

# **Slovenia 2023 Human Rights Report**

## **Executive Summary**

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

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons.

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 that 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 constitution and law prohibited such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them. Impunity was not a significant problem in the security forces. The punishment for such treatment was from one to 12 years' imprisonment.

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

According to the human rights ombudsperson and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), physical conditions were generally acceptable, but some overcrowding existed. The ombudsperson also reported a shortage of prison staff.

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

**Independent Monitoring:** The government permitted local and international human rights groups, media, and other independent international bodies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture, to monitor prison conditions. The human rights ombudsperson, together with eight human rights groups, visited all prisons. The government allowed designated NGOs and the human rights ombudsperson to monitor the

treatment of prisoners.

#### **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 detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

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

Police generally made arrests with warrants issued by a prosecutor or judge based on evidence. Authorities could detain suspects for 48 hours before charging them. The law required authorities to inform suspects of their rights immediately after arrest and to advise detainees in writing within six hours (or within three hours for minor offenses) of the reasons for their arrest. Suspects were required to have prompt access to a judge to assess whether they qualified for release on bail or should remain incarcerated pending trial. Authorities generally released defendants on bail except in the most serious criminal cases. The law provided for prompt access to immediate family members and detention under house arrest.

Upon arrest, detainees had the right to contact legal counsel of their choice and the right to counsel during interrogations, and the government protected these rights. While indigent defendants had the right to an

attorney provided at public expense, there was no formal system for providing such legal counsel. The NGO Legal Information Center and the government's Free Legal Aid Office made free counsel available to indigents. There were no reported cases of arbitrary or unlawful detention.

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

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

### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution and law provided for the right to a fair public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

## **f. Transnational Repression**

Not Applicable.

## **g. Property Seizure and Restitution**

The government had laws or mechanisms in place, but NGOs and advocacy groups reported that the government did not make significant progress on resolution of Holocaust-era claims, including for foreign citizens.

The law permitted all persons who were citizens of the former Yugoslavia or Allied nations to recover property confiscated by fascist or Nazi occupying forces. Cases involving property confiscated after 1945-46 were subject to restitution procedures under the Criminal Procedure Act. Cases involving property that was nationalized were subject to restitution procedures under the Denationalization Act of 1991. The Denationalization Act required claimants to have had Yugoslavian citizenship at the time the property was confiscated, and excluded, with some exceptions, property confiscated before 1945. Some cases involving the restitution of property seized during the communist era (especially from 1946 to 1958) remained unresolved.

Although some heirs of Holocaust victims could seek restitution of confiscated property through these laws and mechanisms, NGOs and advocacy groups reported the government did not make significant progress on the resolution of Holocaust-era claims. This included both former citizens who were required to renounce Yugoslavian citizenship as a condition for emigrating and Holocaust survivors from Yugoslavia and their heirs who did not return and never had Yugoslav citizenship. The World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) engaged the government regarding Holocaust survivors and their heirs who were not eligible to file claims based on Slovenian law.

There was no provision in law for restitution or compensation of heirless property. In 2018, the WJRO and Ministry of Justice agreed to launch a joint

research project to compile as complete a historical record as possible of heirless, formerly Jewish-owned properties in the country. Ministry of Justice researchers concluded their research in 2019, but WJRO research remained under internal review at year's end. The ministry agreed to a one-year timeline after completion of the joint research project to perform an assessment of the value of the heirless properties.

Some remaining non-Jewish confiscated properties appeared to be unrecoverable because the parties occupying the sites were politically influential and thwarted attempts to reach a negotiated settlement. For example, since 1993 close ties between the Gornia Radgona Municipality and the company Radenska d.d., a major mineral water producer, stymied a foreign family's claims to the Radenci Spa property located on the family's ancestral lands. Although the Supreme Court rejected the family's claim to the trademark in 2015, the litigants appealed to the Constitutional Court, which returned the case multiple times to lower courts where it remained pending at year end. Multiple cases for different land claims by the family were still being reviewed by administrative courts.

