

prohibiting FGM/C. Although rarely performed on adult women, the practice remained a serious problem for girls younger than age 18 in some regions. According to the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, FGM/C was significantly higher in the Upper East Region with a prevalence rate of 27.8 percent, compared with the national rate of 3.8 percent. According to the 2017-2018 *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey* (MICS), women in rural areas were subjected to FGM/C three times more often than women in urban areas (3.6 percent compared with 1.2 percent). Intervention programs were partially successful in reducing the prevalence of FGM/C, particularly in the northern regions.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence: The constitution prohibits practices that dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a person. Media reported several killings and attempted killings of women for ritual purposes. In the Northern, North East, Upper East, and Upper West Regions, families or traditional authorities banished rural women suspected of “witchcraft” to “witch camps.” Most of those accused of witchcraft were older women, often widows. Some women suspected to be witches were killed. The number of persons in the camps dropped significantly since 2020 due to education, support, and reintegration services provided by churches and civil society organizations.

The law criminalizes harmful mourning rites, but such rites continued, and authorities did not prosecute any perpetrators. In the north, especially in the Upper West and Upper East Regions, some widows were required to undergo certain rites to mourn or show devotion for a deceased spouse. The most prevalent widowhood rites included a one-year period of mourning, tying ropes and padlocks around the widow’s waist or neck, forced sitting beside the body of the deceased spouse until burial, solitary confinement, forced starvation, shaving the widow’s head, and smearing clay on the widow’s body. In the Northern and Volta Regions along the border with Togo, “wife inheritance,” the practice of forcing a widow to marry a male relative of her deceased husband, continued.

Sexual Harassment: No law specifically prohibits sexual harassment, although authorities prosecuted some sexual harassment cases under assault and other provisions of the criminal code.

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

In January the government added sexual and reproductive health services to the National Health Insurance Scheme for all women, including survivors of sexual violence. This comprised multiple methods of family planning including emergency contraception as part of method mix and as part of the clinical management of rape cases, and long-term contraception free of additional charge.

According to the 2017 *UN Trends in Maternal Mortality* report, the maternal mortality rate was 308 per 100,000 live births. The Ghana Health Service indicated that neonatal and maternal deaths had increased since the outbreak of COVID-19, primarily due to the inability to provide adequate services in rural areas.

Discrimination: The constitution and law provide for the same legal status and rights for women as for men under family, labor, property, nationality, and inheritance laws. While the government generally made efforts to enforce the law, predominantly male tribal leaders and chiefs are empowered to regulate land access and usage within their tribal areas. Within these areas women were less likely than men to receive access rights to large plots of fertile land. Widows often faced expulsion from their homes by their deceased husband's relatives, and they often lacked the awareness or means to defend property rights in court.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law protects members of racial or ethnic minorities from violence and discrimination, but it was unclear whether the government enforced the law effectively.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived by birth in the country or outside if either of the child's parents or one grandparent is a citizen. Children unregistered at birth or without identification documents could be excluded from accessing education, health care, and social security. Although having a birth certificate is required to enroll in school, authorities indicated children would not be denied

access to education based on a lack of documentation. According to the MICS, birth registration increased with levels of education and wealth and was more prevalent in urban centers than in rural areas. Authorities adjudicated birth registrations in a nondiscriminatory manner.

Education: The constitution provides for tuition-free, compulsory, and universal basic education for all children from kindergarten through junior high school. The government continued to implement tuition-free enrollment in senior high school.

Girls in the northern regions and rural areas throughout the country were less likely to continue and complete their education due to the weak quality of educational services, inability to pay expenses related to schooling, prioritization of boys' education over girls', security problems related to distance between home and school, lack of dormitory facilities, and inadequate sanitation and hygiene facilities.

Child Abuse: The law prohibits sex with a child younger than age 16 with or without consent and sexual abuse of minors. There continued to be reports of male teachers sexually assaulting and harassing both female and male students. Physical abuse and corporal punishment of children were concerns. Local social workers rarely effectively monitored cases of child abuse and neglect.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The minimum legal age for marriage is 18. Child, early, and forced child marriage, while illegal, remained a problem. According to the MICS, child marriage was highest in the Northern, North East, Upper East, Savannah, and Volta Regions; it was lowest in the Greater Accra, Ashanti, and Ahafo Regions.

The Child Marriage Unit of the Domestic Violence Secretariat of the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection continued to lead governmental efforts to combat child marriage. The ministry's *National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage in Ghana (2017-26)* prioritized interventions focused on strengthening government capacity to address neglect and abuse of children, girls' education, adolescent health, and girls' empowerment through skills development. The National Advisory Committee to End Child Marriage and the National Stakeholders Forum, with participation from key government and civil society

participants, provided strategic guidance and supported information sharing and learning on child marriage among partners in the country. The Child Marriage Unit maintained a manual with fact sheets and frequently asked questions and used social media accounts to reach wider audiences.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation of children, although it does not specifically mention sale, grooming, or use of children for commercial exploitation. Authorities did not effectively enforce the law. The minimum age for consensual sex is 16. Participating in sexual activities with anyone younger than 16 is illegal. The law criminalizes the use of a computer to publish, produce, procure, or possess child pornography.

