

Cyprus 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

Note: 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”; Turkey (Türkiye) is the only country that does. 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 areas. This report outlines developments in both communities.

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in the Republic of Cyprus or the area administered by Turkish Cypriots during the year.

Significant human rights issues in the Republic of Cyprus included credible reports of: substantial interference with freedom of association of nongovernmental organizations; refoulement of asylum seekers to a country where they would face torture or persecution; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national or ethnic minority groups, including foreign asylum seekers.

The Republic of Cyprus government took steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses, although there were limited cases of impunity.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, significant human rights issues included: harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, and enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including for nongovernmental organizations; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence within the territory of a “state” and on the right to leave the area administered by Turkish Cypriots; refoulement of refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they would face torture or persecution, including serious harms; serious “government” corruption; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national or ethnic minority groups, including foreign asylum seekers; and trafficking in persons, including forced labor.

“Authorities” in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots took limited credible steps to identify and punish “officials” who may have committed human rights abuses. There was evidence, however, of widespread impunity.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

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

On November 28, a trial began of three prison guards and four inmates charged in the premeditated murder of prisoner Tansu Cidan in the Republic of Cyprus (ROC) central prison in October 2022.

There were no reports the “government” in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of the ROC government, and the same was reported for the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

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

The constitution and laws of the ROC prohibited such practices, but there were reports government officials employed them during the year.

The ROC commissioner for administration (ombudsman), who also acted as

the country's national preventive mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture, reported the commission investigated citizen complaints of verbal and degrading treatment by the Cyprus National Police (CNP). During the year, the ombudsman launched an investigation into a complaint the CNP subjected a person to degrading treatment on the basis of the person's gender identity.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the "law" did not refer explicitly to torture, but it prohibited "police" mistreatment of detainees under the section of the "criminal code" covering assault, violence, and battery. There were reports "police" abused detainees.

Turkish Cypriot nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that a lack of security cameras at detention centers and the old and new "central prisons" allowed "police" officers and prison guards to abuse detainees with impunity. NGOs further reported security cameras at the old "central prison" did not feed directly to the "ministry of interior," allowing the possibility of potential abuse because camera footage could be revised on site or interrupted.

In contrast with 2022, the "attorney general's office" in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots reported no battery or excessive use of force by "police" during the year. It also reported completing investigations into three complaints from 2022 of "police" battery and use of excessive force. One complaint was determined to be baseless, and the other two

investigations concluded there was no “police” battery.

A Turkish Cypriot NGO reported that in June, a detainee in a custody cell at the Kyrenia “police station” reported being exposed to “police” violence after insisting on seeing a doctor. The NGO reported widespread examples of “police” mistreatment of detainees that were not reported by “officials.”

A Turkish Cypriot NGO reported it received a complaint from a political party that it was contacted by family members of six different inmates who alleged they were subjected to or witnessed mistreatment, violence, and torture in August. The families refused to give their names or the names of the inmates for fear of reprisal. The NGO also reported the investigation showed reasonable suspicion the head of the “prison administration” ordered prison “officers” to raid cells to “conduct inspections” while wearing camouflage and masks. The NGO claimed some of the assaulted inmates were younger than 18. The NGO collaborated with the Turkish Cypriot Bar Association and the Union of Doctors to request “authorities” investigate the matter and comply with the requirements of the Istanbul Protocol. The NGO reported no investigation was conducted.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

NGOs reported some prison and detention centers in the ROC were grossly overcrowded.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, prisons and detention centers,

inmates faced gross overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, inadequate medical care, poor heating, and inadequate access to food or water.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Gross overcrowding, combined with old and antiquated facilities, were the main problems faced by the ROC's Central Prisons Department. The prison's capacity was 620; the maximum number of inmates held during the year was 1,030. Most doors opened only manually, which presented potentially life-threatening risks in the event of an emergency. Many cells lacked sanitary facilities, and access to toilets was difficult at night. As a result, prisoners sometimes used plastic containers to urinate.

On May 5, officers from the ROC's Office of the Ombudsman conducted an unannounced visit to the ROC Central Prison following receipt of a complaint from the Cypriot-Kurdish Solidarity Association that they were not able to communicate with Kenan Ayaz, detained pending the outcome of his appeal against extradition to Germany. According to the ombudsman's report, Ayaz was confined in his cell on May 4 after he informed prison management in writing he would go on a hunger strike for reasons related to his court case, not his detention conditions. The ombudsman concluded that although prisons regulations required the prisoner's confinement for preventive reasons and protection of his interests, the prisoner should have been allowed to communicate with relatives (not only his lawyer) and should have had at least one hour of outdoor exercise, as per relevant

European Prison Rules.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, NGOs and media reported overcrowding was a problem throughout detention facilities. An NGO reported receiving complaints regarding “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.

An NGO that visited prisons and detention centers reported conditions were deplorable and asylum seekers complained regarding inadequate sleeping area, poor hygiene conditions, insect infestations, poor ventilation, lack of heating and cooling systems, lack of access to shower facilities, and inadequate food. In July the Turkish Cypriot Public Sector Workers’ Union (KTAMS) held a press conference to call attention to the severe shortage of guards, technical and mechanical personnel, and social services providers at the “central prison.”

Sanitation was a significant problem in the old and new “central prisons,” according to NGOs, with inadequate access to water and plumbing problems. NGOs claimed prison health care was inadequate, lacking sufficient medical supplies and a full-time doctor, and they reported that testing for contagious diseases at the old “central prison” was haphazard and inconsistent.

A Turkish Cypriot NGO reported receiving complaints that Nicosia “police” held transgender individuals in the “police” station detention center during the entirety of investigative processes, which by law could last up to three months. Cells in the detention could be smaller than 140 square feet without ventilation, fresh air, or windows, and detainees slept on pieces of hardwood with a blanket. Detainees claimed to have no access to showers; however, “authorities” disputed this claim.

In an interview with the press in March, the head of the Human Rights Committee at the Turkish Cypriot Bar Association, Asli Murat, stated that according to information obtained from bar association clients, detainees at “police” detention centers were overcrowded in concrete cells with unwashed blankets and no access to showers.

In February local Turkish Cypriot press reported four inmates at the “central prison” were charged with the battery and rape of a pretrial detainee. The press reported that on the next day, two of the four suspects raped the detainee again. According to doctors at the Nicosia “State” Hospital, the detainee suffered bodily harm.

