

2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Israel

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On October 7, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian terrorists launched a large-scale attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip, killing an estimated 1,200 individuals, injuring more than 5,400, and abducting 253 hostages. Israel responded with a sustained, wide-scale military operation in Gaza, which had killed more than 21,000 Palestinians and injured more than 56,000 by the end of the year, displaced the vast majority of Palestinians in Gaza, and resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis. The continuing conflict had a significant negative impact on the human rights situation in the country.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearance; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by government officials; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict by Hamas and Israel, including unlawful or widespread civilian deaths and harm, enforced disappearances or abductions, torture, physical abuses, and conflict-related sexual violence or punishment; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecution of journalists, and censorship; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of national, racial, or ethnic minority groups.

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

This report covers Israel within the 1949 Armistice Agreement lines as well as the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem territories that Israel occupied during the June 1967 war and where it later extended its domestic law, jurisdiction, and administration. The United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 and Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights in 2019. Language in this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status issues to be negotiated between the parties to the conflict, including the specific boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the borders between Israel and any future Palestinian state.

Section 1.

Respect for the Integrity of the Person

A. ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE AND OTHER UNLAWFUL OR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS

There were several reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that on January 25, a border police officer shot Wadea Abu Ramouz, a Palestinian, age 17, when he was with a group of teenagers who were throwing stones and launching fireworks at Border Police vehicles in the Silwan neighborhood of East Jerusalem. HRW reported witnesses did not see whether Abu Ramouz himself launched fireworks or stones. According to one witness, he lay bleeding on the street for 45 minutes until an ambulance was permitted to evacuate him. Israeli medics provided first aid and without informing his family took him to a hospital in West Jerusalem, where he died on January 27, with his hands cuffed and feet manacled, according to press reports. On May 30, authorities returned Abu Ramouz's body to the family. The family's lawyers appealed to the Department of Internal Police Investigations within the Office of Israel's State Attorney (Machash) to investigate Wadea's shooting and received no updates regarding their complaint by mid-August. In February a police spokesperson told *Haaretz* newspaper they rejected witness testimony and claimed Abu Ramouz was shooting firecrackers and throwing Molotov cocktails at border police officers, and that in a search conducted afterwards, authorities seized firecrackers, a knife, and a Hamas flag.

On December 4, military police arrested Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) reserve soldier Aviad Frija for allegedly shooting and killing Yuval Castleman, an Israeli civilian who had shot and killed two Hamas terrorists who killed three civilians on November 30 in Jerusalem. Frija said he believed Castleman to be a terrorist even though Castleman fell to his knees, laid down his gun, put his hands in the air, and reportedly pleaded to Frija to check his identification. An investigation into whether to prosecute Frija with charges of reckless homicide continued at year's end.

(For information on killings related to Hamas' October 7 attack, see section 1.i.)

Arab criminal organizations were involved in many intracommunity killings, with 244 Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel who were victims of crime and violence within Arab communities, an increase of 134 percent over the previous year, according to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Abraham Initiatives, making it the deadliest year ever for crime and violence within the society of Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel.

B. DISAPPEARANCE

There were reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities. Most were related to the conflict following Hamas' October 7 attacks (see section 1.i.).

C. TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT, AND OTHER RELATED ABUSES

The law did not include a specific prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment practices, and there were credible reports that government officials employed them. The state's attorney argued the law exempted from prosecution Shin Bet personnel who used so-called exceptional methods of interrogation (including what NGOs assessed could include torture, physical violence, threats, and cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment, and related abuses) in cases determined by the Ministry of Justice after the fact to have involved an imminent threat. The government declined to reveal publicly the rules, procedures, and methods of interrogation that it stated would be kept confidential for security reasons.

Human rights organizations raised concerns over reports of systemic torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment of Palestinian detainees in prison facilities after October 7. One of the six Palestinians who died in Israeli custody during the period was Thaer Abu Assab, a Palestinian from the West Bank who died at Ketziot Prison on November 18. Abu Assab was arrested in 2005 and sentenced to 25 years in prison. According to local press reports, authorities carried out an autopsy without notifying the family, stating they had difficulties in contacting his family, and that by year's end, a final opinion on the cause of death had not yet been received. On December 1, a prisoner who alleged to be Abu Assab's cell mate claimed Abu Assab was beaten to

death by the prison service's Keter unit, according to press reports. Press reported 19 prison guards were detained for questioning on suspicion of assault and causing injury. The *Jerusalem Post* reported a media gag order had been in place since the incident and expired by December 21. In response, the domestic NGO Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI) stated the case "raises serious suspicion that the IPS [Israeli Prison Service] is being transformed from a professional incarceration body to a vindictive and punitive force."

According to media, Abed al-Rahman Mara'i, a resident of the West Bank, died on November 13 during his administrative detention at Megiddo prison that began in February. According to reports, an autopsy was performed on him 10 days later, with a doctor from Physicians for Human Rights present on behalf of his family, and the autopsy found his chest and other areas were bruised and his ribs and breastbone were broken. According to the autopsy, he was healthy and had no pre-existing conditions prior to his imprisonment, and according to a medical examiner, Mara'i had been under forceful restraint six days prior to his death. Authorities' investigations continued at year's end.

PCATI identified persistent and systemic shortcomings in the government's investigations of allegations of mistreatment of detainees, especially in the aftermath of October 7.

(For more information on abuse of Palestinians detained after October 7, see section 1.i.)

According to human rights NGOs that conducted visits to detention facilities, detainee testimonies, and local press reports, Palestinian detainees held by Israel were subjected to physical and sexual violence, threats, intimidation, severely restricted access to food and water, exposure to extreme cold without adequate clothing, and regular prolonged periods of isolation.

In criminal cases investigated by police involving crimes with a maximum imprisonment of 10 years or more, regulations required recording interrogations, but a "temporary" law continuously extended by the Knesset exempted Shin Bet and police from the recording requirement for interrogations of suspects of so-called security offenses. In nonsecurity related cases, Shin Bet interrogation rooms were equipped with closed-circuit cameras, and only supervisors appointed by the Ministry of Justice had access to real-time audiovisual feeds. Supervisors were required to report to the comptroller any irregularities they observed during interrogations. PCATI criticized this mechanism as insufficient to prevent or identify abuses, arguing that any absence of recordings of interrogations impeded accountability and judicial review.

The government acknowledged it used so-called exceptional measures during interrogations in some cases, but the Ministry of Justice refused to provide information regarding the number of such interrogations, or which specific "exceptional measures" were used. According to PCATI, these measures included beatings, forcing an individual to hold a stress position for long periods, incommunicado detention, sexual harassment, threats of rape and other physical harm, painful pressure from shackles or restraints applied to the forearms, religion-based humiliation, sleep deprivation, exposure to extreme heat and cold, and threats against families of detainees, and other acts that might constitute torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment. In addition, PCATI cited as a prevailing form of torture and ill treatment Shin Bet's holding of detainees in interrogation facilities with poor living conditions, in cells reported to be insect-infested, lacking adequate food and water, and unsanitary, and with constant exposure to light and extreme hot or cold temperatures.

On October 23, National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir announced new restrictions for detainees accused of terrorist crimes, including measures to "make prisoners' living spaces more crowded," provide mattresses instead of beds, and overall worsen living conditions. Ben Gvir declared these measures were designed to enable prisons to absorb additional detainees accused of terrorist crimes.

During a November 14 visit to a prison where Hamas members who allegedly carried out the October 7 attack were held, Ben Gvir confirmed the detainees were, according to his instructions, shackled in dark cells with seven other prisoners and subjected to harsh living conditions. He also

stated he backed the IPS commissioner in taking a strong hand against them. On December 7, Ben Gvir instructed the IPS commissioner to reopen the closed Rakefet underground facility at Nitzan prison for Hamas members. Media outlets and NGOs did not report whether the underground facility was operating by year's end.

PCATI reported a continuous upward trend in the number of cases in which Shin Bet was alleged to have used "exceptional measures." During the year, PCATI filed 12 complaints to the Inspector of Interrogee Complaints on behalf of victims of alleged torture by Shin Bet personnel and had 33 cases pending at year's end, including cases from previous years. PCATI reported that in some cases of abuse, prisoners did not file complaints due to fear of reprisals by authorities. PCATI identified persistent and systemic shortcomings in the government's investigations of allegations of mistreatment of detainees, especially after October 7.

The government reported requests from prisoners for independent medical examination at the prisoner's expense were reviewed by the IPS medical team. According to PCATI and Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI), IPS medics and doctors ignored bruises and injuries resulting from violent arrests and interrogations.

On May 24, the IDF stated a military court accepted a plea agreement imposing only a suspended prison sentence for two Golani Brigade soldiers convicted of abusing a Palestinian man and exceeding authority to the point of endangering life or health. One soldier served a 40-day prison term. The soldiers were also convicted of obstruction of justice. The case of a fourth soldier accused of assault and abuse under aggravated circumstances and threats was pending at year's end.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

There were numerous reports that authorities held some prisoners in conditions that harmed their health, including severe overcrowding.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Local human rights organizations reported Palestinian security prisoners (those convicted or suspected of nationalistically motivated violence), including Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel, often faced more restrictive conditions than prisoners accused of other types of crimes. Restrictive conditions included increased incidences of administrative detention, restricted family visits, ineligibility for temporary furloughs, and solitary confinement. The NGO Ma'avirim – Israeli Trans Community, noted prisons held transgender women in solitary confinement due to their gender identity.

On September 21, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) filed a petition to the Supreme Court presenting testimony from dozens of detainees held for days without access to toilets, proper food, or medical services in police stations throughout the country. On January 10, the court dismissed a 2022 petition after a government report claimed it had nearly eliminated the holding of detainees in police stations, but according to documents obtained by civil society groups through freedom of information laws, police continued to hold detainees in stations under conditions that contradicted the law and violated detainee rights. The court scheduled a hearing on the petition for July 2024.

IPS informed the Knesset that as of December 10, there were 19,372 prisoners, an increase of more than 3,000 since October 7. In February the government established a limit on incarcerations of 14,500 for the year. According to IPS data, overcrowding in prisons was approaching the level it was when the High Court issued its 2017 ruling, which required prisons and detention centers to provide a minimum living space of 48 square feet (including toilet and shower) per prisoner and mandated a deadline for compliance within 18 months. The court extended the deadline several times, most recently until December 31, 2027, due to the government's failure to meet this requirement. According to IPS data, as of December 18, 84 percent of Palestinian security prisoners and 18 percent of criminal prisoners were held in less than 32 square feet per person. IPS noted more than 3,000 inmates slept without a bed, on only a mattress.

A temporary law remained in force allowing the early release of prisoners (excluding “security prisoners” and those convicted of severe offenses such as sex offenses), to facilitate compliance with the court’s ruling. According to the Public Defender’s Office and legal scholars, the state was also required to investigate possible alternative approaches to arrests and imprisonments. On August 31, NGOs Adalah, Al Mezan, and ACRI petitioned the Supreme Court against the law’s denial of administrative release for security prisoners, arguing it was discriminatory and went against the law’s intent to ease prison overcrowding.

Regulations allowed the IPS to deny prisoners medical treatment due to lack of funds or budget constraints, according to PHRI.

According to PCATI, in response to a complaint, the IPS admitted Shin Bet maintained control over many of the decisions setting conditions in IPS detention facilities, including on solitary confinement, holding detainees in cells with cameras, temperature control, water infrastructure, and general cell maintenance.

Administration: Authorities investigated some credible allegations of mistreatment but ignored others.

On March 23, the state attorney indicted former Gilboa Prison commander Bassem Kashkosh and former prison intelligence officer Rani Basha on charges of fraud, breach of trust, and failure to fulfill their duties. The indictment alleged the two attempted to obtain information for intelligence purposes from Palestinian prisoner Muhammad Atallah by forcing women guards into sexual situations with Atallah from 2015 to 2017.

Independent Monitoring: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited prisons and detention facilities (including interrogation centers) to monitor conditions of detention, detainee treatment, and detainee access to family visits until October 7. Authorities imposed limitations on detainee visitation more broadly following October 7 and did not permit ICRC prison visits thereafter.

