

Moldova 2023 Human Rights Report

Note: Except where otherwise noted, all references in this report exclude the breakaway region of Transnistria.

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in the Republic of Moldova during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by authorities; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; serious government corruption; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence and sexual violence; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting Roma; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting persons with disabilities.

The government took some credible steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses, but progress was slow.

Significant human rights issues in the breakaway region of Transnistria in the country included credible reports of: torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by “authorities;” harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious

problems with the independence of the “judiciary;” political prisoners or detainees; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media, including censorship and the enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel “laws” to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive “laws” on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; restrictions on freedom of movement; inability of citizens to change their “government” peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious “government” corruption; serious “government” restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; and extensive gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

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, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

In the separatist Transnistria region, former political prisoner and political activist Oleg Horjan was found dead in his home after reportedly being stabbed to death on July 17. Transnistrian “law enforcement” claimed Horjan was murdered incident to a burglary, but civil society observers called Horjan’s death “suspicious.” Horjan’s killing occurred less than two weeks following his signing of a joint declaration expressing the need to consolidate the civic initiatives to fight for the social, economic, and human rights of persons in Transnistria and the rest of the country. The Moldovan government called for an independent investigation into the killing, while the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Promo-LEX called for the intervention of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

b. Disappearance

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

There were no known reports of disappearances in the Transnistria region.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

The law prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports that government officials employed them.

The Antitorture Prosecution Office reported allegations of torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, mainly in detention facilities. Reports included cases of mistreatment in pretrial detention centers in police stations, particularly in regional police inspectorates. Impunity persisted, but authorities increasingly initiated prosecutions regarding allegations of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment during the year.

Many cases classified by authorities as suspected torture occurred in public spaces, through abusive physical or psychological treatment by the police, carabinieri, or border police officers initially encountering individuals, or by emergency law enforcement officers called to a scene.

There was an uptick in recent years in the number of torture cases investigated and prosecuted. The Prosecutor General's Office attributed this increase to better implementation of a Prosecutor General directive mandating that all abuse complaints automatically trigger the opening of a criminal investigation.

In Transnistria, there were reports of torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in detention facilities, including denial of medical assistance, detention in metal cages during court hearings, and prolonged solitary confinement. There was no known mechanism to investigate alleged acts of torture by Transnistrian "security forces." Promo-LEX noted that "authorities" perpetrated most inhuman and degrading treatment in the region to obtain self-incriminating confessions. Transnistrian "law

enforcement” bodies did not report any investigations or prosecutions for torture or inhuman treatment by Transnistrian “security forces” during the year.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in most prisons and detention centers remained harsh, due to overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of privacy, insufficient or no access to outdoor exercise, and a lack of facilities for persons with disabilities.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Human rights organizations, members of the National Mechanism to Prevent Torture, and the ombudsman reported overcrowding, poor lighting and ventilation, noise, no minimum detention standards, inadequate medical care, and insufficient medical personnel and health care in most detention facilities. The chronic staff shortage in prisons led to a reliance on informal hierarchies to keep control over the inmate population, often through violence.

Conditions at Penitentiary No. 13 in Chisinau were reportedly the worst in the country. Prison officials stated they closed basement cells that inmates had previously complained did not meet national or international standards. Allegations of inhuman treatment persisted. Some cells were overcrowded, unhygienic, and lacked ventilation. Authorities called for the closure of the facility and construction of a new penitentiary, but no construction took place during the year.

In Transnistria, physical conditions of prisons and detention facilities remained poor, and mistreatment of detainees remained a major problem. Most pretrial detention cells lacked beds and toilet facilities, a condition the Transnistrian “ombudsman” qualified as an “infringement against human dignity.”

There were consistent reports that persons detained in Transnistria were often denied access to professional medical assistance. According to Moldovan authorities, Alexandr Dimov, sentenced in March by a Transnistrian “court” to 20 years in prison for alleged terrorist attacks in Transnistria, was denied medical assistance and shared a cell with an inmate who was ill with tuberculosis.

Administration: Internal investigation procedures in the penitentiary system slightly improved during the year and detainees had access to complaint mechanisms.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted independent monitoring of prison conditions by local and international human rights observers. Prison officials generally allowed observers to interview inmates in private. In Transnistria, “authorities” denied access for independent evaluation of detention center conditions.

Improvements: The Ministry of Justice carried out penitentiary staff personnel training on respect for human rights and dignity, zero tolerance to

torture, and improved health care for prison inmates.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

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. In Transnistria, there were frequent reports that Transnistrian “authorities” engaged with impunity in arbitrary arrest and detention.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Authorities were required to promptly inform detainees of the reasons for their arrest and describe the charges against them. Authorities could detain suspects without charge for 72 hours.

Once charged, a detainee could be released pending trial. The law provided for bail, but authorities generally did not use it due to a lack of practical mechanisms for implementation. In lieu of confinement, the courts could also impose house arrest or travel restrictions. The Superior Council of Magistrates reported judges rarely applied alternative arrest measures. The law provided safeguards against arbitrary use of pretrial detention and required noncustodial alternatives wherever possible. Judges disproportionately used noncustodial alternative detention mechanisms in

cases with political implications.

Detainees had the right to a defense attorney. The government required the local bar association to provide representation to indigent defendants, but frequently delayed reimbursement of legal fees. Indigent defendants often did not have adequate counsel.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were no reports of arbitrary arrests during the year.

In Transnistria, arbitrary arrests, particularly of those who criticized de facto Transnistrian authorities, remained a significant problem. Adrian Glijin, whose 2020 arrest and charge of espionage was viewed by human rights NGOs as politically motivated, was released on April 7 after three years in a Transnistrian prison. Stanislav Minzarari, who was arrested with Glijin and two others, was the only member of the “Camenca four” remaining detained in Transnistria. Minzarari was sentenced to 16 years in prison.

Pretrial Detention: In Transnistria, lengthy pretrial detention remained a problem.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

While the law provided for an independent judiciary, judicial independence remained a problem due to problems stemming from corruption and selective justice, in which the law was not applied equally to all and was often selectively enforced for politically motivated reasons.

Selective justice remained a problem and lawyers complained of instances in which their clients' rights to a fair trial were denied. Several prominent politicians detained during the year alleged selective justice and abuses of their right to a fair trial.

Authorities passed several laws authorizing vetting of candidates to judicial and prosecutorial oversight bodies, as well as of judges and prosecutors. These efforts were designed to weed out corruption in the judicial system. In April, the General Assembly of Judges elected a fully vetted Superior Council of Magistrates, which oversaw the appointment, functioning, and discipline of judges.

