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In a year marked by horrific attacks by armed extremists in Paris in January and November, and a deepening refugee crisis, the European Union and its member states struggled to develop an effective and principled response to the hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers and migrants who reached Europe. Narrow government interests too often displaced sound policy responses, delaying protection and shelter for vulnerable people and raising questions about the union's purpose and limits.

Migration and Asylum

Poor management and disagreements among EU member states escalated a crisis, as large numbers of migrants and asylum seekers reached Europe, most by sea. At time of writing, more than 850,000 people had crossed the sea during the year to reach Europe. The vast majority – an estimated 82 percent – of people crossed the Aegean Sea, from Turkey to Greece, and only 17 percent crossed the central Mediterranean, from North Africa to Italy, historically the most common sea route.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 84 percent of those arriving by sea came from the refugee-producing countries of Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, and Somalia. Nigerians, Gambians, Sudanese, Pakistanis and Malians together made up seven percent of the new arrivals.

The EU tripled the budget and resources of patrol operations in the Mediterranean following the deaths at sea of more than 1,000 people in a single week in April. Frontex, the EU's external border agency, began patrolling in international waters near Libya and increased patrols in the Aegean Sea, carrying out search-and-rescue and border enforcement activities. While tens of thousands of people were rescued throughout the year, including by private humanitarian initiatives, more than 3,500 migrants died or went missing at sea.

Many of those who reached Greece by sea continued their journey over land through the Western Balkans, encountering police abuse in EU candidates Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia and EU member Hungary, and appalling detention conditions at times in Macedonia and Hungary.

In September, thousands of migrants and asylum seekers were stuck at various borders with inadequate shelter, unable to proceed with their journeys but with no genuine alternative, and at times dispersed by tear gas and water cannons. Hungary effectively closed its border with Serbia to asylum seekers and migrants in September, and with Croatia in October. Slovenia and Croatia at times blocked access for asylum seekers and migrants in September and October. In late November, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia imposed border restrictions for asylum seekers and migrants, allowing only certain nationalities, including Syrians, to enter.

EU governments worked fitfully over the course of the year to implement a set of proposals on migration and asylum policy that the European Commission made in May. An EU-wide refugee resettlement scheme was established, with countries pledging over 22,000 places over the next two years. Following a fractious debate and over the objections of Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania, EU governments agreed to a program to relocate over the next two years a total of 160,000 asylum seekers who had landed in Italy, Greece, and potentially other countries experiencing significant arrivals. The United Kingdom opted out. At time of writing, only 159 asylum seekers had been relocated from Italy and Greece to other EU member states under the scheme.

The majority of the commission's proposals focused on measures to limit arrivals, strengthen border controls, and accelerate returns of people not granted the right to remain in the EU. The EU took some positive action, including pledges of increased aid to countries hosting large refugee populations and to humanitarian assistance organizations. Yet efforts to intensify immigration cooperation with origin and transit countries raised concerns about enabling rights abuses and denying people effective protection. Combating smuggling networks remained central to the EU approach, with a naval mission in the Mediterranean poised, beginning in October, to board, seize, and divert vessels used by smugglers.

The full package of recast directives making up the Common European Asylum System entered into force in July, imposing revised common standards and rules with respect to procedures and reception conditions. Asylum seekers continued to face a protection lottery, with wide disparity among EU member states in recognition rates, accommodation, and integration measures. The European Commission stepped up its own enforcement, opening 74 infringement proceedings against 23 member states for failure to abide by EU asylum laws.

Discrimination and Intolerance

Attacks by armed extremists in Paris in January left 20 people dead – 12 staff members of the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo, four people taken hostage in a kosher supermarket, a police officer, and three attackers. In Copenhagen in February, attacks on a free speech debate and a synagogue left three people dead, including the attacker. The attacks underscored the serious problem of anti-Semitism in the EU. An October report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights showed that many EU governments fail to collect adequate data on hate crimes against Jews, a finding that reflects a wider failure to collect disaggregated hate crimes data.

Hate crimes against Muslims are also a serious problem, with spikes in incidents reported in France and the UK. The acceptability of intolerance against Muslims was demonstrated in September when several EU leaders said they only wanted Christian, as opposed to Muslim, refugees in their countries.

In September, the UN high commissioner for human rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, criticized ongoing forced evictions of Roma and Travellers in several European countries in recent years. He

highlighted France's "systematic national policy to forcibly evict the Roma" and urged Bulgaria to halt forced evictions, "which are devastating to the affected communities."

