refugees with temporary residence status and asylum seekers from crossing to the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, asserting it could not assure their safety in an area not under its control. Local media reported police officers at the crossing points occasionally harassed Greek Cypriots returning from the area under Turkish Cypriot administration.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

The government considers Greek Cypriots displaced as a result of the 1974 division of the island to be refugees, although they fall under the UN definition of internally displaced persons (IDPs). As of December 2020, there were 221,466 such individuals and their descendants. Assistance programs for IDPs were conducted by the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus and other UN agencies. Depending on their income, IDPs were eligible for financial assistance from the government. They were resettled, had access to humanitarian organizations, and were not subject to attack, targeting, or mandatory return under dangerous conditions.

f. Protection of Refugees

UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations reported difficulty in cooperating with the government to provide protection and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for granting asylum or refugee status, and

the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. Three Cameroonians became stranded in the buffer zone on May 24 after attempting to cross into Republic of Cyprus-controlled territory from the area under Turkish Cypriot administration. According to UNHCR and NGOs, police at the Ledra Palace crossing, where the Cameroonians presented themselves to apply for asylum, received instructions from the government not to accept their applications. In October, one of the three Cameroonians appeared at Pournara reception center and applied for asylum. The other two remained in the buffer zone until early December, continuing to live in tents and subsisting on food provided by UNHCR and diplomatic missions. During a December 2-4 visit, Pope Francis arranged to take 50 asylum seekers, including the two Cameroonians, to Italy under a special humanitarian program. They travelled to the Vatican on December 16. Apart from this case, NGOs did not receive complaints that other asylum seekers were denied access to the asylum process.

Due to a significant increase in asylum claims in recent years and long delays in the examination of applications, 18,322 asylum claims were pending as of November 30 – approximately the same number as at the end of 2020. The Asylum Service, the ombudsman, UNHCR, and NGOs reported some accelerated examination of asylum applications, but the backlog remained, and delays persisted in the appeals process. The government, UNHCR, and NGOs agreed that a significant proportion of registered asylum claims were not credible. In 2019 the government established an International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC) to streamline the examination of asylum appeals. NGOs reported the establishment of IPAC was an improvement of the previous system and that its decisions were fair, but the process was slow and a backlog of 7,000 appeals pending adjudication remained at year's end.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: In May 2020 the government published a list of 21 safe countries of return with the aim of examining all applications from safe countries under accelerated procedures. As of August the list included 28 countries: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Georgia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Serbia, Sri Lanka, The Gambia, Togo, Tunisia, Ukraine (not including the

areas of Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk), and Vietnam.

Refoulement: Media outlets, NGOs, and UNHCR reported that authorities continued pushing back boats carrying irregular migrants, including potential asylum seekers. In a March 10 letter to Minister of Interior Nouris, the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner stated she had “received a number of reports indicating that boats carrying migrants, including persons who may be in need of international protection, have been prevented from disembarking in Cyprus, and summarily returned, sometimes violently, without any possibility for their passengers to access the asylum procedure.” From January to August authorities pushed back to Lebanon a total of five boats carrying Syrians. UNHCR and NGOs reported many of these individuals faced “chain” refoulement, as they were subsequently deported from Lebanon back to Syria. In a December 30 Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations operation in Cyprus, Secretary-General Guterres confirmed that “pushbacks at sea increased during the reporting period,” July-December, “resulting in eight confirmed cases of collective refoulement and one person missing at sea.” NGOs and media outlets reported that irregular migrants, including women and children, were left at sea between two to five days, in high temperatures and with limited supplies. On May 16, authorities pushed back to Lebanon a boat carrying 56 individuals. On June 25, they pushed back a boat with 58 persons, and on July 25, pushed back a boat with 85 persons.

Maritime Police intercepted two boats carrying irregular migrants on August 22. UNHCR and NGO contacts reported both vessels departed from Lebanon and all individuals on board were Syrian nationals. The first boat, reportedly intercepted seven miles off Cape Greco, carried 69 persons. A second, carrying 19, was intercepted near Paralimni. According to media reports, five occupants of the boat jumped overboard as the Maritime Police approached. Four were rescued but a fifth, wearing a mask, flippers, and life preserver, reportedly swam to shore, where authorities were unable to locate him. UNHCR and NGO contacts reported a pregnant woman was separated from her family and transferred to shore, where she spent the night on a wooden bench. Authorities took her and an ill man to the hospital the next day, but chartered a vessel, and, under police escort, returned 85 of the 88 individuals to Lebanon, including the pregnant woman’s husband and two young children. The woman and her newborn were later transferred to

Kofinou reception center for asylum seekers. NGOs, UNHCR, and the leader of the main opposition party made public statements requesting the government allow her family to join her. UNHCR stated the government was bound by EU law and international convention to abide by the principle of family unity.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: NGOs reported that some Social Welfare Service officers and police subjected asylum seekers to racist verbal abuse. The NGO KISA reported six cases of attacks against asylum seekers by security personnel at Social Welfare Services premises. On November 2, KISA made a formal complaint to the Independent Authority Investigating Complaints Against the Police that in all six cases, police failed to investigate, and in one case, police used excessive force against the complainants. On August 11, police officers of the Crime Investigation Unit were called to resolve an altercation between two Nigerian female asylum seekers and a local couple that had rented an apartment to them. The couple reportedly refused to allow them to move in after payment of two-months' rent. The asylum seekers reported one police officer physically attacked them, grabbing one by the hair and pulling her out of the apartment. The same officer reportedly returned and grabbed the other woman by the neck, kicked her, and shouted "I will kill you."

In an incident at the Lakatamia Welfare Office on October 18, KISA reported an asylum seeker waiting for several hours with her 11-month-old child for a scheduled appointment with her case worker was pushed and grabbed by the neck by a security guard. The asylum seeker told KISA she recorded the incident on her mobile phone and went to Lakatamia Police station to file a report. After seeing the video, police reportedly told her she was responsible because she touched the security guard. In a separate incident at the same welfare office, KISA reported a security guard used excessive force against a female asylum seeker on October 20. Police responded to the scene in response to a call from the asylum seeker and called an ambulance to take her to the hospital to treat her fractured leg. The asylum seeker told KISA that police at the scene refused to take her report, citing a need for a translator although they spoke to her in English. The government's policy was to minimize the length of detention of irregular migrants. If unable to execute a court-ordered deportation order within 18 months, the government is required to release detained migrants and provide a temporary residency permit.

An NGO reported immigration authorities pressured migrant detainees to sign a voluntary return consent by threatening them with indefinite detention. The same NGO reported that an asylum seeker from Kazakhstan was detained in 2019 for reasons of national security and continued to remain in detention at year's end, despite Kazakh authorities withdrawing the Interpol notice that led to his arrest.

Freedom of Movement: The government restricted the exit of asylum seekers from the Pournara Migrant Reception Center in Kokkinotrimithia until March 2 as part of the country-wide COVID-19 lockdown. The restrictions resulted in severe overcrowding, with the center at times reaching nearly double its 1,000-person capacity.

NGOs and the ombudsman reported improved conditions for asylum seekers residing in the main compound of Pournara reception center. Increased arrivals and slow processing of applicants resulted in severe overcrowding of the center most of the year (see section 1.d., Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees). The Cyprus Refugee Council reported that the average stay at the center for processing was 30 days. The ombudsman reported that many improvements were implemented during the year, including the lifting of exit restrictions and the transfer of residents with vulnerabilities to accommodations outside the center. CARITAS reported that vulnerable asylum seekers transferred from Pournara to Social Welfare Services accommodations before their applications were processed were often unable to return to the center to complete their asylum process because of inadequate public transportation links to the center. As a result, many of these individuals did not have access to benefits for months.

Employment: Authorities allowed asylum seekers whose cases were awaiting adjudication to work after a one-month waiting period. In October the Ministry of Labor, pressured by the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and employers struggling with severe labor shortages, amended the process for employment of asylum seekers to allow employers to hire asylum seekers immediately, without waiting for approval of the contract by authorities. This effectively accelerated the permit process for the employment of asylum seekers from four to six months to one day, overcoming a significant hurdle that previously discouraged employers from employing asylum seekers.

During the year the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance received 3,279 applications for asylum seeker labor contracts, and by year's end had approved 3,199 applications and rejected 80.

Access to Basic Services: Recognized refugees had access to public services such as education, health care, and the courts. The only permanent reception center for asylum seekers, located in Kofinou, remained full, and the majority of asylum seekers lacked proper housing. UNHCR and local NGOs continued to report a high number of asylum seekers faced homelessness and destitution. They reported that many asylum seekers slept in outdoor parks or temporarily stayed with friends, relatives, or strangers, often sleeping on floors without adequate access to hygiene facilities. The growing number of new arrivals, the limited supply of affordable accommodations, delays in the provision of government financial support, and the backlog in the examination of asylum applications increased the risk of homelessness, according to local NGOs.

Emergency measures continued for part of the year to contain the spread of COVID-19, and included restrictions on freedom of movement, social distancing requirements, and limits on gatherings, as well as the closure of public spaces and certain businesses, government institutions, and facilities. NGOs and UNHCR reported that these actions had personal, public, economic, and social implications on the human rights and living conditions of refugees and asylum seekers. Primarily these included prolonged detention at overcrowded government reception facilities in poor conditions (see "Freedom of Movement" above); the loss of jobs and livelihoods (see "Employment" above); restrictions in access to healthcare; adverse mental health impacts; delays in social welfare payments; a lack of access to technology, education, and personal development opportunities; delays in asylum and migration procedures; and limited access to the legal and judicial systems.

NGOs reported long delays and inconsistencies in the delivery of welfare benefits to asylum seekers and payment of rent to landlords that in some cases led to evictions. The ombudsman reported that several complaints concerning the delivery of welfare support were resolved after her office mediated with the Ministry of Labor. An NGO reported exceptionally long delays of more than six months in Limassol and Paphos districts that left beneficiaries with only an

emergency stipend of 100 euros (\$115) per month. In March 2020 the Council of Ministers abolished the coupon system for welfare support provided to asylum seekers and replaced it with direct payments. In October 2020 the Social Welfare Services began printing and mailing benefit checks to asylum seekers or paying welfare benefits directly into beneficiaries' accounts, in accordance with the new system. NGOs continued to complain that many asylum seekers lacked reliable, stable mailing addresses and the ability to cash checks, and noted that banks were unwilling or reluctant to open accounts for asylum seekers. Homeless asylum seekers faced difficulties in opening a bank account without a valid address.

