

# **ESTONIA 2020 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Estonia is a multiparty, constitutional democracy with a unicameral parliament, a prime minister as head of government, and a president as head of state. The prime minister and cabinet generally represent the party or coalition of parties with a majority of seats in the parliament. The most recent parliamentary elections took place in March 2019. The coalition is composed of the Center Party, the Estonian Conservative People's Party, and the Pro Patria party, and is headed by Prime Minister Juri Ratas (Center Party), who took office in April 2019. Observers considered the elections free and fair.

The Police and Border Guard Board and the Internal Security Service maintain internal security. The army is responsible for external security but also has some domestic security responsibilities. The Police and Border Guard Board and the Internal Security Service report to the Ministry of the Interior. The Defense Forces report to the Ministry of Defense. The Police and Border Guard Board and the Internal Security Service investigate civilian cases, while military police investigate defense force cases. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. Members of the security forces committed some abuses.

There were no reports of significant human rights abuses.

The government had mechanisms in place to identify and punish officials who may commit human rights abuses.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. The Prosecutor's Office leads criminal investigations in the

## **ESTONIA**

country, investigates whether security force abuses were justifiable, and pursues prosecutions.

### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The law prohibits such practices, but there were reports that police used excessive physical force and verbal abuse during the arrest and questioning of some suspects. The number of cases brought against police officers for excessive use of force was similar to that in previous years. During the first half of the year, authorities filed four cases against police officers for excessive use of force.

Impunity was not a significant problem in the security forces.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

There were no significant reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns.

**Physical Conditions:** In April the legal chancellor publicly criticized the government's COVID-related ban on prisoners' outdoor time and reduction of visits from relatives, characterizing the ban as impermissible treatment of prisoners under government guidelines.

In a November 2019 report on its 2017 visit to the country, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) expressed concern over "appalling material conditions" at the Parnu, Tallinn, Tartu, and Valga detention houses as well as at the Tallinn East Police Station and over the small size of some of the cells seen in various police establishments. The report also expressed the CPT's "serious misgivings" that remand prisoners were frequently held in deficient police detention houses for one to four weeks, and in some cases for several months, beyond the period of police custody (pending their transfer to a prison).

## ESTONIA

With regard to prison conditions, the CPT report noted that the use of solitary confinement as a punishment appeared to be widespread in all three of the country's prisons and that the practice appeared to be particularly excessive at Viru Prison. Prisoners were placed in disciplinary solitary confinement continuously for more than 14 days, thus exceeding the maximum permissible time. At Viru Prison, multiple periods in solitary confinement were imposed on prisoners consecutively, which in a number of cases resulted in very long periods of solitary confinement (in one prisoner's case, 225 days). There were no major concerns in prisons regarding physical conditions or inmate abuse except for the excessive use of solitary confinement.

**Administration:** Authorities conducted proper investigations of credible allegations of mistreatment.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government generally permitted monitoring by independent nongovernmental observers, including human rights groups, media, and international bodies.

### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The constitution and laws prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her detention in court, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

#### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

Apart from those arrested during the commission of a crime, the law requires that in making arrests, authorities must possess warrants issued by a court based on evidence and must inform detainees promptly of the grounds for their arrest. There is a functioning bail system and other alternatives for provisional release pending trial. Authorities may hold individuals for 48 hours without charge; further detention requires a court order. Police generally complied with these requirements. Criminal procedure rules provide for a maximum detention of two months during preliminary investigations in cases where the accused is a minor and four months in cases of second-degree (less serious) crimes. Detainees are entitled to immediate access to legal counsel, and the government pays for legal

## **ESTONIA**

counsel for indigent persons.

### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality.

#### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Defendants enjoy the right to: a presumption of innocence; prompt and detailed notification of the charges (with free interpretation if necessary); a fair and public trial without undue delay; be present at their trial; communicate with an attorney of their choice; have adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense; have free interpretation as necessary from the moment charged through all appeals; confront prosecution or plaintiff witnesses; and present one's own witnesses and evidence. Defendants cannot be compelled to testify or confess guilt and have the right to appeal. A single judge, a judge together with public assessors, or a committee of judges may hear cases. In criminal proceedings, an attorney is available to all defendants at public expense, although individuals often preferred to hire their own attorneys. In civil proceedings, the government provides an attorney for indigents. Authorities generally respected these rights and extended them to all residents regardless of citizenship.

#### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

#### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

Individuals or organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights violations in domestic courts. They may appeal unfavorable decisions to the European Court of Human Rights after exhausting all domestic remedies.

## ESTONIA

### **Property Restitution**

The government has laws and mechanisms in place for property restitution, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups reported no issues with the government's resolution of Holocaust-era claims, including for foreign citizens.

The Department of State's Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act report to Congress, released publicly on July 29, 2020, can be found on the Department's website: <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

### **f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The constitution prohibits such actions, and there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press**

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, and the government generally respected these rights. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of speech, including for the press.

**Freedom of Press and Media, Including Online Media:** Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction.

### **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority.

### **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

## ESTONIA

### **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

#### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution provides for freedom of peaceful assembly, and the government generally respected these freedoms. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government introduced several temporary restrictions on public assembly, which changed in proportion to the assessed risks throughout the year.

#### **Freedom of Association**

While the constitution provides for freedom of association, the law specifies that only citizens may join political parties. There were no restrictions on the ability of noncitizens to join other civil groups.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

### **d. Freedom of Movement**

The constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

### **e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons**

Not applicable.

### **f. Protection of 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, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees.

## ESTONIA

The NGO Estonian Human Rights Center and other NGOs provided legal and social assistance to asylum seekers in cooperation with authorities. Government officials indicated that access to legal aid was available at every stage of the asylum procedure. The Estonian Human Rights Center continued to raise concerns about the prolonged detention of asylum seekers during adjudication of cases.

**Safe Country of Origin/Transit:** The government has a policy of denying asylum to applicants from a “safe” country of origin or transit. Authorities asserted that they granted interviews to all individual asylum seekers.

**Durable Solutions:** The government assisted in the safe, voluntary return of some refugees to their countries of origin under an International Organization for Migration program. The country worked with the EU and UNHCR to implement a refugee resettlement program. Naturalization is open to all permanent residents of the country after five years’ residence, provided they pass mandatory citizenship and language examinations.

**Temporary Protection:** The government provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. Temporary protection includes the right to work, access to education, and health care. In 2019 the government granted temporary protection via residence permits to 10 persons.

### **g. Stateless Persons**

UNHCR categorized 76,639 persons residing in the country as stateless in 2019. As of July 1, according to government statistics, there were approximately 70,000 residents of undetermined citizenship, or 5.3 percent of the population. Nearly all were ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, or Belarusians. These persons are eligible to apply for naturalized citizenship, and some of them may hold Russian, Ukrainian, or Belarusian citizenship.

There are statutory procedures that offer persons older than 18 opportunities for obtaining citizenship by naturalization, but some human rights observers regarded them as inadequate, and their rate of naturalization remained low. To facilitate acquisition of citizenship, authorities funded civics and language courses and simplified naturalization for persons with disabilities. The government also

## ESTONIA

simplified the Estonian language requirements so that applicants older than 65 are no longer required to take a written language examination, although they still must pass an oral one. The government also provides citizenship, without any special application by the parents, to persons younger than 15 who were born in the country and whose parents were not citizens of Estonia or of any other country and had lived in Estonia for five years at the time of the birth of the child.

### **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

#### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** Parliamentary elections in March 2019 were considered free and fair and led to the formation of a three-party coalition government comprising the Center Party, the Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE), and the Pro Patria party. The coalition is led by Prime Minister Juri Ratas (Center Party).

**Participation of Women and Minorities:** No laws limit participation of women or members of minorities in the political process, and they did participate. The law allows only citizens to organize or join political parties.

Noncitizens who are long-term residents may vote in local elections but cannot vote in national elections or hold public office.

### **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. The government has effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. There were isolated reports of official corruption during the year.

**Corruption:** In January a member of parliament, Kalev Kallo, was found guilty of corruption charges connected to a criminal case involving malfeasance in the



## ESTONIA

Tallinn City Government. He was convicted of three crimes: mediating a bribe, aiding and abetting the bribe, and illegally financing the Center Party. Kallo was sentenced to one-and-a-half years on conditional release, with an additional six months of conditional parole. Following a Supreme Court ruling in November upholding his conviction, Kallo resigned from parliament, as required by law.