By enacting the Gender Recognition Bill in July, Ireland became the fifth country in the world to offer legal recognition to the gender of people's choice, excluding children under the age of 16. Ireland brought into effect a law permitting same-sex marriage in November following a successful constitutional referendum guaranteeing marriage equality in May.

Following its review of the EU, in September the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) raised concerns about children with disabilities living in institutions in EU countries who have no access to mainstream inclusive education. The committee also expressed concern about the negative effects of austerity measures on services for families with children with disabilities. The committee also noted concerns about the detention of refugees and migrants with disabilities, and the fact that many persons with disabilities have their legal capacity restricted, affecting their ability to make their own decisions.

Counterterrorism

The November attacks in Paris, the most deadly in Europe in more than a decade, prompted emergency measures in France (see below), a major security operation in Belgium, stepped-up border checks, including inside the Schengen free movement area, and a renewed push for stronger EU security and intelligence cooperation. Past experience of major attacks in Europe raised concerns that human rights protections would again be weakened in the name of security.

The publication in December 2014 of a redacted version of a report by the United States Senate on torture by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) again threw a spotlight on the complicity of EU states with programs of rendition and torture and their limited progress towards accountability. The European Parliament civil liberties committee in February decided to resume its investigation into EU states' complicity in torture.

Lithuanian prosecutors announced in April that they had reopened an investigation into allegations that their country hosted a secret CIA detention facility. Romanian authorities continue to deny that their country hosted a secret CIA facility, despite an admission in April by the former President Ion Iliescu that he authorized a CIA site. There were few signs of progress during the year in investigations in Poland and the UK into complicity by state officials in torture and rendition (see below).

In March, the Council of Europe's human rights commissioner raised concerns about plans in several European countries to increase surveillance powers of security services without prior judicial authorization.

In July, the UN Human Rights Council appointed Joseph Cannataci as the first special rapporteur on the right to privacy. His mandate includes reviewing government policies and legislation on interception of digital communications. In August, Cannataci criticized the weakness of the UK's surveillance oversight mechanism.

Croatia

More than 441,931 asylum seekers and migrants entered Croatia by the end of November. Almost all stayed only for a short period before going on to Hungary (until it closed its border) or Slovenia. Croatia struggled to meet asylum seekers' and migrants' basic needs and at times closed border crossings from Serbia and restricted entry at its borders to certain nationalities in November.

Fewer than 5,000 people have claimed asylum in Croatia since 2006, and as of July 2015, only 165 had been granted some form of protection, 32 of them in 2015. Long-term asylum seekers and refugees face difficulties in accessing housing, health services, and education. Unaccompanied migrant and asylum-seeking children continue to be placed in a residential home for children with behavior problems and in reception centers for adults, without adequate guardianship or specific protection.

While the Croatian government made some progress in protecting the rights of people with disabilities, the guardianship system continues to deny roughly 18,000 people with disabilities the right to make decisions about their lives. Implementation of a 2011 deinstitutionalization plan progressed slowly and excludes people with disabilities in psychiatric hospitals and foster homes for adults. More than 7,500 people remained institutionalized as of September. In April, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities urged the Croatian government to ensure that its domestic laws protect the rights of people with disabilities.

More than 220 war crimes cases have yet to be addressed by national courts. In February, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that Croatia violated the fair trial rights of a dual Croatian-Serbian national convicted in his absence of war crimes and unable to obtain a retrial.

In April, the UN Human Rights Committee adopted concluding observations on Croatia, including concerns about discrimination and violence against members of ethnic minority groups, particularly Roma and Serbs.

Serbs stripped of tenancy rights during the war faced ongoing difficulties in benefitting from the 2010 government program that permits the purchase of property at below-market rates.

Stateless Roma faced particular difficulties accessing basic state services, such as health care, social assistance, and adequate housing. Roma children are de facto segregated in the education sector.

Estonia

Estonia ranks 10th in terms of stateless populations worldwide. According to the Interior Ministry, as of June 2015, about 6.3 percent of the country's population of 1.3 million is stateless.

In 2015, the government adopted measures to decrease child statelessness and simplify the naturalization process for older people. In January, the government amended the Citizenship Law to allow children born to stateless parents to automatically obtain Estonian citizenship at birth; previously, parents had to apply. Parents can reject Estonian citizenship on behalf of their children within a year. The amendments also exempt people 65 and older from the written portion of the mandatory Estonian language exam for naturalization.

