

CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech Republic

Head of state: **Miloš Zeman**

Head of government: **Andrej Babiš** (replaced Bohuslav Sobotka in December)

The government refused to participate in the EU mandatory refugee relocation quotas. Despite reforms, Roma pupils continued to be segregated in schools. An amendment allowing municipalities to declare zones of “socially pathological behaviour” with restricted access to housing benefits entered into force.

DISCRIMINATION – ROMA

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

One year after the reform of the primary education system that aimed to facilitate the inclusion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds into mainstream schools, Roma children continued to face discrimination in access to education. In July, the government published data which showed that over 24% of Roma pupils continued to be educated in ethnically segregated schools.

In March, a district court ordered a primary school in the city of Ostrava to apologize to two Roma pupils. The school had refused to register the pupils in 2014, claiming that it had reached full capacity. Legal guardians of the pupils complained that the director justified his decision by claiming that non-Roma parents could start removing their children from the school as there were already nine Roma pupils registered in that grade. The court held that a fear of “white flight” could not justify the treatment of pupils on the basis of their ethnicity.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

In July, an amendment to the law on welfare benefits entered into force and dozens of municipalities announced that they would restrict access to housing allowances. The amendment allows municipalities to declare zones of “socially pathological behaviour” where residents would be barred from claiming some housing allowances. This will

affect new tenants or those who move to or within these zones. NGOs raised concerns that the new regulation would disproportionately affect Roma and poor people.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

The Czech Republic accepted only 12 asylum-seekers out of the 2,691 it had been assigned under the 2015 EU Emergency Relocation Scheme – which aimed to relocate refugees from EU member states such as Greece and Italy – by the end of the year. In June, the European Commission started infringement procedures against the Czech Republic, as well as Poland and Hungary, for refusing to participate in the scheme. In July, the government stated it would not accept any further asylum-seekers. In December, the European Commission decided to step up the action against all three countries and referred them to the Court of Justice of the European Union over their refusal to accept the asylum-seekers under the scheme.

There were 974 applications made for international protection by the end of the year. Thirteen people were successful in their applications; 79 applications were rejected. Sixteen asylum-seekers from Afghanistan were refused an extension to their temporary protection. The government continued to base such asylum decisions on its arbitrary designation of certain areas in Afghanistan as “safe”, despite evidence to the contrary and with violence continuing to escalate in Afghanistan during the year.

RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

High-level government officials, including the President, made xenophobic statements about refugees and migrants. During the pre-election campaign, the Minister of Interior presented as a success the restrictive policies that led refugees to avoid the Czech Republic.

In February, the police discontinued their investigation into the 2016 death of a Roma man at a pizzeria in Žatec, determining that no crime had been committed. The man died after he was restrained by municipal police

officers and some customers as a result of his allegedly aggressive behaviour. The victim's family had filed a complaint against the police in January, alleging that the investigation was not thorough; their lawyer criticized the police for failing to secure the scene and evidence.

In May, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights urged the Czech authorities to remove a pig farm from the site of a former Nazi concentration camp, where most of the victims were Roma, in the village of Lety u Písku. While appreciating the government's efforts to buy the land, the Commissioner was concerned over the length of the process, and the government's repeated failure to remove the pig farm and create a memorial as a measure of reparation for the Roma who suffered and died there during the Second World War. In November, the government signed a contract to buy off the land from the owner of the pig farm and made a commitment to build a memorial on the site.

SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Czech Republic continued to export arms to countries where there was a substantial risk that such arms could be used to commit or facilitate serious human rights violations, including the unlawful use of force against protesters or opposition groups. In May, during an arms fair in the city of Brno, the President stated that the Czech arms industry needed to "export globally", denying that the country had responsibility to prevent the re-export of its equipment to countries which are "not safe".

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Head of state: **Joseph Kabila**

Head of government: **Bruno Tshibala Nzenze (replaced Samy Badibanga Ntita in April)**

The human rights situation further deteriorated. Violence in the Kasai region left thousands dead, at least 1 million internally displaced, and caused more than 35,000 people to flee for neighbouring Angola. In the east, armed groups and government forces continued to target civilians and engage in illegal exploitation of natural resources with impunity. Police, intelligence services and courts continued to crack down on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Human rights defenders and journalists were harassed, intimidated, arbitrarily arrested, expelled or killed.

BACKGROUND

President Kabila remained in post although his second constitutional term ended on 19 December 2016. A political agreement was signed in December 2016 by the ruling coalition, the opposition and some civil society organizations. It provided that President Kabila would remain in power, and a government of national unity would be appointed, led by a Prime Minister designated by the Rassemblement, the main opposition, with the task of organizing the elections by December 2017. The agreement established the National Council for the Implementation of the Accord and the Electoral Process (CNSA) to monitor progress, led by Rassemblement leader Etienne Tshisekedi. The agreement included a commitment by President Kabila to adhere to the constitutional two-term limit and not undertake a revision or change of the Constitution. Implementation of the