

Trinidad and Tobago 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Trinidad and Tobago 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 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 combined with a functioning democratic political system to promote freedom of expression.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of most workers, including those in state-owned enterprises, to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes, but with some limitations.

The law's definition of a worker excluded publicly appointed or elected officers in government; members of the defense force, police, fire, and prison services; educators; managers; members of the Central Bank; apprentices; and domestic workers (house cleaners, chauffeurs, handymen, and gardeners).

Domestic workers had an established trade union that advocated for their rights. A broad range of civil servants, including public servants and teachers, were members of unions such as the Public Services Association

and Trinidad Teachers Unified Teachers' Association. Unions were required to be officially registered, and penalties could be applied to officers of unions that did not have official registration. Unions were precluded by law from engaging in political activities. The government could unilaterally deregister a union under a variety of conditions.

The law prohibited employers from discriminating against workers due to union membership. The law mandated reinstatement of workers illegally dismissed for union activities. Penalties for breaking these laws were commensurate with penalties for other laws involving denials of civil rights, such as discrimination. The government effectively enforced these laws, and penalties were sometimes applied against violators.

By law, only officially registered unions could engage in collective bargaining. Unions had to demonstrate the support of an absolute majority of workers to be certified as a recognized majority union and engage in bargaining. Observers noted this requirement limited the right of collective bargaining.

There were impediments to exercising the right to strike. Strikes had to have prior authorization, which required the ministry to certify that a dispute was unresolved. Authorities could prohibit strikes at the request of one party unless the strike was called by a union representing a majority of the workers. Strikes regarding political issues and sympathy or solidarity strikes were considered unlawful.

Employees providing a broad range of public services, including police, fire, prison, teaching, central bank, public health, public utilities, communication services, public transport, civil aviation, liquid fuel pipeline facilities, and meteorological services, did not have the right to strike. These employees were referred to a special tribunal in the Industrial Court to resolve labor disputes. The minister of labor could petition the court to curtail any strike the minister deemed harmful to national interests.

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 law provided for a national minimum wage that covered all sectors. The minimum wage was greater than the official poverty income level. The law established a 40-hour workweek, a daily period for lunch or rest, and premium pay for overtime. The law did not prohibit excessive or compulsory overtime. The law provided for paid leave.

Occupational Safety and Health

Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country. Responsibility for identifying unsafe

situations remained with OSH experts and not the worker. The government proactively identified unsafe conditions. The law gave workers the right to remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment; authorities generally protected this right.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government effectively enforced minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. The Ministry of Labour was responsible for enforcing labor laws related to minimum wage and acceptable conditions of work.

Penalties for wage, overtime, and OSH violations were less than penalties for similar violations, such as negligence. Penalties were regularly applied against violators. There were insufficient labor inspectors to enforce compliance. Inspectors were able to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

In 2017, the Inter-American Development Bank estimated the informal sector was 26-33 percent of the workforce. 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 law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of persons to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem. Pretrial detainees constituted approximately two-thirds of the prison population. Most detainees' trials began seven to 10 years after their arrest, although some detainees spent even longer in pretrial detention. The length of pretrial detention frequently equaled or exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime. Officials cited several reasons for the backlog, including the burden of the preliminary inquiry process and limited use of plea bargaining.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

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

e. Trafficking in Persons

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

Section 3. Security of the Person

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

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports some officials employed them.

A parliamentary report in March to the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality, and Diversity contained allegations of sexual exploitation by Coast Guard members of migrants detained at immigration facilities.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

Children ages 14 to 16 were allowed to work in activities in which only family members were employed or that the minister of education approved as vocational or technical training. The minimum age for working in hazardous activities was 18. The government enforced the applicable laws, and penalties were commensurate with similar labor violations. Penalties were sometimes applied to violators.

A 2022 survey indicated that 4.3 percent of children ages five to 17 were involved in child labor, with 2.7 percent engaged in hazardous work.

Child Marriage

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

c. Protection to Refugees

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

Provision of First Asylum

The law did not provide for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government did not have a system for providing protection to refugees. The government allowed UNHCR to conduct refugee status determinations. A positive determination by UNHCR, however, did not confer automatic recognition by the government of refugee status or always protect persons from deportation.

Access to asylum remained a significant problem for detained individuals, since there were no formal procedures to register those who sought asylum. UNHCR and other international observers did not have regular access to immigration detention centers to register asylum seekers or screen for other needs.

In May, a High Court judge ruled the 2017 denial of entry for three Venezuelan women was illegal, since it was based on the unjustified claim the women might become a financial burden. The judge criticized the lack of standard policies and proper assessment procedures by the Immigration Division and emphasized the need for clear guidance, training, and the use of special inquiry provisions to ensure fairness and accountability. Although no damages were awarded, the judge annulled the rejection orders, potentially allowing the individuals to return.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

There were fewer than 100 Jewish persons in the country.

Throughout the year, there were isolated instances of violent messaging, including the use of swastikas in graffiti and in signs during demonstrations in reaction to the Israeli response to the October 2023 Hamas terrorist attack on Israel. Online antisemitic hate speech increased. A small number of religious and nonprofit organizations used antisemitic language in their messaging and in demonstrations, including some vague calls for violence.