The Department of State's *Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act Report* to Congress, released 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 and laws prohibited such actions, and there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

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

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

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.

**Freedom of Expression:** The law prohibited the incitement to hatred, violence, and intolerance based on nationality, race, religion, gender, skin color, social status, political or other beliefs, sexual orientation, and disability in a way that could threaten or disrupt public order, typically requiring violence to occur for the prosecution of such incitement. The penal code also prohibited the expression of ideas of racial superiority and denial of the Holocaust.

**Violence and Harassment:** RTV Slovenia journalists continued protests

against staffing and program decisions of the public broadcaster's leadership appointed under the previous government. They reported on cases of disciplinary action, threats of dismissal, and smearing of journalists, particularly against members of the striking committee.

The web platform for journalists to report physical and verbal attacks listed a total of 15 reports during the year of alleged attacks against journalists by individuals or institutions, a decrease compared to the previous year.

### **Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other**

**Media, Including Online Media:** Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction. Instances of overt political pressure on the press remained isolated. In its 2023 *Rule of Law Report*, the European Commission stated that the situation of media freedom and pluralism continued to face challenges, but it noted positive developments with respect to a more favorable climate for media and the generally improved attitude of the government towards media. The *Rule of Law Report* pointed to new safeguards to improve the independence of the public media and noted initial steps the government took regarding protection of journalists. The commission raised concerns, however, over a lack of safeguards for the independence of the media regulator, online harassment, intimidation and smear campaigns against journalists, an increasing trend of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) and the lack of an anti-SLAPP framework, and a regulatory gap for



addressing the high concentration of media ownership and lack of transparency. Media analysts noted online threats led some journalists to practice self-censorship. They also observed that a lack of job security contributed to self-censorship.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** The print and broadcast media, including online newspapers, journals, and book publishers, were subject to laws criminalizing hate speech, libel, and slander. The government did not use the law to retaliate against journalists or political opponents.

**Actions to Expand Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media:** On March 17, the government established an advisory and monitoring body, the Strategic Council for the Prevention of Hate Speech. On July 19, the council issued a set of 57 recommendations to combat intolerance and hate speech in the media, the internet, politics, education and youth, and criminal law. The council was scheduled to meet again in 2024 to review the implementation of its recommendations.

On May 26, amendments to the RTV Slovenia Act took effect following a Constitutional Court decision. In line with the changes aimed to depoliticize the public broadcaster, two previous governing bodies were replaced by a new RTV Slovenia Council, with its members being appointed by civil society groups and RTV Slovenia employees, and none by parliament.

## **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content.

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

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

## **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 law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

## **e. Protection of 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. According to the Asylum Information Database, beneficiaries of international protection and employed asylum seekers, like citizens, had difficulty obtaining a personal doctor due to a lack of such professionals in the country.

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

Due to an increase in numbers of asylum seekers and a backlog of cases, applicants were detained at asylum centers while waiting to file their applications for international protection. The lack of capacity to address large numbers of arrivals resulted in overcrowding, lower hygienic standards, and greater health risks. The government expanded capacity at existing facilities to address the increase in asylum seekers and refugees. By the end of October, police had processed more than 50,000 unauthorized entries into the country, with most individuals expressing an intention to apply for international protection. Due to the large number of applicants for international protection, accommodation facilities in the asylum center in Ljubljana were extremely overcrowded. According to the human rights ombudsperson, the conditions in the asylum center did not meet the minimum reception standards. The ombudsperson emphasized the rights of these individuals to dignity, privacy, and security. The director of the asylum center said that despite the overcrowding, it provided all individuals with

food, clothing, and emergency medical care.

The government did not have a systemic solution for the accommodation of children. Lack of access to information for asylum seekers staying in private housing was also a problem, according to NGOs.

