

Singapore 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Singapore in the past year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: detention by the government without prior judicial review or warrant; monitoring private electronic or telephone conversations without a warrant; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media, including the enforcement of criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; and substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.

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

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 the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

b. Disappearance

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

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

The law prohibited such practices, and the government generally respected these prohibitions.

The law mandated imprisonment and mandatory caning for approximately 30 offenses, such as certain cases of rape, robbery, and drug trafficking. Caning was discretionary for convictions on other charges involving the use of force, such as kidnapping or voluntarily causing grievous hurt. Caning also could be used as punishment for legally defined offenses while in prison if a review by the Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee deemed it necessary and the commissioner of prisons approved. Women and girls, men older than 50, boys younger than 16, men sentenced to death whose sentences were not commuted, and persons determined medically unfit were exempt from caning.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Observers described some conditions as harsh, including cramped and

poorly ventilated cells. The government described the conditions as “intentionally austere” but consistent with the basic needs of inmates. Inmates could be subjected to solitary confinement up to 30 days and to canings for prison offenses.

Administration: Mechanisms existed for prisoners to file complaints alleging mistreatment or misconduct with judicial authorities. A board of justices of the peace appointed by the minister of home affairs monitored prisons and oversaw investigations.

Independent Monitoring: Authorities allowed members of the press to visit prisons with prior approval. The Prisons Service permitted visits by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Prison Fellowship International and volunteer welfare organizations during the year. The Ministry of Home Affairs also appointed a nongovernmental body composed of citizens to conduct regular prison inspections.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention. The law permitted arrest without warrant and detention without trial in defined circumstances. Persons detained under these circumstances had a right to judicial review of their case, but the scope was limited in certain instances by the law. The government generally observed the laws.

The constitution provided for the right of habeas corpus in regular criminal

law, although not in Internal Security Act (ISA) or Criminal Law (temporary provisions) Act (CLTPA) cases.

Under the CLTPA, the minister of home affairs' decision regarding a suspect's engagement in criminal activities was final and not subject to appeal, as was the minister's decision whether detention was necessary for reasons of public safety, peace, and good order, once concurrence by the public prosecutor was secured. The courts could review the decision but only based on the tests of illegality, irrationality, and procedural impropriety.

Persons detained without trial under the CLTPA could challenge the substantive basis for their detention only to the CLTPA advisory committee, chaired by a Supreme Court judge, and only within 28 days of the detention order. The president considered the advisory committee's report in determining whether to cancel or confirm the detention order.

Under the ISA, detainees could challenge their detention only by seeking judicial review of whether their detention complied with the procedural requirements of the ISA; they had no right to challenge the substantive basis for their detention through the courts. Detainees under the ISA had a right to legal counsel and to make representations to an advisory board chaired by a past or sitting Supreme Court judge. The ISA specifically excluded recourse to the normal judicial system for review of a detention order made under its authority.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

In most instances the law required issuance of an authorized warrant for arrests, but some laws such as the ISA provided for arrest without a warrant if the government determined the suspect acted in a manner threatening the security of the country. The law specified some offenses, such as robbery or rape, did not require an arrest warrant.

Those arrested according to regular criminal procedure had to appear before a magistrate within 48 hours or be released. Authorities expeditiously charged and brought to trial the majority of those arrested. A functioning bail system existed.

Persons who faced criminal charges were allowed access to counsel within a “reasonable” but undefined period. Any person accused of a capital crime was entitled to free counsel assigned by the state. The government also funded a Criminal Legal Aid Scheme run by the registered charity Pro Bono SG that covered additional, but not all, noncapital criminal offenses. The Public Defender’s Office, established in December 2022, provided representation to citizens and permanent residents charged with noncapital criminal offenses but unable to afford legal representation.

Arbitrary Arrest: Some laws, such as the ISA and the CLTPA, contained provisions for arrest and detention without a warrant, trial, or full judicial due process in defined circumstances when there was evidence a person

was associated with any of the criminal activities listed in the law that posed a threat to public safety, peace, and good order. ISA cases were subject to review by the courts to provide for compliance with its procedural requirements. Authorities invoked the ISA primarily against persons suspected of posing a security threat and employed the CLTPA mostly against persons suspected of organized crime activity or drug trafficking.

Pretrial Detention: Pretrial detention was not excessively long. Some individuals, however, were held in prolonged detention without trial and with minimal judicial due process under laws that allowed for such detention.

The ISA and the CLTPA permitted preventive detention without trial for the protection of public security, safety, or the maintenance of public order.

The government used the CLTPA against serious criminal activities involving narcotics, loan sharks, or criminal organizations. The law specified the criminal activities for which individuals could be detained without trial or placed under police supervision. Before issuing a CLTPA detention order for an initial period of one year, the minister of home affairs was required to obtain the consent of the public prosecutor. A Supreme Court judge chaired a committee that reviewed all cases and conducted hearings in which detainees, or their lawyers, were present. The country's president considered the committee's recommendations when deciding whether to cancel, confirm, or amend the detention. The president could extend

detention for unlimited additional periods of up to one year at a time. Each detention, however, was reviewed by a separate advisory committee on an annual basis.

The CLTPA allowed for supervision within the community through means such as curfews, residence limitations, requirements to report regularly to authorities, and limitations on travel.

The ISA authorized authorities to order detention without filing charges if they determined a person posed a threat to national security. The initial detention could be for a maximum of two years, after which the minister of home affairs could renew the detention indefinitely. ISA detainees were permitted legal counsel. An independent advisory board consisting of a Supreme Court judge and two other presidential appointees reviewed each detainee's case within three months of initial detention and at intervals of no longer than 12 months thereafter. If the minister disagreed with an advisory board recommendation to release a detainee, the president would have discretion whether to continue detention.

In January authorities disclosed the arrest and detention in October 2022 of a teacher who allegedly was preparing to take up armed combat with Hamas against Israel.

In February authorities disclosed the December 2022 detention of a student, age 18, who had allegedly planned armed violence in the country and

overseas in support of ISIS, as well as of a boy, age 15, who had allegedly considered attacking with knives non-Muslims in popular tourist areas in the country, under the belief that “disbelievers” should be killed.

In addition to detention, the ISA allowed for issuance of restriction orders that required an individual to seek official approval for a change of address or occupation, overseas travel, or participation in any public organization or activity. Individuals subject to restriction orders could be required to report regularly to authorities.

