

Ziguinchor during the year, many of them videoed by the attackers. In May, several conservative groups organized a large protest in Dakar, calling for the criminalization of homosexuality in Senegal's Criminal Code.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Senegal failed in its obligation to protect children from ill-treatment. Hundreds of thousands of Quranic students continued to be forced to beg for their sustenance, despite the existence of a 2005 law against forced begging and child trafficking, and a 2018 bill to modernize Quranic teaching.

SERBIA

Republic of Serbia

Head of state: **Aleksandar Vučić**

Head of government: **Ana Brnabić**

There was negligible progress in bringing to justice those suspected of criminal responsibility for past crimes under international law. Police enjoyed impunity for ill-treatment. Media workers and NGOs were attacked by the government and pro-government media. Discrimination against women, Roma and other ethnic minorities, LGBTI people and the socially vulnerable was widespread.

BACKGROUND

The Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) strengthened its power in parliament, with no effective opposition to curtail its dominance. The EU-US sponsored dialogue on Serbia's normalization of relations with Kosovo stalled after resuming in June. Tensions rose in September when Kosovo enforced their prohibition on Serbian number plates.

RIGHT TO TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPARATION

The European Commission in October contrasted Serbia's weak record in addressing impunity against the support and privileges the state afforded to convicted war criminals. Prosecutions at Belgrade High

Court, mostly based on indictments transferred from the Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) state prosecutor, held Bosnian Serb defendants accountable for war crimes, including torture, murder, rape and sexual exploitation. Proceedings related to Srebrenica and Štrpci were delayed for over a year.

In January, the Court of Appeal acquitted two defendants accused of the inhumane treatment, torture and murder of 69 civilians, and the wounding of 12 in Lovas, Croatia, and reduced the sentences of six others to below the legal minimum.

In September, the same court upheld judgments awarding compensation to the families of 193 prisoners of war and civilians murdered by the Yugoslav Army at Ovčara, Croatia, in 1991. However, compensation fell below levels awarded at the European Court of Human Rights.

In August, following retrial, the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals sentenced former state security officials Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović to 12 years' imprisonment for aiding and abetting murder as a war crime; and for murder, deportation, forcible transfer and persecution as crimes against humanity in BiH in April 1992.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

In April, the Croatian president cautioned that Serbia needed to clarify the fate of missing Croats before joining the EU. Only seven bodies of persons missing from Kosovo were returned, and neither party opened their military archives, as requested by families of the missing in 2020.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

In July, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights reported no progress in criminal complaints by 40 people injured by police during demonstrations in July 2020, due to the police's failure to identify the officers responsible.

In December the UN Committee against Torture urged the authorities to implement legal safeguards protecting detainees' rights

and to end impunity for torture and ill-treatment by ensuring all complaints were independently investigated.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

A draft internal affairs law was withdrawn in September following concerns about its potential impact on the rights to protest and privacy. In October, the requirement for advance notification for holding assemblies was increased to 20 days under a new environmental law regulating noise levels. In November police used excessive force against environmental protesters.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

NGOs and independent media were vilified by politicians and media close to the government. In March, Aleksandar Martinović, SNS parliamentary leader, accused the CRTA – an NGO monitoring the parliament – of involvement in an earlier coup and attempted murder of President Vučić. In August, when the government intensified its campaign against NGOs and independent media, over 70 organizations called on the Ministry of Human Rights for protection. In October-November NGO Women in Black's offices were twice spray-painted with misogynist and nationalist graffiti.

JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA WORKERS

In March, five media organizations left the Working Group for the Security and Protection of Journalists following government-orchestrated campaigns against independent media, including accusations that the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK) was complicit with organized crime. Four former state security officials were convicted in December for their part in the murder of journalist Slavko Čuruvija in 1999.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Thirty women were killed, 20 through family or partner violence; five deaths were still to be investigated. NGOs expressed concern that the new Law on Gender Equality delayed

funding for support services for victims of violence until 2024.

