

Cyprus

Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman)

International accreditation status and SCA recommendations

The Cypriot NHRI was first [accredited](#) with B status in November 2015. In its review, the SCA made certain recommendations and observations on the appointment of the Ombudsman, the allocation of resources to the NHRI and the management of its budget.

The NHRI indicated that it has taken concrete steps to follow-up on the recommendations of the SCA and has applied for re-accreditation. The Cypriot NHRI will be [reviewed](#) by the SCA in June 2021.

It has to be noted that according to relevant legislation (the Law on the Commissioner for Administration), the Commissioner is appointed by the President, based on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers and with the prior consent of the majority of the House of Representatives.

Given that Cyprus Republic is a Presidential Republic and not a Parliamentary Republic, the appointment of the Commissioner still depends on prior consent and approval by the majority of the House of Representatives. The Commissioner is the only independent Incumbent in Cyprus, whose appointment takes place after the prior consent and approval of the Parliament, which may reject the recommended candidate. Because of the fact that the government (ruling party) never has the majority in the Parliament, the approval of the candidate by the Parliament needs the synergies of most political parties and the final decision for the appointment is upon the House of Representatives prior consent and approval.

Impact of 2020 rule of law reporting

Follow-up by State authorities

The main follow up actions taken by the state authorities during the year 2020 for the purpose of fostering a rule of law culture, were related to the additional initiatives and measures taken by the Government to combat corruption in Cyprus.

In relation to addressing corruption in Cyprus, we would like to recall that:

- A “National Anti-Corruption Strategy” has been approved by the Council of Ministers in November 2017
- A draft bill which provides for the establishment of an “Independent Body against Corruption” and the protection of whistle-blowers, was discussed before the Committee for Legal Affairs of the House of Representatives. The Institution was actively engaged in these discussions, by participating in Committee’s meetings and submitting a relevant memorandum to the Committee. The discussions have been concluded recently and the bill will be forwarded to plenary session to vote.

Furthermore, we also would like to note that, recently, (on 29/1/2021), the President of the Republic and the Minister of Justice, announced new measures to combat corruption, which are based on the principals/pillars of "rule of law, transparency and accountability" (1). The new measures announced include: a reform of the judicial system and the penal code; the enhancement of the internal control mechanisms in the Ministries; as well as the promotion of bills that allow for the confiscation of illegal proceedings, prohibit entities from taking part in public procurements if they have been prosecuted for illegal acts, and a bill that provides for transparency in the financial assets of government officials (2).

References

- (1) <https://www.pio.gov.cy/%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BD%CF%89%CE%B8%CE%AD%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B1-%CE%AC%CF%81%CE%B8%CF%81%CE%BF.html?id=18152#flat>
- (2) <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=18161#flat>
- <https://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/publikacije/>

Impact on the Institution’s work

The 2020 ENNHRI Report on Rule of Law was important to the Institution’s work, mainly because:

- It has stressed the important and interlinked relationship that the implementation of the Rule of Law has on the protection of human rights of citizens and, thus, the emphasis and the priority that our Institution, as a NHRI, has to give in the promotion and protection of the Rule of Law in Cyprus;

- It has provided an important benchmark to compare and assess our work on the respect of Rule of Law in Cyprus, with the work of other NHRIs in Europe. For example, it was helpful to see the work that other NHRIs did on the measures to protect the public from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the emphasis given, as our Institution did, on the impact that these measures had on the human rights of the most vulnerable groups of people (such as asylum seekers, migrants, detainees, long term patients, and persons with disabilities);
- It provided to us with an insight to the (similar) challenges that other European NHRIs face in their work (albeit in varying degrees), in relation to the implementation of the Rule of Law in their respective countries, including challenges on the issues of safeguarding their independence and effectiveness.