Language test requirements remain the most significant naturalization challenge for the country's Russian-speaking population. The cost of naturalization, including application and language exam preparation, and the income requirements for citizenship, continue to disenfranchise poorer long-term residents, and have contributed to statelessness among the Russian speakers. The up-front cost of language classes to prepare for the test poses a considerable financial obstacle for non-citizens with modest or no income. The state reimburses language class fees only after the applicant passes the test.

Stateless residents do not enjoy full employment rights and are barred from occupying several professions, such as posts in the national and local civil service, police, and customs, and they may not become prosecutors, judges, or notaries.

The government has not taken sufficient steps to prepare for implementation of the Co-habitation Act, which was passed in October 2014 and enters into force in 2016. The act extends the rights of married couples to unmarried – including same-sex – couples.

Estonia maintains a minimalist refugee policy. The government agreed to accept 329 asylum seekers over a two-year period under the EU relocation scheme, but at time of writing, no one had yet been relocated. Asylum seekers encounter serious obstacles in receiving translation support in their language during refugee status determination interviews.

France

France suffered deadly attacks in January and November. Multiple attacks in Paris and the suburb of Saint-Denis on November 13 killed 130 people and wounded hundreds. On November 20, parliament passed a law extending by three months the state of emergency declared by President François Hollande following the attacks. The law also expanded the government's emergency powers including to conduct searches without a warrant and to place people under house arrest without judicial approval, raising concerns about the rights to liberty, freedom of movement, and freedoms of association and expression.

Over three days in early January, attacks on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, a police officer, and a kosher supermarket left 20 dead, including the three attackers, who died in shootouts with the police. A surge in Islamophobic acts followed, and the government recorded over 50 attacks and threats against Muslims between January 7 and 12.

On January 12, the minister of justice instructed prosecutors to respond with criminal law to speech "glorifying terrorism" and anti-Semitic and racist speech in relation to the Paris attacks. By March 24, the French judiciary had opened 298 cases involving "glorification of terrorism" – an overly broad term that can include speech that does not incite violence – including 185 cases in which it was the only offense.

Anti-Semitic acts, including violent attacks and threats, increased by more than 100 percent in 2014 compared with 2013, according to the annual report of the National Consultative Commission of Human Rights published in April.

In a June review of France, the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern about discrimination against migrants and "people of foreign origin" in access to employment, housing, culture, and health care, and difficulties they face in education.

In September, the UN high commissioner for human rights criticized France's "systematic national policy to forcibly evict" migrant Roma. According to rights groups, between January and September 2015, 8,714 Roma were evicted from 79 places in France, in most cases without alternative accommodation.

According to official estimates, around 4,500 asylum seekers and migrants lived in unsanitary conditions in a makeshift camp in Calais with limited daytime access to showers, electricity, and food in a center equipped to serve 1,500. In November, the Council of State ordered the government to equip the camp with water taps, toilets, and garbage collection, and to ensure emergency services can access the site if needed.

A law passed by parliament in July requires authorities to register asylum claims within three days of an asylum seeker lodging an application, or ten working days if there are large numbers of simultaneous claims. The law also ends the detention of unaccompanied children in transit zones if they intend to seek asylum in France, but provides for exceptions, such as when children are from a country the authorities consider to be "safe." Other unaccompanied children who do not

assert an intent to claim asylum can continue to be detained for up to 20 days in a seaport or airport.

In July, France enacted a law permitting the government to conduct sweeping digital surveillance on broad grounds and without prior judicial authorization, in breach of the right to privacy. Following a July review, the UN Human Rights Committee urged France in August to ensure surveillance activities are necessary and proportionate and subject to judicial approval and oversight. In November, the French parliament passed a law permitting the surveillance of electronic communications sent or received from abroad.

In five ground-breaking rulings in June, the Paris Court of Appeal ordered the state to compensate victims of discriminatory identity checks. The court found that the failure to record checks deprived victims of an effective remedy. The government has failed to introduce stop forms, a key measure in addressing abusive identity checks, despite President Hollande's commitment to fight against abuses during such checks when he was a presidential candidate in 2012.

In a February report on his visit to France in September 2014 on a range of human rights concerns, the Council of Europe's human rights commissioner found France "lagging significantly behind" in making public places and transportation accessible to persons with disabilities, and noted high unemployment among persons with disabilities.

