

including Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara and Anamely Ramos González, and approximately 10 or more activists and independent journalists were subjected to constant surveillance and faced arrest by police and state security officials if they left their houses, essentially amounting to house arrest, in violation of international law.⁷

1. [Cuba: Opposition leader sentenced to house arrest after trial tainted by irregularities \(Press release, 3 April\)](#)
2. [Cuba: Authorities must guarantee press freedom in the COVID-19 era \(Press release, 2 May\)](#)
3. [Cuba: Prisoner of Conscience at risk of COVID-19: Roberto Quiñones Haces \(AMR 25/2210/2020\)](#)
4. [Cuba: Harassment of San Isidro movement exemplifies ongoing assault on freedom of expression \(Press release, 20 November\)](#)
5. [Cuba: Artist opposing censorship at risk: Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara \(AMR 25/2028/2020\)](#)
6. [Cuba: Amnesty International calls for release of two San Isidro prisoners of conscience \(Press release, 27 November 2020\)](#)
7. [Cuba: San Isidro movement and allies under frightening levels of surveillance \(Press release, 15 December 2020\)](#)

CYPRUS

Republic of Cyprus

Head of state and government: **Nicos Anastasiades**

Asylum-seekers were detained in substandard conditions in Pournara refugee camp. Several incidents of pushbacks of refugees and migrants were reported.

BACKGROUND

In October, the UN Security Council called on Turkey to reverse the decision to open parts of the military controlled area of Varosha. In November, the UN hosted an informal meeting between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot leaders where the topic of fresh talks about the island was discussed.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

In April, NGOs denounced the detention in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions of nearly 700 asylum-seekers in Pournara refugee camp in Kokkinotrimithia. They were initially detained without legal basis between

mid-March and 8 April and then prohibited from leaving the camp following a Ministerial Decision citing COVID-19 concerns.

In May, the NGO KISA reported that excessive force was used against asylum-seekers protesting against poor living conditions and detention in Pournara.

From 20 May, the authorities prohibited residents from leaving the camp citing a scabies outbreak. This sparked new protests by residents. While the measures were lifted on 15 June, UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, described Pournara as a closed facility as of 28 September. In November, new COVID-19 measures reintroduced the ban on movements outside the camp. In December, the Ombudswoman recommended the camp's decongestion.

On 20 March, reports emerged that the Cyprus Coast Guard pushed back to sea a boat carrying 175 Syrian refugees. Further incidents were reported in September concerning the Coast Guard forcibly returning to Lebanon more than 200 refugees and migrants who had reached or tried to reach Cyprus by boat.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

In January, a British teenager appealed against a Cyprus district court ruling finding her guilty of making false claims in her report of being gang-raped in July 2019. Serious concerns remained about the reported shortcomings of the police investigation and the fairness of her trial.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In June, the Observatory of Human Rights Defenders and the International Federation for Human Rights expressed concerns over a Supreme Court ruling convicting the NGO KISA of "defamation" and imposing a penalty of €10,000. The case related to action taken by KISA in 2010 against online hate speech. The ruling was appealed.

IMPUNITY

In January, the European Court of Human Rights found Cyprus in breach of the Convention for failing to effectively investigate

the death of Athanasios Nicolaou, an army conscript, found dead under a bridge in 2005.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Between 2006 and 30 November 2020, the remains of 993 missing individuals (711 Greek Cypriots and 282 Turkish Cypriots) were identified by the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus in its mission to establish the fate and whereabouts of individuals who were forcibly disappeared during the inter-communal fighting of 1963 to 1964 and the events of 1974.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech Republic

Head of state: **Miloš Zeman**

Head of government: **Andrej Babiš**

Discrimination against Roma persisted. Parliament again failed to ratify an international convention on violence against women and take forward a bill on same-sex marriage. The European Court of Justice ruled against the government for failure to accept mandatory refugee quotas. Up to 16% of primary school children were reportedly unable to access education online during the lockdown related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerns remained over continuing arms transfers to parties in the Yemen conflict.

BACKGROUND

Both the Czech authorities and the EU continued to investigate alleged conflicts of interest by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš relating to EU subsidies received by his business interests. Prior to the first lockdown as a result of the pandemic, in March thousands of people held a demonstration in the capital, Prague, against the Prime Minister and what they perceived as his corrosive effect on the country's institutions.

The tenure of the new Public Defender of Human Rights, appointed in February, provoked controversy. Over 300 academics

and lawyers signed an open letter in April, concerned that he appeared to demonstrate insufficient commitment to certain issues including minority rights.

DISCRIMINATION

Roma

Discrimination against Roma remained widespread, although the new Public Defender of Rights claimed that it was only a marginal problem.

Some steps were taken towards implementing a mechanism for providing compensation to Roma women who were victims of forced sterilization. In September the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner called on the lower house of parliament to adopt a draft law providing one-off compensation for victims. The bill was awaiting its first reading at year's end.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe held a regular review in December of the measures taken to address the discriminatory segregation of Roma in schools and classes for pupils with mental disabilities (following the continued failure to implement the judgment in *D.H. and Others v Czech Republic*). The Committee noted some positive trends but remained concerned that the majority of Roma pupils assessed as needing individual educational plans were still educated outside the mainstream.

Women

Parliament failed to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women (Istanbul Convention) although it was scheduled to be submitted for ratification in 2018. According to a group of Czech NGOs, the Coalition Against Violence, annually some 168,000 victims of domestic violence have sought medical help in recent years. Service providers noted an increase in the number of domestic violence incidents during the restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic.

In June the European Committee of Social Rights made public its decision (in the case