

# About the U.S. Department of State

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Ghana during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government or on behalf of the government; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists and unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists; refoulement of refugees to a country where they would face torture or persecution; serious government corruption; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence and female genital mutilation; laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, although not fully enforced; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting persons with disabilities.

The government took minimal steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

### Section 1.

#### Respect for the Integrity of the Person ✓

##### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

In contrast with 2022, there were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

##### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

##### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses**

While the constitution and law prohibited such practices, there were credible reports police beat and otherwise abused detained suspects and other citizens. Victims were often reluctant to file formal complaints. Police generally denied allegations or claimed the level of force used was justified.

In March the armed forces conducted an operation in Ashaiman, a suburb of Accra, after armed robbers killed an off-duty soldier. Soldiers detained 184 persons, while bystanders filmed the stripping, handcuffing, and beating of dozens of men. Senior defense leaders claimed the operation was justified but regretted the excessive use of force by the soldiers. Authorities later released all 184 persons without charge, and police arrested the armed robbers. The armed forces did not release the results of an internal investigation.

Impunity was a significant problem in the Police Service.

## **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison conditions were generally harsh due to overcrowding, inadequate sanitary conditions, lack of medical care, and substandard and inadequate food.

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** The Prisons Service reported overcrowding was substantially more than existing capacity. Overcrowding at medium-security prisons was considerably higher than in lower-security “camp prisons.”

While prisoners had access to potable water, the quantity and quality of food were inadequate. Meals routinely lacked fruit, vegetables, or meat, forcing prisoners to rely on charitable donations and their families to supplement their diet. Authorities did not provide food to pretrial detainees. If community or family members were not able to provide them, prison officers paid with their own funds.

Prisons were aging or abandoned public or military buildings, which despite improvements had poor ventilation and sanitation, substandard construction, and inadequate space and light. There were not enough toilets available for the number of prisoners, with as many as 100 prisoners sharing one toilet. Toilets often overflowed with excrement. There were no facilities to support intersex or transitioning persons.

Most prison infirmaries had a severely limited supply of medicine. Prisons did not provide dental care. Prisons often lacked ambulances to transport inmates offsite for emergency care.

**Administration:** Each prison designated an officer-in-charge to receive complaints, and they sometimes investigated credible allegations of mistreatment.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government permitted independent monitoring of prison conditions by local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which were independent of government influence. They monitored juvenile confinement and pretrial detention, bail, and recordkeeping procedures. Local news agencies also reported on prison conditions.

## **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court, but the government sometimes disregarded these protections.

### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

The law required detainees be brought before a court within 48 hours of arrest in the absence of a judicial warrant, but authorities frequently detained individuals without charge or a valid arrest warrant for periods longer than 48 hours. The constitution granted a detained individual the right to be informed immediately, in a language the person understood, of the reasons for detention and the right to a lawyer. Most detainees, however, could not afford a lawyer. While the constitution granted the right to legal aid, the government often did not provide it. The government had a Legal Aid Commission providing defense attorneys to those in need, but the commission was often unable to do so due to the limited number of available attorneys and high volume of cases. Defendants in criminal cases who could not afford a lawyer typically represented themselves.

The law required any detainee not tried within a “reasonable time,” as determined by the court, be released either unconditionally or subject to conditions necessary to compel the person’s appearance at a later court date, including use of bail. The definition of “reasonable time,” however,

was never legally determined or challenged in the courts, and courts often struggled to come to timely decisions regarding release and often set bail at prohibitively high levels. As a result, officials rarely observed this provision. The government sought to reduce the population of prisoners in pretrial detention by placing paralegals in some prisons to monitor and advise on the cases of pretrial detainees and assist with the drafting of appeals, as well as by directing judges to visit prisons to review and take appropriate action on pretrial detainee cases. In October the government issued guidelines and encouraged prosecutors and defense attorneys to plea bargain in advance of trial.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** There was a general practice of holding detainees without proper warrant or charge. Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) community were at particular risk for arbitrary arrest.

In September police arrested three men in Kumasi, including one HIV educator, on false charges of promoting homosexuality. Police demanded an immediate cash payment before releasing them hours after the intervention of local activists and paralegals.

**Pretrial Detention:** Lengthy pretrial detention was a serious problem. Officials detained some prisoners for indefinite periods by renewing warrants or simply allowing warrants to lapse while an investigation took place. Other problems included: the government keeping prisoners in extended pretrial detention (up to many months) due to police failure to investigate or follow up on cases; the loss of case files when police prosecutors rotated to other duties every three years; slow trial proceedings marked by frequent adjournments; detainees' inability to meet bail conditions that were often set extremely high even for minor offenses; and inadequate legal representation for criminal defendants. In some instances the length of pretrial detention exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime.

