

# GUINEA-BISSAU 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Guinea-Bissau is a multiparty republic. Presidential elections held in November 2019 resulted in two finalists: Umaro Sissoco Embaló and Domingos Simões Pereira. Sissoco assumed the presidency in February 2020, following elections that the international community judged largely free and fair. Sissoco's inauguration caused controversy because it occurred before the Supreme Court had ruled on a legal protest filed by the opposition. On May 16, Sissoco dissolved the government and announced that national legislative elections would be held on December 18. Ruling and opposition party leaders later agreed to delay the elections, tentatively scheduled for June 2023.

National police forces maintain internal security. The Judicial Police, under the Ministry of Justice, has primary responsibility for investigating drug trafficking, terrorism, and other transnational crimes. The Public Order Police, under the Ministry of Interior, is responsible for maintenance of law and order. Other police forces include the State Information Service (intelligence), Border Police (migration and border enforcement), Rapid Intervention Police, and Maritime Police. The armed forces have some internal security responsibilities and may be called upon to assist police in emergencies. Civilian authorities at times did not maintain control over the security forces. There were reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

On February 1, armed assailants attacked the central government administrative center and took President Sissoco and some members of his cabinet hostage for several hours. Eleven persons were killed during the attack, and while some alleged perpetrators were reportedly incarcerated and awaiting trial, the attackers' motive remained unknown.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy;

serious restrictions on free expression and media, including violence against journalists; serious government corruption; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence; and trafficking in persons.

The government had mechanisms to investigate and punish officials who committed human rights abuses or engaged in corruption, but impunity remained a problem.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses**

The constitution and law prohibit such practices, but the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Guinea-Bissau Human Rights League (GBHRL) reported at least 10 individuals were subjected to torture or arbitrary physical abuse while detained. On February 26, government forces reportedly raided a conference of the opposition African Party for the Independence of Guinea Cape Verde (PAIGC), beating several attendees and causing physical damage to the building (see section 3).

The GBHRL criticized the public prosecutor's office for failing to prosecute public officials accused of participation in violent attacks against media and civil society. While there were mechanisms in place to investigate and prosecute reports of human rights abuses and corruption, the GBHRL alleged the public prosecutor's office permitted a culture of impunity to exist in the country. There were no reports of government action such as training to increase respect for human rights

by the security forces.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison conditions varied widely but were generally poor. In the makeshift detention facilities for pretrial detainees, conditions were crowded and unsanitary.

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** Conditions were poor. Except in the prisons in Bafata and Mansoa, electricity, potable water, and space were inadequate. Pretrial detention facilities generally lacked secure cells, running water, adequate heating, ventilation, lighting, and sanitation. Detainees' diets were meager, and medical care was virtually nonexistent. At the pretrial detention center in Bissau, detainees relied on their families for food. Officials held pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners and juveniles with adults. There were no reported deaths in detention centers, but the GBHRL stated it was aware of approximately two dozen cases of detainees becoming ill due to unsanitary conditions in detention centers.

**Administration:** There was no prison ombudsperson to respond to prisoners' complaints or independent authorities to investigate credible allegations of inhuman conditions. In 2018, the National Commission for Human Rights recommended the closure of four pretrial detention centers (Cacine, Catio, Bigene, and Bissora) due to inhuman conditions, but they remained in use during the year.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government permitted independent monitoring of detention conditions by local and international human rights groups.

### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, but the government did not always observe these prohibitions. Detainees may challenge the lawfulness of detention before a court through an appeals process and obtain prompt release as well as compensation if found to have been unlawfully detained.

### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

The law requires arrest warrants, although warrantless arrests occurred, particularly of immigrants suspected of crimes. By law detainees must be brought before a magistrate within 48 hours of arrest and released if no indictment is filed, but this

standard was not always met. Authorities were obligated to inform detainees of charges against them, but they did not always do so. The law provides for the right to counsel at state expense for indigent clients; lawyers did not receive compensation for their part-time public defense work and often ignored state directives to represent indigent clients. There was a functioning bail system. Pretrial detainees had prompt access to family members. Authorities usually held civilian suspects under house arrest.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** Following the February 1 attack on the government administrative center in Bissau, media and the GBHRL reported that individuals were detained without charge for extended periods. The GBHRL estimated that 30 individuals were still being held without charge at a military base in Bissau as of year's end.

### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, but the judiciary was subject to political manipulation. Judges were inadequately trained, irregularly paid, and subject to corruption. A lack of resources and infrastructure often delayed trials, and convictions were rare. Authorities respected court orders, however.

### **Trial Procedures**

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but the independent judiciary did not always enforce this right. The court system did not often provide fair trials, and corrupt judges sometimes worked in concert with police. Cases were sometimes delayed without explanation, and occasionally fines were directly taken out of defendants' bank accounts without their knowledge. Defendants generally had adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense; however, most cases never came to trial.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

## **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

Individuals may seek civil remedies for human rights abuses; however, there was no specific administrative mechanism to address human rights abuses.

### **f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The constitution and law prohibit such actions but, following the February 1 attack on the government administrative center, some civil society activists and NGO representatives reported having their homes invaded at night by individuals dressed in police or military uniforms. The individuals targeted in the raids suspected their homes had been raided and ransacked as a means of intimidation. On November 29, a lawyer representing defendants accused of participation in the February 1 attack was reportedly beaten by masked assailants who forcibly entered his home. The perpetrators of the crime were not apprehended or identified, but the targeted individual claimed the attack was related to his participation in the case.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech, including for members of the press and other media; however, the government did not always respect this right. Media watchdogs reported multiple acts of intimidation against media, including state-owned media outlets.

**Violence and Harassment:** The government took insufficient steps to preserve the safety and independence of media or to prosecute individuals who threatened journalists. Intimidation and harassment of journalist and media outlets remained a problem during the year.

On February 7, unidentified armed assailants attacked the Capital FM radio station in Bissau, one of the country's most prominent radio outlets. Seven individuals, including three journalists, were reportedly injured. Individuals present at the scene said the assailants were wearing military uniforms and used military-grade

weapons. The assailants reportedly fired live rounds into the façade of the home of one of the journalists and also lobbed tear gas containers into his yard.

On April 12, the government issued a decree threatening privately owned radio stations with closure, fines, and even incarceration if the stations failed to pay an annual licensing fee of CFA francs 230,000 (\$380). Local private radio stations viewed the fee as excessive, since they struggled to bring in sufficient revenue to cover salaries and operational expenses. A journalist association alleged the government sought to use imposition of the fee as a means to close private radio stations.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media:** In December, the government announced annual licensing fees would be mandatory for all media outlets to operate in the country. Journalists and media advocacy organizations denounced the fees as exorbitant and as an attempt by the government to close independent media outlets.

### **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored online communications without appropriate legal authority.

### **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The constitution and law provide for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

### **d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

## **e. Protection of Refugees**

The government, through the National Coordinator for the Assistance of Refugees and Displaced Persons (CNRD), cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and provided protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provides for granting of asylum or refugee status. UNHCR closed its office in the country in March, so during the remainder of the year the CNRD was responsible for issuing and renewing any expired refugee cards as well as providing all refugee assistance. The CNRD had limited capacity to identify asylum seekers and individuals in need of protection in many regions of the country.

**Durable Solutions:** The country continued to host thousands of individuals from Senegal's Casamance region who in recent decades migrated and settled long-term in the country. Many of these residents maintained ethnic and family ties in both countries and traveled across the often-unmarked international border, rendering the nationality and status of many individuals in the area unclear. After an extensive process interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR reported that since the beginning of 2021, more than 4,900 refugees received Guinea-Bissau naturalization and identification documents.

## **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** The last national presidential election took place in November 2019. The top two finishers from the first round, Domingos Simoes Pereira and Umaro Sissoco Embaló, met in a runoff election in December 2019. The National Election Commission declared Sissoco the winner. International observers characterized the election as free, fair, and transparent. The opposition PAIGC party appealed, disputing the fairness and accuracy of the results. An institutional stalemate ensued, as the Supreme Court of Justice did not ratify the electoral

results despite the National Election Commission declaring Sissoco the winner. Sissoco assumed the presidency in 2020 after an unofficial inauguration and transfer of power from the previous president, Jose Mario Vaz. Later in 2020 the Supreme Court of Justice dismissed the opposition's appeal disputing the election results.