Asylum seekers who refused an available job could be denied state benefits. The Ministry of Labor reported that it examined the reasons an asylum seeker declined a job offer, and if found valid, benefits remained in place.

Durable Solutions: The government offered recognized refugee status to 249 asylum seekers residing in the country and in collaboration with the International Organization of Migration assisted 274 migrants in their voluntary return to their homes.

Temporary Protection: The government also provided temporary protection, called subsidiary protection, to individuals who might not qualify as refugees. The government provided subsidiary protection status for citizens or residents of Syria who entered the country legally but only some who entered illegally. All persons seeking such status were required to provide a Syrian passport or other identification. Authorities granted subsidiary protection to 1,866 persons during the year.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law and constitution provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. In national elections, Turkish Cypriots who resided in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots were ineligible to vote and run for office in the government-controlled area, although Greek Cypriots living in the north faced no such restrictions. In elections for the European Parliament, Cypriot citizens, resident EU citizens, and Turkish Cypriots who live in the area administered by

Turkish Cypriots have the right to vote and run for office.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: On May 30 the country held free and fair elections for the 56 seats assigned to Greek Cypriots in the 80-seat House of Representatives. The 24 seats assigned to Turkish Cypriots remained vacant. In 2018 voters re-elected President Nicos Anastasiades in free and fair elections.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Nevertheless, women remained underrepresented in senior political positions. Only 27 percent of ministers and 14.3 percent of the members of the House of Representatives were women.

In 2019 more than 5,600 Turkish Cypriots voted in the European Parliament elections at 50 polling stations near buffer-zone crossing points, compared with 1,869 who voted in 2014. Voters elected a Turkish Cypriot to one of the country's six seats in the European Parliament for the first time. According to press reports, between 1,100 and 1,500 Turkish Cypriots were unable to vote because their names did not appear on the electoral list. The law provides for the registration of adult Turkish Cypriot holders of a Republic of Cyprus identity card who resided in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots in the electoral roll for the European Parliament elections. Turkish Cypriots not residing in that area needed to apply for registration in the electoral roll, as did all other citizens residing there. The government did not automatically register an unspecified number of Turkish Cypriots residing in the north because they were incorrectly listed in the official civil registry as residents of the government-controlled area. This problem persisted but to a lesser extent than previous years, as the number of registered Turkish Cypriot voters increased from approximately 56,000 in 2014 to 81,000 in 2019. Media outlets attributed much of the increase to the successful campaign of the first Turkish Cypriot elected to the European Parliament.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in

Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were numerous reports of government corruption during the year.

Corruption: In October 2020 al-Jazeera broadcast an expose, *The Cyprus Papers – Undercover*, in which undercover reporters captured extensive evidence of government corruption related to the Citizenship by Investment program (CBI). In the video, the president of the House of Representatives, Demetris Syllouris, House of Representatives member Christakis Giovanni, and CBI facilitators indicated their willingness to assist a fictitious Chinese CBI applicant whom they were told had been convicted of money laundering and corruption. After the broadcast, the government announced it was terminating the CBI program, effective November 2020, and Attorney General George Savvides ordered an investigation into any possible criminal offenses arising from the al-Jazeera report. Syllouris and Giovanni later resigned from the House of Representatives. In December 2020 the government released a heavily redacted report prepared by the three-member “Kalogirou Committee,” appointed by the attorney general to probe the CBI program. The committee found serious shortcomings that enabled individuals with criminal backgrounds to acquire citizenship and bypass anti-money-laundering safeguards. In May the attorney general filed the first criminal case against five companies and four individuals based on the committee’s findings.

On August 11, the attorney general instructed police to open a new investigation following an August 10 al-Jazeera expose showing British “fixers,” who claimed use of Cypriot passports acquired through the CBI program aided international laundering of money through British soccer clubs. An investigation continued at year’s end.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human

Rights

Domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction and were able to investigate and publish their findings on human rights cases without interference. Government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views.

KISA reported that its deregistration as an NGO in December 2020 (see 2.b., Freedom of Association) and the subsequent blocking of its bank account by the government significantly limited its ability to operate. All of its applications to open a new organizational bank account were rejected by local banks. The organization was unable to complete previously awarded EU-funded projects due to its inability to access the funds in its bank account. Projects funded by the EU account for a majority of KISA's operating budget, and the revocation of its formal NGO status restricted its ability to apply for new EU-funded projects. As a result of its deregistration, KISA was prevented from engaging with government agencies, participating in government-funded training, or applying for funding. Citing its removal from the associations' registry, the Asylum Service denied KISA permission to visit migrant reception centers on September 24 and 30.

On September 20, Minister of Interior Nouris refused to appear before the House of Representatives Human Rights Committee meeting to which KISA was invited, citing the presence of a deregistered organization. The committee meeting addressed the treatment of a pregnant Syrian asylum seeker and her family on board a migrant boat authorities pushed back to Lebanon. Separately, the Cyprus Roma Association, the only civil society organization representing the Cypriot Romani community, reported that it did not have the resources to prepare the extensive financial documentation required to maintain its NGO registration and was therefore deregistered.

Government Human Rights Bodies: There is a government ombudsman, whose portfolio includes human rights, and a legislative Committee on Human Rights.

During her independent investigations, the ombudsman generally enjoyed good cooperation with other government bodies. NGOs complained, however, that the Office of the Ombudsman routinely refused to investigate their complaints on the

grounds that similar complaints had been investigated in the past.

The legislative Committee on Human Rights, which most local NGOs considered effective, consists of nine members of the House of Representatives who are elected for a five-year term. The committee discussed a wide range of human rights problems, including trafficking in persons, treatment of asylum seekers, gender-based violence, including sexual abuse of women and children, prison conditions, and the rights of foreign workers. The executive branch does not exercise control over the committee.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape, including spousal rape, with a maximum sentence of life in prison. The law also criminalizes domestic violence, with a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. The government generally enforced the law effectively, although many cases continued to go unreported. From January to September, police investigated 36 cases of rape and eight cases of sexual assault.

The law establishes clear mechanisms for reporting and prosecuting family violence. A court can issue a same-day restraining order against suspected or convicted domestic violence offenders. The number of reported cases of domestic violence increased sharply, as it did in 2020. Police claimed the increase was due to more effective domestic violence policies, citing the establishment of specialized domestic violence units in all police divisions, more intensive police training, and increased public awareness. In the first eight months of the year, 2,179 cases of domestic violence were reported to police, 300 more than in 2020 and significantly higher than in 2019 when 519 cases were reported to police. As of December police had completed investigations for 780 of the cases and filed 611 cases in court. The NGO Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO) attributed the significant increase in domestic abuse cases, in part, to the government-imposed COVID-19 mitigation lockdowns. Of the reported survivors in 2020, 76 percent were women. SPAVO received a total of 2,854 messages concerning domestic violence cases on its hotline, live chat, and

SMS text service, compared to 2,147 messages in 2020. As in previous years, SPAVO stated domestic violence survivors often faced significant family and social pressure not to report abuse and to withdraw complaints filed with police.

Media outlets and NGOs criticized the Social Welfare Services for providing insufficient support to survivors of domestic violence. In one example a man in Ergates village stabbed to death his wife and his son. A second son witnessed the killings and escaped. At the time of the killing, the family had been under the care of the Social Welfare Services due to a history of psychological and financial problems. According to media reports, relatives and neighbors had reported frequent incidents of violence against the woman and her children. Police and the Social Welfare Service denied reports that they received any official complaints from the victims. The man's trial was pending at year's end.

There were three shelters for survivors of domestic violence, each funded primarily by the government and operated by SPAVO, which provided shelter to a total of 661 women and children during the year. In December 2020 the government opened the "Women's Home," a one-stop facility in Nicosia where female survivors of violence and sexual assault and their children are provided with medical, legal, and psychological services while also having the opportunity to provide testimony to police. The Women's Home served 404 female victims of violence during the year. It was funded by the government and operated by SPAVO.

Police conducted detailed educational programs for officers on the proper handling of domestic violence, including training focused on child abuse. NGOs reported, however, that some police officers continued to dismiss claims of domestic abuse by foreign women and children.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace with a maximum penalty of six months in prison, a monetary fine, or both. A code of conduct outlines the prevention and handling of sexual harassment and harassment in the public service. NGOs and foreign domestic worker associations reported that authorities did not adequately investigate sexual harassment complaints submitted by foreign domestic workers.

Unlike in previous years when complaints were rare, several women reported sexual harassment to police following a high-profile case in Greece involving a female athlete, widely covered in local media. From January to September, police opened investigations into seven sexual harassment complaints and filed five cases in court. Two of the most prominent cases covered by media outlets involved a senior member of the Church of Cyprus, former metropolitan of Kitium, Chrysostomos, who was accused of rape, and a high-profile politician, who was facing charges of sexual assault. In the Chrysostomos case, the Larnaca-Famagusta Criminal Court ruled on October 22 that the complainant's testimony was inconsistent, contradictory, and untruthful and cleared the former metropolitan of charges.

NGOs reported cases of sexual harassment of foreign female domestic workers remained a widespread but underreported problem. NGOs reported permissive social attitudes, fear of reprisals, and lack of family support for victims discouraged victims from reporting instances of sexual harassment. From January through October, the Department of Labor reported receiving three sexual harassment complaints, including one from a foreign domestic worker and one from an asylum seeker. The complaints were under investigation. The ombudsman continued to receive and examine complaints of sexual harassment in the workplace. In 2019 the country's major labor unions – the Confederation of Cypriot Workers and the Pancyprian Labor Federation – agreed with the Employers and Industrialists Federation on a code of conduct for how to treat cases of harassment and sexual harassment at the workplace. The ombudsman's office and the Academy of Public Administration delivered online training and seminars on sexual harassment and gender mainstreaming for the public sector during the year.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. An NGO reported that some doctors in the private and public sectors required married women to have their husband's consent in order to proceed with sterilization, although the law does not require such consent.

The government funded an NGO that provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. Emergency contraception was

available as part of clinical management of rape.

Discrimination: The law provides the same legal status and rights for women and men. The government generally enforced the law, but women experienced discrimination in employment and pay in the private sector. Although reporting by Eurostat showed pay parity between the genders in the public sector, NGOs reported that vertical and occupational segregation remained a challenge.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law protects members of racial or ethnic groups from violence and discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, community, language, color, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and political or other beliefs. The ombudsman's office, acting as the Equality Authority and Antidiscrimination Body, has jurisdiction to investigate discrimination complaints in the public and private sector. The government generally enforced the law, but according to NGOs, many incidents of discrimination against members of racial, national, or ethnic minority groups were not reported to authorities.

