

# SERBIA 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Republic of Serbia is a constitutional, multiparty, parliamentary democracy, led by a president. The country held regular elections for seats in the unicameral National Assembly (parliament) in June 2020 and for the presidency in 2017. International observers stated the country efficiently organized the 2020 elections in difficult circumstances, but the dominance of the ruling party, the opposition parties' lack of access to the media, and the lack of media diversity overall limited voters' choice. A coalition led by President Aleksandar Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party won an overwhelming majority with more than 60 percent of the vote. The Republic Electoral Commission ruled that elections had to be rerun in 234 of 8,253 municipalities – an unusually high number – due to calculation errors in the voting and other confirmed irregularities. In 2017 Vucic, as leader of the Serbian Progressive Party, was elected president, winning approximately 55 percent of the vote in the first round. International observers stated that the 2017 presidential election was mostly free but noted that campaigning ahead of these elections was tilted to benefit the ruling party.

The national police maintain internal security and are under the control of the Ministry of Interior. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. Members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: serious restrictions on free expression and the press, including violence, threats of violence, and unjustified arrests and prosecutions against journalists; numerous acts of serious government corruption; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting persons with disabilities; and crimes, including violence, targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex individuals.

The government took steps to identify, investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed human rights abuses, both in the police force and elsewhere in the government, following public exposure of abuses. Nevertheless, many observers believed numerous cases of corruption, social and domestic violence, attacks on















































































































construction, transportation and storage, agricultural, and industrial sectors of the economy.

Beginning in October 2020 the Labor Inspectorate participated in the Working Group for the Suppression of the Spread of the Infectious Disease COVID-19 and conducted joint and coordinated inspections with other national inspectors, including the inspections of local governments and other state bodies to combat the spread of COVID-19, based on the workplan prepared by the working group.

Between late October and the end of December 2020, labor inspectors, communal militia, and Ministry of Interior representatives carried out 1,724 joint and coordinated labor inspections to control the implementation of antipandemic and preventive measures against the spread of COVID-19. During 200 of the inspections, labor inspectors identified irregularities and as a result, issued 26 decisions and submitted 10 requests to initiate misdemeanor proceedings.

In June two strong explosions occurred at an ammunition plant's facilities in the city of Cacak. There were no injuries in the first explosion on June 4, but the second explosion on June 19 left three workers with non-life-threatening injuries. The Ministry of Defense told Radio Free Europe in September that no conclusions would be released until a full review was complete, and the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Cacak confirmed that the pre-investigation procedure was underway. In parallel with the government's investigation, the company was also conducting an internal review.

**Informal Sector:** Some smaller, private-sector employers were unwilling or unable to pay minimum wages and mandatory social benefits to all their employees, leading those companies to employ unregistered, off-the-books workers. Unregistered workers, paid in cash without social or pension contributions, frequently did not report labor violations because they feared losing their jobs. Informal arrangements existed most often in the trade, hotel and restaurant, construction, agriculture, and transport sectors. The most frequently reported legal violations in the informal sector related to contractual obligations, payment of salaries, changes to the labor contract, and overtime. According to labor force survey data, informal-sector employment represented 13.2 percent of total employment in the second quarter of the year, 2 percent lower than a year

