

SLOVENIA 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Slovenia is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional republic. Power is shared among a directly elected president (head of state), a prime minister (head of government), and a bicameral parliament composed of the National Assembly (lower house) and the National Council (upper house). In 2018 the country held elections for seats in the National Assembly; the most recent presidential election was held in 2017. Observers considered the elections free and fair.

The national police maintain internal security. The army is responsible for external security but also has some domestic security responsibilities. Police report to the Ministry of Interior, and the army reports to the Ministry of Defense. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. Members of the security forces committed few abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: serious restrictions on free expression and media, including threats of violence against journalists by nongovernment actors, and the existence of criminal libel and slander laws.

The government took steps to investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed abuses or engaged in corruption, whether in the security services or elsewhere in the government, and there were no cases of impunity involving security forces reported during the year.

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.

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

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

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

According to the human rights ombudsman, physical conditions were generally acceptable but overcrowding existed. There were also some reports of inmate mistreatment and prisoner-on-prisoner violence. Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) stated the government-run asylum center and other intake facilities housing asylum seekers were often overcrowded. A significant increase in the number of migrant detainees coupled with the lack of personnel to process detainees and a dearth of linguistic and cultural training exacerbated overcrowding.

Physical Conditions: Local NGOs reported prison overcrowding remained a problem. The human rights ombudsman noted that conditions at the country's sole incarceration facility for women, Ig Prison, were inferior to those at Dob Prison, the country's largest and highest-standard correctional facility, where male prisoners were confined. The ombudsman established that inmates at the Ig Prison had unequal opportunities when it came to telephone calls, electronic communication, and recreational time, and that no female prisoner in the country had ever been afforded the opportunity to have an overnight visitor or otherwise allowed intimate contact, something that was available to Dob Prison inmates.

Administration: Authorities investigated accusations of mistreatment and documented the results in a publicly accessible manner.

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 (CPT), to monitor prison conditions. The

human rights ombudsman, together with numerous human rights groups and other NGOs, visited all prisons. The government allowed designated NGOs to monitor the treatment of prisoners.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her detention in court, and 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 may detain suspects for 48 hours before charging them. The law requires 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 must have prompt access to a judge to assess whether they qualify 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 provides for prompt access to immediate family members and detention under house arrest.

Upon arrest, detainees have 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 have 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. In its most recent report, released in 2017, the CPT expressed concern that persons unable to pay for a lawyer could not, as a rule, benefit from the right of access to a lawyer from the outset of their detention. According to the CPT, "ex officio lawyers would only be appointed if such an appointment was considered 'in the interests of justice' and, if appointed, they would meet detainees only after police questioning, very briefly before the court hearing." Such practices remained common for persons facing minor offenses, but indigent defendants facing serious criminal charges generally had access to an attorney throughout legal proceedings provided at public expense.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

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

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Defendants enjoy rights to a presumption of innocence, to be informed promptly and in detail of charges against them, to a fair and public trial without undue delay, to be present at their trial, and to communicate with an attorney of their choice or have one provided at public expense if unable to pay. Defendants have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense, to free interpretation as necessary from the moment charged through all appeals, to confront prosecution or plaintiff witnesses and present their own witnesses and evidence, not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt, and to appeal. The law also provides safeguards against self-incrimination. These rights extend to all defendants.

According to NGOs and advocacy groups, the judicial system was overburdened and lacked administrative support, at times resulting in delays in the judicial process.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The constitution and law provide for an independent and impartial judiciary in civil matters, including damages for, or cessation of, human rights violations. Individuals may appeal court decisions involving alleged government violations of the European Convention on Human Rights to the European Court of Human Rights once they exhaust all avenues of appeal in domestic courts.

Property Seizure and Restitution

The law permits 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 are subject to restitution procedures under the Criminal Procedure Act. Cases involving property that was nationalized are subject to restitution procedures under the Denationalization Act of 1991. The Denationalization Act requires claimants to have had Yugoslavian citizenship at the time the property was confiscated and excludes, 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 may 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 includes 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.

Some Holocaust survivors and their relatives, along with Slovenian deportees, reclaimed pre-1945 confiscated property through 1945-46 restitution legislation. Most Holocaust-era claims are categorized as heirless property, for which there is no provision in law for restitution or compensation. 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. Research teams commenced the project in 2018. 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 in 2015, the litigants appealed to the Constitutional Court, which returned the case to lower courts where it remained pending consideration.