In May the Ministry of Home Affairs announced that a youth detained in 2020 for alleged threats against Israel and Jews was released on a restriction order, stating the youth had made good progress in rehabilitation.

There was also a category of restriction called “suspension direction” that replaced a suspended order of detention and could prohibit association with specified groups or individuals and overseas travel without prior written government approval. Suspension directions also included reporting conditions.

The country’s drug laws permitted the involuntary admission of drug abusers to an approved institution for treatment and rehabilitation without judicial approval. If a suspected drug abuser tested positive for an illegal drug or displayed signs of drug withdrawal, the director of the Central Narcotics Bureau could commit the person to a drug rehabilitation center

for a six-month period, which a review committee of the institution could extend for a maximum of three years. By law the bureau director could order treatment for up to six months of a person after first sending the suspected drug abuser for medical examination or observation to determine the person to be an abuser of intoxicating substances. The director's decision could be challenged in court and the detained individual had the right to file a complaint to a magistrate who could issue an order to release the individual from the institution.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provided for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence. Some civil society activists and government critics in the past expressed concern regarding undue government influence in the judicial system. Laws limiting judicial review, moreover, permitted restrictions on individuals' constitutional rights.

The ISA and CLTPA explicitly precluded normal judicial due process and empowered the government to limit, on broadly defined national security grounds, other fundamental liberties provided for in the constitution.

Trial Procedures

The law provided for a fair and public trial, except for persons detained under the ISA, CLTPA, and similar legislation. The judiciary generally

enforced this right when applicable. Some commentators observed a small number of exceptions in cases involving direct challenges to the government or the ruling party. The judicial system generally provided an efficient judicial process.

Criminal defendants enjoyed a presumption of innocence, although in some cases, the law employed a mechanism whereby once the prosecution had proven certain facts, the burden shifted to the defendant to disprove certain elements of the offense. For example, in a drug possession case, the defendant was presumed aware of the substance and was required to prove otherwise. Similarly, if the amount of the narcotic was above set limits, the defendant had to prove he or she did not have the drug for trafficking purposes.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

f. Transnational Repression

Not applicable.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

Not applicable.

h. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family,

Home, or Correspondence

The constitution did not address privacy rights; statutory or common law provided remedies for infringement of some aspects of privacy rights. Several laws provided for privacy, regulated access to and processing of personal data, and criminalized unauthorized access to data. Public agencies, however, were exempt from these data-protection requirements; subject to public sector-specific laws, they could intercept communications and surveil individuals if it was determined to be in the national interest or necessary for investigations or proceedings.

The government generally respected the physical privacy of homes and families. Normally, police were required to have a warrant issued by a court to conduct a physical search but could search a person, home, or property without a warrant if they decided such a search was necessary to preserve evidence or was permissible according to discretionary powers of the ISA, CLTPA, and other laws.

Law enforcement authorities had broad powers to search electronic devices without judicial authorization, including while individuals were in custody. In 2020 Privacy International stated, “Singapore has a well-established, centrally controlled technological surveillance system.” Law enforcement agencies, including the Internal Security Department and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, had extensive networks for gathering

information and conducting surveillance, and highly sophisticated capabilities to monitor telephone, email, text messaging, or other digital communications intended to remain private. No court warrants were required for such operations and the law gave police access to computers and decryption information under defined circumstances.

Crimes for which police could collect DNA from persons under arrest included murder, rape, robbery, theft, molestation, voluntarily causing harm, drunk driving, mischief, obstructing public servants from fulfilling their duties, and obscene acts. Collected DNA could be used for criminal investigations, forensic comparisons, criminal proceedings, and identifying dead individuals and living persons unable to identify themselves. There was no requirement for police to immediately delete DNA data if the suspect was acquitted or discharged, or if the case was settled out of court. Eligible individuals had to apply to have their data deleted, and police could reject the application on grounds of national security or relevance to other cases. Members of parliament expressed concerns regarding citizens' privacy rights and data protection.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the

Press and Other Media

The constitution provided for freedom of expression but allowed parliament to impose such restrictions on freedom of speech as it “considers necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the country or any part thereof, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality and restrictions designed to protect the privileges of parliament or to provide against contempt of court, defamation or incitement to any offense.”

Freedom of Expression: The government significantly restricted public statements it contended would undermine social or religious harmony or the legal system, interfered in domestic affairs, or did not safeguard national or public interest.

In September the Ministry of Communications and Information warned *The Economist* magazine’s Singapore bureau chief Dominic Ziegler for allegedly endorsing the Singaporean online publication *Jom* by allegedly comparing the country to an “illiberal state” and “encouraging Singaporeans to embrace an alternative vision, instead of what was being offered by the state and an allegedly captive media.”

In March the professional-conduct body of the Supreme Court suspended capital defense lawyer Ravi Madasamy for five years, the maximum sanction for attorney misconduct, for statements made in a 2020 interview to alternative news website *The Online Citizen*. Ravi had stated the

prosecutor's "overzealous[ness]" in prosecuting his client led to the accused's death sentence and the prosecution's fairness was "called into question by the court itself." In a judgment delivered by the chief justice, the court stated these were "grave and baseless accusations" and undermined the integrity of the country's key legal institutions.

In March a court extended an arrest warrant for former chairman of the opposition Reform Party Charles Yeo, who had earlier fled to the United Kingdom after being charged with "wounding the religious feelings of the Christian community" with remarks on his Instagram and Facebook pages and for making a threatening communication to a police officer. The warrant was for breach of bail conditions by failing to return to Singapore.

The law gave the home affairs minister discretion to authorize special police powers if a "serious incident," such as a terrorist attack, occurred or was threatened. These powers allowed the commissioner of police to prohibit anyone from taking or transmitting photographs or videos in a defined area, or from making text or audio messages concerning police operations if these actions could compromise the effectiveness and safety of the law enforcement operations. A breach of the order could lead to up to two years' imprisonment, a substantial fine, or both.

The law prohibited the public display of any foreign national emblems, including flags or symbols of political organizations or leaders. A 2022 law relaxed restrictions on the use of the country's flag outside of the July to

September national-day period, if permitted by the minister of culture, community, and youth. That law, however, added the national pledge, flower, lion head emblem, and public seal as recognized symbols and increased penalties for misuse of these national symbols to a substantial fine, a jail term of up to six months, or both. Barring limited exceptions, the national coat of arms could not be used without prior written permission. The national anthem could be performed or sung on any appropriate occasion but use for commercial purposes required permission from the minister of culture, community, and youth.