Media and judicial reform activists noted it was common for judges to indefinitely postpone hearings for wealthy or well-connected defendants. This practice was believed to be connected to personal corruption of the judges. The government implemented an electronic case management system to provide transparency in the assignment of judges to cases. All courts in the country used the system, increasing transparency and efficiency in court proceedings.

Media representatives and NGOs remained concerned regarding limitations on access to data on the national courts' information portal developed by the Ministry of Justice's Agency for Court Administration. Civil society and journalists complained that, because there was no search option, they could not find the names of those involved in court cases, nor could they

determine who adjudicated or prosecuted a case.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary enforced this right to some extent. The law presumed the innocence of defendants in criminal cases.

Justice NGOs noted that courts repeatedly delayed hearings without justification in high-profile cases. Hearings on a criminal appeal by Ilan Shor, the leader of the Shor Party and member of parliament convicted and sentenced in 2017 to seven-and-one-half years' imprisonment for his involvement in a billion-dollar bank fraud scandal in 2014, were postponed until April 13 when the Chisinau Appeal Court issued a final sentence of 15 years in prison.

In Transnistria, "authorities" disregarded fair trial procedures and denied defendants a fair trial. Attorneys in Transnistria reported "authorities" regularly denied accused individuals the right to an attorney of their choosing and that trials were often held in secret without public announcement of charges. For example, the trial of Adrian Glijin was held in secret and he was denied access to the court decision due to the "secrecy of the case" even after he was released on April 7. Trials for those who were arbitrarily arrested for exercising fundamental freedoms and criticizing the de facto authorities were held behind closed doors.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

In Transnistria, several known political prisoners remained in custody or served sentences. Most political prisoners were arrested for exercising freedoms of expression and assembly under accusation of criticizing the “authorities.” Transnistrian “authorities” used the “2020-2026 Strategy for Combating Extremism” as a pretext to apply additional repressive tools to silence dissent and repress fundamental freedoms. The de facto authorities did not permit access to political prisoners by international organizations with very few exceptions.

f. Transnational Repression

Not applicable.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

Although the law provided for restitution of private property confiscated during the Communist era, the government had no laws or mechanisms in place for restitution of communal property, and NGOs and advocacy groups reported the government did not make progress on resolving Holocaust-era claims concerning communal property, including for foreign citizens.

The state did not return any communal or religious property the Jewish

community had purchased or was seeking to acquire through litigation. Jewish groups sought a comprehensive restitution solution for communal property instead of the current system of the government returning individual buildings piecemeal.

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

h. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution prohibited such actions, and there were no reports that the government in Chisinau failed to respect these prohibitions. However, there was a report that Transnistrian “authorities” forcefully separated a foreign resident in Transnistria from his child, age seven, when they prohibited his re-entry into Transnistria from another region of Moldova.

Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, parliament approved a state of emergency that imposed: special entry and exit rules; special rules for the use of airspace; limits on public gatherings; rules for evacuating citizens from life-threatening areas; potential rationing of food and other products; special use of telecommunications; and other necessary measures to ensure state security. Parliament repeatedly

extended the state of emergency since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The most recent extension of the state of emergency was on November 24 for 30 days.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the authorities generally respected these rights. The influence by oligarchs and Russia over certain media outlets, a challenging advertising market that limited outlets' commercial sustainability, and the lack of an independent judiciary created challenges for independent media. Harassment and intimidation against journalists occurred in some instances, but there were no reports of government involvement. Media outlets and NGOs contended that frequent lawsuits, including by public officials, represented threats to press freedom.

Freedom of Expression: Hate speech was regulated by the Law on Freedom of Speech and the Audiovisual Code.

Several symbols representing Russia's military operations remained banned, including the "Z" and "V" symbols used by Russia during its invasion of Ukraine. In April, the Constitutional Court reviewed legislation banning the

black and orange St. George's ribbon, which was associated with the Russian military, and determined that it could be worn as long as it did not promote military aggression or crimes against humanity. The General Police Inspectorate reported 180 violations concerning banned symbols (the St. George ribbon) on May 9, including by nine Members of Parliament. The minimum fine for the violation was 4,500 Moldovan lei (MDL) (\$245).

In Transnistria, de facto authorities used the "2020-2026 Strategy for Combating Extremism" to silence dissent and repress freedom of expression, complementing the existing "anti-extremism law". Several individuals faced charges pursuant to the "anti-extremism law" for publicly criticizing "authorities" during the year. Public insults of the region's "leader" could be punished by a fine or up to five years in prison.

"Authorities" arrested Mihail Ermurachi in December 2022, based on his July 2021 conviction for "insulting" the de facto leader of Transnistria in a private conversation.

In April, the Moldovan Bureau for Reintegration requested the Transnistrian "authorities" release Victor Plescanov or at least allow an independent doctor to examine him. Plescanov was serving a three-year sentence for alleged "extremism," because he said he would fly a Ukrainian flag from his balcony.

Violence and Harassment: Some journalists continued to be subjected to

harassment, intimidation, and frequent lawsuits.

At Chisinau town hall meetings in March, Mayor Ion Ceban initiated what media NGOs referred to as an intimidation campaign to criticize the media, including public broadcaster Teleradio Moldova, and stated he was unhappy with how journalists covered issues in the city. He classified reporting that criticized the city as “lies,” “nonsense,” and “gross manipulation.” He also called on vice-mayors and department directors of the mayoralty to “univocally and urgently” contract services that provide public information monitoring, in addition to legal services. Mayor Ceban also announced a series of lawsuits against media outlets that had run content critical to him. Media NGOs criticized Ceban’s statements as attacks on the media and as actions that undermined press freedom.

On September 21, Elena Covalenco, a photo-reporter for IPN news agency, was denied entry to the Transnistria region and informed of an entry ban from August 2 for three years. Moldovan NGO Promo-Lex called this a violation of freedom of movement and freedom of expression.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: In its *2023 Press Freedom Index* report, Reporters Without Borders moved the country from #40 to #28 and classified the media situation as “satisfactory.” Nevertheless, the Press Freedom Index pointed to the polarization and political control of the media space as well as the influence of fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor on the media

landscape as negative influences.

On July 31, parliament amended the Audiovisual Code to decrease the maximum share of the media market that any individual or single entity could hold from 35 percent to 25 percent. The change was intended to help the de-oligarchization process in the media field and reduce political influence in the media.

On October 25, the Audiovisual Council fined TV stations Prime, Publika TV, Canal 2, Canal 3, Canal 5, and Mega TV MDL 12,000 (\$662) each for covering the electoral campaign despite earlier notifying the council that their programs would not include electoral campaign coverage, which was inconsistent with the country's electoral regulations. The coverage included summaries of campaign events and direct and indirect participation by candidates.

