

The State of the World's Human Rights; Croatia 2023

Refugees' and migrants' rights

According to the authorities, the number of people trying to enter Croatia through neighbouring countries increased by 70% compared with 2022, with over 65,000 recorded entries by November. Aid organizations continued to document violations against refugees and migrants, including illegal summary returns, physical violence, humiliation and theft by law-enforcement officials.

In October, the CERD Committee urged Croatia to cease collective expulsions and pushbacks, and investigate incidents of excessive use of force against refugees and migrants.

Freedom of expression

Journalists investigating organized crime and corruption continued to face harassment, including strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). According to a survey by the Croatian Journalists' Association, there were at least 945 SLAPPs against editors and journalists, mostly filed by public officials. Defamation remained a criminal offence. In December, the government adopted the National Plan on Culture and Media Development 2023-2027, which included concrete measures to facilitate early detection and dismissal of SLAPPs.

In July, the Ministry of Culture and Media proposed a draft media law, which, among other things, would allow publishers and editors to refuse to publish a journalist's reports without explanation, and would require journalists to reveal their sources. The Croatian Journalists' Association argued that the law would seriously undermine journalistic freedom and encourage media censorship. The International Federation of Journalists urged the government to "rethink" the proposal.

Sexual and reproductive rights

Widespread refusal by individual doctors and clinics to perform abortions on grounds of conscience, and the prohibitive cost of the procedure and medicines, continued to restrict access to abortion services. Abortion remained particularly inaccessible in rural and economically deprived areas.

Violence against women and girls

Domestic violence remained rife. In September, the government announced a range of measures to address violence against women. These included amendments to the criminal code to classify femicide as a separate criminal offence and impose longer sentences for rape, among other measures aiming to strengthen victims' rights. Women's groups welcomed the measures and urged the government to adopt a comprehensive national plan to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women in line with the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

In September, the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence praised steps taken to stop domestic violence, but urged the authorities to

do more, including implementing comprehensive policies to address all forms of violence against women and increase the number of shelters and other support for victims.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

Women victims of wartime rape faced numerous barriers when applying for the status of civilian victims of sexual violence during the war, which guaranteed certain welfare benefits. According to civil rights organizations, victims had to provide excessive and difficult to obtain documentation and witness testimonies, while some applicants were wrongfully rejected because they were suspected of being related to members of the Serb military or the perpetrator was a member of the Croatian forces.

The CERD Committee expressed concern that some provisions of the Law on Civilian Victims of War were being interpreted in a discriminatory way against members of the Serb ethnic minority group and prevented them from exercising their rights as victims of war.

Discrimination

LGBTI people

Over 10,000 people gathered in Zagreb in June to participate in the biggest annual Pride march to date. The march took place without incident, but in the weeks beforehand, LGBTI people faced widespread discriminatory speech, threats and harassment, both in public spaces and on social media platforms.

Conservative groups proposed an initiative to hold a referendum to constitutionally define marriage as a lifelong union between a woman and a man, which would rule out the possibility of legalizing same-sex marriage.

Roma, Serbs and ethnic minorities

Roma continued to face extreme poverty and live in substandard conditions in segregated neighbourhoods and informal settlements without proper infrastructure.

In October, the CERD Committee expressed concern about reports of racial discrimination against members of Roma and Serb minorities, particularly in employment and education, as well as the prevalence of discriminatory speech against minority groups and non-citizens, including by politicians and other public figures.

Right to a healthy environment

Despite the recent expansion of and a good potential for renewables, Croatia's energy consumption remained dominated by fossil fuels. Nevertheless, Croatia's 2030 target of 36.4% for renewables was ambitious and above the EU goal of 32%.