The government-approved Speakers' Corner remained the only outdoor venue where citizens or Singapore-registered entity members could give public speeches without a police permit, provided certain criteria were met. The Speakers' Corner could be used for exhibitions, performances, assemblies, and processions. Event organizers were required, however, to preregister online with the National Parks Board and had to provide the topic of their event. Regulations stated the event should not be religious in nature or cause feelings of enmity, ill will, or hostility among different racial or religious groups. The commissioner of parks and recreation had the right to cancel or disallow any event or activity determined to endanger, cause discomfort to, or inconvenience other park users or the general public. Only citizens or permanent residents of the country were allowed to attend events at Speakers' Corner. If the event required a police permit and the permit was obtained, nonresident foreigners could also attend.

Citizens needed a permit to speak at indoor public gatherings if the topic referred to race or religion. Indoor private events were not subject to the same restrictions. Organizers of private events, however, had to prevent inadvertent access by uninvited guests or they could be cited for noncompliance with the rules regarding public gatherings.

Although faculty members at public universities were not government employees, they were potentially subject to government influence.

Academics spoke, published widely, and engaged in debate on social and political problems, but Freedom House noted self-censorship on topics related to the country occurred among academics, who could face legal and career consequences for critical speech. Publications by local academics and members of research institutions rarely deviated substantially from government views.

According to a 2021 survey of 198 academics, 77 percent reported at least “moderate” interference by nonacademic actors in their decisionmaking and more than a quarter in some disciplines reported consistent censorship or self-censorship.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: According to the ISA and other legislation, the government could restrict or place conditions on publications that incited violence, counseled disobedience to the law, had the potential to arouse tensions in the country’s diverse population, or threatened national

interests, national security, or public order.

Government leaders urged news media to support the government's goals and help maintain social and religious harmony, and authorities enforced strict defamation and press laws. Freedom House in 2022 reported "self-censorship is common, though newspapers occasionally publish critical content." The government also strictly enforced laws protecting racial and religious harmony, which also applied to members of media.

Although there were no legal bans on owning or operating private press outlets, government managerial and financial control strongly influenced all print and some electronic media. Two companies, SPH Media Trust and Mediacorp, owned all general circulation newspapers in the four official languages of English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. Following the restructuring of SPH Media Trust in 2021, the government announced in 2022 it would provide the new not-for-profit company up to 180 million Singapore dollars (\$135 million) annually during the subsequent five years, which raised further questions concerning the company's editorial independence. The government approved (and could remove) the holders of SPH Media Trust management shares, who appointed or dismissed the firm's management. The country's other major newspaper owner, Mediacorp, was wholly owned by Temasek Holdings, the government investment company. The two companies' coverage of domestic events and reporting of sensitive foreign relations topics usually closely reflected official policies and views.

Government-linked companies and organizations operated all domestic broadcast television channels and almost all radio stations. The government did not censor international news channels, but entertainment programs were required to meet the content codes of the state's Infocomm (information and communication) Media Development Authority (IMDA), which operated under the Ministry of Communications and Information and regulated broadcast, print, and other media. The IMDA had the power to sanction broadcasters for transmitting what it deemed inappropriate content. All content broadcast between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. had to be suitable for viewers of all ages. Broadcasters often censored or edited content they anticipated would breach the IMDA code, such as content that normalized or positively portrayed lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) relationships, or offended any religion.

The government could limit broadcasts or the circulation of publications by “gazetting” (listing) them under the Broadcasting Act and could ban the circulation of domestic and foreign publications. The law empowered the minister of communications and information to gazette or place formal restrictions on any foreign broadcaster it assessed was reporting on domestic politics in a one-sided or inaccurate manner.

The government could require a gazetted broadcaster to obtain express permission from the minister to continue broadcasting. The government could impose restrictions on the number of households receiving a

broadcaster's programming and could impose a substantial fine on a broadcaster for failing to comply.

In previous years international and regional human rights organizations criticized the government's use of the law to file contempt of court charges against government critics. In April the high court fined Terry Xu, editor of *The Online Citizen*, 18,000 Singapore dollars (\$13,500) for contempt of court for a 2021 Facebook post reposting an Australian citizen's article allegedly impugning the integrity of the Singaporean judiciary. The high court stated Xu "failed to practice responsible journalism and instead proceeded to publish scurrilous allegations against the courts." In 2022, following the suspension of its class license, *The Online Citizen* reactivated its website and social media accounts after Xu relocated to Taiwan. In response the IMDA highlighted that the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) and the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act (FICA) would continue to apply to the outlet independent of where its company was located.

In May a court rejected journalist and antideath penalty activist Kirsten Han's application to quash a conditional warning received in 2022 for contempt of court for comments made on Facebook, in which she criticized cost orders imposed on capital defense lawyers as "acts of intimidation." The court held the conditional warning lacked legal effect and was thus unreviewable.

In September the Ministry of Communications and Information suspended the press accreditation for local media website *Mothership* for six months after the website broke an embargo on the announcement of water price increases.

The law allowed the banning, seizure, censorship, or restriction of written, visual, or musical materials if authorities determined such materials threatened the stability of the state, contravened moral norms, were pornographic, showed excessive or gratuitous sex and violence, glamorized or promoted drug use, or incited racial, religious, or linguistic animosities. The banned publications comprised sex-related and religious material.

The IMDA regulated movies, video materials, computer games, and music. The law gave IMDA officers power to enter and search premises and seize evidence without a warrant for “serious offenses,” such as those involving films prohibited on public interest grounds or the unlicensed public exhibition of a film.

Libel/Slander Laws: Defamation was a criminal offense and could result in a maximum prison sentence of two years, a fine, or both. Critics alleged government leaders used defamation lawsuits or threats of such actions to discourage public criticism, coerce the press, and intimidate opposition politicians.

In September Minister of Home Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam and Minister

of Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan sued Lee Hsien Yang, estranged brother of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, for defamation regarding Lee Hsien Yang's earlier accusations the two acted improperly in arranging renovations at their government-owned rental properties.

In May an appellate court upheld criminal defamation convictions of *The Online Citizen* editor Terry Xu and site contributor Daniel De Costa but reduced the three-week jail sentences to a fine. The convictions were originally for publishing that there had been "corruption at the highest echelons," the meaning of which was disputed at trial. The prosecution had argued it referred to cabinet ministers, while the defendants had argued it referred to elite members of society. The appellate court held the meaning was that the cabinet members had allowed corruption to infect the elite, and thus while harming the cabinet ministers' reputation, did not attack their integrity and merited a lower sentence. Xu had already served three weeks while his appeal was pending, and in August a court rejected the prosecution's argument that Xu should serve an additional two-week default term.