Infanticide, Including Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: The law bans infanticide, but several NGOs reported that communities in the Upper East Region killed “spirit children” born with physical disabilities who were suspected of being possessed by evil spirits. Local and traditional government entities cooperated with NGOs to raise public awareness concerning causes of and treatments for disabilities and to rescue children at risk of ritual killing. Authorities enforced governing prohibitions on infanticide.

Displaced Children: The migration of children to urban areas continued due to economic hardship in rural areas. Children often had to support themselves to survive, contributing to both child sexual exploitation and the school dropout rate. Girls living on the streets were among the most vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation.

Antisemitism

The Jewish community had a few hundred members. There were no reports of antisemitic acts.

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 criminalizes the act of “unnatural carnal knowledge,” which is defined as “sexual intercourse with a person in an unnatural manner or with an animal.” The offense covers only persons engaged in same-sex male relationships and those in heterosexual relationships. There were no reports of adults prosecuted or convicted for consensual same-sex sexual conduct, but police used the law to harass the LGBTQI+ community through detention, extortion, and arbitrary arrest. Police and local leaders also used arrests to “out” members of the LGBTQI+ community to humiliate and alienate them. In Cape Coast, police detained two lesbian community members at a house that had served as a gathering spot for LGBTQI+ community members. The landlord subsequently terminated the lease, specifically citing their opposition to the LGBTQI+ community.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: The LGBTQI+ community reported police violence against LGBTQI+ persons. Civil society groups and activists reported police were resistant to investigate claims of assault or violence against LGBTQI+ persons. Stigma, intimidation, and the perceived negative attitude of some police toward LGBTQI+ persons were factors in preventing survivors from reporting incidents of abuse. Activists noted great difficulty in engaging officials on problems facing the LGBTQI+ community because of social and political sensitivity. LGBTQI+ persons in prison were vulnerable to harassment, as well as sexual, mental, and physical abuse, which authorities generally did not investigate.

Attacks by private citizens on LGBTQI+ persons were common and growing in number. The attacks were increasingly well organized, and in some cases targeted outspoken activists. The attacks were sometimes shared on social media to further humiliate and ostracize LGBTQI+ persons.

Increasing harassment forced many members of the LGBTQI+ community to relocate from their homes or sever familial relationships. Two different LGBTQI+ NGOs, one in the Central Region and the other in the Volta Region, reported they had to relocate their operations because of community and police harassment. Civil society groups reported that several LGBTQI+ community members permanently left the country because of increasing hate speech and harassment.

In August unknown assailants in the Ashanti Region kidnapped, assaulted, and blackmailed a prominent human rights advocate because of their LGBTQI+ advocacy. Police never identified the perpetrators.

Discrimination: The law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. LGBTQI+ persons faced widespread discrimination in education and employment. Evictions, divorce, loss of employment, extortion, denial of financial services, public humiliation, and community ostracism were common. For the second year in a row, there was a notable increase in anti-LGBTQI+ statements by high-ranking political figures and by religious and community leaders, and media coverage of these statements. Most activists believed the introduction of an anti-LGBTQI+ bill in parliament spurred on the statements. Some members of parliament called on LGBTQI+ persons to not seek medical services and for medical providers to refuse to treat them.

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

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: There was an increasing number of reported instances of so-called conversion therapy or practices, including pressuring LGBTQI+ persons to “recant” their identity and reveal the identities of others in the LGBTQI+ community. In July the Ghana Registered Nurses and Midwives Association ran a workshop for medical professionals promoting conversion “therapies,” and the chief executive of the country’s Mental Health Authority called homosexuality “a mental disorder.”

Restrictions on Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: LGBTQI+ persons were unable to meet in public or demonstrate, and landlords closed many private spaces community members used for meetings. Media coverage regarding homosexuality and related topics was usually negative. In June community leaders and local politicians illegally removed billboards in Accra and Tamale promoting LGBTQI+ tolerance. Police did not conduct investigations.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities and protects the rights of persons with disabilities to have access to health services, information, communications, transportation, public spaces such as schools and public buildings, the judicial system, and other state services, but the government did not effectively enforce the law. Few adults with disabilities had employment opportunities in the formal sector.

Persons with both mental and physical disabilities, including children, were frequently subjected to abuse and intolerance. Authorities did not regularly investigate and punish violence and abuses against persons with disabilities. Children with disabilities who lived at home were sometimes tied to trees or under market stalls and were caned regularly; families reportedly killed some of them.