D. ARBITRARY ARREST OR DETENTION

The 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. The government generally observed these requirements, although NGOs identified cases where the requirements were not followed, and where authorities applied different laws to residents of Jerusalem based on their ethnicity or religion, regardless of their Israeli citizenship status. Military law allowed the indefinite administrative detention without charge or trial of Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza detained or imprisoned within Israel.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law required police to have a warrant based on sufficient evidence and issued by an authorized official to arrest a suspect. Authorities generally informed defendants promptly of charges against them, but this did not apply to the thousands of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza who were held in administrative detention in prisons within Israel. The law allowed authorities to detain criminal suspects without charge for 24 hours prior to appearing before a judge, with limited exceptions allowing for up to 48 hours; the judge then had the authority to extend the detention for a period of up to 15 days at a time to a total of 30 days. Authorities generally respected these rights for persons arrested on non-“security related” criminal charges. There was a functioning bail system, and detainees could appeal decisions denying bail. Authorities allowed detainees to consult with an attorney in a timely manner, including one provided by the government for the indigent, and to contact family members promptly.

The Ministry of Defense had the authority to administratively detain a person for a period of up to six months – without an indictment, arrest warrant, judicial order, or finding of criminal culpability – if it determined the individual likely presented a danger to the security of the state. The minister of defense had the authority to extend administrative detention orders repeatedly. According to IPS data, as of December 31, the government held 3,242 Palestinians in administrative detention, of whom 41 were from East Jerusalem. Freedom House reported the Supreme Court almost never granted attorneys' requests to void administrative detention orders. The organization also reported that although the law prohibited the detention of children younger than 12, authorities occasionally held Palestinian children younger than 12 under administrative detention.

Israeli citizens who committed crimes within the West Bank were subject only to Israeli law and could only be tried in civilian courts within Israel, whereas Palestinians in the West Bank were subject to trial in Israeli military courts. NGOs criticized this practice, stating that international humanitarian law permitted it only on a temporary basis in a situation of military occupation. According to the NGO Military Court Watch (MCW), 96 percent of cases tried in military courts ended in convictions.

Authorities relocated most Palestinian prisoners detained in the West Bank or Gaza to detention facilities inside Israel. Some human rights groups, including MCW, claimed the country's detention of the majority of convicted Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza in prisons inside Israel was a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and raised concerns that relocations made it more difficult for the family members of Palestinians to visit their loved ones in detention.

The law allowed authorities to prosecute persons detained on "security" grounds or to hold them as administrative detainees or unlawful combatants. During its military operation in Gaza following October 7, the government arrested hundreds of Palestinians it claimed were suspected Hamas militants under the Unlawful Combatants Law, which defined as an unlawful combatant anyone "who has participated either directly or indirectly in hostile acts against the State of Israel or is a member of a force perpetrating hostile acts against the State of Israel." In contrast to administrative detention, the law did not provide "security" detainees the same protections afforded to detained civilians under International Humanitarian Law. After October 7, the government amended the Unlawful Combatants Law by emergency regulations, increasing the maximum length of time for detention from 96 hours to 30 days and the length of time a detainee could be held without being brought before a judge from 14 to 45 days. Rights groups reported hundreds, and possibly thousands, of Palestinians detained in Gaza under the Unlawful Combatants Law had no affiliation with Hamas. Authorities held detainees incommunicado as unlawful combatants in ad hoc facilities, according to PCATI. As of year's end, it was unknown how many Palestinians authorities continued to detain without charges pursuant to the Unlawful Combatants Law.

(For more information on Palestinian workers from Gaza detained in Israel, see section 1.i.).

The government stated it used solitary confinement only when a detainees threatened themselves (e.g., hunger strike) or others and authorities had exhausted other options, or in some cases, during interrogation to prevent disclosure of information. On May 2, Khader Adnan, a Palestinian prisoner protesting his administrative detention, died in solitary confinement after an 87-day hunger strike.

Authorities maintained such detainees retained the right to meet with ICRC representatives, IPS personnel, and medical personnel, if necessary, but authorities did not permit ICRC visits after October 7. NGOs, including Military Court Watch, HaMoked, and B'Tselem, accused authorities of using isolation to punish or silence politically prominent Palestinian detainees, but the government stated the IPS did not hold Palestinian detainees in separate detention punitively or to induce confessions. PCATI and other local human rights organizations received dozens of complaints following October 7, alleging the IPS severely limited water, electricity, and food in all prison cells where Palestinians were held. The IPS put prisons on lockdown and imposed restrictions on the exit of individuals to receive medical care, giving rise to concerns that acute and chronically sick individuals were prevented from receiving necessary medical attention.

Human rights NGOs reported the IPS placed Palestinian detainees with mental disabilities in isolation and without full medical evaluations, or placed in isolation detainees who were a threat to themselves or others, including prisoners on hunger strike who in most cases were protesting their repeated administrative detention. According to PHRI, isolation of Palestinian prisoners with mental disabilities was common. On September 20, the Lod District Court postponed a hearing to extend Ahmad Manasra's solitary confinement, citing a deterioration in his health. Subsequently, he was transferred to a mental health unit at Ayalon prison, where he remained in solitary confinement. Manasra was convicted of attempted murder at the age of 14. Amnesty International reported that although the courts subsequently found that Manasra did not participate in the stabbings that occurred in the crime, he was serving a nine-and-one-half year sentence for attempted murder and had been in solitary confinement since 2021. Amnesty also reported independent psychiatrists diagnosed Manasra with schizophrenia and severe depression and warned his life was at risk if he remained in prison. The IPS said Manasra was kept in a supervised cell because of his mental state.

Arbitrary Arrest: NGOs reported cases of arbitrary arrests of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. B'tselem reported that on January 19, Israeli police detained five Palestinian children between ages 12 and 15 from the neighborhood of Wadi Qadum in East Jerusalem without notifying parents for more than six hours and interrogated them without an adult present on their behalf. According to B'tselem, after some of them refused to sign a statement in Hebrew and insisted they hadn't thrown stones, the interrogators reportedly humiliated them, swore at them, and in some cases hit the children. They were later released on house arrest, without being told what they had been suspected of, according to B'tselem.

According to Amnesty International, police arbitrarily arrested dozens of protesters during demonstrations against government efforts to overhaul the judicial system during the year. The weekly protests were attended by hundreds of thousands before ending due to the post-October 7 conflict.

There were allegations authorities arbitrarily arrested persons who participated in protests. Hundreds of Palestinians, including Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel, were arrested for social media posts after the Knesset passed on November 8 an amendment to the counterterrorism law, criminalizing the "consumption of terrorist materials." Mossawa Center for Arab Citizens in Israel reported that after October 7, authorities launched 350 criminal investigations for speech-related offenses, claiming most of those investigated were supporting terrorism. Human rights groups criticized this practice as suppressing free expression. According to *The Washington Post*, these efforts were spearheaded by National Security Minister Ben Gvir.

As of November 7, Adalah was monitoring 251 cases of arrests and detentions (excluding cases in the Jerusalem District) that it characterized as arbitrary. These cases included arrests, interrogations, and "warning talks" by police or Shin Bet. Of these 251 cases, 121 were linked to social media posts and 31 involved arrests made during demonstrations. The remaining cases were associated with events after October 7, including allegations of obstructing police work during arrests, and engagement in political or religious activities. In at least 132 cases, police filed at least one request with the court to extend detentions.

Pretrial Detention: Authorities regularly held "security" detainees in lengthy administrative detention, and in some cases authorities never brought security detainees to trial. The Israel Prison Service reported to HaMoked that at year's end, the government held 3,291 Palestinians under indefinite administrative detention, which did not include detained Palestinians from Gaza. Haaretz reported that by the year's end, authorities held at least 661 Palestinians from Gaza in prisons inside Israel, not including an unknown number detained at the Sde Teiman prison. The ICRC estimated that nearly 2,000 Palestinians from Gaza who had disappeared were believed to be detained by the Israeli military by year's end, though it was unknown how many were detained in prisons within Green Line Israel.

Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA) policy allowed the administrative detention of foreigners either without a trial or for additional periods following the completion of time served. On September 5, authorities placed 53 Eritreans in administrative detention without a trial,

following their September arrest for alleged participation in clashes in Tel Aviv between supporters of the Eritrean regime and its opponents. The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (HRM) alleged some of those detained did not participate in the clashes. All Eritrean regime opponents detained on September 5 were released within a month. Between January and October (the period for which data were available at year's end), 84 asylum seekers were placed in administrative detention without a trial, according to HRM. As of October 31, 47 asylum seekers remained in administrative detention, either without a trial or following completing time served, according to HRM.

E. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

The law provided for an independent judiciary. The government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality but attempted to make legislative changes that if adopted would have significantly diminished judicial independence.

On July 24, the Knesset passed an amendment to Basic Law, eliminating the courts' ability to hear a petition or proactively rule against the government, the prime minister, or a government minister based on a court's assessment that a government decision or action was "extremely unreasonable." From January to September, weekly mass protests by hundreds of thousands of participants, and the announcement that opponents of the bill would refuse to volunteer for IDF reserve service, preceded and followed the law's passage. NGOs, the Israeli Bar Association, and private individuals petitioned to the Supreme Court to annul the law. On September 12, a panel that for the first time in the country's history included all 15 justices held a hearing on the case. A ruling was pending at year's end.

Trial Procedures

The law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary enforced this right with some exceptions, including for individuals the government claimed were national security concerns, cases involving protection of the interest of a minor or an individual requiring special protection, and cases involving protection of the identity of an accuser or defendant in a sexual offense case. Military law allowed the indefinite detention without charge or trial of Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza detained or imprisoned within Israel, and their trial in military rather than civilian courts.

The law generally required the prosecution to provide all evidence to the defense following an indictment, but did not apply to "security" cases, which mostly impacted Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza detained or imprisoned within Israel and tried in military courts. The government could, on security grounds, withhold from defense lawyers evidence it had gathered that was not intended for use in the case against the accused. The Supreme Court could scrutinize the decision to withhold such evidence in civilian courts, while the Court of Appeals had jurisdiction for military courts. The rules of evidence in espionage cases tried in criminal court did not differ from the normal rules of evidence, and use of secret evidence was not permissible, although trials and hearings could be held behind closed doors under gag order restrictions.

Courts conducted virtual hearings with prisoners and detainees under a temporary law instituted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which the Knesset extended on December 18 for the duration of the escalation in the conflict following the October 7 attacks, due to the claimed risk to human life by bringing suspects to hearings. While authorities usually allowed visits from lawyers and claimed every inmate who requested to meet with an attorney was able to do so, this was not always the case, according to civil society organizations. The ICRC reported that after October 7, authorities prohibited Palestinian detainees from having visitors.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Some human rights organizations claimed Palestinian security prisoners held in Israel should be considered political prisoners. The government described security prisoners as those convicted or suspected of nationalistically motivated violence or speech-related support for such violence.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported the IDF arrested Palestinian journalist Moath Amarneh, a photographer and cameraman, and detained him on October 28 in Megiddo Prison. According to local news reports, prison guards beat Amarneh on November 10, resulting in a head injury. CPJ reported that as of December 31, Amarneh was one of at least 19 Palestinian journalists in Israeli custody and was held under administrative detention. CPJ also reported Palestinian journalists Sabri Jibril, Mustafa al-Khawaja, Radwan Qatanani, and Abu Award were held in prisons at year's end.

F. TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

Not applicable.

G. PROPERTY SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION

The Jerusalem Municipality recorded government forces demolished 140 Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem, a 60 percent increase from 2022. Government forces also demolished 84 other structures belonging to Palestinians, including shops and warehouses. There were credible claims that municipal authorities in Jerusalem often placed insurmountable obstacles against Palestinian residents who applied for construction permits, including by failing to incorporate community needs into zoning decisions, requiring that they document land ownership despite the absence of a uniform post-1967 land registration process, imposing high application fees, and requiring residents to connect housing to municipal infrastructure that was often unavailable or inaccessible. Human rights organizations argued these regulations forced Palestinian residents into unauthorized construction.

