

Central African Republic 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

A new constitution was approved by voters via a July 30 referendum, for which the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic, Wagner Group, and Rwandan bilateral forces provided security. Regional observers described it as consistent with international best practices and free of violence. Civil society and political opposition leaders denounced unsubstantiated voting irregularities.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government and on behalf of the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including reportedly unlawful or widespread civilian deaths or harm, enforced disappearances or abductions, torture, physical abuses, and conflict-related sexual violence or punishment; unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers by armed groups and the armed forces; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including

the enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly; restrictions of religious freedom; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual violence, workplace violence, child, early, and forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, femicide, and other forms of gender-based violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of ethnic groups, in particular the Peuhl; trafficking in persons; laws criminalizing consensual same-sex relationships between adults, which were enforced; and existence of the worst forms of child labor.

The government took limited steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

Armed groups reportedly continued to perpetrate serious abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. They reportedly committed unlawful killings, physical abuses, abductions, sexual assaults, looting, and destruction of property. The government investigated and prosecuted some of these actions.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or

Politically Motivated Killings

There were several reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) recorded 33 instances of extrajudicial killings committed by state security forces, including the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic (FACA), and other security personnel recognized as Kremlin-backed Wagner Group elements, subsequently referred to as “Wagner Group,” as of May. Many of these killings occurred when security forces and Wagner Group elements suspected civilians of being affiliated with armed groups or when civilians lived or worked near mining areas, such as the reports of attacks against residents of Ndassima in 2022.

In February, MINUSCA reported FACA and Wagner carried out the extrajudicial killing of three men in Sikikédé, Vakaga prefecture, for communicating with *Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique* (UPC), *Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique* (FPRC), Misseriya Arab, and Salamat armed groups in the area. The victims’ hands were tied with ropes and electric cables. In March, nine Chinese citizens were executed near a gold mine in Chimbolo, Ouaka prefecture. The government created a commission to investigate the killings, which concluded the Coalition of

Patriots for Change (CPC) was responsible for the deaths but did not name any suspects or record any arrests.

MINUSCA reported ex-UPC militants recruited by Wagner Group elements as proxies also committed human rights abuses in the Maloum area, in the same prefecture. MINUSCA reported the increasing trend of using proxies for extrajudicial killings and cited another incident also in March in the Basse-Kotto prefecture, in which police used an ex-anti-Balaka combatant proxy to execute a man.

b. Disappearance

There were limited reports of disappearances committed by or on behalf of government authorities. These included reported disappearances and eventual release involving community members from the PK5 district of Bangui, including a Muslim cleric, leading to protests in May.

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

The law prohibited the practice of torture and specified punishment for torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment. Although sentences for those convicted of torture ranged from 20 years to life in prison and forced labor, impunity persisted. As of September, there were no reports that the government conducted any official investigations into accusations of

torture.

MINUSCA's Human Rights Division claimed state actors, such as FACA, committed most recorded incidents of torture during security operations against armed groups. Nonstate armed group actors were responsible for most cases of other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatments and punishments, such as maiming and dismembering, and widespread sexual violence.

In February, MINUSCA reported the torture and mistreatment of 12 civilians by FACA and Wagner Group elements in the locality of Sikikédé, Vakaga prefecture. FACA and Wagner Group personnel beat the 12 victims with hammers and applied electric shocks to their heads and stomachs in retaliation for allegedly providing support to UPC, FPRC, Misseriya Arab, and Salamate armed groups. In addition, three bodies were found at the entrance of the Sikikédé village, 800 meters from the temporary base established by FACA and Wagner Group elements, with signs of torture including hands bound by ropes and electric cables. As of September, there were no reports of arrest or charges for this incident.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

According to the National Commission for Human Rights and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), prison conditions were often harsh, life-threatening, and inhuman due to gross overcrowding, food shortages,

and inadequate sanitation.

Abusive Physical Conditions: According to MINUSCA, three prisons reported exceeding their designed capacity: Ngaragba by 499 percent, Berbarati by 117 percent, and Banbari by 144 percent.

Prison conditions remained extremely poor in almost all locations. Necessities such as food, clothing, and medicine were inadequate and were often confiscated by prison officials. The Ministry of Justice reported 452 cases of malnourishment during the year, mainly at the Ngaragba Central Prison. Diseases were pervasive in all prisons. UN observers reported imprisoned men carried out sexual violence against their fellow inmates, including minors, with impunity.

Detention centers affiliated with the Central Office of Gang Repression and the Investigation and Research Section, the criminal investigations bureau of the gendarmerie, were both cited as egregious examples of overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and health care, according to UN sources.

Administration: Prison detainees had the right to submit complaints of mistreatment but rarely exercised this option due to the lack of a functioning formal complaint mechanism and fear of retaliation from prison officials. There were reports that complainants paid police officers or gendarmes fees to file their complaints. There were no reports authorities conducted investigations of credible allegations of mistreatment.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring by international donors, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the UN Human Rights Council's independent expert on the situation of human rights in the country. At least in some cases, NGOs reported being able to monitor prison conditions during 2022.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of persons to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government sometimes observed these requirements.

Although the law provided detainees the right to challenge the lawfulness of their detention in court, many detainees were not able to exercise this right due to a lack of quality, affordable legal services and a poorly functioning justice system. According to NGOs, in October 2022, the General Inspectorate of Judicial Services was strengthened to better address arbitrary detention matters.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law provided that persons under arrest be informed immediately of the allegations against them. Detainees had to be presented before a judge within 72 hours and could not be held longer than 144 hours without appearing before a judge. According to UN reports, police and the gendarmerie routinely violated the 48-hour custody limit, often on suspicion

alone. Provisional release was available for those awaiting trial but not consistently granted. In April, Wagner Group elements prohibited MINUSCA investigators from carrying out its mandate to visit seven CPC detainees. Wagner Group elements claimed one of its directives prohibited any visits. There was a functioning bail system. Suspects were often detained incommunicado.

