

Back to Moldova

The rights to freedom of association and expression were violated. Torture and other ill-treatment remained unaddressed, and impunity prevailed for past violations. The right to privacy was compromised by a new law on the security service and its activities. Discrimination against LGBTI people remained commonplace. Authorities introduced a new immigration regime under which refugees risked losing access to critical goods and services. Moldova adopted a climate change adaptation programme. In the breakaway Transdniestria region, the killing of an opposition leader remained unsolved.

Background

The economic downturn underpinned by Russia's invasion of Ukraine continued, further affecting living standards in one of the poorest countries in Europe and fuelling opposition-led anti-government protests. Tensions with Russia escalated and 45 Russian diplomats and other staff were expelled over accusations of espionage. A growing number of Russian nationals were refused entry to Moldova if the border police concluded that they had failed to provide well-founded reasons for visiting the country; in some weeks there were dozens of such cases. Some people travelling by air were stranded for hours and even days at the airport as a result.

Freedom of association

The Sor party, the main driving force behind ongoing anti-government protests since 2022, was declared "unconstitutional" by the Constitutional Court and banned, accused of seeking to destabilize Moldova in collusion with Russia. Its five serving MPs remained in parliament as independents. Many party members left and joined the Shansa party. On 3 November, the Commission for Exceptional Situations (a body whose formal remit is limited to immigration and energy security) banned members of the Shansa party from standing in the 5 November local elections.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Institutional causes of torture and other ill-treatment in detention remained unaddressed. Detainees in adult and juvenile penitentiary institutions continued to suffer overcrowding, unsanitary and otherwise inadequate detention conditions and poor health provision.

Impunity

Impunity remained endemic for past human rights violations by members of law enforcement agencies.

The NGO Legal Resources Centre from Moldova (LRCM) analysed decisions by the Supreme Court from July 2013 to February 2022 and concluded that court hearings in alleged torture cases took considerably longer compared with other criminal cases, and resulted in an acquittal rate 13 times higher and more lenient sentences. LRCM believed the likely cause was judges' fear of the suspects or collusion between judges, suspects and the prosecution. No plans to address these long-standing issues were made public.

No further progress was made in the case of the abduction and forcible return to Türkiye of seven Turkish teachers by Moldovan security services in 2018, beyond the fining in 2020 of the former director of the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS) for a related economic offence.

Right to privacy

The Laws on the Security and Intelligence Service and on Counter-Intelligence Activities, adopted by parliament on 8 June and 7 July respectively, reflected critical comments on their earlier drafts by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission and Moldovan civil society. The revised laws tamed the government's intention to give the SIS extensive and vaguely defined powers to engage in covert surveillance and interception of private communications. The new laws mandated judicial approval for such measures, although some legal provisions remained general and open to abusive interpretation.

Freedom of expression

In October, the SIS extrajudicially blocked access to 22 (mostly Russia-based) online media platforms and suspended broadcasting by six television channels, ostensibly for publishing information "that may cause tension or social conflict", according to the head of the SIS.

LGBTI people's rights

In June, a Pride march took place in the capital, Chişinău, bringing together some 500 participants. Despite the mayor's threats to ban the event, it proceeded without incident. Discrimination against openly LGBTI people remained commonplace, however, as did homophobic statements by religious activists and some officials.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

In January, for the first time, the government enacted the Temporary Protection regime envisaged under the 2008 Law on Asylum. This required Ukrainians and other refugees falling under its provisions to apply for protection within 90 days of arriving at the border. Previously, refugees' status and rights were administered under state of emergency legislation, by a Commission for Exceptional Situations, and via derogation from national legislation, such as by lifting limitations concerning the right to work and access to essential services. National and international NGOs raised concerns that many refugees risked losing access to employment and certain other rights due to the tight deadline, poor information, lack of proof of residence, or other bureaucratic requirements. As of 3 December, Moldova was hosting 112,811 refugees from Ukraine.

Right to a healthy environment

According to the UN Development Programme, Moldova was "one of Europe's most climate change-vulnerable countries, particularly prone to floods and droughts", with 80% of its territory having been affected by floods over the past two decades. An extreme heatwave was recorded in the summer.

On 30 August, the government adopted the National Climate Change Adaptation Programme until 2030 and its Action Plan, aimed at aligning the country with global efforts to limit the negative impacts of climate change.

Transdniestria region

Impunity

In July, the local Communist Party leader, Oleg Khorzhan, was found dead with stab wounds in his home. He had been released in 2022 on completing a sentence imposed in 2018 for an alleged assault on de facto law enforcement officers. Oleg Khorzhan was a public critic of the de facto authorities, and reported on human rights abuses in prison. No effective investigation into his death had been carried out by year's end.