

Central African Republic 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in the Central African Republic during the year. The government again postponed local elections, from October to 2025.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious abuses in a conflict; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict by armed groups, the armed forces, and Kremlin-backed Wagner Group forces; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom; restrictions on religious freedom; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; and existence of the worst forms of child labor.

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

Armed groups reportedly continued to perpetrate serious abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. They reportedly committed unlawful killings, physical abuses, abductions, sexual assaults,

looting, and destruction of property. The government investigated and prosecuted some of these actions, in coordination with the Special Criminal Court. The transnational criminal organization the Wagner Group secured blanket immunity from the government as part of its security agreement.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were several reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

On May 3, local newspapers reported the Wagner Group kidnapped 10 soldiers from the predominantly Muslim PK5 neighborhood in Bangui, the capital's largest Muslim-majority district. Neighborhood residents and former members of local militias had joined the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) after disarming themselves. Wagner mercenaries, accompanied by FACA soldiers, stopped them at their homes and took them to an unknown location. Two days later, the bodies of six of the soldiers, including Staff Sergeant Sanda and Chief Warrant Officer Moussa Zakaria, were brought back to PK5 and found riddled with bullets. The fate of the other four soldiers remained unknown. As a result of the killings, PK5 residents protested.

In October, local media reported the transnational criminal organization

Wagner Group secured blanket immunity from the government.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

c. War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Evidence of Acts that May Constitute Genocide, or Conflict-Related Abuses

There were numerous reports of serious human rights abuses and international humanitarian law violations countrywide committed by the FACA, Wagner Group elements, and armed groups. Reports of abuses included unlawful killings, torture, disappearances, rape, forced marriage, sexual exploitation and abuse, looting, destruction of property, unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers by armed forces and armed groups, and disruption of humanitarian access.

During the year, the court in Bambari and the SCC took actions to bring those who had committed abuses to justice. On December 13, in the “Ndele I Trial,” the SCC sentenced four individuals for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in April 2020, namely Kalite Azor (20 years in prison), Antar Hamat (15 years), Charfadine Moussa (15 years), and Wodjonodroba Oumar Oscar (15 years).

In the “Ndele II Trial,” seven members of the armed group Popular Front for the Rebirth of the Central African Republic (FPRC) were charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the village of Ndele in March 2020 during fighting between two FPRC factions from different ethnic groups (the ROUNGAS and GOULAS), which involved innocent community members.

The United Nations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported incidents of conflict-related sexual violence. Between January-September, the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) documented 222 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, affecting 292 victims. MINUSCA noted such cases remained underreported.

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but the government did not always respect these rights.

The government and security forces suppressed and surveilled independent media and punished criticism of the government. Misinformation and

disinformation, including by Russia-linked actors, proliferated in media.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

Journalists reported being assaulted and threatened with violence during the year by authorities and Wagner forces due to their reporting, including on human rights abuses.

In August, Minister of Public Security Michel Nicaise Nassin assaulted and ordered the arrest of two journalists, Jefferson Cyrille Yapende and Jospin Bissi, while they were reporting for France 24. The journalists and their interviewee were released after being detained for an hour and a half. The Union of Central African Journalists and the Association of Central African Bloggers condemned the attack and encouraged the journalists to file a complaint. The government had not responded officially to the incident by year's end.

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

Local journalists reported domestic media outlets routinely engaged in self-censorship. Many independent media outlets reported on and criticized Wagner Group elements' human rights violations, but other topics, such as Wagner's economic interests in the country, were seen as off-limits. Some journalists shared sensitive information with international human rights-

focused NGOs to avoid repercussions for publishing sensitive stories in their own media outlets.

Armed groups limited the freedom of expression in areas they controlled.

Efforts to Preserve the Independence of the Media

On March 18, Minister of Communication and government spokesman Maxime Balalou initiated a weekly meeting gathering all members of the press to discuss developments from the previous week.

On August 2, President Faustin-Archange Touadéra met with media representatives. This meeting, called the “first edition of the press lunch,” allowed media professionals to engage in person with the president on “all subjects that affect the life of the nation,” according to Balalou. The widely reported meeting sought to reduce the spread of false information in the country.

