

Liberia 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

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

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government or on behalf of the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists and censorship; serious government corruption; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and female genital mutilation/cutting; laws criminalizing consensual same-sex conduct between adults, which were enforced; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and systematic restrictions on workers' freedom of association.

The government did not take 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 several reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

On January 20, an officer of the Armed Forces of Liberia, Abu Konneh, allegedly arrested, tortured, and killed Abraham Hanson Wleh after he allegedly burglarized a private residence. Konneh, along with several unidentified accomplices, remained at large at year's end.

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, but there were credible reports government officials employed them. The law provided criminal penalties for excessive use of force by law enforcement officers and addressed permissible uses of force during arrest or while preventing the escape of a prisoner from custody.

There were reports government authorities physically abused peaceful civilians, including persons in custody or seeking protection. There were also reports of rape and sexual abuse by government agents. In February, the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency suspended Maryland County Commander Sergeant Targeddine following allegations of a sexual assault brought against him. According to a police report, Targeddine allegedly sexually assaulted a girl, age 16, in Harper, Maryland County. Targeddine remained free pending trial at year's end.

Impunity was a significant problem in the security forces, including the Liberia National Police's (LNP) Emergency Response Unit and the Public Support Unit, and the Executive Protection Service in the form of soliciting bribes, disregard for rules and regulations, abuse of authority, making physical and verbal threats against unarmed civilians, and other forms of intimidation.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh and life threatening due to gross overcrowding, food shortages, inadequate sanitary conditions, vermin infestation, and poor medical care that led to disease outbreaks.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Gross overcrowding was a problem. The Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation stated prison overcrowding was caused mainly by prolonged pretrial detention, delay in preparing

indictments for felony cases, and difficulties in transferring case files from magisterial court to circuit court.

Administration: There were significant reports regarding prison and detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns such as allegations of employee misconduct when executing administrative actions, including possible illegal suspensions. Authorities reported they investigated allegations of misconduct.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted independent monitoring of prison conditions by the government-mandated Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR), local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations, diplomatic personnel, and media throughout the year, including both scheduled and ad hoc visits.

Improvements: To ease prison overcrowding, and as part of executive clemency issued by President Weah, the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation released 127 inmates, including those convicted of armed robbery or sexual assault.

The availability of medical supplies and medication available in the prisons improved. The Ministry of Health assigned medical personnel to six out of the 16 prisons in the country and lobbied for medical training for correction officers in each of the prisons.

Major renovations of the F building roof in Monrovia Central Prison were completed.

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 arrest or detention in court. The government did not always observe these prohibitions and rights.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

In general, the law required police to have warrants issued by a magistrate to make arrests. The law allowed for arrests without a warrant if the necessary paperwork was filed immediately afterwards for review by the appropriate authority. Nonetheless, arrests often were made without judicial authorization, and warrants were sometimes issued without sufficient evidence.

The law required authorities to arraign or release detainees within 48 hours. Detainees generally were informed of the charges against them upon arrest but were not always brought before a judge for arraignment within 48 hours. The law also provided that, once arraigned, a criminal defendant had to be indicted no later than the next succeeding term of court after arrest. If the indicted defendant was not tried within the next succeeding court term and no cause was given, the law prescribed the case against the defendant

be dismissed; nevertheless, cases were rarely dismissed on either ground, making this one of the most frequent abuses of the law. Approximately 60 percent of pretrial detainees, especially those held for felony offenses, were detained for more than two terms of court without a hearing.

According to the INCHR, a detainee's access to a hearing before a judge sometimes depended on whether there was a functioning court or available transportation in the area. The INCHR further stated some jurisdictions occasionally lacked both a prosecutor and a public defender, and the magistrate judge proceeded without them. Additionally, some magistrates solicited money from complainants to transport the accused or convicted to detention.

Detainees had the right to prompt access to counsel, and, if indigent, an attorney provided by the state in criminal cases. The national public defender office was short staffed and faced logistical constraints that hindered visits to rural courts. Two domestic NGOs also provided legal assistance to some indigent defendants.

The bail system was inefficient and susceptible to corruption. The INCHR and other civil rights observers reported judges misused the bail system, viewing it as punitive rather than a way to regulate appearance in court. Some judges reportedly used the possibility of bail to solicit bribes.

Although official policy allowed detained suspects to communicate with others, including a lawyer or family member, inadequate telephone services

resulted in many inmates being unable to communicate with anyone outside of the detention facility.