Follow-up initiatives by the Institution

Recently the Institution carried out a number of actions in relation to the strengthening of the Rule of Law in Cyprus, including:

- Presentations/Trainings by Officers of our NHRI to Police Officers, in cooperation with the Police Academy, on the crucial role of the Police in implementing the Rule of Law, especially the Laws that protect human rights;
- Drafting and submitting Reports or making public announcements, on the protection of rights of citizens, especially those who are more vulnerable (1);
- Working together with a local NGO on LGBTQI Rights, and other civil society partners, in a Project that aims to promote the political representation and participation in decision making of the LGBTQI+ community (2). In this framework, we participate in a Working Group that will prepare an Action Plan on the promotion of LGBTQI Rights, including the strengthening of the relevant institutional and legal framework;
- We continued to be engaged, and express our views, in the discussions that were held for the drafting of a bill which provides for the establishment of an “Independent Body against Corruption” and the protection of whistle-blowers. (see also above). The discussions were held before the Committee for Legal Affairs of the House of Representatives.

We have equally launched a number of awareness raising campaigns, including:

- Information campaign on COVID-19 & Human Rights (2020–ongoing) (3):

With the spread of COVID-19 virus in Cyprus and the restrictions imposed by the State to prevent its spread, our Office, as a human rights defender, has been put on alert in order to intervene and help any possible violation. In view of the above, our Office has been conducting since last March an awareness campaign in relation to the COVID-19 and the protection of human rights.

To this end, a special page was created on the website of our Office which includes links to all the necessary information about the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as our reports/interventions regarding the virus and its impact on human rights in general.

- On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the introduction of the institution in the Republic of Cyprus, our Office has launched a series of information and awareness-raising campaigns, on the basis of the Commissioner's responsibilities.

Specifically:

- Information and Awareness-Raising Campaign "Break the Silence" (2021) (4):

The Campaign was launched in March 8, 2021. The same date, an Own Initiative Report was published regarding the prevention and treatment of harassment and sexual harassment in workplace and a press conference took place, during which the report as well as the results of a survey regarding sexual harassment in Cyprus were presented. Additionally, the audio-visual material (video and audio) prepared for the campaign, was sent to all radio and television stations and was broadcasted for a long period time and the prepared posters were sent to all public sector departments who placed them at their offices. It is noted that the topic of the campaign was chosen due to the constant revelations about cases of sexual harassment that come to light.

- Information and Awareness-Raising Campaign "Equal Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Elections" (2021) (5)

The Campaign was launched in May 15, 2021. The trigger for the campaign was the assurance of the right of all persons with disabilities to legal capacity, including their right to vote. An Own Initiative Report was published regarding the right of all persons with disabilities to legal capacity, their civil rights and their equal participation in elections. An information leaflet about Equal Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Elections was also prepared and published, containing information about the rights of persons with disabilities according to CRPD Convention, before and during election procedures, for ensuring the equal exercise of their civil rights. The Report and the leaflet were sent to the involved public authorities, to the representative organizations of persons with disabilities and to the political parties. The information leaflet has been prepared

and in audio format as well. It is noted that in May 30, 2021, the Parliamentary Elections will take place and Local Authorities' elections will also take place in December 2021.

References

- (1) http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/index_new/index_new?openform
- (2) <https://www.voiceitproject.eu/>
- (3) http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/annualreport_table/annualreport_table?openform
- (4) <http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/AF7CE4A0ED353EC4C225867100418F7C?OpenDocument>
- (5) <http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/Ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/AE1D5634069B1F9EC22586D80034DBA1?OpenDocument>)
- <https://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/publikacije/>

Independence and effectiveness of the NHRI

Changes in the regulatory framework applicable to the Institution

There were no significant changes in the national framework applicable to the Institution over the past year.

As regards the independence of the Commissioner, under her mandate to act as an NHRI, it has to be noted that the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman) was established in 1991 by virtue of Law no. 3(I)/1991 (the Law on the Commissioner for Administration as amended, (1991-2014)), as an independent Incumbent, responsible to deal with individual complaints concerning maladministration, misbehaviour and the protection and the promotion of human rights.

According to the legislation (article 3), the Commissioner is appointed by the President, based on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers and with the prior consent of the majority of the House of Representatives, a citizen of the Republic (...), with a high level of education and experience and with the highest integrity, as Commissioner.

