

# **The State of the World's Human Rights; Italy 2024**

There were new reports of torture by prison officers. Violence against women continued at an alarmingly high level. Racialized and LGBTI people continued to experience racism and discrimination, including by state officials. Italy attempted to send asylum seekers rescued at sea to Albania, to have their claim examined outside of the country. Police used excessive and unnecessary force against protesters on multiple occasions and limited people's right to freedom of peaceful assembly. About 10% of the population lived in absolute poverty. Barriers to abortion persisted. Human-induced climate change caused an extreme heatwave in July.

## **Torture and other ill-treatment**

Thousands of detainees endured substandard conditions in overcrowded and dilapidated cells. There was concern that such conditions contributed to the rising number of suicides among detainees, numbering 83 as of 20 December.

Conditions in migrant repatriation centres also failed to meet international standards, with people held in bare cages with concrete furniture, inadequate hygiene facilities and lacking meaningful activities.

In April, prosecutors revealed that 13 prison officers had been arrested and eight suspended on allegations of torture and other violations against children in Milan juvenile prison. Two former prison directors were also being investigated for failure to prevent and report the abuses, which spanned years.

## **Violence against women and girls**

There were 95 killings of women in domestic violence incidents, with 59 killed by their partners or former partners.

In February, the CEDAW Committee expressed concern at the "high prevalence of gender-based violence against women" and its under-reporting. It also noted that the definition of rape was not consent based.

## **Discrimination**

Two international bodies, the UN International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in the Context of Law Enforcement, and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), published reports in September and October respectively, describing how Roma, Africans and people of African descent, migrants and LGBTI people continued to be subjected to racism and discrimination, including by state officials.

Both bodies lamented the systemic practice of racial profiling by law enforcement officials, with the UN mechanism noting that law enforcement was tainted by a "pervasive presumption of criminality" towards Africans and persons of African descent. ECRI was concerned about xenophobic, homophobic and transphobic speech, including from politicians and public officials.

In May, the European Committee of Social Rights found that Italy had violated the European Social Charter with respect to the right to housing of Roma, who continued to experience discrimination in accessing adequate housing, faced forced evictions and lived in segregated and substandard conditions.<sup>1</sup>

## Refugees' and migrants' rights

Some 1,700 people died at sea along the central Mediterranean route, while trying to reach Europe. Most had departed from Libya and Tunisia.

In July, prosecutors indicted six customs police and coastguard officers for failing to prevent a shipwreck near Steccato di Cutro, Calabria, in February 2023, when at least 94 people, including 34 children, drowned in Italian territorial waters. The inquiry indicated that a decision by the Ministry of the Interior in 2019 to deploy rescue assets less promptly to boats of refugees and migrants approaching Italian coasts might have contributed to the preventable loss of life.

In April, Amnesty International visited the repatriation centres in Ponte Galeria in the capital, Rome, and Pian del Lago in Caltanissetta, and found that some asylum seekers and migrants were subjected to unlawful administrative detention, leading to concerns that similar violations might occur in other centres.<sup>2</sup>

The accelerated border procedures introduced in 2023 to examine asylum applications from people coming from countries regarded by Italy as “safe” continued to be challenged in the courts.

## Cooperation with Albania, Libya and Tunisia

In October, Italy started to implement the 2023 protocol with Albania, aimed at processing asylum claims by people from countries deemed “safe” in extraterritorial detention centres in Albania. Twenty-four men rescued at sea by the Italian navy were taken to Albania, where they had their asylum claims rejected in under 48 hours. However, a court in Rome declined to validate the detention orders, arguing that the asylum seekers’ countries of origin could not be regarded as “safe” and requiring Italy to allow the men into Italian territory and release them. An EU Court of Justice ruling on the matter was pending at year’s end. The government tried to discredit the judges who did not validate the detention orders, undermining their independence.<sup>3</sup>

Italy continued to support Libya to contain people in that country, despite evidence of serious human rights violations against refugees and migrants there. Italy’s assistance to Tunisia to establish its search and rescue region raised concerns that it would lead to further interceptions and disembarkations in Tunisia of people at risk of persecution there.

In June, the Civil Tribunal of Rome ordered Italy to pay reparations of EUR 15,000 each, and grant the right to enter Italy, to the survivors of an unlawful return by boat to Libya in 2018.

## Criminalization of solidarity

In April, the Trapani Tribunal acquitted all defendants and dismissed the case against the crews of the *Iuventa* and other NGO rescue ships for facilitating irregular migration. The court stressed that the *Iuventa* crew acted to save lives under the direction of Italian authorities.

In May, three UN special procedures raised concern about Italy’s restrictions on the activities of human rights defenders rescuing lives at sea. Nevertheless, Italy continued to obstruct their life-saving work. In September, the authorities instructed the Médecins Sans Frontières rescue ship *Geo Barents* to disembark people in Genoa rather than in the closest safe port. They also halted the

ship's operations for 60 days for, in their view, not cooperating with Libyan authorities and alleged technical breaches.

## **Freedom of peaceful assembly**

In January, parliament criminalized the defacing or damaging of heritage buildings and artefacts during demonstrations. There was concern the law would lead to excessive restrictions on the right to peaceful protest.

A security bill including draconian provisions restricting the right to peaceful assembly was debated by parliament. In December, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights called on parliament to substantially amend the bill to ensure compliance with human rights standards.

Police used excessive and unnecessary force against protesters on numerous occasions. In February, police unlawfully used batons against students protesting in Pisa in solidarity with Palestinians, injuring 15 people, 11 of them children. An investigation into the actions of 10 police officers was ongoing.

The authorities banned a protest in solidarity with Palestinians on 5 October in Rome. The ban was partially lifted on the day, but other restrictions on freedom of movement were applied. <sup>4</sup>

In February, the Milan Tribunal acquitted eight climate activists accused of obstructing traffic and defacing public property during a protest in 2021, highlighting the protesters' motives, which were to ensure that governments act on climate change.

## **Economic, social and cultural rights**

In October, the National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) revealed that in 2023 nearly 10% of the population (2.2 million families or 5.7 million individuals) was living in absolute poverty. Families comprising at least one foreign national were disproportionately affected, representing over 30% of those in absolute poverty.

Insufficient investment in the national health service led to growing inequalities in the enjoyment of the right to health. Data published in April by ISTAT showed that in 2023 economic reasons and the length of waiting lists were among barriers leading 4.5 million people to decline medical appointments, undermining accessibility and affordability of healthcare. In February, the CEDAW Committee expressed concern about regional disparities and inequalities in access to basic health services due to social and economic status, gender and geographical location.

## **Sexual and reproductive rights**

Barriers persisted to access to abortion, including the high number of doctors and other healthcare providers refusing to provide abortion care.

In April, in an amendment to an unrelated law, parliament allowed anti-abortion groups to operate inside family health centres providing abortion care.

## **Right to a healthy environment**

In July, Italy reviewed its National Energy and Climate Plan retrogressively, delaying coal phase-out from 2025 to 2030.

Also in July, Italy experienced an extreme heatwave, which scientists attributed to human-induced climate change. The extreme drought conditions in Sardinia and Sicily, which lasted for months and culminated in May, were also rendered significantly more severe by climate change. According to a study by World Weather Attribution, people's livelihoods in Sicily were severely affected by the catastrophic economic impact of the drought.

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