Thousands of persons with mental disabilities, including children as young as seven, were sent to spiritual healing centers known as “prayer camps,” where mental disability was often considered a “demonic affliction.” Some residents were chained for weeks in these environments, denied food for days, and physically assaulted. Officials took few steps to implement the law that monitored prayer camps and barred involuntary or forced treatment. International donor funding helped support office space and some operations of the Mental Health Authority.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Chieftaincy disputes, which frequently resulted from the lack of a clear chain of succession, competing claims regarding land and other natural resources, and internal rivalries and feuds, continued to result in deaths, injuries, and destruction of property. According to the West Africa Center for Counter Extremism, chieftaincy disputes and ethnic violence were the largest sources of insecurity and instability in the country. Disputes continued among Fulbe herdsmen as well as between Fulbe herdsmen and farmers that at times led to violence. The government generally sought to tamp down violence and encourage dialogue and

peaceful resolution of disputes.

The law penalizes discrimination against a person with HIV and AIDS, although the government did not effectively enforce the law. The law contains provisions that protect and promote the rights and freedoms of persons with, as well as those who are suspected of having, HIV and AIDS. These rights include the right to health, education, insurance benefits, employment, privacy, confidentiality, nondisclosure of HIV and AIDS status without consent, and the right to hold a public or political office.

Discrimination against persons with HIV and AIDS remained a problem. Fear of stigma, and fear that getting tested would mean immediate labeling as gay, discouraged persons from getting tested for HIV infection. As a result, many of those who tested positive avoided seeking timely care. HIV-positive persons faced discrimination in employment and often were forced to leave their jobs or houses. The government and NGOs subsidized many centers that provided free HIV testing and treatment for citizens, although high patient volume and the physical layout of many clinics often made it difficult for the centers to protect confidentiality. The Ghana AIDS Commission continued to raise concerns regarding how high levels of stigma and discrimination contributed to the spread of HIV in the country.

There were frequent reports of violence against suspected criminals in “mob justice” incidents, and the failure of police to prevent or respond to them. Community members often saw such vigilantism as justified considering the difficulties and constraints facing the judicial and police sectors.

In the Northern, North East, Upper East, and Upper West Regions, families or traditional authorities banished rural persons suspected of “witchcraft” to “witch camps.” A June academic study estimated 16 ritual killings by unknown perpetrators occurred each year, with most of the victims being children or young adults.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers, except for members of the armed forces,

police, the Ghana Prisons Service, and other security and intelligence agency personnel, to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination but does not provide adequate protection against discrimination. The law requires trade unions or employers' organizations to obtain a certificate of registration and be authorized by the chief labor officer, who is an appointed government official. Union leaders reported that fees for the annual renewal of trade union registration and collective bargaining certificates were exorbitant and possibly legally unenforceable.

The law provides for the right to conduct legal strikes but restricts that right for workers who provide "essential services." Workers in export-processing zones are not subject to these restrictions. The minister of employment and labor relations designated a list of essential services, which included many sectors that fell outside of the essential services definition set by the International Labor Organization. The list included services carried out by utility companies (such as water and electricity), ports and harbors, medical centers, and the Bank of Ghana. These workers have the right to bargain collectively. In these sectors parties to any labor disputes are required to resolve their differences within 72 hours. The right to strike may also be restricted for workers in private enterprises whose services are deemed essential to the survival of the enterprise by a union and an employer. A union may call a legal strike only if the parties fail to agree to voluntary arbitration or if the dispute remains unresolved at the end of arbitration proceedings.

The law provides a framework for collective bargaining. A union must obtain a collective bargaining certificate from the chief labor officer to engage in collective bargaining on behalf of a class of workers. In cases where there are multiple unions in an enterprise, the majority or plurality union would receive the certificate but must consult with or, where appropriate, invite other unions to participate in negotiations. The certificate holder generally includes representatives from the smaller unions. Workers in decision-making or managerial roles are not provided the right to collective bargaining under the law, but they may join unions and enter into labor negotiations with their employers.

The National Labor Commission is a government body with the mandate of requiring employers and unions to comply with labor law. It also serves as a forum for arbitration in labor disputes. The government effectively enforced

applicable laws, but penalties were not commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights, such as discrimination. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference and provides reinstatement for workers dismissed under unfair pretenses. It protects trade union members and their officers against discrimination if they organize.

The government generally protected the right to form and join independent unions and to conduct legal strikes and bargain collectively, and workers exercised these rights. Although the law makes specified parties liable for violations, specific penalties are not set forth. An employer who resorts to an illegal lockout is required to pay the workers' wages. Some instances of subtle employer interference in union activities occurred. Many unions did not follow approved processes for dealing with disputes, reportedly due to the perceived unfair and one-sided application of the law against the unions. The process was often long and cumbersome, with employers generally acting when unions threatened to withdraw their services or declare a strike. The National Labor Commission faced obstacles in enforcing applicable sanctions against both unions and employers, including limited ability to enforce its mandate and insufficient oversight.