In June KTAMS complained there were shortages of prison guards and that the sole contracted psychologist and sole dentist only visited the prison irregularly. KTAMS also reported there was insufficient water and electricity at the central prison in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. In June a Turkish Cypriot NGO received two complaints from detainees that they were

refused access to health care and medication.

Administration: ROC authorities generally conducted investigations into credible allegations of mistreatment.

Independent Monitoring: The ROC government permitted visits to prison and detention centers by independent human rights observers, and unrestricted and unannounced visits occurred during the year.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, there were no reports “authorities” allowed independent prison monitoring. “Authorities” reportedly permitted representatives from diplomatic missions in Cyprus to visit inmates holding their countries’ citizenship and permitted lawyers and “members of parliament” to visit the “central prison” on September 5, although lawyers were only able to observe the lawyers’ visiting room. NGOs reported not being allowed to carry out inspections in the “central prison” despite making numerous requests to the “ministry of interior affairs.”

Improvements: To address overcrowding in the central prison, the ROC added Block 10A, used during the COVID-19 pandemic to quarantine newcomers, to the main prison facilities.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

ROC law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right

of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements. The same was reported for the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

ROC law required court warrants, and authorities respected this requirement. Authorities could not detain a person for more than one day unless a court granted 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.

There was a functioning system of bail. In general, detainees had access to an attorney. The law permitted detainees to speak to their attorney at any time, including before and during interrogation by police.

In criminal cases the state provided an attorney to indigent detainees who had court confirmation of their financial need. The ROC Bar Association provided pro bono legal services to financially stressed populations.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, “police” could keep detainees in custody for up to three months, but a “judge” needed to review the detention after the third day and every eight days thereafter. Turkish Cypriot “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 could be granted by the “courts” and was routinely used, but “courts” confiscated detainees’ passports pending trial. According to an NGO and a human rights attorney, during the detention review process, “officials” pressured detainees to sign confessions to be released on bail. The human rights attorney 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 had the right to access legal representation. Turkish Cypriot “authorities” usually allowed detainees prompt access to family members and a lawyer of their choice, but NGOs reported cases in which “authorities” prevented detainees from seeing a lawyer. Turkish Cypriot “authorities” provided lawyers to the indigent 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 Turkish Cypriot “central prison” regulation prohibited sentenced individuals in solitary confinement from meeting with a lawyer without permission from the “prison director,” who was authorized to deny the visit without providing justification. “Authorities” reported inmates and

detainees in solitary confinement cells were allowed one meeting with their lawyer, with the knowledge of the “prison director,” during their time in the cell.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

ROC law and its constitution provided for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. The same was reported in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Trial Procedures

ROC law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. The ROC Bar Association reported 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.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and independent judicial “authorities” generally enforced this right.

Human rights observers and one NGO reported translators were not available for non-Turkish speakers, forcing defense attorneys or NGOs to provide a translator. 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.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees in the ROC or in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

f. Transnational Repression

Not applicable.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

According to ROC law, the minister of interior was the guardian of properties of Turkish Cypriots who had not had permanent residence in the government-controlled area since 1974. Ownership remained with the original owner, and the sale or transfer of Turkish Cypriot property under the guardianship of the minister required approval of the government. The minister was authorized to return properties to Turkish Cypriot applicants after examining the circumstances of each case. Owners could appeal the minister’s decisions to the Administrative Court.

During the year, the Administrative Court issued judgments in three cases

relating to Turkish Cypriot properties under the guardianship of the minister of interior. On January 18, the Administrative Court rejected a request by a Turkish Cypriot seeking to reclaim his property. The court found the applicant's request to present additional evidence he was not in possession of Greek Cypriot property in the area under Turkish Cypriot administration, a precondition for eligibility to reclaim property in the government-controlled area, was vaguely and inadequately drafted. The applicant appealed the decision. On February 7, the Administrative Court rejected an appeal against the expropriation of part of a Turkish Cypriot property because the applicant failed to challenge within the specified time limit. On February 14, the court dismissed, on grounds of admissibility, an appeal filed by a British citizen who acquired the property from his Turkish Cypriot wife.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, a property commission handled claims by Greek Cypriots. As of December, the commission paid more than £421 million (\$524 million) in compensation to applicants during the year.

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

ROC law and its constitution prohibited such actions, but there were reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

On September 19, Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), a Europe-wide

mechanism monitoring and responding to violations of press and media freedom, published an open letter expressing concern regarding the alleged surveillance and intimidation of investigative journalist Makarios Drousiotis and the failure of ROC authorities to conduct a prompt and adequate investigation of the allegations. The MFRR called on the attorney general, minister of justice, and chief of the CNP to ensure those responsible for wrongdoing were investigated and prosecuted. Drousiotis claimed that following the publication of a series of books he authored exposing corruption in the highest echelons of government, ROC authorities illegally monitored his communications and installed spyware in his computer to gain access to information identifying his sources. Drousiotis said he reported interference with his mobile phone and computer to police in 2020, but police made no progress in the investigation.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” prohibited such actions. There were reports “police” subjected Greek Cypriots and Maronites (an ethnoreligious group) living in areas administered by the Turkish Cypriots to physical surveillance and monitoring, including “police” patrols and questioning. Greek Cypriot and Maronite residents reported “police” required them to report their location when they expected visitors. A Maronite representative asserted 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

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

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but “authorities” did not respect this right.

Freedom of Expression: ROC law criminalized incitement of hatred and violence based on race, color, religion, genealogical origin, national or ethnic origin, or sexual orientation. Such acts were punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment, a fine, or both.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, it was a criminal offense to insult the Turkish Cypriot “government” and “officials,” as well as the Turkish government and its officials. 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 “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus [(“TRNC”)] president,” “TRNC government,” Turkish military, Turkish interference into Turkish Cypriot affairs, and Turkish President Erdoğan.

In June, Serhat Incirli, journalist for the periodical *Yeniduzen*, announced he was removed from the “presidential palace” during Erdoğan’s visit, despite being credentialed to enter the palace. *Yeniduzen* reported this was an abuse of freedom of the press. Opposition parties, the Journalist Association, and the Press Workers Union condemned the “presidency,” which claimed Incirli did not present credentials before the event and accused him of provocation.