NGOs and media reported an incidence of racially motivated violence in late March when a Greek Cypriot neighbor fired 14 bullets into the Limassol home of a Nigerian and Greek Cypriot family. The perpetrator pled guilty to "attempted threat" and at year's end awaited sentencing. Human rights activists and NGOs reported migrants, particularly Muslims, were frequently presented negatively in media and associated with problems such as rising unemployment and criminality. A parliamentary election campaign video released in early April by the ruling Democratic Rally party linked irregular migration to a threat to public safety. Critics in media called the ad "racist and xenophobic" and "the last refuge of the incompetent and desperate."

In June media outlets reported two incidents of discrimination by a Larnaca high school headmaster against teenage students of African descent. The headmaster reportedly told one student on June 8 that he would "blacken" the school class graduation photograph. On June 26, media outlets reported the same headmaster told a 14-year-old student of African descent that she would not be allowed to participate in the graduation ceremony because of her hair braids. The mayor of

Larnaca, Andreas Vyras, intervened, and the girl attended graduation. Minister of Education Prodromos Prodromou defended the headmaster and attributed the complaints to partisan politics. Prodromou stated no official complaints had been filed against the headmaster and that anonymous complaints submitted in the past were investigated and found to be fabricated.

In 2018 a European Commission Roma Civil Monitor pilot project report stated that Cypriot Roma continued to face discrimination in housing, employment, and education. The report asserted government actions to promote the inclusion of Roma were insufficient.

The ombudsman continued to receive complaints that the government delayed or denied approval of citizenship for the children of Turkish Cypriots married to Turkish citizens, and who reside in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots (see section 6, Children). The ombudsman again reported that the government did not make progress towards implementing her past recommendations to ensure such applications were processed within a reasonable time and applicants are promptly informed in writing when their application does not meet stated criteria. The government reported granting citizenship to 50 such children in 2019.

A member of the Turkish Cypriot community submitted a complaint to the ombudsman regarding the nonuse of the Turkish language by a government authority. Turkish is an official language of the Republic of Cyprus. The ombudsman was investigating the complaint at year's end.

The government provided destitute persons and families legally residing in the country with a minimum guaranteed income (GMI) to cover basic needs. Republic of Cyprus and EU citizens, long-term legal residents, recognized refugees, and victims of trafficking are eligible for GMI payments. In addition, Social Welfare Services provided a wide range of benefits, calculated on the basis of individual and family needs, through public assistance benefits programs. These included family, unemployment, disability, housing, and child benefits.

The Ministry of Education has a code of conduct against racism that provided schools and teachers with a detailed plan on handling, preventing, and reporting racist incidents.

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive citizenship from their parents, and there was universal registration at the time of birth. Citizenship is denied, however, when either of the parents entered or resided in the country illegally. The government considers as illegal settlers those Turkish citizens who entered and resided in the area under Turkish-Cypriot administration. Children born to a Turkish-Cypriot parent are not automatically granted citizenship if one or both of their parents were a Turkish national who entered and resided in the country illegally. Their applications for citizenship are reviewed by the Council of Ministers, which has the right to override this provision of the law and grant them citizenship, provided the applicants meet a set of criteria adopted by the Council of Ministers.

Child Abuse: The law criminalizes child abuse. The maximum penalty for child abuse is one year imprisonment, a monetary fine, or both. From January to August, police investigated 208 cases of child abuse involving 235 children. As of December, 78 of those cases were filed in court. In 2020 police established a new subdirectorate under the Crime Combating Department that specialized in domestic violence and child abuse and created a special investigation unit for cases of child sexual abuse.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal age of marriage is 18, but persons ages 16 and 17 may marry, provided there are serious reasons justifying the marriage and their legal guardians provide written consent. A district court can also allow the marriage of persons ages 16 and 17 if the parents unjustifiably refuse consent, or in the absence of legal guardians.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation of children, child pornography, offering or using a child for commercial sexual exploitation, and engaging in or promoting a child in any form of sexual activity. The maximum penalty for sexual abuse and exploitation of a child between the ages of 13 and 17 is 25 years in prison. The penalty for sexual abuse and exploitation of a child younger than 13 is up to life in prison. Possession of child pornography is a criminal offense punishable by a maximum of life imprisonment. Authorities enforced these laws. The minimum age for consensual sex is 17.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

There were approximately 6,500 persons in the Jewish community, which consisted of a very small number of native Jewish Cypriots and a greater number of expatriate Jews, primarily from Israel, the United Kingdom, and Russia.

In November the Jewish community reported that it received three or four complaints of verbal attacks against members of their community. The complaints were not reported to police.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Persons with Disabilities

The law protects the rights of persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities and prohibits discrimination against them. The government generally enforced these provisions.

Children with disabilities attended mainstream schools. The government provided a personal assistant to children with disabilities attending public schools but not to children with disabilities attending private schools. The ombudsman did not report substantive progress on its September 2020 report noting that the law requires private secondary education schools provide personal assistants for children with disabilities.

Problems facing persons with disabilities included limited access to natural and constructed environments, transportation, information, and communications. The Cyprus Paraplegics Organization reported that many open public spaces, including

paved areas and cultural sites, and several public buildings were still not accessible to wheelchair users. During the year the ombudsman examined several complaints from persons with disabilities regarding accessibility concerns and discrimination. In January 2020 the ombudsman reported that, in violation of relevant legislation, television broadcasters failed to provide audiovisual services accessible to persons with hearing disabilities. At the ombudsman's recommendation, the Cyprus Radio-Television Authority (CRA) requested all broadcasters comply with their legal obligations. All broadcasters submitted accessibility action plans to the CRA, which was evaluating their implementation. The ombudsman reported that as of December 2020, state broadcaster Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC) translated into sign language all emergency events and announcements, including information on COVID-19. Since August 2020 CyBC provided sign language interpretation for all main news bulletins and other daily news programs.

In February 2020 three nurses at the public Athalassa Psychiatric Hospital reported appalling physical conditions, serious overcrowding, and personnel and medication shortages to the *Cyprus Mail* newspaper. The nurses reported that the building's poor condition led to injuries of patients and staff. The ombudsman issued two reports in March and September 2020 that confirmed a shortage of nurses, the lack of a permanent pharmacist, and the failure of prior attempted building improvements to create a suitable environment for patients. The ombudsman reported that there was no progress towards implementing her 2020 recommendations and that only minor improvements were made to the patients' living quarters during the year.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance's Service for the Care and Rehabilitation of the Disabled is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. The ombudsman acts as the Independent Mechanism for the Promotion, Protection and Monitoring of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

A University of Nicosia study presented in September showed that HIV-positive persons continued to face discrimination in employment, housing, education, and health care and that they faced social stigma and exclusion from society and from

their own families. Activists complained that raising public awareness of the problem was not a government priority and reported that even medical staff at hospitals were prejudiced and reluctant to examine HIV-positive individuals. On September 23, the president of the HIV-Positive Persons Support Center, Stella Michaelidou, reported that a private clinic in Limassol refused to treat an HIV-positive person who required emergency treatment after an accident. The patient was transferred and treated at another clinic in a different city.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Antidiscrimination laws prohibit direct or indirect discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Antidiscrimination laws cover employment and the following activities in the public and private domain: social protection, social insurance, social benefits, health care, education, participation in unions and professional organizations, and access to goods and services. The law also criminalizes incitement to hatred or violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

The government did not always enforce laws against discrimination, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals faced significant societal discrimination, particularly in rural areas. As a result many LGBTQI+ persons were not open concerning their sexual orientation or gender identity, nor did they report homophobic violence or discrimination.

There were reports of employment discrimination against LGBTQI+ applicants (see section 7.d.).

As in previous years, ACCEPT representatives reported that transgender persons undergoing hormone replacement therapy experienced discrimination accessing health care following the introduction of a new national universal health insurance system in 2019. The NGO also reported that transgender persons faced increased difficulties accessing hormone treatment due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, strike, and bargain collectively with employers. Both antiunion discrimination and dismissal for union activity are illegal.

The law requires labor unions to register with the registrar of labor unions within 30 days of their establishment. Persons with prior convictions for fraud-related and immoral offenses are not allowed to serve as union officials. Union accounts and member registers can be inspected at any time by the registrar. An agreement among the government, labor unions, and employers' organizations established the procedure for dispute resolution for essential services personnel.

The government generally enforced applicable labor laws, and investigations were adequate in the formal sector. Administrative procedures were efficient and immediate, but judicial procedures were subject to delays due to a case backlog. Penalties for violations, which occurred primarily in the informal sector, were not commensurate with those for other similar civil rights violations. Violations rarely occurred in the formal sector.

The government generally protected the right of unions to conduct their activities without interference, and employers generally respected the right of workers to form and join independent unions and to bargain collectively. Although collective agreements are not legally binding, they are governed by a voluntary agreement between the government and employer organizations. Unions, employers, and employees effectively observed the terms of collective bargaining agreements. Workers covered by such agreements were employed predominantly in larger sectors of the economy, including construction, tourism, health care, and manufacturing.

There were isolated reports of private-sector employers that were able to discourage union activity due to the government's sporadic enforcement of labor regulations prohibiting antiunion discrimination and employers' implicit threat of arbitrary dismissal for union activities.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. The penalties were not commensurate with those for other serious crimes. The government did not effectively enforce the law, and forced labor occurred. Inspections of the agricultural and domestic service sectors remained inadequate.

Forced labor occurred primarily in agriculture and in domestic work. Foreign migrant workers, children, and asylum seekers were particularly vulnerable, according to NGOs. Employers reportedly forced foreign workers, primarily from Eastern Europe and East and South Asia, to work up to 15 hours a day, seven days a week, for very low wages and in unsuitable living conditions. During the year, police identified five victims of labor trafficking. Some employers reportedly retained a portion of agriculture workers' salaries as payment for accommodations, in violation of the law. In one example police arrested a retired police officer in July after videos posted on social media recorded by his foreign domestic worker indicated that he had physically assaulted and terrorized her. Police charged him with trafficking in persons, labor exploitation, insult based on race, and other serious offenses. He was initially released on bail and then rearrested two weeks later after police uncovered additional evidence against him. The domestic worker was identified as a victim of trafficking and transferred to the government shelter. A trial began on December 6.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the employment of children, defined as persons younger than 15, except in specified circumstances, such as combined work-training programs for children who are at least 14, or employment in cultural, artistic, sports, or advertising activities, subject to rules limiting work hours. The law prohibits night work and street trading by children. The law permits the employment of adolescents, defined as persons ages 15 through 17, subject to rules limiting hours of employment and provided the work is not harmful or dangerous. The law prohibits employment of adolescents between midnight and 4 a.m. The minimum

age for employment in industrial work is 16. The government effectively enforced the law, and penalties for violations were commensurate with those for other serious crimes.

Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance inspectors were responsible for enforcing child labor laws and did so effectively. Social Welfare Services and the commissioner for the rights of the child also have investigative authority for suspected cases of exploitation of children at work.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits direct or indirect discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, national origin or citizenship, sex, religion, political opinion, gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation. The government did not effectively enforce these laws or regulations and penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for other civil rights laws. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and HIV-positive status.

Despite a strong legal framework, the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance ineffectively enforced the law governing employment and labor matters with respect to women. The law requires equal pay for equal work. Women experienced discrimination in areas such as hiring, career advancement, employment conditions, and pay. European Institute for Gender Equality data indicated the average pay gap between men and women was 13.7 percent in 2017. NGOs reported the relatively small overall gender pay gap masked significant vertical and occupational gender segregation. The ombudsman reported receiving complaints related to gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Discrimination against Turkish Cypriots and Romani migrant workers occurred.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: Although there is no national minimum wage, there are minimum wages for groups deemed vulnerable to exploitation. The minimum wages for shop assistants, clerks, assistant baby and child minders, health-care

workers, security guards, cleaners of business premises, and nursery assistants were above the poverty line. The Ministry of Interior, however, established a minimum wage for foreign domestic workers that was well below the poverty line.

Collective bargaining agreements covered workers in most occupations, including unskilled labor. The wages set in these agreements were significantly higher than the poverty level.

Foreign workers were able to claim pensions, and some bilateral agreements allowed workers to claim credit in their home countries. The Migration Service was responsible for enforcing the minimum wage for foreign workers but did not effectively do so.

The legal maximum workweek is 48 hours, including overtime. The law does not require premium pay for overtime or mandatory rest periods. The law stipulates that foreign and local workers receive equal treatment. The Department of Labor Relations within the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance is responsible for enforcing these laws. The penalty for violating the law was commensurate with those for similar crimes, but laws for wages and hours were not adequately enforced. Labor unions reported enforcement problems in sectors not covered by collective agreements, such as small businesses and foreign domestic workers. They also reported that certain employers, mainly in construction and agriculture, exploited undocumented foreign workers by paying them very low wages.

The law protects foreign domestic workers who file a complaint with the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance from deportation until their cases have been adjudicated. The Department of Labor Relations reported that from January 1 to June 30, it received 198 complaints from migrant workers against their employers. Of those, 166 complaints were examined by October.

In addition to completing its own investigation, the Department of Labor made recommendations to the ombudsman concerning complaints submitted by foreign domestic workers against their employers concerning the conditions of their employment. During the year the Council of Ministers assigned oversight of these cases to the ombudsman as one of the measures to address issues arising from the ombudsman's 2019 report evaluating the government's policies on foreign

domestic workers. The report highlighted that domestic workers' high dependence on their employers, combined with the lack of consequences for employers who violate the terms of the employment contract or who physically abuse the employee, discouraged domestic workers from filing complaints. Domestic workers also feared deportation. A domestic worker's residence permit can be cancelled at the employer's request in the event the employer files a complaint with police regarding theft, regardless of whether the alleged crime was investigated or substantiated.

Some domestic workers complained their employers or employment agencies withheld their passports. The ombudsman's report also noted that the lack of action by authorities to impose consequences on employers and employment agencies who illegally held domestic workers' passports enabled the practice to continue with impunity. NGOs reported a decline in foreign domestic workers reporting contract violations by their employers due to labor shortages and a higher demand for domestic workers. NGOs noted, however, that Department of Labor and police skepticism of domestic workers' allegations of sexual harassment and violence discouraged them from submitting complaints.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health standards were appropriate for the main industries, and the responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remains with safety and health experts. The Department of Labor Inspection in the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance is responsible for enforcing health and safety laws. Workers have the right to remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardizing their employment, but authorities did not provide adequate protections for employees in these situations. Authorities enforced health and safety laws satisfactorily in the formal sector. The penalties for failing to comply with work safety and health laws were commensurate with those of other similar crimes.

The Ministry of Labor employed an insufficient number of inspectors to effectively enforce labor laws in the agricultural sector and in the informal economy, in which the majority of employees were migrant workers and undocumented workers. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions in most industries but were not allowed to inspect the working conditions of domestic workers in private households without a court warrant. Five major

industrial accidents occurred during the year that caused death or serious injury of workers.

NGOs reported the lack of social protections raised serious questions concerning the potential deterioration of working conditions, particularly in hazardous sectors and for vulnerable groups. In July one of the largest forest fires in the country's history occurred, devastating rural communities and forcing residents to evacuate. During the crisis approximately 100 migrant workers in the Troodos Mountains continued to work as they were left behind by evacuating employers and residents. Four of the migrant workers were picking tomatoes as the fire approached and were killed while trying to flee. Due to the loss of life, multiple human-rights organizations and labor unions, such as the Pancyprian Federation of Labor, urged the Ministry of Labor to investigate the individuals' employment status and working conditions. In the meantime the government announced plans to provide financial payments and scholarships to the workers' families.

Informal Sector: The informal sector included approximately 12.7 percent of the workforce, including migrant and undocumented workers. Authorities did not enforce labor laws satisfactorily in this sector.

THE AREA ADMINISTERED BY TURKISH CYPRIOTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The northern part of Cyprus has been administered by Turkish Cypriots since 1974 and proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" in 1983. The United States does not recognize the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus," nor does any country other than Turkey. In 2020 Ersin Tatar was elected "president" and leader of the Turkish Cypriot community in elections widely seen as influenced by pro-Tatar interference from Turkey. In 2018 voters elected 50 "members of parliament" in free and fair elections. The "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" "constitution" is the basis for the "laws" that govern the area administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities.

Police are responsible for enforcement of the "law." The "chief of police" is

nominally under the supervision of the “Prime Ministry.” Police and Turkish Cypriot security forces, however, are ultimately under the operational command of the Turkish armed forces, as provided by the “constitution,” which entrusts responsibility for public security and defense to Turkey. Authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: serious restrictions on free expression and media, including criminal libel “laws”; refoulement of asylum seekers; serious acts of “government” corruption; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence; trafficking in persons; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national minorities.

Authorities took steps to investigate officials following allegations of human rights abuses and corruption. There was evidence, however, of impunity.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were no reports that the “government” or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of “government authorities.”

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The “law” does not refer explicitly to torture but does prohibit police mistreatment of detainees under the section of the “criminal code” that deals with assault, violence, and battery. There were reports that police abused detainees.

In February police arrested Russian fugitive Alexander Satlaev in Kyrenia four

days after he escaped from the “Central Prison.” The Turkish Cypriot Bar Association Human Rights Committee, Refugee Rights Association, Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation, and other human rights organizations issued a joint statement claiming police subjected Satlaev to inhuman treatment and torture. Organizations reported a police officer pulled Satlaev’s hair and that there were bruises on his arms and his face. Online news outlets posted photographs and videos purportedly showing a police officer pulling Satlaev’s hair while his arms were handcuffed behind his back.

The “attorney general’s office” reported they received four complaints concerning police battery and use of force and had launched investigations into all four cases. The “attorney general’s office” determined two of the complaints were baseless, based on statements from eyewitnesses. Investigations regarding the other two cases continued at year’s end.

The “attorney general’s office” also reported the completion of three investigations regarding police mistreatment pending since 2020: two complaints were assessed to be baseless; the third resulted in a police officer being charged with abuse. The trial was pending at year’s end.

An “attorney general’s office” investigation concluded that a complaint by two female international students of police mistreatment in July 2020 was unfounded. The students had reported that they were forced into a vehicle by four undercover police officers, beaten in the vehicle and at a police station, and then released 24 hours later without any explanation. Press outlets published photos of their bruised faces. The “attorney general’s office” determined the students were fighting in the street while intoxicated and had refused to report to the police station to provide statements, so police detained both students and held them overnight at the police station. The students were charged with disturbing the peace and public intoxication.

In one of the complaints, which it assessed to be baseless, the “attorney general’s office” determined that a complainant’s injuries in 2019 resulted from a traffic accident that occurred three days prior to an alleged abuse complaint. The complainant was charged with providing false statements to police and fined.

In April a police officer was sentenced to 50 days in prison after a video was published of the officer kicking a detained tourist in the presence of other officers at the Ercan (Timbou) airport in 2019. Other police officers present during the incident received administrative penalties. According to local press, the detainee was drunk and yelled at police for getting his cell phone wet during the security screening.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions did not meet international standards in a number of areas, including overcrowding, sanitary conditions, medical care, heating, and access to food. A nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported asylum seekers were detained in overcrowded, “government”-run detention centers pending their return to Turkey.

Physical Conditions: Gross overcrowding was reported to be a problem. The “Central Prison,” the only prison administered by Turkish Cypriots, is in the northern part of Nicosia and has an official capacity of 454 inmates. Authorities stated the number of prisoners and pretrial detainees at the “Central Prison” was 622 in October, after peaking at 633 earlier in the year, requiring the use of prison classrooms and computer rooms as cells for inmates. Press reported as many as 45 to 50 persons for every 10 square meters (107.6 square feet) living in unhygienic conditions. An NGO that visited both the “Central Prison” and detention centers reported conditions remained deplorable: asylum seekers complained about inadequate sleeping arrangements, poor hygienic conditions, insect infestation, poor ventilation, lack of heating and cooling systems, lack of access to fresh air or shower facilities, inadequate food, and no access to internet or phones. Asylum seekers at detention centers, as a general practice, were provided sandwiches twice a day.

NGOs, media, and the “ombudsman” reported overcrowding remained a problem. An NGO also reported receiving complaints about police mistreatment of detainees in police detention centers. Most of the complaints alleged inhuman conditions in the detention centers and that police officers verbally abused detainees. According to NGOs, the “Central Prison” did not effectively separate adults and juveniles, and there were no detention or correction centers for children. Due to lack of

space, pretrial detainees and prisoners occupied the same cells. NGOs reported conditions were better in the women's section of the prison.