The Department of State's Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act report to Congress, released in July 2020, can be found on the Department's website at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress>.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and laws prohibit 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 provide for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected these rights. An independent media, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for the members of the media.

Freedom of Expression: The law prohibits 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 prohibits the expression of ideas of racial superiority and denial of the Holocaust.

Cases of individual court convictions and sentences for spreading intolerance on Twitter were reported. On January 22, the Slovenian Association of Journalists (DNS) filed a criminal complaint against TV3 talk show host Norma Brscic and

TV3 editor in chief Tomaz Taskar for public incitement of hatred and intolerance. The complaint alleged that on January 20, Brscic commented on the inferiority of the “black race” and of a Jewish conspiracy. In October the District State Prosecutor’s Office in Ljubljana filed a request for investigation by the Ljubljana District Court, and the case remained under investigation.

On July 5, the Communications Networks and Services Agency ordered TV3 to cease inciting racial hatred and intolerance. On August 11, the independent state Office of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, established to enable constitutional protection against discrimination, stated that TV3 had violated the ban on discrimination when it broadcast the talk show.

Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction; however, the European Commission and press-freedom NGOs expressed concern regarding the deterioration of media freedom in the country.

The European Commission, the Council of Europe commissioner for human rights, and NGO media watchdog groups expressed concerns regarding online harassment of journalists, the government’s undermining of the independence of media, and nontransparent media ownership structures.

On September 15, the Supreme Court ruled that “the use of Twitter grants no one an unlimited right to communicate” and that the right to make value judgements on Twitter is limited (to the) existence of a “convincing and firm factual basis.” The ruling was issued in response to an appeal filed by the prime minister regarding a lower-court judgment against him for tweets he wrote in 2016 defaming RTV Slovenia journalist Eugenija Carl. The DNS stated the court ruling sent a clear message to those who “discredit, insult, and embarrass” journalists.

The Government Communication Office (UKOM) ceased funding the Slovenian Press Agency (STA) at the beginning of the year, pushing STA to the brink of insolvency. The government justified the move by stating greater accountability from STA was needed. On November 8, the government agreed to resume funding when STA and UKOM signed an agreement providing for UKOM to fund the STA

public service with two million euros (\$2.3 million) for the remainder of the year. In a letter dated September 24 to Minister of Culture Vasko Simonit, European commissioner for values and transparency Vera Jourova stated EU member states should refrain from any attempts to put direct or indirect pressure on media, including by withholding necessary financing, and urged the government to fund and preserve STA's independence. The DNS raised 385,000 euros (\$443,000) in support of STA through two fundraising campaigns.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists reported the prime minister and certain other public officials spurred hateful rhetoric in the public discourse and incited threats against journalists. They warned that online attacks and harassment created a hostile environment that could lead to physical violence. For example, in response to a critical article on the deteriorating media situation written by journalist Lili Bayer of the online news site *Politico*, the prime minister accused Bayer on Twitter of lying and being “instructed not to tell the truth.” On January 25, the prime minister also accused RTV Slovenia of false reporting, expressing hope that RTV's new director general would “do a better job”. On April 2, the prime minister accused the news portal *24ur.com* and Tjasa Slokar Kos, editor in chief of a television program on POP TV, of lying regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and contributing to the number of infected and dead. On May 6, the prime minister accused STA director Bojan Veselinovic of having been an accomplice to the killing of former STA editor in chief Borut Mesko. Veselinovic responded by filing criminal charges and a civil defamation suit against the prime minister.

On June 26, the DNS launched a web platform for journalists to report physical and verbal attacks. As of November 19, a total of 29 cases of alleged attacks against journalists by individuals, politicians, institutions, or media/social media were reported.

There were numerous reports of abuse. On June 15, Gregor Mitev, a 26-year-old man from Maribor, was convicted of assaulting and injuring photojournalist Borut Zivulovic, police officers, and other reporters during the November 2020 violent protests in Ljubljana. Mitev was sentenced to two years and eight months in prison. On September 3, a group of approximately 20 COVID-19 pandemic deniers, who had been protesting in front of RTV Slovenia headquarters and

harassing journalists for several months, broke into the RTV Slovenia newsroom studio, demanding broadcast time. They were removed by police and the incident was condemned by RTV Slovenia and top officials as an unacceptable attack on media, journalism, and democracy. On September 22, RTV journalist Eugenija Carl received an envelope addressed to her containing a threatening handwritten note and suspicious white powder. Several media outlets reported that on September 29 and October 11, their crews were intimidated, insulted, pushed, attacked, and obstructed while reporting on protests against COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in Ljubljana.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Instances of overt political pressure on the press remained isolated. The Slovenian Association of Journalists and media analysts observed that standards of journalistic integrity suffered because of economic pressure, nonstandard forms of employment such as freelance or student status, and reduced protections for journalists, especially against online threats, leading some to practice self-censorship.