Violence and Harassment: In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, “authorities” usually respected press and media freedom; however, at times they harassed, intimidated, or arrested journalists or otherwise obstructed their reporting. According to NGOs, journalists, and human rights defenders, Turkish Cypriot “authorities” advised some journalists not to criticize the Turkish president or the Turkish government. An NGO reported that due to perceived pressure and potential reaction from Turkey, some journalists did not express critical opinions and preferred to remain silent.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: ROC law penalized use of geographical names and toponyms other than those included in *A Complete Gazetteer of Cyprus* of 1987. Violations were punishable by up to three years in prison, a

fine, or both.

According to a human rights NGO, “authorities” in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots investigated several cases against journalists accused of writing with “malicious intent” and spreading “fear and concern,” among other charges.

In February Turkish Cypriot leader and “president” Ersin Tatar opened a libel and slander lawsuit against journalist Serhat Incirli for allegedly insulting Tatar in 2022 in articles in *Yeniduzen*. Tatar demanded *Yeniduzen* pay compensation or punitive damages. He also called for the removal of the articles from all electronic platforms and demanded *Yeniduzen* be banned from making similar publications on its social media account and website. The Turkish Cypriot Press Workers Union criticized Tatar for attempting to silence freedom of speech and freedom of the press by not showing tolerance towards criticism and called for solidarity.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, journalists could not interview or report on persons under control of the “armed forces.” In August the “attorney general’s office” filed a “court” case against Ali Kismir for “humiliating the Turkish military.” Kismir was charged with “insulting and defaming the morality of the ‘TRNC’ security forces command” in an article he wrote in 2020 and faced 10 years in prison. The hearing began in October.

Libel/Slander Laws: In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” criminalized libel and blasphemy. “Authorities” regularly used these “laws” to justify suppression of free speech.

In June press reported Turkish Cypriot leader Tatar withdrew a defamation case against Turkish Cypriot Sabit Parsel, who was charged with “insulting the president” by posting on Facebook in 2022, in reference to Tatar, “Continuing on the path to be the laughingstock of the island, the clown of Turkey. This island is ashamed of you.” Parsel rejected the “court’s” request to furnish his identification card and was arrested and detained for seven days. Parsel said he was notified in February that Tatar withdrew the case and charges were dropped.

In August, Yudum Mison appeared in “court” on charges of insulting Tatar in a social media post by sharing a photograph of Tatar laughing before he visited a wildfire area. According to a human rights organization, “police” confiscated Mison’s mobile phone and confirmed with university language experts Mison’s post contained language insulting to Tatar. The “judge” moved the case to trial, and at year’s end Mison was free on bail.

Internet Freedom

The ROC government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content.

ROC law criminalized the use of computer systems to incite and promote

racism, xenophobia, prejudice, racial discrimination, hate speech, and violence. Such acts were punishable by up to five years' imprisonment, a fine, or both.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, "authorities" did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content.

According to a 2020 cybercrime "law," a verbal attack made with deliberate intent to harm individuals, institutions, or organizations over the internet was considered a crime punishable by substantial fines and from one to 10 years' imprisonment. Activists expressed concern the "law" could be used to suppress free speech.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The ROC constitution and law provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, but the government limited freedom of association.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the "law" provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, but the "government" regularly limited freedom of peaceful assembly.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, a labor union reported "police" sometimes interfered in demonstrations and at times used force against

peaceful demonstrators. Other NGOs reported “police” used obscure regulations and requirements for permits to interrupt protests.

“Authorities” at times used threats of legal action or expanded “police” presence to discourage protests.

Throughout the year, some union representatives reported “police” obstructed unions and civil society organizations from demonstrating in front of “parliament” and marching and opening banners in front of the Turkish “embassy” during demonstrations and protests.

In August, Turkish Cypriot “police” filed cases against 22 members of teachers unions for allegedly “preventing the ‘police’ from doing their job” in front of the “ministry of education.” Teachers denied the accusations, stating they were engaging in peaceful demonstrations. The first hearing, scheduled to begin November 24, was postponed to January 2024.

Freedom of Association

The ROC government continued to block the bank accounts of the NGO Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism (KISA) following a 2020 Ministry of Interior decision to deregister the NGO because KISA did not comply in a timely manner with an amendment to the law governing NGOs. KISA filed an appeal with the Administrative Court against the deregistration, but the government’s block of KISA’s assets continued, pending adjudication of the appeal, which limited KISA’s capacity to operate.

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

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

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and “authorities” generally respected these rights.

In-country Movement: NGOs reported the ROC 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.

e. Protection of Refugees

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations reported difficulty in cooperating with the ROC government to provide protection and assistance to refugees and asylum

seekers.

Turkish Cypriot “authorities” at times cooperated with the Refugee Rights Association, the NGO implementing partner of UNHCR, and other humanitarian organizations to provide protection and assistance to refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. Access to the area administered by Turkish Cypriots was not ensured for persons seeking international protection who arrived regularly at the airport or ports if authorities believed their intention was to seek asylum.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, there was no specific domestic asylum “legislation”; however, “authorities” unilaterally adopted various international human rights conventions through domestic “legislation.” Access was not ensured for persons who arrived regularly at seaports or the airport in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots and expressed their intention to seek asylum. Asylum-seeking persons who arrived irregularly were arrested, detained, and sentenced. Furthermore, asylum seekers were subject to arrest, prosecution, and deportation when caught attempting to cross the “Green Line” irregularly to access the available asylum mechanism in the ROC. Some persons who arrived “regularly” but with a fear of persecution applied for a UNHCR “Person of Concern Certificate,” allowing them to remain and entitling them to basic rights in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Access to Asylum: ROC law provided for granting asylum or refugee status,

and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees.

During the first eight months of the year, the number of asylum applications was half that of 2022. The ROC, UNHCR, and NGOs reported an accelerated pace in the examination of applications, but the backlog from previous years was high. During the same period, the government doubled the number of assisted voluntary returns and deportations of asylum seekers whose applications were rejected. An NGO reported forced and voluntary returns were not independently monitored and reported receiving some complaints from returnees regarding payment of their cash incentive.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” did not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and “authorities” did not have a system for providing protection to refugees. Instead, according to an NGO, asylum seekers arriving at legal entry points were detained and deported to Turkey. The NGO also reported asylum seekers arriving irregularly were considered prohibited migrants by Turkish Cypriot “authorities” and were placed in detention facilities to await deportation.

