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Latvia 2020

Roma and LGBTI people continued to face discrimination. Statelessness remained high. There remained no comprehensive law on gender-based violence. Limitations on education in minority languages continued.

Background

A state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, effective from March to June and then from November onwards, allowed for restrictions on certain human rights. During the first period, Latvia derogated from several of its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights.

The government implemented swift measures to address the impact of the pandemic and contain the spread of the virus, but COVID-19 related infections and deaths spiked at the end of the year.

Discrimination

The Latvian Centre for Human Rights noted in March an increase in cases of incitement to violence and discrimination targeting Latvian nationals repatriating from abroad due to COVID-19.

Roma

Discrimination against Roma persisted in many areas of life.

Concrete measures to include Roma children, in particular girls, in the mainstream education system remained insufficient. Data on dropout rates for Roma, disaggregated by factors such as sex and age, were not available.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people

Latvia's legislative framework regarding LGBTI rights remained weak, and NGOs reported widespread discrimination against LGBTI people. The EU's Fundamental Rights Agency reported that 47% of LGBTI people did not report physical or sexual attacks to the police out of fear of a homophobic and/or transphobic reaction.

On 12 November, the Constitutional Court recognized the right of same-sex couples to parental leave.

Statelessness

Statelessness remained high, with 212,814 people having the status of “non-citizen” – a special category for citizens of the former USSR who have neither Latvian nor another citizenship – and 163 people with “stateless” status. Domestic law provisions for “non-citizens” continued to fall short of international standards, including a lack of political rights and some restrictions on employment and land ownership. Gaps remained for stateless migrants, including a lack of protection during the statelessness determination procedure, absence of a facilitated route to naturalization and few safeguards against arbitrary detention, with alternatives to detention applied only in a small proportion of cases.

Women's rights

In Concluding Observations in March, the CEDAW Committee reiterated many concerns from its previous review in 2004, including calling on Latvia to adopt a comprehensive law on gender-based violence.

Latvia again failed to ratify the Istanbul Convention, and 21 members of parliament lodged a case in the Constitutional Court challenging the Convention's compliance with the Constitution.

Right to education

The Council of Europe's Venice Commission noted in June that certain 2018 amendments to the law on education in minority languages failed to strike a fair balance between protection of the rights of minorities and promotion of the official state language.

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