

people and sex workers, and included a ban on gay pride events. The draft legislation also included a provision requiring the government to establish a “social reintegration” policy for LGBTI people who voluntarily abandoned their homosexuality.

ERITREA

State of Eritrea

Head of state and government: **Isaias Afwerki**

The whereabouts of government critics and pro-democracy leaders who had been arbitrarily detained since 2001 remained unknown. The authorities continued to violate the rights to freedom of expression, religion and freedom of movement. Prisoners were denied their rights to health. Thousands continued to flee abroad as the repression and indefinite military conscription continued, even after Eritrea restored relations with its former arch-enemy Ethiopia.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

There continued to be no independent press since the authorities banned all non-state media in 2001. In 2020, the Committee to Protect Journalists found Eritrea was the most censored country in the world and had more journalists in prison than any other country.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Hundreds of politicians, religious leaders, journalists and other government critics – some held for more than a decade without charge or trial – remained in arbitrary detention and continued to be denied access to their families and lawyers. The whereabouts and fate of 11 high-profile politicians and 17 journalists who criticized President Afwerki’s rule in 2001 remained unknown at the end of the year.

Former Finance Minister Berhane Abrehe remained in prison since his arrest in the

capital Asmara in 2018. No charges had been brought against him by the end of the year. He was arrested after he had published a book calling for democratic reform and was subjected to enforced disappearance.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

Prisons and detention centres

Prisons and detention centres remained chronically overcrowded with unsanitary living conditions.¹ Adi Abeto prison, north of Asmara, held about 2,500 inmates despite having capacity for only 800. The Mai Serwa Asmara Flowers detention camp near Asmara, where many Jehovah’s Witnesses were held, had no toilets for an estimated 700 detainees, and men and women inmates had to relieve themselves in the open. The Mai Serwa Maximum Security prison, close to Asmara, had only 20 toilets for 500 detainees.

Prisons and detention facilities did not provide detainees with adequate water, food and hygiene products such as soap. Many detainees in Mai Serwa Maximum Security prison, Mai Serwa Asmara Flowers detention facility and the all-male Ala prison, near Asmara, relied on their families for supplementing the meagre food that was provided to them. On 2 April, the authorities imposed a lockdown on prisons to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases. No visitors were allowed in, cutting off necessary supplies from relatives, and putting detainees at even greater risk of malnutrition and disease.

FORCED LABOUR

Conscripts to the mandatory national service programme continued to be forced to serve for indefinite periods extending far beyond the legal limit of 18 months. There was no provision for conscientious objection and thousands remained in open-ended conscription, many of them having already served for decades. The government continued to send final-year high-school students to Sawa Defence Training Centre and made no commitment to release them

from national service after they had served 18 months.

Conscripts earned ERN800 (approximately US\$53) a month which was not enough to cover basic needs. The government used them to work on infrastructure projects such as irrigation, roads and agriculture. Working conditions could be degrading and inhumane, and in some cases amounted to torture.

At the Mai Serwa Asmara Flowers detention facility, which in reality is a forced labour camp, Jehovah's Witnesses and other detainees were forced to work on the nearby flower farms.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

The right to leave the country remained severely restricted and people were prevented from travelling abroad without government permission.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Thousands of Eritreans continued to flee the country, primarily to avoid indefinite national service, and sought asylum in other countries. According to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, 9,463 asylum-seekers from Eritrea crossed the border into Ethiopia during the first quarter of the year. After April, there was a marked reduction in the number of new arrivals in Ethiopia, due to COVID-19 restrictions on the movement of people.

Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers continued to face serious human rights abuses as they made their way to Europe, including in transit countries, particularly Libya, where many were subjected to detention, abduction, sexual abuse, and torture and other ill-treatment.

1. Eritrea: Detainees in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions defenceless against COVID-19 (Press release, 21 May)

ESTONIA

Republic of Estonia

Head of state: **Kersti Kaljulaid**

Head of government: **Jüri Ratas**

The number of stateless individuals remained high; ethnic minorities continued to face discrimination. Legislative developments to improve LGBTI rights slowed. A government minister attempted to limit funding to NGOs working on equality and gender issues.

BACKGROUND

In March, the government invoked Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights, enabling partial restriction of several freedoms, including freedom of assembly, for the two-month emergency period in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

In May, amendments to the Aliens Act gave police and border guards the right to annul the visa or visa-free period of all non-Estonian nationals if they had lost employment, including as a result of COVID-19.

Five of the 15 ministerial posts in government continued to be held by the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) who spoke out against immigration and LGBTI rights.

DISCRIMINATION

In January, Parliament amended the Citizenship Act, easing children's access to citizenship in cases where at least one of their parents was effectively stateless and the other a citizen of another country. Consequently, 1,500 minors were granted citizenship. However, some 71,000 people, approximately 5.3% of the population, remained stateless. The European Commission noted that Estonia's citizenship policy "continued to be conservative".

Non-Estonian speaking minorities, albeit with residency rights, continued to face discrimination in a range of areas, including employment, housing, education and health