

Albania 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Albania during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including journalist self-censorship.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

b. Coercion in Population Control

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

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government usually respected these rights, although defamation was a criminal offense. Independent media organizations and professional journalists asserted the government, political parties, businesses, and criminal groups sought to influence media in inappropriate, nontransparent ways. There were credible reports of senior media representatives using their outlets to blackmail businesses by threatening unfavorable media coverage. Political pressure, corruption, and lack of funding constrained the independence of print media, and journalists reportedly practiced self-censorship.

A lack of enforceable labor contracts reduced reporters' independence and contributed to bias in reporting.

Citizens were free to criticize the government openly, including in traditional and social media, and did so. Nevertheless, concern persisted that open criticism of the government could have adverse consequences. Observers believed media in the country reflected political affiliation rather than standards of independent and professional journalism. Politicians used established media to spread false information regarding rivals and critics.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

Political and business interests reportedly pressured journalists. Several journalists reported receiving threatening communications or being the victim of public smear campaigns after reporting on alleged government corruption or misconduct. In March, the Albanian Journalists Union publicly denounced the prime minister for using intimidating language with a journalist investigating tourism investment in the country.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

Journalists often practiced self-censorship to avoid violence and harassment or to ensure employment.

Reportedly, the government, political parties, and criminal groups used direct links with media owners and senior editors to influence coverage.

Media reported access to public information continued to decrease, and journalists found it increasingly difficult to obtain public documents and receive timely responses from public institutions to media inquiries.

Organizations reported concern regarding academic freedom, claiming that several academic public institutions elected or appointed leaders due to their political ties. Media organizations in the country expressed concern that journalists encountered considerable obstacles monitoring or reporting

the election process inside academic institutions.

Efforts to Preserve the Independence of the Media

In April, parliament established an ad hoc committee on disinformation and in its initial meetings the committee invited members of media organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to participate and monitor the work of the committee. Media and civil society saw these actions as a positive step towards protecting freedom of expression.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided the right for most workers to form independent unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively. The law prohibited anti-union discrimination and provided for the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity.

The law prohibited members of the military and senior government officials from joining unions and required trade unions have at least 20 members to be registered. Strike action was prohibited in special cases such as a natural catastrophe, war, and when the freedom of holding or participating in elections was at risk.

The government provided limited protection to domestic and migrant

workers in some sectors of employment. The labor inspector did not inspect private residences for violations of domestic laborers' rights, and the NGO Solidarity Center and labor inspectorate noted cases of employers confiscating migrant workers passports. Labor unions were generally weak and politicized. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Unions representing public-sector employees negotiated directly with the government. Effective collective bargaining and enforcement of agreements were difficult because of lengthy delays registering unions. Observers reported threats of retaliation against employees deciding to participate in new unions.

The Solidarity Center reported that while the law provided comprehensive protection for workers to form and join unions, workers still feared retaliation and did not trust the justice system to enforce employment law. Penalties for violations of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike were sometimes applied against violators.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The law provided for a minimum wage for all sectors, and the national minimum wage was higher than the national poverty threshold.

While the law established a 40-hour workweek, individual or collective agreements typically set the actual workweek. The law allowed employers to mandate additional working hours, but not more than 200 per year, which could be exceeded in cases of force majeure or emergency work for the benefit of the population with the authorization of the State Labor Inspectorate and Social Service (SLISS). The law provided for paid annual holidays, but only employees in the formal labor market had such rights. Many persons in the private sector worked six days a week, in excess of 40 hours. The law required rest periods and premium pay for overtime, but employers did not always observe these provisions.

The Solidarity Center reported the law was not universally enforced, particularly in the garment and footwear industry. Additionally, workers at private companies with municipal contracts for services reported being paid below the minimum wage and not receiving required benefits.

Occupational Safety and Health

Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were generally appropriate

for the country's main industries, although enforcement was lacking. The government at times proactively identified unsafe conditions in addition to responding to worker's complaints.

Workers often could not remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardizing their employment. According to the Solidarity Center, violations of OSH standards occurred most frequently in the textile, footwear, manufacturing, construction, and mining industries. SLISS reported violations of the legal provisions on wage and work hours occurred most frequently in the hospitality and manufacturing industry.