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

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

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

Freedom of Association

Several civil society organizations alleged that the government took steps to retaliate against them for their criticism of government policy (see section 5).

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 provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

In-country Movement: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government instituted limitations on internal movement.

Citizenship: Based on a 2012 decision by the European Court of Human Rights, in 2013 the government introduced a system for providing just satisfaction (i.e., restitution for damages) for “erased” citizens of other former Yugoslav republics denied the right to reside legally in the country in the 1990s. As of 2015 more than 10,300 “erased” individuals had regularized their legal status in the country. An additional 3,000 were presumed deceased, and approximately 12,000 were believed to be living abroad with no intention of returning to the country.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. 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.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status,

and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. NGOs alleged that border authorities continued to reject without due process most individuals seeking asylum.

According to the human rights ombudsman, migrants were often returned to the neighboring country, principally Croatia, from which they entered Slovenia without being considered for asylum. The ombudsman stated that failure to follow due process made appeal to authorities impossible and that authorities did not document asylum requests correctly. Migrants lacked access to legal aid.

NGOs reported that asylum seekers returned by police to Croatia had no legal remedies to challenge border police decisions. NGOs alleged Croatian police forcibly pushed returning many migrants to Croatia into Bosnia and Herzegovina. Amnesty International stated that the expulsions from Slovenia took place without appropriate procedural safeguards against refoulement. This situation made it difficult for migrants to apply for international protection.

In August 2020 the Supreme Court overturned an Administrative Court ruling that blocked the return of migrants to Croatia, effectively authorizing the immediate return of migrants to Croatia. The Administrative Court had ruled that fast-track returns based on a bilateral agreement between Slovenia and Croatia but without a specific Slovenian decision in each case violated European and Slovenian law and constitutionally secured rights. The Supreme Court ruled that the 2006 agreement provides for the summary return of migrants.

Abuse of Migrants and 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 and lower hygienic standards and greater health risks.

In August 2020 a migrant rights advocacy group, Taskforce for Asylum, maintained that authorities were violating the rights of foreigners kept at the Center for Aliens in Postojna by returning them to Croatia. The center held 96 asylum seekers as of July 2020, mostly from Afghanistan, Algeria, Morocco, and Pakistan, with 55 of them in the process of obtaining international protection. Pending

deportation, they were moved to an asylum home in Logatec that provided them with food, clothing, hygienic accessories, and basic health-care services.

Asylum seekers outside EU resettlement and relocation programs often waited six months or more for their cases to be adjudicated and were barred from working during the initial nine months of this period, although many reportedly worked illegally. Local NGOs criticized this restriction, asserting it made asylum seekers vulnerable to labor exploitation and trafficking due to their illegal status, lack of knowledge of local labor laws, and language barriers.

Freedom of Movement: Local NGOs reported unjustifiable limitations on the movement of asylum seekers residing in government-operated integration houses 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.

Temporary Protection: The government also provided temporary protection (subsidiary protection) to individuals who may not qualify as refugees, but the Ministry of Interior did not maintain separate statistics for refugees and those who qualified for subsidiary protection.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and law provide 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

Recent Elections: In 2018 the country held elections for seats in the National Assembly in which the Slovenian Democratic Party won the plurality of votes. Observers considered the elections free and fair. The list of Marjan Sarec won the second largest share of votes and formed a five-party coalition. In January 2020 former prime minister Marjan Sarec resigned, and in March 2020 Prime Minister Janez Jansa of the Slovenian Democratic Party was sworn in. Presidential elections in 2017 were considered free and fair.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No law limits participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Women only occupied 22 percent of elected seats in the National Assembly. The constitution provides for the National Assembly to include one member each from the Hungarian and Italian minorities.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

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

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. Civil society groups claimed conflicts of interest and a failure to report outside activities, bribes, and lack of governmental transparency persisted throughout the country's political and economic spheres, particularly in the fields of energy, construction, urban planning, health care, and state-owned enterprises. In late 2020 parliament amended the law to better define conflict of interests, including acceptance of gifts, lobbying, and regarding official positions for which disclosure of property owned and business activity is required.