Germany

Authorities increased staff and budget of the federal asylum office in response to a significant increase in new asylum applications, and created new reception centers around the country. The government estimated Germany would receive one million new asylum applications by year's end.

In October, the Federal Parliament adopted legislation to accelerate asylum procedures, improve integration measures, replace cash support with benefits in kind, and expedite construction of new accommodation. Lack of unified, binding standards meant wide disparities in quality of asylum accommodation, including lack of safeguards to protect women and children from harassment and abuse.

The legislation adds Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro to the list of safe countries that already includes Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Macedonia. Syrians were the largest national group of asylum seekers, followed by Albanians and Kosovars. Nationals from countries considered safe are presumed not to need international protection and are subject to accelerated procedures, raising concerns about the quality of individual examinations and the consequences for the many Roma applicants from the Western Balkans.

Federal police registered 473 attacks on asylum accommodations in the first nine months of the year, more than double the total for 2014, and expressed concern about the rise of right-wing extremist groups. Anti-migrant protests flared throughout the year, particularly in the east.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern in May about broad police stop-and-search powers leading to ethnic profiling and inadequate investigations of racially motivated attacks. In July, a law entered into force giving prosecutors greater powers to investigate racially motivated crimes, now subject to more severe punishment.

Germany's constitutional court ruled in March that a 2004 ban in North Rhine-Westphalia on teachers wearing the headscarf violated religious freedom and was discriminatory. The ruling renders unconstitutional similar bans in other states.

A new data retention law attracted concerns of unjustified interference with privacy rights and the criminalization of whistleblowing. The federal commissioner for data protection said the law was unconstitutional.

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities said in May that Germany's system of guardianship denies equal recognition under the law and expressed concern about the widespread institutionalization of persons with psychosocial disabilities.

Greece

Political uncertainty, mass immigration, and instability marked Greece's year. In June and July, the UN independent expert on foreign debt and human rights urged the European institutions, the International Monetary Fund, and the Greek government to ensure that new austerity measures did not undermine human rights.

Thousands of migrants and asylum seekers arriving on Greece's Aegean islands and also in Athens faced appalling reception and detention conditions. Poor registration systems on the islands failed to identify people with special protection needs, including people with disabilities or medical conditions, and women and children, exacerbating risks for these groups.

At time of writing, almost 726,000 people, mainly from Syria and Afghanistan, have taken the sea journey from Turkey to Greece since the start of 2015. According to the International Organization for Migration, at least 588 died crossing from Turkey in 2015.

There were continuing allegations that Greek border guards engaged in collective expulsions and pushbacks of migrants and asylum seekers at the land borders with Turkey. In October, the authorities indicated they were investigating 20 such allegations brought by human rights groups. Unidentified armed masked men disabled boats carrying migrants and asylum seekers in the Aegean Sea, pushing them back to Turkish waters.

Asylum-seeking and migrant children registered as unaccompanied minors by the authorities were often detained much longer than adults or children traveling with their families, while authorities sought shelter facilities for them. There is no reliable estimate of the number of unaccompanied migrant children who entered Greece during the year.

In February, the government revoked a ministerial decision that had allowed detention of migrants beyond the 18 months permitted by EU law, and announced the immediate release from immigration detention of vulnerable categories of asylum seekers, as well as of people whose detention exceeded a six-month period. Conditions in immigration detention remain poor.

The ECtHR held Greece responsible for inhuman and degrading treatment in immigration detention in five separate cases since December 2014.

Despite improvements in the asylum system and significant increases in Greece's protection rates, asylum seekers face serious difficulties in accessing the asylum procedure. According to the Greek Asylum Service, only 10,718 people had applied for asylum in Greece as of the end of October. The authorities have yet to clear the backlog of asylum appeals under the old system operated by the police.

Attacks on migrants and asylum seekers and LGBT people continued, with a network of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) recording more than 460 incidents over the last four years. In October, an Athens court published its written judgment in a 2014 conviction and sentence of life imprisonment for two men for the murder of a Pakistani man. The judgment

clarified that the court found that the murder was racially motivated, the first such case in Greece for a serious offense.

In May, the UN special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism urged Greece to set up efficient mechanisms for victims of racist attacks to seek remedies and ensure their access to justice as well as the due punishment of perpetrators. A law adopted in July introduced residence permits on humanitarian grounds for undocumented victims and witnesses of hate crimes.

