

Croatia 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Croatia 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 by government authorities.

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, 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.

The law prohibited individuals acting “with the goal of spreading racial, religious, sexual, national, ethnic hatred, or hatred based on the color of skin or sexual orientation or other characteristics.” Internet hate speech was punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment. The law provided for six months’ to five years’ imprisonment for organizing or leading a group of three or more persons to incite violence or hate via print media, radio, television, computer system or networks; during public gatherings; or in any other way against certain designated categories or groups. Another law prohibited the use of banned salutes and symbols, with fines ranging from €700 to €4,000 (\$763 to \$4,362) or a 30-day prison sentence.

On August 9, police launched an investigation of an individual for the crime of public incitement to hatred and violence. On August 6, the individual allegedly played songs of the World War II-era, fascist, Nazi-aligned Ustasha regime over loudspeakers at the public square in Imotski.

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

Members of the press reported self-censorship due to fear of online harassment, lawsuits, upsetting politically connected individuals, or possible adverse employment effects.

On March 14, parliament voted for amendments to the Criminal Code that introduced criminal sanctions for the disclosure of “nonpublic” information regarding pending criminal cases. On June 13, nongovernmental organization (NGO) ARTICLE 19 called on legislators to repeal the amendments, asserting the amendments did not comply with international standards on freedom of expression. Several thousand journalists signed a petition against the draft law before it was passed, and protesters and opposition parties organized antigovernment demonstrations. The Council of Europe in its 2024 report on media freedom in Europe stated the government attempted to restrict the media’s right to protect their sources and criticize courts and prosecutors. The report assessed that the working situation for journalists in the country was “worrying.”

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent

unions of their choice, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination. The law required reinstatement of workers terminated for union activity.

Workers could strike only at the end of a contract or in specific circumstances cited in the contract, and only after completing mediation. Labor and management had to jointly agree on a mediator if a dispute went to mediation. If a strike was found to be illegal, participants could be dismissed, and the union held liable for damages.

The government and employers generally respected and enforced laws protecting freedom of association, the right to strike, and the right to collective bargaining. Penalties were commensurate with violations for analogous crimes and were regularly 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 established a national minimum wage slightly above the official poverty income level, provided for a standard workweek of 40 hours, and limited overtime to 10 hours per week and 180 hours per year. The Retail

Law allowed retail stores to be open only 16 Sundays per year.

Violations of wage, hour, and overtime laws were recorded in the construction, tourism, and hospitality sectors of the economy.

Occupational Safety and Health

The law established occupational safety and health (OSH) standards that were appropriate for the main industries. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remained with OSH experts, not the worker. Workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment.

Violations of OSH standards were most frequently reported in the construction and tourism sectors.

Zagreb police promptly investigated six separate attacks on foreign workers that took place August 13-20. One attack resulted in the victim being hospitalized, and in at least three of the incidents, the attackers robbed the victims. On August 22, the Minister of Interior stated that police would protect the safety and dignity of every citizen, including foreign workers, and reiterated that the government would not tolerate related violence. Police arrested four people in November for violent attacks against foreign workers.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The Labor Inspectorate effectively enforced minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. Inspection was sufficient to enforce compliance. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for similar violations and were regularly applied against violators. The Labor Inspectorate had 186 inspectors with authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. The government acted to prevent violations through regular inspections of businesses across all sectors of the economy. Legislation forbade employment discrimination against vulnerable groups.

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During the year, the Croatian Bureau of Statistics assessed the informal economy's size was between 6-8 percent of GDP during the prior 10 years. The informal sector was individualized, with persons, mostly in trades, working after hours.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities; however, 1,788 missing person cases from the 1991-1995 conflict remained unresolved. The government made efforts to identify the missing and investigate and punish those responsible.

On August 27, the Croatian National Memorial Hospital in Vukovar identified the remains of two Croatian civilians from that city that were exhumed from a mass grave near Vukovar city in 1999. During the year, authorities discovered two mass graves and one individual grave in Vukovarsko-Srijemska county. Of the 16 remains found in the county, at least 10 were found at the Petrovacka Dola landfill near Vukovar. Progress on finding missing persons remained slow, primarily due to bilateral difficulties of working with Serbia. Minister of War Veteran Affairs Tomo Medved claimed several times during the year that Serbia was not providing information to help in the search for missing persons.