Internet Freedom

The law permitted government monitoring of internet use, and the government closely monitored internet activities, such as social media posts, blogs, and podcasts. The IMDA could direct service providers to block access to websites that, in the government's view, undermined public security,

national defense, racial and religious harmony, or public morals. Political and religious websites were required to register with the IMDA.

The government subjected internet content to similar rules and standards as traditional media, as defined by the IMDA's Internet Code of Practice.

Internet service providers were required to provide content that complied with the code. The IMDA licensed the internet service providers through which local users were required to route their internet connections. The IMDA investigated content potentially in breach of the code when it received complaints from members of the public.

The Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) was used to curb what the government viewed as online falsehoods through various directives requiring addressees to carry correction notices or internet intermediaries to restrict access in cases of noncompliance. Under POFMA any government minister had broad authority to identify "falsehoods" and issue correction or takedown notices with immediate effect. Some aspects of a minister's decision could be challenged in court.

In March the POFMA Office added TikTok to a list of platforms the government stated were responsible for combating fake news, including preventing abuse by bots and ensuring online transparency for political advertising under POFMA.

The law required individuals or online platforms, on a case-by-case basis, to

publish corrections or remove online information where a government minister deemed a statement factually false or misleading and deemed it was in the public interest to do so. The law was not supposed to apply to opinions, criticisms, satire, or parody. Individuals in breach of the law could face a substantial fine and imprisonment for up to five years, with penalties doubled if the individual used bots. A platform that failed to remove false content could receive a substantial fine and, in the case of a continuing offense, a fine for each additional day the offense continued after conviction.

In December the Ministry of Communications and Information designated opposition politician Kenneth Jeyaretnam's website "The Ricebowl Singapore" and his Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn social media accounts Declared Online Locations under POFMA. The designation meant Jeyaretnam's site and accounts were required to warn users for the following two years of Jeyaretnam's alleged history of communicating falsehoods. Designated platforms could remain active, but their owners could not accrue financial benefit from the sites. The ministry and others issued Jeyaretnam five POFMA correction orders between July and December for various articles and posts.

In May the Ministry of Home Affairs rejected Terry Xu's application to cancel a correction direction under POFMA related to Xu's online article and social media posts alleging police had taunted an elderly woman for not wearing a

mask.

The Online News Licensing Scheme required heavily visited internet sites focused on news regarding the country to obtain a license, submit a bond, and remove prohibited content within 24 hours of notification from the IMDA. Many viewed this regulation as a way to censor online critics of the government. The IMDA cited the need to regulate commercial news sites and promote conformity with other forms of media such as print and television.

Smaller news sites that covered political topics were required to register under the Broadcasting Act for a Class License, which required registrants to report their income sources and not receive foreign funding.

The government's stated goal of FICA was to help "prevent, detect, and disrupt foreign interference" in domestic politics conducted through hostile information campaigns and the use of local proxies. Under FICA's hostile information campaign provisions, the minister of home affairs could compel internet and social media service providers to disclose information, remove online content, and block user accounts. Under the provisions regarding local proxies in effect as of December, the minister of home affairs could take "countermeasures" against "politically significant persons" who were suspected of working on behalf of or receiving funding from "foreign political organizations" and "foreign principals."

In February the Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act came into effect. Passed in November 2022, the law empowered the IMDA to direct specified “online communication services” such as social media services to disable in-country users’ access to “egregious content” (including sexual harm, child sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, terrorism, self-harm, public health and security, racial or religious intolerance) or block specified sources from communicating the content to in-country users. The law also allowed the government to designate platforms “with significant reach or impact” as “regulated online communication services,” which would be required to proactively detect and remove such content under a code of practice. In July IMDA’s code of practice for online safety came into effect. Social media services that failed to comply with the law could be fined or blocked. Also in July, the parliament passed the Online Criminal Harms Act, which empowered the government to order the disabling, blocking, or removal of online content or restriction of accounts it suspected were being used to commit crimes. The law also required designated online services to put systems in place to counter scams and malicious cyber activities.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution provided for the rights of peaceful assembly and association, but the government restricted those rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Although the constitution provided citizens the right to peaceful assembly, the law imposed restrictions in the interest of security, public order, or morality. Public assemblies, including political meetings and rallies, required police permission. It was a criminal offense to organize or participate in a public assembly without a police permit, and those convicted could be assessed a substantial fine; repeat offenders faced a steeper fine.

By law a public assembly could include events staged by a single person. Citizens did not need permits for indoor speaking events unless they touched on “sensitive topics,” such as race or religion, or for qualifying events held at the Speakers’ Corner. The commissioner of police could decline to authorize any public assembly or procession that could be directed toward a political end and be organized by, or involve the participation of, a foreign entity or citizen. Police could also order a person to “move on” from a certain area and not return to the designated spot for 24 hours.

International human rights organizations criticized authorities’ use of the law and their concerns regarding public order to prevent peaceful protest, especially by human rights defenders. Human Rights Watch lamented the government’s use of “laws that violate international standards ... against the country’s few remaining dissenting voices.” Amnesty International called on the government to stop “its penalization, intimidation and harassment of

human rights defenders and activists.”

The government closely monitored political gatherings regardless of the number of persons present. Spontaneous public gatherings or demonstrations were virtually unknown.

In October the National Parks Board denied a permit for a rally to show support for Palestine; the board and police stated they would deny all permits related to the Israel-Hamas conflict, citing the sensitivity of the topic and the country’s need to preserve “peace and harmony between different races and religions.” They stated police “will not grant any permit for assemblies that advocate political causes of other countries or foreign entities, or may have the potential to stir emotions and lead to public order incidents.” Police initiated investigations in October and December, respectively, against activist Gilbert Goh for standing in front of the Speakers’ Corner with a placard on the Israel-Hamas conflict and against a woman for allegedly placing placards at the entrance to the Israeli embassy.

As of year’s end, investigations continued against human rights activists Kirsten Han and Rocky Howe for holding two public assemblies outside Changi Prison Complex in 2022 without a permit. In January the UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders posted a communication with the government regarding the investigations, to which the government responded the investigations were being carried out under the Public Order Act in accordance with the law and were “in no way an attempt to

intimidate any individual.”

