

Document #1425484

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Amnesty International Report 2017/18 - The State of the World's Human Rights - Latvia

Ill-treatment of detainees by law enforcement officials continued to be reported and prison conditions remained poor. A disproportionate fine imposed on a news portal for defamation gave rise to concerns about the right to freedom of expression. The government put forward draft legislation that would discriminate against women wearing full-face veils in public places.

Unfair trials

In January, the European Court of Human Rights found that Latvia had violated the European Convention on Human Rights, including in relation to Article 6 because proceedings had exceeded a reasonable time in the case of a man seeking compensation for injuries inflicted on him by a police officer upon his arrest in 1995. The man alleged he had lost his sight as a result of being beaten and kicked by the officer. Although the perpetrator was convicted of ill-treatment in 2003, the complainant had not received adequate reparations.

Detention

In June, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture called on the authorities to address inter-prisoner violence and improve prisoners' access to health care. It also expressed concerns about allegations of excessive use of force by police officers during the apprehension and questioning of suspects in the absence of their lawyers.

Freedom of expression

In January, the Riga Higher Court ordered the news portal Tvnet to pay a EUR50,000 fine for damaging the reputation of the Latvian National Opera and Ballet. Tvnet had published an article criticizing it for becoming a “public house of Putin's court”. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights described the fine as disproportionate and raised concerns about the harmful effect of such a measure on the right to freedom of expression in the country.

Discrimination

In August, the government put forward draft legislation which effectively prohibits wearing the full-face veil in public. The Justice Ministry argued that the measure would protect people's welfare and morality, and facilitate the integration of immigrants. Critics called the legislation discriminatory and disproportionate.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

Latvia continued to build a fence along its border with Russia, expected to be completed in 2019 and to cover a 90km area, with the stated aim of preventing an “influx of migrants”.

Under the EU relocation and resettlement schemes, Latvia pledged to relocate 481 asylum-seekers from Greece and Italy. By May it had relocated 308.

Women's rights

In March, the Minister of Welfare announced that the government would ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) by the end of 2018.

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ecoi.net summary:

Annual report 2017/18 (covering 2017)



Country:

Latvia

Source:

AI – Amnesty International (</en/source/10960.html>)

Original link:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/latvia/report-latvia/> (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/latvia/report-latvia/>)

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

22 February 2018

Document ID:

1425484 (former ID [353889 \(/en/document/353889\)](/en/document/353889))

Austrian Red Cross

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research
and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien

T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583

F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589

info@ecoi.net

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

