

Document #2028189

AI – Amnesty International

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

Refugees and migrants faced pushbacks and abuse by the Croatian police. Domestic violence continued to attract light penalties and protective measures were rarely enforced. Women faced numerous barriers in accessing abortion. Journalists were threatened and prosecuted because of their work.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

Croatia failed to provide refugees with effective access to international protection and used pushbacks and collective expulsions, frequently accompanied by violence, to keep people out of its territory. NGOs and the media documented numerous cases of refugees and migrants being apprehended deep inside Croatian territory, held for hours in police custody and forcibly returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina in groups without an opportunity to seek asylum. Such returns took place without due process and away from official border crossings. People reported being rounded up by police, shouted at and beaten with batons, stripped of their clothes and made to walk barefoot, sometimes through deep snow and freezing rivers.[1]

The authorities continued to deny the violence. However, in July the President acknowledged that pushbacks, accompanied by "some violence", were necessary to prevent irregular entries.

In July, the Swiss Federal Administrative Court suspended the return of an asylum-seeker to Croatia citing the risk of repeated pushbacks and violence that had left him with serious physical and psychological consequences.

The authorities targeted two NGOs, Are You Syrious and the Centre for Peace Studies, who criticized police activities at the border. The NGOs were accused of "facilitating illegal migration" and activists and volunteers were detained without charge. An appeal against the judgement of the Are You Syrious volunteer convicted of "involuntary negligence" for assisting an Afghan family to cross the border was pending at the end of the year.

Fewer than 150 asylum-seekers were granted international protection in Croatia during 2019.

Violence against women and girls

Croatia had still not fully harmonized its legislative and policy framework on gender-based violence with the Istanbul Convention by the end of the year. In the vast majority of cases, domestic violence continued to be treated as a minor offence attracting lesser penalties, and protective measures were rarely enforced. The practice of dual arrests persisted, with some women who reported abuse being arrested as co-perpetrators, questioned in the presence of the abuser and, in some cases, sanctioned for offensive language or acting in self-defence.

Despite considerable improvements, the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence continued to exclude victims who did not share the same residence as a partner, who had lived with their partner for less than three years or who did not have children with their partner, forcing some women to undertake private prosecutions against their abusers. Shelters for victims of domestic violence were not available in six regions and facilities and support services in others remained underfunded.

The vast majority of successful rape convictions resulted in prison sentences of one year or less. The criminal law continued to distinguish between rape and the lesser offence of "sexual violence without consent", which carried lighter penalties. In September, the government announced legal amendments that would bring the definition of rape into line with international standards and increase penalties for crimes of gender-based violence.

Right to health

Women's access to sexual and reproductive rights remained seriously constrained. Individual doctors, and in some cases health care institutions, continued to refuse abortions on the grounds of conscience. In several regions, abortion services were not available at any authorized clinic and women were often forced to travel to nearby towns at their own cost. National health insurance did not cover termination of pregnancy and the cost at some authorized clinics was prohibitively high. Combined, these factors represented insurmountable obstacles for women with lower socio-economic status, forcing some to seek unsafe clandestine abortions.

The National Assembly failed to adopt a new law on termination of pregnancy by the deadline set by a 2017 Constitutional Court ruling. An expert commission set up by the Ministry of Health was widely criticized for including conservative healthcare professionals and no representatives of organizations advocating sexual and reproductive rights.

Crimes under international law

The fate and whereabouts of over 1,500 of the 6,000 people who went missing during the 1991-1995 armed conflict remained unknown. The authorities warned that further progress depended primarily on an improved cooperation with the Serbian authorities, who failed to provide information about the locations of mass and individual graves.

In July, the National Assembly adopted the Law on Missing Persons, granting victims and their families special rights to truth and justice.

Freedom of expression

Journalists who investigated corruption, organized crime and war crimes continued to be threatened, intimidated and, in some cases, attacked. The authorities failed to condemn such attacks.

In September, journalist Gordan Duhaček was arbitrarily detained for 24 hours on charges of "discrediting public authorities" for posting a satirical message on Twitter. His arrest was criticized by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe.

Discrimination

Discrimination against ethnic minorities, as well as refugees and migrants, remained widespread. Roma continued to face numerous barriers in accessing education, health, housing and employment.

[1] Croatia: Pushed to the Edge, Violence and Abuse against Refugees and Migrants along the Balkans Route, (EUR 05/9964/2019)

© Amnesty International

ecoi.net summary:

Report on the human rights situation covering 2019



Country:

Croatia

Source:

AI – Amnesty International [_\(/en/source/10960.html\)](https://www.amnesty.org/en/source/10960.html)

Original link:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/croatia/report-croatia/>
(<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/croatia/report-croatia/>)

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

16 April 2020

Document ID:

2028189

Austrian Red Cross

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien

T. (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583

F. (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589

info@ecoi.net

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