Refoulement: Media outlets, NGOs, and UNHCR reported that in July and August, ROC authorities pushed back three boats to Lebanon carrying irregular migrants, including potential asylum seekers. UNHCR and NGOs reported many of these individuals faced “chain” refoulement, as they were subsequently deported from Lebanon back to Syria. Of the 109 passengers forcibly returned to Lebanon, at least 12 were unaccompanied children,

according to UNHCR.

UNHCR observers reported deportations from the area administered by Turkish Cypriots occurred via Turkey. Those without legal residence status faced onward refoulement, particularly non-Syrians, as Turkish Cypriot “authorities” deported individuals they claimed entered illegally before they were granted refugee status determination interviews by migration “authorities.”

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, “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 several persons designated by the Turkish government as alleged members of the Gulen movement. Some observers considered these deportations refoulement.

Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Incidents of violence against refugees and asylum seekers increased during the year. In August and September, antimigrant demonstrations in Paphos and Limassol turned violent and resulted in some injuries and extensive damage to refugee and asylum seekers’ property. ROC authorities acknowledged police response was slow and inadequate and failed to prevent the escalation of violence. UNHCR and NGOs reported public sentiment against migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, was on the rise. NGOs reported an increase in

attacks against asylum seekers, particularly against delivery drivers.

In September, NGOs and UNHCR reported overcrowding at the Pournara Reception Center, which served as the ROC's center to initiate asylum applications, was reduced substantially. Pournara residents were relocated to prefabricated housing units rather than being placed in tents.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, NGOs reported refugees faced racism, exploitation, and impediments to achieving self-sufficiency and integration within society. According to an NGO, there were long detention periods for asylum seekers pending deportation or prosecution; Syrians arriving irregularly were detained an average of 31 days prior to deportation. Syrians smuggled into the "TRNC" were, however, detained as long as six months in crude jails below "police" stations. "Authorities" attributed the long detention period as necessary in case charges were filed against the Syrians' smuggler and the Syrians would need to serve as witnesses.

An NGO reported that at year's end, more than 22 asylum seekers interviewed at places of detention complained regarding physical violence they received from "police" in the places of detention and during arrest.

Freedom of Movement: The ROC government restricted the departure of asylum seekers from the Pournara Migrant Reception Center in Kokkinotrimithia unless they had a residential address. UNHCR and NGOs

reported, however, asylum seekers faced great difficulties finding accommodation without being allowed to exit the center.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, if asylum seekers traveled abroad, they would be unable to return due to their lack of “legal” status.

Employment: In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, under the “law,” persons holding UNHCR protection papers received the same access to the labor market as third-country nationals. NGOs, however, reported “authorities” refused to issue work permits to some individuals with UNHCR protection papers.

Durable Solutions: The ROC offered recognized refugee status to asylum seekers residing in the country.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, persons who arrived “regularly” but expressed a fear of persecution could obtain a UNHCR Person of Concern Certificate, which allowed them to remain and entitled them to basic rights.

Temporary Protection: The ROC government provided temporary protection, called subsidiary protection, to 743 individuals who may not qualify as refugees.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the Refugee Rights Association secured certification of 128 “persons of concern,” a designation that

conveyed some protections in the absence of asylum procedures.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The ROC considered Greek Cypriots displaced because of the 1974 division of the island to be refugees, although they fell under the UN definition of IDPs. As of October, there were 281,094 such individuals and their descendants.

Turkish Cypriots considered those displaced because of the island's 1974 division to be refugees, although they also fell under the UN definition of IDPs. At the time of the division, the number of IDPs in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots was approximately 60,000.

For further information concerning IDPs in the country, please see the materials of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center:

<https://www.internal-displacement.org>.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

ROC law and the constitution provided 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 the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” provided 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

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: In the ROC, national elections in February were widely reported to be fair and free of abuses and irregularities.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, elections were widely reported to be fair and free of abuses or irregularities; however, a May report by German think tank Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung reflected that most respondents to its survey of businesspersons believed vote buying and offering special favors in election periods were common.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups: In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, “authorities” did not permit Greek Cypriots or Maronites to participate in elections.

Section 4. Corruption in Government

ROC law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were numerous reports of government corruption.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” provided 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.

Corruption: Several investigations and prosecutions were underway in the ROC against public officials and private entities suspected of assisting individuals with criminal backgrounds to acquire citizenship or bypass antimoney-laundering safeguards. In May the government hired two British anti-corruption experts to assist with an investigation involving former and sitting high-ranking government officials because local experts were reluctant to participate. Investigative journalist Makarios Drousiotis reported ROC authorities monitored his communications and employed intimidating tactics after he published a series of books exposing corruption in the government.

In the area administrated by Turkish Cypriots, observers generally perceived corruption, cronyism, and lack of transparency to be serious problems in the “legislative” and “executive” branches. In May the Center for Migration and Rights Studies published the results of a survey citing corruption as the biggest problem within the Turkish Cypriot community and noting complaints of unfairness, partisanship, corruption, and bribery.

For additional information concerning corruption in the country, please see

the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

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

Domestic and international human rights groups in the ROC generally operated without government restriction to monitor or investigate human rights conditions or cases and publish their findings. NGOs reported government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views.

KISA, a Cypriot NGO deregistered in 2020 for failure to submit required documentation in a timely manner, was unable to complete previously awarded EU-funded projects due to its inability to access its bank account, and it was unable to apply for new EU-funded projects. Citing KISA's deregistration, the Asylum Service denied KISA permission to visit migrant reception centers.

NGOs reported a limited number of domestic human rights organizations operated in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, and "authorities" were rarely cooperative or responsive to their views and requests.

Government Human Rights Bodies: There was a legislative Committee on Human Rights and an ROC government ombudsman, whose portfolio included human rights. The ombudsman was considered independent and effective.

During independent investigations, the ombudsman generally enjoyed good cooperation with other government bodies. NGOs complained, however, 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, consisted of nine members of the House of Representatives elected to five-year terms. The executive branch did not exercise control over the committee.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “ombudsman’s” portfolio included issues related to human rights. The “ombudsman” was not considered independent and was not always effective due to the lack of an enforcement mechanism.