**Political Parties and Political Participation:** The largest opposition party, the PAIGC, criticized the government for blocking its annual conference on three separate occasions. On February 26, government forces reportedly used violence to break up a PAIGC conference (see section 1.c.). On May 8, parliamentarian Agnelo Regala was shot in the leg while leaving his home. Regala claimed the attack was an attempt by the government to kill him in retaliation for his criticism of President Sissoco. The perpetrators of the attack remained at large. Domingos Simoes Pereira and Aristedes Gomes, prominent members of the PAIGC, alleged the government blocked them from departing the country for legally spurious reasons. The government claimed both individuals were subject to pending legal cases that prevented them from leaving the country. Both individuals were eventually permitted to leave the country. Membership in the ruling party conveyed advantages such as greater access to civil service jobs and government contracts.

**Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups:** No laws limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Some observers believed views regarding traditional gender roles in some parts of the country, particularly in rural areas, may have limited the political participation of women compared to men.

## **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties of one month to 10 years in prison for corruption by officials. The government did not implement the law effectively, and officials in all branches and on all levels of government engaged in corrupt and nontransparent practices with impunity. There were numerous reports of government corruption during the year.



**Corruption:** Members of the military and civilian administration reportedly trafficked in drugs and assisted international drug cartels by providing access to the country and its transportation infrastructure. Antonio Indjai, the former head of the armed forces, continued to circulate freely in the country. A fugitive still subject to a 2012 UN travel ban for his involvement in a successful 2012 coup d'état, Indjai reportedly retained influence within the military.

The government arrested two officials during the year for suspected involvement in drug trafficking, but these individuals have not yet faced trial.

On March 31, Seidi Ba, a private citizen reportedly well-connected to several government agencies, was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment for drug trafficking, but subsequently was reported to be circulating freely in Bissau surrounded by armed bodyguards.

In July, the country's top court overturned the convictions of two alleged drug traffickers who had been sentenced in 2020 to 16 years in prison. The two were linked to a stash of almost two tons of cocaine that authorities seized in 2019, the largest-ever seizure of cocaine in the country's history. The overturning of these convictions raised suspicions among domestic and international observers that untoward influences on the judiciary were behind the court's decision.

## **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

Several domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The National Commission on Human Rights is a government human rights organization. It was independent but remained ineffective.

## Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

### Women

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law prohibits rape of women and men, including spousal rape, and provides penalties for conviction of two to 12 years in prison; however, the government did not always effectively enforce the law. The law permits prosecution of rape only when reported by the survivor, which observers noted was rare due to survivors' fear of social stigma and retribution.

Although the law prohibits domestic violence, such abuse was thought to be widespread, based on media reports of specific cases of domestic violence as well as input from civil society organizations working to combat domestic violence. The government did not undertake specific measures to counter social pressure against reporting domestic violence, rape, incest, and other mistreatment of women.

Cases of domestic violence and child abuse were commonly resolved within the household. Limited access to institutions of justice also contributed to the preference for customary law as a way of solving societal problems. Recourse to the formal justice system was poorly understood, expensive, and seldom used.

**Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C):** The law prohibits FGM/C for females of all ages. FGM/C, however, was practiced on girls younger than age five. Conviction for its practice is punishable by a fine and five years in prison. A 2021 study by UNICEF found that approximately 52 percent of local women between 15 and 49 years of age were survivors of FGM/C and that FGM/C was practiced most often on girls younger than age five.

UNICEF further concluded that the rate of FGM/C remained unchanged for the past four decades. The anti-FGM/C NGO 28 TooMany stated that in some parts of the country, the figure was as high as 95 percent. The Joint Program on FGM/C of the UN Population Fund and UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Justice to strengthen the dissemination and application of the law by building the capacities of officials responsible for program implementation.

UNICEF reported that FGM/C led to increased rates of maternal morbidity, genital

infections, urinary incontinence, increased infertility, and an increased risk of HIV transmission.

**Sexual Harassment:** No law prohibits sexual harassment, and it was thought to be widespread. The government undertook no initiatives to combat the problem.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

The UN Population Fund reported that 114 health centers offered family planning services but that the availability of birth control services offered varied from center to center. The 2018-19 UNICEF *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey* reported that 20.2 percent of girls and women between the ages of 15 and 49 used a modern method of contraception. Certain religious groups discouraged use of modern contraception. Two NGOs provided emergency contraception kits at public health clinics.