Pretrial Detention: Although the law provided for a defendant to receive an expeditious trial, lengthy pretrial detention was a serious problem. In some cases, the length of pretrial detention equaled or exceeded the maximum length of sentence that could be imposed for the alleged crime.

The use of detention as a punitive measure, failure to issue indictments in a timely manner, lack of a functioning bail system, poor court recordkeeping, failure of judges to assign court dates, ineffective assistance of defense counsel, and a lack of resources for public defenders all contributed to prolonged pretrial detention.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provided for an independent judiciary, but the government generally did not respect judicial independence and impartiality. Judges reportedly solicited bribes to try cases, grant bail to detainees, award damages in civil cases, or acquit defendants in criminal cases. Defense attorneys and prosecutors reportedly directed defendants to pay bribes to secure favorable decisions from judges, prosecutors, and jurors or to have court staff place cases on the docket for trial. Some judicial officials and prosecutors appeared subject to pressure, and the outcome of

some trials appeared to be predetermined, especially when the accused persons were politically connected or socially prominent.

Trial Procedures

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

Defendants also had the right to a trial without delay and to have adequate time and facilities to prepare their defense, although these rights often were not observed. Defendants were generally presumed innocent under the law, and they had the right to confront and question prosecution or plaintiff witnesses, present their own evidence and witnesses, and appeal adverse decisions. These rights were sometimes not observed.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

f. Transnational Repression

Not applicable.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

Not applicable.

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

The constitution prohibited such actions, and there were no reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

i. Conflict-related Abuses

On June 21, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Enforcement and Removal Operations in Detroit, Michigan deported alleged warlord Varfley Dolley to Liberia. Dolley was a former executive of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy, a rebel group that participated in the country's first civil war, who was accused by the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of widespread human rights abuses, including rape, killings, torture, and sexual enslavement.

The government did not implement recommendations on accountability measures detailed in the 2009 TRC report for crimes committed during the country's two civil wars.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

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

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected these rights, although with some unofficial limits.

Freedom of Expression: Individuals could generally criticize the government publicly or privately, but government officials used the threat of civil defamation suits to place limits on free expression, and self-censorship was widespread as a result.

Violence and Harassment: Press associations reported government officials occasionally harassed newspaper and radio station owners, as well as individual journalists, because of their political opinions and reporting.

On September 24, unidentified individuals broke into the facilities of leading independent radio station OK FM 99.5 in Monrovia and damaged equipment, leading to a disruption in broadcasting. The Press Union of Liberia (PUL) denounced the attack as a deliberate attempt to obstruct the dissemination of independent news and information in the lead-up to the October 10 national elections.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other

Media, Including Online Media: Although generally able to express a wide variety of views, some journalists practiced self-censorship to avoid harassment. Some but not all media outlets avoided criticizing government officials due to fear of legal sanction and potential loss of government advertising, which, according to the Press Union, was the largest source of media revenue. Other outlets avoided addressing sensitive human rights topics such as female genital mutilation/cutting.

Libel/Slander Laws: Criminal libel and slander laws were repealed in 2019; nonetheless, government officials occasionally used the threat of civil defamation suits to intimidate critics or political opponents. For example, on July 14 a civil law court ordered the shutdown of Spoon Network, which had been embroiled in a defamation suit filed by Wilmot Smith, the former Deputy Director General of the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services. The PUL denounced the order, considering it a direct infringement on freedom of expression and the free press. Following the closure, the government clarified it was not a party to Smith's lawsuit, but the PUL noted Wilmot Smith was a close confidante of Finance Minister Samuel Tweh and a member of the ruling Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) party.

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 provided for the freedoms of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

A variety of civil society groups conducted demonstrations throughout the year, including outside the legislature and the Foreign Ministry. On July 19, unidentified individuals disrupted an anti-corruption rally in central Monrovia and began to throw stones at the attendees. Liberian People's Party (LPP) presidential candidate Tiawan Gongloe blamed the government for its failure to provide protection for the gathering even though the LPP had informed the government regarding the date and time of the rally in advance.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-reports/>.

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

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

Foreign Travel: In an effort to reduce the risk of human trafficking, authorities imposed a 90-day moratorium on international travel by persons seeking domestic service employment outside the country.

e. Protection of 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.