## **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

While the constitution and law provided for an independent judiciary, the government sometimes did not respect judicial independence and impartiality, and the judiciary was subject to unlawful influence and corruption. Judicial officials reportedly accepted bribes to expedite or postpone cases, lose records, or issue favorable rulings.

The government generally respected court orders.

### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution and law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right.

Although defendants had the right to an attorney at public expense if unable to pay, most indigent accused persons represented themselves in court. Defendants had the right not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt, although generally defendants were expected to testify if the government presented sufficient preliminary evidence of guilt.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

## **f. Transnational Repression**

Not applicable.

## **g. Property Seizure and Restitution**

Not applicable.

## **h. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The constitution prohibited such actions, and there were no reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

## **Section 2.**

## **Respect for Civil Liberties ✓**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right.

**Violence and Harassment:** In March prosecutors arrested journalist Noah Dameh and charged him with “false publication” stemming from a May 2022 social media post accusing police and a politically well-connected salt mining company of corruption. Dameh died before further court proceedings occurred.

In September police detained members of the press and some protest participants following an anti-corruption protest in front of Jubilee House, the presidential office. Authorities released the protesters and members of media without charge, most within 24 hours of their detention.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media:** The law provided for criminal penalties for those who posted false or misleading information online, with penalties of up to five years in prison and substantial fines. Unlike in 2022, there were no known examples of authorities censoring media.

**Nongovernmental Impact:** Supporters of opposition political parties in several incidents harassed and attacked journalists. Unknown assailants also occasionally attacked journalists and harassed and intimidated them. For example, in May, a former political operative with the opposition National Democratic Congress and another man entered a radio station and assaulted a journalist while he was hosting a live show. In October, 20 youth activists affiliated with the New Patriotic Party stormed UTV studios during a live broadcast, halting the broadcast. Police arrested and charged the perpetrators of the May and October attacks, who pled guilty and paid a fine.

### **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content.

### **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The constitution and law provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, but the government sometimes restricted the freedom of peaceful assembly.

## Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution and law provided for the freedom of peaceful assembly, but the government sometimes did not respect it. The Police Service and judges' rulings on protest permits sometimes impeded demonstrations or heavily restricted demonstration routes. In September, police arrested or detained for unlawful assembly dozens of protesters and journalists at the Occupy Julorbi protest, after the court denied a permit to protest in front of Jubilee House. Authorities released the journalists without charge but charged 49 of the protesters with violations of public order.

## c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

## d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The constitution provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

**Foreign Travel:** The government banned labor recruitment for work in Gulf countries to curb abuses of migrant workers. The policy, however, impacted legal migration, subsequently increasing worker vulnerability to trafficking. Media investigations revealed some recruitment agencies continued their operations despite the ban.

## e. Protection of Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian offices in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government operated an effective system for providing protection to refugees. The law allowed rejected asylum seekers to appeal and remain in the country until their appeal was adjudicated. A four-member appeals committee, appointed by the minister of the interior, was responsible for adjudicating the appeals, but the process was subject to delays. These delays sometimes meant asylum seekers could not obtain documentation needed for certain services.

**Refoulement:** In July authorities conducted a 10-day operation to forcibly repatriate approximately 1,200 persons (called Burkinabe) to Burkina Faso, more than 80 percent of whom were women and children. UNHCR stated the operation "amounts to a violation of the non-refoulement principle." The expelled Burkinabe were not able to claim asylum due to a delay in the regional registration process. Many on-the-ground reports indicated the operation targeted members of the Fulbe ethnic community. As of November, UNHCR reported no further cases of forced returns to Burkina Faso.

**Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers:** UNHCR reported a few cases of gender-based violence in the refugee camps despite awareness, response, and prevention programs by UNHCR and partners. UNHCR reported constraints regarding legal aid for survivors but indicated in most cases survivors received pro bono services from individual lawyers. UNHCR noted xenophobic attitudes against Burkinabe Fulbe and other indigent migrants.

## f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Not applicable.

## g. Stateless Persons

The country contributed to statelessness through discrimination and exclusion on grounds such as ethnicity (such as stateless Fulbe persons), administration of nationality laws, and birth registration.

### Section 3.

## Freedom to Participate in the Political Process ✓

The constitution and law provided citizens the ability to choose their government through free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

## Elections and Political Participation

**Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections:** Both the 2020 national elections and more recent by-elections were widely reported to be fair and mostly free of abuses and irregularities. Some observers noted concerns regarding the misuse of incumbency, lack of enforcement of regulations on campaign financing, and unequal access to state-owned media during the campaign.

**Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups:** Cultural and traditional factors limited women's participation in political life. Women held significantly fewer leadership positions than men, and women in political campaigns and in elected office faced sexism, harassment, and threats of violence. Research organizations found that insults, concerns regarding physical safety, and overall negative societal attitudes toward women politicians hindered women from entering politics.

### Section 4.

## Corruption in Government ✓

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by government officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were widespread reports of government corruption.

**Corruption:** Corruption was present in all sectors of government, according to media and NGOs, including recruitment into the security services. A January report by Afrobarometer revealed a widespread perception of corruption and waste of public funds. Seventy-seven percent of Ghanaians said the level of corruption in the country increased from the previous year. A 2022 study by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime found 26 percent of the adult population either paid a bribe to a public official or declined to do so when requested.

The Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) conducted investigations into the minister of sanitation, who resigned after media reports of large amounts of cash stolen from her home. OSP investigations led to the arrest of four individuals for corruption, including officials from the Office of the Vice President, the National Insurance Commission, and the Customs Division of the Revenue Authority.

For additional information concerning corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.



## Section 5.

### Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights ✓

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction to monitor and investigate human rights conditions and cases and publish their findings. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to the views of these groups.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** Established as an autonomous agency, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) had offices across the country and mediated and settled cases brought by individuals against government agencies or private companies. CHRAJ operated with no overt interference from the government; however, some critics questioned its ability to investigate high-level cases independently. Its biggest obstacles were low salaries, poor working conditions, and the loss of many of its staff to other governmental organizations and NGOs.

The Police Professional Standards Board also investigated human rights abuses and police misconduct and brought some cases to conclusion, although rarely with any publicity. Observers considered the board to be relatively independent but minimally effective in its deliberations.

## Section 6.

### Discrimination and Societal Abuses ✓

#### Women

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalized the rape of women, including spousal and domestic or intimate partner rape. Rape of a man could be charged as indecent assault, a misdemeanor. Prison sentences for rape ranged from five to 25 years, while indecent assault was a misdemeanor subject to a minimum term of imprisonment of six months. Domestic violence was punishable by a fine or a sentence of up to two years in prison. Rape and domestic violence were serious problems. Although the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Police Service, working with other government offices, sought to address rape and domestic violence, authorities did not enforce the law effectively.

Unless specifically called upon by the DOVVSU, police seldom intervened in cases of domestic violence, in part due to a lack of counseling skills and shelter facilities to assist survivors. Few of the cases in which police identified and arrested suspects for rape or domestic abuse reached court or resulted in convictions due to witness unavailability, inadequate training on investigatory techniques, police prosecutor case mismanagement, and, according to the DOVVSU, lack of resources on the part of survivors and their families to pursue cases. Police could refer survivors to government or NGO-operated shelters. In cases deemed less severe, survivors were returned to their homes. Authorities reported officers occasionally had no alternative but to shelter survivors in the officers' own residences until other arrangements could be made.

There were three government-run shelters for survivors of domestic violence, the Madina Social Welfare Center, the Center for Abused Children, and the DOVVSU's national One-Stop Center collocated with the Criminal Investigations Department of the Police Service.

DOVVSU taught a course on domestic violence case management for police officers assigned to the unit, which had one clinical psychologist to assist domestic violence survivors. DOVVSU

reached out to the public through various social media accounts. It also addressed rape through public education efforts on radio and in communities, participation in efforts to prevent child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence, expansion of its online data management system to select police divisional headquarters, and data management training. Pervasive cultural beliefs regarding gender roles, as well as sociocultural norms and stereotypes, posed additional challenges to combatting domestic violence. A July 2022 study at a teaching hospital in Accra indicated 31 percent of pregnant women experienced domestic violence during pregnancy.

**Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C):** Several laws included provisions prohibiting FGM/C. Although rarely performed on adult women, the practice was 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.

**Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment:** The constitution prohibited practices that dehumanized or injured 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 declined from a high in 2020 due to education, support, and reintegration services provided by churches and civil society organizations. In July parliament criminalized the “naming, accusing, or labelling” of another person as a witch, with offenders facing up to five years in jail.

The law criminalized 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” continued, forcing a widow to marry a male relative of her deceased husband.

**Discrimination:** The constitution and law provided 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 were 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. 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, and employment discrimination occurred.