Several allegations of sexual abuse or harassment were made by girls and women against men in senior political, educational or professional positions. While some criminal investigations were opened, there were no convictions.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Over 39,675 migrants and refugees (predominantly from Afghanistan and Syria) entered Serbia, of whom 2,306 expressed their intention to seek asylum. Some 158 applied, yet out of 65 substantive decisions by the end of November only six people received refugee status and six subsidiary protection, including two relatively high-profile figures.

Investigative journalists alleged that state officials were complicit in smuggling migrants.

In January, the Constitutional Court concluded that in 2017 police had inhumanely treated 17 Afghan nationals, who had already registered their intention to seek asylum when police pushed them back into Bulgaria.

In mid-December UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, reported 210 pushbacks into North Macedonia from Serbia, (probably an underestimate) and 27,892 collective expulsions from EU countries (Hungary, Croatia and Romania) and BiH into Serbia.

RIGHT TO HOUSING

Following a complaint by the A11 Initiative, an NGO, and six Romani people forcibly evicted in 2019 from an informal settlement in Vinca, Belgrade, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development agreed to facilitate negotiations with the city authorities to ensure their rights, including to affordable alternative housing.

In March, a homeless couple successfully appealed against a fine imposed for breaking the Covid-19 curfew. During the pandemic, shelters were closed and some homeless people were sentenced to 50 days' imprisonment.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

In October, cases of Covid-19 rose dramatically; human rights organizations continued to urge the government to act to protect the right to physical and mental health. In many cases unvaccinated employees were forced to work indoors without face-coverings.

Environmental activists highlighted the detrimental health impacts of coal-fired power plants and a copper mine run by a Chinese company, and the development of a lithium mine by Rio Tinto.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

The draft law on same-sex partnership, opposed by the president, was not adopted. The draft allowed the registration of same-sex partnerships and afforded a range of rights but prohibited others, including the right to adoption. The September Pride called for its introduction, action against hate crimes and hate speech, and progress in gender recognition. In October, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality called on local authorities to implement gender recognition regulations.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS

In August, armed groups operating in the Sahel were observed with Serbian small arms and light weapons, highlighting the high risk of diversion of Serbia's ongoing arms' transfers to Burkina Faso.¹

1. "Sahel: Amnesty identifies Serbian weapons in stockpiles of brutal armed groups", 24 August

SIERRA LEONE

Republic of Sierra Leone

Head of state and government: **Julius Maada Bio**

The president signed the Abolition of the Death Penalty Bill into law. The police used excessive force against protesters and other people. The government failed to protect the rights of LGBTI people. Sexual and gender-based violence remained prevalent.

Sierra Leonians denounced poor sanitation in hospitals, and maternal and infant mortality rates were high.

BACKGROUND

In January, 246 prisoners, including political opponent Alfred Paolo Conteh, were released following a presidential pardon. Restrictive measures used to control the Covid-19 pandemic intensified. Sierra Leone accepted 216 of 274 recommendations made under the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

DEATH PENALTY

On 23 July, parliament voted unanimously to abolish the death penalty for all crimes and passed the Abolition of the Death Penalty Bill, which was signed by the president on 8 October.

EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

On 12 April, students at the Institute of Public Administration and Management participated in a protest against the institution's release of an incomplete graduate list which omitted hundreds of would-be graduates. The police violently dispersed protesters, beating and stripping a woman of her shirt.

Three days later, a police officer shot dead a young man in Hastings over a private land dispute. Following an internal investigation, five officers were dismissed and the officer who fired the gun was arrested and charged with murder.

Recommendations to strengthen the Independent Police Complaints Board went before the ministry of internal affairs as the basis for a proposed Act of Parliament to regulate police violence.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

During the UPR process, the government accepted a recommendation to enact a law to protect human rights defenders. By the end of the year, the legislative process to do so had not yet started.