The “ombudsman” investigated and reported on institutions exercising administrative and “executive” powers and ensured “legislation” and “court” decisions were properly implemented. The “ombudsman” could initiate investigations in response to media reports or complaints from

individuals and organizations or on their own initiative.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: ROC law criminalized rape of a person, regardless of gender, including spousal and domestic or intimate partner rape and other forms of domestic and sexual violence, with a maximum sentence of life in prison. The law also criminalized domestic violence, with a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. The government generally enforced the law effectively, although many cases went unreported.

In May the Larnaca District Court found former Metropolitan Bishop of Kition (Larnaca District) Chrysostomos guilty of indecently assaulting a girl, age 16, in 1981 when he served as bishop. Chrysostomos was sentenced to 12 months in prison, but the sentence was suspended for three years.

The law established clear mechanisms for reporting and prosecuting domestic violence within the family. Courts could issue same-day restraining orders against suspected or convicted domestic violence offenders. The NGO Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (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.

There were three shelters for survivors of domestic violence, each funded primarily by the government and operated by SPAVO. The government also funded the SPAVO-operated Women's Home, a one-stop facility in Nicosia where women survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual assault, and their children were provided with medical, legal, and psychological services, while also having the opportunity to provide testimony to police.

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

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the "law" criminalized rape of a person, regardless of gender, including spousal rape, and provided for a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. "Authorities" and "police" did not enforce the "law" effectively. The "law" prohibited domestic violence under various assault and violence or battery clauses, with a maximum sentence of four years' imprisonment, but no "laws" specifically addressed domestic violence.

Gender-based violence, including spousal abuse, was a major problem. The Nicosia Turkish Municipality operated a shelter for survivors of domestic

violence, and local NGOs supported rape and domestic violence survivors. Turkish Cypriot “authorities” established gender focal points at relevant “ministries” to respond to complaints of violence against women.

Shelters operated by the Nicosia Turkish Municipality provided temporary housing and support for survivors of domestic violence and their children, as well as victims of human trafficking.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: ROC law prohibited sexual harassment in the workplace with a maximum penalty of three years in prison, a fine, or both. A code of conduct outlined the prevention and handling of sexual harassment and harassment in the public service.

NGOs and foreign domestic worker associations reported authorities did not adequately investigate sexual harassment complaints submitted by foreign domestic workers. Officials and NGOs reported sexual harassment of foreign women domestic workers was a widespread but underreported problem. NGOs reported permissive social attitudes, fear of reprisals, and lack of family support for survivors discouraged the reporting of sexual harassment. The ombudsman received one complaint of sexual harassment in the workplace and several complaints of gender-based harassment at the workplace. The Office of the Ombudsman and the Academy of Public Administration delivered training and seminars on sexual harassment and gender mainstreaming for the public sector during the year.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “criminal code” prohibited sexual harassment and considered it a misdemeanor punishable by up to 12 months’ imprisonment, a fine, or both. According to NGOs, sexual harassment went largely unreported. The NGO Voice of International Students in Cyprus reported widespread sexual harassment of women international students and noted “police” routinely dismissed complaints.

Discrimination: ROC law provided the same legal status and rights for women as for men, and those laws were generally respected. Women were legally prohibited from working in underground mines. ROC law required all men ages 18-50 to complete 14 months of service in the Cypriot National Guard, but there was no service requirement for women.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” provided the same “legal” status and rights for women as for men, but “authorities” did not enforce the “law” effectively. Women experienced discrimination in such areas as employment, credit, owning or managing a business, education, and housing. For example, women teachers were reportedly instructed to time their pregnancies so delivery would occur during summer break, and women teachers working at private schools were dismissed from their duties for pregnancy.

NGOs reported women in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) community faced discrimination in education, housing, and employment in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of ROC government authorities. An NGO reported doctors in the private and public sectors required married women to have their husband's consent to proceed with sterilization, although the law did not require such consent. An NGO reported police and the Social Welfare Services did not respond to their calls to investigate suspicious cases of persons with intellectual disabilities being subjected to abortions while living in homes for persons with disabilities.

The government funded an NGO that provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. Emergency contraception and postexposure prophylaxis were available as part of clinical management of rape.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, there were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization by Turkish Cypriot "authorities." Some doctors required women to have their husband's consent to proceed with sterilization, although the "law" did not require such consent. According to the Association of Women to Support Living, women did not have free access to contraception, and one of every four women was under pressure from their spouse not to use contraception.

For survivors of sexual violence, "authorities" did not provide access to sexual and reproductive health services, and there were no publicly funded services. Emergency contraception was not available as part of clinical

management of rape.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

ROC law protected members of racial or ethnic groups from violence and discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, and religion. The Office of the Ombudsman, acting as the Equality Authority and Antidiscrimination Body, had jurisdiction to investigate discrimination complaints. 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.

A March report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance concluded the ROC had made progress and developed good practices since the commission's previous evaluation in 2016. There were concerns, however, regarding the lack of sufficient protections for irregular migrants and the lack of a comprehensive system to monitor hate speech, which the report found was widespread in public discourse.

During the year, there was an increase in incidents of violence and discrimination against members of racial or ethnic groups. On August 27, after a rally by residents of Chlorakasto to protest the presence of high numbers of predominantly Syrian migrants and refugees in the area, 250 mostly hooded and masked individuals physically attacked migrants and refugees in the streets and in their homes, including women and children,

causing extensive damage to their properties. Police charged 21 individuals involved in the incident.

There were several incidents throughout the year of physical attacks by local young men against migrants and asylum seekers working in the food delivery business. In March the Larnaca District Court found a local man guilty of the July 2022 assault of a Congolese woman seeking asylum, while she held her baby, age 11 months. The man was charged with 10 offenses under racism and xenophobia laws, as well as violence against women, aggravated assault, use of profanity in public, and threat of violence, and was sentenced to eight months' imprisonment.

The 2023 European Commission Roma Civil Monitor Civil society monitoring report concluded Cypriot Roma faced discrimination in housing, employment, education, access to public services and health care, and social protection.

The ombudsman received complaints the government delayed or denied approval of citizenship for children of Turkish Cypriots married to Turkish citizens who resided in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. The government reported granting citizenship to two such children during the year.

The ROC Ministry of Education upheld a code of conduct against racism that provided schools and teachers with a detailed plan on handling, preventing,

and reporting racist incidents. The “constitution” in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots prohibited discrimination and stated, “No privileges shall be granted to any individual, family, group, or class.”

