

Amnesty International Report 2015/16 - The State of the World's Human Rights - Czech Republic

The European Commission continued infringement proceedings against the Czech Republic for discrimination against Roma. The government adopted measures aimed at improving equal access to education. The routine detention of refugees and migrants provoked domestic and international criticism.

Discrimination – Roma

Education

The European Commission continued infringement proceedings against the Czech Republic for discrimination against Roma in education, amounting to a violation of the EU Race Equality Directive, on account of the over-representation of Romani children in schools and classes for pupils with mild mental disabilities, where they represent a third of all pupils. In March, Parliament adopted an amendment to the Schools Act introducing measures to support pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. The amendment will enter into force on 1 September 2016. In May, the Prime Minister dismissed the Minister of Education following Ministry staff's complaints of bullying by the Minister. On 17 June, a new Minister of Education with a record of engagement in human rights was appointed. On 23 September, the government adopted an amendment to the Schools Act that introduced a compulsory year of pre-school education. In September, the Minister of Education announced that the Ministry was considering abolishing the educational programme for pupils with mild mental disabilities.

Housing

In October, a government report on the situation of the Roma minority concluded that about half of the 242,000 Roma in the country met the government's definition of social exclusion. The government presented a Conceptual Framework on Social Housing in October with the aim of improving access to affordable housing for those in need. The Framework envisaged the adoption of a new law on social housing in 2016.

Sexual and reproductive rights

On 1 October, the government rejected a draft law on reparations for Romani women who were forcibly sterilized between 1966 and 2012. The draft, presented by the Minister for Human Rights, aimed to ensure access to remedies for the women, such as monetary compensation, including in cases where they could not access remedies through court proceedings due to the statute of limitations. In a letter to the Prime Minister in October, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights urged the government to adopt the law. The Prime Minister dismissed the recommendation, arguing that it was not necessary.

Racism and xenophobia

Between June and September, hundreds of protesters participated in anti-refugee and migrant demonstrations in the capital, Prague, and other cities. Some protests were countered by refugee rights and anti-racism activists.

Groups supporting refugees faced threats from far-right organizations. In September, stickers featuring a noose and “death to traitors” were placed on the display window and door of the community centre Kašpárek, in the town of Pardubice. The incident happened a few days after the centre organized a food drive and other aid for refugees. Police informed the media that they were investigating the case as a misdemeanour.

Refugees’ and migrants’ rights

The government continued to refuse the relocation of refugees within the EU. In October, the Prime Minister called for the powers of the EU Border Agency, Frontex, to be strengthened, to protect the external borders of the Schengen area. According to opinion polls, 50% of Czech people opposed policies consisting of accepting refugees fleeing armed conflict.

Since the beginning of the year, police routinely checked trains for irregular migrants. Those without valid visas were apprehended and brought to a detention centre while their deportation proceedings were pending. The NGO Organization for Aid to Refugees reported in September that about 700 refugees and migrants, predominantly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, were held in one of the centres, Bělá-Jezová. As the centre only had a capacity of 260 people, a large number of refugees and migrants had to sleep in military tents, a gym and pre-fabricated containers.

In October, the Public Defender of Rights (Ombudsperson) stated that living conditions in the Bělá-Jezová centre amounted to degrading treatment and were worse than in prison. Adults were brought to the premises handcuffed, routinely checked by the police in the evening and accommodated in unhygienic sleeping quarters. Food was distributed by police officers wearing balaclavas and helmets. Refugees and migrants held in the centre were charged for their stay at a rate of €260 per month. In its response on 13 October, the Ministry of Interior ignored these concerns and rejected the Ombudsperson’s recommendation to stop placing families with children in the centre. On 22 October, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights criticized the treatment of migrants and refugees and expressed concern that the government was pursuing detention as a routine policy. The President’s spokesperson said the criticism was part of a campaign against the country. On 17 November, the President attended a demonstration in Prague organized by the anti-Islam group Block Against Islam. In his speech he declared that there are half a million foreigners living in the country with whom “there are no problems... Their culture is fully compatible with European values. It is not a culture of assassins, it is not a culture of religious hatred.”

Torture and other ill-treatment

Patients with mental disabilities continued to be ill-treated in mental health institutions. In March, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture called for an end to the practice of police officers restraining agitated patients in psychiatric hospitals; expressed concerns over the use of net beds as a protective measure or means of restraint, often for excessive duration; and reiterated its call to withdraw them from psychiatric hospitals and to use more suitable means, such as bordered beds, for patients in need of protective measures.

Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people

In November, a district court in Prostějov recognized an adoption order which had been issued for a gay couple by a district court in California in 2007. The Czech-French couple permanently living in the USA applied for the recognition to move to the Czech Republic and continue enjoying the right to family life. The Prostějov court held that recognition of the adoption was in the best interests of the children despite the lack of legislative provision allowing adoption by same-sex couples.

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