Asylum seekers outside EU resettlement and relocation programs often waited six months or longer for their cases to be adjudicated. On April 18, parliament passed a law allowing asylum seekers to enter the labor market three months after arriving in the country, compared to the previous wait of nine months. Experts raised concerns regarding gaps in trafficking victim identification. NGOs reported double standards in the government's treatment of Ukrainians fleeing Russia's invasion and asylum seekers from other parts of the world. Ukrainians fleeing the war were granted temporary protection beginning in 2022.

On February 6, the Administrative Court ruled police deported two Pakistani citizens in January who were in the process of applying for refugee status. The court determined officials at the Center for Foreigners interviewed one of these individuals while he was detained and unable to consult with his representatives. NGOs accused the officials of tricking the individual into withdrawing his request for refugee status, by promising they would release him if he did so.

**Freedom of Movement:** Local NGOs reported unjustifiable limitations on

the movement of asylum seekers residing in government-operated reception facilities and asserted that the restrictions had no legal basis. Local NGOs reported that asylum seekers in reception facilities faced detention periods of up to two weeks while authorities processed their initial asylum requests.

**Durable Solutions:** At the end of 2022, the government announced it would accept 50 Syrian and Afghan citizens from Turkey who were registered as refugees with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and could be granted refugee status in Slovenia. Twenty-three Syrian citizens arrived in the country for resettlement in December. Twenty-seven Afghan citizens were expected to arrive in early 2024.

The law did not provide for children to gain citizenship if they were born in the country to persons with international protection. The Ministry of Interior, however, ordered the Administrative Unit to grant citizenship to such children, who otherwise were de facto stateless.

**Temporary Protection:** The government provided temporary protection (subsidiary protection) to individuals who might not qualify as refugees. In 2022, it launched a special temporary protection for persons displaced from Ukraine due to Russia's unprovoked invasion. As of September 19, the government had granted temporary protection to 8,936 Ukrainians. Persons who received temporary protection had the right to accommodation, meals, health care, work, education, financial assistance,

and legal assistance.

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

The constitution and 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:** Parliamentary, presidential, and local elections in 2022 were widely reported to be fair and free of abuses and irregularities.

## **Section 4. Corruption in Government**

The law provided criminal and civil penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were numerous reports of government corruption.

**Corruption:** Officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Despite the country's well-developed and comprehensive legal framework for identifying and combating corruption, critics asserted implementation and prosecution efforts remained inadequate. In January, parliament

adopted whistleblower legislation that provided for free legal aid, unemployment benefits, and psychological counseling to individuals subjected to retaliation. The law also called for the identity of whistleblowers to be protected, with punishments for companies or individuals who disclosed the identity of someone who reported wrongdoing. Companies that retaliated against whistleblowers could be fined up to €60,000 (\$64,860).

Local anti-corruption experts stated corruption in the country was systemic, although only isolated cases were investigated. Corruption manifested itself through politically motivated staffing in state-owned enterprises, conflicts of interest, failure to report outside activities, bribes, and lack of transparency throughout the country's political and economic spheres, particularly in public tenders and the fields of energy, construction, urban planning, and health care. Due to limited police capacity, only a small portion of alleged corrupt practices were investigated, and courts had a poor track record in trying corruption cases.

In October, media outlets reported on widespread corruption at the state-owned Motorway Company of the Republic of Slovenia (DARS), with one individual claiming to have paid €90,000 (\$97,290) in bribes to individuals linked with the previous government to secure contracts with DARS.

Another person claimed they were approached by an individual who offered a tailored contract with DARS if he would give one of the parties then in

government 5 percent of the contract. The head of DARS resigned in November but denied any wrongdoing.

