

Government officials allegedly committed acts of sexual violence. Deputy Police Commissioner Joshua During was accused of raping an LNP colleague at police headquarters, and Harper City Solicitor Thomas Togba Kun was charged with sexually assaulting a law client (see section 1.c.).

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

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law does not prohibit the practice of FGM/C, and NGOs reported there was little political will within the legislature to address the issue. According to the 2019-20 *Liberia Demographic and Health Survey* (LDHS), the most recent data available, 38 percent of girls and women between ages 15 and 49 had undergone FGM/C, with a higher prevalence in the northern regions.

Political resistance to legislative prohibition of FGM/C continued because of the public sensitivity of the topic and its association with cultural traditions of certain tribes and secret societies in populous counties. For example, the Sande society for women and girls combined traditional religious and cultural practices, and members underwent FGM/C as part of their indoctrination ceremonies. On February 21, the National Traditional Council suspended the practice of FGM/C for three years.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace, but it remained a significant problem at work and in schools. UNICEF reported that sexual harassment in schools in the form of "sex for grades" and "sex for school fees" was common. Government billboards and notices in government offices warned against harassment in the workplace.

On January 31, local radio reported that residents of Maryland County staged a protest at the Maryland Palm Oil concession company and accused the company of harassment of women employees.

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. While public clinics throughout the country provided family planning counselling 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 LDHS, 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 want 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 the ages of 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 remained 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 2019-20. FGM/C remained a problem and contributed to maternal morbidity (see the Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting subsection).

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. On September 21, a civil society group petitioned the government to take action to improve menstrual health by abolishing a tax on sanitary pads and providing menstrual changing rooms in schools. There was no evidence the government took such steps at year's end.

The law is 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. For example, after being raped by Anthony Mulbah, a math teacher at the Grace Heritage International School System in Monrovia, a pregnant student aged 14 was expelled on the grounds that her presence at the school would be a shame and disgrace and other students would likely mock her.

Discrimination: By law, women may inherit land and property, are entitled to equal pay for equal work, have the right of equal access to education, and may own and manage businesses. In rural areas, traditional practice or traditional leaders 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 that women's pay lagged that of 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.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

Although the law prohibits ethnic discrimination, racial discrimination is enshrined in the constitution, which restricts citizenship and land ownership to those of "Negro descent" only.

Indigenous Peoples

The law recognizes 16 Indigenous ethnic groups; each speaks a distinct primary language and has a regional concentration. Long-standing disputes among ethnic groups regarding land and other resources continued to contribute to social and political tensions.

Children

Birth Registration: The law stipulates children of "Negro" descent born in the

country to at least one citizen parent are citizens. Children born outside the country to a citizen parent are also considered citizens but are not entitled to birth registration or issued a birth certificate.

Every child born in the country is entitled to birth registration and certification, regardless of the parents' nationality or socioeconomic status, but if a child born in the country is not of "Negro" descent, the child may not acquire citizenship. "Non-Negro" residents, such as members of the large Lebanese community, may not acquire or transmit citizenship. The law requires parents to register their infants within 14 days of birth but, according to the LDHS, only 66 per cent of children younger than age five were registered. Failure to register births did not necessarily result in restricted access to education and other public services.

Education: The law provides for tuition-free compulsory education in public schools through grade nine. The Ministry of Education nevertheless authorized public schools to charge fees for registration, activities, identity cards, entrance and placement exams, and graduation from kindergarten and grade 12. There were additional fees for early childhood education and night school. The fees prevented a significant number of poor students them from attending school.

Sexual and gender-based violence, early marriage and pregnancy, and unequal division of domestic labor were key constraints for girls' education. Girls comprised less than half of all students and graduates in primary and secondary schools, with their proportion decreasing progressively at higher levels of education. Poor and rural girls experienced the highest levels of disadvantage, with 14 percent completing primary school, 2 percent completing secondary school, and 57 percent having no formal education at all (see subsection Women, Reproductive Rights). Students with disabilities and those in rural counties were most likely to encounter significant barriers to education.

Child Abuse: The law provides for children to be protected from 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 public awareness campaigns to combat child rape.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: Laws regarding minimum age for marriage are inconsistent, setting the minimum marriage age for all persons at either 18 or 21 but also permitting girls to marry at age 16. According to UNICEF, in 2020, the most recent data available, 9 percent of girls were forced to marry before age 15 and 36 percent before age 18.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. A 2021 amendment to the law strengthened penalties for child sex trafficking offenses and removed the requirement to demonstrate elements of force, fraud, or coercion. Authorities generally enforced the law, although girls continued to be exploited, including in commercial sex in exchange for money, food, and school fees. The minimum age for consensual sex is 18, and statutory rape is a criminal offense that carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Sexual abuse was a pervasive problem in secondary schools, with many teachers forcing girls to exchange sexual favors for passing grades. Orphaned children remained particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Infanticide, including Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: There were no known reports of infanticide. According to a report by the African Child Policy Forum, there were some ritual attacks against children with disabilities who were accused of witchcraft (see also Persons with Disabilities).