In 2019 a court sentenced Indrek Suld, a railways official, to three years in prison and three years' probation for violating the Anticorruption Act. Suld was arrested in 2016 for various incidences of manipulating public contracts. One other defendant, Raivol Lill, was also convicted of lesser offenses related to the contracts. The court also fined the company Autsec OU for violations of the law related to the contracts.

In 2019 the number of corruption cases dropped considerably compared to 2018. Of these cases, 44 percent occurred in the state government sector and 41 percent in the local government sector.

**Financial Disclosure:** The law requires all public officials to disclose their income and assets. Designated offices are responsible for monitoring and verifying disclosures. The financial declarations of high-level government officials were available to the public, and there are criminal and administrative sanctions for noncompliance with the law.

### **Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

A number of domestic and international human rights groups operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were cooperative and responsive to their views.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The legal chancellor, an independent official with a staff of more than 45, performs the role of human rights ombudsman. The chancellor reviews legislation for compliance with the constitution; oversees authorities' observance of fundamental rights and freedoms and the principles of good governance; and helps resolve accusations of

## ESTONIA

discrimination based on gender, race, nationality (ethnic origin), color, language, religion, social status, age, disability, or sexual orientation. The legal chancellor also makes recommendations to ministries and local governments, requests responses, and has authority to appeal to the Supreme Court. The chancellor compiles an annual report for the parliament. Public trust in the office was high, and the government was responsive to its reports and decisions.

### **Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons**

#### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalizes rape, including spousal rape, and physical abuse, including domestic violence. The law is effectively enforced. The penalty for rape, including spousal rape, is imprisonment for up to 15 years. According to the NGO Sexual Health Union, 13 percent of women have suffered sexual abuse, including rape.

According to NGOs and shelter managers, violence against women, including domestic violence, was a problem. During the first nine months of the year, domestic violence crimes made up 40 percent of all violent crimes in the country. Women constituted more than 80 percent of the victims of domestic violence registered by police. During the first nine months of the year, there were six percent fewer official reports of domestic violence than in the same period in 2019.

NGOs, local governments, and others could seek assistance for victims from the national government. There is a network of shelters for women and women with children who were victims of gender-based violence as well as hotlines for domestic violence and child abuse. There are four treatment centers for victims of sexual violence. Police officers, border guards, and social workers received training related to domestic and gender violence from NGOs and the Ministries of Social Affairs, Interior, and Justice.

**Sexual Harassment:** The law prohibits sexual harassment, and there were reports of such harassment in the workplace and on public transport. By law, sexual harassment complaints may be resolved in court. The penalty for sexual

## ESTONIA

harassment is a fine or detention for up to 30 days. In 2019 the number of registered sexual harassment cases was 17 percent above the previous year; 97 percent of the victims in reported cases of sexual harassment were women. The number of registered stalking incidents in 2019 was similar to the previous year; 88 percent of reported stalking victims were women, 92 percent of alleged perpetrators were men.

**Reproductive Rights:** The government recognized the basic right of couples and individuals to decide freely the number, spacing, and timing of their children; to manage their reproductive health; and to have access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. The government provides access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence.

**Coercion in Population Control:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

**Discrimination:** The law provides the same legal status and rights for women as for men. The government generally enforced such laws. There were reports of discrimination in employment and occupation, and unequal treatment, due to gender, age, disability, and sexual preference (see section 7.d.).

### Children

**Birth Registration:** Citizenship derives primarily from the citizenship of at least one parent. Either citizen parent may pass citizenship to a child regardless of the other parent's citizenship status. Children born to parents who are not citizens of Estonia or of any other country and have lived in the country for five years acquire citizenship at birth. Registration of births occurred in a timely manner.

**Child Abuse:** In 2019 the number of sexual crimes committed against persons younger than 18 grew by 18 percent over the previous year. The Police and Border Guard Board worked to combat child abuse, including sexual abuse. The legal chancellor acted as children's ombudsman. Police provided training to officers on combatting sexual abuse in cooperation with the justice, education, and social ministries and local and international organizations.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The legal minimum age for marriage is 18.

## ESTONIA

A court may extend the legal capacity of a person who is at least 15 for the purpose of marriage.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, and authorities enforced the law. The minimum age for consensual sex is 14. Conviction of engaging in child pornography carries punishment ranging from a fine to three years in prison. Girls were more frequently exploited than boys.