Freedom of Association

Most associations, societies, clubs, religious groups, and other organizations with more than 10 members were required to register with the government. The government could deny registration to or dissolve groups it believed were formed for unlawful purposes or for purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare, or public order, although it approved the majority of applications in prior years. The government had absolute discretion in applying criteria to register or dissolve societies, although an organization could appeal to the minister of home affairs if the registration was unsuccessful and challenge a dissolution in court.

In October parliament passed a bill expanding the government’s powers to restrict the registration of societies, allowing the registrar to scrutinize all applications.

The government prohibited organized political activities except by groups registered as political parties or political associations. These could not receive foreign donations but could receive funds from citizens and locally controlled entities. The ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) was able to use nonpolitical organizations, such as residential committees and neighborhood groups, for political purposes far more extensively than opposition parties.

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 constitution and the law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, although it limited them in certain circumstances.

In-country Movement: The ISA permitted authorities to restrict a person's movement, and they did so in the case of some former ISA detainees.

Foreign Travel: The government could refuse to issue a passport; this was done primarily on security grounds.

Persons with national service reserve obligations (male citizens and permanent residents between ages 18 and 40 for enlisted men, or between 18 and 50 for officers) were required to advise the Ministry of Defense of plans to travel abroad. Men and boys ages 13 and older who had not completed national service obligations were required to obtain exit permits for international travel if they intended to be away for three months or more.

Citizenship: The law allowed the government to deprive naturalized citizens of citizenship if they engaged in activities deemed harmful to public safety and order or resided outside of the country for more than five consecutive years and either did not register annually at a consulate or were believed by the government to have no intention of retaining citizenship.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government occasionally cooperated with organizations such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to repatriate or send refugees to a third country.

Access to Asylum: The law did not provide for granting asylum or refugee status. The government had no system for providing protection to refugees.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

g. Stateless Persons

As of December, there were 853 stateless persons in the country. Many were reportedly born in the country before independence but did not or could not meet requirements for citizenship then in force. Others were permanent residents who lost their foreign citizenship, or were children born to foreign nationals who were not recognized as citizens in their home

countries. Stateless persons could apply for citizenship. The government provided a mechanism to facilitate stateless individuals' travel abroad, called a certificate of identity.

Approximately 76 percent of stateless persons had obtained permanent residency, but those without permanent residency could not buy or rent real estate, were not entitled to government health or education subsidies, and could have difficulty securing employment.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provided citizens the ability to choose their government in open and free periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. In more than five decades of continuous rule, however, the PAP employed a variety of measures that effectively limited the ability of the opposition to mount a serious challenge to its hold on power. In recent years opposition parties won additional seats that amounted to only a small fraction of seats in parliament.

Elections and Political Participation

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: The September presidential election and the 2020 parliamentary general election were reported to be free of abuses and irregularities. Although 10 opposition parties

participated in the 2020 election, the PAP won 83 of 93 seats in parliament.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The opposition criticized the PAP for abusing its incumbency. For example, government-appointed and predominantly publicly funded community development councils, which provided welfare and other services, strengthened the PAP's position.

The PAP controlled key positions in and out of government, influenced the press, and benefited from structural advantages such as the group constituency system and short campaign period that disadvantaged opposition parties, according to some human rights groups. While the PAP's methods were consistent with the law and the prerogatives of parliamentary government in the country, the overall effect was to perpetuate PAP power.

The PAP maintained its political dominance in part by circumscribing political discourse and action. There were 34 registered political parties, which were legally free to organize. Authorities, however, imposed strict regulations on their constitutions, fundraising, and accountability, including a ban on receiving foreign donations and a requirement to report donations.

Changes to the law during the year expanded the ability of overseas citizens and nursing home residents to vote.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable

Groups: No law limited the participation of women and members of

historically marginalized or minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Of the 19 members of the cabinet, three were women and six were members of a minority group. In September Tharman Shanmugaratnam became the first nonethnic Chinese candidate to win the presidency in a contested election.

There were no restrictions against voting or political participation by members of minority groups; they were well represented throughout the government and civil service, except in some sensitive national security positions in the armed forces and intelligence community. As part of the country's group representation constituency system – in which some constituencies were represented by groups of candidates who ran for election together – each group constituency had to include at least one candidate from a racial minority group.

Section 4. Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government implemented these laws effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption.

Corruption: On July 11, the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau arrested Minister of Transport S Iswaran as part of a corruption investigation, the first time in more than 30 years a minister was included in such an investigation. Prime Minister Lee stated he concurred with the bureau's

request to open a formal investigation and that Iswaran would be on leave of absence until the investigation was completed.

In August Immigration and Checkpoints Authority officer Teo Hwee Peng was convicted of corruption and sentenced to 33 months' imprisonment and fined 2,634 Singapore dollars (\$1,940). In 2018 Teo accepted sex and cash from an overseas national who overstayed her visa in exchange for a special pass that allowed her to remain in the country while assisting with an investigation.

For additional information about 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 human rights groups generally operated without government interference, but subject to close monitoring and legal restraints, and these organizations investigated and published their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views. NGOs were subject to registration according

to the Societies Act or the Companies Act.

Some international human rights NGOs criticized the government's policies in areas such as capital punishment, migrant workers' rights, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and protection of the rights of LGBTQI+ persons. They alleged the government generally ignored such criticisms or published rebuttals.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Under the law, rape was a crime, with maximum penalties of 20 years' imprisonment and possible caning. There was no marital immunity for rape and the definition of rape was gender neutral. The law imposed up to twice the maximum penalty for offenses affecting the human body – “rape, hurt, or wrongful confinement” – committed by partners in a close or intimate relationship (even if unmarried) than it imposed for these offenses committed outside such relationships. Acts of domestic violence were crimes, and penalties ranged from fines to sentences of up to 24 years' imprisonment. Survivors could also obtain court orders restraining the respondent and barring a spouse or former spouse from the survivor's home until the court was satisfied the spouse had ceased aggressive behavior. The government effectively enforced the laws on rape and domestic violence. In May a man was

sentenced to 29 years' imprisonment and 24 strokes of the cane for drugging his wife and having her raped by five men during a period of eight years. The man himself raped the wives of two of the other men.

Identity protection orders were mandatory for sexual crimes or child abuse even before a police report was filed. Survivors of sexual crimes could video-record their testimony instead of having to recount it in person. Survivors could testify in closed-door hearings, with physical screens to shield them from the accused person. Lawyers could not ask questions concerning a survivor's sexual history unless the court granted them permission to do so.