On October 27, the Audiovisual Council voted unanimously to fine media distributors in the autonomous region of Gagauzia, Oguzsatlink SRL and Ilk Halk Televizion SRL MDL 130,000 (\$7,111) each for “not protecting the national audiovisual space.” In its decision, the council cited 2022 amendments to the Audiovisual Code intended to prohibit rebroadcasts of news, political, and military content from countries other than the member states of the European Union, the United States, Canada, and others which had ratified the European Convention on Transfrontier Television. The council said these actions were in response to the channels' rebroadcasting

programs from Russian and Belarusian television channels, some of which included military content. The council previously fined these channels in July for broadcasting prohibited content.

On October 30, the Commission for Emergency Situations (CSE) suspended the licenses of six TV stations – Orizont TV, ITV, Prime, Publika TV, Canal 2, and Canal 3 – at the request of the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS), which said it had evidence that Russia was using the stations to influence local elections. The Center for Independent Journalism (CJI), the Association of the Electronic Press (APE), and Acces-Info NGOs jointly signed a statement expressing concern about the suspension, asking authorities to present more detailed reasons and evidence underlying the decision.

In many cases, journalists practiced self-censorship to avoid conflicts with the sponsors or owners of their media outlets, many of whom were politicians or oligarchs connected to political parties. Obstacles for accessing information persisted. News reporters from the *Ialoveni Online* local portal tried unsuccessfully to obtain copies of draft decisions that were to be adopted at a June 30 meeting of the Costesti village council. Their requests were denied by local authorities, and Costesti Mayor Vasile Borta later stated he would not give the journalists any documents because he did not know what their purpose was. Several media organizations, including the Independent Journalism Center, issued a joint statement urging local elected officials to follow the law requiring draft decisions to be published in

advance.

In Transnistria, de facto authorities censored media outlets, including through controlling licensing and accreditation. On February 16, the Joint Control Commission (JCC) press center denied accreditation to Irina Tabaranu, a journalist for the *Zona de Securitate* news outlet, due to opposition by the Russian and Transnistrian delegations to the JCC. The Moldovan delegation challenged this decision, and Tabaranu was able to obtain accreditation. In Transnistria, journalists regularly practiced self-censorship and avoided criticizing “authorities,” the separatists’ goal of independence and their “foreign policy,” or anything that would be deemed “extremist” under the “2020-2026 Strategy for Combating Extremism.”

Libel/Slander Laws: Libel and slander were civil offenses punishable by a fine, community service, being barred from holding certain public offices for a period of months, or a combination of these punishments. Defamation was not a crime, but individuals and organizations could be sued civilly for defamation. Some newspapers practiced self-censorship and avoided controversial topics due to concerns that government officials and other public figures could use slander, libel, or defamation accusations to retaliate against critical news reports.

The Transnistrian “Criminal Code” criminalized the “denial of the positive role of the peacekeeping mission of the Russian Federation in Transnistria.”

Article 278-3 on denial of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Transnistria

provided for a punishment of up to three years in prison or up to seven years in prison if the ‘violation’ was made by a group of individuals or an “official.” Article 316-1 in the Transnistrian “Criminal Code” provided for up to five years in prison for offending the Transnistrian de facto leader.

Actions to Expand Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the

Press and Other Media: On June 9 parliament approved a new law on access to information of public interest aimed at increasing the transparency of public sector activities. The previous law was adopted in 2000 and observers said it contained insufficient safeguards to ensure constitutional right of access to public interest information.

Internet Freedom

Under the instructions of the Commission for Emergency Situations, the intelligence service issued a public warning in 2022 to online media outlets to refrain from publishing or distributing “fake news” and “biased information” that incite hatred, public disorder, war, justify military aggression in Ukraine, provoke conflict, or glorify military aggression.

Under the ongoing state of emergency, the government blocked access to online content deemed threatening to state security, including websites that justified Russia’s full-scale war in Ukraine or called for civil disobedience. The Intelligence and Security Service (SIS) blocked eight websites in the first half of year, including five Sputnik affiliates, for promoting false narratives

affecting national security and for inciting to hatred during the state of emergency.

On October 24, the SIS ordered internet service providers to block 22 Russian websites, inclusive of news and media sites, for inclusion of “online content used in the war of information against the Republic of Moldova.”

On October 30, the SIS ordered internet service providers to block 31 additional portals, including 21 managed by Russia, for “altering the informational space of the Republic of Moldova.” The sites included major Russian state news agencies like TASS, Lenta, Interfax, and portals of TV stations controlled by fugitive oligarchs Vlad Plahotniuc and Ilan Shor.

Internet users and civil society in Transnistria accused the region’s largest internet service provider, Inderdnestrcom, believed to be controlled by the de facto authorities, of eliminating its competitors in Transnistria.

Linkservice, one of Inderdnestrcom’s two small competitors, ceased operations after the Transnistrian “authorities” suspended Linkservice’s license on July 18. Linkservice’s owners were likewise prohibited by the “authorities” from transferring their equipment to their newly created “Links Plus” company.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The Transnistrian “authorities” did not authorize any protests in the region during the year.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provided for freedom of association and stated that citizens were free to form parties and other social and political organizations, and the government generally respected this right. The law prohibited organizations “engaged in fighting against political pluralism, the principles of the rule of law, or the sovereignty and independence or territorial integrity” of the country.

The Constitutional Court ruled on June 19 that the Russia-backed Shor Party was unconstitutional because it violated the rule of law and carried out activities against the country’s sovereignty. Most prominent human rights NGOs did not publicly comment on the ruling.

In Transnistria, “authorities” severely restricted freedom of association, granting it only to persons they recognized as “citizens” of the region. All activities had to be coordinated with local “authorities”; groups that did not comply faced criminal charges and harassment by “security forces.”

“Authorities” strictly prohibited organizations favoring reintegration with the rest of the country.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The government generally respected these rights, with some exceptions.

In-country Movement: In Transnistria, “authorities” restricted travel to and from the region. The Moldovan delegation to the Joint Control Commission demanded Transnistrian “authorities” remove additional illegal checkpoints installed in 2022. Transnistrian “authorities” maintained the restrictions throughout the year.

Foreign Travel: The law required individuals to settle all outstanding financial obligations with other persons or legal entities before emigrating. The government did not strictly enforce this requirement. The law also provided that close relatives who were financially dependent on a potential emigrant had to concur before the prospective emigrant could depart the country. In practice, the government did not limit entry or exit of citizens.

e. 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, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. In Transnistria, “authorities” did the same.

Access to Asylum: The law provided for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government had established a system for providing protection to refugees. The process for obtaining formal refugee status was slow but conducted in line with international and European standards. Authorities issued refugees identity cards valid indefinitely; beneficiaries of humanitarian protection received identification documents valid for three years; and asylum seekers received temporary identification cards. UNHCR provided financial support to refugees in the form of multipurpose cash assistance. A temporary accommodation center administered by the Bureau of Migration and Asylum was available for asylum seekers.