Local anticorruption 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, bribes, and lack of transparency throughout the country's political and economic spheres, particularly in public tenders. Due to limited police capacity, just 1 percent of alleged corrupt practices were investigated, and courts also had a poor track record in trying corruption cases.

On September 27, the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (CPC) stated it had found evidence of a breach of integrity by former Economy Ministry state secretary Ales Cantarutti regarding procurement of personal protective equipment in the first COVID-19 pandemic wave. Cantarutti allegedly favored the company

HMEZAD-TNT, a major supplier of personal protective masks, in the procurement process. The CPC ruled that he had committed a “breach of integrity,” a violation of law. Cantarutti rejected the CPC assertion. As of year’s end, authorities had not filed charges or taken punitive action against him.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

Several domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials often were cooperative and responsive to their views.

Several civil society organizations alleged that the government took steps during the year to retaliate against them for their criticism of government policy. In April 2020 the government notified 15 NGOs that it was terminating their grant agreements with the previous government for projects related to civic education, media literacy, and assisting migrants and other vulnerable groups. Authorities stated that the funds were needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The NGOs pointed to anti-NGO rhetoric by the prime minister and other officials alleging the NGOs were partners of left-wing parties engaged in self-enrichment as an indication that the termination of the grant agreements was politically motivated. Most of the NGOs suspended their project activity.

In October 2020 the Ministry of Culture ordered 18 NGOs with offices in a state-owned building in Ljubljana to vacate the premises by the end of January or face a court-imposed eviction. The government explained that the action was necessary because the building was to be renovated, but the affected groups stated they believed the eviction was politically motivated. A total of 200 NGOs subsequently signed a letter protesting the government’s decision. In November 2020 the National Assembly Culture Committee asked the government to provide alternative premises for the NGOs. Between June and September, the Ministry of Culture issued eviction notices to 18 NGOs. All the affected NGOs filed complaints with the District Court of Ljubljana. As of year’s end, authorities had not acted to implement the eviction notices, pending a court ruling.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The constitution provides for an independent human rights ombudsman to monitor violations of human rights. Individuals may file complaints with the independent ombudsman to seek administrative relief in the case of a human rights violation by the government. The human rights ombudsman 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 raises awareness of and helps 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 men and women, including spousal rape, and domestic violence, are illegal. Sexual violence is a criminal offense, and the penalty for conviction is six months' to eight years' imprisonment. The penalty for conviction of rape is one to 10 years' imprisonment. Police generally investigated accusations of rape, and courts generally tried accused offenders.

The penal code defines rape as an act resulting from a perpetrator coercing the survivor into sexual intercourse by force or serious threats. Several local NGOs criticized sentencing as excessively light and demanded the government change the penal code's definition of rape to the absence of consent. In April the National Assembly adopted amendments to the criminal code to provide greater protection for survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence, including adoption of the "yes means yes" principle that intercourse absent explicit consent constitutes rape.

The law provides from six months' to 10 years' imprisonment for conviction of committing aggravated and grievous bodily harm. Upon receiving reports of spousal abuse or violence, police generally intervened and prosecuted offenders, but local NGOs reported that survivors of sexual violence often did not report crimes to police.

Local NGOs reported that 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 reported a lack of practical training and educational programs for professionals who are legally bound to offer services to survivors of violence. NGOs highlighted the lack of systematic and continuous prevention programs for domestic violence and rape and reported there were no specialized support programs for Romani women, elderly women, or other historically marginalized groups.

During the year police resumed annual “train the trainer” programs on domestic violence. Police officers, in cooperation with social welfare bodies, NGOs, and health-care workers, trained regional police officers on best practices through workshops at local police stations.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment of men and women is a criminal offense carrying a penalty if convicted of up to three years’ imprisonment. The law defines sexual harassment as psychological violence, mistreatment, or unequal treatment in the workplace that causes “another employee’s humiliation or fear.” Authorities did not prosecute any sexual harassment cases during the year.

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

By law infertility treatment and biomedical fertilization procedures are only available for women and men living in a heterosexual marital or cohabiting relationship who are 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 are not eligible for state-supported infertility treatment.

