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CYPRUS 2020

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.

