

Amnesty International Report 2022/23; The State of the World's Human Rights; Lithuania 2022

People who fled Ukraine were welcomed and assisted; other refugees and migrants were forcibly returned to Belarus or arbitrarily detained, denied access to asylum and, in some cases, subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Same-sex unions were still not legalized.

Refugees' and migrants' rights

Lithuania granted access to and assisted at least 71,932 people who had fled Ukraine following Russia's invasion. Non-European refugees and migrants who arrived from Belarus continued to be subjected to violent pushbacks, arbitrary detention and other violations.¹ Border guards forcibly pushed at least 11,097 people back to Belarus over the year, despite the risk of torture and other ill-treatment by Belarusian authorities.

In June, the Court of Justice of the EU ruled that Lithuania's emergency legislation breached EU law because it deprived people of the possibility of seeking asylum and provided for their automatic detention on the sole basis of their irregular entry. The legislation remained in place at the end of the year; in August the Ministry of Interior proposed legislation that would further formalize the practice of border pushbacks.

As of March, roughly 4,000 people remained in prolonged arbitrary detention in government-managed centres, where they were denied access to adequate asylum procedures. Following court decisions, most were later allowed to leave the centres; by December, 39 people remained in detention.

In detention centres, refugees and migrants suffered overcrowding, disproportionate restrictions to movement, and inadequate access to toilets and medical assistance. In January and July, the Ombudsperson concluded that conditions in the Kybartai and Medininkai centres constituted inhumane and degrading treatment. The Medininkai centre was subsequently closed, and authorities decided to close the Kybartai centre in early 2023.

Officers conducting forcible pushbacks at the borders or responding to protests in detention centres attacked asylum seekers and migrants, including with batons, pepper spray and taser guns.

On 1-2 March, an anti-riot squad raided the Medininkai detention centre. Officers sexually humiliated a group of Black women, forcing them outside into the cold, half-naked with their hands tied, and then

locking them in a container. In October, police authorities terminated a pretrial investigation on the raid, pointing to a lack of evidence and objective reasons for a criminal case.

LGBTI people's rights

In May, the parliament started debating a compromise bill introducing gender-neutral civil unions, which would grant same-sex couples some rights. A previous bill legalizing same-sex partnerships had been voted down in 2021.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

In January, news emerged that Lithuania had paid about €100,000 in compensation to Abu Zubaydah, a Palestinian national detained in Guantánamo Bay. In 2018, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against Lithuania for its deliberate facilitation of his enforced disappearance and torture by the CIA. Due to Abu Zubaydah's ongoing detention and assets freeze, he could not receive the compensation.

In March, Lithuania signed an agreement with Ukraine and Poland to establish a Joint Investigation Team to investigate crimes under international law committed in Ukraine.

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1. *Lithuania: Forced Out or Locked Up – Refugees and Migrants Abused and Abandoned, 27 June*

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ecoi.net summary:

Report on the human rights situation covering 2022

Country:

Lithuania

Source:

AI – Amnesty International

Original link:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/lithuania/report-lithuania/>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

27 March 2023

Available on ecoi.net since:

28 March 2023

Document ID:

2089555

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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.