Infertility treatment and biomedical fertilization procedures are only available for

spouses or common-law partners who are of legal age, able and prepared to perform parental duties, and mentally sound. The law does not restrict access to in vitro fertilization by a specific age but requires that women must 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 provides access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence; emergency contraception was available for girls and women.

Discrimination: The law provides the same legal status and rights for women and men and prohibits official discrimination in matters such as employment, housing, inheritance, nationality, religious freedom, or access to education or health care. Gender-based discrimination in the workplace persisted (see paragraph 7.d.). Despite legal provisions for equal pay, inequalities persisted.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The country's constitution recognizes Hungarians and Italians as national minorities. The government also recognizes Roma as an ethnic minority. Other minority populations are not officially recognized, including ethnic Germans, Albanians, Bosniaks, Croatians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Serbs. These communities have called on 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 has raised no objections to the existing legal framework for recognizing minorities in the country.

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 ombudsman 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, may obtain public services and utilities.

Although education is compulsory through grade nine, school attendance and completion rates by Romani children remained low. Members of the NGO Council of the Roma Community stated that most Romani children begin first grade without any preschooling and a limited knowledge of the Slovenian language. Despite increased government efforts to enroll Romani children in preschool, few were enrolled. In April the NGO Scientific and Research Association for Art, Cultural and Educational Programs and Technology (EPEKA) conducted a meeting, attended by members of the Romani community, civil society groups, and the Maribor City Council Employment Service, concerning employment of the Roma. Participants drew a connection between a lack of education among Roma and unemployment, noting that of the nearly 230 unemployed Roma in the Maribor area, approximately 100 had not completed primary school. Council of the Roma Community members stated that low attendance stemmed from the negative experiences with organized education many Romani parents faced as children, leading them not to enroll their children in school.

The Center for School and Outdoor Education continued its 2016-22 project on Romani education, financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the European Social Fund. The project helped Romani children succeed in the educational system through mentoring and support, including extracurricular activities and preschool education at community multipurpose centers. Although segregated classrooms are illegal, several Roma reported to NGOs their children attended segregated classes and that school authorities selected them disproportionately to attend classes for students with special needs. A local NGO estimated that 30 to 40 percent of the students attending special needs schools and classes were Roma, even though Roma constituted less than 1 percent of the total population.

High unemployment rates among the Romani population continued, due to a lack of education, job training, and isolation from places of employment. Member of the Council of the Roma Community estimated only 2 percent of Roma in the

southeast of the country worked in the formal economy. Roma employed in the informal sector were vulnerable to labor law violations, particularly in terms of benefits and procedures for termination of employment. According to EPEKA's unofficial data, the unemployment rate among the Roma in the Maribor area exceeded 90 percent (see section 7, Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation).

NGOs called on the government to adopt measures to improve access to housing, education, and employment for Roma. Several government ministries participated in the preparation of the *National Program of Measures for Roma from 2022–2030*. 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.

Children

Birth Registration: A child is granted citizenship at birth if the child's mother and father were citizens, or one of the child's parents was a citizen and the child was born on the territory of the country, or one of the child's parents was a citizen while the other parent was unknown or of unknown citizenship and the child was born in a foreign country. Naturalization is possible. Children born in the country to migrants and asylum seekers do not qualify for citizenship; however, their parents may file for asylum or refugee status on their behalf.

Child Abuse: Child abuse is a criminal offense, and conviction carries a penalty of up to three years' imprisonment. Police were active with social media campaigns and appealed to citizens to report any violence against children and other vulnerable groups.

There were nine crisis centers for children between ages six and 18 and one center for children younger than six. The government allowed children to stay at these

centers until they reached 18, or 21 if they were still in school.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The minimum age for marriage is 18. With the approval of parents or legal guardians, centers for social service may approve the marriage of a person at age 16. Marriage of individuals as young as 16 occurred in the Romani community but was not common.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation, sale, grooming, the offer or procurement of children for commercial sexual exploitation, and practices related to child pornography. The possession, sale, purchase, or propagation of child pornography is illegal. Penalties for conviction of violations ranged from six months to eight years in prison. The government enforced the law effectively. The law prohibits sexual violence and abuse of minors and soliciting minors for sexual purposes. Conviction of statutory rape carries a sentence of three to eight years in prison. The law sets the minimum age of consent for consensual sexual relations at 15. The government generally enforced the law. Some children were also subjected to sex trafficking; however, the government did not identify any child trafficking survivors.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

There were an estimated 300 persons of Jewish descent in the country.