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” prohibited discrimination, and the 1975 Vienna III Agreement was the legal source of authority regarding treatment of the 310 Greek Cypriot and 62 Maronite residents in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Despite the “law,” “authorities” rarely acted on incidents regarding racial or ethnic discrimination. According to human rights observers, most incidents went unreported in part because victims did not expect “authorities” to open an investigation. One NGO reported that when members of minority communities reported discrimination or filed complaints, “police” told them to return to their country of origin instead of opening an investigation.

There was discrimination against Maronites, who maintained possession of property in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots but were unable to bequeath the property to heirs residing in the ROC. Maronites could use their property in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots only if it was not under the control of the Turkish military or otherwise allocated to Turkish Cypriots.

Foreign domestic workers and international students faced discrimination and, at times, violence. Some African students studying at universities in the

area administered by Turkish Cypriots reported racial discrimination in housing, employment, and interactions with “authorities.”

Children

Education: In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, NGOs reported discrimination in the way education was provided to certain groups through the secondary level, including on the basis of sex, gender, and ethnicity. According to the NGOs, the Turkish “embassy” provided funding and contributions to the Religious Public School, and teachers’ unions and human rights groups complained the funding was for Quran courses at mosques the children could attend during the three-month summer break.

Child Abuse: ROC law criminalized child abuse, and the government enforced the law effectively. The maximum penalty for child abuse was one year in prison, a fine, or both.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” did not explicitly prohibit child abuse, but it prohibited sexual abuse of children, which carried a penalty of up to six years’ imprisonment. There were reports of child abuse, and “authorities” enforced the “law” effectively. As with domestic violence, there were social and cultural disincentives to seeking legal remedies for such problems.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age of marriage was 18 in the ROC, and the government effectively enforced the law. Persons

ages 16 and 17 could marry, provided there were serious reasons justifying the marriage and with written consent from their legal guardians. A district court could also allow the marriage of persons ages 16 and 17 if the parents unjustifiably refused consent or in the absence of legal guardians.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the minimum age of marriage was 18, and “authorities” effectively enforced the “law.” A “court” could allow marriages of persons ages 16 or 17 if they received parental consent.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: ROC law prohibited the sale, grooming or use of children for commercial sexual exploitation, 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 ages 13 and 17 was 25 years in prison. The maximum penalty for sexual abuse and exploitation of a child younger than 13 was life in prison. Possession of child pornography was a criminal offense punishable by a maximum of life imprisonment. Authorities enforced these laws. The minimum age for consensual sex was 17.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” prohibited the sale, grooming, or use of children for commercial sexual exploitation, and “authorities” generally enforced the law. The minimum age for consensual sex was 16. Statutory rape or attempted statutory rape of a person younger than 16 was a felony with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. If the

offender was younger than 18 and less than two years apart in age from the survivor, the crime was a misdemeanor punishable by up to two years in prison, a fine, or both. Possession or production of child pornography was punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Antisemitism

There were approximately 11,000 persons in the ROC's Jewish community, which consisted of a small number of native Jewish Cypriots and a greater number of expatriate Jews, primarily from Israel, the United Kingdom, and Russia. Due to the conflict in Israel, Jewish community representatives reported an estimated 5,000 Jewish persons temporarily relocated to the ROC. Jewish community representatives provided multiple reports of antisemitic incidents against members of the Jewish community in the ROC. Compared with 2022, there were more antisemitic attacks during the year.

Representatives from the Jewish Community Center reported a dramatic increase in antisemitic attacks in the weeks following Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel. On October 21, Israeli and Jewish community members were attacked while circulating posters featuring images of Israelis taken hostage by Hamas on October 7. Youths attacked the group by throwing rocks and chanting antisemitic slurs at the group. Police were called to investigate, and a small police contingent was posted 24/7 outside the Israeli embassy in Cyprus in the weeks following the beginning of hostilities

in Israel.

In an October 19 social media post, National Unity Party “member of parliament” Yasemin Ozturk called for the immediate closure of the Jewish center in Kyrenia – Chabad Lubovitch of Northern Cyprus – and the deportation of Rabbi Chaim Hillel Azimov. Ozturk accused the center of “being behind the Israeli attacks on Gaza” and claimed the Israeli president was a member of the organization. Ozturk’s post on social media continued to receive “likes” and generate antisemitic comments from the Turkish Cypriot online community. In December, Ozturk created on her social media account a public, open invitation to join her for a demonstration in front of the Jewish center. Ozturk said she would give a statement at the demonstration “in front of the extortionist, child murderer Chabad organization’s House in our country.” Some right-wing journalists supported Ozturk.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, please see the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: No ROC laws criminalized consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, cross-dressing, or other sexual or gender characteristic-related behaviors.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, no “laws” criminalized consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, cross-dressing, or other sexual or gender characteristic-related behaviors.

Violence and Harassment: LGBTQI+ individuals faced significant societal discrimination, including potential violence, in the ROC, particularly in rural areas. As a result, many LGBTQI+ persons did not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity, and they generally did not report homophobic violence or discrimination. The NGO Accept LGBTI Cyprus reported improved police response to incidents and complaints of violence, harassment, and hate speech against LGBTQI+ individuals. In October the CNP instructed all police personnel to show zero tolerance of any actions constituting discrimination based on sexual orientation and to effectively investigate such instances. On February 22, approximately 10 hooded

individuals stormed a student-organized discussion on sexual orientation at the Cyprus University of Technology. The attackers assaulted participants and discharged a fire extinguisher at them. Police arrested five individuals in connection with the incident.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, a human rights NGO reported online hate speech towards LGBTQI+ individuals was increasingly common, especially during Pride parades. Despite filing hundreds of complaints with “police” of online statements by “officials,” “politicians,” and businessmen that constituted hate speech under the “law,” the NGO reported “police” declined to investigate based on a “lack of expertise.”

In March, Queer Cyprus Association reported a man in military clothes attacked another man in Famagusta with a bucket full of sewage water in what the organization stated was a homophobic incident.

Discrimination: ROC law prohibited discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics in employment, social protection, social insurance, social benefits, health care, education, participation in unions and professional organizations, and access to goods and services. The law also criminalized incitement to hatred or violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The government did not always enforce these laws. Couples entering a civil partnership, the only legally recognized form of union for same-sex couples, were not allowed to adopt children. There were reports

of employment discrimination against LGBTQI+ applicants.