Trade unions engaged in collective bargaining for wages and benefits with both private and state-owned enterprises without government interference. No union completed the dispute resolution process involving arbitration, and there were numerous unsanctioned strikes.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor. The government took some steps to effectively enforce the law. The penalties for forced labor were not commensurate with those for other analogous serious crimes such as kidnapping, but the government prosecuted and imposed penalties in some cases of labor trafficking. Human trafficking, including forced labor, persisted with insufficient investigation and prosecution. NGOs, civil society, and human rights activists reported corruption within police ranks, the justice system, and political authorities that impeded prosecution, with perpetrators accumulating

significant wealth from trafficking and forced labor, and senior police officers intimidating NGO staff to deter their investigations.

There were reports of forced labor of children and adults in the fishing sector, as well as forced child labor in informal mining, agriculture, domestic labor, portage, begging, herding, quarrying, and hawking (see section 7.c.).

Legal counsel encountered difficulties in investigating trafficking and gathering witnesses to testify, especially in cases perpetrated by a family member or involving victims from another country.

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

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings> and the Department of Labor's *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law stipulates that an employer may not discriminate against a person based on several categories, including age, pregnancy, refugee status, gender, race, color, ethnic origin, religion, social or economic status, or disability, whether that person is already employed or seeking employment. The law does not mention sexual orientation, HIV and AIDS status, or statelessness. The government did not effectively enforce prohibitions on discrimination. Penalties were not commensurate with laws related to civil rights, such as election interference. Penalties were rarely enforced against violators.

Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to women, persons with disabilities, HIV-positive persons, and LGBTQI+ persons (see section 6). For example, reports indicated few companies offered reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities. Many companies ignored or turned down such individuals who applied for jobs. Women in urban centers and those

with skills and training encountered little overt bias, but resistance persisted to women entering nontraditional fields or seeking related vocational education or training. There were insufficient systems in place to protect women from sexual harassment and other violence in the workplace.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law provides for a national minimum wage for some sectors of the economy. A national tripartite committee composed of representatives of the government, labor, and employers set a minimum wage. The minimum wage exceeded the government's poverty line. There was widespread violation of the minimum wage law in the formal economy across all sectors. Many companies did not comply with the law.

The maximum workweek is 40 hours, with a break of at least 48 consecutive hours every seven days. These provisions, however, did not apply to piece workers, domestic workers in private homes, or others working in the informal sector. The law does not prescribe overtime rates and does not prohibit excessive compulsory overtime.

Occupational Safety and Health: The government sets industry-appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) regulations. By law workers may remove themselves from situations that endanger their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. This legislation covers only workers in the formal sector, which employed approximately 10 percent of the labor force. The law reportedly provided inadequate coverage to workers due to its fragmentation and limited scope. Few workers believed they were free to exercise this right.

Accidents in the mining sector were common, often in illegal mining. In September, an illegal pit mine collapsed in the North East Region, killing five miners. The unregulated mining sector attracted Chinese nationals who collaborated with citizens to run illegal mines. In September police arrested a Chinese national who had been deported in 2018 for running a series of illegal mining sites, finding she had illegally acquired Ghanaian identity documents under a false name. Civil society organizations stated that corruption and lax enforcement allowed unsafe illegal mining practices to continue.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations was unable to enforce the wage law effectively. The government also did not effectively enforce health and safety regulations, which are set by a range of agencies in the various industries, including the Food and Drugs Authority, the Ghana Roads Safety Commission, and the Inspectorate Division of the Minerals Commission. The government did not employ sufficient labor inspectors to enforce compliance. Although inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections, they were poorly trained and did not respond to violations effectively. Penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud or negligence. Penalties were never applied against violators. Inspectors did not impose sanctions and were unable to provide data as to how many violations they addressed. In most cases inspectors gave advisory warnings to employers, with deadlines for taking corrective action.

Informal Sector: Approximately 77 percent of the working population was employed in the informal sector, down from approximately 90 percent in 2015, according to the Ghana Statistical Service's *2021 Population of Regions and Districts Report*. Most of these workers were self-employed.

Some labor laws, such as legislation governing working hours, applied to the informal sector and part-time workers, but authorities did not enforce the minimum wage law in the informal sector. Employers widely flouted labor law in the informal sector, and the government did not enforce it. Some informal economy workers could receive social protections through constitutional provision for specific vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities, the aged, and children. Additionally, legislative social insurance schemes covered some self-employed workers for health, disability, and old age benefits. Informal economy workers could contribute on a voluntary basis to private or public social pension funds, but rarely did so.