In 2019 the Supreme Court annulled the 1946 death sentence of General Leon Rupnik, who collaborated with the Nazi occupying forces during World War II, on an appeal filed by a relative and sent the case to the Ljubljana District Court for retrial. The Jewish Cultural Center in Ljubljana expressed deep concern regarding what it called “these contemptible acts of Holocaust denial, revision...and attempts at reviving and justifying the Fascist and Nazi horrors.”

In August Urban Purgar, editor in chief of the online *National Press Agency* (a

right-wing news website) and president of the NGO Association for the Promotion of Traditional Values, described Adolf Hitler as a hero. On August 4, the prime minister tweeted that supporters of democracy wanted nothing to do with those who worship national socialists and communists such as Hitler, Stalin, and Tito. Opposition parties also denounced Purgar and called on the Ministry of Culture to strip his association of its NGO status.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits 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.

The law mandates 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. The law provides social welfare assistance and early-childhood, elementary, secondary, and vocational education programs for children with disabilities. Children with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities are 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 provides 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 government generally enforced these provisions effectively.

The electoral law requires all polling stations to be accessible to persons with disabilities. Voters with disabilities who are unable to reach a polling station on election day may also vote by mail.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

NGOs reported HIV-positive individuals often faced stigma and discrimination in access to health care. For example, the NGO Activists for the Rights of People Living with HIV and medical experts from the Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile Conditions reported that 90 percent of individuals living with HIV experienced discrimination in medical institutions due to their HIV status.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The law prohibits discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons in housing, employment, nationality laws, and access to government services. The government enforced such laws effectively, but societal discrimination was widespread. According to NGOs, transgender persons remained particularly vulnerable to societal discrimination and targeted violence.

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 January neo-Nazis posted anti-LGBTQI+ statements and videos to an online event organized by the LGBTQI+ NGO Legebitra, including the statement, “homosexuality is a sin of God” and videos and pictures of burning rainbow flags and Nazi marchers. According to a Legebitra member, police responded to the initial report of the incident with “insults and ridicule.” Legebitra subsequently filed a complaint against the officers.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination or require reinstatement of workers fired for union activity; however, courts have ruled that the right to unionize is protected in law. NGOs reported that employers have informally pressured employees to refrain from organizing or to deunionize, particularly workers in the metal industry and transport sector.

The law requires unionization of at least 10 percent of workers in a sector before the sector may engage in collective bargaining. The law restricts the right to strike for police, members of the military, and some other public employees, providing for arbitration instead. Local NGOs assessed that although penalties for violations were sufficient, a shortage of labor inspectors impeded the government's ability to effectively prevent, monitor, and deter violations. Judicial and administrative procedures were not subject to lengthy delays or appeals.

The government respected freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

While the law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, and the government generally enforced the law, forced labor occurred and was most common in the metal and wood industry, construction, hospitality, and transport sectors. Local NGOs assessed that while penalties for violations were sufficient, there were concerns that the number of inspectors and resources dedicated to trafficking, coordination between labor inspectors and police, and the prioritization of prosecuting labor trafficking was insufficient, which impeded the government's ability to effectively prevent and monitor violations. A local NGO stated fewer labor inspections were conducted during the year due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and the perennial lack of inspectors.

There were reports men, women, and children were subjected to forced labor in the

construction sector and forced begging. A government report found minors and migrant workers were particularly vulnerable to forced labor or trafficking conditions, while fraudulent employment and recruitment of migrant workers remained a problem. Penalties were not commensurate with those for other analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping.

Also 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 prohibits the worst forms of child labor. The minimum legal age of employment is 15. The law limits hours, mandates rest periods, prohibits working in hazardous locations, and specifies adult supervision for workers younger than age 18. While no specific occupations are restricted, hazardous work locations specified by the law include those that are 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 range from a monetary fine to one year in prison and were sufficient to deter violations. The government generally enforced child labor and minimum age laws effectively. Nevertheless, children younger than 15 in rural areas often worked during the harvest season.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law establishes a general framework for equal treatment and prohibits discrimination with respect to employment or occupation based on race or ethnic origin, sex, color, religion, age, citizenship, disability, or sexual orientation. The law specifically prohibits discrimination based on language or HIV-positive status. The government effectively enforced these laws. Penalties for violations range widely, depending on the type and size of the employing organization, and were sufficient to deter violations. The law prohibits women from working in some industries. Women's earnings overall were approximately 68 percent of those of men; in comparable positions their earnings were approximately 97 percent of those of men.