Access to Asylum: The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government established a system for providing protection to refugees. The law forbade the forced return of refugees, their families, or other persons who could be subjected to persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, and the government generally respected those rights for refugees.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to individuals who might not qualify as refugees. Asylum seekers who presented themselves to UNHCR and the Liberian Refugee Repatriation Resettlement Commission were provided temporary protection while their cases were being adjudicated.

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: National elections were widely reported to be fair but not free of abuses or irregularities.

On October 10, the country conducted presidential and legislative elections, which observers characterized as free, fair, and largely peaceful. After lengthy legal challenges to first-round results, Joseph Boakai won the presidential runoff on November 14 with 50.64 percent of the vote in a process deemed free and fair.

In its official preliminary observation report on the presidential and legislative elections, the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) Election Observer Mission deemed the proceedings as generally peaceful.

Andreas Schieder, the head of the EU Election Observers Mission (EU-EOM) in Liberia, commended the National Election Commission poll workers for their training and knowledge during the elections. Schieder stated that while some cases experienced delays, the overall organization of the elections appeared to be functioning well.

Integrity Watch Liberia released a report highlighting widespread violations of campaign financing in the country. The ruling CDC party was identified as the primary violator, with the opposition Unity Party ranking second in violations. The violations included the misuse of state properties, exceeding legal limits for campaign contributions and expenditures, and the disproportionate use of state resources by the CDC.

The EU-EOM also accused President George Weah and his CDC party of using state resources to gain an unfair political advantage. It noted the disproportionate allocation of airtime to the ruling party on state-owned media. Head of the Delegation of the European Parliament, Leopoldo López Gil, raised concerns regarding the misuse of state resources during the presidential runoff election. He emphasized the incumbent's advantage in campaign financing, noting the misuse of government buildings, vehicles, and staff for campaigning during working hours. López Gil highlighted the

lack of enforcement of campaign finance regulations, leading to an uneven playing field.

In early November, the LNP charged 21 persons with multiple crimes in connection with the September 29 election-related violence in Lofa County, which left at least two persons dead and several injured, when supporters of the main opposition Unity Party and the ruling CDC clashed in the streets. International observers from the EU, ECOWAS, and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy of Africa expressed disappointment in the LNP for selectively transferring partisans of the main opposition Unity Party in Gbarnga, Bong County to be investigated, while excluding members of the ruling CDC party involved.

On November 27, Lawrence K. Williams, who was accused of ramming a vehicle into a crowd of Unity Party supporters in Monrovia on November 20, was charged with murder, aggravated assault, and recklessly endangering another person. Witnesses attested that Williams drove with the headlights off and the front passenger door open during the incident. The court records noted the collision resulted in the injury of approximately 27 persons and damage to property, with three victims dying while receiving medical attention.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable

Groups: Observers believed traditional and cultural factors, societal pressure, and financial constraints limited women's participation.

Section 4. Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government generally did not implement the law effectively. There were numerous reports of government corruption.

Corruption: On September 5, the *FrontPage Africa* newspaper reported the government issued a batch of diplomatic passports to British, Kenyan, Turkish, and Croatian nationals in August. Sources familiar with these issuances disclosed to the newspaper certain officials and lawmakers of the ruling CDC party collaborated with senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and various other government ministries and agencies, to facilitate the issuance of diplomatic passports to foreign individuals in exchange for payments ranging from \$200,000 to \$350,000 per passport.

The Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) was established by law in 2008 with a mandate to investigate and prosecute acts of corruption, as well as to educate the public regarding the ills of corruption. In July 2022, an amended law gave a new anti-corruption commission more powers and established an open and competitive process for selecting commissioners. The former Executive Director of the LACC, Edwin Kla Martin, challenged the legislature's constitutional power to make and alter laws without limitation. In January, the Supreme Court ruled against Martin and in September, the senate confirmed seven individuals nominated by President Weah to serve as commissioners.

For additional information regarding 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 national 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 often were cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The INCHR had a mandate to promote and protect human rights; investigate and conduct hearings on human rights abuses; propose changes to laws, policies, and administrative practices and regulations; and counsel the government on the implementation of national and international human rights standards. The INCHR also created a monitoring unit to receive and analyze reports from field offices and prepare quarterly and annual reports consistent with its statutory mandate. Human rights groups generally considered the INCHR independent and effective.

The government had not implemented most of the TRC recommendations contained in its 2009 TRC.