During these press meetings, media representatives were free to ask any questions to government members and get responses from them.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers, except for senior-level state employees, security force members, and foreign workers in residence for

less than two years, to form or join independent unions without prior authorization. The law provided for the right of workers to organize and administer trade unions without employer interference and granted trade unions full legal status. The law required that union officials be full-time, wage-earning employees in their occupation and allowed them to conduct union business during working hours if the employer was informed 48 hours in advance and provided authorization. The labor code provided that unions could bargain collectively in the public and private sectors. The government, the country's largest employer, set wages after consultation, but not negotiation, with government employee trade unions.

Workers had the right to strike in both the public and private sectors, but the law prohibited security forces, including the armed forces and gendarmes, from striking. Strikes were limited to work-related matters. Requirements for conducting a legal strike were lengthy and cumbersome. For a strike to be legal, authorities required that the union first present its demands, the employer respond to these demands, labor and management attend a conciliation meeting, and an arbitration council find that the union and the employer failed to reach agreement on valid demands. The government required the union to provide eight days' advance written notification of a planned strike. The law stated that if employers initiated a lockout that was not in accordance with the labor code, the employer was required to pay workers for all days of the lockout. The Ministry of Labor had the authority to establish a list of enterprises that were required by law

to maintain a “compulsory minimum service” in the event of a strike. The government had the power of requisition or the authority to end strikes by invoking the public interest. The code made no other provisions regarding sanctions on employers for acting against strikers.

The law expressly outlawed antiunion discrimination. Employees could have their cases heard in labor court. The law did not state whether employers found guilty of antiunion discrimination were required to reinstate workers fired for union activities, although it required employers found guilty of such discrimination to pay damages, including back pay and lost wages.

The government generally enforced applicable laws and respected laws concerning freedom of association in the formal sector. Penalties were commensurate with other violations of civil rights, but enforcement was inconsistent. Workers exercised some of these rights, but only a relatively small part of the workforce, primarily civil servants, exercised the right to join a union. While worker organizations were officially independent of government or political parties, the government exerted some influence over the leadership of some organizations.

Labor unions did not report any underlying patterns of discrimination or abuse. The labor court did not hear any cases involving antiunion discrimination during the year.

Collective bargaining occurred in the private sector during the year,

although the total number of collective agreements concluded was unknown. The government was not generally involved if the two parties were able to reach an agreement. Information was unavailable on the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the private sector.

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 required the Ministry of Labor to set minimum wages in the public sector by decree. The minimum wages in the private sector were established based on sector-specific collective conventions resulting from negotiations between employers and workers' representatives in each sector.

The minimum wage in the private sector varied by sector and type of work. The minimum wage in all sectors was less than the World Bank standard for extreme poverty.

The law set a standard workweek of 40 hours for government employees and most private-sector employees. Household employees could work up to 52 hours per week. The law also required a minimum rest period of 48

hours per week for citizen, foreign, and migrant workers. Overtime policy varied according to the workplace. There was no legal prohibition on excessive or compulsory overtime. The labor code, however, stated employers had to provide for the health and security of employees who were engaged in overtime work.

Occupational Safety and Health

There were general laws on occupational safety and health (OSH) standards in the workplace, but the Ministry of Labor did not precisely define them. The labor code stated a labor inspector could compel an employer to correct unsafe or unhealthy work conditions.

The law provided that workers could remove themselves from dangerous working conditions without jeopardy to their employment. In such instances, the labor inspector notified the employer and required that conditions be addressed within four working days. The high unemployment and poverty rates deterred workers from exercising this right.

Diamond mines, which employed an estimated 400,000 persons, were subject to standards imposed by the mining code and inspection by the Miners' Brigade. Nevertheless, monitoring efforts were insufficient. Despite the law requiring those working in mines to be at least 18, observers frequently saw underage diggers during the year. Diggers often worked in open pits susceptible to collapse, working seven days a week during the dry

season. Diggers were employed by larger mine operators, worked in dangerous conditions at the bottom of open pits, and lacked safety equipment.

The use of toxic chemicals in gold mines endangered environmental and personal health. Observers and NGOs documented the widespread use of cyanide and mercury for gold extraction. The government did not regulate the use of harmful chemicals in semi-mechanized or artisanal mining operations, and NGOs reported the legal definition of semi-mechanized was stretched to include mining operations involving large foreign investors from the People's Republic of China, whose sites were sometimes guarded by government security forces. Wagner Group elements controlled diamond and gold mining sites. Observers reported Wagner Group elements blocked access for inspectors at all the mining sites under their control.