Institutionalized Children: Regulation of orphanages continued to be very weak, and many lacked adequate sanitation, medical care, and nutrition. The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection did not monitor orphanages to ensure provision of basic services. Orphanages relied primarily on private donations and support from international organizations. Many orphans received little or no assistance.

Antisemitism

There were no known reports of antisemitic acts 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 prohibits consensual same-sex sexual conduct. “Voluntary sodomy” is a misdemeanor under criminal law with a penalty of up to one year’s imprisonment. The government enforced the law. Activists reported LGBTQI+ persons faced difficulty obtaining redress for crimes committed against them, including at police stations, because those accused of criminal acts used the survivor’s LGBTQI+ status to justify their crime.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: LGBTQI+ persons recorded instances of assault, harassment, and hate speech. The NGO Lesbian and Gay Association of Liberia reported 14 cases of abuse, including mob violence and assault. On July 13, local radio reported that several residents of Sinoe County threatened to kill “anyone involved with homosexuality.”

LGBTQI+ victims were sometimes afraid to report crimes to police due to social stigma surrounding sexual orientation and rape, as well as fear that police would detain or abuse them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The LNP’s Community Services Section claimed improvements in obtaining redress for crimes committed against LGBTQI+ persons as 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: LGBTQI+ persons faced discrimination in access to housing, health care, employment, and education. There were several reports from activists that property owners refused housing to members of the LGBTQI+ community by either denying applications or evicting residents from their properties. In recognition of the problem, the Ministry of Health had a coordinator to assist minority groups, including LGBTQI+ persons, in obtaining access to health care

and police assistance.

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.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: The government does not allow individuals to change their gender identity marker on legal and identifying documents to bring them into alignment with their gender identity. The option of identifying as “non-binary/intersex/gender non-conforming” was not available.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: 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+ issues 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, as antigay sentiment is 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 constitution prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities, but these prohibitions were not always enforced. Most government buildings were not easily accessible to persons with mobility impairment. 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. Election ballots were not available in braille, but visually impaired voters could be accompanied by a sighted helper in the voting booth.

Persons with disabilities lacked equal access to social, economic, and political opportunities and were among the most vulnerable population groups in the country. Few children with disabilities had access to education. In 2019-20, less than 1 percent of students in public schools had a disability, suggesting that nearly all school-age children with disabilities were out of school. Some students with disabilities attended a few specialized schools, mainly for the blind and deaf, but only through elementary school. Persons with disabilities faced discrimination in employment, housing, and health care. According to the National Union of Organizations for the Disabled, persons with disabilities were more likely to become subjects of gender-based violence.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

The law classifies violence by mob as a crime. Nevertheless, mob violence and vigilantism, due in part to the public's lack of confidence in police and the judicial system, were common and often resulted in deaths and injuries. Although mob violence sometimes targeted alleged criminals, it was difficult to determine underlying reasons for attacks because cases were rarely prosecuted.

The law prohibits “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 provides 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 work slowly). The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and allows unions to conduct their activities without interference by employers, parties, or government. The law provides that employers and workers may establish and join organizations of their own choosing, without prior authorization, and subject only to the rules of the organization concerned. The law provides that labor organizations and associations have the right to draw up their

constitutions and rules on electing their representatives, organizing their activities, and formulating their programs. There is no minimum number of workers needed, and foreigner and migrant members are not prohibited, although a long approval process or denial on arbitrary grounds could be hurdles to registration.

The government's Labor Practices Review Board has 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 are registered with, and licensed by, the Ministry of Labor, which represents the government in the labor and employment sector. The ministry's Bureau of Trade Union Affairs & Social Dialogue coordinates activities of trade unions and employer organizations in the labor sector.

Public-sector employees and employees of state-owned enterprises are prohibited under law from unionizing and bargaining collectively, but they may join associations and process grievances through the Civil Service Agency grievance board. The law outlines the rules and regulations governing the conduct of the civil service as well as addressing issues affecting civil servants. Representatives from the Ministry of Labor, Labor Congress, and Civil Servants Association continued to argue the law conflicts with the constitution, which affords 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.