The law did not require defendants in nonfelony cases access to state-funded attorneys. Many felony and nonfelony defendants could not afford counsel. Many prisoners were unaware of their rights, especially outside of Bangui. The practice of appointing lawyers was rare outside of the criminal sessions supported by external donors.

Arbitrary Arrest: Security forces and armed groups arbitrarily detained individuals. Many arbitrary arrests occurred during offensive operations by security forces and Wagner Group elements, according to reports by the United Nations, the local press, and NGOs. In some cases, arbitrary arrests targeted ethnic and religious minorities on suspicion of alleged collusion with armed groups. UN reports published in 2022 claimed that the Gbaya, the Fulani, and Muslims in general were particularly targeted by the Wagner Group and FACA for arbitrary arrests.

Pretrial Detention: Slow investigation and processing of cases was the primary cause of lengthy pretrial detention. The judicial police force charged with investigating cases was poorly trained and understaffed,

resulting in slow case-processing times. Lengthy pretrial detentions also occurred in part because of a lack of affordable legal representation. In many cases, the duration of pretrial detention exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime.

In May, Remy Quignolot, a French citizen, was released on humanitarian grounds to seek medical care after being arrested in 2021 on charges of espionage followed by detention in a military prison in Bangui. Civil society groups claimed the charges were false and based on planted evidence.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the constitution provided for an independent judiciary, political actors exerted undue influence on it. In a high-profile case in October 2022, the Constitutional Court upheld President Touadera's retirement order of two judges from the Court, Daniele Darlan and Trinite Bango Sangafio, prematurely ending their terms, which the constitution set at seven years. Corruption was a serious problem at all levels. Authorities at all levels did not always respect court orders.

The Special Criminal Court (SCC), operated with both domestic and international participation and support. The SCC had jurisdiction over serious abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law, including genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. According to the United Nations, SCC investigations were often impeded by security

constraints and insufficient political support.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, but this right was not always enforced. The law presumed defendants innocent until proven guilty, required trials to be public, and stated that indigent felony defendants facing sentences of 10 years or more had the right to consult a court-appointed attorney. Defendants had the right to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf, question witnesses, and file appeals. They also had the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them, with free interpretation as needed, throughout all stages of the legal process, received adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense, and not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt. All defendants who did not speak the country's main languages, French and Sango, were entitled to an interpreter. If this right was not respected, defendants had the right to appeal the decision of the court. Authorities did not always respect these rights due to systemic disfunction, including undertrained staff, budget shortfalls, and outdated technology in the court system.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

f. Transnational Repression

Not applicable.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

Not applicable.

h. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law prohibited home searches without a warrant during preliminary investigations, except for provisions in the law that permitted searches with the defendant's consent. Once the case was under investigation by an investigating magistrate, the presence of the defendant or witnesses was sufficient. The government did not always follow this requirement.

In May, Wagner Group elements arrested three men in the PK5 neighborhood of Bangui, an area with a large Muslim population. Wagner elements entered the men's homes accompanied by FACA and arrested two men. The men were questioned regarding the whereabouts of a brother but did not respond. Wagner Group elements then took the individuals to Camp de Roux, a military installation known to host Wagner Group elements. During the detention, MINUSCA reported the victims were tortured when they were forced to lie down on their stomachs and Wagner Group

elements sat on their backs while another hit the soles of their feet with a stick and whipped their backs with a cable. The next day, Wagner Group elements returned to PK5 and arrested the son-in-law of one of the victims. The third victim also reported being questioned and subjected to similar maltreatment. Wagner Group elements released the three men the next day. Wagner Group elements also arrested the father of one of the victims and questioned him before releasing him several days later.

i. Conflict-related Abuses

There were numerous reports of serious human rights abuses and international humanitarian law violations countrywide by FACA, Wagner Group elements, and armed groups. Reports of abuses included unlawful killings, torture, disappearances, rape, forced marriage, looting, destruction of property, unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers by armed forces and armed groups, and disruption of humanitarian access.

Between January and May, a joint report by the UN Human Rights Office and MINUSCA recorded 854 cases of abuses of human rights and of international humanitarian law across the country, impacting 1,680 victims. FACA, internal security forces, and other security personnel, including Wagner Group elements, were responsible for 453 incidents (53 percent). Armed groups affiliated with the CPC were responsible for 47 percent of the incidents. NGO and MINUSCA reports did not disaggregate collateral deaths

during combat operations and noncombat incidents. Abuses included summary and extrajudicial executions, acts of torture and mistreatment, arbitrary arrests and detentions, conflict-related sexual violence including sexual slavery, and serious abuses of children's rights. The reports also included kidnappings, attacks on peacekeepers and civilians, and looting of humanitarian organizations' premises by several rebel groups.

During the year, the SCC took actions to bring those who had committed abuses to justice. The SCC indicted 45 persons for crimes against humanity and war crimes. As of September, the court detained 43 persons and convicted three persons. There were numerous examples similar to the following ones. In July, Philemon Kahena (alias "CB") and Francois Boybanda (alias "Balere") were indicted for their role in various crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in February and March 2014 in Guen, Gadzi, and Djomo by the anti-Balaka militia. In September, the SCC charged and arrested Abdoulaye Hissene, ex-military chief of the FPRC, with crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The SCC issued its first verdicts in October 2022 for Issa Sallet Adoum, Ousman Yaouba, and Mahamat Tahir. The Appeals Chamber upheld most convictions in July, including as perpetrators for murder, and other inhuman acts as crimes against humanity, and for murder and outrage upon personal dignity as a war crime for events that occurred in Lemouna. The Appeals Chamber also upheld the conviction for rape as a crime against humanity

and a war crime for the events in Koudjili for Issa Sallet Adoum in his capacity as a military commander. Sallet Adoum was sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment. Ousman Yaouba and Maahamt Tahir received 20-year sentences.