Temporary Protection: In March, the government approved Temporary Protection Status for refugees, allowing greater access to employment, education, health care, and other social services for those who registered. Those who exited the country for more than 45 days temporarily lost Temporary Protection Status and were required to pay a small fine to

restore the status upon re-entry, which they could pay at border crossing points. The government also allowed for some exceptions to the 45-day rule for exceptional cases at the discretion of the General Inspectorate for Migration. The government provided asylum or humanitarian protection to 145 individuals who might not qualify as refugees.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The law did not define the concept of IDPs and authorities did not report any official data on IDPs as such. Nonetheless, NGOs such as Promo-LEX and a 2004 Norwegian Refugee Council report estimated that approximately 130,000 persons were displaced by the 1992 conflict in Transnistria, with approximately 51,000 of them residing in government-controlled territory. IDPs could include victims of forced displacement by Transnistrian “authorities,” former combatants, and persons who left the region for political reasons.

For further information about IDPs in the country, please see the materials of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center: <https://www.internal-displacement.org>.

g. Stateless Persons

According to the Public Service Agency (PSA), as of January there were 1,797

persons registered as stateless in the country, 1,249 of whom resided in Transnistria. According to immigration law experts, most stateless persons fell into one of two categories: 1) former citizens of the Soviet Union residing in Moldova who were ineligible for Moldovan citizenship and did not hold another country's citizenship, and 2) Moldovan citizens who had renounced their citizenship to acquire another citizenship and had not notified Moldovan authorities of any subsequent acquisition of citizenship. Experts assessed that most persons in the second category, especially Transnistria residents, were not actually stateless, and most acquired Russian or Ukrainian citizenship or another nationality. PSA data showed 6,849 citizens of the country did not possess any valid documentation of their citizenship but had Soviet era passports endorsed by the Public Services Agency, which served as a prima facie proof of citizenship. There were an additional 1,400 persons of indeterminate citizenship status.

Stateless persons and refugees could gain citizenship through naturalization. The law allowed a refugee or stateless person who had resided legally in the country for eight years to seek citizenship. The family reunion process for naturalized refugees was burdensome.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provided 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

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: National elections were widely reported to be free and fair, with observers noting some irregularities in presidential election in 2020 and parliamentary elections in 2021.

ODIHR's preliminary report following the November local elections concluded that the elections "were peaceful and managed efficiently, but interference from abroad and restrictive measures, imposed due to national security concerns on freedom of speech, association, and the right to compete, had a negative impact on the process." In particular, the report noted that the de-registration of all candidates from the Sansa Party on the eve of the elections "limited voters' choice and resulted in uncontested races in some smaller localities." ODIHR also stated that the suspension of broadcast licenses for certain media outlets appeared "to be a disproportionate restriction of freedom of expression." The report commented that the Central Electoral Commission worked professionally and in an open manner, and "generally enjoyed the confidence of stakeholders, with the exception of the opposition," but the fact that a majority of its members were nominated by the ruling party could impact perceptions of its impartiality.

Election irregularities were reported during the year in regional elections in Gagauzia, an autonomous region within the country.

Residents of Gagauzia elected their Governor (Bashkan) on April 30 and May 14 in the first and second round respectively, and the Comrat Appeal Court validated the results May 22. Shor Party candidate Evghenia Gutul was sworn in as Gagauzia Governor on July 19, one month after the Shor party was declared unconstitutional. Prosecutors and the National Anticorruption Center alleged the Shor Party engaged in widespread fraud, including vote-buying, in order to secure Gutul's victory. The Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections NGO expressed concern regarding "the degradation of the electoral process" and accused local authorities of ignoring the basic legal principles of ensuring free and fair elections.

Political Parties and Political Participation: On June 19 the Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the government's November 2022 request to dissolve the Shor Party for crimes including illicit campaign financing and working to support Russia's malign influence in the country. Pursuant to the ruling, Shor Party members of parliament became independent members without the right to join other parliamentary factions. Parliament approved a law on July 31 to ban executive officers, party members in elective offices, or party members on the list of the alternative candidates during elections from any party declared unconstitutional from running for elective offices for five years. Human rights NGOs and the Venice Commission recommended that

the government narrow the legislation to exclude broad categories of party officials who did not play a role in the party's unconstitutional activities. On September 29, the Constitutional Court suspended the five-year ban prohibiting former members of unconstitutional parties from competing in elections, in effect enabling approximately 600 former Shor Party members to register to run in November's local elections. On October 4, the Emergency Situations Commission (CSE) adopted a decision to establish a more narrow, individualized criteria for those not permitted to run in the November 5 local elections. Subsequently, on October 5, parliament passed, and President Sandu signed into law, these changes to the electoral code, which prohibited former members of any party deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court from running for office for three years if they had either been removed from previous races, suspected or convicted of crimes that were cited in the Constitutional Court's decision to ban the party, or subject to international sanctions. Effectively, this decision banned 102 Shor Party leaders from seeking office. Individuals subject to restrictions had the right to challenge the decision in the Chisinau Court of Appeals. Several politicians and experts criticized the measures, noting that parliament adopted them quickly without public consultations.

On November 3, two days before the first round of local elections, the CSE determined that candidates of the Sansa Party, which was affiliated with fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor, would have their registration cancelled and should be removed from the ballot throughout the country. The CSE stated

they acted based upon evidence submitted by the SIS demonstrating that the Sansa Party had taken over the banned Shor Party's party structures and had engaged in widespread vote buying and illegal campaign spending on a scale unprecedented in the country's history. The SIS published a detailed report on the evidence they compiled against Sansa, including financing and support from the Russian government.

On December 12, the Chisinau Court of Appeal overturned the November 5 CSE decision on the Sansa Party candidates but said its ruling did not affect the election results. The government spokesperson indicated the government would challenge the decision at both the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Justice.

Opposition parties claimed that several criminal cases opened by authorities against their members in previous years were politically motivated. Several high-profile politicians were charged or investigated in criminal cases, including former President Igor Dodon, accused of corruption and state treason, and Shor Party member of parliament Marina Tauber, accused of corruption and illicit party financing. Authorities rejected allegations regarding the political nature of the criminal cases, and no prominent legal or human rights experts concluded the investigations were politically motivated. These and several other criminal cases from previous years regarding high-level politicians continued during the year.

Section 4. Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government generally did not implement the law effectively.