The Human Rights Protection Unit of the Ministry of Justice convened coordination meetings to provide a forum for domestic and international human rights NGOs to identify abuses to the government, but a lack of national funding hampered its ability to implement recommendations from civil society.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalized rape of a woman or man, including spousal and domestic or intimate partner rape and other forms of domestic and sexual violence including so-called corrective rape of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons, but the government did not enforce the law effectively, and rape was a serious and pervasive problem.

Government officials allegedly committed acts of sexual violence. In February, the Commander of the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency Maryland Detachment, Sergeant Joseph Targeddine, allegedly sexually assaulted a girl age 16.

Although illegal, domestic violence was a widespread problem. The maximum penalty for conviction of domestic violence was six months' imprisonment, but the government did not enforce the law effectively. Civil society observers suggested the lack of speedy trials led some survivors to seek redress outside the formal justice system.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law did not prohibit the practice of FGM/C, and NGOs reported there was little political will within the legislature to address the issue.

On February 6, the National Council of Chiefs and Elders in Liberia, headed by Chief Zanzan Karwor, instituted a national ban on FGM/C and closed a traditional rural school in Montserrado County, replacing it with a heritage and vocational center to train FGM/C practitioners with alternative skills for livelihood. During the year, local authorities closed three secretive rural so-called bush schools, where the practice took place, in three separate counties and worked with UN Women to provide training to residents.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: The law prohibited sexual harassment in the workplace, but it was a significant problem at work and in schools. UNICEF reported sexual harassment in schools in the form of "sex for grades" and "sex for school fees" was common.

Discrimination: The law prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, color, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, or HIV and AIDS status. The government did not effectively enforce

the law. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar violations and were seldom applied. Mechanisms for receiving and acting on complaints were inadequate, and the government took no efforts to strengthen antidiscrimination regulations.

The law provided the same legal status and rights for women as for men, but those laws were not respected in certain rural areas of the country. In rural areas, traditional practices often did not recognize a woman's right to inherit land, and women experienced economic discrimination based on cultural traditions discouraging their employment outside the home. Anecdotal evidence indicated women were paid less than men. Programs to educate traditional leaders on women's rights, especially those regarding land rights, made some progress, but authorities often did not enforce those rights in rural areas.

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

The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence, including emergency contraception as part of the clinical management of rape, through one-stop centers. There were no reports postexposure prophylaxis was available as part of clinical management of rape. While public clinics throughout the country provided family planning counseling and a mix of modern contraceptive methods,

access to these services at times proved difficult, particularly for women living in rural areas or those with limited financial means.

According to the 2019-2020 *Liberia Demographic and Health Survey* (LDHS), the most recent available, 25 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 reported using a modern form of contraception. Among sexually active unmarried women, 45 percent used modern family planning, while 23 percent of married women used a modern method. Unmet needs for family planning, defined as the percentage of sexually active women who wanted to postpone their next birth or limit their number of births but did not use a modern method of contraception, increased slightly from 31 percent in 2013 to 33 percent, according to the LDHS. Almost half of all respondents between ages 15 and 19 reported an unmet need for family planning, primarily for the spacing of children.

The LDHS estimated the maternal mortality rate was 742 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. Postpartum hemorrhage was the leading cause of maternal mortality and accounted for approximately 34 percent of maternal deaths. In remote areas, clinics often lacked basic infrastructure and facilities, and midwives and health workers sometimes delivered babies at night without electricity. According to the survey, teenage childbearing accounted for 30 percent of all births in 2019-2020. FGM/C was a problem and contributed to maternal morbidity.

There were no legal barriers related to menstruation and access to menstruation hygiene that impacted the ability of women and girls to participate equally in society, including access to education, but economic, social, and cultural barriers remained.

The law was silent regarding school attendance of pregnant students, leaving school administrators to decide the course of action. Adolescent girls were often denied access to school if they became pregnant, and students who became pregnant while enrolled often did not return until after they gave birth due to fear of being bullied and stigmatized. Pregnant girls were sometimes expelled from school due to pregnancy or motherhood status.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

Although the law prohibited ethnic discrimination, the constitution restricted citizenship and land ownership to those of “Negro descent” only.

Children

Education: Students with disabilities and those in rural counties were most likely to encounter significant barriers to education.