The *World Health Statistics 2020* report estimated skilled health personnel attended 45 percent of births and that 55.7 percent of women of reproductive age had access to modern methods of family planning. The health system's capacity for obstetric care was insufficient, and emergency care was available only in Bissau. The adolescent birth rate was 103 per 1,000 girls between the ages of 15 and 19. There was no information on government assistance to survivors of sexual assault, including the availability of emergency contraception.

According to UN estimates, the maternal mortality rate was 667 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020, and the lifetime risk of maternal death was one in 160. Major factors causing high maternal mortality were poor health infrastructure and service delivery as well as high rates of adolescent pregnancy. Some girls were not able to attend school due to pregnancy or inadequate access to menstruation hygiene products.

**Discrimination:** The constitution grants men and women equal rights. Gender discrimination, however, prevailed due to societal norms based on traditional customs and rules of ethnic groups and religious communities that perpetuated inequalities. The land-tenure law recognizes equal rights for men and women to access the land, yet it also recognizes the customary law that favors men as a way

of acquiring tenure rights. There were legal restrictions to women's employment in the same occupations and industries as men (see section 7.d.).

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The constitution and law protect members of racial or ethnic minorities or groups against violence and discrimination; however, the government did not enforce the laws effectively.

## **Children**

**Birth Registration:** Citizenship is derived by birth within the country or from citizen parents. Birth registration does not occur automatically at hospitals; parents must register births with a notary. Lack of registration resulted in denial of public services, including education.

UNICEF estimated that only 24 percent of births were officially registered. A lack of access to official birth registration could have significant discriminatory effects against children from vulnerable families, complicating the process for obtaining government benefits, health care, and educational enrollment.

**Education:** Most school-age children frequently remained at home during at least part of the year due to teacher strikes, primarily over the government's failure to pay salaries. There was no significant difference between boys and girls in school enrollment.

**Child Abuse:** There are no specific laws regarding child abuse. Violence against children was thought to occur but was seldom reported to authorities. The country had no state shelters for child survivors of violence. A regulatory framework was in place to allow for alternative housing arrangements for child survivors of violence, including privately funded shelters, orphanages, and host family habitation.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The legal minimum age of marriage is 16 for all individuals. Child, early, and forced marriage occurred among all ethnic groups. Girls who fled arranged marriages often were subsequently exploited in sex trafficking. The buying and selling of child brides also occurred. There were

no government efforts to mitigate these problems. According to UNICEF, 6 percent of all girls were married by age 15, and 24 percent by age 18. The Association of Friends of Children (AMIC), a national NGO that advocated for the rights of children, stated that from January to August it rescued 25 girls who were survivors of forced marriage.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The minimum age for consensual sex is 18 for both boys and girls. The law prohibits sex with a person younger than age 16. The law carries a penalty for conviction of statutory rape of two to 12 years in prison. The law also prohibits child pornography, and authorities enforced the law. The law criminalizes commercial sexual exploitation of children, including for sex trafficking, and prescribes penalties of three to 15 years' imprisonment and the confiscation of any proceeds from the crime. When pedophilia and sexual harassment were reported, police at times blamed survivors.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

**Displaced Children:** The national NGO AMIC estimated up to 500 children, mostly from neighboring Guinea, lived on the streets of urban centers including Bissau, Bafata, and Gabu. Several NGOs focused on combating trafficking in persons stated the number of children forced to beg on the streets of Bissau increased substantially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Anecdotal evidence confirmed the presence of children begging at many of the city's large intersections. On September 15, the government announced that it had identified and removed 20 children being held in squalid conditions at a Quranic school in the southern part of the country.

## **Antisemitism**

There were small communities of Jews in the country and no reports of antisemitic acts.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics**

**Criminalization:** No laws criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults or so-called cross-dressing. No seemingly neutral laws, such as laws on immorality or loitering, were disproportionately applied to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons to justify arbitrary arrest.

**Violence Against LGBTQI+ Persons:** Civil society activists reported acts of violence against LGBTQI+ persons. Although violence against LGBTQI+ persons was neither reported to be widespread nor publicly supported by the government or society, at least one LGBTQI+ individual alleged that police did not assist him after he reported being beaten. There was no information on if or how the police were disciplined for their inaction.

