

BULGARIA 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bulgaria is a constitutional republic governed by a freely elected unicameral National Assembly. A caretaker government headed by a prime minister appointed by the president led the country for much of the year. On November 14, the country held early National Assembly elections as well as the first round of the regular presidential election, which was followed by a runoff on November 21. National Assembly elections were also held on April 4 and July 11. The Central Election Commission did not report any major irregularities in any of the elections. International and local observers considered the three National Assembly elections and presidential election to be generally free and fair but noted some deficiencies.

The Ministry of Interior is responsible for law enforcement, migration, and border control. The State Agency for National Security, which reports to the Prime Minister's Office, is responsible for investigating corruption and organized crime, among other responsibilities. The army is responsible for external security but also can assist with border security. The National Protective Service is responsible for the security of dignitaries and answers to the president. 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: violent treatment by police, including abuse of freedom of assembly; arbitrary arrests; serious problems with judicial independence; serious restrictions on free expression, including violence and threats of violence against journalists, and corporate and political pressure on media; serious acts of corruption; intolerance and discrimination against Roma; violence against children; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons.

Authorities took steps to prosecute and punish officials who committed human rights abuses and corruption, but government actions were insufficient, and impunity was a problem.

Informal Sector: Legal protections and government inspections did not cover informal workers in the gray-market economy which, according to the National Statistical Institute, accounted for 21 percent of the country's GDP in 2019. According to a survey by the Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association presented in February, the share of undeclared work in the country decreased by 41.4 percent over the previous 10 years. During the two-month COVID-19 state of emergency in 2020, the law allowed employers to assign teleworking and work at home and permitted them to force workers to use half of their accrued annual leave. The law also lifted the ban on overtime work for workers and civil servants who assisted the health-care system and police.