

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Ten years after signing the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on Violence Against Women, Slovakia had still not ratified it. Drawing on the data of helplines for victims of domestic violence, a report by the Institute for Labour and Family Research highlighted an increase in cases during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, there was a 49% increase in calls to helplines in comparison with 2019.

In April, the prime minister allocated €3 million to centres for victims of domestic violence to increase the financing of shelters.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In June and November, parliamentarians unsuccessfully attempted to adopt amendments that would restrict access to abortion. The proposals, which were rejected by parliament, aimed to restrict access to legal abortion.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In August, Slovakia announced that it would only accept 10 Afghan evacuees. The party leaders of the government coalition stated that the country would not be open to accept a "larger number" of refugees.

SLOVENIA

Republic of Slovenia

Head of state: **Borut Pahor**

Head of government: **Janez Janša**

Asylum seekers were denied access to asylum and forcibly returned to Croatia. The definition of rape in the Criminal Code was brought into line with international standards. Media freedom deteriorated. Freedom of peaceful assembly was further restricted.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Slovenia continued to deny access to asylum to potential asylum seekers irregularly entering the country. The vast majority of people apprehended on Slovenian territory

were summarily returned to neighbouring Croatia, based on a bilateral readmission agreement, enabling informal returns which circumvent the usual asylum procedures. The Ombudsman's Office criticized the practice, saying that it deprived people of legal remedies to address potential human rights violations.

In April, the Supreme Court upheld the earlier Administrative Court ruling that the authorities violated the right of a Cameroonian national to seek asylum when he was deported without formal procedure to Croatia and then on to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Courts in Italy and Austria also found that Slovenia's practice of expelling asylum seekers based on bilateral agreements was in breach of international law and subjected the victims to so-called chain pushbacks, which resulted in people being further expelled to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In December, two people trying to cross to Slovenia drowned in the Dragonja river, including a ten-year-old Kurdish girl from Turkey.

Changes to the Law on Foreigners and the Law on International Protection were adopted in March, further restricting asylum seekers', refugees' and migrants' access to protection and rights, and allowing the possibility of complete border closure in case of a "complex migration crisis". NGOs argued that the amendments violated Slovenian and EU law and put people at risk of torture.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

In June, the Slovenian Parliament adopted amendments to the Criminal Code that recognized that sex without consent is rape, bringing the legislation in line with international law and standards.¹ Under the new law, coercion, or the use or threat of force, will no longer be required as conditions for the crime to be considered rape.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

In December, the parliament adopted the law on long-term care for older people to address insufficient care services for the growing elderly population.

In June, the Constitutional Court declared as unconstitutional the parts of the Communicable Diseases Act that the government had used as a basis for imposing restrictive measures during the Covid-19 pandemic, and gave parliament two months to amend the act. The proposed amendments failed to gain the necessary majority in parliament in July, leaving the unconstitutional legal provision in force for the time being.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION AND ASSEMBLY

The prolonged blanket ban on public assemblies, originally introduced in October 2020 as part of the Covid-19 mitigation measures, remained, except for a 12-day hiatus, in place until 19 April. The authorities imposed heavy fines on protesters who defied the ban. In June, the Constitutional Court ruled that the government's decisions to prohibit public gatherings and limit the number of protesters were unconstitutional and represented a disproportionate infringement of human rights.

Media freedom continued to deteriorate, with journalists – particularly, female journalists – being the target of frequent online harassment and threats, including by the prime minister Janez Janša and other senior politicians. Government officials took measures to weaken public media services by labeling them as “anti-government” or, in case of the Slovenian Press Agency, by withholding their funding until November. Slovenia's ranking in the World Press Freedom Index dropped from 32nd in 2020 to 36th place.

Government officials also frequently engaged in smear campaigns against NGOs and other critical voices. The Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner warned that the toxic and hostile environment for media and civil society organizations had a chilling effect on freedom of expression and human rights work.

1. [Slovenia: Recognition that sex without consent is rape is a “historic victory for women”, 4 June](#)

SOMALIA

Federal Republic of Somalia

Head of state: **Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (Farmaajo)**

Head of government: **Mohamed Hussein Roble**

All parties to the armed conflict carried out indiscriminate attacks killing hundreds of civilians. The right to freedom of expression was suppressed; two journalists were killed and others were beaten, threatened, harassed and intimidated, and subjected to arbitrary arrest. The government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic remained inadequate and only 5.1% of the population had been vaccinated by December; health workers were particularly exposed to infection risks and suffered poor and unsafe working conditions. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced. In Somaliland, the authorities continued to censor critics and journalists and carried out large scale forced evictions and transfer of people in Las Anod town.

BACKGROUND

Heightened political tensions between federal authorities, regional authorities and opposition leaders rose to new levels, leading to the postponement of presidential and parliamentary elections. Political infighting between Somalia's president and his prime minister prevented the implementation of necessary judicial, constitutional and human rights reforms. Their public disagreement about the apparent enforced disappearance of a woman officer in the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) threatened to create political divisions including within the security forces.

In May, Somaliland held long-delayed parliamentary and local council elections for 82 members of the House of Representatives and Councillors in 21 districts. On 5 June, the opposition won 52 of the 82