In July parliament amended the Women's Charter to strengthen protections for survivors of domestic violence. The bill updated the definition of domestic violence to include emotional and psychological abuse, such as coercive control, besides physical and sexual abuse. It introduced two new types of protection orders which prohibited a perpetrator from being in the vicinity of or communicating with the survivor. It also lowered the eligible age to apply for a protection order from 21 to 18. The law further strengthened the government's ability to intervene and protect survivors through so called "protectors." Protectors were allowed to enter homes to assess and obtain information, issue emergency orders to protect survivors in high-risk settings, apply for protection orders on behalf of the survivors, and apply to the court to remove survivors from their home for their safety

if they did not take steps to protect themselves, or to initiate electronic monitoring of high-risk perpetrators. The law increased fines for family violence-related offenses and increased the maximum prison term to 12 months from six months.

In April police launched a new Sexual Crime and Family Violence Command after a five-year high of 2,549 sexual assault cases were reported in 2022.

During the year, the government deployed specially trained forensic psychologists to protection specialist centers to provide consultation and assessments of survivors and offenders in sexual and family violence cases.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Types I (a) and IV (as classified by the World Health Organization) FGM/C were practiced among a portion of the Muslim population. There was no legislation banning FGM/C and no official data were available on how prevalent the practice was, but 75 percent of Muslim women indicated they had undergone FGM/C, according to an End FGC Singapore survey in 2020. Some medical clinics offered the procedure, requiring parents to consent and go through counseling, according to the Singapore Muslim Women's Association. This medicalization, however, contravened guidance by the World Health Organization and the UN Population Fund on this practice. End FGC Singapore, a community-based movement, criticized the practice as covert and stated girls often did not know they had undergone the procedure until later in life.

Discrimination: Women enjoyed the same legal rights as men in civil liberties, employment, commercial activity, and education. Women were well represented in many professions and the constitution provided for equality in employment, but women faced discrimination in the workplace. No specific antidiscrimination legislation existed, although statutes prohibited certain forms of discrimination and guidelines for employers prohibited asking about marital status or family responsibilities during job interviews. For example, employers could not dismiss women employees during pregnancy or maternity leave, and employers could not dismiss employees solely due to sex, marital status, or family responsibilities. The government effectively enforced these statutes and investigated complaints of workplace discrimination. Pregnancy, however, was deemed a breach of standard work permit conditions for foreign workers and, unless the worker was married to a Singapore citizen or a permanent resident, the government cancelled work permits and required repatriation of foreign domestic workers who became pregnant.

Polygyny was permitted for Muslim men but was extremely rare; it was limited and regulated by the Registry of Muslim Marriages, which oversaw Muslim marriages and other family law matters.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services,

including emergency contraception and postexposure prophylaxis, for survivors of sexual violence. Contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health services were widely available. The government provided subsidies for such services to couples as long as one partner was a citizen, but the amount depended on the citizenship and residence status of the other partner. As of July, women between ages 21 and 38 were permitted to freeze their eggs for nonmedical reasons; however, only married couples could use their frozen eggs for procreation.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law criminalized violence and incitement of violence against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities or groups. The government took a proactive stance in fighting racial and ethnic discrimination and enforced the law effectively.

Racially motivated violence was rare. Cases of racial discrimination were also rare, although they occurred in the workplace. Employers were required to provide explanations for putting requirements such as specific language skills in a job advertisement. Companies found to have engaged in discrimination based on race or ethnicity could not hire foreigners for at least 12 months and could not renew work passes of existing foreign workers. The government maintained a watchlist of companies engaging in discriminatory hiring practices.

Throughout the year individuals who committed racist or racially insensitive verbal offenses were prosecuted and sentenced under the law. In August a man was sentenced to three months' jail for racially insulting and assaulting a woman. The man attacked the woman in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic because she was not wearing a mask while exercising outdoors, as permitted by law.

The Presidential Council on Minority Rights examined pending bills to prevent any measure from disadvantaging a racial, ethnic, or religious minority or group. It also reported to the government on matters affecting any racial or religious community.

Government measures to mitigate racial and ethnic biases and promote ethnic and racial harmony included mandated representation of all major ethnic groups in elected and nonelected government positions; allocation of public holidays for each racial group; and the use of four official languages, with an emphasis in schools on teaching English as the common language.

Children

Child Abuse: The law criminalized mistreatment of children, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The government enforced the law and provided support services for child abuse victims.

The number of child abuse cases the Ministry of Social and Family Development investigated remained high at approximately the same level as

in 2022, after a 63 percent increase from 2020 to 2021.

In September a man was sentenced to 21.5 years' imprisonment and 18 strokes of the cane for physically abusing his daughter, age two, until she suffered a seizure and died. The parents burned her remains in a metal pot and stored them for five years before they were discovered.

The courts sentenced several men to long prison terms for sexually abusing their children. In September a perpetrator was sentenced to 18 years in jail and 16 strokes of the cane for sexually abusing and raping his sister-in-law when she was between ages nine and 15.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The law characterized unmarried persons younger than age 21 as minors and persons younger than 14 as children. Individuals younger than 21 who wished to marry were required to obtain parental consent, and the couple was required to attend a mandatory marriage-preparation program. Individuals younger than 18 also required a special license from the Ministry of Social and Family Development to wed or, if marrying under Muslim law, required permission from the *kadi* (a Muslim judge appointed by the president), who granted permission only under special conditions.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law criminalized human trafficking, including child sex trafficking, and authorities enforced the law.

The age of consent for noncommercial sex was 16. Sexual intercourse with a

person younger than 16 was punishable by a maximum of 10 years in prison, a fine, or both; if the survivor was younger than 14 it was punishable by up to 20 years in prison and a fine or caning.

The law prohibited commercial sex provided by anyone younger than age 18. Authorities prosecuted those who organized or profited from commercial sex, brought women or girls to the country for commercial sex, or coerced or deceived women or girls into commercial sex.

The law protected minors and children from sexual exploitation and distinguished between child pornography and other types of pornography. It was a separate offense to use or involve a child younger than age 16 in the production of child-abuse material and a crime to be involved in the supply and consumption of child-abuse material. The law criminalized offenses, such as sexual intercourse, pornography, or sexual grooming, committed in the context of exploitative relationships when the survivor was older than 16 but younger than 18, even if the survivor consented.

By law, those convicted of any offenses committed against vulnerable survivors – children younger than age 14, persons with disabilities, and domestic workers – were subject to up to twice the maximum penalty.