NGOs reported that the lack of security cameras at detention centers and in parts of the "Central Prison" allowed police officers and prison guards to abuse detainees with impunity. In addition, NGOs reported that sanitation remained a significant problem in the "Central Prison," with inadequate access to hot water. Authorities stated hygiene supplies were insufficient due to an increasing number of inmates. An NGO also reported the police detention facilities lack hygienic conditions, direct sunlight, proper ventilation, and access to water.

NGOs claimed that prison health care was inadequate, lacking sufficient medical supplies and a full-time doctor. NGOs reported testing for contagious diseases at the "Central Prison" was haphazard and inconsistent. In June 2020 the Prison Guards Association chair stated that overcrowding in prison cells created a breeding ground for contagious diseases. Authorities reported all inmates were subject to hospital health checks before entering the "Central Prison." Authorities stated a doctor visited the prison twice a week and was on call for emergencies. A dentist visited the prison once per week, a dietician visited twice per week, and there were two full-time psychologists at the prison, according to authorities.

An NGO reported that the detention center at Ercan (Timbou) airport lacked proper ventilation and access to natural light. The NGO stated hygiene was a concern because there was only one bathroom inside each detention room and the rooms were not regularly cleaned.

An NGO reported that pandemic quarantine centers generally included cells where individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 were placed together with close contacts or travelers undertaking mandatory quarantine after their arrival in the country.

In October local press reported COVID-19 continued to spread at the "Central Prison," with 125 inmates and eight guards testing positive for COVID-19 in one week. The COVID-19 positive inmates were first placed in a quarantine hotel and later transferred to a newly constructed – but at the time, not yet fully functional – prison meant to replace the "Central Prison." After several days at the new prison,

the inmates were sent back to another quarantine hotel as the infrastructure at the new prison was inadequate, including a lack of running water and closed-circuit cameras. Multiple media outlets reported the inmates did not have water for three days.

Administration: Authorities reported an investigation of a complaint regarding a prison guard's mistreatment and battery against an inmate. Authorities reported there were no intentional or nonintentional deaths at the "Central Prison." Authorities stated facilities were available for Muslim prisoners and detainees to conduct their religious observance but that due to space restrictions, inmates generally conducted their religious observance in their cells. No equivalent facilities or space was provided for non-Muslim prisoners to conduct religious observances, services, or prayers. Non-Muslim clergy were permitted to visit the prison, although there were no reports of such visits.

Independent Monitoring: Authorities generally permitted prison monitoring but with some restrictions. An NGO reported the physical conditions at the "Central Prison" could not be observed in detail, as their staff were not allowed to visit the cells. They were only allowed to conduct detainee interviews in the visitor waiting room or in areas designated for private conversations.

Improvements: Authorities reported that the "Ministry of Health" provided disinfectant and masks to the "Central Prison" to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Authorities also reported that all prisoners and prison guards had been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Authorities reported some inmates completed their high school education and exams online. While in-person visits were restricted due to the pandemic, inmates held video conferences with their families.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The "law" prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. Authorities generally observed these requirements.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

"Judicial warrants" are required for arrests. According to the "law," police must

bring a detained person before a “judge” within 24 hours of arrest. Police can then keep the detainee in custody for up to three months, but a “judge” must review the detention after the third day and every eight days thereafter. Authorities generally respected this right and usually informed detainees promptly of charges against them, although they often held individuals believed to have committed a violent offense for longer periods without charge.

Bail may be granted by the “courts” and was routinely used. “Courts” confiscated detainees’ passports pending trial. Human rights contacts and an NGO reported that translators were not available for non-Turkish speakers, forcing defense attorneys or NGOs to provide one. As in previous years, according to an NGO and a human rights attorney, during the detention review process, officials pressured detainees to sign confessions in order to be released on bail. The lawyer cited situations in which police used the threat of prolonged detention to induce detainees to plead guilty.

According to the “constitution,” indicted detainees and prisoners have the right to access legal representation. Authorities usually allowed detainees prompt access to family members and a lawyer of their choice, but as in previous years, NGOs reported there were cases in which authorities prevented detainees from seeing a lawyer. Authorities provided lawyers to the indigent only in cases involving violent offenses. According to NGOs and human rights attorneys, police sometimes did not observe required legal protections, particularly at the time of arrest. Suspects who demanded the presence of a lawyer were sometimes physically intimidated or threatened with stiffer charges.

A lawyer reported a “Central Prison” “regulation” prohibits sentenced individuals in solitary confinement from meeting with a lawyer without the “prison director’s” permission. The “prison director” has the authority to deny the visit without providing justification.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The “law” provides for an independent judiciary, and authorities generally respected judicial independence and impartiality.

Most criminal and civil cases begin in “district courts,” whose decisions can be

appealed to the “Supreme Court.” Civilian “courts” have jurisdiction in cases where civilians face charges of violating military restrictions, such as filming or photographing military zones.

Trial Procedures

The “law” provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and independent judicial authorities generally enforced this right.

Defendants enjoy the right to a presumption of innocence. NGO representatives and human rights lawyers stated defendants generally enjoyed the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them. The “constitution” provides for fair, timely, and public trials, the defendant’s right to be present at those trials, and the defendant’s right to consult with an attorney in a timely manner (or, in cases of violent offenses, to have one provided at public expense if unable to pay). The “attorney general’s office” reported the pandemic and COVID-19 mitigation measures delayed investigations, prosecutions, and court proceedings. The “attorney general’s office” reported the “courts” often chose to ban departure from the island or request a pecuniary guarantee in order to avoid sending pretrial detainees to prison for minor offenses.

There was insufficient free interpretation for some languages and insufficient professional translation in “courts.” Lawyers and NGOs claimed authorities haphazardly recruited nonprofessional translators who did not translate everything said during proceedings. Inadequate translation delayed hearings and prolonged defendants’ detentions.

Defendants may question prosecution witnesses and present evidence and witnesses on their behalf. They cannot be compelled to testify or confess guilt, and they have a right to appeal.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

As in previous years, there were reports of detention and deportation to Turkey of persons with alleged ties to Fethullah Gulen and his movement. The Turkish government holds Gulen responsible for the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey and designated his network as the “Fethullahist Terrorist Organization” (“FETO”).

According to press reports in March, police arrested an alleged Gulen movement member in the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”) and transferred him to a Turkish General Directorate of Security Interpol-Europol team, who took him to Turkey.

In July 2020 the Turkish “ambassador” to the “TRNC” stated the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” was the first “foreign country” to define “FETO” as a terror organization and that cooperation between Turkish and “TRNC” authorities would continue toward identifying additional members of Gulen’s network.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals or organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights abuses through domestic “courts.” After exhausting local remedies, individuals and organizations may appeal adverse decisions that involve human rights to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

Property Seizure and Restitution

Greek Cypriots continued to pursue property suits against the Turkish government in the ECHR for the loss of property in the area administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities since 1974.

A property commission handles claims by Greek Cypriots. As of November the commission had paid more than 318 million British pounds (\$420 million) in compensation to applicants this year.

The Department of State’s Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act report to Congress, released publicly in July 2020, can be found on the Department’s website: <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The “law” prohibits such actions. There were reports that police subjected Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the area administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities to physical surveillance and monitoring, including police patrols and

questioning. Greek Cypriot and Maronite residents reported that police required them to report their location and when they expected visitors. A Maronite representative asserted that Turkish armed forces continued to occupy 18 houses in the Maronite village of Karpasia.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The “law” provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and authorities generally respected this right. Libel and blasphemy are criminalized, but these “laws” are rarely enforced by “courts.” While individuals were sometimes able to criticize authorities publicly without reprisal, human rights defenders, NGOs, and press reported a marked increase in harassment and threats against critics of the “TRNC government,” of Turkish interference into Turkish Cypriot affairs, and of Turkish President Erdogan.

Freedom of Expression: It is a criminal offense to insult the “government,” the Turkish government, or “government” officials. This often led journalists and others to self-censor. According to NGOs, journalists, and human rights defenders, authorities advised some journalists not to criticize the Turkish government. An NGO reported that due to perceived pressure and potential reaction from Turkey, some journalists did not express their critical opinions and preferred to remain silent. According to a survey conducted by the Center for Migration, Identity, and Rights Studies, 63 percent of respondents said freedom of speech had declined in the past year.

According to media reports and human rights defenders, police prevented opposition political parties, NGOs, and unions from assembling in front of the Turkish “embassy” on March 12 and March 21 to demonstrate against the arrest of Leftist Movement member Abdullah Korkmazhan. Following complaints from the Turkish Justice and Reform Party youth branch, authorities arrested Korkmazhan and three others on March 12 on suspicion of vandalizing “Love Erdogan” billboards. Korkmazhan was charged with “conspiracy to create a secret alliance” and released, only to be detained again on March 19 after making remarks critical

of “president” Tatar during a subsequent protest. Korkmazhan said that police confiscated his cell phone and charged him with insulting the “TRNC president.” The “president” formally asked the court to sentence Korkmazhan to five years in prison. The court released him on bail for 25,000 Turkish lira (\$2,717 as of mid-October) and ordered him to report in-person to a police station weekly. As of November Turkish Cypriot police still had Korkmazhan’s cell phone in their possession. In March Tatar filed another defamation and slander lawsuit against Korkmazhan, seeking compensation of 100,000 Turkish lira (\$10,870 as of mid-October) for the speech he delivered at the protest against Tatar. The charges against Korkmazhan were pending at year’s end, and he reportedly continued to appear at a police station every week.

This Country is Ours Platform, an umbrella organization for more than 25 trade unions and political parties that supports a federal solution to the Cyprus problem, released a statement criticizing Turkey’s suppression of freedom of expression in the area administrated by Turkish Cypriots. The Cyprus Press Council, a bicommunal umbrella organization for left-wing, pro-solution parties, issued a statement criticizing Korkmazhan’s arrest as an attempt to “muzzle” critics in northern Cyprus. In March several unions and left-wing political parties issued a joint statement expressing concern that increased suppression of freedom of expression in Turkey was having a spillover effect in the “TRNC.”

Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: While authorities usually respected press and media freedom, at times they harassed, intimidated, or arrested journalists or otherwise obstructed their reporting.

In March the Turkish Cypriot Journalists Association and the Press Workers Union held a demonstration with approximately 200 participants in support of press freedom and freedom of expression. In their joint statement to the press, the association and the union stated there has been an increase of insults, pressure, mobbing, and violence against journalists in northern Cyprus, and that freedom of expression and freedom of the press was under threat.