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 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 often cooperative and responsive to the views of these groups.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The constitution provided for an independent human rights ombudsperson to monitor violations of human rights. Individuals could file complaints with the ombudsperson to seek administrative relief in the case of a human rights violation by the government. The ombudsperson was effective, adequately resourced, reported to parliament annually on the human rights situation, and provided recommendations to the government. The Office of the Advocate of the



Principle of Equality raised awareness of and helped prevent all types of discrimination but reported that a lack of resources and personnel limited its effectiveness.

## **Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses**

### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** Rape of a person, regardless of gender, including spousal rape, and domestic violence were illegal. Sexual violence was a criminal offense, and the penalty for conviction was six months to five years' imprisonment. The penalty for conviction of rape was one to 10 years' imprisonment. Police generally investigated accusations of rape, and courts generally tried accused offenders.

The law provided from three to 10 years' imprisonment for conviction of committing aggravated, grievous, or particularly humiliating bodily harm. Upon receiving reports of spousal abuse or violence, police generally intervened and prosecuted offenders.

Local NGOs reported police and courts did not effectively intervene in or prosecute cases of alleged domestic abuse. NGOs blamed the problem on deficient institutional cooperation; lengthy court proceedings; untrained investigators, prosecutors, and judges in matters of domestic violence; and poor information flow among authorities, institutions, and NGOs.

A network of maternity homes, safe houses, and shelters provided care to women and children who were survivors of violence. The police academy offered annual training on domestic violence. Local NGOs reported women lacked equal access to assistance and support services and that free psychosocial assistance from NGOs was unavailable in many parts of the country. NGOs also highlighted most efforts were project-based and subject to grant money, rather than part of sustained government programming.

**Discrimination:** The law provided the same legal status and rights for women as for men, and the government generally enforced those laws effectively.

The law prohibited women from performing underground work in mines, with limited exceptions. The law did not prohibit women from working in any other profession. According to Eurostat, women's earnings were approximately 97 percent of those of men. The government noted women were sometimes subjected to workplace prejudice and discriminatory treatment in technical professions. The government also noted that despite higher education levels, women were less likely to occupy leadership positions. Women were also more likely to be employed in temporary or part-time work.

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

By law, state-supported infertility treatment and biomedical fertilization procedures were available only for women and men living in a heterosexual marital or cohabiting relationship who were unable to become pregnant through sexual intercourse or by other treatments. Marital and cohabiting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) couples and single persons were not eligible for state-supported infertility treatment. The law did not restrict access to in vitro fertilization by a specific age but required that women be of an age suitable for childbirth. In vitro fertilization was not available or covered by health insurance for women aged 43 and older, forcing some women to have the procedure done in other countries.

The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence; emergency contraception and post-exposure prophylaxis were available as part of clinical management of rape.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The country's constitution recognized Hungarians (approximately 8,000 persons) and Italians (approximately 4,000 persons) as national minorities. The government also recognized Roma (approximately 10,000 to 12,000 persons) as an ethnic minority. Other minority populations were not officially recognized, including ethnic Germans, Albanians, Bosniaks, Croatians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Serbs. These communities

called for the constitution to be amended to recognize them as official minorities with the right to designated parliamentary seats. Despite these calls for recognition, the Council of Europe raised no objections to the existing legal framework for recognizing minorities in the country.

In January, the government passed hate crime legislation, mandating stricter punishments for crimes committed against a victim due to the victim's nationality, race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, political beliefs, social position, or other personal circumstances.

Discrimination against socially marginalized Roma persisted in some parts of the country. Organizations monitoring conditions in the Romani community noted that Roma faced difficulties securing adequate housing in traditional housing markets. The human rights ombudsperson reported elderly Roma were among the most vulnerable individuals and needed additional care and support services. Many Roma lived apart from other communities in illegal settlements lacking basic utilities and services, such as electricity, running water, sanitation, and access to transportation. Authorities stated the illegality of Romani settlements remained the largest obstacle to providing adequate public housing, water, and sanitation. By law only owners or persons with other legal claims to land, such as legal tenants, could obtain public services and utilities.