In March a man was sentenced to two years in jail for downloading more than 13,600 files depicting child pornography, some involving babies.

Antisemitism

According to the Jewish Welfare Board, there were approximately 2,500 members in the Jewish community. There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.

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 after the repeal of a previous law took effect in January. Before that, Section 377A of the Penal Code criminalized consensual sexual conduct between men, although it had not been enforced for years.

Violence and Harassment: There were no official reports of violence against persons based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics, although observers noted some instances could go unreported.

Discrimination: No laws explicitly protected members of the LGBTQI+ community from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics; nor did the law recognize LGBTQI+ couples or their families. No law prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Discrimination toward LGBTQI+ persons was reported across social domains, including the military, public accommodation, and educational settings.

Same-sex partners had the same access to legal protections as others, including expedited protection orders in cases of harassment or violence, including by close and intimate partners.

Since unmarried persons were prevented from purchasing government housing reserved for married couples until age 35, and same-sex marriage was not permitted, LGBTQI+ couples were unable to receive certain government services and benefits available to other citizens before age 35. Adoption was limited to couples married under laws recognized by the government and for single persons only if they met certain conditions, effectively preventing LGBTQI+ couples from adopting children.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Individuals were prohibited from updating their gender on official documents unless they underwent sex reassignment surgery.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: Practices of

“conversion therapy” to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression reportedly included talk therapy, encouragement of celibacy, and physical and psychological abuse. Perpetrators included families and religious groups. There was no law banning “conversion therapy” but acts of abuse were punishable by law. In 2021 the Singapore Psychological Society discouraged “conversion therapy” on LGBTQI+ individuals due to its harmful effects and encouraged therapy that affirmed a person’s orientation and identity.

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

The country’s overall legal restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly applied to those speaking on LGBTQI+ topics. Critics were concerned media censorship resulted in underrepresentation of the LGBTQI+ community. According to the IMDA website, authorities allowed the broadcast of LGBTQI+ themes on television “as long as the presentation does not justify, promote, or glamorize such a lifestyle.”

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities had access to education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. Government information and communication on disability concerns were provided in accessible formats such as screen readers, sign language interpretation,

captioning, and subtitling. Government websites also complied with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

The government maintained a comprehensive code on barrier-free accessibility mandating minimum accessibility requirements for new building developments undergoing additions or alterations.

The country provided a high level of educational support for children with disabilities from preschool to university, allowing them to choose between mainstream programs and special-education schools depending on their needs.

The Disabled People's Association, an advocacy group, stated discrimination against persons with disabilities was underreported and noted discrimination against persons with disabilities who were seeking private-sector employment continued.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Although no legislation barred employers from discriminating against job applicants based on their HIV status, government guidelines for employers stated employees dismissed based on their medical status, including HIV-positive status, had grounds for wrongful dismissal claims against their employers. Many persons living with HIV were, however, afraid to disclose their status during the job application process and, during employment, feared dismissal if discovered and determined to have made a false

declaration.

The government discouraged discrimination, supported initiatives that countered misperceptions regarding HIV and AIDS, and publicly praised employers who welcomed workers with HIV or AIDS. HIV-positive foreigners, however, were barred from obtaining work permits, student visas, or immigrant visas.

In May a man was convicted of perjury and sentenced to 3.5 months in jail after lying about his sexual activities and his HIV-positive status to authorities to donate blood.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of most workers to form and join trade unions, with limits on union independence. Workers had the legal right to strike and to bargain collectively. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination.

Parliament could impose restrictions on the right of association on security, public order, or morality grounds. The Ministry of Manpower also had broad powers to refuse to register a union or to cancel a union's

registration. Refusal could occur when a trade union already existed in an industry or occupation. Laws and regulations restricted freedom of association by requiring any group of 10 or more persons to register with the government. The law also restricted the right of uniformed personnel and government employees to organize, although the president, as head of state, could grant exemptions. Foreigners and those with criminal convictions generally could not hold union office or become employees of unions, but the ministry could grant exemptions.

The law provided for the right to strike with certain limits. A legal strike required the majority of affected unionized workers to vote in favor by secret ballot, as opposed to the majority of those participating in the vote. Workers in “essential services,” defined broadly, were required to give 14 days’ notice to an employer before striking, and there was a prohibition on strikes by workers in the water, gas, and electricity sectors.

The government effectively enforced applicable laws. Penalties were commensurate with those under other laws involving denial of civil rights, such as discrimination. Collective bargaining was common but strikes almost never occurred.

Unions were unable to carry out their work without interference from the government. The law limited how unions could spend their funds, prohibiting, for example, payments to political parties or the use of funds for political purposes. Legal strikes were limited to trade disputes within the

trade or industry in question.

Almost all unions were affiliated with the National Trade Union Congress, an umbrella organization with a close relationship with the government and the ruling PAP. The organization prohibited union members who supported opposition parties from holding office in its affiliated unions.

Collective bargaining was a routine part of labor-management relations in the private sector. Because nearly all unions were affiliates, the National Trade Union Congress had almost exclusive authority to exercise collective bargaining power on behalf of employees. A national tripartite Industrial Arbitration Court had to certify all collective bargaining agreements before they went into effect. Although transfers and layoffs were excluded from the scope of collective bargaining, employers consulted with unions on both matters.

Foreign workers constituted approximately 15 percent of union members. Labor NGOs also filled an important function by providing support for migrant workers, including legal aid and medical care.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for

Employment

The law prohibited all the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited employment of children younger than age 13. A child age 13 or older could engage in light, nonindustrial work, subject to medical clearance. Exceptions existed for family enterprises; children age 13 or older could work in an industrial undertaking if it employed members of their families. Ministry of Manpower regulations prohibited night employment of children and restricted industrial work for children ages 15 and 16. Children younger than age 15 could not work on commercial vessels, with moving machinery, on live electrical apparatus lacking effective insulation, or in any underground job, and normally they were prohibited from employment in the industrial sector.

The Ministry of Manpower effectively enforced these laws and regulations. Employers who violated laws related to child labor were subject to fines, imprisonment, or both. Penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping. Government officials asserted they had no information on any violations of the laws. The incidence of children in formal employment was low, although some children worked in family enterprises.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law did not specify a national minimum wage for all sectors. All firms hiring foreign workers were required to pay local employees a minimum salary. The government, in consultation with unions and employers, had a sectoral progressive wage model (PWM), which set wage floors and skills requirements for specific positions in employment with companies providing cleaning, landscaping, and elevator maintenance, and in security services and retail sectors. The government extended PWM coverage to the food sector and waste management sector. In March the government introduced an occupational PWM which covered administrators and drivers because these occupations existed across many sectors. Employers were required to follow these pay scales as a requirement to obtain a business license.