In April, the government repealed a health regulation used in 2012 to round up dozens of women alleged to be sex workers who were then forced to take HIV tests. In early February, the new government of Alexis Tsipras announced the end of Operation Xenios Zeus, a police operation that targeted migrants and foreigners. However, the police continued to stop, arbitrarily detain, and harass homeless people and those who use drugs and sell sex, interfering with their ability to access health care and support services.

In a report published in February, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance noted discrimination and police harassment toward LGBT people, notably against transgender persons.

Hungary

Hungary saw an enormous increase in asylum applications in 2015, stressing a flawed and inefficient asylum system. By late August, authorities had registered over 150,000 asylum applications since the start of the year, a tenfold increase compared to 2014.

In response, the government erected a fence along its border with Serbia, completed in September, and erected a fence on its border with Croatia in October. Through legal changes in July and August, authorities also introduced a new border regime, criminalizing irregular entry and establishing Serbia as a "safe third country," thus permitting the quick return of asylum seekers transiting through that country. As of late October, more than 500 people had been convicted of irregular border crossing and placed in immigration detention pending deportation, in most cases to Serbia.

Further changes included an accelerated asylum procedure, which jeopardizes due process rights, and a three-day limit for judicial reviews, which undermines the right to effective remedy. A September law authorized the army's deployment to the border and allowed soldiers to use non-lethal force, including tear gas grenades and rubber bullets, against migrants and asylum seekers.

In September, Hungarian border and counterterrorism police used tear gas and water cannons against asylum seekers protesting the closure of a border point with Serbia, some of them violently. The UN high commissioner for human rights criticized the use of force by police as disproportionate.

Police also beat three international journalists with batons, dragged them from Serbian to Hungarian territory, arrested them for 24 hours, and charged them with irregular border crossing. Charges were later dropped.

During the first part of 2015, the government engaged in an anti-migrant campaign, including a biased questionnaire to Hungarian citizens that linked migration and terrorism in April, and an anti-migrant billboard campaign in May.

The government also continued to restrict media freedom. In January, the CEO of RTL Klub, the independent broadcaster, moved his family abroad and hired bodyguards after being threatened with violence. In July, the Office of Immigration and Nationality denied Hungarian media access

to refugee reception centers, arguing that the presence of journalists could impinge upon the personal rights of asylum seekers.

The Council of Europe's Venice Commission issued an opinion in June on Hungary's media stressing ongoing concerns about vague broadcast content regulation, particularly the ban on criticizing religious or political views and on content that violates privacy rights.

By October 31, 2015, 71 homeless people were charged with misdemeanors under local decrees banning the homeless from residing habitually in public spaces, a significant decrease from 234 reported by end of November 2014. In late January, the High Court annulled sections of a municipal decree that banned the homeless from living in the streets of certain areas of Budapest, effective May 31.

Roma continue to face discrimination and harassment. In May, the Supreme Court ruled that evictions of Roma in 2014 constituted unlawful discrimination. The European Roma Rights Center documented a pattern of police fining Roma for petty offenses, such as lack of bicycle accessories, and sometimes jailing those unable to pay. In September, Hungary's Equal Treatment Authority found the practice discriminatory.

Italy

By the end of November more than 143,000 migrants and asylum seekers had reached Italy by sea. Their main countries of origin were Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Gambia. New asylum applications decreased compared to 2014 because most new arrivals quickly transited out of Italy.

Italy faced ongoing challenges providing accommodation to asylum seekers. As of August, 86,000 asylum seekers were staying in official centers and hundreds of temporary facilities. The government committed to creating 10,000 additional places in special shelters for asylum seekers and refugees. Residents in neighborhoods hosting emergency asylum centers periodically protested, sometimes violently.

An EU-supported screening center – a "hotspot" – began operating in Lampedusa in September, with four more planned to be fully operational by the end of the year. Rights groups reported concerns over triage procedures, with certain nationalities effectively prevented from applying for asylum and ordered to leave the country.

In May, the UN special rapporteur on migrants' rights expressed concerns about access to, and conditions in, asylum centers, as well as inadequate protection for unaccompanied migrant children. According to Save the Children, at least 7,600 unaccompanied children arrived in the first eight months of the year. The UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture conducted a week-long visit in September to assess treatment and conditions of detained migrants.

