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Amnesty International Report 2016/17 - The State of the World's Human Rights - Albania

Roma and Egyptian communities continued to live in poor housing conditions and were at risk of forced evictions. Over 20,000 Albanians sought asylum in the EU.

Enforced disappearances

The authorities made no progress in bringing to justice those responsible for the enforced disappearance in 1995 of Remzi Hoxha, an ethnic Albanian from Macedonia. His fate and whereabouts remained unknown.

The government started to co-operate with the International Commission on Missing Persons to locate and identify the remains of Albanians forcibly disappeared under the communist governments between 1944 and 1991; however, by the end of 2016, new exhumations were yet to be carried out. An estimated 6,000 persons remained disappeared.

Housing rights – forced evictions

In June, the local authorities in Tirana threatened to forcibly evict over 80 families – mainly Roma and Egyptian – living in the area of Bregu i Lumit, an area at risk of being flooded by the Tirana River. The authorities failed to provide adequate notice, genuine consultation and alternative housing. Following the intervention by housing activists and the Albanian Ombudsperson, evictions were temporarily suspended at the end of September. As part of an “intervention plan”, proposed by the Mayor of Tirana, the families were given options on their eviction and resettlement. By the end of the year, it remained unclear if all families would be able to access resettlement and if the offered alternatives were adequate and sustainable.

Justice system

In June, a judge suspended the chief of the national police for abuse of power and participation in planting wiretapping devices in police stations. In response, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Internal Affairs accused the judge of serving the opposition and undermining the independence of the judiciary. The national police chief remained in pre-trial detention at the end of the year.

~~In July, a justice reform was passed in Parliament. The reform amended dozens of articles of the Constitution and introduced new legislation to ensure the independence and impartiality of the judiciary and to prevent political intervention and corruption.~~

Refugees and asylum-seekers

Over 1,000 asylum applications were submitted to the authorities as border closures in Greece and Macedonia prompted people to seek protection in Albania. Some refugees and migrants arriving from Greece were summarily returned.

An estimated 20,000 Albanians applied for asylum in EU countries, the majority of them in Germany, but most of them were rejected. In July, the European Parliament proposed an EU common list of “safe countries of origin” to process asylum applications. The list included Albania. This raised concerns about fair and individualized asylum processes for Albanians.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Prisons

In March, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) expressed concerns over detention conditions in Albania. The CPT documented numerous reports by detainees – including juveniles – of ill-treatment by police officers, in some cases amounting to torture. It also noted that detention conditions remained poor in several locations across the country, and that progress was lacking in health care, activities and specialized care provided to prisoners.

Children’s rights

In May, the torture or other ill-treatment of children, including sexual abuse of girls, in an orphanage in the town of Shkodra, caused a national scandal after the district prosecutor revealed the scale of the abuse. Five persons, including the former director of the orphanage, were arrested.

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