One NGO estimated that only 2 percent of Roma in the southeastern part of the country worked in the formal economy. Employment in informal sectors

made Roma vulnerable to labor law violations, particularly in terms of benefits and procedures for termination of employment. Employment discrimination against Roma was not limited to a specific sector.

NGOs called on the government to adopt measures to improve access to housing, education, and employment for Roma. A government-established commission composed of representatives from the Romani community, municipalities, and the government to safeguard the rights of Roma continued to function. Representatives of the Romani community participated in a program designed to improve communication between police and individual Roma through discrimination-prevention training. The government provided medical equipment to health-care facilities and supported programs, workshops, and educational initiatives to establish best practices for health-care professionals working in Romani communities.

The Ministry of Education encouraged the inclusion of Romani children in preschool education at least two years before the start of primary education by providing financial assistance to families that enrolled their children, including Romani assistants in kindergartens, and providing state subsidies to kindergarten departments with enrolled Romani children for additional staffing. The ministry cofinanced the salaries of Romani assistants in elementary schools. The ministry implemented five education and training programs for professionals, which included content aimed at the upbringing and education of Romani children.

The government allocated €17.3 million (\$18.9 million) during the year for programs to support and integrate the Romani community. These funds were allotted for health programs, education subsidies, infrastructure investments in Romani communities, Romani associations, and Romani cultural programming.

## Children

**Child Abuse:** Child abuse was a criminal offense, and conviction carried a penalty of from three to eight years' imprisonment. The government enforced the law effectively. Police were active with social media campaigns and appealed to citizens to report any violence against children and other vulnerable groups.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The minimum age for marriage was 18. With the approval of parents or legal guardians, centers for social service could approve the marriage of a person at age 16. The government enforced the law effectively. Forced marriage of individuals as young as 16 occurred in the Romani community, but were not registered with the government, so numbers were difficult to confirm.

In March the Office for National Minorities led a professional lecture entitled "Recognition of early and forced marriages in the Romani community and action in these cases." The program, led by police, NGOs, and social workers, instructed teachers, assistants, and counselors in and

near Romani communities on how to recognize risks of forced marriages and how to respond in case of suspicion. Ministry of Interior officials also led a program for administrative unit officials to recognize potential risk factors and indicators of forced marriage.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law prohibited the commercial sexual exploitation, sale, grooming, offer, or procurement of children for commercial sexual exploitation, including child sex trafficking, and practices related to child pornography. Penalties for convicted child sex traffickers ranged from three to 15 years in prison. The possession, sale, purchase, or propagation of child pornography was illegal. Penalties for conviction of violations ranged from six months to eight years in prison. The government enforced the law effectively. The law prohibited sexual violence, abuse of minors, and solicitation of children for sexual purposes. Conviction of statutory rape carried a sentence of three to eight years in prison. The law set the minimum age of consent for consensual sexual relations at 15. The government generally enforced the law.

## **Antisemitism**

There were an estimated 400 persons of Jewish descent in the country. NGOs reported cases of antisemitic hate speech on social media. The Simon Wiesenthal Center accused an RTV Slovenia journalist of making antisemitic comments and called for his firing. On November 15, unidentified vandals

spray painted a swastika followed by an equal sign and the Star of David on the door of the Jewish Cultural Center.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, 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:** No laws criminalized consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, cross-dressing, or other sexual or gender characteristic-related behaviors.

**Violence and Harassment:** There were no reports that authorities condoned or perpetrated violence against LGBTQI+ persons.

The Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities and



law enforcement authorities recorded incidents of violence against LGBTQI+ persons but did not track the number of cases. Local NGOs asserted that violence against LGBTQI+ persons was prevalent, but that survivors often did not report such incidents to police.

