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Annual Report 2019 - Latvia [EUR 01/2098/2020]

The government made some progress towards reducing children's statelessness. Latvia failed to ratify the Istanbul Convention. Discrimination occurred against refugees and asylum-seekers, Roma and the LGBTI community.

Background

The government continued to construct a barbed wire fence on the border with Russia, and had completed 93 kilometres in March in order to - in the government's words - "combat illegal migration".

Discrimination

Statelessness

In October, the Latvian Parliament adopted a law to grant automatic citizenship to children of "non-citizens" born on or after 1 January 2020 (unless the parents opt for another nationality), a significant step towards realizing the right of each child to a nationality and towards fully including all children in Latvian society. Regrettably, the law did not extend automatic citizenship to the almost 4,900 stateless children under the age of 15. "Non-citizen" children between 15 and 18 could apply for Latvian citizenship. Statelessness in Latvia remained high: an estimated 230,000 people – more than 10% of the population – were deprived of the right to vote in national parliamentary elections and could not occupy certain positions in local and national government and civil service.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

In its fifth monitoring cycle, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) found that support was insufficient for refugees and those under subsidiary protection (that is people not eligible for refugee status but at risk of serious harm in the country of origin), especially in the areas of language training and integration into the labour market. In addition, refugees and people under subsidiary protection reported that they were refused access to health care services.

Roma

Progress to increase enrolment rates of Roma children was limited despite various efforts by the authorities. ECRI reported that the number of Roma children enrolled in special needs programmes remained disproportionately high. The government’s long-term plans to integrate all children with special needs into mainstream education did not constitute timely steps to improve the situation for Roma children wrongly placed into these programmes.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people

There was a marked absence of government research, allocated funding or any monitoring mechanism to provide a basis for developing and implementing policies to address intolerance and discrimination faced by LGBTI people. Issues raised by ECRI range from insufficient provisions in anti-discrimination legislation recognising sexual orientation and gender identity as grounds, non-recognition of same-sex partnerships, to discrimination in the workplace.

Women’s rights

Latvia had not ratified the Istanbul Convention by the end of 2019, despite an earlier ministerial announcement that the government would do so before the end of 2018. In its latest report, the Committee against Torture (CAT) expressed concern that domestic violence is not defined as a specific crime in criminal law, and that marital rape remains unrecognized as a separate criminal offence. Victims faced difficulties in filing complaints and accessing the authorities for protection measures and separation from the perpetrators.

Detention

The conditions of detention in places of deprivation of liberty continued to fall short of international standards, including with regard to material conditions such as hygiene, sanitation, humidity, ventilation and access to natural light.

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Report on the human rights situation covering 2019



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