Representatives of the NGO Accept LGBTI Cyprus reported transgender persons undergoing hormone replacement therapy experienced difficulty accessing health care.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” prohibited 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 was a minor offense for a civil servant to discriminate against any person based on sexual orientation or gender identity. “Authorities” did not effectively enforce the “law.”

There were reports of official and societal discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons in employment, housing, and access to education or health care. Community members 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.

Registered partnership was not authorized for same-sex partners. NGOs reported school curricula excluded any acknowledgement of LGBTQI+

identities.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Individuals 18 or older could change their gender identity marker on ROC legal and identifying documents by submitting a written application to the District Administration Office for approval. Submission of medical certificates was not mandatory. Gender identity changes could only be requested twice.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, according to NGOs, legal gender recognition was available only after surgery and sterilization. Gender-affirming health-care services were not accessible for LGBTQI+ individuals.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: In May the ROC House of Representatives approved a law criminalizing so-called conversion therapies. The prescribed penalty for practicing such therapies was a maximum of two years' imprisonment if the victim was an adult, three years' imprisonment if the victim was a child, and a fine.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, an NGO reported that due to societal expectations, intersex newborns underwent sex assignment surgeries without consent from the parents. There were no measures to prevent unnecessary medical interventions.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:

There were no restrictions in the ROC on those speaking out or media

reporting on LGBTQI+ matters, on the ability of LGBTQI+ individuals to assemble in public or private or to form associations, or on the ability of LGBTQI+ organizations to legally register or convene events. The same was true in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Persons with Disabilities

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

Children with disabilities attended mainstream schools. The ROC government provided a personal assistant to children with disabilities attending public schools. Parents and NGOs reported some school buses lacked accessibility features and did not have sufficient wheelchair securement areas. On one occasion, a student in a wheelchair had to be tied with a rope to the bus seat for safety, and in another, a student with disabilities fell off a bus. The ombudsman received complaints related to the inaccessibility of school buses.

Problems facing persons with disabilities included limited access to their places of employment and to natural and constructed environments, transportation, information, and communications. During the year, the ombudsman examined complaints concerning accessibility of persons with disabilities to services and health-care providers offered by the General

Health System. It also issued binding recommendations to relevant authorities to draw up accessibility criteria and standards and make them mandatory for all health-care providers contracted by the General Health System. The Cyprus Paraplegics Organization and the Cyprus Confederation of Organizations for the Disabled reported many open public spaces, including paved areas and cultural sites, bus stops, and several public buildings, were not accessible to wheelchair users. The Pancyprian Organization for the Blind reported Nicosia did not make provisions to enable visually impaired persons to access many public places in the center of Nicosia.

State broadcaster Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation translated into sign language all emergency events and announcements, and provided sign language interpretation for all main news bulletins and other daily news programs. The Cyprus Confederation of Organizations for the Disabled reported the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation did not provide audio-video description for visually impaired persons.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” protected the rights of persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities, including their access to social benefits, and prohibited discrimination against them. “Authorities” did not effectively enforce all parts of the “law.”

Persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, or transportation on an equal basis with others. For example,

advocates and the Turkish Cypriot Orthopedic Disabled Persons Association complained of the absence of accessible infrastructure in public areas, including lack of and blocked sidewalks, and that bathrooms and public transportation were inaccessible to persons with disabilities. In August the association stated there had been no employment of persons with disabilities in the public sector since 2006.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Persons with HIV faced discrimination in employment, housing, education, and health care in the ROC and faced social stigma and exclusion from society and their own families. Activists complained that raising public awareness of the problem was not a government priority and reported medical staff at hospitals were prejudiced and reluctant to examine persons with HIV. The president of HIV/AIDS Support Center, Stella Michaelidou, reported a Limassol clinic contracted with the General Health System refused to offer emergency treatment to a patient with HIV and asked her instead to seek treatment at a Larnaca hospital. The ombudsman received a complaint that applicants for a visitors' permit to enter the ROC were required by the Ministry of Interior to present medical reports certifying they did not suffer from infectious diseases, including HIV and AIDS.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, "officials" deported foreign nationals with HIV.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

ROC law provided for workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. Both antiunion discrimination and dismissal for union activity were illegal.

The law required labor unions to register with the registrar of labor unions within 30 days of their establishment. 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. Penalties for violations, which occurred primarily in the informal sector, were less than those for other similar civil rights violations. Violations rarely occurred in the formal sector, and penalties were regularly applied against violators.

The ROC 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 were not legally binding, they were 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 private-sector employers discouraged union activity due to the ROC's sporadic enforcement of labor regulations prohibiting antiunion discrimination and employers' implicit threat of arbitrary dismissal for union activities.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the "law" protected the rights of workers, except members of the "police" and other Turkish Cypriot security forces, to form and join independent unions of their own choosing without prior authorization. The "law" allowed unions to conduct activities without interference and provided for the right to strike, with the provision a union notified "authorities" in writing when members planned to strike for longer than 24 hours. The "law" did not permit "judges," members of the "police" force, or other Turkish Cypriot "security forces" to strike. The "council of ministers" could prohibit a strike in any individual sector two times per year for up to 60 days if the strike affected the general health, security, or public order or prevented the provision of essential services. There was no list of what constituted essential services.

The "law" provided for collective bargaining. The "ministry of labor" reported employers could not condition employment on membership or

lack of membership in a union or participation in strikes. The “law” did not provide for reinstatement of workers fired for union activities. The “government” did not effectively enforce applicable “laws.”

Despite freedom of association and the right to engage in collective bargaining, very few private-sector workplaces were unionized, according to labor union representatives, who also stated employers would likely dismiss private-sector workers if they affected business operations while exercising their rights. Some companies pressured workers to join unions led or approved by the company. Officials of independent unions claimed “authorities” created public-sector unions as rivals to compete with and weaken independent unions.

Labor “authorities” did not effectively enforce labor “laws.” Penalties were sometimes applied against violators. Penalties for employers convicted of violating labor “laws” were less than those for violating other “laws” involving the denial of civil rights and were sporadically enforced.

Union members reported “police” sometimes maintained a heavy presence and took measures at demonstration areas to deter union members from engaging in union activity and peaceful protests. Union members also reported “police” habitually arrested some union members during peaceful demonstrations to intimidate other demonstrators. Some union members were charged with “preventing the ‘police’ from doing their job” or “causing damage to public property” because of a confrontation with “police.”