The United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported authorities demolished, confiscated, sealed, or evicted Palestinians from 229 Palestinian-owned structures in East Jerusalem. Among the homes demolished, 47 percent were destroyed by their owners to avoid fines imposed by authorities for lacking building permits. Legal experts attributed the increase to laws reducing administrative processing times for demolitions, limiting court interventions, and escalating fines for those not demolishing their own buildings. UNOCHA reported authorities' demolition of Palestinian-owned homes displaced 633 Palestinians and directly affected 5,952 persons.

Authorities issued approximately 1,984 administrative demolition orders in 2022 (the most recent year for which data was available), overwhelmingly against Arab/Palestinian-owned structures, an increase of 7 percent from 2021. In cases of demolitions with no agreement from the residents to relocate, the government levied monetary fines against residents to cover the costs of demolitions.

Several human rights groups and the United Nations stated the authorities' punitive demolitions were a form of collective punishment that violated the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Supreme Court ruled on several occasions that the demolitions were not punitive but rather a deterrent and were therefore lawful.

According to media reports, on January 25, government forces sealed for demolition the home of the family of Udai Tamimi in the Shuafat refugee camp in East Jerusalem, accusing Tamimi of killing an Israeli soldier and seriously wounding a civilian guard in October 2022 at a checkpoint near the camp. Following those attacks, Tamimi attempted another attack at a checkpoint and was killed by security personnel near the West Bank settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim.

According to local press, on February 12, government forces sealed the home of the family of Hussein Qaraqe in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of A-Tur, ahead of its subsequent demolition,

displacing his parents and two brothers. Qaraqe had rammed a vehicle into an East Jerusalem bus stop, killing three persons, including two children, before he was shot and killed at the scene of the attack. Qaraqe's family and a director of a medical center said he was released from a psychiatric ward the day before the attack and developed a mental illness after falling from a crane six years prior.

NGOs stated the government maintained a policy intended to limit construction and prevent the creation or maintenance of contiguous Palestinian neighborhoods between the West Bank and Jerusalem. *Haaretz* reported that in April, the Jerusalem municipality retracted its support for the first neighborhood built specifically for Palestinian residents since 1967 over political opposition from the mayor of Jerusalem. Official policy historically had been to maintain an ethnic balance between Jews and non-Jews in Jerusalem at a 70-30 ratio; however, the *Jerusalem Local Outline Plan 2000 Report No. 4* stated the goal was unattainable. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated the Jerusalem Municipality did not have any such policy. The law did not prevent non-Jews from purchasing housing units, although cultural, religious, and economic barriers as well as segregated homeowners' associations remained obstacles to integrating existing neighborhoods or establishing new integrated neighborhoods, according to civil society organizations.

Construction was illegal in towns without an authorized plan for development. Some NGOs criticized the lack of Arab/Palestinian representation on regional planning and zoning approval committees and stated planning for Arab/Palestinian areas was much slower than for Jewish municipalities, leading Arab/Palestinian citizens to build or expand their homes, usually on privately owned land, without legal authorization, thus risking a government-issued demolition order. Arab members of the Knesset and human rights organizations condemned the law for increasing enforcement and demolitions without addressing the systemic housing shortages in Arab communities that led to unpermitted construction. According to human rights organizations, approximately 50,000 Arab families lived in unpermitted houses.

The government stated it used both incentives and punishments to compel Bedouin Israeli citizens to move from 35 unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev desert inhabited by approximately 90,000 persons into government-recognized villages, including by demolishing unpermitted structures and offering monetary compensation to move to Bedouin towns. According to a state comptroller report and information from NGOs, Bedouins often refused to move because they asserted either that they owned the land or that the government had given them prior permission to settle in their existing locations. Bedouins reported fear of losing their traditional livelihoods and way of life, as well as moving onto land claimed by a rival Bedouin clan. The seven Bedouin townships in the Negev were all crowded and had poor infrastructure and inadequate access to public services such as health care, education, welfare, public transportation, mail, and garbage disposal, especially compared to Jewish towns and cities in the area, according to the state comptroller. According to the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF), Bedouins accounted for 34 percent of the population of the Negev, but only 12.5 percent of the residential-zoned land was designated for them.

In August, the NCF reported that 2,745 Bedouin structures – including tents, fences, tin structures, sheds, and embankments – were demolished in 2022, citing information gained through freedom of information requests to the government. According to the NCF, self-demolition constituted most of demolitions carried out in 2022.

The government maintained laws and mechanisms regarding claims for the return of or compensation of assets imported during World War II and the Holocaust-era whose owners did not survive the war. Unclaimed assets were held in trust and not transferred to legal inheritors, who in most cases were not aware their late relatives had property in Israel.

The Department of State's *Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act Report* to Congress, released publicly in July 2020, can be found on the Department's website at <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

H. ARBITRARY OR UNLAWFUL INTERFERENCE WITH PRIVACY, FAMILY, HOME, OR CORRESPONDENCE

The law prohibited such actions, and the government generally respected those prohibitions for Israeli citizens, but the law restricted residency for different groups based on nationality, and there were multiple court cases pending at year's end based on security agencies' surveillance technologies and practices.

NGOs and Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem alleged security forces devoted disproportionate enforcement resources to Palestinian neighborhoods, particularly Silwan, Jabal Al Mukaber, Sheikh Jarrah, and Jerusalem's Old City, with higher numbers of temporary checkpoints and raids than in West Jerusalem.

On May 2, Amnesty International reported the government's use of an experimental facial recognition system to track Palestinians and enforce movement restrictions, expanding surveillance in East Jerusalem. According to Amnesty, government forces conducted facial scans at checkpoints and entered them into government databases without consent. The NGO reported authorities expanded their city-wide surveillance system across the Old City, allowing authorities to identify protesters and keep Palestinians under constant observation.

The law allowed Shin Bet to collect data of all users of telecom services in the country without a court order. A 2022 ACRI petition to the Supreme Court demanded the cancellation or amendment of a clause of the law that allowed Shin Bet to search and process personal information without supervision, which potentially included individuals' location data, other information that could reveal a user's sexual orientation, participation in protests, and political views. The petition was pending at year's end.

As of year's end, the Supreme Court was considering a petition from ACRI demanding the revocation of the government's expansion of Shin Bet's functions and authorities in the past 20 years. In a 2022 interim injunction, the court ordered the government to justify the need for such expanded authorities and to explain why it would not limit the use of these authorities to urgent circumstances, and why these would not be subject to periodic review.

A state attorney directive allowed police to search suspects' mobile phones without a court order if the suspect consented. On June 26, the Supreme Court ordered the state to explain by April 2024 why it would not cancel or amend the directives in response to a 2022 petition by the Public Defender's Office. The petition remained pending at year's end.

I. CONFLICT-RELATED ABUSES

Significant conflict-related abuses were documented throughout the year. Human rights groups reported extensive and in many cases unprecedented conflict-related abuses and alleged the commission of war crimes by Israel, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other Palestinian militant groups.

Killings: In May, there was an escalation of violence between Israel and PIJ in Gaza following the death of PIJ activist Khader Adnan after a lengthy hunger strike in an Israeli prison. According to IDF data, PIJ launched 1,468 rockets during this escalation, including 1,139 rockets that crossed into Israeli territory. Inside Israeli territory, rocket fire claimed the lives of two individuals, one Israeli and one Palestinian worker from Gaza. Israeli missile defense systems intercepted more than 95 percent of the rockets. (For more information on the effect of the conflict in Gaza, see section 1.i. of 2023 *Country Report on Human Rights Practices* in the West Bank & Gaza.)

According to UNOCHA, from January 1 to October 6, 30 Israelis were killed by Palestinians in rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza, the West Bank, in Jerusalem, and inside the Green Line established following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, and 213 Israelis were injured in these attacks by

armed Palestinian militant groups. According to UNOCHA, 237 Palestinians were killed by Israelis during the year prior to October 7, including 199 Palestinians killed in the West Bank, 34 killed in Gaza, and four killed inside the Green Line, almost exclusively by the IDF during counterterrorism operations. UNOCHA also reported that during that period, 9,378 Palestinians were injured by Israeli security forces and Israeli settlers.

On October 7, thousands of Hamas, PIJ, and other armed terrorists breached the security fence between Gaza and Israel by land and air via paragliders and killed an estimated 1,200 Israelis and foreigners, including at least 42 U.S. citizens and 36 children. At least 843 of the victims were civilians, and more than 5,400 Israelis and foreigners were injured in the terrorist attacks. The attack began with Hamas firing a barrage of more than 3,000 rockets toward Israel from Gaza. Terrorists attacked military bases, clashed with security forces in the south, and simultaneously infiltrated civilian communities, deliberately targeting noncombatants. During the attack, terrorists committed multiple abuses, including sexual assault and sexual mutilation. The attackers killed hundreds of civilians and injured many more at the Supernova music festival near Kibbutz Re'im and kidnapped approximately 253 Israelis and foreigners, including men, women, and children. Among the victims were one autistic girl, age 12, killed at Kibbutz Nir Oz and a girl, age 16, with muscular dystrophy and cerebral palsy, according to press reports.

Amnesty International verified video footage showing armed men from Gaza shooting Israeli civilians at close range in cars trying to escape, hiding in bomb shelters, and lying directly on the ground while injured. The attacks, which included the burning of homes, led to severe damage and the destruction of Israeli communities bordering Gaza. Some human rights organizations and the government described the October 7 attacks as war crimes and crimes against humanity. The government called the attacks the deadliest by a terrorist organization in the history of the state. The government officially declared war on Hamas on October 8.

(For journalist deaths during the conflict, see section 2.a.)

In October, the terrorist organization Hizballah in Lebanon initiated cross-border fire against Israel in support of Hamas following its October 7 attacks on Israel from Gaza and the ensuing hostilities, which continued through the end of the year. In the context of this conflict, several Palestinian terror organizations inside Lebanon also fired munitions into Israel. On November 5, Hizballah antitank missiles killed two Israeli civilians, one in Yiftah kibbutz and another in Kirya Shmona. On November 23, Hizballah antitank missile and mortar attacks killed an employee of the Israeli Electric Corporation and injured 21 others, including six other employees and seven soldiers.

(For more information on the military actions along the Israel-Lebanon border, see the *Country Report on Human Rights Practices* in Lebanon, section 1.i.)

Abductions: On October 7, Hamas, PIJ, and other armed terrorists abducted soldiers and civilians from Israeli communities, a nearby music festival, and army bases. Amnesty International reported video footage showed men in military gear taking away civilians with their hands tied behind their backs. Hamas, PIJ, and others held 253 Israeli and international hostages in Gaza, including at least 30 children, women, and elderly persons, and at least 19 soldiers. After the release of four hostages in October, and following an agreement with Israel secured through international mediators, in November Gaza-based militants released 105 hostages from Israel and other nations in exchange for the release of 240 Palestinian prisoners and detainees held in Israeli prisons. According to a *New York Times* analysis, the freed Palestinians included 107 children. As of year's end, there were 136 Israelis and foreigners held hostage by Hamas, PIJ, and others in Gaza, including 132 hostages abducted on October 7 and an additional four hostages held in Gaza before October 7. The exact whereabouts of the hostages remained unknown at year's end. At least 23 hostages were believed to have been killed in captivity, according to press reports, including three mistakenly killed by Israeli security forces. The ICRC reported that by year's end it did not receive proof of life for any of the remaining hostages.

In early December, Israeli forces in search of Hamas or other militants reportedly took Palestinian men and boys from their homes in northern Gaza and transferred some of them to Israeli prisons. At

year's end, the ICRC cited approximately 4,000 cases of Palestinians from Gaza who had disappeared, estimating nearly half were detained by the Israeli military. ICRC reported it had received proof of life only in a handful of cases. Human rights groups expressed concern that the government warned civilians who did not flee areas in Gaza under military evacuation orders that they could be considered a partner in a terrorist organization, and they reported Israeli forces arbitrarily detained military-age men in areas of northern Gaza.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: During the October 7 attack, Hamas, PIJ, and other terrorist groups carried out acts of abuse, rape, mutilation, and other conflict-related sexual violence.

