

# **Barbados 2024 Human Rights Report**

## **Executive Summary**

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Barbados 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.

In June, media reported an inmate was found unresponsive in a detention cell at a police station. Authorities gave no explanation for the cause of death, and family members were not allowed to see the body for months. As of December, an investigation was underway to determine the cause of death.

## **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 unions and conduct legal strikes but did not specifically recognize the right to bargain collectively. Moreover, the law did not obligate employers to recognize unions or to accept collective bargaining. Although employers were under no legal obligation to recognize unions, most major employers did so when more than 50 percent of the employees made a request to unionize.

Companies were sometimes hesitant to engage in collective bargaining with

a recognized union, but in most instances they eventually did so. At times the Labour Department intervened to bring both parties to come to a resolution.

The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and protected workers engaged in union activity. A tribunal could order reinstatement, rehiring, or compensation for antiunion discrimination. Penalties were not commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights, such as discrimination. Generally, the government effectively enforced the law in the formal sector. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators.

The law gave persons the right to have allegations of unfair dismissal tried before the Employment Rights Tribunal. The process often had lengthy delays.

A tripartite group representing labor, government, and the private sector (The Social Partnership) met regularly. The group dealt with social and economic problems, formulated legislative policy, and worked towards harmonious workplace relations.

## **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 that was above the World Bank poverty income level. The standard legal workweek was 40 hours in five days. The law provided employees with three weeks of paid vacation annually for persons with fewer than five years of service and four weeks of paid vacation annually for persons with five years of service or more. The law required overtime payment of time and a half for hours worked more than the legal standard and prescribed that all overtime hours be voluntary. The law did not set a maximum number of overtime hours.

In February, the government passed the Labour Clauses Concession Act, which required companies receiving concessions from the government to comply with obligations under the law. These companies were also required to pay their employees the wage rates established as standard for the sector or industry within which they were operating, observe the hours of work and other conditions of employment that were established as standard for the particular sector or industry, comply with their obligations to their employees under the National Insurance Act, and recognize the freedom of their employees to be members of a registered trade union and to bargain collectively. Government concessions could be revoked if companies failed to comply with these obligations.

## **Occupational Safety and Health**

The government set occupational safety and health (OSH) standards that were appropriate for its industries. The government responded to workers' OSH complaints. The law provided for the right of workers to refuse dangerous work without jeopardy to their employment, and authorities generally protected employees in this situation.

In January, media reported the Employment Rights Tribunal found a local company discriminated against unvaccinated employees during the COVID-19 public health crisis by insisting they undergo “onerous and unreasonable” weekly testing. The tribunal, which ordered no compensation for the complainant worker, also found there was no evidence the firm had insisted on mandatory vaccination against the virus, as one of its employees had claimed. The case was the first test of the 2020 Employment (Prevention of Discrimination) Act, which put the complaint under the tribunal's jurisdiction.

## **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

The Ministry of Labour, Social Security, and Third Sector was responsible for enforcing wage, overtime, and OSH regulations. The government effectively enforced the law. Penalties for OSH violations were higher than penalties for analogous violations, such as negligence. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators.

Labor inspectors were required during an inspection to notify employers of their presence, except where the inspectors considered such a notification would impinge on the performance of their duties. The law gave inspectors the power to initiate proceedings against employers for any violation or offense. The number of labor inspectors was sufficient to enforce compliance. Trade unions monitored safety problems to verify the enforcement of OSH regulations, as well as the correction of related problems by management.

An Inter-American Development Bank study estimated up to 40 percent of the workforce engaged in informal work. The government did not enforce labor laws in this 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**

There was no significant presence of the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited all the worst forms of child labor. The minimum age of employment was 16. The law prohibited persons younger than 18 working in industrial settings between 6 p.m. and 7 a.m. or performing tasks that

could harm their health, safety, or morals. The government effectively enforced applicable laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous crimes, and penalties were sometimes applied to violators.

### **Child Marriage**

The legal minimum age for marriage was 18. Persons ages 16 and 17 could marry with parental consent. The government enforced the law effectively.

### **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.

### **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

The Jewish community was estimated to be no larger than 60 persons. There were no reports of antisemitic incidents.