

GEORGIA 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Georgia's constitution provides for an executive branch that reports to the prime minister, a unicameral parliament, and a separate judiciary. The government is accountable to parliament. The president is the head of state and commander in chief. The president is elected by members of the electoral college, comprised of all members of parliament, members of the high councils of the autonomous republics, and city council representatives. The country held two rounds of parliamentary elections in October and November 2020. In its final report, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe stated the first round of parliamentary elections was competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected, but "pervasive allegations of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the state reduced public confidence in some aspects of the process." The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe deployed observers for local elections held in two rounds in October. In a preliminary assessment of the first round, the observers stated, "Contestants were able to campaign freely in a competitive environment that was, however, marred by widespread and consistent allegations of intimidation, vote-buying, pressure on candidates and voters, and an unlevel playing field." In a preliminary assessment of the second round, the observers stated, "Candidates were generally able to campaign freely, but allegations of intimidation and pressure on voters persisted. Sharp imbalances in resources and an undue advantage of incumbency further benefited the ruling party and tilted the playing field."

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Security Service of Georgia have primary responsibility for law enforcement and the maintenance of public order. The ministry is the primary law enforcement organization and includes the national police force, the border security force, and the Georgian Coast Guard. The State Security Service is the internal intelligence service responsible for counterintelligence, counterterrorism, and anticorruption efforts. There were indications that at times civilian authorities did not maintain effective control of domestic security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security

Employer abuses of workers' rights persisted, and it was difficult for workers to remove themselves from hazardous situations without jeopardizing their employment. Workers hired on fixed-term contracts frequently feared that calling employers' attention to situations that endangered their health or safety would be cause for the employers not to renew their contracts. The Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center reported that, considering the difficulty of finding a new job as well as a lack of adequate social protection mechanisms in the country, workers were reluctant to be vocal concerning improper and even hazardous working conditions due to fear they would lose their jobs. This situation was particularly acute in some industrial towns where the local population was dependent on a single business operation. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the situation, putting employees in precarious positions due to their social insecurity and inability to demand adequate working conditions.

Conditions for migrant workers were generally unregulated. While the government did not keep specific statistics on migrant laborers in the country, the Public Services Development Agency issued up to 5,000 residence permits annually to migrant workers.

According to GTUC, 33 workers died and 252 were injured in work-related accidents through the end of the year, compared with 39 deaths and 249 injuries in 2020. The mining and construction sectors remained especially dangerous, with reports of injuries, sleep deprivation, and unregulated work hours.

Informal Sector: More than 35 percent of nonagricultural workers worked in the informal sector. Labor laws do not cover workers performing work outside of "organized labor conditions," as most informal employment arrangements do not include employment contracts and thus many informal workers were not protected by the law. NGOs reported informal-sector workers were vulnerable to exploitation. These workers also tended to be the most affected by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.