Child Abuse: The law criminalized child abuse, but it was not effectively enforced. Child abuse was a widespread and persistent problem, and there were numerous cases reported throughout the year, including of sexual

violence against children. The government engaged in periodic public awareness campaigns to combat child rape.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: Laws regarding the minimum age for marriage were inconsistent, setting the minimum marriage age for all persons at either 18 or 21 but also permitting girls to marry at age 16. The lowest median ages of marriage were in rural areas and the median age of first marriage generally increased with growing wealth among women age 25 to 40.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibited the commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. Authorities generally enforced the law, although girls were exploited, including in commercial sex in exchange for money, food, and school fees. The minimum age for consensual sex was 18, and statutory rape was a criminal offense that carried a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Orphaned children were particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Antisemitism

There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents against the country's small Jewish community.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The law prohibited consensual same-sex sexual conduct. “Voluntary sodomy” was a misdemeanor under criminal law with a penalty of up to one year’s imprisonment. The government enforced the law.

According to the INCHR, on January 12, the LNP charged two assault victims perceived to be LGBTQI+ with sodomy instead of investigating allegations of assault perpetrated against them by residents of Paynesville City.

Violence and Harassment: LGBTQI+ persons recorded instances of assault, harassment, and hate speech. LGBTQI+ crime victims were sometimes afraid to report such crimes, as well as cases of sexual and gender-based violence, to police due to social stigma surrounding sexual orientation and rape, in general, as well as fear police would detain or abuse them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

The LNP’s Community Services Section claimed improvements in obtaining redress for crimes committed against LGBTQI+ persons were a result of

human rights training. Police sometimes ignored complaints by LGBTQI+ persons, but activists noted improvements in treatment and protection after officers underwent training.

Discrimination: The law did not prohibit discrimination by state or nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. The law did not recognize LGBTQI+ couples or their families nor grant them rights equal to the rights of other persons.

Antidiscrimination and equality laws existed, but the government failed to enforce them.

LGBTQI+ persons faced discrimination in access to education, employment, health care, and housing.

There were media and civil society reports of harassment of persons based on their real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, with some newspapers targeting the LGBTQI+ community. Anti-LGBTQI+ hate speech was a persistent problem. Influential figures, such as government officials and traditional and religious leaders, made public homophobic and transphobic statements. The INCHR reported politicians and traditional leaders who referred to LGBTQI+ persons as “deviants influenced by foreign governments” fueled homophobia in the country.

During the campaign period preceding the country's national elections during the year, several candidates were openly hostile towards LGBTQI+ persons, leaving them feeling targeted in the electoral process.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Legal gender recognition was not available.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: There were no known reports of involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices specifically targeting LGBTQI+ individuals.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: There were no legal restrictions on those speaking out on LGBTQI+ topics or on the ability of LGBTQI+ organizations to register or convene events, but few engaged in these permissible activities due to fear of verbal or physical abuse. Anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment was a regular part of political, social, and religious discourse.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. The government did not provide information and communication on disability concerns in accessible formats. Sign language interpretation was often not provided for deaf persons in criminal proceedings or in the provision of state services.

According to a report by the African Child Policy Forum, there were some ritual attacks against children with disabilities who were accused of witchcraft. According to the National Union of Organizations for the Disabled, persons with disabilities were more likely to be subjected to gender-based violence.

The constitution prohibited discrimination against persons with disabilities, but these prohibitions were not always enforced.

Persons with disabilities faced discrimination in employment, housing, and health care.

Election ballots were not available in braille, but visually impaired voters could be accompanied by a helper in the voting booth.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

The law classified violence by mob as a crime. Nevertheless, mob violence and vigilantism, attributed in part to the public's lack of confidence in police and the judicial system, were common and often resulted in deaths and injuries. For example, on January 18, a group of angry commercial motorcyclists set a police station on fire in Grand Bassa County in retaliation for a cyclist who allegedly drowned after an altercation with officers belonging to the Liberia Drugs Enforcement Agency. Thirteen persons were arrested and charged with multiple crimes to include rioting, theft of property, arson, and criminal mischief.

Although mob violence sometimes targeted alleged criminals, it was difficult to determine underlying reasons for attacks because cases were rarely prosecuted.

