

The Bahamas 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in The Bahamas 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 were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful 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 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.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, participate in collective bargaining, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination. To be recognized, trade unions had to register with the Ministry of Labour and Public Service. Union representatives said the registration process caused delays but was otherwise not a barrier to union formation. By law, employers could be compelled to reinstate workers illegally fired for union activity. Members of the defense force, police, fire brigade, and prison guards were prohibited from joining unions. To be recognized by the government, a union was required to represent at least 50 percent plus one of the affected workers.

By law, labor disputes had to first be filed with the Ministry of Labour. If not resolved there, disputes were transferred to an industrial tribunal. The tribunal's decision was final and could be appealed only on a question of law.

There were significant restrictions on the right to strike. Prior to an anticipated strike, the law first required negotiations between the employer and union leaders. If there was a stalemate, the union had to notify the minister of labor at least two days before a vote to strike. The employer and union leaders sometimes negotiated for months before the minister became involved. The minister could supervise a secret strike ballot. The government had the authority to intervene in a strike to ensure the delivery of essential services and uphold the "national interest." Workers who engaged in illegal strikes were subject to imprisonment for up to two years.

The government and private sector generally respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

The government generally enforced laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers. Penalties for violations of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike were commensurate those for analogous violations such as civil rights violations and 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 minimum wage for all sectors. The minimum wage was above the established poverty income level. The laws provided for a 40-hour workweek.

Occupational Safety and Health

The government set occupational safety and health (OSH) standards appropriate to the main industries. Some workers in construction, agriculture, informal tourist operators, engineering, and informal sectors endured hazardous conditions. These workers could not remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. The government did not proactively identify unsafe conditions, but instead only responded to OSH complaints.

Typically, persons who were unable to work because of hazardous conditions were protected from dismissal; however, there were no statutory provisions that guarantee paid leave.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government did not effectively enforce minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. The Ministry of Labour was responsible for enforcing labor laws, including standards for minimum wage, work hours, and OSH. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions but infrequently conducted random site visits. Inspectors levied fines to enforce OSH standards and to investigate employee concerns and complaints. Penalties for violations of OSH, wage, and work hour laws were commensurate with those for similar crimes such as fraud or negligence. Penalties were rarely applied against violators. The number of labor inspectors was not sufficient to enforce compliance.

The informal economy was estimated to represent 10-12 percent of the economy, primarily in the landscaping, construction, and hotel industries. There was 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 law prohibited such practices, and there were no credible reports government officials employed them. There were allegations of police brutality and reports of physical abuse of prisoners by prison guards.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

The law prohibited the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited the employment of children younger than 14 for industrial work and any work during school hours or between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. Children ages 14-17 could work between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. but only in hotels, restaurants, food stores, general merchandise stores, and gas stations. Children ages 14-17 could work outside school hours for not more than three hours on a school day, eight hours on a nonschool day, or 40 hours in a week. The government did not publish a list of jobs considered dangerous, although it intervened when children worked in dangerous environments, such as selling peanuts at an intersection. The government did not publish a list of light work activities permitted for children. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous crimes but were never applied against violators.

There were no confirmed reports during the year of the worst forms of child labor. Incidents of child labor occurred in the informal sector. Children worked on family farms and as street vendors. The Ministry of Labour lacked sufficient inspectors to follow up on reports of child labor.

Child Marriage

The legal minimum age for marriage was 18, although minors could marry at 14 with parental permission. The Office of the Registrar General strictly enforced laws related to marriage licenses, and there were no reports of child marriages outside the law.

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.

International organizations reported the government unduly expedited the repatriation of some Haitian nationals, causing separation of children from their guardians in certain cases.

Provision of First Asylum

The law did not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status; access to asylum was informal. There was no legal framework whereby the government could provide protections and safeguards. Authorities involved UNHCR in asylum proceedings, but the lack of legislation complicated UNHCR's work to assist asylum seekers and refugees.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The local Jewish community consisted of approximately 500 persons. There were no reports of antisemitic incidents.