

Guinea-Bissau 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Guinea-Bissau during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom; and trafficking in persons, including forced labor.

The government did not take credible steps or action 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 on the part of 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, but media members, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and media watchdogs reported the government did not always respect this right.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

The Journalists Union received reports journalists were often followed home and threatened by unidentified individuals in unmarked vehicles for their coverage of political events and anything that could be deemed unfavorable to the government.

In July, after a public dispute with a leading journalist, the president instructed the communications ministry to inspect the Journalists Union, a move widely seen as intimidation and retribution. The union was subsequently ordered to certify its registration status.

There were several examples of violence or harassment of journalists during the year similar to the following. In November, security forces assaulted journalists Carabulai Cassama and Ture de Silva while they were covering a student protest in front of the Ministry of Education. The Journalists Union reported Cassama required medical attention at a local hospital. There was

no reported investigation of these assaults.

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

The government occasionally barred journalists from covering official government events.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided the freedom to form and join independent unions without prior authorization. The law excluded the military and police and did not fully cover other public-sector officials, agricultural workers, dock workers, or workers in the informal economy.

The law provided for the right to strike, but workers were required to give 72-hour prior notice. The law also prohibited retaliation against strikers and did not exclude any group of workers from relevant legal protections. Many sectors of the economy were on strike at some time during the year, typically because of low salaries or nonpayment of salaries. Workers in the education, health, and public sectors went on strike during the year.

The law allowed unions to conduct their activities without government interference. Laws on unions provided protection only for trade union

delegates, while the constitution provided for workers' rights to free speech and assembly. The law prohibited employer discrimination against official trade union representatives. The law required reinstatement of workers terminated for union activity. The law did not apply to domestic workers.

Authorities generally respected freedom of association in the formal sector. Worker organizations were not independent of government and political parties, employers, or employer associations, which sometimes sought to influence union decisions and actions.

Penalties were not commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights. In 2021, the International Labor Organization observed that statutory penalties for antiunion activity were insufficient to deter such activities. Penalties were rarely 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 Council of Ministers annually established minimum wage rates for different categories of public sector workers but continued to rely on a wage establishment mechanism that the International Labor Organization stated

was outdated. The minimum wage rates were above the official estimate for the poverty income level. There was no minimum wage for private sector workers. The law provided for a maximum 45-hour workweek and had provisions for overtime pay.

Occupational Safety and Health

In cooperation with unions, the ministries of justice and labor established the country's first legal occupational safety and health (OSH) standards for workers in 2021, but these standards did not have the force of law or regulation because the National Assembly did not adopt them by year's end. The standards were up-to-date and appropriate for the main industries. Workers did not have the right to remove themselves from unsafe working conditions without jeopardizing their employment. Many individuals working in the construction industry reportedly worked in conditions that violated OSH standards.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The labor ministry inspector general was responsible for enforcing the law but did not do so effectively. The number of labor inspectors was insufficient to detect and deter violations, and inspectors lacked authority to carry out unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. Penalties, which usually took the form of minimal fines that had not been adjusted for inflation, were not commensurate with those for similar crimes. Many

persons worked under conditions that endangered their health and safety. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators.

Wage and OSH regulations were not enforced in the informal sector, which accounted for approximately 80 percent of workers.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

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

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention, but the government did not observe these prohibitions. By law, detainees could challenge the lawfulness of detention before a court through an appeals process and obtain prompt release as well as compensation if found to have been unlawfully detained.

The law required arrest warrants, although warrantless arrests occurred, particularly of immigrants suspected of crimes. By law, detainees were required to be brought before a magistrate within 48 hours of arrest and released if no indictment was filed, but this standard was not always met. Authorities were obligated to inform detainees of charges against them, but

they did not always do so. The law provided for the right to counsel at state expense for indigent clients; lawyers did not receive compensation for part-time public defense work and often ignored state directives to represent indigent clients. There was a functioning bail system.

In January, a civil society group reported the arbitrary arrest of 93 demonstrators, including a journalist, most of whom were affiliated with opposition political parties, for protesting inflation and living conditions. The government cited national security concerns for the arrests. In February, the NGO Guinea-Bissau Human Rights League (GBHRL) reported the arbitrary arrest of at least three political party officials who were released without charges the same day. The GBHRL documented the arbitrary arrest of six students for protesting tuition increases in October, and the Students Union reported the arbitrary arrest of 14 additional students for protesting in front of the education ministry in November. All 20 students were released without charge shortly after their arrests.

Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem due in part to a lack of political will to conduct investigations. Pretrial detention did not exceed maximum sentences.

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, but the GBHRL reported at least 70 persons were subjected to torture or arbitrary physical abuse while detained, with four of the cases resulting in serious injuries that required hospitalization. According to the GBHRL, none of the individuals responsible for these acts were punished.

While there were mechanisms in place to investigate and prosecute reports of human rights abuses, the GBHRL alleged the Public Prosecutor's Office permitted a culture of impunity to exist in the country, including in the security forces and national police.

The law prohibited female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) for girls and women of all ages, and the practice was punishable by a fine and five years in prison. The government did not enforce the law effectively. A 2021 study by UNICEF found that 52 percent of local women between ages 15 and 49

were survivors of FGM/C and that FGM/C was practiced most often on girls younger than age five.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>.

Child Marriage

The legal minimum age of marriage was 16 for all individuals, but the government did not enforce the law effectively. Child marriage occurred among all ethnic groups. Girls who fled arranged marriages often were subsequently exploited in sex trafficking. The buying and selling of child brides also occurred. There were no government efforts to mitigate these problems. According to UNICEF, 6 percent of all girls were married by age 15, and 24 percent by age 18.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government, through the National Coordinator for the Assistance of Refugees and Displaced Persons (CNRD), cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and provided 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. In 2022, UNHCR closed its office in the country, so the CNRD was responsible for issuing and renewing refugee cards as well as providing all refugee assistance. The CNRD had limited capacity to identify asylum seekers and individuals in need of protection or to conduct refugee status determination for asylum seekers.

Resettlement

The country continued to host thousands of persons who migrated from Senegal's Casamance region in recent decades. Many of them maintained ethnic and family ties in both countries and traveled frequently across the often-unmarked international border, rendering the nationality and status of many individuals in the area unclear.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

There was a small Jewish community in the country, and no known reports of antisemitic incidents.