Based on evidence published by Israeli authorities, civil society organizations, survivor testimonies, and videos posted by Hamas, on October 7, Hamas terrorists committed sexual assaults against women, girls, and men, including rape and gang rape, in private homes, at a music festival, on the side of the road, and in a military base. Eyewitnesses testified they saw rapes, mutilation, and sexual assaults taking place, some followed by killing. Medical and search and rescue professionals described signs of sexual violence. The Lahav 433 Police Unit and the Civil Commission on October 7th Crimes by Hamas against Women and Children continued to collect evidence and testimonies regarding sexual violence at year's end. A December 12 report published by the Hostages and Missing Families Forum indicated hostages who were released from Gaza reported some women and men suffered sexual assaults by Hamas while in captivity.

Human rights organizations PCATI, HaMoked, PHRI, and Adalah raised concerns regarding systemic torture and inhuman treatment of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prison facilities after October 7. According to the organizations, the abuse included severe physical assaults, sexual harassment and threats, and intimidation of children and both male and female detainees, as well as other acts of humiliation. They highlighted 19 cases of reports of severe abuse, including the deaths of six Palestinians held in Israeli custody since October 7. They raised concerns regarding allegations that abuse or medical neglect by prison personnel could have caused several of those deaths.

(For more information on conflict-related physical abuse, punishment, and torture in the West Bank and Gaza, see the West Bank and Gaza report, section 1.i.)

Other Conflict-Related Abuses: On October 7, Hamas, PIJ, and other armed terrorists systematically destroyed Israeli homes, schools, bomb shelters, and other civilian property of Israeli communities near the Gaza border.

A total of 2,692 terror attacks occurred during the year, including rockets and mortars, of which 326 occurred in October, according to Shin Bet. Many of these rocket launches hit or endangered Israel's civilian communities. To protect these communities, on October 7, the IDF began to evacuate residents of localities neighboring the Gaza border. According to the Ministry of Defense's National Emergency Authority data, 253,000 residents were displaced due to Hamas' attack on October 7, the Israel-Hamas conflict, and the conflict along the northern border with Hizballah.

UNOCHA reported that from October 7 through December 18, authorities increased demolitions in East Jerusalem, with 59 Palestinian-owned homes, schools, businesses, and other civilian property demolished or sealed, displacing 213 persons. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions reported that on November 20, authorities sealed a Palestinian school in the Old City of East Jerusalem that was originally built in 1295, due to alleged scribbles on the wall opposing the war in Gaza.

Rights groups and local and international media reported Israel arrested and detained thousands of Palestinian workers and medical patients from Gaza with valid permits to enter Israel on October 7 who were not connected with the October 7 attacks. The Israeli NGO Gisha reported that at year's end, it was unknown how many of these Palestinians were still being held by Israel. Reports indicated the government suspected some of the detainees of involvement in the October 7 attacks, such as by providing information about Israeli communities located near Gaza. Media reported that

some remained in detention, and authorities did not disclose whether any workers from Gaza were charged with any crime. Rights organizations reported Palestinian workers from Gaza were placed in incommunicado detention at ad hoc military camps-turned detention centers outside of any legal framework or procedural safeguards.

On November 2, following internal deliberations and a pending second petition, the cabinet decided to return to Gaza the Palestinian workers present in Israel on the day the war broke out. On November 3, media reports indicated thousands of Palestinian workers were returned to Gaza on foot via the Kerem Shalom Crossing. Released Palestinian workers told media and human rights organizations that Israeli forces subjected them to severe beatings and electric shocks, urinated on them, attacked them with dogs, held them for days without food or water, and took their cell phones and cash. Local rights groups reported that workers were detained without charge, due process, or legal representation.

At least two workers from Gaza died while in Israeli custody. At year's end, authorities retained custody of their bodies and had not provided their dates of death, according to local media reports. Haaretz reported accounts that one of these workers, Reja Samour, was diabetic and may have died after not receiving requested medical treatment in detention, and that the cause of the death of the other worker, Majed Zakol, reportedly a cancer patient, remained unclear. HRW reported that by year's end, the whereabouts of thousands of workers who fled or were released to the West Bank remained unclear, with many living in temporary shelters provided by the Palestinian Authority and NGOs.

Section 2.

Respect for Civil Liberties

A. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

The law generally provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right with some exceptions, especially for Palestinians and Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel. An independent media, an effective judiciary, and a democratic political system combined to protect freedom of expression, including for members of the media. Opposition leaders, NGOs, academics, and protest groups stated government efforts to implement changes to the rules governing the judiciary put freedom of expression and other civil liberties and human rights at risk, whereas supporters of the changes claimed they would make the judiciary more responsive to elected leaders. NGOs reported violations of freedom of expression particularly for Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel following the October 7 Hamas attack. NGOs and Palestinian journalists reported authorities restricted press coverage and limited certain forms of expression, particularly for Palestinians. These included restricting Palestinian journalists' movement in Israel, as well as using violence, arrests, intimidation, imprisonment, and closure of media outlets on security grounds, according to the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms.

Freedom of Expression: The law prohibited hate speech and content liable to incite violence or discrimination on grounds of race, origin, religion, nationality, and gender. In cases of speech defined as incitement to violence or hate speech, the law empowered authorities to limit freedom of expression.

The law restricted freedom of expression by imposing tort liability on any person who knowingly issued a public call for an economic, cultural, or academic boycott of the State of Israel or Israeli institutions or entities or products, including those in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Plaintiffs

had to prove direct economic harm to claim damages under the law. The law also permitted the minister of finance to impose administrative sanctions on those calling for such a boycott, including restrictions on participation in tenders for contracts with the government and denial of government benefits. Regulations required to implement the law were approved on February 5. The law barred entry into the country of visitors who were actively and consistently calling for such boycotts.

Desecrating the Israeli flag carried a maximum penalty of three years in prison and a fine. Waving a Palestinian flag was a criminal offense, but according to a 2014 attorney general legal advisory opinion, it should be enforced only in cases of a credible suspicion that waving the flag represented support for a terrorist organization or when there was a high likelihood that flag waving would lead to a serious disturbance of the peace. On January 8, Minister of National Security Itamar Ben Gvir called on the police commissioner to order a ban on waving the Palestinian flag in public spaces. Although no such order was issued by year's end, police officers prohibited displaying Palestinian flags and confiscated them on multiple occasions during demonstrations throughout the country, particularly in Jerusalem, and in some cases used violence against protesters who waved them. On July 17, ACRI petitioned the Supreme Court to instruct police not to confiscate Palestinian flags during demonstrations, per the 2014 directive. On July 20, the court rejected the petition on technical grounds, while encouraging police to remind officers of the procedures and to examine individual cases based on complaints.

The law prohibited individuals or organizations that initiated political or legal action abroad against IDF soldiers or the State of Israel from holding activities in schools. While the law was enacted in 2018, the Ministry of Education had not issued regulations necessary to implement the law as of year's end. Both supporters and opponents of the law stated it was intended to target the NGO Breaking the Silence, a group of military veterans whose goal was to end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. The NGO criticized the law as a violation of freedom of expression, and that the law would not apply to them because they were not acting to support and promote indictment of IDF soldiers or the State of Israel in foreign courts.

On January 23, the Ministry of Education published a tender for external programming in schools, which required applicants to commit not to include "degradation and humiliation of IDF soldiers, fallen soldiers or victims of terror" in their programming. On August 1, the ministry used the tender's language as its basis for removing the Parents Circle-Families Forum (PCFF), an NGO composed of bereaved Palestinian and Israeli families that promoted reconciliation, from a list of approved external programs in schools. PCFF claimed they still fit the tender's criteria and that the ban was solely political, and commentators stated the tender was tailored to remove the NGO from programming in schools.

On September 27, ACRI and a Haifa University legal clinic submitted a petition to the Jerusalem District Court against the Ministry of Education's decision on behalf of PCFF. The petition was pending at year's end. Authorities continued to delete certain information on Palestinian history and culture they considered inciting against Israel from the Palestinian Authority (PA) curriculum in East Jerusalem. Authorities sought to tie funding for schools to the use of the Israeli curriculum and acted against noncompliant schools.

In March, two Christian private schools in East Jerusalem faced threats of closure from the Ministry of Education, which demanded they switch from the PA-issued curriculum to a modified Israeli curriculum after an October 2022 inspection alleged school materials contained incitement against Israel. During a three-week reprieve, school administrators and parents, after meeting with attorneys, agreed to adopt the Israeli-modified version if required. Church officials in Jerusalem expressed serious concern, asserting that threatened school closures not only affected educational institutions but also posed a broader threat to the Christian community in Jerusalem.

Following Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, Israeli authorities arrested hundreds of individuals and issued dozens of indictments for alleged incitement, support for terrorism, and other charges, according to police data. On November 21, State Prosecutor Amit Eisman warned in a letter to the head of the Police Investigation Unit that the unjustified arrest of dissenters "harms the rule of law," asserting that his office did not sanction such measures.

On October 12, Minister of Education Yoav Kish sent a letter to university presidents demanding “severe measures be taken” against anyone suspected of incitement or support for Hamas, including the immediate suspension of any student or university employee. Kish called for hearings within 72 hours of any allegation of support for terrorist groups and urged permanent expulsion or termination when incitement was confirmed. Kish’s letter instructed all universities to report to the Council on Higher Education and the National Police any confirmed cases of incitement. Several leading universities responded to Minister Kish’s directives saying they had lost faith in him and warned against fostering an atmosphere of “McCarthyism.” NGOs and academics reported allegations of support for terrorism or incitement led to dozens of workplace terminations and academic suspensions or expulsions, often without due process or criminal charges being filed.

On October 16, Israeli police arrested prominent singer and doctor Dalal Abu Amneh after she posted on Facebook a verse from the Quran, “*wala ghaliba illa Allah*” (there is no victory but God), accompanied by a Palestinian flag. On October 18, Dalal posted on Instagram that she had been held in police custody for two days in solitary confinement and accused authorities of trying to strip her of her humanity and voice. Dalal was released without charges, and activists reported the arrest sent a chilling message to the entire Arab community in Israel, particularly because she was arrested when she went to a police station to ask for protection. Despite her being released without charges, demonstrations led by the city’s mayor continued outside her home, and authorities repeatedly cut off her water supply for several hours at a time.

On October 19, Israeli history and civics teacher Meir Baruchin was dismissed from his position in a Peta Tikva school, after posts on social media opposing Israel’s military occupation and the government he published after October 7. Following a complaint by the Petah Tikva municipality, on November 9, police arrested Baruchin on charges of intent to commit treason. He was released after five days without any indictment. Baruchin appealed against the dismissal and the appeal was pending at year’s end.

Mossawa reported that between October 7 and the end of the year, approximately 130 Arab students and lecturers from 33 higher education institutions were summoned to disciplinary hearings and suspended or expelled through what it referred to as expedited and improper procedures.

Violence and Harassment: According to CPJ, at least 77 journalists and media workers had been killed from October 7 to year’s end, including 72 Palestinians and two Israelis, as well as three Lebanese journalists killed due to the Israel-Hizballah conflict. CPJ stated three journalists were reported missing, including two Palestinians from Gaza, Nidal al-Waheidi and Haitham Abdelwahed; their whereabouts were unknown at year’s end. The report did not identify whether these individuals were killed while conducting journalistic activities but noted CPJ was investigating the circumstances of the deaths and “is particularly concerned about an apparent pattern of targeting of journalists and their families by the Israeli military.”

The Union of Journalists in Israel received reports of 23 incidents of physical attacks by security forces and 23 incidents of threats and incitements against journalists in Israel and East Jerusalem during the year.