Killings: In July, an unidentified armed group attacked the village of Diki and killed 13 civilians. The government blamed the attack on the CPC and claimed the killings were retribution for villager participation in the constitutional referendum the day prior. MINUSCA's investigators instead reported evidence of a dispute concerning transhumance routes, which might have triggered members of the Fulani minority group to carry out the killings.

UPC and Azande militia, consisting of individuals primarily from the Zande ethnic community, reportedly targeted civilians during clashes in the Haut-Mbomou prefecture. After a clash between the parties in August, retreating UPC elements burned huts and killed five civilians. A second armed clash resulted in 12 additional casualties, including three civilians. During the same period, the UPC group kidnapped and killed a local village chief.

Abductions: The UN Human Rights Division verified 72 adult and 15 child victims of abduction and deprivation of liberty in the first quarter of the year. UPC and Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation (3R) armed groups were responsible for most violations.

In November 2022, members of the *Parti du rassemblement de la nation centrafricaine* abducted two UN Office for Project Services staff and a representative of the Ministry of Equipment and Public Works in the Vakaga prefecture. The victims were released in March after MINUSCA negotiated their release.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: There were numerous reports throughout the year that all parties to the conflict, including FACA, Wagner Group elements, and rebel armed groups, mistreated, assaulted, and raped civilians with impunity.

The UN Human Rights Division counted 30 abuses and 34 survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Of these cases, the vast majority were rapes. State actors were responsible for 12 violations affecting eight survivors. Armed groups, chiefly 3R combatants, were responsible for most of the cases. The UN Human Rights Division documented one case of sexual slavery where the survivor, age 17, was abducted and held by FACA between November 2022 and January in Batangafo, Ouaka prefecture. The UN Child Protection Unit verified the kidnapping of a girl in early February 2022 by two Wagner Group members in Bria. The kidnapped girl was subjected to forced labor and multiple instances of gender-based violence. According to media and NGO reports, rape was also used as a tool to punish FACA soldiers resisting orders. In January, a soldier was allegedly raped by four Wagner mercenaries in the town of Digui, which led to an exchange of fire

resulting in the deaths of several Wagner and FACA troops.

The United Nations and NGOs reported incidences of conflict-related sexual violence. State actor incidents also included a report from Baoro, Nana-Mambéré prefecture, where MINUSCA documented a case of where a FACA officer raped a woman. While the woman was waiting to buy groceries next to a FACA barrier, a FACA officer called her into a shed under false pretexts, threatened her with his gun, and raped her. Despite the woman's filing a complaint with the gendarmerie and a confession from the FACA officer, the officer was released.

There were 17 reports of alleged sexual exploitation or abuse in MINUSCA reported during the year. The alleged perpetrators included peacekeepers from Peru, Morocco, Burundi, Cameroon, Tanzania, and Senegal. Survivors of the alleged attacks included 40 adults and 11 children. The incidents reported during the year were alleged to have taken place between 2014 and 2023.

In June, the United Nations announced that following serious allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by 11 Tanzanian peacekeepers, an entire unit of 60 soldiers was repatriated.

President Touadera hosted the Presidential Conference on Conflict-Related Gender-Based Violence in Bangui on September 8, bringing together the international community, civil society, and MINUSCA. He also funded work

by the Trafficking-in-Persons and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Focal Point and attended the Ceremony to Present the Biannual Report of the Strategic Committee to Combat Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.

Child Soldiers: The Secretary of State determined that the Central African Republic had governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces and government-supported armed groups that recruited or used child soldiers during the reporting period of April 2022 to March 2023. See the Department of State's annual Trafficking in Persons Report at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Armed militias associated with Anti-Balaka, ex-Seleka, the CPC, the Lord's Resistance Army, and other armed groups forcibly recruited and used child soldiers. As in 2022, credible sources reported Wagner Group elements and FACA recruited children to serve in combat and support roles, an issue exacerbated by instability and lack of security for youth, resulting in many children seeking shelter and employment at military installations throughout the country.

Despite signing the UN's Standard Operation Procedures proscribing the use of child soldiers, the Central African Patriotic Movement, the FPRC, and the UPC continued to use child soldiers. The FPRC and the UPC issued orders barring the recruitment of children; however, NGOs reported the continued presence of children within these groups. Although UN agencies verified fewer incidents of child soldier recruitment compared with the previous

year, 90 confirmed reports as of May, there were multiple reports of Azande self-defense forces utilizing child soldiers, including reports that the children were often intoxicated.

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

Other Conflict-related Abuse: The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) noted that humanitarian organizations' ability to access remote areas remained difficult because of insecurity.

Intimidation and extortion by armed actors remained the chief obstacle to delays in assistance delivery. Thefts, robberies, looting, threats of violence, and assaults accounted for 75 percent of incidents; the remainder involved interference with assistance operations. In May, armed elements attacked a clearly marked International Medical Corps vehicle near the border with Sudan. The attackers ordered two passengers out of the vehicle, got into the back seat, and ordered the driver to proceed towards Am Dafok.

Approximately four miles later, the driver crashed the vehicle and was shot and killed. In March, an office belonging to the Alliance for Medical Action was pillaged, and reports indicated that several FACA soldiers and a gendarmerie officer were implicated in the thefts.

Between January and August, OCHA recorded 123 incidents affecting humanitarian workers, including one killed and four injured. In July alone, OCHA recorded six cases of robbery affecting traveling humanitarian teams,

one case of sexual harassment, the looting of a health center run by an NGO, the kidnapping of an NGO staff member, and the theft of a motorcycle.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

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

Although the constitution and law provided for freedom of expression and the press, the government did not always respect these rights. The law allowed criminal prosecutions for defamation of public officials.

Freedom of Expression: Public discussion and political debates were generally free from state authorities' influence. Public political debates, known as *patara*, were broadcast on private radio stations in Bangui and in most provincial capitals. In areas controlled by armed groups, freedom of expression, however, was inhibited due to the risk of retaliation.