Officially, miners had the right to share in the proceeds of diamond sales. Miners often supplemented these earnings with either black-market diamond sales or wages from other sectors of the economy. NGOs reported the clandestine export of gems and gold undermined equitable profit sharing.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government did not effectively enforce wage, overtime, and OSH standards, and violations were common in all sectors of the economy. The

Ministry of Labor had primary responsibility for managing labor standards, while enforcement fell under the Ministry of Interior and Public Safety and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. The government did not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to enforce compliance with labor laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar crimes such as fraud or negligence but were seldom applied and insufficient to enforce compliance. The law applied to foreign and migrant workers as well, although foreign workers had to meet residency requirements to join a union. Employers commonly violated safety and health standards in agriculture and mining. Violations of overtime policy could be referred to the Ministry of Labor, although it was unknown whether this occurred during the year.

Most economic activity in the country, especially for young persons, was informal, conducted by micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises representing 40 to 60 percent of GDP. The minimum wage applied only to the formal sector, leaving most of the labor force of the country without a minimum wage.

Most labor was performed outside the wage and social security system, especially by farmers in the large subsistence agricultural sector and laborers in the artisanal mining sector. Independent workers were excluded from labor code protections. While most labor protection laws applied to informal-sector employees, laws were not enforced, and violations of wage, hour, and OSH regulations were common. No official entities provided

social protections for workers in the informal sector.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were reports of enforced disappearances committed by or on behalf of government authorities. MINUSCA's Human Rights Division reported enforced disappearances perpetrated by the government's armed forces and nonstate armed groups throughout the year, including one incident in May in which the FACA, alongside Wagner and other armed actors, forcibly disappeared nine individuals.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of persons to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government usually observed these requirements but did so inconsistently. Although the law provided detainees the right to challenge the lawfulness of their detention in court, many detainees were not able to exercise this right due to a lack of quality, affordable legal services and a poorly functioning justice system.

The law provided that persons under arrest be informed immediately of the allegations against them. Article 40 of the penal procedure code stipulated the period of police custody following arrest be limited to 72 hours,

renewable once. At the end of this period, the detainee had to be presented to the public prosecutor or immediately released. Beyond this time, police custody would be illegal. The new constitution adopted in 2023 provided for 48-hour police custody only. According to UN reports, police and the gendarmerie routinely violated the 48-hour custody limit, often on suspicion alone. Most authorities responsible for police custody continued to observe the 72-hour provisions of the criminal procedure code.

Detainees had to be presented before a judge within 72 hours and could not be held longer than 144 hours without appearing before a judge.

Provisional release was available for those awaiting trial but not consistently granted. Suspects were often detained incommunicado.

The law did not guarantee defendants in nonfelony cases access to state-funded attorneys. Many defendants could not afford counsel. Many prisoners were unaware of their rights, especially outside of Bangui. The practice of appointing lawyers was rare outside of the criminal sessions supported by external donors.

Security forces and armed groups detained individuals without legal basis. Many arrests and detentions occurred during operations by national security forces and Wagner Group elements, according to reports by the United Nations, local press, and NGOs. In some cases, arrests reportedly targeted ethnic and religious minorities on suspicion of alleged collusion with armed groups.

A MINUSCA report published in July documented 431 illegal or arbitrary arrests and detentions by state agents, affecting 1,521 victims (including 61 women, 10 girls, 87 boys and two groups of collective victims). MINUSCA also documented 41 cases in 2023 of illegal arrest and detention committed solely by the FACA affecting 98 victims (including women, girls and boys).

Slow investigation and processing of cases was the primary cause of lengthy pretrial detention. The judicial police force charged with investigating cases was poorly trained and understaffed, resulting in slow case-processing times. Lengthy pretrial detentions also occurred in part because of a lack of affordable legal representation. In many cases, the duration of pretrial detention exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime.

A MINUSCA report released in June highlighted how detention facilities nationwide failed to comply with legal time limits for police custody in pretrial detention. At the end of 2023, nearly 2,000 detainees were awaiting trial, including some who had spent six years or more in prison without trial.