According to the PA’s official Wafa News Agency, 32 Palestinian journalists were detained in Israeli jails as of December 18, including 19 held in administrative detention. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) stated government forces often subjected Palestinian journalists to arrest, interrogation, and administrative detention without clear grounds. The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate said Israel’s crackdown on Palestinian journalists increased significantly during the year. On March 3, government forces reportedly assaulted CNN photojournalist Karim Khader and other freelance Palestinian photojournalists as they covered weekly solidarity sit-ins in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem. On July 12, a Jerusalem court ended the 10-month house arrest of Palestinian Jerusalemite journalist Lama Ghosheh, sentencing her to nine months of community service and a 4,500 shekel (\$1,230) fine on charges of incitement on social media, after she was accused of “identification with a terrorist group.”

On May 9, CPJ published a report documenting IDF killings of 20 journalists between 2000-22, 18 of whom were Palestinian. No charges were brought in any of the incidents, according to the report. CPJ called on authorities to open criminal investigations into the killings of journalists Shireen Abu Akleh (2022), Ahmed Abu Hussein (2018), and Yaser Murtaja (2018). According to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, government forces targeted 64 Palestinian journalists during the first half of the year, including using live and rubber bullets as well as stun grenades and “skunk water,” a noxious waste-water-based substance, with the syndicate alleging this was to deter them from covering incidents and clashes.

There were several reported instances of police using physical violence against journalists covering demonstrations opposing the government’s plan for a judicial overhaul and other demonstrations. For example, on July 11, according to several local media outlets and reports on social media, police kicked, choked, and pushed to the ground *Haaretz* photographer Rami Shlush, who was covering a “day of disruption” against proposed judicial reforms, despite his identifying himself as a journalist.

Palestinian journalists who were able to obtain permits to enter Israel, as well as Jerusalem-based Arab/Palestinian journalists, reported incidents of harassment, racism, and occasional violence when they sought to cover news in Jerusalem, especially in the Old City and its vicinity. According to RSF, during a period of tension at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in East Jerusalem, two journalists were attacked, and eight others encountered obstruction. On April 4, police entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque while hundreds of Muslim worshipers were inside for Ramadan, citing the need to dislodge “rioters,” as Jews were preparing for Passover celebrations. According to B’tselem, authorities arrested approximately 350 persons, after which they were forced to sign a restraining order keeping them away from the mosque for one week. According to RSF and local media, police officers arrested and assaulted two media workers reporting from the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Wehbe Makieh, a freelance cameraman reporting for Al-Mayadeen TV, and freelance photojournalist Atta Awisat. RSF reported that Makieh and Awisat both identified themselves as journalists to the authorities.

On November 6, the government approved emergency regulations granting the minister of communications the authority to close media offices, confiscate broadcasting equipment, and block the use of communications infrastructure for any broadcasting body that posed an immediate harm to the country’s security, in consultation with the minister of defense and with the approval of the cabinet. On November 13, the minister of communications signed orders blocking the website of Lebanese Hizballah-affiliated media network Al-Mayadeen and seizing its broadcasting equipment.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Police regulations granted broad authorities to prevent journalists’ access to violent incidents but also required authorities to minimize the restriction of media freedom to cover those incidents.

All media organizations had to submit to the Israeli Military Censor, a unit within the IDF’s Directorate of Military Intelligence, any material relating to specific security matters or strategic infrastructure matters such as oil and water supplies. Organizations were able to appeal the censor’s decisions to the Supreme Court, and the censor could not appeal a court judgment.

The government regularly enacted gag orders on what it deemed to constitute sensitive security information and continuing investigations, and it required foreign correspondents and local media to abide by these orders. Of 5,916 articles submitted to it in 2022, the censor banned 159 articles and interfered with the content of an additional 990 articles, according to data released during the year.

On November 28, the Union of Journalists in Israel sent a letter to the Military Censor, asking it to investigate possible discrimination in exercising the censor’s authority towards journalists and media organizations.

Editors and journalists from East Jerusalem publications reported they engaged in self-censorship due to fear of retribution by Israeli authorities.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law allowed for both civil suits for damages and private criminal complaints alleging libel and slander. The maximum sentence in criminal libel or slander cases was one year's imprisonment. According to the HRDF, individuals, state authorities, and right-wing NGOs abused civil suits, including allegations of defamation, violation of privacy, and copyright infringement, to seek to discourage public criticism of the Israeli occupation.

According to the magazine *The Seventh Eye*, since becoming a Member of Knesset in 2021, Minister of National Security Ben Gvir had filed 12 defamation lawsuits against journalists and private citizens, seven of which were also filed on behalf of his party, Jewish Power. The lawsuits focused mainly on statements regarding Ben Gvir's alleged past behaviors and accusations of racism. Meanwhile, the law allowed Ben Gvir as a member of the Knesset to maintain the right of parliamentary immunity, which prevented others from taking legal actions against acts he performed in an official capacity.

National Security: The law criminalized the following as "terrorist acts": speech supporting terrorism, including public praise of a terrorist organization, the display of symbols, expression of slogans, and "incitement." On November 8, the Knesset added a clause to the counterterrorism law for a two-year period prohibiting and stipulating a one-year prison sentence for the "systematic and continuous" consumption of certain publications of terrorist groups, including Hamas and ISIS, that included statements of praise, sympathy, or encouragement for acts of terrorism, or documentation of an act of terrorism. The law authorized restrictions on the release of bodies of terrorists and conducting their funerals to prevent "incitement to terror or identification with a terrorist organization or an act of terror." Mossawa reported the amendment raised significant concerns regarding freedom of speech and information access and that the definition of "systematic and continuous" consumption was vague, potentially leading to arbitrary or unjust applications of the law, which was used to disproportionately target Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Mossawa reported that between October 7 and year's end, more than 350 criminal investigations for speech-related offenses were initiated, predominantly against Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel. Human rights NGOs alleged the government was misusing counterterrorism legislation to seek to silence opposition to the war in Gaza and criticism of government policies and officials and to restrict freedom of expression, and NGOs alleged dozens of individuals were charged with incitement or support for terror in response to having expressed solidarity with Palestinian civilians or for posting verses from the Quran.

Minister of National Security Ben Gvir also prohibited celebrations and "expressions of joy" in response to the release of Palestinian prisoners during the November prisoner exchange with Hamas. Ben Gvir stated that "expressions of joy are equivalent to backing terrorism."

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet but regularly censored online content. The government stated it regularly monitored electronic communications for security purposes and routinely censored online content it suspected as illegal according to law. The law authorized district court judges to restrict access to internet sites to prevent the commission of crimes. The Cyber Unit of the State Attorney's Office further requested that social media companies remove or restrict access to, on a voluntary basis, content and accounts suspected of violating the law.

The Cyber Unit reported that between October 7 and December 12, it received more than 39,000 requests for content removal from security agencies. The unit stated it requested the voluntary removal by social media platforms of more than 26,000 posts, accounts, pages, and groups with content that authorities claimed included incitement to terror and praising and encouraging terror

acts. More than 90 percent of the content the government requested be removed was removed, including by Meta, TikTok, and YouTube.

B. FREEDOMS OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

The law provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights. The government particularly limited and restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. During the conflict after October 7, the government limited demonstrations for citizens expressing solidarity with the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza or calling for a ceasefire.

Authorities stated they would detain and ban PA-affiliated officials in Jerusalem from conducting PA-related activities. PA officials publicly pointed to the 1993 letter from then Minister of Foreign Affairs Shimon Peres to his Norwegian counterpart Johan Holst as proof of an agreement to allow Palestinian institutions and activities in East Jerusalem. In May, officials renewed a ban on the PA Governor of Jerusalem, Adnan Gheith, from traveling to the West Bank. He remained under house arrest in East Jerusalem for alleged PA political activity in East Jerusalem and was prohibited from communicating with Palestinian political leaders.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law provided for this right, and the government generally respected it, with the exception of certain restrictions on peaceful assembly for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem and Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel, and restrictions on protests regarding Israel's military response following the October 7 Hamas attacks.

There were reports authorities used excessive force against protesters in East Jerusalem, including at the Old City's Damascus Gate, and at Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount throughout the year. On March 3, *Haaretz* reported eight activists were arrested and four were injured during clashes between protesters and police. The confrontation occurred during a demonstration against the pending eviction of a Palestinian family from their Sheikh Jarrah home in East Jerusalem. Police alleged the protesters attacked police officers, who responded with clubs and the spraying of "skunk water."

Protest groups reported that during weekly mass demonstrations across the country against the government's plan for a judicial overhaul, police used stun and smoke grenades, skunk water, water cannons, horses, and physical violence against peaceful protesters. There were reports police used excessive force in several instances in response to protests throughout the country, particularly in East Jerusalem.

Police officials argued that while most protests were peaceful, disorderly conduct by some obligated police to disperse the crowds. On March 1, police officer Meir Suissa was filmed throwing a stun grenade towards a group of peaceful protesters standing on a road blocked by police. The Ichilov hospital in Tel Aviv reported it treated 11 individuals for injuries sustained at the protests that day, with one protester needing surgery and another suffering a severe ear injury. On March 2, the Ministry of Justice's Department for Investigation of Police Officers opened an investigation into Suissa's actions.

On June 18, the Supreme Court ordered the state to explain why it would not cancel a 2022 amendment to the police ordinance law, which allowed the minister of national security to direct police policy. The court's order was in response to five petitions from opposition MKs and NGOs, who argued sensitive decisions regarding the exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly had to be separated from the influence of the political echelon to prevent use of police force for political purposes. The petition was pending as of year's end.

On July 24, following the passage of a part of the government's judicial overhaul, police officers used force against protesters. Media outlets reported this included a police officer holding a protester by her hair and throwing her against a wall; police officers beating, kicking, and choking protesters while they were already on the ground; and police aiming a water cannon at a seated protester.

On October 17, Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai stated police would have "zero tolerance" towards protests of solidarity with Gaza in the wake of the October 7 Hamas attack, announcing that "anyone who wants to identify with Gaza is welcome to; I'll put him on buses that are headed there now." The statement came in response to a small protest in Haifa against IDF operations in Gaza, which was dispersed by dozens of police officers after authorities claimed the protest lacked a permit. In several instances, police required permits from protests although civil society groups claimed the law did not require them; when civil society groups did request permits, they said they often were denied.

On November 8, the Supreme Court rejected petitions by Adalah and the Hadash party against the police directive requiring permits for protests and a police denial of permits for demonstrations in Umm al-Fahem and Sakhanin. Despite rejecting the petitions, the ruling stated the police commissioner was not authorized to impose a general ban on demonstrations and police had to examine each request on an individual basis. On November 18, a Hadash Arab-Jewish protest calling for a ceasefire took place in Tel Aviv after police had initially rejected Hadash's request to hold the protest. According to +972 magazine, by year's end, authorities had prohibited all but one protest organized independently by Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel since October 7.

Freedom of Association

The law prohibited registration of an association or a party if its goals included denial of the existence of the State of Israel or of the democratic character of the state.

The Jerusalem Center for Human Rights issued a report in September on the obstacles that East Jerusalem NGOs faced, including restrictions on employing individuals holding Palestinian identity cards and threats of imminent closures by Israeli authorities due to accusations of ties with Palestinian political parties or certain individuals.

The law required NGOs receiving more than one-half of their funding from foreign governments to state this fact in their official publications, applications to attend Knesset meetings, websites, public campaigns, and any communication with the public. The law allowed fines for NGOs that violated these rules. The government had not taken legal action against any NGO for failing to comply with the law as of year's end. Local NGOs critical of the government asserted the law sought to intimidate them, delegitimize them in the public eye, and prevent them from receiving foreign government funding.

The government maintained prohibitions on numerous prominent Jerusalem-based Palestinian institutions, such as the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce and the Orient House, which had been the de facto Palestine Liberation Organization office. The government renewed a closure order for these and other institutions under a 1994 law passed after the Oslo Accords that required the PA to obtain Israeli permission to open a representative office or hold a meeting in areas Israel recognized as under its sovereignty. According to media reports, on January 7, government security forces raided a meeting of students' parents in the Issawiya neighborhood of Jerusalem and prevented them from meeting. A Ministry of National Security statement indicated the raid was ordered by the minister of national security, who declared that "it is time to stop the Palestinian Authority's celebrations in Jerusalem and not allow it to hold terrorist conferences in Jerusalem."

C. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

D. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND THE RIGHT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights for citizens. Citing security concerns and frequent attempted terrorist attacks, the government imposed significant restrictions on Palestinian movement in East Jerusalem and between Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.

The law prohibited Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza (including Palestinian spouses of Israeli residents or citizens), Iranians, Iraqis, Syrians, and Lebanese from obtaining resident status unless the Ministry of Interior made a special determination, usually on humanitarian grounds. The law allowed only 58 humanitarian status adjustments per year, a figure based on the total cases approved in 2018. Civil rights organizations, including Adalah, ACRI, PHRI, HaMoked, and Society of St. Yves, petitioned the Supreme Court on behalf of families affected by the law demanding its revocation, calling it discriminatory, racist, and contrary to the Basic Law and international law, and arguing that it labeled all Palestinians as a security risk. The court held a hearing on the petition in 2022 but had not issued a ruling by year's end.

Human Rights Watch reported in January that the government effectively halted the approval process for family unification for Palestinians, after approving several thousand in 2021 and 2022 as a gesture to the Palestinian Authority. HaMoked reported most of the requests filed in the previous two years were for West Bank Palestinians married to Israelis or East Jerusalemites.

On March 5, the Knesset extended the "temporary" Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law through March 2024. The law prohibited the minister of interior from granting residency or citizenship status to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza who were married to Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel and banned reunification of citizens or residents of Israel with spouses from "enemy states," including Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran. Thousands of Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza were living in Israel, including Jerusalem, on temporary stay permits because they did not qualify for family reunification under the Citizenship and Entry law. Some of these West Bank or Gaza Palestinians were living with their spouses in East Jerusalem without legal status.

In-country Movement: The barrier that divided the majority of the West Bank from Israel, including communities within Jerusalem and inside the West Bank, significantly impeded freedom of movement for Palestinians, affecting residents' access to their extended families, places of worship, employment, agricultural lands, schools, and hospitals as well as the conduct of commerce, journalism, and humanitarian and NGO activities. For example, restrictions on access in Jerusalem caused delays at checkpoints sometimes lasting hours and affecting the ability of Palestinian patients and medical staff to reach the six Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem that offered specialized care. Authorities sometimes restricted internal movement in Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem and Jerusalem's Old City and periodically blocked entrances to the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Issawiya, Silwan, and Jabal Mukabber. The government stated the barriers were for security and that restrictions on movement in Jerusalem were implemented only when necessary for investigative operations, public safety, or public order, and when there was no viable alternative.

Foreign Travel: Citizens generally were free to travel abroad, provided they had no outstanding military obligations and no administrative restrictions. Authorities did not permit any citizen to travel to Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen without permission from the interior minister or the prime minister.

The law authorized the government to revoke residency permits of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem who had lived in another country, the West Bank, or Gaza for more than seven years. According to the government's response to HaMoked's January freedom of information request to

the Ministry of Interior, authorities revoked 81 residency permits in Jerusalem in 2022, including for 42 women and one child. Some Palestinians who were born in Jerusalem but studied abroad reported losing their Jerusalem residency status, although the government denied revoking the residency status of anyone who left for the sole purpose of studying abroad. The government stated it would not revoke the residency status of individuals who maintained an “affinity to Israel” and that former residents who wished to return to Israel could receive renewed residency status under certain conditions.

Palestinian residents of Jerusalem possessing residency permits issued by the Israeli government, but not PA or Jordanian identity documents, needed special travel documents to leave the country.

The government generally prohibited Druze citizens and residents from visiting Syria.

Exile: NGOs reported continued Israeli revocation of Jerusalem identity cards amounted to forced exile to the occupied territories or abroad. Authorities did not permit permanent residence in Jerusalem for any Palestinians who were abroad during the 1967 war or whose residency permits the government had withdrawn. Human rights organizations called on the government to repeal the law and resume processing of family reunification applications. The law allowed for the entry of spouses of Israelis on a “staying permit” if the male spouse was 35 or older and the female spouse 25 or older, for children up to age 14, and for a special permit for children ages 14 to 18, but they were not eligible for residency or citizenship.

Citizenship: The law allowed the minister of interior to revoke citizenship and permanent residence on grounds of “breach of trust to the State of Israel” or following a conviction for an act of terror, with the consent of the district courts and subject to appeal to the Supreme Court, but the courts mandated the granting of residency in cases of resulting statelessness. On February 15, the Knesset amended the law, allowing the minister of interior to revoke citizenship or residency of individuals convicted and imprisoned for a terrorist act or who received a PA stipend following a terrorist attack. The government selectively revoked residency permits of some Palestinian residents of Jerusalem.

E. PROTECTION OF REFUGEES

The government maintained communication with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations but provided limited protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, and asylum seekers as well as to other persons of concern. The government did not allow UNHCR regular access to monitor the detention facility at Ben Gurion Airport.

Access to Asylum: The law provided for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government had an established system for providing protection to refugees. The government, however, very rarely granted refugee status and often kept applications of asylum seekers under temporary protection pending for years. NGOs alleged the government purposely delayed these cases. According to NGOs and UNHCR, the refugee recognition rate was less than 1 percent.

Most asylum seekers received a “conditional release visa” that required frequent renewal and was available in only two locations, Bnei Brak and Eilat; the government did not accept initial asylum claims at airports. The government provided these individuals with a limited form of group protection, granting them the right not to be deported but not giving access welfare or medical services. HIAS, an NGO, reported that while the permit was not a work visa, the government did not often prosecute employers who employed individuals with these visas in specified industries and circumstances, de facto allowing some asylum seekers opportunities to work in the country. Advocacy groups asserted most government policies aimed to deter the arrival of future asylum seekers by pressuring those already in the country to depart, either by restricting their access to work, social, and medical services, or by not examining their asylum requests. On June 4, a district court rejected a petition filed by NGOs demanding that asylum seekers receive services from PIBA offices throughout the country due to multiple closures of the facility in Bnei Brak in recent years.

Local press reported that while authorities issued tourist visas to Ukrainians arriving in the country with periodic automatic extensions, the government advised Ukrainians fleeing the war not to file for refugee status and stated it would not process asylum claims from Ukrainian or Russian nationals until further notice. PIBA published a report in May noting that the government did not process asylum claims filed by Ukrainian citizens since there was a nonremoval policy regarding Ukrainian citizens. According to a report by the local NGO Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, by the year's end, approximately 32,000 citizens fleeing violence between Russia and Ukraine who arrived after the start of Russia's war on Ukraine were still in the country, including 16,000 Russians, 14,000 Ukrainians, and 1,000 Belarussians.

As of September 30, there were 23,249 adult asylum seekers in the country, of whom 20,759 were from Eritrea or Sudan, according to PIBA. In addition, more than 8,000 children of asylum seekers resided in the country, the majority of whom were born in Israel, according to PIBA.

PIBA did not record entries of asylum seekers via the Jordanian border, but according to HRM, at least 50 Sudanese asylum seekers entered there during the year. PIBA detained nine Sudanese who entered during the year. HRM also reported 47 Ethiopian women trafficking victims entered via the Jordanian border, of whom the government recognized 26 as trafficking victims following HRM referrals, with six more awaiting a government decision on their status at year's end. Media reported several instances of authorities deporting migrants to Jordan. HIAS received multiple reports of authorities deporting Palestinian members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) community to the West Bank, which HIAS characterized as deportations without due process.

PIBA applied a fast-track procedure to reject asylum applicants from Georgia due to a high volume of claims by Georgian citizens seeking work in Israel while their asylum applications were pending. According to HRM, the fast-track procedure prevented proper examination of legitimate asylum claims.

Refoulement: The government discontinued protection against deportation or return for individuals from the Democratic Republic of Congo in late 2022, but children and their immediate families still received protection, and Congolese with pending asylum requests could stay in the country until their request was adjudicated.

Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Authorities regularly referred to asylum seekers as "infiltrators." Police sometimes used discriminatory violence against asylum seekers.

Media outlets reported that on September 2, clashes occurred between supporters of the Eritrean regime and its opponents, including Eritrean asylum seekers, at a festival organized by the Eritrean embassy in Tel Aviv. Police responded using live ammunition, tear gas, and stun grenades, resulting in injuries to at least 157 persons, including 49 police officers, according to media reports. Police arrested 53 Eritrean nationals and on September 5 placed them in administrative detention. Police had approved the event despite warnings by regime opponents that it could lead to clashes. On September 2, the Department for Investigation of Police Officers opened an inquiry into police conduct that remained pending at year's end.

Government policies restricting refugees' ability to work legally forced many to work in "unofficial" positions, making them more susceptible to poor treatment and abusive work practices by their employers. PIBA, unlike police or the IPS, did not have an external body to which migrants could file complaints if subjected to violence, according to HRM.

Freedom of Movement: The law permitted the government to detain for up to two months asylum seekers from countries to which government policy prohibited deportation upon entry, but authorities recorded no such arrivals. The law also permitted the government to detain irregular migrants "implicated in criminal proceedings" without trial and for an indefinite period.

Authorities prohibited asylum seekers released from detention after arrival from residing in Eilat, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Petah Tikva, Netanya, Ashdod, and Bnei Brak – cities that already had a high

concentration of asylum seekers.

Employment: There were credible reports the government restricted employment of asylum seekers. While conditional-release visas for asylum seekers did not include work permits, making their employment illegal, the government did not enforce this prohibition against employers. Authorities applied a similar policy towards Ukrainian nationals holding tourist visas who entered the country before October 2022 and had resided in Israel for more than 90 days. On April 25, authorities extended this policy to Ukrainians who had arrived after October 2022.

According to UNHCR, asylum seekers from countries not listed under the government's nonrefoulement policy could not work legally for three to six months after submitting their asylum requests, unless they held a valid visa before applying. Asylum seekers were prohibited from working on government contracts, including local government contracts for cleaning and maintenance, which often employed irregular migrants.

On March 9, the Supreme Court issued a provisional order temporarily halting a 2022 PIBA regulation limiting work eligibility of a large group of asylum seekers and Ukrainian nationals to four sectors, consisting mainly of manual labor, in 17 cities across the country. According to NGOs, the regulation harmed disadvantaged communities and young persons in the education system. The case was pending as of year's end. According to NGOs, limiting work eligibility combined with the lack of work permits increased the risk of abusive employment and exploitation.

Many asylum seekers lost their jobs following the beginning of the conflict after October 7 and were not eligible for unemployment benefits and income support allowances, according to the NGO Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel (ASSAF). According to Freedom House, asylum seekers were barred from owning businesses.

Access to Basic Services: Legally recognized refugees received social services, including some access to the national health-care system, but the government for the most part did not provide asylum seekers with public social benefits. According to ASSAF, women survivors of domestic violence, persons with disabilities, and homeless persons among the asylum seeker community were eligible for limited social services but did not always have access to these rights. According to ASSAF, most asylum seekers in need of welfare and social services received them from aid organizations.

Adult asylum seekers were able to enroll in a health-insurance program only through their employers. Ukrainian citizens older than 60 were eligible for government-provided health insurance. Without medical insurance through employers, adult asylum seekers had access only to emergency care. The Ministry of Health offered medical insurance for children of asylum seekers for 120 shekels (\$33) per month. Mental health services for the asylum seeker and refugee population were available in two Tel Aviv clinics, one treating 250 patients, which had a lengthy waitlist, and a new clinic opened in May and that treated torture survivors, according to ASSAF. Asylum seekers who were recognized as victims of trafficking were eligible for rehabilitation and care. The same eligibilities did not apply to an estimated 4,000 refugees and asylum seekers who were victims of torture, who received limited support.