In June, media outlets reported a woman wearing a rainbow flag was assaulted near the Ljubljana Pride Parade route. LGBTQI+ organizations and individuals reported multiple incidents of individuals throwing eggs at parade participants and posting videos burning rainbow flags. The NGO Pride Parade Association president claimed police did not adequately respond to attacks and reported instances of police officers discouraging LGBTQI+ victims from filing criminal reports. Another NGO reported police were investigating such crimes, but noted authorities were unable to pursue anonymous reports. It added that a designated police liaison to LGBTQI+ communities encouraged victims of anti-LGBTQI+ crimes to come forward. Several assaults were also reported at the Maribor Pride Parade in September.

In July, the Parliamentary Commission for Petitions, Human Rights, and Equal Opportunities invited LGBTQI+ groups to a special session entitled “Homophobic and Transphobic Violence at Pride.” The commission condemned the incidents at the June Pride Parade and called on the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunity to draft a national strategy for equality of LGBTQI+ persons.

**Discrimination:** The law prohibited discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. The law recognized LGBTQI+ individuals, couples, and their families and granted them rights equal to rights of other persons, with the exception of state-supported access to infertility treatment. The government enforced such laws effectively, but societal discrimination was widespread. In May, the Advocate for the Principle of Equality ruled against a gynecologist for refusing to treat a patient who was in a same-sex relationship. According to NGOs, transgender persons remained particularly vulnerable to societal discrimination and targeted violence. NGOs and LGBTQI+ individuals noted discrimination most commonly took the form of verbal insults against LGBTQI+ individuals, with transgender individuals most frequently targeted.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** The law permitted persons to change their gender identity marker on legal and identifying documents to bring them into alignment with their gender identity. The law required a certified statement from a competent health-care provider or medical doctor diagnosing the individual with “transsexualism,” which the National Institute of Public Health classified as a mental disorder, and it did not allow for self-certification. There was no legal requirement for gender-affirming surgery or any other medical procedure before persons could legally change their gender identity. There were no legal provisions for a third/other gender option.

**Involuntary of Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices:** So-called conversion therapy to change one’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression occurred rarely, according to local NGOs.

There were no reports of medically unnecessary and irreversible “normalization” surgeries performed on minors or adult intersex persons. In June, President Nataša Pirc Musar called for legislation prohibiting unnecessary surgeries on intersex minors.

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

There were no laws or other reported restrictions on individuals speaking or media reporting on LGBTQI+ matters, on the ability of LGBTQI+ individuals to assemble in public or private or to form associations, or on the ability of LGBTQI+ organizations to legally register or convene events. Multiple cities held Pride parades and other LGBTQI+ events in June and September without restrictions.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The law prohibited discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities; however, persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, transportation, and information and communication on an equal basis with others. Local NGOs reported employers sometimes were prejudiced against persons with disabilities, but no cases of employment discrimination based on disability

were reported during the year.

The law mandated access to buildings and public transportation for persons with disabilities, but modification of public and private structures to improve access continued at a slow pace, and some public transportation stations and buildings, particularly older buildings, were not accessible, especially in rural areas.

In March, the ombudsperson reported only three-quarters of the units in social work centers provided access for persons with disabilities. The report also found a lack of braille inscriptions and sign language or subtitled videos in public buildings. The ombudsperson highlighted these findings were not in compliance with the law which mandated such barriers to access be remedied by December 2025.

The law provided social welfare assistance and early-childhood, elementary, secondary, and vocational education programs for children with disabilities. Children with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities were entitled to tailored educational programs with additional professional assistance and resources. Depending on their individual needs, some children attended school (through secondary school) with peers without disabilities, while others attended separate schools. The law also provided vocational and independent living resources for adults with disabilities. The government continued to implement laws and programs to provide persons with disabilities access to education, employment, health services, buildings,

information, communications, the judicial system, transportation, and other state services. The electoral law required all polling stations to be accessible to persons with disabilities. Voters with disabilities who were unable to reach a polling station on election day could alternatively vote by mail.