One month before the vote to adopt a new constitution, the High Council of Communication issued a decision suspending all political debates on religious radio stations. The decision concerned six religious broadcasting stations and came shortly after Martin Ziguele, spokesman for the Bloc Républicain pour la Défense de la Constitution (BRDC), a coalition of opposition parties, gave an interview on the Roman Catholic radio station,

Radio Notre Dame, where he criticized the proposed new constitution.

In September, Communications Minister Serge Ghislain Djorie threatened to suspend Radio Ndékèluka if it continued to discuss the constitutional referendum.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists reported being contacted by the minister of communications to criticize press coverage of sensitive subjects. Some journalists reported receiving threatening calls or text messages from unknown sources in response to published stories. Journalists self-censored after progovernment militias, specifically The Sharks and the since-disbanded Galaxie Nationale group, threatened them with violence.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Local journalists reported domestic media outlets routinely engaged in self-censorship. Many independent media outlets reported on and criticized Wagner Group elements' human rights violations, but other topics, such as Wagner's economic interests in the country, were seen as off limits. Some journalists shared sensitive information with western human rights-focused NGOs to avoid repercussions for publishing sensitive stories in their own media outlets.

Libel/Slander Laws: In July, the justice minister filed a civil suit against The Sentry, a U.S.- based NGO, for defamation claiming 500,000 CFA francs (\$826) in damages. Days later, the government filed another suit seeking

650 billion CFA francs in the Bangui Superior Court. The government complained that The Sentry's published report *Architects of Terror: The Wagner Group's Blueprint for State Capture in the Central African Republic* unfairly linked the government with the Wagner group in a "widespread, systematic, and well-planned campaign of mass killing, torture, and rape throughout the country."

Nongovernmental Impact: In areas controlled by armed groups, freedom of expression was inhibited due to the risk of retaliation. In February, after publishing a critical commentary on the Wagner Group, Jean Saint-Clair Maka Gbossokotto, the director of a news website and print newspaper, died, reportedly showing signs of having ingested poison. Civil society groups investigating the matter reported that he met Wagner Group elements the previous day.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, but the government did not always respect these rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

In April 2022, the Ministry of Public Security banned all public demonstrations of a political nature. On July 14, opposition leaders demonstrated against the referendum for a new constitution. The BRDC demonstrated in the streets of Bangui under heavy escort by the government and armored vehicles deployed by MINUSCA. The Ministry of the Interior and Public Security had justified the original order to ban the demonstration on the grounds of its “subversive nature” and the “security situation.” Approximately 500 persons participated in the march, which was carried out without any major incidents.

Freedom of Association

A law prohibiting unregistered organizations from organizing for purposes of political advocacy remained in place. Authorities required all political organizations in the country to register with the Ministry of Administration.

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 provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government did not always respect these rights.

In-country Movement: Armed groups, criminals, and Wagner Group elements made in-country movement extremely dangerous. Those actors, as well as government forces, frequently used illegal checkpoints to extort funds. Additionally, due to the significant number of police, gendarmerie, customs, FACA, and armed group checkpoints, it was difficult to move freely between Bangui and provincial cities.

There were reports that members of the predominantly Muslim Peuhl ethnic group were singled out for particularly abusive treatment and heightened scrutiny at many checkpoints and international crossings due to a bias that members of the Peuhl community were supporting armed groups. In September, MINUSCA reported incidents of extortion by FACA soldiers that singled out Muslim Peuhl at a checkpoint located near Bria in the Haute-Kotto prefecture.

On August 16, a decree signed by the prime minister creating a special mixed barriers surveillance and control committee was issued to confirm the legality of barriers and remove unlawful practices and barriers. The decree authorized the arrest of illegal operators, a mechanism to report and

investigate offenders, and a toll-free number to record complaints.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Access to Asylum: The laws provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had established a system for providing protection to refugees, but access to education, health services, and employment was provided only by the international donor community. Individuals who had fled their countries of origin and had prior criminal records, however, were immediately repatriated. In August, the government granted prima facie status to more than 15,000 newly arrived Sudanese refugees in the northeast part of the country.

Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Internal conflicts made it difficult for the country to provide security and protection routinely for persons within its borders.

Durable Solutions: In 2022, 5,600 refugees were able to return to the country with the support of UNHCR, bringing the total since 2017 to 32,700. In May 2022, the government implemented a voluntary effort to repatriate 6,000 Central African refugees who fled to the Democratic Republic of the

Congo as part of a tripartite agreement in 2019. A total of 218 persons, mainly from Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, were returned between January and March.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

According to UNHCR, in September the estimated number of IDPs having returned to their communities was 166,000, while the total remaining IDPs in the country was estimated at 490,868. The largest concentrations of IDPs were recorded in Haute-Kotto, Ombella M’Poko, and Ouham prefectures. There were no reports of forced returns. There were, however, multiple reports of instances in which government forces and Wagner Group elements obstructed humanitarian organizations from providing services to civilians, including the displaced. During the year, regional actors reported IDP communities faced insecurity and limited access to food and health services. Women and children comprised the majority of those displaced during the year.

For further information about IDPs in the country, please see the materials of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center: <https://www.internal-displacement.org>.

g. Stateless Persons

UNHCR reported that 1.1 million persons were estimated to be at risk of statelessness in the country. Low birth registration rates, targeted destruction of civil status registries, hindered access to individual documentation, and massive forced displacement inside and outside the country constituted significant statelessness risk factors.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provided citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Refugees continued to face obstacles in accessing their right to vote.

Elections and Political Participation

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: National elections last held in 2020 were widely reported to not be fair and free of abuses and irregularities.