Violence and Harassment: There were reports that defendants in some “court” cases allegedly threatened journalists, who also faced pressure to report favorably

on companies that advertised in their publications.

A journalist association reported some journalists were verbally and physically attacked at “court” hearings by detainees or their families or friends. Other journalists reported being similarly assaulted while reporting at hospitals and police stations by individuals associated with detainees.

In October the Turkish Cypriot Journalist’s Association condemned the beating of journalist Suna Erden for attempting to photograph right-wing National Democratic Party leader Buray Buskuvutcu as he was entering the Kyrenia District “Court.” The association reported Erden was blocked by 15 individuals known to be Buskuvutcu’s security guards and physically attacked outside the “court.”

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Journalists cannot interview or report on persons under control of the armed forces.

Journalists practiced self-censorship to avoid losing their jobs. Journalists reported some press representatives censored themselves when reporting on Turkey’s role in Cyprus and on Turkish leadership. A labor union leader reported a journalist was dismissed from his job for reading and talking about an anti-Erdogan article on a local television channel operated by “president” Tatar’s wife.

Libel/Slander Laws: The “law” criminalizes libel and blasphemy, although “courts” often declined to convict defendants on those charges, citing free speech legal precedent.

Internet Freedom

Authorities did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that they monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority.

In July 2020 a cybercrime “law” was passed in “parliament” and approved by the “presidency.” According to the “law,” any verbal or physical attacks made with deliberate intent to harm individuals, institutions, or organizations over the internet is considered a crime. Human rights defenders expressed concern the new “law” could be used to suppress free speech. Penalties range from six to 200 times the

minimum monthly wage and from one to 10 years' imprisonment.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no reports of “government” restrictions on cultural events. There were no reports of blocked visits during the year; although, for much of the year, foreign tourists were not permitted to enter due to COVID-19-related restrictions.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The “government” sometimes limited freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The “law” provides for the right of peaceful assembly, and the government usually respected this right, although some restrictions were reported. A labor union reported police sometimes interfered in demonstrations and at times used force against peaceful demonstrators.

Throughout the year, some union representatives reported police obstructed unions and civil society organizations from marching and opening banners in front of the Turkish “embassy” during demonstrations and protests. For example, according to local press reports, in March police prevented unions and associations from demonstrating in front of the “parliament” and the Turkish “embassy” on at least two occasions.

In August the NGO Voice of International Students in Cyprus (VOIS) reported some of its members and representatives of other student groups were allegedly threatened by police and prevented from issuing a press release in front of the “parliament.” After VOIS reportedly notified police that 10 to 15 students planned to read a press release in front of “parliament,” the student group declined a request from police to provide additional information about the planned demonstration. On the day of the protest, 20 to 30 police officers reportedly physically forced the students away from the area and told them they did not have the right to protest. Police allegedly told VOIS that according to “TRNC laws,” foreigners are not permitted to organize protests. The altercation ended with police allegedly

threatening to arrest the students and to declare VOIS an illegal entity.

Freedom of Association

The “law” provides for the freedom of association, and the “government” usually respected this right.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The “law” provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. Authorities generally respected these rights.

In-country Movement: Authorities required individuals to show identification when crossing the “Green Line.” Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some checkpoint crossings on the island were closed during the year, at times causing altercations with authorities (see section 2.d. of the Republic of Cyprus report).

In January Turkish Cypriot workers who crossed the buffer zone daily to work in the government-controlled area of Cyprus held a series of demonstrations at “parliament” and at various buffer zone checkpoints. They protested the “Ministry of Health’s” COVID-19-related decision preventing Turkish Cypriot workers from crossing to the south of the Green Line for employment or other purposes without quarantine requirements.

Foreign Travel: Only Turkey recognizes travel documents issued by the “TRNC.” Some Turkish Cypriots used Turkish travel documents, but many obtained travel documents issued by the Republic of Cyprus government. Turkish Cypriots born after 1974 to parents who were both Republic of Cyprus citizens prior to 1974 obtained Republic of Cyprus passports with greater ease than Turkish Cypriots born after 1974 to only one Cypriot parent.

According to media reports and contacts, Turkish authorities barred some Turkish Cypriot critics from entering Turkey in early July and in October. Contacts

reported the Turkish “embassy” in the “TRNC” created a list of politicians and writers supportive of a bizonal bicomunal federal (BBF) Cyprus solution and who were critical of Ankara’s policies. Media commentators claimed Ankara’s enforcement of an “entry blacklist” – purportedly introduced in September 2020 – was intended to intimidate BBF solution supporters and silence opposition against the Erdogan regime. Citing national security grounds, Turkish authorities denied entry to former “president” Akinci’s press officer Ali Bizden on July 5, to Turkish Cypriot intellectual and pediatrician, Dr. Ahmet Cavit on July 9, and to the chair of Basin-Sen (the Press Workers’ Union) and journalist Ali Kismir on October 10. Turkish immigration officials told all three they were denied entry for posing a security threat to Turkey. All were reportedly interrogated upon arrival and held overnight at Istanbul airport before being flown back to northern Cyprus.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Turkish Cypriots considered those displaced because of the island’s 1974 division to be refugees, although they fell under the UN definition of internally displaced persons (IDPs). At the time of the division, the number of IDPs in the north was approximately 60,000.

f. Protection of Refugees

Turkish Cypriot authorities at times cooperated with the Refugee Rights Association (RRA), the NGO implementing partner of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. UNHCR reported cooperation was more frequent during the first half of the year, when authorities allowed RRA lawyers to interview Syrian asylum seekers seeking access to international protection in Cyprus. Following the introduction of a new “visa” requirement for Syrian nationals in June, cooperation between Turkish Cypriot authorities and UNHCR was less frequent. With the assistance of these organizations, several asylum seekers gained access to asylum procedures in Turkey or in the government-controlled area.

Turkish Cypriot authorities shared information with RRA for locating and

identifying Syrian asylum seekers in detention or in quarantine pending deportation. Authorities allowed RRA to access quarantine centers holding Syrian asylum seekers. As a result of RRA's advocacy, Syrian asylum seekers arriving irregularly from Turkey, Lebanon, or Syria are no longer prosecuted but are instead quarantined pending return to Turkey.

According to human rights advocates, the few refugees residing in the north face racism, exploitation, and challenges achieving self-sufficiency and integration within society.

Access to Asylum: The "law" does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and authorities have not established a system for providing protection to refugees. An NGO reported that approximately 100 persons of concern to UNHCR were able to stay in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots with UNHCR protection papers.

One NGO reported asylum seekers arriving at legal entry points are generally not allowed entry into the "TRNC," are detained, and subsequently deported to Turkey. Once returned to Turkey, those that do not have valid residence status face the risk of onward refoulement, particularly non-Syrians, as Turkish authorities continued efforts to deport those it claimed entered the country illegally before they were granted refugee status-determination interviews by Turkish migration authorities. The NGO also reported asylum seekers arriving irregularly are considered prohibited migrants by Turkish Cypriot authorities and are detained under deportation procedures in quarantine facilities.

There were reports Turkish Cypriot authorities continued to deport numerous asylum seekers during the year before UNHCR's implementing partner could interview them to obtain information necessary for assessing their asylum claims. Some potential asylum seekers who attempted to enter the area administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities illegally were arrested, taken to "court," and deported after serving their prison sentences. One NGO reported incidents of asylum seekers repeatedly being arrested for irregular entry as many as three times a week, and that these incidents went unreported in the press.

Refoulement: Authorities did not provide protection against the expulsion or

return of asylum seekers or refugees to countries where their lives or freedom could be threatened. According to NGOs, authorities at ports often denied entry and extradited to Turkey asylum seekers, including a number of persons designated by the Turkish government as alleged members of the Gulen movement. Some observers considered these deportations refoulement, as the individuals were denied the opportunity to seek refuge in the territory of Cyprus and were at substantial risk of mistreatment in Turkey (also see section 2.f., Protection of Refugees, in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Turkey).

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: UNHCR reported asylum seekers generally were treated as illegal migrants because an official framework for asylum does not exist in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. Most were either denied entry or deported, irrespective of the risk of refoulement.

In April, 26 Syrian asylum seekers, two boat captains, and three other accomplices were arrested while illegally entering through the Sadrazamkoy coast, on the northwest side of the island. All 31 were detained and appeared in “court.” The 26 Syrians were quarantined in a student dormitory in Lefke. Following the RRA’s intervention and interviews, 11 individuals were provided with clothing by “social welfare services,” two persons were given access to health care, and one received medication. After 19 days the group was returned to Turkey where they were readmitted and reportedly given access to asylum procedures.

In June police arrested 13 Syrian nationals for illegal entry into the north. The Syrians, all men, were identified at the Famagusta port inside a truck on June 6. They had arrived in a cargo truck from Turkey’s Mersin province and were placed in a student dormitory under police control. After 12 days the group was sent back to Turkey and reportedly given access to asylum procedures.

On July 9, 17 irregular migrants from Syria were discovered on the Taslica coast between Derince and Avtepe in the Karpaz region. Media outlets reported the group included six children, four women, and seven men. Police stated that the boat carrying the migrants was found stranded on the coastline. Following RRA’s intervention and interviews, all individuals were provided with clothing by “social welfare services.” After 19 days the group was returned to Turkey where they were readmitted and reportedly given access to asylum procedures.

Freedom of Movement: Asylum seekers in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots could not travel abroad because they would be unable to return due to their lack of “legal” status.

Employment: According to immigration “law,” employers need official permission from the “Department of Labor” to register foreign workers. Persons holding UNHCR protection papers receive the same access to the labor market as third country nationals, although NGOs reported that authorities refused to issue work permits to some individuals with UNHCR protection papers. UNHCR reported access to employment improved during the year after authorities lifted requirements that job seekers post a financial guarantee and hold a valid passport.

Access to Basic Services: Persons holding UNHCR protection papers and persons of concern to UNHCR who had not gone through a status determination procedure but were found to be of concern after screening could access basic services, including primary health care and education, but lacked access to residence permits or welfare assistance, which rendered them at risk of exploitation and put vulnerable individuals at risk of destitution.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The “law” provides Turkish Cypriots the ability to choose their “government” in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Turkish Cypriots choose a leader and a representative body at least every five years. In 2018 Turkish Cypriots held “parliamentary elections” that observers considered free and fair. In October 2020 Turkish Cypriots elected Ersin Tatar as “president” in “elections” that were widely seen as influenced by pro-Tatar interference from Turkey.