The law provided mandatory education for any child from age three regardless of citizenship status. According to civil society organizations, several municipalities illegally segregated children of African asylum seekers from Israeli children in schools and kindergartens. In June the Ministry of Education and the Tel Aviv municipality agreed on a pilot program in which 96 asylum seeker children residing in south Tel Aviv would study in schools in the north and center of the city using an "adjusted curriculum," in response to a petition against school segregation by asylum seekers and NGOs. According to ASSAF, this raised concerns regarding whether the real goal of the program was integration or weakening asylum seekers' children's connection to Israel. The petition was pending as of year's end. Approximately 65 percent of Ukrainian children who arrived in Israel were registered in Israeli schools, according to ASSAF.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to individuals whom it did not recognize as refugees or who might not qualify as refugees, primarily Eritreans, Sudanese, and Ukrainians.

Palestinian residents of the West Bank who claimed to be in a life-threatening situation due to their sexual orientation or to gender-based violence did not have access to the asylum system due to the government's claim the 1951 Refugee Convention did not apply to Palestinians because they received assistance from the UN Relief and Works Agency. Some Palestinians were able to obtain a temporary permit from the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) renewed annually, allowing them to live and work in the country. According to UNHCR, prior to the issuance of permits COGAT requested proof of efforts to resettle in a third country. Many Palestinians in life-threatening situations in the West Bank could not obtain a work permit and resided in Israel without legal status. NGOs stated this resulted in individuals being vulnerable to human trafficking, violence, and exploitation. After Hamas' October 7 attack, the government canceled all permits for Palestinians without notice, making them unlawfully present in Israel. This led to arrests and deportations of some Palestinians who held valid permits. The NGO Aguda reported in their questionnaire surveying Palestinian LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in Israel that a majority experienced increased violence and lost their jobs after October 7. Aguda also stated a majority of Palestinian LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in Israel reported being arrested by police between October 7 and year's end, and that nearly a third of respondents reported being expelled to the West Bank in that period. In response to a letter from HIAS and ACRI, the Ministry of Justice stated on October 16 it had no intention to deport Palestinians holding such permits, and the permits were renewed automatically. According to HIAS, most of the Palestinians in life-threatening situations who were deported to the West Bank since October 7 were able to return to Israel.

F. STATUS AND TREATMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)

For information on conflict-related internal displacement, see section 1.i.

For further information about IDPs in the country, please refer to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center at <https://www.internal-displacement.org>.

G. STATELESS PERSONS

Despite being eligible for Israeli citizenship, approximately 80 percent of the estimated 23,600 Druze living in the Golan Heights territory captured from Syria in 1967 refused to accept it, and their status as Syrian citizens was unclear. They held Israeli "laissez passer" travel documents, which listed their nationality as "undefined."

Only a small fraction of Palestinians in East Jerusalem had Israeli citizenship. Most had not applied for Israeli citizenship and had a special residency status providing all rights and services enjoyed by Israeli citizens except voting in national elections. Authorities could revoke such residency status if they deemed a resident to have abandoned Jerusalem as their primary residence or to have endangered public security. According to the most recent government data from 2022, 34 percent of naturalization applications submitted by Palestinians living in East Jerusalem were approved, and in many cases final approval took years.

Section 3.

Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provided citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Palestinian residents of Jerusalem and noncitizen Druze of the Golan Heights who had permanent residency status could vote in municipal elections and seek some municipal offices, except that of mayor, but only citizens had the right to vote in general elections or serve in the Knesset.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: National elections were widely reported to be fair and free of abuses and irregularities.

On October 23, the Knesset postponed the October 31 local government elections to February 2024 due to the escalation of the conflict following October 7. The government decided to further postpone elections in 14 communities evacuated since the beginning of the war, affecting an estimated 125,000 citizens and residents. Elections for the evacuated communities would take place no earlier than 150 days after a government decision allowing the return of evacuees to their homes.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The Basic Law prohibited the candidacy of any party or individual that denied the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people or the democratic character of the state, or that incited racism. A political party could not register if its goals or actions included support of an armed struggle, enemy state, or terror organization against Israel. Otherwise, political parties operated without restriction or interference.

The law restricted the funding of individuals and groups who engaged in “election activity” during the period of a national election, which was typically three months.

On November 15, the Knesset Ethics Committee suspended Arab members Aida Touma-Sliman (Hadash) and Iman Khatib-Yassin (Ra’am) for one month and two months, respectively, and docked their salaries for two weeks. The committee suspended Touma-Sliman for accusing the IDF of war crimes, including shooting at displaced Palestinians in Gaza and attacking a hospital. The committee suspended Khatib-Yassin for saying in an interview that the video footage of the Hamas attacks shared by the Israeli authorities showed that “no babies were slaughtered..., as per the film, and no women were raped” during the October 7 attacks. Khatib-Yassin later apologized. On October 18, the committee suspended member of the Knesset Ofer Cassif (Hadash) for 45 days and docked him two weeks’ pay for comparing Israel’s war in Gaza to “the final solution.”

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups: Approximately 100,000 Arab Bedouin citizens living in unrecognized villages in the Negev and Galilee could not vote or run in municipal elections, because they did not have a legal address acknowledged by the government.

Section 4.

Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption.

Corruption: The government continued to investigate and prosecute top political figures. The criminal trial of Prime Minister Netanyahu on charges of bribetaking, fraud, and breach of trust, originally filed in 2019 during his previous term of office, was still underway at year’s end. Netanyahu’s indictment included an alleged attempt to assist a media outlet to capture greater market share in exchange for favorable press and the alleged receipt of inappropriate gifts.

For additional information about 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 or cases and publish their findings. Those groups reported government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views, and parliamentarians routinely invited NGOs critical of the government to participate in Knesset hearings on proposed legislation. Human rights NGOs had standing to petition the Supreme Court directly regarding governmental policies and could appeal individual cases to the Supreme Court.

In July, following a directive from the minister of finance, the tax authority announced an inquiry into the local branch of Amnesty International to examine a possible revocation of its eligibility for tax-deductible donations, due to the organization's calls for boycotts on settlement products and for an arms embargo on Israel. Amnesty Israel stated the arms embargo call was part of a global campaign and was not directed specifically against Israel. The inquiry was pending as of the year's end.

Local NGOs, particularly those focused on human rights abuses, continued to view the law requiring disclosure of support from foreign entities on formal publications as an attempt to stigmatize, delegitimize, and silence NGOs critical of the country's occupation.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: Police initiated investigations of some nonviolent activists protesting the occupation of the West Bank or the government's proposed overhaul of the judiciary. Activists stated this was an effort to bully and harass them. Police cited suspicion of violence or disturbance of public order as justification for the investigations. The staff of local NGOs, particularly those calling for an end to the country's military occupation of the West Bank, stated they received death threats from nongovernmental sources.

The government maintained the designation of seven Palestinian NGOs as terror organizations. Israeli NGOs continued to call for a reversal of the designation, arguing it was done to prevent documentation of human rights abuses and advocacy for reforms.

The Front Line Defenders *Global Analysis for 2022*, released in April, reported the seven designated Palestinian NGOs were subjected to office raids, interrogations, and threats of closure. The report also highlighted the Palestinian-French lawyer and human rights defender Salah Hammouri was deported to France in December 2022, following nine months of administrative detention without charge or trial, after his East Jerusalem residency permit was revoked in 2021.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government generally cooperated with the United Nations and other international bodies, aside from issues pertaining to the Palestinian territories. The government maintained a policy of nonengagement with the UN Human Rights Council's special rapporteur on the situation in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 and Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel. The government did not cooperate with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and stopped granting visas to its staff following the 2020 publication of a UN Human Rights Council database of companies and "business activities related to settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory." The government did not grant or renew visas for OHCHR international staff during the year, forcing the agency's 16 resident staff to work remotely from outside the country without direct access the West Bank and Gaza. The government did not renew

the visa of the UN chief humanitarian aid official and Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Lynn Hastings, claiming alleged anti-Israel bias; Hastings rejected those allegations but departed the country on December 16 after her visa expired.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The state comptroller served as ombudsman for human rights and investigated complaints against statutory bodies subject to audit. Many NGOs did not find the ombudsman effective for resolving human rights concerns. The Supreme Court was responsible for upholding the basic laws, which in the absence of a constitution provided for individual and minority rights.

Section 6.

Discrimination and Societal Abuses

WOMEN

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape, including spousal, domestic or intimate partner rape and other forms of sexual violence including so-called corrective rape of LGBTQI+ persons, was a felony punishable by 16 years' imprisonment, with sex crimes 'nationalistically' motivated subject to harsher sentences, often doubling imprisonment time. Rape under aggravated circumstances or rape committed against a relative was punishable by 20 years' imprisonment. Killing a spouse following abuse was chargeable as murder under aggravated circumstances, with a sentence of life imprisonment if convicted. Authorities generally enforced the law. (For information on sexual abuse committed by Hamas and other militants on October 7, see section 1.i.)

On September 6, an expanded procedure for better protections for survivors of sex offenses in court proceedings came into effect, including minimizing presence of the survivor and perpetrator in the same space, providing security escorts for survivors while in court, and making efforts towards more expeditious handling of court cases.

According to the NGO Israel Observatory on Femicide, 22 women and girls were killed by their partners or other family members during the year. According to the NGO, half of the victims were Jewish and two-fifths were Arab, and more than 200,000 women lived in situations of domestic violence. According to a report by the Knesset Research and Information Center, in 2022 police opened approximately 16,500 investigations on offenses between partners and prosecutors filed 3,730 indictments in cases of domestic violence and threats. The Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs' hotline received 5,877 calls regarding domestic violence cases between January and November 15.

On July 30, the Knesset approved a law set to enter force in 2024 that would allow court to approve electronic monitoring of men to ensure enforcement of protection orders due to gender-based violence offenses. While women's rights NGOs welcomed the approval of the law, they stated it had been significantly watered down and questioned whether it would be effective.

According to the government, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs operated 17 shelters for survivors of domestic abuse, including three for the Arab community, two mixed Jewish-Arab shelters, three for the ultra-Orthodox and religious community, and eight for the general population. The ministry also operated a hotline to report domestic abuse, including a text-message-based hotline. Social workers collaborated with police for immediate intervention in response to complaints made to police. The Ministry of Justice's Legal Aid Department represented women seeking restraining and protection orders and defended them in domestic violence cases.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: Sexual harassment was illegal. Penalties for sexual harassment depended on the severity of the act and whether the harassment involved

blackmail. The law provided that anyone who was a target of gender-based violence could follow the progress of their cases through a computerized system and information call center.

Discrimination: The law generally provided women the same legal status and rights as men, including under laws related to nationality, labor, property, inheritance, employment, access to credit, and owning or managing business property. The government generally enforced the law.

The law allowed discrimination against women in religious courts responsible for the adjudication of family law, including marriage and divorce. The law allowed a Jewish woman or man to initiate divorce proceedings but required both parties to consent for the divorce to take effect, which sometimes resulted in a husband making divorce contingent on his wife acceding to demands, such as those relating to property ownership or child custody. Jewish women in this situation – which in some cases could last years – could not remarry, and rabbinical courts would deem any children born to them from another man illegitimate without a writ of divorce. Rabbinical courts sometimes punished a husband who refused to grant his wife a divorce, while also stating they lacked the authority under Jewish religious law to grant the divorce without a husband's consent.

The law allowed a Muslim man to divorce his wife without her consent and without petitioning the court. A Muslim woman could petition for and receive a divorce through sharia courts without her husband's consent under certain conditions. A marriage contract could stipulate other circumstances in which she could obtain a divorce without his consent.

The law provided equal pay for equal work, but a wage gap persisted between men and women. Part of the pay gap reportedly resulted from a differential between the average number of weekly hours men and women worked.

The law restricted women younger than 45, pregnant women, and women who were nursing from working in jobs that had the possibility of exposure to certain chemicals.

On June 28, the Supreme Court ordered the government to explain why it would not issue guidelines for appropriate representation of women in public service positions, in response to a petition by women's rights NGOs against the appointment of 28 men and only two women to director general positions in government ministries. The petition was pending at year's end.