In the July constitutional referendum, the National Electoral Authority reported a 61.1 percent voter turnout rate, with 95.27 percent voting in favor of the new constitution. Security authorities and Wagner Group and

Rwanda bilateral elements managed security on voting day. The day following the election, the Economic Community of Central African States Observer Mission reported the election complied with international norms. Opposition leaders called for a boycott of the election and claimed the voter rate of participation published by the electoral authority was inflated. Reports indicated ballot secrecy might have been compromised, including due to transparent ballot boxes used at some locations with color-coded ballots allowing outsiders to view a voter's choice. The new constitution included an article that made Central African Republic citizenship a requirement to run for president and excluded candidates who were dual nationals. The government announced that it would hold local and regional elections in October 2024. The last local elections were in 1988.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The United Nations reported increased levels of hate speech threatening and inciting violence against the individuals affiliated with the political opposition and other groups. The Galaxie Nationale media platform released a communique in July 2022 calling for the targeting of specific individuals and providing the location of the homes of a lawyer and a spokesperson for the opposition. Although the government suspended the platform in September 2022, it continued regular operations for months thereafter. According to media reports, the platform received funding from Wagner Group affiliates.

Participation of Women and Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups: UN

Women assessed traditional attitudes and cultural practices limited women's ability to participate in political life on an equal basis with men.

Societal and legal discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons prevented them from effectively advocating for their interests in the political sphere (see section 6, Criminalization, Violence and Harassment, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics). The law prohibited gender discrimination and provided for an independent National Observatory for Male/Female Equality to monitor compliance. The National Observatory had not been established.

Section 4. Corruption in Government

Although the law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, the government did not effectively implement the law, and officials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were numerous reports of government corruption during the year.

In a joint agreement between the UN Development Program and Ministry of Finance and Budget, the parties agreed in May to create a program to digitize government finances. This tool was expected to allow for greater consolidation of public finances.

Corruption: Corruption and bribery remained widespread, although the

prime minister and finance minister undertook a series of reforms during the year to eliminate ghost workers, improve accountability, and ensure public workers were performing their work. The government also passed new anti-corruption legislation in October. Weak government capacity further limited attempts to address fully the problem of public-sector corruption.

In August, allegations of embezzlement were levied in media and from other government officials against the mayor in the capital city of Bangui. Despite the allegations, the minister of territorial administration resisted calls for an official investigation. As of September, no criminal investigation had been initiated.

Laws and procedures for awarding natural resource extraction contracts and for ensuring that information on those processes remained transparent were not enforced.

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

Domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restrictions to monitor or investigate human rights conditions or cases and publish their findings. Government officials were typically

cooperative and responsive to the views of these groups.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: International and local NGOs faced multiple incidents of interference by security forces, including arrests of NGO staff and arbitrary demands for documentation. The International NGO Safety Organization recorded 27 attacks against NGO and humanitarian assistance workers from January to July by government forces, Wagner Group elements, and government proxies. The incidents mainly included theft, but also attacks, threats, confinement, and detention. Civil society groups reported increased intimidation of activists, and occasionally their children, in the period preceding the referendum.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The country's independent National Commission on Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties had the authority to investigate complaints, including the power to call witnesses and subpoena documents. According to media, the commission was considered effective and independent.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalized all forms of physical and sexual violence, as well as sexual exploitation. The law prohibited rape of all persons regardless of gender, although it did not specifically prohibit spousal

rape. Rape was punishable by imprisonment with hard labor, but the law did not specify a minimum sentence. The government did not enforce the law effectively.

Domestic abuse, rape, and sexual slavery of women and girls by several armed groups continued to threaten security, as did the use of sexual violence as a deliberate tactic of conflict. The Gender-Based Violence Information Management System identified more than 23,600 total gender-based violence cases during 2022, but due to severe underreporting, this statistic likely underestimated of the number of cases. Due to a lack of officers responsible for investigating gender-based violence and political will, perpetrators enjoyed broad impunity.

Although the law did not specifically mention spousal abuse, it prohibited violence against women and provided for penalties of up to 10 years in prison. Domestic violence against women was common, including physical and verbal abuse and spousal rape. Domestic violence prosecutions were rare, but the Bangui Court of Appeal during the year heard a case brought by the Public Prosecutor's Office regarding a fatality from spousal abuse.

Women and girls were particularly affected by high rates of conflict-related sexual violence. Decades of unrest and harmful traditions and cultural practices in the country exacerbated gender-based violence, in particular rape, forced marriage, and domestic violence. Survivors of sexual violence were discriminated against, and the government was unable to provide

adequate care, including health and social services, to survivors. Sexual violence committed by armed actors increased the risk of spreading HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

According to the UN secretary-general, insecurity and inaccessibility created obstacles to investigating reported incidents, causing delays in reporting. Nonetheless, humanitarian organizations recorded 5,928 incidents of gender-based violence across the country as of April, and 23,644 cases reported in the previous year. FACA forces and Wagner Group elements were implicated in multiple incidents.

Increased instances of sexual violence corresponded to rising armed group activity and clashes between rebel groups and FACA.

More than 60 women leaders took part in a roundtable on “The Decentralized and Integrated Strategy for Prevention and Community Engagement Against Acts of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation” on June 15 in Bangui. The meeting was organized by the Ministry of Gender Promotion, Protection of Women, Family and Child in partnership with MINUSCA. The outcomes of the event were intended to be incorporated into the MINUSCA 2023-24 action plan.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law prohibited FGM/C of women and girls and established penalties of two to five years’ imprisonment and a monetary fine. When FGM/C resulted in the death of

the victim, courts could sentence perpetrators to life in prison with hard labor and a substantial monetary fine. More than 20 percent of girls and women were subjected to FGM/C, with variations according to ethnicity and region, according to the 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey study and verified as up to date by UN agencies. In the central-north region, more than 60 percent of women and girls were subjected to FGM/C. The government mobilized authorities, the Mixed Unit for Rapid Intervention and Repression of Sexual Violence to Women and Children (UMIRR), and the judiciary with support from the UN Population Fund to conduct investigations and prosecutions.

Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence or Harassment: There were reports of widespread conflict-related sexual violence, including sexual slavery. The law prohibited sexual harassment, but the government did not effectively enforce the law, and sexual harassment was common.