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

Sexual and reproductive health services were part of 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 February *UN Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000 to 2020* report, the maternal mortality rate was 263 per 100,000 live births. The national Health Service indicated neonatal and maternal deaths had increased since the outbreak of COVID-19, primarily due to the inability to provide adequate services in rural areas. Data on maternal mortality was limited. Cultural and economic factors posed barriers to menstruation hygiene, impacting school absenteeism. Pregnant



adolescent girls and adolescent mothers faced barriers in completing their education or returning to school, with 30 percent of school dropouts attributed to pregnancy.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

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

## **Children**

**Birth Registration:** Authorities denied some Fulbe birth registrations in a discriminatory manner, based on ethnicity, and thus contrary to law.

Children unregistered at birth or without identification documents could be excluded from accessing education, health care, and social security. Although a birth certificate was required to enroll in school, authorities indicated children would not be denied access to education based on a lack of documentation.

**Education:** 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, security problems related to distance between home and school, lack of dormitory facilities, and inadequate sanitation and hygiene facilities.

**Child Abuse:** The law prohibited sex with a child younger than age 16 with or without consent and sexual abuse of children. Authorities did not enforce the law effectively. For example, local social workers rarely monitored cases of child abuse and neglect.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The minimum legal age for marriage was 18. Child, early, and forced child marriage, while illegal, was a problem. The government did not effectively enforce the law. According to the *2017-2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey*, 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 led governmental efforts to combat child marriage. The ministry's *National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage in Ghana (2017-2026)* 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 agencies and civil society organizations, 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 prohibited commercial sexual exploitation of children, although it did not specifically mention sale, grooming, or use of children for commercial exploitation. Participating in sexual activities with anyone younger than 16 was illegal. The law criminalized the use of a computer to publish, produce, procure, or possess child pornography. Authorities did not effectively enforce the law. The minimum age for consensual sex was 16.

**Infanticide, Including Infanticide of Children with Disabilities:** The law banned infanticide, but several NGOs reported communities in the Upper East Region killed "spirit children," or those born with physical disabilities and suspected of being possessed by evil spirits. Authorities enforced governing prohibitions on infanticide.

## Antisemitism

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

## Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *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 criminalized the act of “unnatural carnal knowledge,” which was defined as “sexual intercourse with a person in an unnatural manner or with an animal.” The offense covered 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 false arrests to “out” members of the LGBTQI+ community to humiliate and alienate them.

**Violence and Harassment:** The LGBTQI+ community reported police violence against LGBTQI+ persons. Civil society organizations and activists reported police were reluctant to investigate claims of assault or violence against LGBTQI+ persons. Stigma, intimidation, and the perceived bias of some police against LGBTQI+ persons dissuaded survivors from reporting abuse. Activists noted great difficulty in engaging officials on problems facing the LGBTQI+ community because of social and political prejudice. Evictions, extortion, public humiliation, and community ostracism were common. 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 frequent and growing in number. Many attacks were well organized and sometimes shared on social media to further humiliate and ostracize LGBTQI+ persons. A local civil society organization tracking violence against the LGBTQI+ community reported more than 76 such attacks during the year. In January, assailants disrupted a traditional celebration with a homophobic attack against the chief celebrant. Social media harassment continued following the incident, until the victim left the country. In May, three persons assaulted and robbed a man after contacting him on social media, justifying the assault because they believed the victim was gay. Verified attacks against LGBTQI+ persons occurred in March, June, July, August, and October. Police arrested the perpetrators from the May attack, but the prosecutor repeatedly delayed the case in court. Police never identified the perpetrators in the other cases.

Increased harassment compelled many members of the LGBTQI+ community to relocate from their homes; some family members publicly revealed their LGBTQI+ relatives' identities. Civil society groups reported several LGBTQI+ community members permanently left the country because of increasing hate speech and harassment.

**Discrimination:** The law did not prohibit discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. The law did not explicitly recognize LGBTQI+ couples and their families nor grant them rights equal to those of other persons. LGBTQI+ persons faced widespread discrimination in education, employment, financial services, and housing. For the third year in a row, there was a notable increase of anti-LGBTQI+ statements by high-ranking political figures and by religious and community leaders, as well as media coverage of these statements. Most activists believed the presence of an anti-LGBTQI+ bill in parliament encouraged 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:** There were an increasing number of reported instances of so-called conversion therapies or practices, including by religious organizations, pressuring LGBTQI+ persons to “recant” their identity and reveal the identities of others in the LGBTQI+ community. There were reports of surgeries performed on intersex children. There were no reports of surgeries performed on nonconsenting adult intersex persons.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:** There were no laws restricting individuals from speaking or reporting on LGBTQI+ matters, forming associations, registering organizations, or convening events. LGBTQI+ persons, however, were unable to meet in public or demonstrate, and landlords closed many private spaces community members used for meetings. Media coverage of LGBTQI+ matters was usually negative.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities could not access education, employment, health services, public buildings, or transportation on an equal basis with others. The law prohibited discrimination against persons with disabilities and protected 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. The government did not provide information and communication on disability concerns in accessible formats.