By law, parties engaged in essential services are prohibited from striking. The law provides that the National Tripartite Council (comprising the Ministry of Labor, Chamber of Commerce, and Federation of Labor Unions) shall recommend to the minister all or part of a service to be an essential service if, in the opinion of the council, the interruption of that service would endanger the life, personal safety, or health of the whole or any part of the population. As of year's end, the council had not published a list of essential services. The act does not apply to public-sector workers, who are under the ambit of the Civil Service Standing Orders.

The law provides for the right of workers to conduct legal strikes, provided they

have attempted and failed to resolve the dispute through conciliation within 30 days of the minister of labor receiving an application for referral to conciliation and have given the Ministry of Labor 48 hours' notice of their intent to strike. On matters of national security, the president may request the minister of labor to appoint a conciliator to mediate any dispute or potential dispute. The law prohibits unions from engaging in partisan political activity and prohibits agricultural workers from joining industrial workers' organizations. It also prohibits strikes if the disputed parties have agreed to refer the issue to arbitration, if the issue is already under arbitration or in court, or if the parties engage in essential services as designated by the National Tripartite Council.

Although the law prohibits antiunion discrimination and provides for reinstatement for workers dismissed for union activity, it allows for dismissal without cause if the company provides the mandated severance package. It does not prohibit retaliation against strikers whose strikes comply with the law if they commit "an act that constitutes defamation or a criminal offense, or if the proceedings arise from an employee being dismissed for a valid reason."

The government did not effectively enforce the law in every sector. The law does 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, most union workers in an enterprise must be represented to engage in collective bargaining.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor, aside from compulsory prison labor, which does not qualify as forced labor, or work defined as "minor communal service." The government did not effectively enforce the law. Resources, inspections, and remediation were inadequate. Criminal penalties were not commensurate with those for other serious crimes, such as kidnapping. Prosecution and conviction rates for human trafficking increased

during the year, and major labor unions noted that child labor abuse existed on some smallholder rubber farms. Gender-based violence on palm plantations, where the work force was dominated by women, continued to take place across the country.

Forced labor, including forced child labor, occurred. Families living in the interior of the country sometimes sent young women and children to live with relatives, acquaintances, or even strangers in Monrovia or other cities, with the understanding the women and children would pursue educational or other opportunities. In some instances, these women and children were forced to work as street vendors, domestic servants, or beggars, or were exploited in commercial sex. There were also credible reports of forced labor on small rubber plantations, family farms, and artisanal mines.

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 <http://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, color, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, or HIV and AIDS status. It does not address refugee or stateless status. The law calls for equal pay for equal work. 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.

Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to gender, disability, HIV-positive status, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Women experienced economic discrimination based on cultural traditions discouraging their employment outside the home in rural areas. Anecdotal evidence indicated that men's pay exceeded that of women. LGBTQI+ persons and persons with

disabilities faced hiring discrimination, and persons with disabilities faced difficulty with workplace access and accommodation (see section 6).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

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

The minimum wage was greater than the World Bank's poverty income level. Many families supplemented minimum-wage earnings with income from subsistence farming, artisanal mining, small-scale marketing, street peddling, and begging.

The law provides for a maximum 48-hour, six-day regular workweek, with a one-hour meal break for every five hours of work. The law stipulates that ordinary hours may be extended by collective agreement up to an average of 53 hours during an agreed period, as well as to 56 hours for workers in seasonal industries. The law provides for overtime pay and prohibits excessive compulsory overtime. The law provides for at least one week of paid leave per year and for severance benefits.

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 requires employers to employ safety and health officers and establish a safety and health committee in the workplace. In practice, however, 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 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.

Some industrial accidents were reported by local media. For instance, on January

11, a train carrying an ArcelorMittal work crew crashed in Nimba County, leaving two employees dead and six seriously injured. This was the fourth such train accident involving the company since 2005.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The Labor Congress noted that, overall, occupational health and safety was 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. The Ministry of Labor's Labor Inspection Department is responsible for enforcing government-established wage, hour, and health and safety standards in the formal sector, but there was no system for monitoring and enforcement in the informal sector. The government did not employ enough labor inspectors to enforce compliance. The Labor Inspectorate did not face a full or partial official moratorium on inspections during the year, including on-site inspections. Penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for similar crimes and were rarely applied. 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.

Informal Sector: The World Bank reported that 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. Informal-sector workers included rock crushers, artisanal miners, agricultural workers, street and market vendors, and domestic workers. In diamond and gold mines, in addition to physical danger and poor working conditions, the industry was unregulated, leaving miners vulnerable to exploitive brokers, dealers, and intermediaries. Illegal mining of gold was rampant throughout the country and posed serious safety risks, resulting in the deaths of several persons every year. No official entity provided social protections for informal-sector workers.