Discrimination: The formal legal structures did not discriminate against women in inheritance and property rights, but at the community level, the government did not effectively enforce these laws. Women experienced economic and social discrimination. Community-adjudicated customary law did not consider single, divorced, or widowed women, including those with children, to be heads of households. Widows in rural areas often fell victim to accusations of witchcraft as a means to appropriate their inherited property. By law, men and women were entitled to family subsidies from

the government, but several women's groups complained of lack of access to these payments for women.

Discrimination against women in employment and occupation occurred in all sectors of the economy and in rural areas, where traditional practices that favored men remained widespread. There were legal restrictions against women in employment, including limiting or prohibiting the employment of women in some tasks, jobs, and industries. Furthermore, carrying, dragging, or pushing any load was prohibited during pregnancy and within three weeks of returning to work after giving birth. Women were not allowed on the premises of businesses where employees worked with certain dangerous chemicals, and women were restricted in the work they could do in other trades, including working on the manufacture of sulfuric acid, application of rubber coatings, and pickling or galvanizing of iron.

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

The maternal mortality rate was 829 per 100,000 live births, according to the World Health Organization. The major factor contributing to the high maternal death rate was the lack of access to adequate health care.

According to 2019 data from the Ministry of Health, there were 873 health-care establishments in the country, of which approximately 52 were hospitals. Of these, 50 percent were small, often rural doctor's offices, and 44 percent were clinics.

According to the most recent available statistics from 2018-19, only 19 percent of women reported receiving prenatal care for their last pregnancy, the birth rate was high at 6.4 per woman, and 43 percent of women reported having a child before age 18. The lack of sexual and reproductive education coupled with low contraceptive use contributed to early pregnancy among girls, which was more prevalent in rural than in urban areas. Only 53 percent of births in 2006 were attended by qualified health personnel (83 percent in urban areas, 35 percent in rural areas). Data from 2018-19 indicated that the infant mortality rate was 100 per 1,000 live births and 53 percent of deliveries were assisted.

The government worked closely with the International Organization for Migration and MINUSCA to train and deploy the UMIRR. The UMIRR opened a new office in Bouar in September to reach survivors of sexual violence in the country's northwestern region. Emergency contraception and postexposure prophylaxis were not widely available as a part of clinical management of rape.

Menstrual health and hygiene problems severely impacted girls' ability to attend school. Socioeconomic barriers, rather than explicit policies, often prevented pregnant girls from attending school.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

It was illegal to discriminate in hiring or employment based on race as well

as national or social origin. The government did not effectively enforce the law, and discrimination occurred with respect to gender, minority status, and national origin. Penalties were commensurate with the penalties for other civil rights violations. Penalties were never applied against violators. The government had no programs to address factors behind racial or ethnic biases.

Nomadic Peuhl pastoralists, predominately Muslim, continued to be targets of violence.

Peuhl pastoralists armed themselves against reprisal attacks from farmers objecting to the presence of their grazing cattle. Security forces often extorted and illegally taxed Peuhl herders at border crossings checkpoints where veterinary services were located. Although groups in conflict often had differing confessional backgrounds, intercommunal violence was most often driven by resources shortages, land use disputes, and poverty.

Peuhl community leaders reported that FACA and Wagner Group elements indiscriminately targeted Peuhl civilians during military operations against the 3R rebels in the western part of the country. There were no reports of authorities acting against Wagner Group element members accused of discrimination-linked killings.

In August in the Haut-Mboumou prefecture, MINUSCA reported that the Azande self-defense group killed 13 Muslim-majority Fulani over the course

of three days. In the same region, there were reports that Fulani were not able to buy food and other items in the market because they were denied access. In addition, some reported that Fulani women had stones thrown at them.

Local news and NGO leaders reported that Muslim residents in Bangui faced discrimination when applying for national residency cards. Government agents in Bangui's PK5, the capital's largest Muslim-majority district, placed onerous documentation procedures and fees on individuals with Muslim names compared to citizens with Christian-sounding names. Citizens were required to present national identification cards to receive government services and to register legal businesses.

Indigenous Peoples

Historically, Ba'Aka, Bofi, and Aka individuals were often coerced into agricultural, domestic, and other types of forced labor. Even when they were remunerated for labor, their wages were far less than those prescribed by the labor code and lower than wages paid to members of other groups, sometimes by as much as 50 percent. According to the World Food Program, the Ba'Aka livelihoods had become increasingly threatened by illegal logging, poaching, and extractive industry activity carried out with the tacit approval of regional authorities.

In many rural regions, Ba'Aka, Bofi, and Aka families lived in camps on the

outskirts of settlements and were not permitted to live inside villages by residents.

The vast majority of Ba'Aka did not have birth certificates and consequently could not travel, register to be political candidates, or vote. They often also faced barriers to registering for school, and in some cases Ba'Aka, Aka, and Bofi children were prevented from attending school. Ba'Aka women frequently were coerced into working long hours for "in-kind" salaries of fabric or other household goods. Access to health care, particularly prenatal health care, was poor.

In March, with support from the Human Rights Division of MINUSCA, the NGO Action and Development of Peuhl, Aka Pygmies, and Ba'Aka conducted a workshop for organizations that promote the prevention of violence against indigenous Ba'Aka, Aka, Peuhl peoples. The campaign educated the public on the history of violence against indigenous and nomadic persons and its impact on the community and development.

Children

Birth Registration: Birth registration was less likely to occur in regions with little government presence. In rural communities, especially in the southeast of the country, almost no births were registered. A government study found that in Bangui one-third of children lacked birth certificates.

Birth registration in IDP camps was often facilitated by NGOs and UNHCR,

but the regularity of such registrations was highly dependent on the presence of these organizations. Unregistered children were at times unable to access education and other social services.

Education: The expected length of schooling was 5.3 years for boys, compared with 3.8 years for girls. Few girls had access to secondary education. Access to education also varied by region and other factors. According to figures provided by the Parents' Association in Bocaranga, a northwestern subprefecture, only five full-time teachers taught nearly 3,000 students in 2022. Few indigenous Ba'Aka children attended primary school, often due to registration barriers, and in some cases, discriminatory beliefs and practices. There was no significant government assistance for efforts to increase Ba'Aka enrollment.

