

Document #2028183

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Human Rights in Europe - Review of 2019 - Albania [EUR 01/2098/2020]

Violence against women and girls was widespread and protection measures were inadequately implemented. A controversial legislative package threatened the freedom of online media.

Background

The political landscape remained polarized, with opposition parties boycotting local elections in June. Regular opposition-led protests were marred by violence. The OSCE voiced criticism around the elections noting that, although voting was generally peaceful and orderly, the atmosphere of legal uncertainty and the standoff between key institutions undermined public confidence in the electoral process.

Albania's path to EU membership continued to be hindered by slow progress in tackling corruption and organized crime.

Justice system

A vetting process for judges and prosecutors negatively impacted on the functioning of the judiciary. While it continued to be crucial to ensure its independence from political interference and organized crime, the process undermined the functioning of the judicial system owing to widespread dismissals and a backlog of cases.

Violence against women and girls

Domestic violence remained widespread and previously adopted measures to address it were inadequate. One in two women reported having experienced violence in their lifetime, according to the National Population Survey. Over 3,200 protection orders were issued for women abused by partners and relatives. Twelve women and young girls died as a result of domestic violence.

The UN Human Rights Council, in its examination of Albania's human rights record under the Universal Periodic Review process, noted concerns about the low rate of reporting of cases of gender-based violence against women, the insufficient number of shelters and the frequent failure to enforce protection orders.

Women's rights

Although pervasive, gender-based discrimination at work, including sexual harassment, remained greatly underreported. In a survey by the Gender Alliance for Development Centre, most women respondents reported being subjected to sexual harassment and some said they were denied maternity leave.

The gender wealth gap persisted. Only 19% of women owned property due to poor implementation of the property registration law and a patriarchal tradition that favours male inheritance.

Freedom of expression – journalists

The media remained diverse but polarized, depending on the owner's political alignment and interests. This led to selective coverage of issues. According to a local NGO, one in three journalists reported being physically or verbally assaulted because of their work. Journalist Enver Doçi was attacked by police officers while filming the arrest of demonstrators in the wake of the June local elections. The police issued an apology for their actions, but no further disciplinary or other appropriate proceedings were taken against the officers concerned.

Controversial anti-defamation legislation widening the powers of the regulator of audio-visual media threatened the freedom of online media. The Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights had urged the parliament to review the draft laws of the so-called "anti-defamation package" and bring them in line with international human rights standards.

Discrimination

Most members of Roma and Egyptian communities continue to face barriers in their access to a range of rights, including housing, education, employment and health services. A market for used clothing was opened to aid Roma and Egyptian families on the outskirts of Tirana.

Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people (LGBTI)

To escape ostracism and various forms of discrimination most LGBTI people continued to conceal their sexual identity. A transgender person who attended the annual LGBTI rally was physically abused by unidentified perpetrators. In May, the NGO *PINK Embassy* requested that parliament issue an apology to those convicted for their sexual orientation under the Communist regime.

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ecoi.net summary:

Report on the human rights situation covering 2019

Country:

Albania

Source:

[AI – Amnesty International](#)

Original link:

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

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

16 April 2020

Document ID:

2028183

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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.