The ECtHR ruled in July that Italy's failure to provide any kind of legal status to same-sex couples violated the right to privacy and family life. At time of writing, parliament had yet to adopt a long-debated bill to recognize same-sex civil unions.

In September, the ECtHR ruled that the 2011 detention of a group of Tunisians, first in Lampedusa and then on ships, and their subsequent expulsion to Tunisia, violated their rights to liberty and security, to an effective remedy, to protection from inhuman or degrading treatment in detention, and against collective expulsion.

Latvia

Latvia has a large population of stateless people. According to the UNCHR, as of late 2014, more than 12 percent of the country's population is effectively stateless (those referred to by the authorities as "noncitizens"). Despite a 2013 reform to address the status of children who are born and live in Latvia without a nationality, 7,800 children in Latvia were stateless as of early 2015, according to a report by the nongovernmental organizations European Network on Statelessness and Latvian Centre for Human Rights.

Discrimination persists against Russian speakers, particularly in the spheres of employment and education. Latvian non-citizens are barred from occupying certain posts in the civil service and other professions. They also face restrictions on owning land.

State-imposed limits on Russian as a language of instruction in schools continue to impact the quality of education in regions where Russian speakers live. In Latvian public secondary schools, at least 60 percent of the curriculum must be in Latvian.

In 2015, the authorities continued efforts to sanction individuals and organizations, including a museum and a local council member, for alleged failure to use Latvian in professional communications.

In June, the Latvian capital Riga hosted EuroPride 2015, an annual European event celebrating LGBT pride, hosted by a different European city each year. It was the first time EuroPride had been held in a former Soviet state. However, also in June, the Latvian parliament voted to require schools to provide "constitutional morality education" to schoolchildren in line with the constitutional definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

Netherlands

In an April resolution, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe reaffirmed a 2014 decision by the European Committee of Social Rights that the Netherlands must offer decent humanitarian conditions to rejected asylum seekers until they leave the country. That same month, the government announced a "bed, bath, bread agreement" providing temporary shelter at night, a shower, and two meals a day. But the agreement is limited to the five largest municipalities and can be terminated if the person refuses to cooperate with removal from the Netherlands.

In August, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination criticized the government's approach, saying that basic needs of migrants should be provided unconditionally. In November, the Dutch Council of State, the highest administrative court, said the Dutch government is generally entitled to place conditions on the provision of shelter to rejected asylum seekers, such as their cooperation with removal from the Netherlands, other than in exceptional circumstances, such as those related to the person's psychological state.

In June, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted with concern the deportation of children in "vulnerable situations" to their countries of origin, where they may end up in orphanages, and urged the authorities to take measures to prevent such deportations.

In August, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concerns over racial profiling by Dutch police and urged the Netherlands to adopt measures to ensure that stop-and-search powers are not exercised in a discriminatory manner. The committee also expressed concerns over reports that citizens seeking to protest peacefully against portrayals of the traditional "Black Piet" (Zwarte Piet) figure of the Sinterklaas festival have been denied authorization to conduct such protests at a meaningful time and place and have been subjected to violent attacks and other forms of intimidation, which have not been adequately investigated.

In June, the Netherlands paid compensation to relatives of victims of the Srebrenica genocide in 1995 who were forced to leave a UN compound by Dutch peacekeepers. A court in the city of Arnhem ruled in April that a former Dutch commander and his two adjutants would not be prosecuted for complicity in war crimes and genocide at Srebrenica.

In November, the Netherlands ratified the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (known as the Istanbul Convention).

Poland

There was little sign of progress in the Krakow Appellate Prosecutor's longstanding criminal investigation into a secret CIA detention and interrogation program. Following the release of the US Senate torture report, former President Aleksander Kwasniewski acknowledged authorizing a secret CIA detention facility. In February, the ECtHR upheld its decision of July 2014 concerning Poland's complicity in the detention program, and confirmed its order that Poland pay compensation to two former "black site" detainees. In September, a Polish court rejected an application for victim status in the case brought on behalf of a Saudi former detainee at Guantanamo Bay.

In May, the prosecutor general published a report on racist and xenophobic crimes. Despite a significant rise in the number of reported cases, convictions remained low. In June, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance urged Poland to take further measures in addressing racial crimes, hate speech, and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Draft legislation on introducing civil partnership was again rejected by parliament's lower house in August.