The law prohibited “discrimination and vilification” of persons with HIV and AIDS, but the LDHS found no measurable change since 2007 in popular attitudes, which remained broadly discriminatory toward persons with HIV and AIDS.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provided workers, except public servants and employees of state-owned enterprises, the right to freely form or join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes or engage in “go-slow” (a protest by workers in which they deliberately worked slowly). The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and allowed unions to conduct their activities without interference by employers, parties, or government. The law provided that employers and workers could establish and join organizations of their own choosing, without prior authorization, and subject only to the rules of the organization concerned. The law provided that labor organizations and associations had the right to draw up their constitutions and rules on electing their representatives, organizing their

activities, and formulating their programs. There was no minimum number of workers needed, and foreigner and migrant members were not prohibited, although a long approval process or denial on arbitrary grounds could be hurdles to registration.

The government's Labor Practices Review Board had the right to supervise trade union elections, which the International Confederation of Trade Unions termed an interference in a union's right to organize its administration. Trade and labor unions were registered with, and licensed by, the Ministry of Labor, which represented the government in the labor and employment sector. The Ministry's Bureau of Trade Union Affairs and Social Dialogue coordinated activities of trade unions and employer organizations in the labor sector.

Public-sector employees and employees of state-owned enterprises were prohibited under law from unionizing and bargaining collectively, but they could join associations and process grievances through the Civil Service Agency grievance board. The law outlined the rules and regulations governing the conduct of the civil service as well as addressing matters affecting civil servants. Representatives from the Ministry of Labor, Labor Congress, and Civil Servants Association argued the law conflicted with the constitution, which afforded the right to associate in trade unions. Some public sector associations, including the National Teachers' Association for public school teachers and the National Health Workers' Union composed of public health workers, declared themselves to be unions despite the law,

and the Labor Congress and Ministry of Labor backed their efforts to unionize.

In October, Judge Kennedy Peabody of the Sixth Judicial Circuit Civil Law Court “A” ruled to prohibit prohibiting the Civil Service Association of Liberia from becoming a part of the Liberia Labor Congress and preventing a similar case involving the same parties from being filed.

The government did not effectively enforce the law in every sector. The law did not provide adequate protection for strikers, and some protections depended on whether property damage occurred and was measurable. Penalties were not commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights. Penalties were rarely applied against violators. Administrative and judicial procedures were subject to lengthy delays or appeals and to outside interference, such as bribes, coercion, and intimidation by politicians. According to the International Labor Organization, authorities required unions to represent a majority of workers in an enterprise in order to engage in collective bargaining.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at:

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <http://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law established minimum wages for unskilled laborers and for formal-sector workers. The law also allowed workers in the informal sector to bargain for a wage higher than the legal minimum.

The minimum wage of \$0.68 per hour or \$5.50 per day was not less than the poverty estimate of \$2.15 per day. The law provided that working hours could not exceed eight hours per day or 48 hours a week. The law provided for a maximum of five hours of overtime in any week at a rate of 150 percent of the normal rate. Alleged wage, hour, and overtime violations were common in the informal sector.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were up to date and appropriate for the intended industries. For certain categories of industries, the law required employers to employ safety and health officers and establish a safety and health committee in the workplace. Workers could not remove themselves from situations that

endangered health or safety without jeopardizing their employment, and authorities did not effectively protect employees in this situation.

The government did not proactively identify unsafe work conditions. The government did respond to workers' occupational safety and health standards complaints.

The government did not keep records of industrial accidents, but evidence pointed to mining, construction, forestry, fishing, and agriculture as the most dangerous sectors. Hazardous occupations were especially dangerous in the informal sector, such as illegal fishing, logging, and mining, where the lack of regulation and remediation contributed to fatalities and obscured accountability.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The Ministry of Labor enforced wage, hour, and OSH laws. The number of labor inspectors was not sufficient to enforce compliance. Labor inspectors had authority to make unannounced inspections, but not to levy fines or initiate sanctions. There were no meaningful government efforts to prevent violations, particularly for vulnerable populations.

The Labor Congress noted that, overall, occupational health and safety were lacking. The government did not effectively enforce minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws in all sectors, especially in the small and medium enterprise sector. Penalties were less than those for similar crimes, such as fraud or negligence. Penalties were rarely applied against violators because

of political interference or bribery. Observers reported labor inspectors solicited and took bribes to certify compliance with regulations, and the labor inspectorate did not track numbers of individual inspections or violations.

The World Bank reported 90 percent of the population worked in the informal sector. Informal sector workers and those working part time were not covered by wage, hour, OSH, and other labor laws and inspections.