Corruption: Despite the government taking steps to combat corruption and increase the independence of the judiciary and capacity of anti-corruption agencies, corruption remained endemic. Corruption in the judiciary and other state structures was widespread. The government, including parliament, prioritized judicial reform and anti-corruption efforts, including through pursuing asset recovery, prosecution of corrupt former officials and oligarchs, and implementing vetting of judicial and prosecutorial oversight bodies.

The key anti-corruption institutions in the country – the Prosecutor General’s Office and its specialized anti-corruption and anti-organized crime units, the National Integrity Authority, the National Anti-corruption Center, the Anti-corruption Prosecutor’s Office (APO), and the Criminal Assets Recovery Agency – made some progress on corruption investigations of illicit enrichment and asset seizures. Prosecutors continued several criminal cases throughout the year on illicit enrichment of sitting and former political leaders, including former President Igor Dodon, Socialist Party member of parliament Corneliu Furculita, Socialist member of parliament and former Prime Minister Zinaida Greceanii, Shor Party member of parliament Marina

Tauber, and others.

On March 10, APO prosecutors sent to the court the criminal cases against Vladimir Andronachi, a close ally of fugitive oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc, on charges of large-scale embezzlement and money laundering in the interest of a criminal organization relating to a \$1 billion bank fraud scandal in 2014. On April 13, the Chisinau Court of Appeals sentenced U.S.-sanctioned oligarch Ilan Shor in absentia to 15 years in prison for participating in the 2014 scandal. The court also ordered the confiscation of Şhor's assets, worth approximately €278 million (more than \$293 million), in favor of the National Bank of Moldova. The oligarch fled the country in 2019.

On April 19, APO prosecutors sent to the court a case against former deputy governor of the National Bank Emma Tabarta, charging her with fraud, money laundering, and influence peddling in the interest of an organized criminal group that committed the 2014 billion-dollar theft.

On July 18, the Anti-corruption Prosecutor's Office announced the completion, in absentia, of the criminal investigation against U.S.-sanctioned oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc. In 2020, prosecutors had charged Plahotniuc with creating and leading a criminal organization, fraud, and money laundering in the case of the 2014 plundering of the banking system. Plahotniuc, whose lawyers deny he was involved, fled the country in 2019.

On September 21, the National Anti-corruption Center detained two non-

affiliated members of parliament, Alexandr Nesterovschi and Irina Lozovan, on charges of accepting illicit financing of the political party from a criminal organized group led by oligarch Ilan Shor, and parliament voted on a waiver of their parliamentary immunity on the same day in order to facilitate their arrest at the request of the prosecutor general.

Following his 2021 arrest and suspension from office on corruption charges and for improperly handling conflicts of interest involving personal connections to fugitive oligarch Veaceslav Platon, Prosecutor General Alexandru Stoianoglo was dismissed on September 26. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled on October 24 that the automatic nature of Stoianoglo's suspension from office upon his indictment violated his rights and ordered the government to pay €3,600 (\$3,800) in damages. At the time of the ECtHR ruling, the government had already amended the law that had enabled Stoianoglo's automatic suspension from office, which government officials and legal experts said now complied with the ECtHR's standards.

Former President Igor Dodon was released from judicial control on September 14, while four criminal cases against him were pending. Law enforcement authorities had accused Dodon of corruption, use of forged documents, abuse of office, and state treason. Dodon pled not guilty and said the charges against him were politically motivated – a claim rejected by authorities, local NGOs, and human rights groups.

In July, authorities released Marina Tauber, a member of parliament and former deputy chair of the now-outlawed Shor Party awaiting trial on charges of illicit party financing, from house arrest and placed her under judicial control.

For additional information concerning corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction to monitor or investigate human rights conditions or cases and publish their findings. Government officials were for the most part cooperative and responsive to the views of these groups.

Authorities in Chisinau did not have full access to or control over the Transnistria region. According to local and international experts, “authorities” in Transnistria monitored and restricted activities of human rights NGOs. There were credible reports that human rights NGOs in the

region limited their investigations of serious human rights abuses due to fear of repression and harassment by Transnistrian “authorities.”

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: OSCE observers reported their access to the Transnistria region was severely restricted, such that OSCE personnel had to be escorted by Transnistria “law enforcement” within the region, and that during the year they were not permitted to travel in the Transnistria region beyond the jointly administered security zone between Transnistria and the rest of the country.

Government Human Rights Bodies: There were three human rights bodies in the country. The People’s Ombudsman and the Council for the Prevention of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality (Equality Council) were independent institutions that reported to parliament, while the Agency for Interethnic Relations was part of the government.

The law provided for the independence of the People’s Ombudsman from political influence and appointment to a seven-year, nonrenewable term. The Office of the People’s Ombudsman could initiate an investigation based on complaints or on its own authority. Although the office lacked the power to enforce decisions, it acted as a monitor of human rights conditions, including in prisons and other places of detention. A separate ombudsperson for children’s rights operated under the same framework within the Office of the People’s Ombudsman.

The Equality Council was responsible for reviewing complaints of discrimination and making recommendations. On February 2, legislation was passed to enable the Equality Council to examine and apply fines in cases of discrimination in employment and education sectors, as well as in cases of harassment and to provide for protection of victims. In addition, the council could determine whether an act of discrimination took place, offer advice on a remedy, and request that prosecutors initiate criminal proceedings. The Agency for Interethnic Relations oversaw and implemented state policies regarding interethnic relations and the use of languages in the country, but its status as an agency not directly answerable to a cabinet-level officer limited the efficacy of its mandate.

Parliament also had a separate standing committee for human rights and interethnic relations; the committee's powers and areas of oversight were narrow.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law defined domestic violence as a criminal offense, provided for the punishment of perpetrators, defined mechanisms for obtaining restraining orders against abusive individuals, and extended protection to unmarried individuals and children of unmarried individuals. The law covered five forms of domestic violence: physical,

psychological, sexual, economic, and spiritual. The maximum punishment for domestic violence offenses was 15 years' imprisonment. The law criminalized rape of a person, regardless of gender, including spousal rape and forcible sexual assault, and established penalties for violations ranging from three years to life in prison. Panel participants at the International Conference on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Girls and Domestic Violence held in Chisinau in October mentioned that requirements that survivors prove they were subjected to violence impeded some survivors from seeking legal protection, as did lack of understanding about laws covering domestic violence.

Domestic violence resulting in "nonsignificant bodily harm" fell under the civil code, rather than the criminal code, and could be punished by a fine or community service. The law provided for cooperation between government and civil society organizations, established survivor protection as a human rights principle, and allowed third parties to file complaints on behalf of survivors. During the year, 65 percent of requests for restriction orders were filed by the victims themselves and 30 percent were filed by police investigating the incident.