Child Abuse: The law criminalized parental abuse of children younger than 15, but the government did not effectively enforce this law. UMIRR was the government's entity charged with investigating abuses against women and children.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The law established 18 as the minimum age for civil marriage, but the government did not effectively enforce the law. Early marriage was more common in Muslim communities. There were reports of forced marriages of young girls to ex-Seleka and Anti-Balaka members during the year. The government did not take steps to address forced marriage.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law provided a lifetime sentence and significant monetary fines for trafficking in persons involving minors. The law prohibited the creation, sale, or distribution of child pornography and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation. The age of consent for sexual activity was 18. Armed groups and Wagner Group elements committed sexual violence against children and exploited girls as sex slaves. From January to May, MINUSCA documented 18 cases of conflict-related sexual violence against children, and in June, the United Nations announced it would investigate 11 Tanzanian peacekeepers concerning allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of four survivors, including two children.

Antisemitism

There was no significant Jewish community in the country, and there were no reports of antisemitic incidents.

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: The law criminalized consensual same-sex sexual conduct in public or in the military. The penalty for conviction of “public expression of love” between persons of the same sex was imprisonment for six months to two years and a substantial monetary fine; there was no equivalent law prohibiting consensual heterosexual sexual conduct in public. The law did not strictly criminalize consensual sexual conduct in private. The government enforced the law.

Violence and Harassment: There were no reports that state actors incited, perpetrated, condoned, or tolerated violence or harassment against LGBTQI+ individuals, but it was not clear whether this represented an absence of violence against LGBTQI+ persons, the difficulty of identifying causes of violence, or LGBTQI+ persons’ unwillingness to openly identify.

Discrimination: There were no legal provisions protecting persons based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. Same-sex marriage was constitutionally banned; the constitution defined marriage as a “union between one man and one woman.” Members of the LGBTQI+ community could not openly serve in the military.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Legal gender recognition was not permitted.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: No laws

prohibited involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices specifically targeting LGBTQI+ persons. According to religious leaders, conversion could be preached in sermons, but cultural stigma against LGBTQI+ persons meant few were open regarding their sexual orientation to their family or community members and thus subjected to coercive practices. There were no known reports of medically unnecessary or irreversible “normalization” surgeries performed on children or on nonconsenting adult intersex persons.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:

Societal norms, in conjunction with the criminalization of consensual same-sex activity in public, forced the LGBTQI+ community underground and created a social environment wherein maintaining a same-sex relationship was extraordinarily dangerous. There were no known organizations that promoted the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others, especially in refugee and IDP camps where mobility constraints limited access to humanitarian rations and sanitary facilities. The government did not enact programs to provide access to buildings, information, and communications. The independent High Authority for Good Governance was tasked with

protecting the rights of members of minority groups and persons with disabilities, although its reach was limited. The government did not provide government information and communication in accessible formats.

The law prohibited discrimination against persons with both mental and physical disabilities but did not specify other forms of disabilities. It required that in any company employing 25 or more persons, at least 5 percent of staff consist of sufficiently qualified persons with disabilities presuming that they were represented in the applicant pool. The law stated that at least 10 percent of newly recruited civil service personnel should be persons with disabilities. Statistics covering implementation of these provisions were unavailable.

Most schools allowed children with disabilities to attend, but school infrastructure was often inaccessible for these children and could have negatively impacted attendance. Approximately one-third of schools had taken steps to integrate children with disabilities, mainly through awareness-raising sessions and additional tutoring. The rate of secondary school attendance was low for all children and even lower for individuals with disabilities.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Many, but not all, members of the ex-Seleka and its factions were Muslim and had roots in neighboring countries or in the country's remote north, a

region predominantly inhabited by Muslim communities and that the government historically neglected. During the worst of the 2013 crisis, some Christian communities formed Anti-Balaka militias that targeted Muslim communities, although all participants, including armed groups with Muslim majority factions, carried out violent attacks. The Interfaith Religious Platform, which included Muslim and Christian leaders, continued working with communities to defuse tensions and call for tolerance and restraint.

The law prohibited the practice of witchcraft. Witchcraft charges disproportionately affected women. Individuals accused of sorcery or witchcraft experienced social exclusion and elder abuse. According to UN agencies, persons accused of witchcraft most often came from vulnerable populations such as orphaned girls and widows, who were targeted for their inheritances. Children and minors accused of witchcraft were frequently disowned by their families and often became homeless. According to a legal advocate, the law did not have an established definition of witchcraft, and the state did not typically intervene in these cases. District chiefs often presided over witchcraft trials, but the accused were often ostracized, abused, humiliated, or killed by vigilantes. Authorities often placed women accused of witchcraft in confinement cells reportedly to protect them from mob violence while they awaited trial. These women often languished in holding cells for weeks and in some cases months before a magistrate could hear their case.

In August in Bambio village in the Sangha-Mbaere prefecture, a woman was stoned to death after accusations that she used witchcraft to kill a local young man. There were no reports that anyone involved in the killing was prosecuted. There also were no reports that authorities had any prior notice of the accusation and were able to offer any protection.

Persons with HIV and AIDS were subjected to discrimination and stigma, and as a result, many individuals with HIV and AIDS did not disclose their status. Many persons with HIV and AIDS had difficulty accessing appropriate treatment. MINUSCA representatives assessed that the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV was the result of protracted insecurity, humanitarian crises, and retrograde social norms.

The law did not explicitly prohibit discrimination in employment and occupation based on HIV-positive status or having other communicable diseases.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers, except for senior-level state employees, security force members, and foreign workers in residence for less than two years, to form or join independent unions without prior

authorization. The law provided for the right of workers to organize and administer trade unions without employer interference and granted trade unions full legal status. The law required that union officials be full-time, wage-earning employees in their occupation and allowed them to conduct union business during working hours if the employer was informed 48 hours in advance and provided authorization. The labor code provided that unions could bargain collectively in the public and private sectors. The government, the country's largest employer, set wages after consultation, but not negotiation, with government employee trade unions.

