

Switzerland 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

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

There were no credible reports of significant human rights abuses.

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

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

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

b. Coercion in Population Control

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

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The constitution 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.

The law provided for punishment of hate speech, including public incitement to racial hatred or discrimination, spreading racist ideology, and denying crimes against humanity, with monetary fines and up to three years' imprisonment.

On November 14, the Basel court convicted the former local head of the Pnos party of racial discrimination, in particular antisemitism, sentencing the defendant to six months in prison. The defendant, a repeat offender, had called for violence against Jewish persons in online posts.

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

Publications specializing in corruption, money laundering, or white-collar crime by very wealthy individuals and oligarchs were routinely brought

before court by such individuals to prohibit preemptively their publication of articles. Specialized journals like the web portal *Gotham City*, which specialized in financial crime, reported not having the financial resources to fight such publication bans in court.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The federal constitution provided for freedom of association for employers and employees, including the right to strike and the right to hold lockouts. It provided for the right of all workers to form and join independent unions of their choice without additional authorization or excessive requirements.

The constitution foresaw collective agreements between workers and employers and stipulated for the right to unionize. The government protected these rights.

While there were no legal restrictions that limited freedom of association or collective bargaining, strikes were required to be linked to industrial relations and the government could curtail the right of federal public servants to strike for reasons of national security or to safeguard foreign policy interests. Local laws prohibited public employees in some cantons and municipalities from striking. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and protected employees from termination because of union membership or lawful union activities. Collective agreements committed

employers and employees to maintain labor peace, thereby limiting the right to strike for the duration of an agreement, which generally lasted several years. The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs maintained a list of collective agreements that were declared binding in various regions and sectors of the economy.

No law defined minimum or maximum penalties for violations of the freedoms of association or collective bargaining. The trade union Unia confirmed the practice followed the guidance of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which stated that unjustified dismissals for workers involved in trade union activity could result in compensation of up to six months' wages.

The government respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, but there were cases when employers dismissed trade unionists or used the legal system to limit legitimate trade union activities. Trade unions continued to report discriminatory behavior against their members.

Penalties for violations of laws protecting freedom of association were commensurate with those for analogous violations such as discrimination. Penalties were regularly applied against violators.

Migrant workers in low-wage jobs were more likely to experience exploitative labor practices, although the criminal code forbade labor exploitation.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

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

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The country had no national minimum wage; five of the 26 cantons (Basel-City, Geneva, Jura, Neuchatel, and Ticino) had minimum wage laws.

Collective agreements on working conditions, including sectoral minimum wages, covered approximately 50 percent of the workforce. Average wages for workers and employees covered by these contracts, particularly in the hospitality, crafts, machinery, production, and retail industries, however, remained relatively low. Minimum wages in the agreements exceeded the poverty income level for a single person but often did not exceed the poverty level for families with two adults and two children. Labor law set a maximum 45-hour workweek for blue- and white-collar workers in industry, services, and retail trades, and a 50-hour workweek for all other workers.

Violations of wages, hours, and overtime laws were common in the restaurant sector and construction industry.

Occupational Safety and Health

There were occupational safety and health (OSH) standards generally

appropriate for the main industries in the country. By law workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. Regular inspections took place to ensure compliance with OSH regulations. The government proactively identified unsafe conditions.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education, and Research and cantonal labor inspectorates effectively enforced laws relating to minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws across all sectors. The department also oversaw collective bargaining agreements. In general, labor inspectorates did not have sufficient personnel to enforce compliance or conduct extensive and unannounced inspections as suggested by the ILO. Where applicable, courts determined fines according to the personal and economic situation of the perpetrator. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud or negligence, and were regularly applied against violators.

The effective implementation and control of the maximum hour workweek was subject to loopholes. Cantonal labor inspectorates were not always independent, since they reported to the cantonal Department of Economy. As a result, public institutions' wage and hour practices were not always subject to independent supervision.

The International Monetary Fund estimated the informal sector to constitute approximately 7.5 percent of the economy. The government enforced labor laws in this sector.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

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

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

According to police and civil society reports, lengthy pretrial detention was a problem. By law pretrial detention could not exceed the length of the expected sentence for the crime for which a suspect was charged. Due to understaffing in the courts, pretrial detention in some cases lasted up to two years.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom*

Report at <https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-reports/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

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

Section 3. Security of the Person

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

The constitution and law prohibited such practices. There were isolated reports that individual police officers used excessive force while making arrests and that prison staff engaged in degrading treatment of detainees.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

There was no significant presence of the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibited all the worst forms of child labor. The minimum age for full-time employment was 15. Children ages 13 or 14 could engage in light work for no more than nine hours per week during the school year and 15 hours at other times. Children younger than 15 could, under special circumstances, work at sports or cultural events with the approval of cantonal authorities.

Children younger than 16 were not allowed to serve as waiters. Employment of youths between ages 15 and 18 was also restricted. Children who had not completed compulsory education could not work on Sundays. Children younger than 18 were prohibited from working under hazardous conditions or at night. Children needed parental oral or written approval to work. The government effectively enforced laws and policies to protect children from exploitation in the workplace. The Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education, and Research monitored the implementation of child labor laws and policies, and cantonal labor inspectors effectively inspected companies to determine whether there were violations of child labor laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous crimes and were regularly applied against violators.

Child Marriage

The legal minimum age of marriage was 18. The law prohibited forced marriage. The government effectively enforced the law.

The federal government supported prevention activities by the NGO Center for Competence against Forced Marriage, including a website where at-risk individuals could declare their unwillingness to be married while on foreign travel. The website enabled authorities either to stop vulnerable individuals from leaving the country or to pronounce the marriages invalid upon their return.

c. Protection to Refugees

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

Provision of First Asylum

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

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

An estimated 18,500 Jewish individuals resided in the country. The largest communities were in Zurich, Geneva, and Basel.

The 2023 *Report on Antisemitism*, published on March 12, produced jointly by the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG) and the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism, cited 1,130 antisemitic incidents. The majority of these incidents took place online, mainly on social media and in media comment sections. Community leaders noted an increase from previous years and reported physical assaults, verbal abuse, and offensive graffiti occurred.

In the wake of Hamas' October 2023 terrorist attacks in Israel and the war in

Gaza, there was a significant increase in antisemitic incidents in the country, primarily in French-speaking regions, according to the SIG and the Intercommunity Center for Coordination against Antisemitism and Defamation (see also section 2.a, Freedom of the Press).

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