**Discrimination:** No antidiscrimination laws apply specifically to LGBTQI+ persons, but the government officially opposed discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons. While most LGBTQI+ persons did not face legal barriers to accessing housing, health care, education, and employment, LGBTQI+ activists reported LGBTQI+ identity was seen in the culturally conservative eastern regions of the country as socially unacceptable and could result in denial of employment or housing by private individuals.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** There was no procedure in place to allow legal gender recognition for official documents.

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals:** Involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices were not reported to be widespread, nor were they encouraged or supported by the government.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:** There were no restrictions on freedom of expression, association, or peaceful assembly for LGBTQI+ persons. An LGBTQI+ advocacy organization reported

hosting an annual LGBTQI+ festival prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities could not access education, health service, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. The law does not specifically prohibit discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities. The government did not counter discrimination against persons with disabilities or provide access for them to buildings, information, and communications. The government did not provide communication and information on disability concerns in accessible formats. There was discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment and occupation (see section 7.d.). The government made some efforts to assist military veterans with disabilities through pension programs, but these did not adequately address health care, housing, or food needs. Provisions existed to allow voters with disabilities and illiterate voters to participate in the electoral process, but voters with proven severe intellectual disabilities could be prohibited from voting.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provides the freedom to form and join independent unions without prior authorization. The law excludes the military and police and does not fully cover other public-sector officials, agricultural workers, dock workers, or workers in the informal economy.

The law provides for the right to strike, but workers must give 72-hour prior notice. The law also prohibits retaliation against strikers and does not exclude any group of workers from relevant legal protections. Many sectors of the economy were on strike at some time during the year, typically because of low salaries. Workers in the education, health, and public sectors went on strike during the year. Public-sector workers demanding an increase in the minimum wage carried out weekly strikes during the year.

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without government interference. Laws on unions provide protection only for trade union delegates, while the

constitution provides for workers' rights to free speech and assembly. The law prohibits employer discrimination against official trade union representatives. The law requires reinstatement of workers terminated for union activity. The law does not apply to domestic workers.

Authorities generally respected freedom of association in the formal sector. Worker organizations were not independent of government and political parties, employers, or employer associations, which sometimes sought to influence union decisions and actions.

Penalties were not commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights. In 2021, the International Labor Organization (ILO) observed that statutory penalties for antiunion activity were insufficient to deter such activities. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

### **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but the government did not effectively enforce the laws. The government did not use these or other relevant laws to prosecute cases of forced labor. Forced child labor occurred.

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

### **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>.

### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, social status, intellectual or cultural belief, and religious identity. The constitution also provides that men and women are equal before the law in all aspects of political, economic, social, and cultural life.



Women faced considerable pay gaps and were less likely to be hired than men. There were legal restrictions to women's working hours and employment in occupations and tasks deemed dangerous, jobs in the mining industry, and other work popularly considered inappropriate for women, including construction and heavy industry. LGBTQI+ persons reportedly faced discrimination in hiring, and persons with disabilities faced discrimination in hiring and access to the workplace. The law does not provide for penalties, and there were no reports of enforcement.

## **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The Council of Ministers annually establishes minimum wage rates for different categories of work but continued to rely on a wage establishment mechanism that the ILO stated was outdated. The law provides for a maximum 45-hour workweek and provisions for overtime pay.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** In cooperation with unions, the Ministries of Justice and Labor established the country's first legal occupational safety and health (OSH) standards for workers in 2021, but they did not have the force of law or regulation because the National Assembly did not adopt them into law by year's end. The standards were up-to-date and appropriate for the main industries. Workers do not have the right to remove themselves from unsafe working conditions without jeopardizing their employment.

There is no official count of workplace accidents in the country, but there were numerous unofficial reports of workplace accidents.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The Labor Ministry inspector general is responsible for enforcing the law but did not do so effectively. The number of labor inspectors was insufficient to detect and deter violations, and they lacked authority to carry out unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. Penalties, which usually take the form of minimal fines that have not been adjusted for inflation, were not commensurate with those for similar crimes. Many persons worked under conditions that endangered their health and safety. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators.

**Informal Sector:** Wage and OSH regulations were not enforced in the informal

sector, which accounted for approximately 80 percent of workers.