

Seychelles 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Seychelles during the year.

There were no credible reports of significant human rights abuses.

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

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization 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, and the government generally respected this right. An independent media, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for media members.

On September 18, the National Assembly passed amendments to the law allowing hate crimes to be recognized and prosecuted for the first time in the country's history. The amendment classified hate speech as a criminal offense. The element of "hate" was included as an aggravating factor for any underlying offense. The law listed particular groups or individuals with protected characteristics. At year's end, there were no known reports of prosecution under these new provisions.

The law prohibited wounding the religious feelings of others, as well as damaging or defiling objects of religious worship or disturbing a lawful religious assembly. There were no reports during the year these provisions were enforced.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

According to the Association of Media Practitioners Seychelles, journalists

were generally free to do their work and were not subjected to violence, but some complained of harassment, intimidation, and harsh criticism by authorities, including the president, due to their reporting.

On April 1, authorities charged Ralph Volcere, editor of *The Seychelles Independent* newspaper, with criminal trespass for entering the premises of the national airline to take pictures of cargo belonging to the royal family of the United Arab Emirates that was allegedly flown into the country without inspection. The case remained pending at year's end.

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

The law allowed the information technology minister to prohibit the broadcast of any material believed to be against the “national interest” or “objectionable.” The law also required telecommunication companies to submit subscriber information to the government. The government maintained a ban on the staff of *The Seychelles Independent* from attending presidential press events on the grounds of irresponsible reporting. During the year, the opposition party United Seychelles withdrew a 2023 lawsuit it had filed against the Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation's editorial policies.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law allowed workers except for police, military, prison, and firefighting personnel to form and join independent unions and to bargain collectively. The law conferred discretionary powers to the Office of the Registrar General to refuse registration of unions. Strikes were illegal unless arbitration procedures were first exhausted. Legislation required that two-thirds of union members vote for a strike in a meeting specifically called to discuss the strike and provided the government with the right to call for a 60-day cooling-off period before a strike started. The law empowered the minister responsible for employment to declare a strike unlawful if its continuance would endanger “public order or the national economy.” Penalties for calling an illegal strike could be a substantial monetary fine and imprisonment for up to six months.

The law prohibited antiunion discrimination. It did not specifically state that foreigners, migrants, or workers in the Seychelles International Trade Zone (SITZ) had the right to join a union. The government had the right to review and approve all collective bargaining agreements in the public and private sectors. The law also imposed compulsory arbitration in all cases where negotiating parties did not reach an agreement through collective bargaining. Migrant workers, an estimated 20 percent of the formal-sector

workforce, had weaker freedom of association rights because their employers could easily deport them. Workers in the SITZ, an estimated 10 percent of the workforce, were not protected by the employment law.

The government rarely applied penalties against violators of freedom of association protections. Cases involving citizens were often subject to lengthy delays and appeals. Employers often deported foreign workers who complained regarding work, pay, and living conditions.

The government enforced the law and generally respected workers' rights to participate in union activities and collective bargaining. There were no reports of workers dismissed for union activity. There were no known local labor nongovernmental organizations, but the Association of Rights Information and Democracy tracked labor matters pertaining to migrant workers.

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 government set mandatory minimum wage rates for employees in both the private and public sectors. The minimum wages were above the poverty

line.

The legal maximum workweek varied from 45 to 55 hours, depending on the economic sector. Regulations entitled each full-time worker to a one-hour break per day and permitted overtime up to 60 additional hours per month. Violations were common in the construction, agriculture, and fishing sectors.

Occupational Safety and Health

The Ministry of Health issued comprehensive occupational safety and health (OSH) regulations that were up to date and appropriate for the main industries. The law allowed citizen workers to remove themselves from dangerous or unhealthy work situations, to report the employer to the Health and Safety Commission of the Department of Employment, and to seek compensation without jeopardizing their employment. The law provided for the protection of foreign workers, but employers often deported foreign workers who complained regarding OSH conditions.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government effectively enforced minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. The penalties were not commensurate with similar crimes. Penalties were often applied against violators. The Department of Employment and the Employment Tribunal enforced wage, hour, and OSH laws, and the Financial Service Authority regulated companies operating in the SITZ.

There were insufficient labor inspectors to enforce compliance. The Ministry of Health, the Department of Employment, and the National Coordinating Committee against Trafficking in Persons were responsible for visiting and inspecting worksites and workers' accommodations. The task force was mandated to make unannounced inspections. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. Inspections and remediation were inadequate.

Approximately 15 percent of the workforce worked in the informal sector. The government did not enforce labor laws in the informal sector.

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 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.

The law required warrants for arrests, except under a law that allowed

police to arrest and detain persons suspected of drug possession, use, importation, and drug trafficking. Authorities generally respected the requirement to bring arrested individuals before a magistrate within 24 hours, with allowance made for travel from distant islands. The law provided for detention without criminal charge for up to 14 days if authorized by court order. Authorities generally notified detainees of the charges against them. Detainees had the right to legal counsel, and indigents received free legal aid in all cases. Courts allowed bail in most instances, except for high-profile drug, homicide, corruption, and terrorism cases.

Pretrial detention was generally not a problem, and most detainees were given bail. In certain cases, detainees involved in high-profile corruption, terrorism, and drug trafficking cases were held in pretrial detention for several years. For example, a prominent couple, Mukesh and Laura Valabhji, and senior military officer Leslie Benoiton, widely viewed as connected to the former ruling party, remained in pretrial detention since their 2021 arrests on charges of illegal weapons possession and terrorism. Courts upheld the continued detention, citing concerns the three could influence witnesses or flee the country. Lawyers for the Valabhjis cited concerns of an unfair trial and concern for human rights due to the long pretrial detention of their clients, who remained in detention at year's end.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

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

e. Trafficking in Persons

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

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, and there were no credible reports government officials employed them.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

There was no significant presence of the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited all of the worst forms of child labor. The law set the minimum age of 15 for employment, subject to exceptions for children who were employed part-time in light work, without harm to their health or morals.

The law made provision for light work in family-owned businesses. The law set forth a list of sectors, such as sewage, garbage collection, and bars, in which children younger than 15 were not allowed to work. A list of hazardous child labor activities was in force for children younger than 18. The penalty for employing a child younger than 15 was not commensurate with those prescribed for analogous abuses. The government enforced applicable laws, and penalties were regularly applied against violators.

Child Marriage

The minimum age for marriage was 18 for both men and women, and the government enforced the law effectively.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Provision of First Asylum

The law did not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had no system or procedural safeguards for providing protection to refugees.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The Jewish community numbered fewer than 25 persons. There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.