

# Canada 2024 Human Rights Report

## Executive Summary

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

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists and activists.

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 the government, and the law prohibited forced sterilization. At least five lawsuits were in progress against health, provincial, and federal

authorities for redress for historic sterilization of Indigenous women without their full and informed consent.

## **Section 2. Liberty**

### **a. Freedom of the Press**

The law 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, although significant curtailments of press freedom remained.

The law criminalized “hate speech” in any public place and defined it as communication that incited hatred against any identifiable group where such incitement was likely to lead to a breach of the peace or communication that willfully promoted hatred against any identifiable group, other than in private conversation. The maximum penalty was two years’ imprisonment.

The public media and majority of private media were substantially dependent on government sources of funding for their activities. Government intervention in the media market favored means of communication that did not diverge from government-suggested bounds of

political speech, and government policy and practices often disadvantaged independent media.

The government used a variety of mechanisms to fund public and private sector media in the country, ranging from direct grants and tax credits to mandatory payments and funds collected from broadcasters, streaming services, and news platforms, but distributed or regulated by the government. News organizations faced direct and indirect pressure to conform their political speech in order to gain or maintain access to these funds, leading to self-censorship. Independent news organizations that did not take government funds faced a substantial market disadvantage.

During the year, the Online News Act of 2023 came into force. The law required large digital media platforms pay news businesses when their content appeared on the platform. The law empowered the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission to set mandatory bargaining guidelines between platforms and news businesses and to otherwise enforce and set regulatory guidance for the act, including codes of conduct and eligibility of news businesses to participate, powers which could be used to discriminate against political speech or disfavored independent media outlets.

In September, a Federal Court judge upheld the government's decision to disqualify an independent news organization from journalism tax credits. The organization was one of the few in the country that produced critical

reporting on the government's response to protests of the COVID-19 lockdowns.

In March, the government announced a grant of 58.8 million Canadian dollars (CAD) (\$43.2 million) to extend the Local Journalism Initiative to 2027 that funded media organizations to hire journalists or pay freelance journalists to produce civic journalism for “underserved communities” across the country. The funding brought total government support for initiative to CAD 94.7 million (\$69.6 million) over eight years since its launch in 2019. Independent media organizations without access to these funds faced increased market pressure. The Changing Narrative Fund revenue stream of the initiative, announced during the year, prioritized funding for hiring journalists in the “Indigenous, Black, racialized, ethno-religious minority, people with disabilities and 2SLGBTQI+ communities,” discriminating against journalists who fell outside of these favored categories.

## **Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure**

In January, Edmonton police arrested Indigenous journalist Brandi Morin on assignment with Ricochet Media for obstruction for conducting interviews with residents at an Indigenous-led homeless encampment when police arrived to dismantle the encampment. Police detained Morin for several hours, although Morin had identified herself as a journalist. Authorities dropped charges against Morin in March after prosecutors determined no

public interest was served in pursuing the case.

## **Efforts to Preserve the Independence of the Media**

In May, a member of parliament of the governing party and other officials allegedly attempted to use supposed security threats to impose unreasonably high security charges (more than the costs of the events otherwise) on two independent media organizations' events. The organizations alleged that they were targeted for their political speech and had a lawsuit pending.

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

Rather than participate in government-mandated bargaining, some American digital platforms announced that they would no longer make news content available to Canadian users, leading to substantial censorship of news content including local news content. The opposition party described the Online News Act as a government censorship law, because of its effects on the character and quality of the country's news reporting.

A trial of two organizers of the 2022 "Freedom Convoy" concluded during the year. A verdict was still pending at year's end. In response to the 2022 convoy (which protested draconian lockdown measures that substantially damaged the communities and economic livelihoods of many Canadians),

the government took the unprecedented step of invoking the Emergencies Act, leading to large-scale social media censorship and debanking. In January, the Federal Court ruled that the government's imposition of the Emergencies Act was unreasonable and violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The federal government appealed the decision.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) continued its legal efforts to block an independent news outlet's Access to Information request for CBC's communications with American social media platform Twitter (now X) dating to 2018. The news outlet previously published investigative reporting alleging that the CBC exerted pressure on Twitter/X to censor it and other disfavored news outlets over political speech.

## **b. Worker Rights**

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

Federal and some provincial laws, including related regulations and statutory instruments, provided for the right of most workers in both the public and the private sectors to form and join independent unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively. Public sector workers performing essential services had recourse to mediation and binding arbitration if labor negotiations failed, but they were generally prohibited from participating in strikes if they were subject to an essential services agreement between the government and their union. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination

and provided for reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. There were no reports of antiunion discrimination or other forms of employer interference in union functions.