Civil society leaders alleged the level of Turkish interference on behalf of Tatar’s candidacy was uncharacteristically high and led to the resignation of several Turkish Cypriot members from the bicomunal Technical Committee on Gender Equality.

According to reports by Turkish Cypriot journalists and statements by candidates during the year, Turkey's interference in the "TRNC presidential" elections in October 2020 was significant. According to an investigative report by Turkish Cypriot journalist Esra Aygin published in June, the Turkish "embassy" in the "TRNC" and Turkish National Intelligence (MIT) pressured, threatened, and blackmailed former Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci and his supporters, other candidates, and journalists during the election campaign. Aygin also reported receiving threats.

Aygin's report, based on the work of a team of civil society representatives, lawyers, and researchers, showed "blatant interference by Ankara" in favor of Tatar. According to Aygin several journalists reported being pressured by Turkish officials who claimed they were in northern Cyprus to ensure Tatar's election. In an interview with local media in July, former Turkish Cypriot leader Akinci alleged there was direct pressure, threats, and blackmailing from MIT and Turkey.

Political Parties and Political Participation: While membership in the dominant party did not confer formal advantages, there were widespread allegations of political cronyism and nepotism.

On June 23, a consortium of Turkish Cypriot organizations spoke out against the "government" in the north concerning its acceleration of "TRNC citizenship" applications. This Country is Ours Platform criticized a decision to reorganize the "Ministry of Interior" in order to approve new passport applications more quickly.

In August opposition Republican Turkish Party "member of parliament" Asim Akansoy said the "Ministry of Interior" was rapidly granting citizenships and asked, "Is it true that 200 people are given citizenship with the approval of the Ministry, per day?" Akansoy criticized the "government" for remaining silent regarding the matter and implied the "government" sought to increase the pro-Turkey voting base by offering "citizenship" to newly arrived immigrants from Turkey.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No "laws" limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Women remained underrepresented in senior political

positions. Nine of the 50 “members of parliament” were women.

Turkish Cypriot authorities did not permit Greek Cypriots and Maronites residing in the north to participate in elections they administered. Greek Cypriots and Maronites residing in the north were eligible to vote in elections in the Republic of Cyprus-controlled area but had to travel there to do so. Greek Cypriot and Maronite communities living in the area administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities directly elected municipal officials, but Turkish Cypriot authorities did not recognize them. There was no minority representation in the 50-seat “parliament” or in the “cabinet.”

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The “law” provides criminal penalties for corruption by “officials.” Authorities, however, did not implement the “law” effectively, and “officials” sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were numerous reports of “government” corruption during the year. Observers generally perceived corruption, cronyism, and lack of transparency to be serious problems in the legislative and executive branches.

Corruption: In July a civil servant working as a cashier at the “tax department” was sentenced to five-and-a-half years in prison for embezzling one million Turkish lira (\$108,700 as of mid-October) in driver’s license fees from 2016 to 2020. The “court” ordered a freeze on the cashier’s assets.

In September, six individuals, including a north Nicosia Police Station officer and an information technology (IT) specialist, were arrested for bribery and forging digital vaccine certificates. According to press reports, an unvaccinated police officer from Nicosia paid 650 Turkish lira (\$70 as of mid-October) to the IT specialist to create a fake electronic vaccination certificate. The allegations arose after the IT specialist offered to create another fake vaccination certificate for another officer at the Kyrenia police station. Five of the suspects were released pending charges. The investigation continued at year’s end.

In 2019 local press outlets reported that former National Unity Party leader and

then “prime minister” Huseyin Ozgurgun inaccurately declared his assets, according to an “attorney general” investigation. Ozgurgun was charged with failing to accurately declare wealth and for abusing public office for private gain. The “parliament” subsequently voted to remove Ozgurgun’s immunity. No trial has yet been held, as Ozgurgun has been living in Turkey since 2019. The “attorney general’s office” reported three lawsuits were pending against Ozgurgun at the Nicosia District Court at year’s end.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A limited number of domestic human rights organizations operated in the area administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities. Authorities were rarely cooperative or responsive to their views and requests. NGOs promoted awareness of domestic violence; women’s rights; rights of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants; trafficking in persons; police abuse; and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons. These NGOs had little effect on changes to “legislation” to improve the protection of human rights. Local NGOs liaised with the United Nations, UNHCR, foreign diplomatic missions, representatives of the European Union, and international NGOs on human rights matters.

“Government” Human Rights Bodies: There is an “ombudsman,” whose portfolio includes human rights issues. The “ombudsman” investigates and reports on institutions that exercise administrative and executive powers and ensures that “legislation” and “court” decisions are properly implemented. The “ombudsman” can initiate investigations in response to media reports, complaints from individuals and organizations, or on its own initiative. The “ombudsman” was not always effective due to the lack of an enforcement mechanism.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The “law” criminalizes rape of men and women, including spousal rape, and provides for a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Authorities and police did not enforce the “law” effectively. No “laws” specifically address domestic violence. The “law” prohibits domestic violence under various assault and violence or battery clauses, with a maximum sentence of four years imprisonment.

Violence against women, including spousal abuse, remained a major problem. The Nicosia Turkish Municipality operated a shelter for victims of domestic violence, and there were local NGOs that supported rape and domestic violence victims. Turkish Cypriot authorities also reported establishing gender focal points at relevant “ministries” to respond to complaints of violence against women.

In March there were multiple reports of violence against women. One man was arrested in north Nicosia for beating his wife with a stick, another man was arrested for breaking a woman’s finger after a dispute concerning a divorce case at the “court” in Famagusta, and three persons (including a relative) were arrested for repeatedly raping a 17-year-old girl. The girl was seven-and-a-half months pregnant.

According to a survey of local women conducted by the Nicosia Turkish Municipality’s Side by Side Against Violence Project in February 2020, 60 percent of women were subjected to psychological violence, and 40 percent of women were subjected to physical violence. Survey results also showed that one out of every four women had been exposed to sexual violence and one out of every four women had been exposed to economic violence – defined by the project as the manipulation of economic resources or money as a means of sanction, intimidation, or control over women. Two out of every 10 women had been threatened with physical violence.

Nicosia district police in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots operated the specialized Combating Violence against Women Unit to respond to complaints of

domestic violence, including calls to a dedicated hotline.

According to the Combatting Violence against Women Unit, 871 women filed complaints to the unit's hotline seeking help between January-October. In 2020 a total of 1,063 women called the hotline and filed complaints or sought help.

In October the Coordination Center for Combating Domestic Violence, a joint effort of the "government," the Nicosia Turkish Municipality Shelter House, police, and the SOS Children's orphanage held a special training session on domestic violence for 100 police officers from the Combatting Violence against Women Unit.

In November, Meral Akinci, Chair of the Association for Women who Support Living (KAYAD) reported that according to KAYAD's research, one in every five women surveyed suffered from domestic violence. Akinci added that the survey indicated one in five women suffered from economic abuse in the form of spouses either seizing their salary or applying for a bank loan in their name without their consent.

Sexual Harassment: The "criminal code" prohibits sexual harassment and considers it a misdemeanor punishable by up to 12 months imprisonment, an unspecified fine, or both. According to NGOs, sexual harassment went largely unreported. The NGO Voice of International Students in Cyprus (VOIS) reported widespread sexual harassment of female international students and noted that police routinely dismissed complaints of sexual harassment from international students. The organization reported in March that an international student was raped by her landlord's friend. The perpetrator allegedly tried to bribe the victim to keep her from reporting the incident to police. Although the victim sought help from local NGOs, as of year's end, police had not opened an investigation.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of "government" authorities.

Authorities did not provide access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. No publicly funded services were available to survivors of sexual violence. Emergency contraception was not available as part of clinical management of rape.

Some doctors in the private and public sectors required women to have their husband's consent to proceed with sterilization, although the law does not require such consent.

According to KAYAD, women living in northern Cyprus did not have free access to contraception, one out of every four women was under pressure from their spouse not to use contraception, and abortion services were not provided at public hospitals upon request.

Discrimination: The “law” provides the same “legal” status and rights for women and men, but authorities did not enforce the “law” effectively. Women experienced discrimination in such areas as employment, credit, owning or managing businesses, education, and housing. For example, female teachers were reportedly instructed to schedule their pregnancies in order to deliver during summer break. Some female teachers working at private schools were dismissed from their duties for being pregnant during or at the beginning of the school year.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The “TRNC Constitution” prohibits discrimination. According to the “constitution,” “Every person shall be equal before the ‘constitution’ and the law without any discrimination. No privileges shall be granted to any individual, family, group, or class. The organs and the administrative authorities of the ‘State’ are under an obligation to act in conformity with the principle of equality before the law and not to make any discrimination in their actions.”

Despite the “law,” authorities rarely acted on incidents regarding racial or ethnic discrimination. According to human rights contacts, most of these incidents went unreported in part because victims did not expect authorities to open an investigation.

The “law” prohibits discrimination, and the 1975 Vienna III Agreement remains the legal source of authority regarding the treatment of the 310 Greek Cypriot and 62 Maronite residents in the area administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities.

There is discrimination against Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. They could take possession of some of their

properties in that area but were unable to leave their properties to heirs residing in the Republic of Cyprus-controlled area. Maronites living in the Republic of Cyprus-controlled area could use their properties in the north only if those properties were not under the control of the Turkish military or had not been allocated to Turkish Cypriots.

Foreign domestic workers faced discrimination and, at times, violence.

As in previous years, the Turkish Cypriot Public Sector Workers Union (KTAMS) reported that many foreign workers receive salaries below minimum wage.

There were reports of social and job discrimination against Kurds in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, as well as allegations that police closely monitored Kurdish activities.

Some of the approximately 10,000 African students reportedly studying at universities in the area administered by Turkish Cypriot authorities reported racial discrimination in housing, employment, and interactions with authorities. Thirty to forty thousand foreign students, excluding Turkish students, study at universities in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. The NGO VOIS stated authorities excluded foreign students from receiving food packages that were distributed to citizens during the pandemic. VOIS claimed that authorities ignored foreign students and deprived them of medical and other support during the lockdown and pandemic. VOIS also reported that measures and restrictions, as well as digital vaccine passes were initially only available in Turkish and that dormitories for students who tested COVID-19 were in poor condition, unhygienic, and lacked food services. VOIS stated obtaining support in anything but Turkish at the pandemic hospital, quarantine centers, and COVID-19 hotline was “nearly impossible.”

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive “citizenship” from their parents, and there was universal registration at birth, including of children born to migrants.