Sexual violence, including rape, remained a significant problem. Survivors of violence were often retraumatized by the system and subjected to social stigmas. Legislative gaps, social stigma, and fear of re-traumatization contributed to a culture of impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence. As

a result, women's rights advocates believed few survivors of sexual offenses reported the crimes.

Through September 30, police registered 7,643 domestic violence cases, including 17 that resulted in death. The General Police Inspectorate issued 2,721 emergency restraining orders, and courts issued 946 protection orders.

The law authorized the Ministry of Justice to use electronic devices for monitoring accused abusers in domestic violence cases.

The police were required by law to inform the survivors of domestic violence regarding the release of the aggressor from detention, detention term expiry, or court refusals to extend preventive detention. Prison administrations were also required by law to inform domestic violence survivors concerning the imminent release of their aggressor from the penitentiary institution.

During the year police and human rights NGOs reported an increase in domestic violence complaints.

Survivors of domestic violence in Transnistria were not protected by the "law," which lacked a definition of domestic violence and did not allow for domestic violence cases to be distinguished from other crimes, creating an absence of official statistics on domestic violence. Domestic violence without "substantial bodily harm" (such as broken bones or a concussion)

remained an administrative, rather than criminal, offense punishable only by a fine. Transnistrian “authorities” often did not take any action when male abusers beat women.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: The law provided criminal penalties for sexual harassment ranging from a fine to a maximum of seven years’ imprisonment. The law prohibited sexual advances that affected a person’s dignity or created an unpleasant, hostile, degrading, or humiliating environment in a workplace or educational institution. There were no criminal penalties or civil remedies for sexual harassment in employment. According to NGOs, law enforcement agencies steadily improved their handling of sexual harassment cases. Civil society groups, however, criticized the judicial system for displaying inadequate concern for the safety of survivors and for not holding perpetrators accountable for their behavior.

On July 19, police placed a vlogger from Chisinau in a 20-day pretrial detention for sexually harassing young women, including minors, on the streets for videos, which were uploaded later to a social media platform.

Discrimination: The law prohibited discrimination in respect to employment and occupation based on sex, age, race, color, nationality, religion, political opinion, social origin, residence, disability, HIV-positive status, sexual orientation or gender identity, refugee or stateless status, and membership or activity in trade unions, as well as other criteria. The law required

employers to provide for equal opportunity and treatment of employees without discrimination, to apply the same criteria to assess each employee's work, and to provide equal conditions for men and women relating to work and family obligations. The law defined and prohibited both direct and indirect discrimination. The government sometimes applied penalties against violators. When enforced, penalties for violations were commensurate with those for other crimes related to denial of civil rights.

Women and men had the same legal status in family, labor, property, nationality, inheritance law, and in the judicial system. The law required that women fill a minimum of 40 percent of decision-making positions in government and political offices, including a minimum quota of 40 percent of candidates for parliament on the electoral lists of political parties, distributed evenly across the entire electoral list, and sanctions for noncompliance. While the law strictly prohibited discrimination, spelled out employers' responsibilities in ensuring that workplaces were free of gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, and prohibited sexist and discriminatory language and images in media and advertising, gender-based discrimination remained a significant problem. The government did not enforce the law effectively and women experienced discrimination in the workplace. The law required equal pay for equal work, but discrimination with respect to employment, pay, and access to pension benefits persisted in the country.

The age at which men and women could retire with either full or partial benefits was not equal, nor was the mandatory retirement age for men and women.

Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to gender, disability, minority status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, and HIV-positive status. Pregnant women reported being denied employment opportunities since such employment was associated with additional benefits payable after childbirth.

The law also stipulated that the Equality Council be responsible for reviewing complaints of discrimination and making recommendations.

Women with disabilities, Romani women, and LGBTQI+ women reported discrimination based on some combination of their protected characteristics.

In Transnistria, employment segregation “laws” banned women from more than 300 professions. Prohibited occupations included those deemed “too dangerous or demanding” for women, including welding, driving, snow blowing, and gas extraction.

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

Women and girls from historically marginalized communities, including rural

areas and ethnic minorities, faced exclusion, stigmatization, and discrimination, which often kept them in poverty and impeded their access to public services. Teenagers and young women in rural areas had particularly limited access to accurate information on reproductive and sexual health.

Survivors of sexual violence had access to sexual and reproductive health services on the same basis as other citizens. Emergency contraception was not universally available to survivors of sexual violence as part of clinical management of rape. Emergency contraception was provided only in pharmacies and by family doctors and was not available in hospital emergency units.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The constitution provided that all citizens were equal before the law and public authorities, regardless of race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, opinion, political affiliation, wealth, or social origin. The law governed the equality principles; prevented and combatted discrimination; and provided for equality in political, economic, social, cultural life, and other areas regardless of race, color, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, sex, age, disability status, opinion, political affiliation, or any other similar criteria. Discrimination and hate-based crime were reported throughout the year, particularly against Roma and the Jewish

community.

Roma were one of the most vulnerable minority groups in the country and faced a higher risk of marginalization, underrepresentation in political decision making, illiteracy, and social prejudice. Roma had lower levels of education, more limited access to health care, and higher rates of unemployment than the general population. Romani women were particularly vulnerable to social exclusion and discrimination. Some Romani communities lacked running water, sanitation facilities, and heating. Other problems facing Roma included lack of emergency health-care services in secluded settlements, unfair or arbitrary treatment by health practitioners, and lower rates of health insurance coverage. Authorities lacked an effective mechanism to address vulnerable families whose children did not attend school.

Romani leaders accused law enforcement bodies of failing to investigate hate speech and holding discriminatory attitudes towards Roma. Romani representatives also reported that police failed or refused to investigate cases of discrimination against Roma. According to Romani leaders, the community faced a high rate of emigration, and the state did not provide sufficient financing for Romani community mediators, as prescribed by law.

Children

Birth Registration: As in previous years, the birth of Roma and children

from very rural areas were not registered, generally due to parents' preferences or limited access to public services. Failing to obtain birth registration limited the ability to receive public services, including education.

Education: Education of Romani children remained a problem; only half of Romani children attended school and one in five attended preschool. According to Romani representatives, absenteeism and school dropout rates in Romani communities stemmed from poverty and fear of discrimination.

Child Abuse: Although the law prohibited child neglect and specific forms of abuse, such as forced begging, child abuse remained a problem.

In most cases of abuse children were subject to physical violence, neglect, psychological violence, and labor exploitation. Local public authorities failed to monitor all cases of abuse against children, claiming a lack of experts.