Federal labor law applied in federally regulated sectors, which included the federal public service and parliament as well as industries of extra-provincial or international character. These industries employed approximately 10 percent of workers.

The law required the government and a bargaining unit in a federal or federally regulated industry to negotiate an essential services agreement. This agreement defined an essential service and identified the number and type of employees and the specific positions within the bargaining unit necessary to provide the essential service. The essential workers designated in the agreement consequently did not have the right to strike. If the parties were unable to agree, either party could apply to the independent Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board for a resolution.

Provincial and territorial governments regulated and were responsible for enforcing their own labor laws in all occupations and workplaces that were not federally regulated.

There were categories of workers excluded from statutory protection of freedom of association in several provinces. Some provinces restricted the right to organize. For example, agricultural workers in Ontario and Quebec

had the right to form associations but were excluded from unionization, collective bargaining, and the right to strike.

The government generally effectively enforced freedom of association, the right of collective bargaining, and the right to strike. The government also effectively enforced other applicable laws and regulations, including with remedies and penalties such as corrective workplace practices and criminal prosecution for noncompliance and willful violations. Penalties were commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights and were regularly applied to violators.

In February, the Ontario government accepted a 2022 ruling of the Ontario Court of Appeal that the legislated cap it imposed on provincial employees in 2019 limiting annual wage increases was unconstitutional and violated the right to collective bargaining and freedom of association. The government repealed the affected legislation.

In August, the Canadian Industrial Relations Board issued a back-to-work order and a binding arbitration process ending a national rail strike. The government stated the infringement of collective bargaining rights was justified due to the risks the stoppage posed to the public and to the national economy.

## **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 did not provide for a national minimum wage. Employees received the minimum wage of the province or territory where they were employed. The law applied a federal minimum wage for workers across the country in federally regulated sectors. If the minimum wage of a province or territory was higher than the federal minimum wage, the law required employers to pay federally regulated workers the higher minimum wage in that jurisdiction. The government used the Market Basket Measure as its first official poverty line, and the minimum wage was less than the poverty line for a family of four, notably in urban centers.

Standard work hours, premium pay for work above the standard workweek, and the threshold for premium pay varied by province, but the limit for standard work hours was 44 hours per week in the province of Ontario, and 48 hours in Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Some workers, e.g., in agriculture and highway transport truck drivers, had a higher threshold for standard work hours, and regulated professionals such as physicians, pharmacists, dentists, lawyers, and public accountants, as well as managers and supervisors, were exempt from overtime pay. Other categories of workers had specific employment rights that differed from the standard and

varied by province on hours of work, including commercial fishermen, oil-field workers, loggers, home caregivers, professionals, managers, and some sales staff. There were reports of employees working unpaid overtime in knowledge and technology sectors, in retail and live-in caregiving, transportation and logistics, as well as among part-time workers.

### **Occupational Safety and Health**

Federal law stipulated Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) standards for employees under federal jurisdiction. Provincial and territorial legislation provided standards for all other employees, including foreign and migrant workers. Standards were appropriate for the industries they covered.

Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations resided with authorities, employers, and supervisors, not the worker. Inspectors proactively conducted workplace visits to raise awareness of hazards; advise parties of their rights, duties, and obligations; and promote and assist with compliance. Inspectors visited reactively in response to fatalities, injuries, and complaints.

Federal, provincial, and territorial laws protected the right of workers with “reasonable cause” to refuse dangerous work and to remove themselves from hazardous work conditions without penalty, and authorities effectively enforced this right. The government also promoted safe working practices and provided training, education, and resources through the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety, a federal agency composed of

representatives of government, employers, and labor.

Violations of OSH standards varied by industry and workplace. In 2021 (latest available statistics), postal services, road and air transportation, handling agricultural products, longshoring and port operations, and shipping and ferries were categories of workers that reported the highest number of disabling injuries in the federally regulated sector.

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

The government effectively enforced minimum wage rates, overtime, and OSH laws. Penalties were generally sufficient to deter violations and commensurate with those for similar crimes. The federal Department of Employment and Social Development was responsible for regulation and enforcement of wage and hour standards in federally regulated sectors across the country. Departments of labor, training, and employment in each province and territory regulated labor standards in all other employment sectors in their respective jurisdictions. Migrant workers in specific occupations, such as agriculture or caregiving, could be exempt from minimum wage, overtime, and other labor standards protections in specific provinces.