Given that Cyprus Republic is a Presidential Republic and not Parliamentary Republic, with strict discretion of powers, the appointment of the Commissioner still depends on prior consent and approval by the majority of the House of Representatives. The Commissioner is the only independent Incumbent in Cyprus, whose appointment takes place after the prior consent and approval by the Parliament, which may reject the recommended candidate. For this reason, intense discussions and consultations are taking place between the parliamentary parties, and the civil society can convey its views in relation to the proposed person. Because of the fact that the government (ruling party) never has the majority in the Parliament, the approval of the candidate by the Parliament needs the synergies of the most political parties. In this way, the final decision of the appointment is upon the House of Representatives prior consent and approval.

Furthermore, as NPM (National Preventive Mechanism) the Institution succeeded the amendment of the relevant Law in order to conduct visits in places where people are deprived of liberty, without prior notice to the competent authorities, in order to comply with the usual practice taking place already.

It is also worth mentioning that another three new posts have already been approved in order to further reinforce the capacity of the Institution.

Following our contribution to ENNHRI 2020 Rule of Law Report, we would like to note the following:

- In 2019 the Commissioner succeeded the approval by the Council of Ministers and the Parliament of the exclusion of the Ombudsman Office staff to take the governmental exams. The Institution now organises specialised exams by the Advisory Committee set up by the Commissioner. Those who succeed in the examination are brought before the Public Service Commission and their recruitment is in accordance with the Commissioner's recommendation, based on a relevant assessment of their specific knowledge and experience. Although during six months the above decision was mistakenly revoked, the Council of Ministers, by a new decision dated February 17, 2021, reverted back to its original decision and confirmed the exclusion of the Ombudsman Office staff to take the general governmental exams. It is to be noted that in the Annual Budget for 2021, an

amount of 18,000 EUR is included for the preparation of specialized exams for the recruitment of new staff during the current year.

- The final selection for the recruitment of the staff of the Office is taking place among candidates who have the academic qualifications based on the employment plan and are eligible to apply for the post, without any limitations. 10% of the vacant post are offered to persons with disabilities, when they are candidates, by relevant Law in force.
- In 2020, the Institution's staff was increased by the recruitment of four new staff members and six more vacant positions are about to be filled in 2021-2022.
- In relation to the threat posed to the Commissioner's "independence" which we reported on in the 2020 ENNHRI Rule of Law Report, following a letter of the President of the International Ombudsman Institute and by reference to the Venice Principles, the Attorney General in his legal opinion stressed that the matter was raised unnecessarily and deemed no further legal examination.
- Concerns over the above-mentioned matter are also included in the European Commission's 2020 Rule of Law Report – country report on Cyprus, where is noted, among others, that "...However, it (the Ombudsman) has faced challenges in view of an attempt by the Auditor General to investigate the way it exercises its powers, which the Commissioner considered an interference with its independence. This position was supported by the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) and subsequently, the Attorney General stopped the procedure...".

References

- <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0312&from=EN>

Enabling space

We consider that we have a good cooperation with most state authorities, in the framework of which we receive their comments and views on subjects or cases that we investigate, and, if we require it, we are given access to relevant documents and/or administrative files.

We consider that the level of compliance with recommendations/suggestions that our Institutions makes, is satisfactory, albeit there is room for improvement. Our Institution, as a rule, follows up on all cases for which interventions are made, to oversee the implementation of our suggestions and recommendations. This is done in the framework of written correspondence or consultations with the implicated public authorities, and in some cases, in discussions held by competent parliamentary committees. Please also note that the Reports that our Institutions submits, are later discussed at the Council of Ministers, and implicated authorities are asked to inform the Council about the actions they have taken, in view of our suggestions and recommendations.

One aspect of our cooperation with state authorities that we feel needs to be improved, is the timeliness of their responses to our requests.

Human rights defenders and civil society space

Our Institution cooperates closely with the civil society active in the promotion of human rights. In this framework, we regularly investigate human rights issues/violations that civil society organizations bring to our attention, both in relation to individual cases, and also on issues of a more systemic nature. These investigations often lead to the drafting and submission of Reports.