In May, FACA and Wagner forces arrested Joseph Martin Figueira, a Portuguese-Belgian humanitarian consultant for the NGO FHI 360, for “endangering state security and espionage” by allegedly communicating with armed group leaders during multiple humanitarian missions to the country. In July, the state public prosecutor charged Figueira with conspiracy, espionage, incitement to hate and to revolt against the government, complicity in undermining internal security of the state, and

complicity with criminal organizations.

In July, international and local media reported Figueira and three other prisoners – opposition member of parliament Dominique Yandocka and two Franco-Algerians, Osmani Samir Antonio and Bensalem Hacade – held at the Camp-de-Roux military prison in Bangui conducted hunger strikes in protest of unjust and illegal detention. Figueira ended his hunger strike in July and remained in detention at year's end.

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, but there were credible reports government officials employed them and impunity persisted. As of

September, there were no reports the government conducted any official investigations into accusations of torture.

MINUSCA's Human Rights Division reported state actors, such as the FACA, committed most recorded incidents of torture during security operations against armed groups. Nonstate armed groups were responsible for most cases of other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment and punishment, such as maiming, dismembering, and widespread sexual violence, according to the same report.

In July, MINUSCA reported that in 2023 it documented 125 victims of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in detention, in some cases resulting in death. In May, a Muslim community leader reported the Wagner Group and the FACA, particularly the Rapid Intervention Battalion, illegally arrested and tortured dozens of persons, mostly from the Muslim community in the Bangui 3rd District, accusing them of planning to overthrow the government and other crimes.

On July 12, President Touadéra announced a new “judicial map” with the creation of four additional courts of appeal during the opening ceremony of the annual judicial general assembly. Following this assembly, the year's first criminal court session of Bangui started on July 22 with 62 registered cases. MINUSCA reported increased court sessions contributed to reducing the number of prisoners awaiting trial and decongesting the prison system, including through acquittals.

More than 20 percent of girls and women were subjected to female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), with variations according to ethnicity and region, according to the 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey study and verified as up to date by UN agencies. In the central-north region, more than 60 percent of women and girls were subjected to FGM/C. The government, with support from the UN Population Fund, mobilized authorities, the Mixed Unit for Rapid Intervention and Repression of Sexual Violence to Women and Children (UMIRR) – an interministerial government agency consisting of the ministries of justice, interior, social affairs, and others – and the judiciary to conduct investigations and prosecutions.

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 Soldiers

The Secretary of State determined the Central African Republic (CAR) had governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces, and government-supported armed groups – specifically the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group – that recruited or used child soldiers from April 2023 to March 2024. See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons*

Report at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Armed groups, including the Unité pour la Paix en Centrafrique, also continued to recruit and use child soldiers. As part of efforts to improve reintegration of children released from armed groups, on September 30, the government and the United Nations signed a memorandum of understanding for the protection and transfer of children associated with armed forces and groups to civilian authorities.

Child Marriage

The law established 18 as the minimum age for civil marriage, but the government did not effectively enforce the law. Early marriage was more common in Muslim communities. There were reports of forced marriages of young girls to ex-Seleka and Anti-Balaka members during the year. The government did not take steps to address forced marriage.

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.

Provision of First Asylum

The laws provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees. Individuals who fled their countries of origin and had prior criminal records, however, were immediately repatriated.

Resettlement

According to the International Organization for Migration and the World Food Program, the trend was for increasing numbers of refugees and IDPs to secure durable living situations and return to normal lives. As of July, a total of 4,026,470 persons were affected by armed conflict, including 453,301 IDPs (11 percent of the displaced population), 2,256,970 former IDP returnees (56 percent), 531,919 returnees from abroad (13 percent), and 784,280 refugees (20 percent). In the country, returnees represented the bulk of the population affected.

Voluntary repatriation was governed by tripartite agreements (CAR-Cameroon-UNHCR, CAR-Democratic Republic of Congo-UNHCR, and CAR-Chad-UNHCR) and the CAR national durable solutions strategy in conjunction with the Yaoundé Declaration and the CAR Solutions Support Platform launched in October 2023. The CAR-Republic of Congo-UNHCR Tripartite Agreement had not been signed by year's end.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

There was no significant Jewish community in the country, and there were no reports of antisemitic incidents.