Federal and provincial labor departments conducted inspections through scheduled and unscheduled visits, in direct response to reported complaints, and at random. Inspectors had authority to require remedies and initiate

sanctions including fines, suspensions, or closures. Penalties for employers were monetary or criminal, with prison terms of up to 12 months for severe violations and were regularly applied against violators. Fines for violations of labor codes or regulations increased based on the number and frequency of offenses. The Labour Program published information regarding employers who violated the labor codes.

Some trade unions claimed limited resources and an insufficient number of inspectors hampered enforcement efforts, including delays in addressing complaints. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported migrants, especially agricultural migrant workers, recent immigrants, young workers, and the unskilled were vulnerable to violations of the law on minimum wage, overtime pay, unpaid wages, and excessive hours of work. NGOs also alleged persons were discouraged from filing complaints due to restrictions on the types of labor complaints accepted for investigation and delays in processing cases. Restrictions varied among provinces in provincially regulated industries, and there were time limits on filing complaints. In 2023 (the most recent data available), the government allocated CAD 48 million (\$35.3 million) over two years to hire more program inspectors, maintain a worker protection tip line to report abuse, and conduct education and outreach to employers who used temporary migrant labor to improve compliance. It increased the monetary value of penalties levied in 2023 for violations by 36 percent over 2022 and increased the number of employers banned from hiring temporary migrant workers to 12 from seven

in 2022.

The size of the informal sector was 11.3 percent of the workforce, according to World Economics data. Workers in the informal economy were protected by standard labor laws, including minimum wage, time off, vacation pay, sick leave, or the right to refuse unsafe work if they were deemed employees under the law, in contrast to some forms of contracted employees. Access to these protections did not extend to independent contractors. Areas of the economy with high levels of informality included home-based and domestic work, in-home child care, gig workers, home and vehicle repair, and freelance work.

## **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 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 [www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](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 that government officials employed them.

In February, the Supreme Court denied permission to appeal a 2021 sexual assault conviction and four-year prison sentence imposed on Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC) officer Douglas Snelgrove for his rape of a young woman while on duty in 2014. A lower court had freed Snelgrove on bail in 2023 during his third trial on the same charges. The court's rejection of the appeal application exhausted Snelgrove's legal options, and authorities returned him to prison to complete his sentence. The victim

resumed a separate public complaint to the RNC against Snelgrove, and in May the RNC confirmed that Snelgrove was discharged from the force. He was registered on a sex-offender list for 20 years.

## **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. In federally regulated sectors, children younger than 17 could work only when they were not required to attend school under provincial legislation, provided the work did not fall under excluded categories (such as working in a mine, on a vessel, or in the vicinity of explosives) and did not endanger health and safety. Children could not work in any federally regulated sector between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m.

The provinces and territories had primary responsibility for regulating child labor, and minimum age restrictions varied by province. Enforcement occurred through the application of laws covering employment standards, OSH, and education, as well as regulations regarding vocational training, child welfare, and the licensing of establishments to sell alcohol. Most provinces restricted the number of hours of work to two or three hours on a school day and eight hours on a non-school day and prohibited children ages 12 to 16 from working without parental consent, after 11 p.m., or in any hazardous employment.

Authorities effectively enforced child labor laws and policies. Federal and provincial labor ministries carried out child labor inspections proactively and in response to formal complaints. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous crimes, were sufficient to deter violations, and were regularly applied against violators.

## **Child Marriage**

The law established 16 as the legal minimum age of marriage with parental consent. The government enforced the law effectively. A 2021 study estimated that child marriages, particularly of brides younger than 18, occurred in approximately 0.2 percent of all marriages, with the highest concentrations of child marriages found in Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest and Yukon Territories.

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



## **Resettlement**

The government accepted refugees for resettlement, offered naturalization to refugees residing in its territory, and assisted in refugees' voluntary return to their countries of origin.

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

Approximately 1.4 percent of the population was Jewish. According to authorities, 900 hate crimes against the Jewish community were reported to police in 2023, a 71 percent increase from the previous year. The B'nai Brith Canada League for Human Rights received a total of 5,791 reports of antisemitic incidents in 2023 (the most recent available data), up 109 percent from 2022. Reports involving violence increased by 208 percent, harassment by 124 percent, and online harassment by 136 percent.

In May, unknown assailants shot at a Jewish school in Montreal. In May and again in October, unknown assailants fired gunshots at the Bais Chaya Mushka School for Girls in Toronto while it was closed overnight. Toronto Police announced they were opening a hate crime investigation. Also in May, unknown assailants threw an incendiary device at the front doors of Schara Tzedek synagogue in Vancouver that ignited while worshippers remained in the building. Police opened investigations, which were still pending at year's end.

For further information on antisemitic incidents in the country, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise their freedom of religion or belief, see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.