## **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

The law specifically prohibited discrimination based on language or HIV-positive status. NGOs reported, however, that HIV-positive individuals often faced stigma and discrimination in access to health care.

There were some reports of employment discrimination most often based on age, especially for work involving physical labor. Migrant workers had the same labor rights as citizens, but they faced discrimination.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

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

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law did not prohibit antiunion discrimination or require reinstatement of workers fired for union activity; however, courts had ruled that the right to unionize was protected in law. NGOs reported employers informally pressured

employees to refrain from organizing or to disband their unions, particularly workers in the metal industry and transport sector.

The law required unionization of at least 10 percent of workers in a sector before the sector could engage in collective bargaining. The law required unionization of at least 15 percent of workers in an organization before that union could engage in bargaining at the enterprise level. The law restricted the right to strike for police, members of the military, and some other public employees, requiring them to perform certain duties while on strike.

The government respected freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively and the right to strike. Local NGOs estimated approximately 20 percent of the labor force belonged to a union and approximately 80 percent of the labor force was covered by a collective bargaining agreement.

Local NGOs assessed that although penalties for violations were commensurate with those for analogous crimes, a shortage of labor inspectors impeded the government's ability to effectively prevent, monitor, and deter violations of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers. Judicial and administrative procedures were not subject to lengthy delays or appeals. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators.

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

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report*

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023

United States Department of State • Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

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

The law prohibited the worst forms of child labor. The minimum legal age of employment was 15. The law limited hours, mandated rest periods, prohibited working in hazardous locations, and specified adult supervision for workers younger than age 18. While no specific occupations were restricted, hazardous work locations specified by the law included those that were underground and underwater and those involving harmful exposure to radiation, toxic or carcinogenic agents, extreme cold, heat, noise, or vibrations. Penalties for child labor were not commensurate with those for other analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping. Penalties for conviction of child labor law violations ranged from a monetary fine to one year in prison. Penalties for violations of child labor and minimum age laws were regularly applied against violators. Nevertheless, children younger than 15 in rural areas often worked during the harvest season.

There were isolated reports of men, women, and children being subjected to forced labor in the construction sector and forced begging.

## **d. Discrimination (see section 6)**

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

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The national monthly gross minimum wage exceeded the poverty line. The law did not require premium pay for overtime, but collective agreements determined whether workers received premium pay for overtime. The law limited overtime to eight hours per week, 20 hours per month, and 170 hours per year.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** Special commissions under the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities set occupational safety and health (OSH) standards for workers that were appropriate for the main industries in the country. Workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardizing their employment. The law required employers to protect workers injured on the job. If incapacitated, such workers could perform other work corresponding to their abilities, obtain part-time work, or receive occupational rehabilitation and wage compensation.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities monitored minimum wage compliance and had inspection authority. Police were responsible for investigating violations of the law and proactively identified unsafe conditions. The



government effectively enforced minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws.

According to NGOs and advocacy groups, penalties for wage and hour violations were commensurate with those for other similar crimes, and they were sometimes applied against violators. Exceptions included some cases involving migrant workers and asylum seekers, who faced conditions of exploitation. Most violations took place in the wood processing industry, the metal industry, construction, and bars and restaurants although the government actively enforced labor laws in these sectors. Workers facing hazardous working conditions included professional divers, mountain rescuers, sailors, construction workers, and miners. Workers employed in the construction and transport sectors, the wood industry, and exotic dancers faced exploitative working conditions.

Penalties for OSH violations were generally commensurate with penalties for similar crimes such as negligence. Labor inspectors carried out some labor contract and OSH inspections, identified violations, and issued penalties. According to NGOs, the number of inspectors was insufficient to monitor conformance with labor contract or OSH laws, however inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions against abusers. The International Labor Organization and some NGOs reported an urgent need to increase the number of inspectors.

The government estimated the informal workers accounted for 5.8 percent of the active labor force. The government enforced labor laws in the

informal sector.