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.

Other than those apprehended during the commission of a crime, persons were arrested with warrants issued by a judge or prosecutor based on evidence. Only state prosecutors were authorized to order suspects held if the prosecutor determined there were grounds for suspicion the arrested person committed a criminal offense for which criminal proceedings were usually initiated. Prosecutors could detain suspects up to 48 hours.

A detainee could appeal the decision of the prosecutor within six hours. The investigative judge had to decide on the appeal within eight hours. Upon the request of prosecutors, an investigative judge was allowed to extend investigative detention for an additional 36 hours for the purpose of gathering evidence of a criminal offense for which a prison sentence of five years or more was prescribed. The detainee could appeal the decision of the investigative judge on the extension within six hours. A judicial panel was required to decide on the appeal within 12 hours.

Authorities informed detainees promptly of charges against them. The law required a detainee be brought promptly before an investigative judge for the purpose of holding a hearing for determination of pretrial detention or release, and those rights were generally respected.

The law limited release on bail only in cases of flight risk. In more serious cases, persons were held in pretrial detention when there was reasonable

doubt a person committed a criminal act, but authorities provided the reasons for the detention. Authorities allowed detainees prompt access to a lawyer of their choice or, if indigent, to one provided by the state.

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

There was no significant presence of the worst forms of child labor. The

minimum age for the employment of children was 15. Children ages 15 to 18 who had completed compulsory education could work with prior approval from the government labor inspectorate only if they would not suffer physically or mentally from the work. Children younger than 15 could work only in special circumstances and with the approval of the Croatian Social Services. The law prohibited workers younger than 18 from working overtime, at night, or in dangerous conditions, including but not limited to construction, mining, and work with electricity.

The government effectively enforced the law, and criminal penalties were generally commensurate with similar violations. Penalties were regularly applied against violators. There were isolated violations of the law that involved children working overtime or past curfew and occurred mainly in the hospitality, retail, construction, and services industries. Some Romani children were reportedly at risk of being forced to beg by their families.

Child Marriage

The legal minimum age for marriage was 18. Children older than 16 were legally allowed to marry with a judge's written consent. Authorities effectively enforced the law.

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. The Ministry of Interior worked with asylum seekers and persons granted international protection and provided access to asylum procedures. Although the government increased the number of staff that adjudicated asylum applications, NGOs continued to report lengthy asylum application procedural delays that, in some cases, lasted longer than one year. NGOs asserted more than 90 percent of applicants left the country before receiving a final decision.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The World Jewish Congress estimated the country's Jewish population was 1,700 persons. Some Jewish community leaders reported historical revisionism and online antisemitic rhetoric, some triggered by the conflict in the Middle East, including use of symbols affiliated with the pro-Nazi Ustasha regime (1941-5).

Jewish community leaders noted the lack of a criminal code provision

outlawing use of specific Ustasha insignia and slogans. The use of Ustasha slogans and symbols could be charged as a criminal offense if combined with charges of incitement to hatred and violence. On July 24, the UN Human Rights Committee underlined its concern regarding the prevalence of hate speech and historical revisionism in the country relating to war crimes, including by politicians and high-level officials.

By law, attacks motivated by antisemitism were defined as hate crimes and criminal offenses. On April 21, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, Speaker of Parliament Gordan Jandrokovic, and President Zoran Milanovic's envoy commemorated the 79th anniversary of the inmate breakout from the WWII Jasenovac concentration camp. Survivors of the camp, representatives of antifascist organizations, diplomats, and officials from state and local institutions attended.

The Coordination of the Jewish Communities in Croatia and the Jewish Community Zagreb, together with representatives of Jewish communities from Belgrade, Sarajevo and Novi Sad, held a separate commemoration prior to the state's, in protest of unsolved problems related to lack of criminal sanction for the use of Ustasha insignia and symbols and lack of sanctions for historical revisionism. Two political parties in the opposition paid tribute to the victims separately.

Prime Minister Plenkovic stated due to the decrease in the number of survivors, the government was focused on addressing the issue of Holocaust

remembrance and obtaining a consensus for a framework document on the politics of remembrance, particularly for incorporation of the topic into the national education system.