There were few formal complaints of discrimination, although there were some reports of employment discrimination most often based on age, especially for work involving physical labor. In certain sectors foreign workers are required to remain employed with their initial employer for a minimum of one year. Local NGOs assessed this requirement enabled labor exploitation through lower salaries, poor living conditions, and longer working hours. Migrant workers enjoyed the same labor rights as citizens, but they faced discrimination. Many migrants worked in the hospitality sector or in physically demanding jobs. Some migrant workers were not aware of local labor laws regarding minimum wage, overtime, health care, and other benefits, a problem compounded by language barriers.

An NGO reported that the inflow of migrant workers decreased significantly in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that workers enjoyed greater bargaining power vis-a-vis employers due to labor shortages in several sectors, such as health care, hospitality, transportation, waste management, and construction.

One NGO estimated 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. The government attempted to address problems experienced by Roma (see also section 6, Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The national monthly gross minimum wage exceeded the poverty line. The minimum gross salary is 1,024 euros (\$1,178) per month. The official poverty line was increased from 703 euros to 739 euros (\$808 to \$850) per month for single-member households. The Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities monitors minimum wage compliance and has inspection authority. According to NGOs and advocacy groups, authorities generally enforced the laws effectively, except in some cases involving migrant workers and asylum seekers, who faced conditions of exploitation. Penalties for violations were sufficient to deter violations.

Collective agreements determined whether workers received premium pay for overtime. The law limits overtime to eight hours per week, 20 hours per month, and 170 hours per year.

Occupational Safety and Health: The European Trade Union Confederation reported to the European Labor Authority five cases of potential labor exploitation of Slovenian nationals temporarily working in other EU countries. A local trade union confederation expressed concern that authorities issued temporary work permits for its nationals to work in other EU countries based on false pretenses and without adequately monitoring the posted employees or checking for potential violations. The trade union confederation urged the government to adopt measures to prevent and combat such violations. Common examples of such exploitation included failure to pay social security contributions, failure to grant paid holidays or sick leave, and the existence of pay discrepancies among local workers (workers employed by local companies who physically work in country) and posted workers (workers employed by local companies whose job location is elsewhere in the EU joint labor market). Local NGOs reported pay discrepancies based on physical location remained a problem, noting that local posting offices (mediators) often failed to provide workers with the necessary documents for them to work in the EU despite requirements to do so. Workers were then subject to penalties in countries where they worked, with many facing a temporary ban on entering the Schengen Area.

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 may remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardizing their employment, and authorities effectively protected employees in this situation. The law requires employers to protect workers injured on the job. If incapacitated, such workers may perform other work corresponding to their abilities, obtain part-time work, or receive occupational rehabilitation and wage compensation.

The Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities monitors labor practices and has inspection authority; police are responsible for investigating violations of the law. The government effectively enforced OSH

laws. Penalties for violations were generally commensurate with negligence and other violations of law. The total number of labor inspectors in the country was 91, 31 of whom focused on safety and health (54 specialized in labor relations and the remaining six were focused on social affairs). Labor inspectors carried out some labor contract and OSH inspections, identified violations, and issued penalties. The number of inspectors was insufficient to monitor conformance with labor contract or OSH laws. The Committee of Experts and NGOs reported an urgent need to increase the number of inspectors. Most violations took place in the wood-processing industry, the metal industry, construction, and bars and restaurants.

Workers facing hazardous working conditions included professional divers, mountain rescuers, sailors, construction workers, and miners. Workers facing exploitative working conditions included those employed in construction, the transport sector, the wood industry, and exotic dancers. There was one work-related accident in which a construction worker died.

Informal Sector: The number of workers in the informal economy was minimal. According to unions, the informal economy has contracted significantly due to 2012 labor market reform legislation that introduced stricter rules. The informal economy represented less than 1 percent of the workforce and was mainly limited to casual labor, housework, and yardwork of friends, relatives, and neighbors; workers in the informal sector are generally not covered by social protections and OSH laws and inspections.