In the first seven months of the year, SLISS imposed 200 urgent measures to suspend work for flagrant violations of safety and health regulations. The most problematic sectors were construction, mining, energy, and manufacturing.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

SLISS and tax authorities were responsible for enforcing the minimum wage and hour laws. Enforcement agencies lacked the tools to enforce collection of fines and rarely charged violators. The number of inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance, and according to NGOs employers were often informed prior to inspections, even though inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. The

government rarely enforced laws related to maximum work hours, limits on overtime, or premium pay for overtime, especially in the private sector. These laws did not apply to migrant workers. In media interviews, hospitality industry owners admitted to confiscating migrants' passports to prevent them from leaving.

The Solidarity Center asserted workers and the public remained skeptical of the government's ability to enforce employment or union rights. The dysfunction and corruption of the judicial system was perceived as a major obstacle to improving workers' access to labor code enforcement, and OSH laws were ineffective.

The estimated size of the informal sector was approximately 26 percent of the non-agricultural labor force. Labor laws did not apply to workers in the informal sector, and SLISS did not inspect informal businesses.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

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

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The law and constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and

provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

The law foresaw two possible procedures for arrest. First, a prosecutor could request an arrest warrant and pretrial detention from a court after providing sufficient justification. The court automatically reviewed the measure on a regular basis. Second, police could arrest a suspect believed to be in the process of committing a crime. The law stipulated police had to immediately inform a prosecutor of an arrest. The prosecutor could release the suspect or petition the court within 48 hours to hold the individual further. A court also had to decide within 48 hours whether to place a suspect in detention, prohibit travel, require bail, or require the defendant to report regularly to police.

By law and based on a prosecutor's request, the court had 72 hours to review the pretrial detention status of a court-ordered arrest. Police could detain without arresting a suspect for a period not exceeding 10 hours, but the ombudsperson reported several procedural irregularities that led to detentions of longer than 10 hours without arrest.

The constitution required authorities to immediately inform detainees of their rights and the charges against them. While the law gave detainees the right to prompt access to an attorney at public expense, the ombudsperson reported instances of interrogations taking place without the presence of

legal counsel.

The ombudsperson, the Albania Helsinki Commission, and the Institute for Activism and Social Change reported lengthy pretrial detention continued to be a problem.

While the law required completion of most pretrial investigations within three months, a prosecutor could extend this period. The law stipulated pretrial detention should not exceed three years. The Ministry of Interior and the General Directorate of Prisons (GDP) reported no cases of individuals detained beyond legal timelines.

Shortages of judges and prosecutors delayed criminal proceedings. Limited material resources, lack of space, poor court-calendar management, insufficient staff, and the failure of attorneys and witnesses to appear also prevented the court system from adjudicating cases in a timely fashion. According to the GDP, the justice system's vetting process exacerbated the situation and led to vacancies in courts and prosecutors' offices.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

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

e. Trafficking in Persons

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

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibited such actions, and there were no credible reports government officials employed them. The Office of the Ombudsperson, an independent, constitutional government watchdog, reported cases of degrading treatment due to inadequate penitentiary conditions.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

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/>.

Child Marriage

The legal minimum age for marriage was 18, but the law allowed for

younger individuals to marry with parental consent. Authorities did not always enforce the law, and legislation did not prescribe measures to prevent child marriage. NGO Nisma Arsis noted underage marriages often occurred with Romani and Balkan-Egyptian children.

The State Agency for the Protection of Children reported forced or early marriage were rare, although they remained more common in Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities.

c. Protection to 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. UNHCR, through its partner the Albanian Services for Refugees and Migrants, monitored personal interviews with asylum seekers during the refugee status determination process and supported their integration.

Provision of First Asylum

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees.

Police allowed UNHCR, the Office of the Ombudsperson, and their civil society partners to conduct independent monitoring of asylum processes

and related facilities.

Resettlement

UNHCR stated that while the law provided for naturalization of refugees, the country had not implemented required bylaws on the needed documentation and processes for naturalization. UNHCR reported that bureaucratic inefficiencies hindered naturalization and repatriation processes.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The Jewish population was estimated to be 40-50 persons. There were no reports of antisemitic incidents.