Access to reproductive and sexual health rights continued to be restricted, with limited access to legal abortion and comprehensive sex education. In October, the Constitutional Tribunal considered the legality of elements of the "conscience clause," a code allowing medical personnel to decline to provide reproductive health services if that conflicts with their personal values or beliefs. The Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the legal obligation to refer the patient to another medical professional in the event of such a conflict is unconstitutional.

In October, parliament failed to override the president's veto on legislation that would have significantly improved the legal recognition process for transgender people.

In February, parliament enacted a law ratifying the Istanbul Convention. Violence against women remained a serious problem, and continued underreporting of cases limits survivors' access to services and justice.

Spain

Changes to Spain's immigration laws entered into force in April, allowing for summary expulsions from the country's enclaves in North Africa, Ceuta, and Melilla. Access to asylum offices established at the borders remained difficult for many, with Morocco at times closing the border, including to Syrians. An ECtHR challenge to the summary return of migrants from Melilla in 2014 was pending at time of writing.

A Melilla judge closed the cases against eight border guards on charges of degrading treatment, and against the local Guardia Civil chief on charges of obstruction of justice, in relation to use of force to return a group of migrants to Morocco in October 2014.

In April, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture renewed its concerns about prison-like conditions in immigration detention facilities and criticized severe overcrowding in the center for migrants in Melilla.

A revamped criminal code and a new public security law, in effect since July, include provisions that define terrorism offenses in overly broad terms and infringe on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly – including steep fines for spontaneous protests and "lack of respect" for law enforcement officers, and stiffer penalties for resisting authority in the context of a protest. UN experts earlier warned these measures could lead to disproportionate or discretionary enforcement. The new criminal code introduced the crimes of stalking and forced marriage.

In September, parliament passed legislation requiring parental or guardian consent for 16- and 17-year-old girls to receive an abortion, despite protest and UN concerns over interference in the right to privacy and autonomy. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed alarm, in July, at the prevalence of violence against women and urged a series of reforms in legislation and practice.

In July, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concerns about ongoing ethnic profiling by law enforcement bodies, despite some positive legislative reforms, excessive use of force by such bodies, and discrimination against immigrants and minorities, including Roma. The committee renewed its recommendation that Spain abrogate incommunicado detention, as well as the 1977 amnesty law that prevents accountability for torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial executions during the Franco regime.

In September, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights found that Spain violated the right to adequate housing in the case of a woman unable to contest a mortgage foreclosure on her home.

UK

In May, the newly elected government announced that it would propose legislation for a "British Bill of Rights" to replace the Human Rights Act, which incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law. Statements by ministers suggest the new bill could weaken human rights protections.

A committee tasked by the government in December 2013 with conducting an investigation into UK involvement in renditions and overseas torture had yet to report at time of writing. Criminal investigations in UK officials' alleged involvement in several rendition cases involving Libya were ongoing.

In March, parliament passed the Modern Slavery Act with the aim of combating slavery, trafficking, forced labor, and servitude. However, the law fails to adequately address abuse of migrant domestic workers, whose immigration status is tied to their employer. An independent review of the domestic worker visa, commissioned by the government, had yet to report at this writing.

In November, the government proposed a bill that would enshrine broad government surveillance practices in law and expand them further, with only limited judicial involvement. In a June report, the UK's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation called for judicial authorization of interception warrants.

The London Metropolitan Police recorded respective increases of 22 percent and 46.7 percent in anti-Semitic and Islamophobic crimes in London between January and July 2015, as compared with the previous year.

In August, UK forces killed three members of the armed extremist group Islamic State (also known as ISIS) in a drone attack in Syria. Prime Minister David Cameron announced the attack was lawful under international law but refused to publish the legal guidance used to authorize the strike.

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, enacted in February, allows authorities to confiscate passports of persons suspected of intending to travel abroad to participate in terrorism-related activities and to prevent UK citizens suspected of involvement in terrorism-related activities from returning to the UK for up to two years, making them de facto stateless for that period.

In August, the UN Human Rights Committee urged the UK to bring its counterterrorism laws in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In July, the government suspended the "detained fast track," an accelerated procedure for assessing claims that UK authorities consider can be decided "quickly." In June, the Court of Appeal had ordered its suspension after the High Court ruled the procedure was unlawful and structurally unfair for appellants. In November, the Supreme Court refused an application by the government to appeal the June ruling.

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