Workers had the right to strike in both the public and private sectors, but the law prohibited security forces, including the armed forces and gendarmes, from striking. In August, members of the Bangui municipal police engaged in a three-day strike to demand three months' back pay and integration into the civil service. Police agreed to suspend the strike after President Touadera intervened. On September 18, local media reported a group of approximately 4,000 teachers advocated for collective employment benefits in front of the Ministry of Education despite threats against leaders of related strikes earlier in the year. Strikes were limited to work-related matters. Requirements for conducting a legal strike were lengthy and cumbersome. For a strike to be legal, authorities required that the union first present its demands, the employer respond to these demands, labor and management attend a conciliation meeting, and an arbitration council find that the union and the employer failed to reach agreement on valid

demands. The government required the union to provide eight days' advance written notification of a planned strike. The law stated that if employers initiated a lockout that was not in accordance with the labor code, the employer was required to pay workers for all days of the lockout. The Ministry of Labor had the authority to establish a list of enterprises that were required by law to maintain a "compulsory minimum service" in the event of a strike. The government had the power of requisition or the authority to end strikes by invoking the public interest. The code made no other provisions regarding sanctions on employers for acting against strikers.

The law expressly outlawed antiunion discrimination. Employees could have their cases heard in labor court. The law did not state whether employers found guilty of antiunion discrimination were required to reinstate workers fired for union activities, although the law required employers found guilty of such discrimination to pay damages, including back pay and lost wages.

The government generally enforced applicable laws and respected laws concerning freedom of association in the formal sector. Penalties were commensurate with other violations of civil rights, but enforcement was inconsistent. Workers exercised some of these rights, but only a relatively small part of the workforce, primarily civil servants, exercised the right to join a union. While worker organizations were officially outside government or political parties, the government exerted some influence over the

leadership of some organizations.

Labor unions did not report any underlying patterns of discrimination or abuse. The labor court did not hear any cases involving antiunion discrimination during the year.

Collective bargaining occurred in the private sector during the year, although the total number of collective agreements concluded was unknown. The government was not generally involved if the two parties were able to reach an agreement. Information was unavailable on the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the private sector.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *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 (See section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law required the Ministry of Labor to set minimum wages in the public sector by decree. The minimum wages in the private sector were established based on sector-specific collective conventions resulting from negotiations between employers and workers' representatives in each sector.

The minimum wage in the private sector varied by sector and type of work. The minimum wage in all sectors was less than the World Bank standard for extreme poverty.

The law set a standard workweek of 40 hours for government employees and most private-sector employees. Household employees could work up to 52 hours per week. The law also required a minimum rest period of 48 hours per week for citizen, foreign, and migrant workers. Overtime policy varied according to the workplace. There was no legal prohibition on excessive or compulsory overtime. The labor code, however, stated that employers must provide for the health and security of employees who were engaged in overtime work.

Occupational Safety and Health: There were general laws on safety and health (OSH) standards in the workplace, but the Ministry of Labor did not

precisely define them. The labor code stated that a labor inspector could compel an employer to correct unsafe or unhealthy work conditions.

The law provided that workers could remove themselves from dangerous working conditions without jeopardy to their employment. In such instances, the labor inspector notified the employer and required that conditions be addressed within four working days. The high unemployment and poverty rates deterred workers from exercising this right.

Diamond mines, which employed an estimated 400,000 persons, were subject to standards imposed by the mining code and inspection by the Miners' Brigade. Nevertheless, monitoring efforts were underfunded and insufficient. Despite the law requiring those working in mines to be at least 18, observers frequently saw underage diggers in 2022 (most recent information available). Diggers often worked in open pits susceptible to collapse, working seven days a week during the dry season. Diggers were employed by larger mine operators, worked in dangerous conditions at the bottom of open pits, and lacked safety equipment.

The use of toxic chemicals in gold mines continued during the year, endangering environmental and personal health. Observers and NGOs documented the widespread use of cyanide and mercury for gold extraction. The government did not regulate the use of harmful chemicals in semimechanized or artisanal mining operations, but NGOs reported that the legal definition of "semimechanized" was stretched to include mining

operations involving large foreign investors from the People's Republic of China, whose sites were sometimes guarded by government security forces. Wagner Group elements controlled diamond and gold mining sites. Observers reported Wagner Group elements blocked access for inspectors at all the mining sites under their control.

Officially, miners had the right to share in the proceeds of diamond sales. Miners often supplemented these earnings with either black market diamond sales or wages from other sectors of the economy. NGOs reported the clandestine export of gems and gold undermined equitable profit sharing.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government did not effectively enforce wage, overtime, and OSH standards, and violations were common in all sectors of the economy. The Ministry of Labor had primary responsibility for managing labor standards, while enforcement fell under the Ministry of Interior and Public Safety and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. The government did not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to enforce compliance with labor laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar violations but were seldom applied and insufficient to enforce compliance. The law applied to foreign and migrant workers as well, although foreign workers had to meet residency requirements to join a union. Employers commonly violated safety and health standards in agriculture and mining. Violations of overtime policy could be referred to

the Ministry of Labor, although it was unknown whether this occurred during the year.

Most economic activity in the country, especially for young persons, was informal, conducted by micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises representing 40 to 60 percent of GDP. The minimum wage applied only to the formal sector, leaving most of the labor force of the country in the informal sector without a minimum wage.

Most labor was performed outside the wage and social security system, especially by farmers in the large subsistence agricultural sector and laborers in the artisanal mining sector. Independent workers were excluded from labor code protections. While most labor protection laws applied to informal-sector employees and those working part-time, laws were not enforced, and violations of wage, hour, and safety regulations were common. No official entities provided social protections for workers in the informal sector.