

# **Bhutan 2024 Human Rights Report**

## **Executive Summary**

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

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of the significant presence of any of the worst forms of child labor.

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 that 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 generally allowed for freedom of expression despite reported incidents of self-censorship.

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

In May, the international nongovernmental organization (NGO) Reporters Without Borders in its *World Press Freedom Index* cited persistent self-censorship by members of the press and difficulty in gaining access to government information as negatively impacting press freedom. The law allowed powerful individuals to use defamation laws to retaliate against critics, but no such cases were reported during the year.

### **b. Worker Rights**

#### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The law provided workers the right to form and join independent unions. Workers could form a union with the participation of at least 12 employees

from a single workplace. Nevertheless, as of November 2022 there were no trade unions. The law did not provide for the right to conduct legal strikes. Most of the country's workforce engaged in agriculture.

The law provided for the right of workers to bargain collectively with employers. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and required reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Violators faced misdemeanor charges and could be compelled to pay damages. The government effectively enforced applicable laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar violations. The law granted workers the right to pursue litigation. Information was unavailable on whether penalties were applied against violators for laws related to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Given the absence of unions, there were no reports of government enforcement of laws respecting their establishment or operation.

## **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 national minimum wage was above the official poverty income level.

According to the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Employment, there were two wage rates in the country: the national minimum wage rate and the national workforce wage rate. The national minimum wage rate applied to anyone working in the country, irrespective of nationality. The national workforce wage rate was higher but applied only to civil servants.

The law defined the workday as eight hours per day with a one-hour lunch break, and employers were required to grant regular rest days, including a minimum of nine public holidays each year. Work for more than eight hours a day was mandated to be paid at 1.5 times the normal rate.

### **Occupational Safety and Health**

Government occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country. Inspectors had the right to conduct unannounced inspections and were responsible for identifying unsafe conditions. Labor regulations granted workers the right to leave work situations that endangered their health and safety without jeopardy to their employment.

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

The Department of Labor's enforcement of minimum wage, work hours, and occupational health and safety standards was generally effective in the formal sector. Penalties, including payment of damages, were generally similar to other types of workplace violation fines, and inspection was

sufficient to enforce compliance. The economy was largely rural and agrarian, and the ratio of informal employment to total employment was relatively high; the World Bank estimated the informal labor rate at approximately 80 percent.

## **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 and law 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 and law prohibited such practices, and there were no credible reports government officials employed them.

### **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 statutory minimum age of marriage was 18. There was a lack of precise data on child marriage in the country because many marriages were unregistered. The National Commission for Women and Children conducted efforts to raise public awareness of the illegality and harmful impacts of child and forced marriage, and of harmful social and cultural practices that increase children's vulnerability to violence, exploitation, and neglect.

### **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 had not established a system for providing protection to refugees.

An estimated 1,300 Tibetan refugees lived in the country during the year.

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

The country did not have a Jewish population and there were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.