Recent examples of such reports are:

- Report on 12/1/2021 regarding the arrangements made in public schools for long distance learning especially for pupils with disabilities – following a complaint submitted by an NGO active on the rights of persons with autism (1);
- Report on 18/12/2020 regarding the Status of Foreign Domestic Workers in Cyprus - submitted jointly with a University Assistant Professor active on the issue (2);
- Report on 22/12/2020 regarding the living conditions of the Roma community in Cyprus - the investigation was done in cooperation with an NGO active in the protection of Roma Rights in Cyprus (3).
- Report on 3/3/2021, after a complaint by the NGO Cyprus Refugee Council, regarding the excessive detention of a third-country national under repatriation at a Police Detention Center until his return to his country of origin.

It is noted that recently, a number of NGOs have been de-registered by the Competent Authority since they did not submit any financial statements, or other required by legislation for them to

continue their operations legally and meet the criteria established by the laws in force to function properly.

The Commissioner observes that the Competent Authority informed these NGOs in good time of the impending amendment of the legislation and gave them a very long time to comply, but several NGOs did not respond. The latest notices about the upcoming deregistration procedure for NGOs failing to comply with the requirements were announced in August and October 2020 and their de-registration took place in December 2020. Among the concerned NGOs there is the well-known NGO KISA. Having failed to submit any financial statements and the names of the members of its Board since 2015, the Competent Authority concluded that KISA did not meet the criteria by law in force to function properly. For this reason, the NGO has been de-registered, and it has questioned the relevant decision before the Administrative Court. Due to the ongoing proceedings before the Court, our Institute is not in a position to comment on the relevant de-registration decision.

References

- (1) [http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/B7434AEFDD11330AC225865C003890F0/\\$file/54.2021_12012021.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/B7434AEFDD11330AC225865C003890F0/$file/54.2021_12012021.pdf?OpenElement)
- (2) [http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/2358C433C1A0F629C2258646002B79DA/\\$file/Domestic%20workers%20.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/2358C433C1A0F629C2258646002B79DA/$file/Domestic%20workers%20.pdf?OpenElement)
- (3) [http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/D1478ED6BB7BC395C22586460047D9B1/\\$file/%CE%91%CE%A5%CE%A4%203-2%CE%BF%20%CE%A0%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%87%CE%B5%CC%81%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BF-18-12-2020%20%CE%A1%CE%9F%CE%9C%CE%91%CE%B1%CE%B1.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/D1478ED6BB7BC395C22586460047D9B1/$file/%CE%91%CE%A5%CE%A4%203-2%CE%BF%20%CE%A0%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%87%CE%B5%CC%81%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BF-18-12-2020%20%CE%A1%CE%9F%CE%9C%CE%91%CE%B1%CE%B1.pdf?OpenElement)

Checks and balances

The level of trust amongst citizens towards the public administration is low. There is a general perception that the public administration does not function efficiently, and that maladministration is widespread. The fact that our Institution handles around 2.500 complaints

every year, is a further indication of the dissatisfaction that of the Public has towards the public service.

Functioning of justice system

Our Institution has no mandate to take cases before courts or intervene in the operation of the courts. Nonetheless, it is worth noting how some problematic aspects related to the functioning of the justice system in Cyprus have been highlighted in a number of international reports. Particular reference is made to the delays observed in the completion of court proceedings and the backlog of cases pending before courts.

References

- <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-evaluation-round-corruption-prevention-in-respect-of-members-of/16808d267b>
- https://www.cyprusbarassociation.org/files/publications/Functional_Review_of_Courts_System_of_Cyprus_IPA_Ireland_-_Final_Report.pdf

Corruption

As stated above, additional initiatives and measures were taken by the Government to combat corruption in Cyprus. In particular, our Institution was actively engaged in the discussions held in the Parliament, for the establishment, by Law, of an Independent Body with responsibility and competences to combat corruption.

Other relevant developments or issues having an impact on the national rule of law environment

Over the last 2 years, Cyprus has witnessed a rapid increase in the number of people who come and apply for international protection, making it the EU country with the highest number of first-time applicants relative to the population (1)(2)(3). That has consequently led to long delays in the examination of asylum applications (as well as appeals filed to Courts on rejection decisions), overcrowding in the 2 Reception Centres that operate in Cyprus, and to major challenges in providing the necessary material reception conditions to the thousands of asylum seekers who live in the community (outside the Reception Centres).