The law set the standard legal workweek at 44 hours and required employers to apply for an overtime exception from the Ministry of Manpower for employees to work more than 72 hours of overtime per month. Workplace protection, including paid sick leave, mandatory annual leave, overtime pay, and protection against wrongful dismissal, was available to all private-sector employees except domestic workers and seafarers, covered under separate laws. Foreign domestic workers were

required to receive one rest day per week or be compensated with at least one day's salary in addition to their basic salary or a replacement rest day. As of January, foreign domestic workers were required to receive at least one rest day per month. The law also mandated benefits for part-time employees, defined as those working 35 hours per week or less.

Wage and hour laws applied to migrant workers. Foreign workers were concentrated in low-wage, low-skill jobs in construction, shipbuilding, services, and domestic work and were often required to work long hours. Approximately 323,000 migrant workers lived in purpose-built dormitory housing which met clearly defined living standard conditions.

The majority of foreign domestic workers, mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia, worked under clearly outlined contracts. Certain offenses, such as causing harm or insulting modesty, had significantly higher penalties if the victim was a foreign domestic worker than if the victims were other foreign workers.

Throughout the year the government investigated and sentenced several employers for abuse of their foreign domestic workers. In June a woman was jailed for 20 months for abusing her domestic worker, including burning her with a hot iron. The mother of the convicted woman was sentenced to nine months in jail for injuring the worker with a knife, and the father to three weeks in jail for slapping the worker.

NGOs advocated for structural changes to the work permit employment system in order to reduce the financial vulnerability and the potential for exploitation of migrant workers.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, and OSH experts actively identified unsafe conditions, including lack of personal protective equipment against COVID-19 in addition to responding to workers' OSH complaints. The law established a framework for workplaces to comply with OSH standards, and regular inspections enforced the standards. Officials encouraged workers to report situations endangering health or safety to the Ministry of Manpower. The law incentivized companies to prevent workplace injuries by permitting employers with better safety records to pay lower insurance premiums, expedited the benefit claim process for workers, and increased the size of benefit payouts to injured workers. The law provided employees with the right to remove themselves without jeopardy to their employment if they were threatened by a danger not agreed to in the contract. The Ministry of Manpower continued to promote training to reduce the frequency of job-related accidents in high-risk sectors such as construction, and authorities provided tax incentives to firms that introduced hazard control measures.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The Ministry of Manpower was responsible for enforcing laws and regulations establishing working

conditions and comprehensive OSH regulations. Penalties for violating these regulations – fines and stop-work orders – were commensurate with those for similar crimes. The number of inspectors was sufficient to enforce compliance. While inspectors had authority to make unannounced inspections and the government stated such inspections were generally unannounced, some NGOs contended this was not always the case. Inspectors had broad powers to act against offenders, including to arrest without warrant, search arrested persons, and seize weapons. The government effectively enforced wage floor and overtime laws, although penalties were lower than those for similar crimes, such as fraud. Penalties were regularly applied against violators, including for nonpayment of salaries, serious safety violations, and abuse or mistreatment of foreign domestic workers.

The Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management, which included the Ministry of Manpower, unions, and the employers' federation, offered mediation services to help employees and employers settle employment disputes such as disagreements on salary. From January through June, the ministry conducted 3,500 worksite inspections, an increase of 35 percent compared with the first half of 2021. It took 9,000 enforcement actions in response to safety breaches and issued 50 stop-work orders, a twofold increase compared with the first half of 2021, with an average duration of 7.5 weeks. The government fined 550 companies a total of 1.8 million Singapore dollars (\$1.35 million). In 2021 the government issued 60 stop-work orders with an

average duration of six weeks and fined 590 companies a total of 1.97 million Singapore dollars (\$1.48 million). The Ministry of Manpower noted receiving between 2,400 and 3,800 reports of unsafe work activities each year during the prior five years and that 84 percent of its 2021 inspections resulted in enforcement actions. The government also enforced requirements for employers to provide one rest day per week or compensation for foreign domestic workers.

Amid a rise in workplace injuries and deaths, in 2022 the ministry put new policies and programs in place, doubling fines for offenses observed during safety inspections. The government required companies subject to stop-work orders and companies where major injuries occurred to engage external auditors to review their safety systems.

In May the government ended a heightened safety period which it previously extended by three months because the workplace fatality rate per 100,000 workers improved. The government retained several OSH measures from this period, including a multiagency workplace safety taskforce, and announced new ones to improve OSH at the sectoral, company, and worker level including mandatory safety training for directors and installation of cameras that were expected to take effect progressively.

Companies were required to set up internal reporting systems to assure workers of fair treatment, make workplace safety a regular item on the agenda of board meetings, and demand effective safety standards from

suppliers. In cases of offenses against the Workplace Safety and Health Act, courts could consider noncompliance with the new code in their judgment.

Under a demerit system, companies with poor safety performances could be placed on the ministry's business-under-surveillance program and be barred from hiring foreign workers for up to two years. The ministry had a multisectoral workplace safety task force to strengthen work safety practices.

The government charged numerous employers with OSH violations during the year. In June a manufacturing firm was fined 200,000 Singapore dollars (\$150,000) for failing to implement adequate safety measures, leading to the death of a worker in a workplace accident in 2021. The company's director of operations was fined an additional 125,000 Singapore dollars (\$93,800). In August several individuals responsible for fatal workplace accidents were sentenced to imprisonment for between two to seven months. Also in August, three companies of the MES Group were fined between 59,000 and 396,500 Singapore dollars (\$43,300 to \$297,000) for labor offenses including illegal employment of foreigners, excessive overtime hours, and making false salary declarations, in one of the largest and most extensive cases of false declaration contraventions to date, according to the Ministry of Manpower. Four of MES Group's former directors were sentenced to jail terms between four months and 42 weeks.

The World Bank estimated the informal economy in 2018 constituted

approximately 11 percent of GDP. The government set and enforced basic employment standards and protections, some of which also applied to workers in sectors that could be considered informal. The law covered all contracts of service and employment, regardless of whether the contract was oral or written, express or implied. The law tightly regulated and provided protections for migrant labor, which accounted for a large proportion of jobs that typically fall in the informal economy.