A special unit for minors in the Prosecutor General's Office, the Juvenile Justice Unit, was responsible for ensuring that particular attention and expertise were devoted to child abuse survivors and child offenders.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age for marriage was 16 for women and 18 for men. Child marriage was most common in Romani communities, where there were reports of girls between the ages of 12 and 16 being married. This either took the form of a forced marriage, whereby a girl was married off to an adult man against her will, or an arranged marriage, whereby "matchmakers" arranged for two children to be married

in the future. In such cases, marriage took place without official documentation or registration. After marriage, girls commonly dropped out of school to take on household duties.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The exploitation of a child in a commercial sex act was punishable by 10 to 12 years' imprisonment. Authorities punished commercial sex with minors as statutory rape. The law prohibited the production, distribution, broadcasting, import, export, sale, exchange, use, or possession of child pornography, for which the punishment was one to three years' imprisonment and fines. These laws were generally enforced. The minimum age for consensual sex was 16.

Antisemitism

The Jewish community numbered between 1,600 and 30,000 persons (depending on source and definition), including up to 2,000 living in Transnistria.

According to the Jewish community, antisemitic discourse and hate speech online and in media against members of the Jewish community remained a problem. Online publications related to the community's activities received hateful and insulting comments.

The law included administrative and criminal liabilities for Holocaust denial and insulting the memory of the Holocaust, as well as xenophobic, racist, and fascist propaganda. During the year, the government appointed Sergiu

Diaconu as Special Envoy for Antisemitism and Holocaust Issues and publicly supported a two-day program commemorating the 120th anniversary of the Kishinev Pogroms. State educators worked with the OSCE to create an optional Holocaust studies curriculum for grades 10-12 and 9,000 students enrolled in this optional course during the year. Holocaust studies were not mandatory in state schools. Civil society experts said the general knowledge concerning Jewish community history in the country and laws governing hate-based crimes remained low. The Jewish Community of Moldova reported that laws were infrequently enforced, as law enforcement was unwilling to prosecute or lacked understanding of what behavior the law prohibited.

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

Trafficking in Persons

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

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or

Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The law did not criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, cross-dressing, or other sexual or gender characteristic-related behaviors. Seemingly neutral laws, such as laws covering debauchery, immorality, loitering, or other activities were not disproportionately applied to LGBTQI+ persons. The country lacked a legal framework for civil partnerships. In Transnistria, the “law” did not criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity. However, the “law” did not recognize same-sex unions. There were no antidiscrimination “laws” protecting members of the LGBTQI+ community and there were no efforts to combat discriminatory behavior.

Violence and Harassment: While LGBTQI+ persons reported an improvement of respect for their rights during the year, they nonetheless still experienced verbal harassment and discrimination by public officials, particularly local officials and opposition party leaders, and religious leaders. A survey on public attitudes towards the LGBTQI+ community showed that the majority of LGBTQI+ individuals surveyed had heard of assaults against LGBTQI+ individuals and believed that most victims did not go to the police., citing widespread distrust of the police among the LGBTQI+ community.

Religious leaders made homophobic statements against LGBTQI+ persons. On January 30, the Moscow-affiliated Metropolitan Orthodox Church

website published an article in response to the January 17 European Court of Human Rights decision concerning recognition and protection of LGBTQI+ unions, calling the decision “promotion of sin” and a “heaven-defying decision for our orthodox conscience.” Similarly on April 13, during an interview with Russia-based Sputnik TV, Orthodox priest Vitalie Sincari declared that liberalism as promoted in connection with LGBTQI+ rights was a “desire for satanic sins” and claimed that the LGBTQI+ community’s understanding of human rights promoted sin, vileness, and bestiality.

As in previous years, police were reluctant to open investigations against perpetrators of abuse. According to the NGO Genderdoc-M, in most cases law enforcement bodies failed to identify and hold to account persons who perpetrated acts of violence against LGBTQI+ individuals. As of December 15, Genderdoc-M reported 15 cases of abuses of the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals, down from 32 in 2022, including hate speech, discrimination, and hate incidents. The state did not provide specialized provisions for LGBTQI+ victims of domestic abuse. On January 1, however, a new provision equating the penalty for same-sex rape with opposite-sex rape entered into force.

Insults against LGBTQI+ representatives on social media by both public officials and private individuals were also frequent. On June 14, pediatrician Igor Pletos posted a video on social media in which he stated that members of the LGBTQI+ community were “mentally ill.” On June 19, Pletos posted a

proposal to petition to prohibit public promotion of LGBTQI+ ideas on his Facebook page.

Discrimination: The law prohibited employment discrimination based on sexual orientation, but societal discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity persisted. As noted by participants in an October “Coming Out” conference organized by NGO Genderdoc-M, hate speech and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity remained a problem especially for adolescents. Transgender individuals also reported employment discrimination.

Same sex couples were not granted the same rights as heterosexual couples. For example, two LGBTQI+ activists filed a lawsuit April 25 demanding that the state recognize them as a couple. The plaintiffs argued the country was not in compliance with a May ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that obligated Council of Europe member states to ensure equal rights for same-sex and heterosexual marriages.

The government trained 39 representatives from the Republican Center for Psycho-pedagogical assistance, and the Ombudsman for the Rights of the Child took a strong stance on “prioritizing the interest of the child” and publicly supported the educational campaign “LGBT Children in Your School,” yet bullying of LGBTQI+ students remained pervasive.

In Transnistria, there were no antidiscrimination “laws” protecting LGBTQI+

persons from discrimination by either “authorities” or private individuals and members of the LGBTQI+ community report bullying in public spaces.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Civil society organizations reported that, although transgender individuals were technically allowed to change their names on legal identity documents, including passports, the government did not permit them to easily update gender markers to reflect their gender identity. The Public Services Agency refused to change identity documents for transgender individuals, despite court orders. Obtaining those court orders remained time-intensive and requirements were case-by-case, often requiring applicants to obtain a psychiatric diagnosis of “transsexualism” or “gender identity disorder,” or else to prove that a gender-affirming surgery had taken place. Self-determination was not permitted.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: There were no reports during the year that so-called conversion therapy or similar practices were practiced on non-consenting adults or minors to try to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:

While Chisinau Mayor Ion Ceban initially voiced opposition to the Pride Parade in June, the parade occurred with protection from the national police and without incident. Registered NGOs promoting LGBTQI+ rights operated freely and held meetings and public events, though their presence

was largely limited to Chisinau.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. The law stipulated equal access to public facilities, health services, public buildings, and transportation. Authorities rarely enforced the law, and discrimination against persons with disabilities persisted. The government did not regularly provide information and communication on disability concerns in accessible formats.

The law required new construction and transportation companies' vehicles to be accessible to persons with disabilities. Authorities implemented the provisions of the law only to a limited extent. While some newly built or reconstructed buildings were accessible, older buildings largely remained inaccessible. According to the disability rights NGO Motivation, more than 70 percent of public institutions lacked access ramps for persons with disabilities. Persons with mobility disabilities complained regarding the lack of access to public transportation and public institutions, as well as a shortage of designated parking places. Despite some improvements during the year, city authorities and construction companies often disregarded legal requirements on accessibility for persons with mobility impairments.