Addressing this situation and intervening towards the protection of the fundamental human rights of this particularly vulnerable group of people, was indeed a pressing challenge for the Institution. In the framework of our competences, in the past years, we did a number of interventions towards implicated state authorities (e.g., the Asylum Service, the migration authorities and the Welfare Services), with specific recommendations and suggestions on enhancing the protection, in practice, of the human rights of asylum seekers, as well as people who eventually are granted international protection status. In these Interventions we cited relevant human rights laws, and especially the provisions of the Cyprus Refugee Law of 2000 (which has been amended to align with the recast Directive 2013/32/EU on asylum procedures and the Directive 2013/33/EU on reception conditions).

Our Reports/Interventions covered, among others: the living conditions of asylum seekers in the reception centres; the level of specialized support provided to those who belong to vulnerable groups; detention of asylum seekers; difficulties in accessing asylum procedures and delays in the examination of applications; access to welfare benefits and difficulties in finding housing etc.

Following our Reports/Interventions, the State implemented the majority of our recommendations. For instance:

- The payments of asylum seekers via coupons was replaced via direct deposit of cash in their bank accounts since it has now been made easier for asylum seekers to open bank accounts. In addition, the financial support provided for asylum seekers (in, allowances, rent coverage etc.) has been increased and supplementing support in cases of families of employed asylum seekers has been approved.
- The employment sectors accessible to asylum seekers have been expanded.
- Further EU funding has been requested in order to improve the services provided to asylum seekers.
- A national plan for the housing of asylum seekers is being promoted by the competent authorities.
- An additional reception centre is planned to be created/constructed.
- Interviews of asylum seekers staying in the Reception and Accommodation Center in Kokkinotrimithia that had been interrupted due to the pandemic, were resumed via video conferencing.

- Our suggestions for improving the living conditions in the Reception and Accommodation Center in Kokkinotrimithia were implemented and procedures for the replacement of a number of tents with prefabricated houses have been accelerated.
- Unaccompanied minors who were staying in the Reception and Accommodation Center in Kokkinotrimithia were transferred to juvenile shelters.

Furthermore, the Asylum Service and the Civil Registry and Migration Department were strengthened with the recruitment of additional staff and 10 Judges were hired for the Administrative Court of International Protection. In this way, the examination of asylum applications has been accelerated and, at the same time, the examination of presumably unfounded applications is expected to be completed within 10 days so that, when the applicant appeals to the Administrative Court of International Protection, the decision is normally issued within 25 days.

References

- (1) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/28/world/europe/cyprus-migrant-crisis.html>
- (2) <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/12/18/cyprus-top-in-asylum-applicants-relative-to-population-in-eu/>
- (3) <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/over-7000-asylum-seekers-entered-cyprus-in-2020-despite-covid-restrictions/>
- (4) Impact of measures taken in response to COVID-19 on the national rule of law environment

Impact of measures taken in response to COVID-19 on the national rule of law environment

Most significant impacts of measures taken in response to the COVID-19 outbreak on the rule of law and human rights protection

The Government took several measures to contain the pandemic, which affected the rights of citizens (e.g., restrictions in movement both inland and internationally, prohibition of social

gatherings, closure of businesses and schools, mandatory wearing of face mask). In view of a 2nd wave of the pandemic, the most restrictive measures have recently been reintroduced.

We have received many complaints regarding the measures taken to combat the pandemic (between March 2020 and December 2020, we received 370 such complaints). Generally, the Institution's approach to these complaints is to assess as to whether the measures taken are: legally based, time-limited, proportionate and non-discriminatory. Furthermore, we give special emphasis to the protection of rights of people in situations of vulnerability.