**International Child Abductions:** The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parent Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

### Anti-Semitism

The Jewish community numbered an estimated 2,000 to 2,500 persons. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

On January 27, the government held an annual memorial event on Holocaust Remembrance Day at the Rahumae Jewish Cemetery in Tallinn. Schools participated in commemorative activities throughout the country. The Education and Research Ministry, in cooperation with the Estonian Jewish community, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, the Estonian Memory Institute, and the Museum of Occupation, organized an essay writing competition on topics related to the Holocaust for schoolchildren. The competition was dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Klooga concentration camp.

### Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

### Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory,

## **ESTONIA**

intellectual, and mental disabilities. The government generally enforced these provisions.

Persons with disabilities may avail themselves of government assistance in accessing information and may request individual personal assistants when necessary. The law provides that new or renovated buildings must be accessible to persons with disabilities. Few older buildings were accessible, but new or renovated ones generally were.

According to the legal chancellor, measures to safeguard the fundamental rights of individuals in mental health facilities remained inadequate, including protections against the use of unauthorized restraint measures in psychiatric care institutions. In April the legal chancellor also raised concerns about movement restrictions on residents of state-run homes for those with disabilities during the COVID-19 emergency.

NGOs complained that, while services typically were accessible in the capital, persons with disabilities in some rural areas had difficulty receiving appropriate care. For persons with disabilities outside of major population centers, access to local government social services (such as a personal assistants, support persons, and transportation) depended on that person's own ability to seek assistance.

There were reports of discrimination in occupation or employment (also see section 7.d.).

The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, and local governments are responsible for the provision of social welfare services to persons with disabilities. The government focused on developing rehabilitation services to improve the ability of those with disabilities to cope independently.

### **Members of National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups**

On October 25, at the height of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, pigs' heads were found in front of the Estonian Islamic Center and the embassies of Turkey and Azerbaijan. Police identified the perpetrator and initiated misdemeanor proceedings pursuant to the law concerning incitement to hatred.

## ESTONIA

The perpetrator was ultimately charged with littering and fined 20 euros (\$24).

In 2019 police registered eight cases of physical abuse, breach of public order, or threats that included hatred against persons from racial, religious, or ethnic minorities.

In August several racially motivated scuffles took place on three separate occasions between neo-Nazis and foreign students in Tartu, the country's second largest city, leading to altercations between the groups. All cases involved the same neo-Nazi perpetrators. The incidents remained under investigation.

Knowledge of Estonian is required to obtain citizenship, and all public servants and public-sector employees, service personnel, medical professionals, and other workers who have contact with the public must possess a minimum competence in the language. Russian speakers stated that Estonian language requirements resulted in job and salary discrimination. The government continued to provide free and subsidized opportunities for learning Estonian.

In districts where more than half the population spoke a language other than Estonian, the law entitles inhabitants to receive official information in their language, and authorities respected the law.

Roma, who numbered fewer than 1,000, reportedly faced discrimination in several areas, including employment. The government took steps to emphasize the importance of education for Romani children, but their school dropout rate remained high.

Nonwhite residents reported discrimination in housing. The government faced difficulties finding housing for resettled refugees, which refugee advocates attributed to societal discrimination.

### **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

The law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. While the law is not specific regarding the forms of sexual orientation and gender identity covered, the general understanding is that it encompasses lesbian, gay,

## **ESTONIA**

bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals. In 2019 police registered two cases that included hatred against LGBTI persons. Advocacy groups reported that societal harassment and discrimination against LGBTI persons remained common but noted improving public attitudes towards LGBTI persons.

### **Section 7. Worker Rights**

#### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law, related regulations, and statutory instruments provide workers with the right to form and join independent unions of their choice, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The government generally respected these rights. The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference and prohibits antiunion discrimination. Both employees and employers have the right to request that labor dispute committees, consisting of representatives of unions and employers, or the courts resolve individual labor disputes. The law prohibits discrimination against employees because of union membership and requires the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Public-sector employees do not have the right to strike, but they can negotiate their salaries and working conditions directly with their employers.

The government generally enforced applicable laws. Resources, inspections, and remediation were usually adequate to achieve compliance with the law. In most cases, violators incurred fines that were sufficient to deter violations. Criminal proceedings and civil claims were also available and penalties were commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights. The penalties employers had to pay were related primarily to workplace accidents and occupational illnesses. Administrative and judicial procedures were not subject to lengthy delays.

