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Parliament passed amendments to the Education Law which discriminated against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people. Protection for LGBTI people against hate crimes remained inadequate. Over 262,000 people remained stateless. Appeals against negative asylum decisions had no suspensive effect, leaving people at risk of being returned to countries where their rights could be violated.

Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people

In June, Parliament passed amendments to the Education Law requiring schools to provide “morality” education based on constitutional values, which include a definition of marriage as the union between a man and a woman. The new legislation risked placing Latvia in breach of its international obligations to respect freedom of expression and the requirement of non-discrimination with regard to LGBTI people’s relationships and families. There was also concern that it would restrict children’s access to sex and sexuality education with potentially negative impacts on their right to health.

Concerns remained about the lack of express protection in criminal law against incitement to hatred and violence on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. In the first nine months of 2015, Latvian NGO Mozaika recorded 14 attacks against LGBTI people. None resulted in serious injuries. Victims told Mozaika they did not report the attacks to the police for fear that they would not be taken seriously.

In June, EuroPride, an international gathering in support of LGBTI people’s rights, took place in Riga, the capital, without major incidents. About 5,000 people participated, including three Latvian MPs. The authorities allowed the parade to pass through the main street of Riga and to cover 2.2km, a route four times longer than in the past. The police offered effective protection to participants.

Discrimination – stateless persons

There continued to be a high number of stateless people – over 262,000 at the beginning of 2015, according to figures of UNHCR, the UN refugee agency. Stateless people, the vast majority ethnic Russians, were excluded from the enjoyment of political rights.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

The number of asylum applications remained low, with about 200 received in the first eight months of the year. Recognition rates also remained very low. However, in September Latvia agreed to relocate 531 asylum-seekers from other European countries. Concerns remained about the excessive use of detention for asylum-seekers and the non-suspensive effect of appeals against negative decisions under the accelerated asylum procedure. The latter increased the risk of individuals being returned to countries where they could face serious human rights abuses.

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