Since what reported in the contribution on Cyprus to the 2020 ENNHRI Rule of Law Report, the Institution made the following additional Interventions:

- 1) Intervention, on 8/5/2020, regarding the protection of women's maternity rights, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2) Intervention/Report, on 21/5/2020, regarding decision of the Ministry of Education to adopt different criteria for children with disabilities, for their return to school on 1/5/2020, after the easing of the COVID-19 measures.
- 3) Own Initiative Intervention of Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman), within the framework of her jurisdiction as National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), regarding measures in aged care facilities to deal with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-COVID-19 era
- 4) Intervention/Report, on 24/8/2020, regarding the decision of the Ministry of Education that all pupils wear protective masks (including children ages 6-11).
- 5) Report, on 15/9/2021 regarding the measures taken for protection from COVID-19 at a Psychiatric Hospital (both for staff and the patients).
- 6) Report on 20/11/2021 regarding the granting of special permits to enter Cyprus, to people who are in long term relations with Cypriot citizens or permanent residents of Cyprus.
- 7) A new follow-up Report, on 9/12/2021, regarding the living conditions of Asylum Applicants in a Reception Center, including the measures or lack of measures taken to protect them from COVID-19.
- 8) Report, on 12/1/2021, regarding the COVID-19 measures taken for online education specifically for children with disabilities (autism) in elementary education.

More information on our Interventions, including a short summary in English, is included in a Publication that the Commissioner prepared in December 2020, titled "COVID-19 and Human Rights"(1).

The Institution is concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic will have negative implications on many people, even after the measures taken to address it are eased or lifted. We are mainly concerned on the long-term effects/implications that the pandemic will have on the people who belong to the most vulnerable groups of the society (e.g., unskilled workers, the elderly, minorities, migrants, persons with disabilities, Roma, detained persons), and, in particular, how it will affect their ability to enjoy equal access to basic social rights (such as employment, welfare support, healthcare (including timely vaccination against COVID-19) and education).

References

- [http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/Ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/039ECAB1E67D4984C225863F00347A1F/\\$file/COVID19%20AND%20HUMAN%20RIGHTS.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/Ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/039ECAB1E67D4984C225863F00347A1F/$file/COVID19%20AND%20HUMAN%20RIGHTS.pdf?OpenElement)

Most important challenges due to COVID-19 for the NHRI's functioning

The most significant changes affecting the Institution's operations are related to the nationwide emergency measures implemented to respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Regarding the impacts that the measures initially adopted to counter the pandemic (March-April 2020) had on the functioning of our NHRI, we refer to our contribution to the 2020 ENNHRI Rule of Law Report.

In relation to the most recent measures taken to address the second wave of the pandemic (that started in Autumn 2020), we would like to note the following:

- In November and December 2020 new emergency measures were implemented to contain the pandemic, which also affected the operation of public authorities. These measures included: the operation of departments/authorities (in rotation) with emergency personnel, the introduction of arrangements for staff to work remotely (from home) where possible, the provision – in view of the closure of schools – for staff with children under the age of 15 years to take a special leave and stay at home or work

remotely if possible, the provision for staff with underlying health conditions to take special leave for public health reasons. Despite the above-mentioned measures, the functionality, operation and productivity of our Institute were not affected;

- In order to comply with these measures, our Institution had to implement organizational arrangements which affected our human resources capacity in dealing with our extensive mandate. Despite the above-mentioned measures, the functionality, operation and productivity of our Institute were not affected significantly. On the contrary, the productivity of our Institute was increased since as a NHRI we remained vigilant over any human rights concern or violation which may arise.
- In view of the lockdown measures, we restricted visits from the public to our premises, and urged the public to use alternative methods to submit a complaint (eg. using either electronic submission, by fax, via our website or by post).

We were able to carry out visits and inspections to different institutions/detention centers/sites, including in the framework of our competence as a National Preventive Mechanism. In fact, our institution not only has continued to carry out, but has increased the visits and inspections as NPM during the pandemic. During the reporting period, we carried out visits and inspections to the following places:

- Nicosia Central Prisons (9 visits)
- Paphos Police Station
- Aradippou Police Station
- Athalassa Psychiatric Hospital (2 visit)
- Temporary Holding Facility at Larnaca Airport
- Temporary Reception and Accommodation Center in Kokkinotrimithia "Pournara Camp" (2 visits)

The recent reinforcement in 2020 of our NHRI with the recruitment of four new Officers (which was mentioned above), was a positive development in our capacity to effectively fulfil our mandate, including in these challenging circumstances. Additionally, with the approval of three more posts (officers) by the State, a total of six more positions are about to be filled in 2021-2022.