The government and most employers generally respected freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively. Parties freely engaged in collective bargaining, and there were no reports that the government or other parties interfered in the functioning of workers' organizations.

The Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions alleged frequent violations of trade

## ESTONIA

union rights in the private sector during the year. Confederation officials claimed antiunion behavior was widespread. They also reported that some enterprises advised workers against forming trade unions, threatening them with dismissal or a reduction in wages if they did, or promising benefits if they did not.

### **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, and the government effectively enforced the law. Authorities prosecuted and convicted three persons for labor-related trafficking crimes during the year. Penalties for human trafficking and forced-labor offenses were commensurate with those for other analogous serious crimes, but sentences often failed to reflect the seriousness of the crime.

See also the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

### **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The law prohibits the worst forms of child labor. In most cases, the legal minimum age for employment is 18. Minors who graduated from basic school may work full time. Children who are 15 to 17 may work, depending on whether they are still at school. Seven- to 12-year-old children may engage in light work in the areas of culture, art, sports, or advertising with the consent of the Labor Inspectorate. Minors may not perform hazardous work, such as handling explosive substances or working with wild animals. The law limits the hours that children may work and prohibits overtime or night work. The Labor Inspectorate is responsible for enforcing these laws. The government effectively enforced laws and policies to protect children from exploitation in the workplace. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes. The Labor Inspectorate monitored whether the conditions for child workers were appropriate.

### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

The law prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation. The government generally enforced the law, and penalties were commensurate with those under laws related to civil rights. If workers claimed discrimination and turned to the



## ESTONIA

courts, and the Labor Inspectorate or gender equality commissioner and the appropriate institution found the suit justified, workers were indemnified by employers. Labor laws and regulations require employers to protect employees against discrimination, follow the principle of equal treatment, and promote equal treatment and gender equality. Nevertheless, discrimination in employment or occupation occurred with respect to age, gender, disability, ethnicity, and language (see section 6), and there were complaints to the gender and equal treatment commissioner, the legal chancellor, and the Labor Inspectorate.

Although women have the same rights as men under the law and are entitled to equal pay for equal work, employers did not always respect these rights. Despite having a higher average level of education than men, according to government statistics, women's average earnings per hour were 17.1 percent lower than those of men. There continued to be female- and male-dominated professions. Women constituted one-third of mid-level managers.

Fewer than 25 percent of persons with disabilities had jobs. During the year the legal chancellor and the commissioner for gender equality and equal treatment received claims of discrimination based on disability. Persons with disabilities faced discrimination in employment and access to the workplace.

Russian speakers worked disproportionately in blue-collar industries and continued to experience higher unemployment than ethnic Estonians. Some citizens and noncitizen residents, particularly native speakers of Russian, alleged that the language requirement resulted in job and salary discrimination. Roma reportedly faced discrimination in employment (see section 6, Members of National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups).

### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

The national monthly minimum wage was higher than the poverty income level. Authorities generally enforced minimum wage laws, and penalties were commensurate with those for similar violations.

The standard workweek is 40 hours. The law requires a rest period of at least 11 hours in sequence for every 24-hour period. Reduced working time is required for

## ESTONIA

minors and for employees whose work is underground, poses a health hazard, or is of an otherwise special nature. The law provides for paid annual holidays and requires overtime pay of not less than 150 percent of the employee's hourly wage. The government effectively enforced these requirements and penalties were commensurate with those for similar crimes. There is no prohibition against excessive compulsory overtime.

The government sets occupational health and safety standards. Authorities generally enforced occupational health and safety standards in all sectors. The Labor Inspectorate, the Health Protection Inspectorate, and the Technical Inspectorate were responsible for enforcing these standards and made efforts to do so in both the formal and informal sectors. Violations of health and safety standards were more common in the construction and wood-processing industries. The Labor Inspectorate had an adequate number of inspectors to enforce compliance. Inspectors have authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for similar crimes. Men from Ukraine experienced labor exploitation, particularly in the construction sector, where "envelope wages" (nontaxed cash payments) were sometimes paid. In May the government passed legislation designed to prevent this form of labor exploitation. An estimated 8 percent of wage payments during the year were informal. Officials reported six fatal workplace accidents during the first eight month of the year and 535 other accidents that led to serious injury during the same period.