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The State of the World's Human Rights; Croatia 2024

Strategic lawsuits against public participation threatened media freedom. Access to abortion remained restricted. Femicide became a criminal offence. Victims of wartime rape faced obstacles in accessing rights. Roma continued to experience discrimination in housing and education.

Freedom of expression

Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) remained a serious threat to media freedom. According to a study by the Croatian Journalists' Association, 40% of over 1,300 lawsuits brought against media outlets and journalists in the preceding eight years, including by senior public officials, demonstrated elements of a SLAPP.

Despite repeated calls to decriminalize defamation, it remained a criminal offence and was used to bring both criminal and civil charges against journalists. The human rights organization Article 19 warned that this practice "suffocates journalism".

In March, parliament adopted a new criminal offence of "unauthorized disclosure of information from ongoing criminal investigations". Although the legislation expressly exempted journalists and disclosures of "public interest", media organizations described it as violating international standards on freedom of expression.

In September the NGO Media Freedom Rapid Response called the state of media freedom "alarming".

Sexual and reproductive rights

Women and pregnant people continued to face barriers to abortion services due to widespread refusal by doctors and clinics to perform

abortions on grounds of conscience. Abortion remained particularly inaccessible in rural and economically deprived areas.

Violence against women and girls

In March, parliament introduced femicide as a separate criminal offence and imposed longer sentences for rape, among other measures aimed at strengthening victims' rights.

Civil society groups noted that, despite the legislative changes, conviction for femicide was rare and urged the government to strengthen education and prevention programmes.

The authorities registered 17 cases of femicide in 2024. Domestic violence offences increased by 9% in comparison with 2023. The Gender Equality Ombudsperson said that the length of criminal proceedings and lenient penalties were causing many women to refrain from reporting violence.

A gynaecologist at Osjek hospital continued to work for six months after receiving a first-instance verdict of raping a patient, causing a public outcry. He was finally removed in September. The ombudsperson urged the government to adopt urgent legislative changes to ensure that individuals charged with or convicted of certain criminal offences, including rape, could not be employed in health institutions.

Right to privacy

The ombudsperson asked the authorities to ensure that the new Law on the Central Register of the Population, which was pending adoption by parliament, included robust safeguards for data protection and protection against discrimination.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

In September the Administrative Court in the capital Zagreb upheld the detention of Vladislav Arinichev, a Russian anti-war activist who applied for asylum in Croatia. In July the authorities rejected his application after the State Intelligence Agency declared him a threat to national security following his public criticism of the conditions in a reception centre for asylum seekers. Vladislav Arinichev was finally released in October after 106 days in detention.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

Most victims of wartime sexual violence remained unregistered for a special status guaranteeing certain welfare benefits and support, due to barriers in the application process, including onerous documentation.

According to civil rights organizations, less than 15% of those eligible applied.

In August the NGO Youth Initiative for Human Rights called on the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia to work together to ensure access to justice and reparations for the victims of a refugee massacre in 1995 in which the Croatian Air Force killed 14 Serb refugees near the Bosnian town of Petrovac.

The UN Human Rights Committee urged Croatia to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries to locate and try suspected perpetrators of crimes under international humanitarian law and to ensure that victims and their families receive full reparation for human rights violations.

In February, Croatia signed the 2023 Ljubljana – The Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and Other International Crimes.

Discrimination

LGBTI people

Legal gender recognition continued to require a mental health diagnosis or psychological evaluation. The Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner urged the authorities to repeal these conditions, saying that they perpetuate the “pathologization of trans people”.

Roma

Roma continued to live in segregated neighbourhoods and informal settlements without adequate infrastructure and with limited access to basic services.

Roma children had low rates of enrolment in preschool education and tended to be in ethnically segregated classes or special education programmes, leading to high dropout rates.

In July the UN Human Rights Committee called on Croatia to intensify efforts to address the de facto segregation of Roma and guarantee non-discriminatory access to adequate housing, education and basic services.

Right to a healthy environment

In June the government announced that more than 75% of total electricity production capacity would come from renewable sources by 2030 and that the country's updated National Energy and Climate Plan would be more ambitious.

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