Most schools were poorly equipped to address the needs of children with

disabilities. Some children with disabilities attended mainstream schools, while authorities placed others in segregated boarding schools, or they were home schooled.

There were reports of violence and abuses against persons with disabilities. In most cases, prosecutors refused to investigate complaints of violence and abuses against persons with disabilities, questioning the accuracy of allegations made by persons with mental disabilities. According to Promo-LEX, most prosecutors and investigators lacked technical skills to investigate acts of violence or torture in psychiatric institutions. Authorities also lacked a regulatory framework for the psychological assessment of victims of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment in psychiatric institutions.

In previous years, members of the Council for Prevention of Torture, as part of the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture (NMPT), conducted preventive visits to residential institutions for persons with disabilities. The NMPT identified pervasive problems in such institutions, including: a shortage of personnel in most residential institutions and of qualified medical staff in institutions hosting persons with disabilities; neglect of the special needs of persons with mental disabilities; verbal and physical abuse by personnel of persons with disabilities; involuntary confinement of patients; insufficient qualified staff at specialized institutions for children with disabilities; and lack of complaint mechanisms.

According to the Moldovan Institute of Human Rights, systemic deficiencies

identified in psychiatric hospitals and temporary placement centers for persons with disabilities were not addressed. Experts reported cases of forced medication without a legally mandated court order. Patients isolated in temporary placement centers reported the administration of psychotropic drugs without consent and mistreatment by personnel. The institute also found deficiencies in the documentation, investigation, and management of cases involving persons with mental or psychosocial impairments by police, prosecutors, judges, and health-care providers. The institute stated the Balti Psychiatric Hospital lacked a separate ward for criminally committed patients, resulting in them being held and treated alongside civilly and voluntarily committed patients. Persons with different types of disabilities and of widely different ages sometimes shared the same rooms, and unjustified restrictive measures were sometimes applied. There was no separation of persons presenting a danger to themselves or others from those who voluntarily committed themselves in any of the country's three psychiatric hospitals.

According to Promo-Lex, patients from psychiatric hospitals held under coercive measures were the most vulnerable. Patients with mental disabilities were neglected, wore old clothes, and were held in poor "detention conditions" with no guarantees against their ill-treatment. The general prosecutor's order on the procedures for identification, registration, and reporting of alleged cases of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment was not functional. One of its provisions, according to which the hospital

staff had to inform the prosecutor's office of any injuries within 24 hours, was not usually enforced.

Although the law provided for equal employment opportunities and prohibited discrimination against persons with disabilities (except for jobs requiring specific health standards), many employers either failed to provide accommodations or avoided employing persons with disabilities.

Not all polling stations in Gagauzia were fully accessible for the elections that took place during the year.

The government continued the deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities and provided alternative community-based services under the *National Program of Deinstitutionalization of People with Intellectual and Psychosocial Disabilities from residential institutions for 2018-26*.

An individual placed under guardianship lost all standing before the law and could not perform social and legal acts, such as marriage, voting, claiming social benefits, and consenting to or refusing medication. Most residential institutions lacked proper accommodation for persons with mobility impairments.

In Transnistria, the "law" provided for protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the areas of education, health care, and employment.

Reliable information on the treatment of persons with disabilities in

Transnistria was generally unavailable, but there were reports that children with disabilities rarely attended school and lacked access to specialized resources.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Persons living with HIV continued to face societal and official discrimination.

The law prohibited hospitals and other health institutions from denying admission or access to health-care services or requesting additional fees from persons with HIV or suspected of being HIV-positive. Prison inmates with HIV or AIDS faced high levels of discrimination by both prison staff and other inmates. Official practice required that positive HIV test results be reported to the public health sector's infectious disease doctor.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provided workers the right to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct strikes. The government generally respected these rights, but with limitations. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination but did not provide for the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The law did not allow government workers and workers in

essential services, including health-care providers and public utility employees, to strike. The law prohibited strikes when the government declared an emergency, such as during natural disasters, epidemics, and pandemics. Authorities could impose compulsory arbitration at the request of one party to a dispute. There were no groups of workers excluded from or covered differently by relevant legal protections.

The State Labor Inspectorate (SLI) and the Prosecutor General's Office were responsible for overseeing labor laws, but they failed to monitor or enforce effectively the rights to collective bargaining and labor union organization. The law did not provide effective sanctions for abuses of freedom of association nor antiunion discrimination, nor stipulate penalties for violating trade union rights. Penalties for violations were less than those of other laws related to civil rights and penalties were rarely applied against violators.

The government and employers generally respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Worker organizations were generally independent of the government, political parties, employers, and employers' associations, although the country's sole national-level trade union confederation remained largely unreformed since independence in 1991.

There were no reports that the government, political parties, or employers interfered in the functioning of workers' organizations. Prosecutors could

reject appeals by trade unions alleging antiunion behavior, and authorities did not punish alleged violations of the trade union law.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

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>.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law provided for a national minimum wage that was less than the poverty level. According to the SLI, as of September salary arrears were at 51.44 million lei (\$2.8 million).

The law set the maximum workweek at 40 hours with overtime compensation, provided for at least one day off per week, and mandated paid annual leave of at least 28 calendar days (government holidays excluded). Different paid leave plans could be used in some sectors, such as

education, health care, and public service. The law prohibited excessive compulsory overtime. Foreign, migrant, and domestic workers had the same wage and hour protections as other workers.

Occupational Safety and Health: The government set occupational safety and health (OSH) standards, which were appropriate for the main industries. Inspectors proactively identified unsafe conditions during announced and unannounced inspections. According to labor law, workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment.

In December 2022, parliament approved legislation empowering the SLI to make unannounced labor inspections. The law entered into force in March.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The SLI was responsible for monitoring the implementation of labor relations and OSH laws. Government efforts to enforce occupational health and safety standards were limited. The number of inspectors was insufficient to effectively enforce minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. The law required the government to establish and monitor safety standards in the workplace, but inspections could only occur when a complaint was received and not all complaints met the criteria for a workplace inspection. Penalties for violations were less than those for other similar crimes.

A thriving informal economy accounted for a significant portion of the

country's economic activity. The labor code required work contracts for employment, but the government did not have an effective mechanism to monitor compliance. According to data issued by the National Bureau of Statistics for the first quarter of the year, 14.5 percent of employed persons worked in the informal sector. Workers in the informal economy did not have the same legal protections under wage, hour, and occupational safety and health provisions as employees in the formal sector.