

Antigua and Barbuda 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Antigua and Barbuda during the year.

There were no credible reports of significant human rights abuses.

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

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There was one report the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year. Media reported a prison inmate died of injuries sustained in an April 28 fight with a prison officer. The prison officer was charged with the murder of the inmate.

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 generally respected this right. An independent media, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for media members. Prominent politicians had ownership interests in the major news publications, which raised concerns regarding the independence of the media houses and political bias in the press.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions. The law also provided for the right to bargain collectively and a limited right to conduct legal strikes. The Court of Industrial Relations could limit the right to strike in a dispute. Once either party to a dispute requested the court to mediate, no strikes were allowed. Due to delays associated with this process, unions often resolved labor disputes before a strike was called. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination by employers but did not specifically require reinstatement of workers illegally fired for union activity.

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining were generally respected for citizen workers and migrant laborers. There were no reports of antiunion discrimination, nor were there reports of violations of collective bargaining rights.

Workers who provided essential services (including water, electricity, hospital, fire, prison, air traffic control, meteorology, telecommunications, government printing office, and port authority) were required to give two weeks' notice of intent to strike. The definition of essential services was broader than what the International Labor Organization generally considered essential. The Industrial Relations Court could issue an injunction against a legal strike when the national interest was threatened or affected. The law prohibited retaliation against strikers.

Penalties for violating labor laws ranged from a minor fine to two months in prison and were commensurate with those for denials of other civil rights. Penalties were regularly applied against violators. The government enforced the right of association and collective bargaining. Administrative and judicial procedures, however, were often subject to lengthy delays and appeals.

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 categories. The minimum wage was more than the official estimate by the World Bank for the poverty income level.

The law provided that workers were not required to work more than a 48-hour, six-day workweek. The law required that employees be paid for overtime work at one and one-half times their basic hourly wage after exceeding 40 hours in the workweek. The Ministry of Labour put few limitations on overtime, allowing it in temporary or occasional cases, but did not allow employers to make regular overtime compulsory. Penalties for illegal overtime did not effectively deter labor violations.

Occupational Safety and Health

The law included occupational safety and health (OSH) provisions, but some were out of date. The Department of Labour and Central Board of Health were responsible for verifying OSH compliance, identified unsafe conditions, and responded to workers' OSH complaints. The Ministry of Labour reported that workers were allowed to remove themselves from unsafe situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardizing their employment. The ministry had the authority to require special safety measures not otherwise defined in the law for worker safety.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government exercised limited enforcement of minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar crimes such as fraud or negligence. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators. Labor inspectors were responsible for enforcement of labor laws in the formal and informal sectors. The number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance. Inspectors had the authority to conduct unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

The government estimated 15 percent of the workforce was in the informal sector. The government exercised limited enforcement of labor laws in the informal sector.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

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

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The 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.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

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

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *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 prohibited such practices, and there were no credible reports government officials employed them.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

Laws collectively prohibited the worst forms of child labor, but specific details were not in any single statute. The government enforced child labor laws, and there were no confirmed reports during the year of the worst

forms of child labor. Penalties against violators were regularly applied.

The law stipulated a minimum working age of 16, although work prohibitions did not apply to family businesses. In some circumstances, children younger than 16 were eligible for employment with restrictions, such as not working during school hours and working a maximum number of hours. Persons younger than 18 were not allowed to work past 10 p.m., except in certain sectors, and in some cases were required to have a medical clearance to obtain employment. No list of types of hazardous work existed for the protection of those younger than 18.

The law required the Ministry of Labour to conduct periodic inspections of workplaces. There were no reports of a significant presence of illegal child labor; however, there were no child labor inspections. The law allowed for a small financial penalty or three months in prison for violations. Penalties were less than for analogous crimes. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

Child Marriage

The legal minimum age for marriage was 18. The government enforced the law effectively. Children ages 16 to 17 could legally marry with parental consent, but this was uncommon.

c. Protection to Refugees

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

Provision of First Asylum

The law did not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government did not have a system for providing protection to refugees. The government handled asylum requests on an ad hoc basis.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The Jewish community was very small, and there were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.