

LITHUANIA

Republic of Lithuania

Head of state: **Gitanas Nausėda** (replaced **Dalia Grybauskaitė** in July)

Head of government: **Saulius Skvernelis**

Lithuanian authorities' alleged complicity in the CIA's secret detention programme continued to be under scrutiny. Proposed amendments to the Law of Equal Treatment lacked provisions on legal recognition of gender identity. Lithuania failed to ratify the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

COUNTER-TERRORISM AND SECURITY

In February, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) communicated to Lithuania a second case in relation to the alleged complicity of its authorities in the US CIA's secret detention programme. Mustafa Al-Hawsawi, a Saudi Arabian national still detained at Guantanamo Bay, was arrested in Pakistan in 2003 and subjected to unlawful transfers and secret detention in a number of countries, allegedly including Lithuania. Lithuania had submitted its position on the Al-Hawsawi case to the ECtHR by the end of November. The case remained pending at the end of the year.

RIGHTS OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX PEOPLE

In January, the Constitutional Court ruled that Lithuania must grant temporary residence permits for third-country nationals in same-sex marriages or registered partnerships. In September, the Parliament started to review a new legislative proposal amending the Law of Equal Treatment, initiated by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. While the proposal would introduce some positive changes, such as including the definition of associative discrimination (discrimination based on an individual's association with another person belonging to a protected group), it still lacked provisions on legal recognition of gender identity, which have been stalled for over a decade.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Gender-based violence continued to be widespread. Lithuania still has not ratified the Istanbul Convention and, despite its passing to Parliament for ratification by the former President in 2018, no hearings had been held. Harmonization of legislation combatting violence against women in accordance with the Convention, as repeatedly raised by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) would be a first step towards addressing

the inadequate handling of cases by the investigating authorities, such as failure to complete the investigation or to move to criminal prosecution.

DETENTION

Prisoners' rights were still violated. Physical ill-treatment, as well as reprisals for prisoners having exercised their lawful right to make complaints, were reported in several prisons. Legal provisions to accommodate prisoners in need of protection were absent, which led to the provisions on disciplinary isolation/segregation amounting to de facto solitary confinement. Other longstanding recommendations by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture were still not implemented.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In January, the Parliamentary Culture Committee abandoned an attempt to amend the Law on Provision of Information to the Public, after widespread criticism. The amendments would have restricted freedom of speech and the ability to criticize the government, in particular through the prohibition of the publication of information "promoting mistrust and dissatisfaction with the Lithuanian state and its institutions".