Child Abuse: The “law” does not explicitly prohibit child abuse, but it does prohibit sexual abuse of children, which carries a penalty of up to six years

imprisonment. There were reports of child abuse. As with domestic violence, there were social and cultural disincentives to seeking legal remedies for such problems.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The minimum age of marriage for girls and boys is 18. A “court” may allow marriages of minors who are 16 or 17 if they receive parental consent.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The “law” prohibits commercial sexual exploitation of children, and authorities generally enforced the prohibition. The age of consent is 16. Statutory rape or attempted statutory rape of a minor younger than 16 is a felony, and the maximum penalty is life imprisonment. If the offender is younger than 18 and less than two years apart in age from the victim, the crime is a misdemeanor punishable by up to two years in prison, an unspecified fine, or both. A cybercrime “law” enacted in July 2020 makes possession or production of child pornography punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Anti-Semitism

There were approximately 150 persons in the Jewish community, which primarily consisted of nonresident businesspersons. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Organ Harvesting

In July police opened an investigation at two private hospitals after receiving information that a young woman had sold her ovaries. Police arrested six persons, including three doctors, a lab technician, and two donors. Police also confiscated documents, computers, and records from the hospitals. According to police reports, two donors sold their ovaries for 3,500 Turkish lira (\$380 as of mid-October) each. One of the donors reported the transaction to police after experiencing health concerns. An investigation continued at year’s end.

Persons with Disabilities

The “law” protects the rights of persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities, including their access to social benefits, and prohibits discrimination against them. Authorities did not effectively enforce all parts of the “law.” Persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. For example, advocates complained of the absence of accessible infrastructure in public areas, including lack of sidewalks, blocked sidewalks, and inaccessible public transportation.

The Turkish Cypriot Orthopedic Disabled Persons Association reported many buildings, sidewalks, and public bathrooms were not accessible to persons with disabilities. The association claimed the “government” had failed to meet the requirement in “law” that 4 percent of public-sector positions be filled by persons with disabilities. In a press statement in May, the chair of the Cyprus Turkish Federation of the Disabled, Dervis Yuceturk, reported there were 660 disabled individuals living in the “TRNC” who were “waiting for employment and support.” Yuceturk stated 800 disabled individuals had been employed under the “Protection, Rehabilitation and Employment Law for the Disabled” and that more than 5,000 disabled individuals have received cash assistance. Yuceturk stated, “We regret that we still have not reached the point we want in terms of employment or assistance. We regret to see that we are still far behind in our fight for a humane life, and that we are far below European standards.”

Children with disabilities attend specific schools that are “state” funded.

Authorities reported that as of August, 260 persons with disabilities worked in the “government.” Authorities also reported that as of August, 5,035 persons with disabilities received financial aid from the “government.”

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The “law” prohibits discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons based on sexual orientation or gender identity in housing, employment, nationality laws and access

to government services. According to the “criminal code,” it is a minor offense for a civil servant employee to discriminate against any person based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Authorities did not effectively enforce the “law.”

While there were no reported cases of official or societal discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in employment, housing, or access to education or health care, members of the LGBTQI+ community noted an overwhelming majority of LGBTQI+ persons concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid potential discrimination.

The Queer Cyprus Association reported LGBTQI+ persons often could not access legal remedies to discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity because authorities declined to enforce them.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The “law” protects the rights of workers, except members of police and other Turkish Cypriot security forces, to form and join independent unions of their own choosing without prior authorization. The “law” allows unions to conduct their activities without interference and provides for their right to strike, with the provision that a union notify authorities in writing if members planned to strike for longer than 24 hours. The “law” does not permit “judges,” members of the police force, or other Turkish Cypriot security forces to strike. The “council of ministers” has the power to prohibit a strike in any individual sector twice a year for up to 60 days if it affects the general health, security, or public order, or if it prevents the provision of essential services. There is no list of what constitutes essential services.

The “law” provides for collective bargaining. The “Ministry of Labor and Social Security” reported that employers could not condition employment on membership or non-membership in a union or participation in strikes. The “law” does not provide for reinstatement of workers fired for union activities.

The “government” did not effectively enforce applicable “laws.” Despite having freedom of association and the right to engage in collective bargaining, very few private-sector workers were unionized, according to labor union representatives. A union representative stated that if private-sector workers affected business operations while exercising their rights, employers would likely dismiss them. Some companies pressured workers to join unions that the company led or approved. Officials of independent unions claimed authorities created public-sector unions as rivals to compete with and weaken independent unions.

KTAMS reported that 35 percent of public sector and 0.5 percent of private sector workers were members of labor unions. According to KTAMS approximately 28 percent of the workforce in Turkish Cypriot administered areas was unionized.

Labor authorities did not effectively enforce the “law.” Penalties for employers convicted of violating the “law” were not commensurate with those for violating other “laws” involving the denial of civil rights and were sporadically enforced.

Public and semipublic employees benefited from collective bargaining agreements. Semipublic employees worked for companies run jointly by public and private enterprises where, for example, the “government” handled administration while the company’s budget came from private sources.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The “law” prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but the “government” did not effectively enforce it. Penalties for violations of the “law” were not commensurate with those for other serious crimes.

Authorities reported they did not receive any complaints regarding forced labor during the year. NGOs and unions stated there were reports of forced labor during the year, primarily in agriculture, construction, and the industrial sector. A labor union representative reported migrant workers in the construction and agricultural sectors were subjected to reduced wages, nonpayment of wages, beatings, and threats of deportation. Another labor union reported that some foreign workers, mainly in the construction and industrial sectors, were forced to work long periods up to 12 hours without additional compensation or pay. The union also reported that some foreign workers were paid less than the minimum wage.

A researcher reported that universities were used to smuggle or traffic large numbers of Africans and South Asians. Some foreign students who could not pay their tuition after arriving in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots became vulnerable to exploitation, including forced labor, and victims of labor and human trafficking.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The “law” prohibits the worst forms of child labor. The minimum age for restricted employment is 15, the last year at which education is compulsory. Employers may hire children between the ages of 15 and 18 in apprentice positions under a special status. Children older than 15 are restricted to no more than six hours of work per day and 30 hours per week. The “law” prohibits children between the ages of 15 and 18 from working during mealtimes, at night, in heavy physical labor, and under dangerous conditions. The “law” also states that every six months the employer must prove, with medical certification, that the physical work done by a child is suitable for children. Written parental consent is also required, and children are entitled to the hourly wage of a full-time employee.

Authorities reported they received three complaints to the child labor hotline in 2020 but that subsequent inspections did not reveal any children working onsite.

The “Ministry of Labor and Social Security” is responsible for enforcing child labor “laws” and policies. Inspections were not sufficient and penalties for violations were not commensurate with those of other serious crimes.

Authorities did not always effectively enforce the “laws,” and NGOs reported that primarily children of Turkish immigrants often worked alongside their families in the agricultural, manufacturing, automotive, and construction sectors. NGOs reported that some children worked in dangerous conditions, such as on construction sites, and were subjected to heavy physical work despite “legal” prohibitions.

Child labor in the urban informal economy was also a problem, but to a lesser

extent than in agriculture and manufacturing. In family-run businesses, it was common for children to work after school in shops and for young children to work on family farms.

In July the Turkish Cyprus Pediatric Institution reported there was lack of inspection and supervision at workplaces and inadequate laws to protect against child labor in the area administrated by Turkish Cypriots. The institution also reported the death of a 15-year-old boy who died in July while working at a car mechanic's garage in the Morphou region. The "Ministry of Labor" announced an investigation into the incident. The investigation continued at year's end.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The "law" generally prohibits discrimination with respect to employment or occupation on the basis of race, sex, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation or gender identity, and social status. The "law" does not specifically address discrimination with respect to religion, political opinion, or HIV-positive status, which were addressed by general "regulations." Authorities did not effectively enforce the "law," and penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for violating other "laws" related to civil rights. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to race, ethnicity, sex, disability, and gender.

Authorities reported there were more than 38,340 registered foreign workers (24,711 Turkish citizens and 13,629 from other countries) in the area administrated by Turkish Cypriot authorities. These workers were mainly from Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. Foreign migrant workers faced societal discrimination based on their ethnicity, race, and religious belief. Although it was uncommon for Greek Cypriots to seek employment in northern Cyprus, they faced social and employment discrimination when they did.

Women faced sexual harassment in the workplace, but most instances of sexual harassment went unreported. Women held far fewer managerial positions than men.

LGBTQI+ individuals often concealed their sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace to avoid discrimination. Persons with disabilities routinely found it physically difficult to access workplaces.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The “government” increased the minimum wage during the year, but it remained below the poverty level for a family of four, as inflation and the cost of living outpaced the increase. The “Ministry of Labor and Social Security” is responsible for enforcing the minimum wage, but it did not effectively do so. The number of inspectors was not sufficient for enforcement. The penalties for noncompliance were not commensurate with those for other similar crimes.

As of September the minimum monthly wage in the area administrated by Turkish Cypriots was 4,324 Turkish lira (\$470 as of mid-October). According to labor unions, this is below the poverty line. As of September KTAMS reported the poverty line for family of four was 4,470 Turkish lira (\$485 as of mid-October).

According to a labor union, per capita income fell from \$12,649 to \$10,055, a level not seen since 2005.

There was premium pay for overtime in the public sector. Premium pay for overtime is also required in the private sector, but it is frequently not paid. The “law” prohibits compulsory overtime and provides for paid annual holidays.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health standards were insufficient. Authorities did not effectively enforce safety and health standards, and the number of inspectors was not sufficient to enforce compliance.

Multinational companies reportedly met health and safety standards. Workers could not remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardizing their employment. Authorities could conduct unannounced inspections or initiate sanctions, but according to unions and associations, inspections were not adequately or routinely carried out. Authorities commonly deported migrant workers who reported violations. Authorities did not penalize violators, and inspections were not adequate to protect worker rights.

Accommodations for migrant workers, either as part of their compensation or for those made to pay, were substandard.

Authorities reported there were 143 major industrial accidents during the year that caused five deaths.

In April, six public sector worker unions filed a case at the “Constitutional Court” to obtain an interim order to stop a “government” statutory decree from freezing cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) for four months. Public sector worker unions, including KTAMS, KAMUSEN, KAMU-IS, GUC-SEN, VERGI-SEN, and the Nurses Union, claimed the COLA freeze was illegal. In June the “Constitutional Court” decided in favor of the unions and cancelled the decree.

Informal Sector: The “government” has not established social protections for workers in the informal economy.