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at:

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

ROC law prohibited all of the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited employment of children, defined as persons younger than 15, except in specified circumstances, such as combined work and training programs for children who were at least age 14 or employment in cultural, artistic, sports, or advertising activities, subject to rules limiting work hours. The law prohibited night work and street trading by children.

ROC law permitted employment of adolescents, defined as persons ages 15-17, subject to rules limiting hours of employment and prohibiting work deemed harmful or dangerous. The law also prohibited employment of adolescents between midnight and 4 a.m. The minimum age for employment in industrial work was 16. Unaccompanied children and children of migrants were especially vulnerable to forced labor. Romani children were also vulnerable to forced begging. The government effectively enforced the law, and penalties for violations were commensurate with those for other serious crimes. Penalties were regularly

applied against violators when such crimes were perpetrated.

Ministry of Labor inspectors were responsible for enforcing child labor laws and did so effectively. Social Welfare Services and the Committee for the Rights of the Child had investigative authority for suspected cases of exploitation of children at work. There were no confirmed reports during the year of the worst forms of child labor.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “law” prohibited all of the worst forms of child labor. The minimum age for employment was 15, the last year at which education was compulsory. Employers could hire students ages 15-17 in apprentice positions under the supervision of the “ministry of education” and the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Small Shopkeepers and Artisans. Children ages 15-17 were restricted to no more than six hours of work per day and 30 hours per week. The “law” prohibited children ages 15-17 from working during mealtimes, at night, in heavy physical labor, and under dangerous conditions. The “law” also stipulated employers needed to update every six months written medical certification that the physical work done by children was suitable for children. Written parental consent was also required, and children were entitled to the hourly wage of a full-time employee.

“Authorities” did not report receiving complaints to the child labor hotline.

The “ministry of labor” was responsible for child labor “laws” and policies.

Inspections were not sufficient, and penalties for violations were less than those for other serious crimes. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators.

“Authorities” did not always effectively enforce the “laws,” and NGOs reported children of Turkish immigrants often worked alongside their families in the agricultural, manufacturing, automotive, and construction sectors. NGOs reported 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 Turkish Cypriot 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.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: On January 1, the ROC government introduced for the first time a national minimum wage. The minimum wage was more than the official estimate for the poverty income level. The new national minimum wage did not apply to foreign domestic workers, workers in agriculture and animal farming, and seamen. The Ministry of Interior

established a minimum wage for domestic workers that was less than the national minimum wage. Collective bargaining agreements covered workers in most occupations, including unskilled labor, and wages set in these agreements were significantly higher than the poverty level.

The legal maximum workweek was 48 hours, including overtime. The law did not require premium pay for overtime or mandatory rest periods. The law stipulated equal treatment for foreign and local workers. The law protected foreign domestic workers who filed a complaint with the Ministry of Labor from deportation until their cases were adjudicated.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the minimum monthly wage according to labor unions was below the poverty line. There was premium pay for overtime in the public sector; premium pay for overtime was required in the private sector but not frequently paid. The “law” prohibited compulsory overtime and provided for paid annual holidays.

The legal maximum workweek for both the public and private sectors was 40 hours, and the “law” provided for premium pay for overtime work in the public sector. There were limits to overtime in the health sector. Private-sector labor “laws” were not enforced, and almost all private-sector employees worked beyond 40 hours per week without overtime pay or compensation.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH)

standards in the ROC were appropriate for the main industries, and safety and health experts were responsible for identifying unsafe situations. Workers had the right to remove themselves from situations endangering health or safety without jeopardizing their employment, but authorities did not provide adequate protections for employees in these situations. 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.

The government proactively identified unsafe conditions and responded to workers' OSH complaints. For hazardous sectors that posed increased safety and health risks, the government conducted targeted inspections at workplaces and took enforcement action, including criminal prosecutions, against employers that failed to comply with OSH legislation.

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 the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, OSH standards were not appropriate for the main industries, and implementation of a 2008 "Occupational Work and Safety Law" was insufficient. Multinational companies, however, reportedly met OSH standards. Workers could not remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety

without jeopardizing their employment. Accommodations for migrant workers were substandard. “Authorities” did not proactively identify unsafe conditions and rarely responded to workers’ OSH complaints.

During the year, several instances of illness and injury highlighted the vulnerability of foreign workers to OSH hazards. In August, two foreign workers died after inhaling gas during waste cleaning work in İskele.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The ROC Department of Labor Relations within the Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing wage, hour, and OSH laws. The penalties for violating wage and hour laws were commensurate with those for similar crimes, and penalties were sometimes applied against violators. Labor unions reported enforcement problems in sectors not covered by collective agreements, such as small businesses and foreign domestic workers. They also reported certain employers, mainly in construction and agriculture, exploited undocumented foreign workers by paying them very low wages.

The government enforced OSH laws satisfactorily in the formal sector. The Ministry of Labor, however, did not have sufficient inspectors to effectively enforce labor laws in the agricultural sector and in the informal economy, in which most employees were migrant or undocumented workers. The penalties for failing to comply with OSH laws were commensurate with those of other similar crimes, such as fraud and negligence. Penalties were regularly applied against violators. From January to July, the government

prosecuted 11 employers for OSH violations.

The ombudsman maintained oversight of cases submitted to the Department of Labor by foreign workers concerning the conditions of their employment. The ombudsman reported receiving some complaints by domestic workers related to their requests to change employer and their living and working conditions.

NGOs noted that during the year, fewer foreign domestic workers reported contract violations by their employers due to labor shortages and a higher demand for domestic workers.

The informal sector in the ROC included approximately 6 percent of the workforce, including migrant and undocumented workers. Authorities did not enforce labor laws effectively for informal-sector workers.

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, the “ministry of labor” was responsible for enforcing wage, hour, and OSH standards, but it did not do so effectively. “Authorities” could conduct unannounced inspections or initiate sanctions, but according to unions and associations, inspections were not adequately or routinely carried out.

The number of inspectors in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots was not sufficient for enforcement, and penalties for noncompliance were less than those for other similar crimes. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators. “Authorities” commonly deported migrant workers who

reported violations. “Authorities” did not penalize violators, and inspections were not adequate to protect worker rights.

While OSH standards applied to all working conditions, “authorities” in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots did not provide social protections for workers in the informal economy. Economists estimated the size of the informal sector was 30-45 percent.