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 monitoring prayer camps and barring involuntary or forced treatment of disabilities.

Few adults with disabilities had employment opportunities in the formal sector, often due to bias and discrimination. Employers rarely offered reasonable accommodation to persons with disabilities.

## **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, resulted in deaths, injuries, and destruction of property. According to the West Africa Centre for Counter-Extremism, chieftaincy disputes and ethnic violence were the largest sources of insecurity and instability in the country. Disputes that occurred among Fulbe herdsman, as well as between herders and farmers, at times led to violence. The government generally sought to tamp down violence and encourage dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes.

The law penalized discrimination against a person with HIV and AIDS, although the government did not effectively enforce the law. The law contained provisions that protected and promoted the rights and freedoms of persons with, as well as those who were suspected of having, HIV and AIDS. These included the rights to health, education, insurance benefits, employment, privacy, confidentiality, nondisclosure of HIV and AIDS status without consent, and holding public or political office.

Discrimination against persons with HIV and AIDS was a problem. Fear of stigma, and fear that getting tested would mean immediate labeling as gay, discouraged persons from getting tested for HIV infection. 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 providing 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 country's AIDS Commission raised concerns regarding how discrimination and high levels of stigma 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.

## Section 7.

### Worker Rights ✓

#### a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers, except for members of the armed forces, police, Prisons Service, and other security and intelligence agencies, to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements. The law prohibited but did not provide adequate protection against antiunion discrimination. The law required trade unions or employers' organizations to obtain a certificate of registration and be authorized by the chief labor officer, an appointed government official. Union leaders reported fees for the annual renewal of trade union registration and collective bargaining certificates were exorbitant.

The law provided for the right to conduct legal strikes but restricted this right for workers who provided "essential services." Workers in export processing zones were not subject to these restrictions. The Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations designated a list of essential services, which included many sectors outside of the essential services definition set by the International Labor Organization. The ministry's 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 had the right to bargain collectively, but parties to any labor dispute were required to resolve their differences within 72 hours. The right to strike could also be restricted for workers in private enterprises whose services were deemed essential to the survival of the enterprise by a union and an employer. A union could call a legal strike only if the parties failed to agree to voluntary arbitration or if the dispute remained unresolved at the end of arbitration proceedings.

The law provided a framework for collective bargaining, which included obtaining a collective bargaining certificate from the chief labor officer. In cases where there were multiple unions in an enterprise, the majority or plurality union would receive the certificate but had to consult with or, where appropriate, invite other unions to participate in negotiations. The certificate holder generally included representatives from the smaller unions. Workers in decision-making or managerial roles were not provided the right to collective bargaining under the law, but they could join unions and enter into labor negotiations with their employers.

The government effectively enforced applicable laws regarding freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike, but penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous crimes such as violating civil rights. Penalties were rarely applied against violators, and specific penalties were usually not set forth, although employers who resorted to illegal lockouts could be required to pay workers' wages.

Some instances of subtle employer interference in union activities occurred.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's annual *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/>.

## **d. Discrimination (see section 6)**

## **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The law provided for a national minimum wage for some sectors of the economy, and 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.

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

**Occupational Safety and Health:** There were generally appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) standards for the main industries in the country. The government did not proactively identify unsafe conditions and only responded to workers' OSH complaints. By law workers could remove themselves from situations endangering their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. The law only covered workers in the formal sector, who comprised 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.

Violations of OSH standards were common in the mining sector, often in illegal mining. Civil society organizations stated corruption and lax enforcement allowed unsafe illegal mining practices to continue.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations set wage and overtime standards but did not effectively enforce the law. The government also did not effectively enforce health and safety regulations, which were set by a range of agencies in the various industries, including the Food and Drugs Authority, the Roads Safety Commission, and the Inspectorate Division of the Minerals Commission. Penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud or negligence, and penalties were never applied against violators. 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. Inspectors did not impose sanctions and were unable to provide data on how many violations they addressed. In most cases inspectors gave advisory warnings to employers, with deadlines for taking corrective action.

Approximately 77 percent of the working population was employed in the informal sector, according to the Statistical Service. Most of these workers were self-employed.

Some labor laws, such as legislation governing working hours, applied to the informal sector, 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.