Incidents of gender segregation and women's exclusion in public spaces and events and in the IDF occurred during the year. On August 13, a public bus driver ordered teenage girls to separate from their male friends, sit in the back of the bus, and cover themselves with blankets, saying, "You need to understand this is the Jewish state...and this is what's happening in this country now." In one incident that received much publicity, on September 22, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the Tel Aviv municipality's condition that the NGO Rosh Yehudi could hold an outdoor Yom Kippur eve prayer gathering in downtown Tel Aviv only without separation between the genders. Despite the ruling, on September 25, Rosh Yehudi attempted to segregate participants by gender, leading to an altercation with Tel Aviv residents.

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

The country maintained pronatalist policies, offering financial incentives for childbirth and funding many reproductive health-care services, while not funding contraceptives. Most women were able to safely go through pregnancy and childbirth.

Individuals had access to safe, effective, and affordable methods of family planning and contraception. Emergency contraception after sexual intercourse was available. Women in Orthodox Jewish communities often sought a rabbi's approval to use contraception.

According to NGOs, Arab/Palestinian women citizens of Israel, particularly from the Bedouin population, women asylum seekers, women without legal status, and Palestinian women residents of East Jerusalem, had limited access to health-care services.

Most women had access to emergency health care, including services for the management of complications arising from abortion. Abortions could only take place following approval of an application to a medical committee. The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence, and emergency contraception was available as part of clinical management of rape.

SYSTEMIC RACIAL OR ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

The law provided members of racial or ethnic minority groups protection against discrimination in employment and products and services. The government generally enforced these protections, but NGOs reported Arab citizens and other minorities faced what they often referred to as de facto discrimination in education, employment, social services, personal security, and access to housing. Local and international media and NGOs reported weakened enforcement of protections for minorities following October 7. According to Adalah, this included expulsion and suspension of students by academic institutions; job terminations, suspensions, and demotions of workers; unlawful arrests and detentions; police ban on solidarity protests with Gaza; suppression of speech by Arab/Palestinian lawyers; and incitement against members of Knesset and representatives of Palestinian political parties.

The October 7 attacks gave rise to significant concerns, including heightened fear and mistrust between Jewish and Arab citizens in daily life, impacting workplaces, campuses, and social media as well as a widespread fear of the potential for intercommunal violence within the country. Some right-wing politicians warned of a potential repeat of the May 2021 intercommunal violence, while justifying recent policies that facilitated expanding civilians' access to firearms, including regulations that allow any individual who had served as a combat soldier to freely carry a handgun in civilian spaces, as opposed to past regulations limiting authorization for a private handgun license to those who had completed advanced rifleman training. Mossawa reported Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel faced what it called a "multifaceted crisis marked by systemic police neglect, selective enforcement of laws, and a blatant disregard for basic civil liberties."

There were numerous reports of discrimination against Arab/Palestinian and Druze Israeli citizens and residents, Ethiopian Jewish citizens, Mizrahi Jewish citizens (those with roots in the Middle East and North Africa), migrant workers from Asia, and asylum seekers. Asian persons and persons perceived to be Asian reported harassment. Some migrant workers experienced poor and sometimes life-threatening working and living conditions.

Citizens, including Arab/Palestinian Muslims, Arab/Palestinian Christians, Druze, and Ethiopian-origin, individuals faced persistent institutional and societal discrimination. Arab communities experienced high levels of crime and violence, especially due to organized crime and high numbers of illegal weapons, according to government data and NGOs. The Abraham Initiatives and other NGOs stated they could not definitively determine the causes, but possible candidates included the following: unequal provision of services to Arab communities, including policing; a low level of police enforcement actions on crime and violence within Arab communities; distrust in Arab communities of police, particularly under the leadership of Minister of Public Security Ben Gvir; neglect from police in addressing violence against Arab citizens; limited financial services and access to credit in Arab localities; easy access to illegal weapons; and socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, unemployment (especially among youth), limited housing, and the breakdown of traditional family and authority structures.

Although the law provided all residents of Jerusalem were fully and equally eligible for public services provided by the municipality and other authorities, according to multiple NGOs the Jerusalem municipality and other authorities failed to provide sufficient social services, education, infrastructure, and emergency planning for Palestinian neighborhoods, especially in the areas between the barrier and the municipal boundary. Approximately 117,000 Palestinians lived in that area, of whom approximately 61,000 were registered as Jerusalem residents, according to government data. According to a report from the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research released in

May, 60 percent of Jerusalem's/Arab Palestinians lived in poverty as of 2021, the most recent year for which data were available.

There were multiple reports of security services or citizens racially profiling Arab citizens. Some Arab civil society leaders cited examples in which Israeli political leaders incited racism against the Arab community or portrayed it as an enemy, including an increase in anti-Arab rhetoric during the escalated military conflict with Hamas.

Throughout the year, there were reports of nationalistic hate crimes by extremist Jewish individuals and groups against Palestinians residents of East Jerusalem and Arab/Palestinians citizens of Israel and their property, often with the stated purpose of exacting a "price" for actions taken by the government against the attackers' interests. The government classified as illegal any association using the phrase "price tag." The government further classified a price-tag attack as a security (as opposed to criminal) offense. According to police, the most common offenses were attacks on vehicles, defacement of real estate, harm to Muslim and Christian holy sites, assault, and damage to agricultural lands. For example, on April 6, unknown individuals set cars on fire and sprayed graffiti writing "administrative price tag" in Kfar Qasim. The graffiti referred to Jewish citizens who were then held in administrative detention due to alleged involvement in extremist settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank. Police opened an investigation into the incident, with no update by year's end. (For more information on extremist settler violence, see the West Bank and Gaza report.)

The government maintained a policy to ensure non-Jewish minorities were well represented in the civil service, but Arab citizens remained underrepresented compared to their percentage of the overall population. Arab citizens comprised 14.7 percent of public-sector employees (61.3 percent of whom were entry-level employees), according to the Civil Service Commission, and approximately 1.4 percent of employees in the 70 government-owned companies, despite comprising 21 percent of the country's population.

Separate school systems within the public and semipublic domains produced a large gap in education quality. Arab, Druze, and ultra-Orthodox students passed the matriculation examination at lower rates than their non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish counterparts. The government operated educational and scholarship programs to benefit some Arab students. According to a survey of Arab university students in Israel conducted by the Union of Arab Students released on December 28, 61 percent of respondents said they had seriously considered terminating their studies because of concerns for their personal safety.

Approximately 93 percent of land in the country was in the public domain. This included the approximately 12.5 percent of all land that was owned by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose statutes prohibited the sale or lease of land to non-Jews. Arab citizens were allowed to participate in bids for JNF land, but the Israel Lands Administration granted the JNF additional parcels of land in compensation whenever an Arab citizen won a bid. While a 2018 Supreme Court ruling stated the Lands Administration Executive Council had to have representation of an Arab, Druze, or Circassian member to prevent discrimination against non-Jews, the council did not include any such members at year's end.

The Bedouin segment of the Arab population was the most socioeconomically disadvantaged. More than one-half of the estimated 268,000 Bedouin citizens in the Negev lived in seven government-planned towns and two regional councils that incorporated several villages. In nine of the 11 recognized villages, none of the residences were connected to the electrical grid or the water infrastructure system, according to the NCF. Nearly all public buildings in the recognized Bedouin villages were connected to the electrical grid and water infrastructure, as were residences that had received a building permit, but most residences did not have a building permit, according to the government. Each recognized village had at least one elementary school, and eight recognized villages had high schools.

Approximately 90,000 Bedouins lived in 35 unrecognized tent or shack villages without access to any government services. Residents of unrecognized villages had no shelters or safe rooms from

rockets, and the country's missile defense system did not provide coverage for most unrecognized Bedouin villages since the government considered them to be "open spaces." At least 10 Bedouin citizens were killed by rockets fired by Gaza-based militants on October 7.

An estimated population of 168,800 Ethiopian Jews reported experiencing persistent societal discrimination, although officials and citizens quickly and publicly criticized discriminatory acts against them. According to a National Anti-Racism Unit report released in March, Ethiopian-Israelis were more than twice as likely to be convicted of crimes, compared with the overall population. On July 17, the government extended an integration program for Ethiopian-Israelis, intended to reduce education and income gaps and increase integration into meaningful military service. The National Anti-Racism Unit was tasked with combating institutional racism, receiving complaints and referring them to the relevant government authorities, and raising public awareness, but NGOs criticized the agency as lacking sufficient authority.

In May, the minister of justice did not extend the term of the National Anti-Racism Coordinator, Awake (Kobi) Zena. Zena filed a petition protesting the decision, arguing he was dismissed before his term was over because he appeared in a blacklist maintained by the ultraconservative Noam Party of public servants and NGOs promoting progressive views. *Haaretz* reported that although the minister of justice claimed the role was only meant to last six years, officials in the Justice Ministry told the outlet that roles like Zena's typically lasted eight years. The Justice Ministry stated the decision was purely professional and that another appointment for the role would be made. On September 6, the minister agreed to transfer Zena to another public service position of equivalent rank, and no appointment for Zena's former role was made.

The law prohibited discrimination in employment and occupation based on race or ethnicity. Civil society organizations reported that discrimination persisted in the employment or pay of Arab citizens and Ethiopian-Israelis.

CHILDREN

Birth Registration: Authorities registered births in the country only if the parents were citizens or permanent residents. Any child born in an Israeli hospital received an official document from the hospital confirming the birth. For children of nonresident parents, including those who lacked legal status in the country, the Ministry of Interior issued a confirmation of birth document, which was not a birth certificate. The Ministry of Interior did not issue identification numbers to children of nonresidents until the age of 16, leading to difficulties accessing medical and other services before that age.

The government registered the births of Palestinians born in Jerusalem, although administrative delays reportedly could last for years. The St. Yves Society estimated more than 10,000 children in East Jerusalem were undocumented.

Education: Freedom House reported in their annual report that school quality and resources were generally lower in majority non-Jewish communities. The government did not enforce compulsory education in unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev, where some parents with conservative social views did not support sending girls to school. Bedouin children, particularly girls, had the highest illiteracy and drop-out rates in the country, and more than 5,000 kindergarten-age children were not enrolled in school, according to the NCF. The government did not grant construction permits in unrecognized villages, including for schools.

There were reportedly insufficient classrooms to accommodate Palestinian schoolchildren in Jerusalem. Based on population data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the NGO Ir Amim published data ahead of the 2022-23 school year showing a shortage of 3,517 classrooms for Palestinian children resident in East Jerusalem. Ir Amim also reported that following a freedom of information request, the Jerusalem municipality reported it did not know where 40,963 Palestinian children in Jerusalem were enrolled in school. According to Ir Amim, this constituted 29 percent of East Jerusalem children of compulsory school age.

The government operated public schools for Jewish children where classes were conducted in Hebrew that were separate from schools for Arab children with classes in Arabic. For Jewish children, separate public schools were available for religious and secular families. Individual families could choose a public school system for their children to attend regardless of ethnicity or religious observance. In September, authorities opened two seminaries for Mizrahi only ultra-Orthodox girls in Jerusalem after ultra-Orthodox seminaries persistently denied admission to Mizrahi girls based on their ethnicity. On February 19, ACRI and a Haifa University legal clinic called on the Ministry of Education to dismantle the segregated schools, arguing it constituted illegal discrimination. Several municipalities segregated children of African asylum seekers from other children in schools. As reported by the *Jerusalem Post* in December, the most recent international PISA test data found very high gaps between Hebrew and Arabic speakers and in general an expansion of gaps in the country's education system across socioeconomic-cultural factors.

Child Abuse: The law prohibited child abuse and required mandatory reporting of any suspicion of child abuse. It also required social service employees, medical and education professionals, and other officials to report indications that children were survivors of, engaged in, or coerced into commercial sexual exploitation, sexual offenses, abandonment, neglect, assault, abuse, or human trafficking. The Ministry of Education operated a special unit for sexuality and for prevention of abuse of children and youth that assisted the education system in the prevention and appropriate intervention in cases of suspected abuse of children.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The law set the minimum age of marriage at 18, with some exceptions due to pregnancy and for couples older than 16 if the court permitted it due to unique circumstances. It was unclear if the government effectively enforced the law. Some Arab/Palestinian girls were coerced by their families into marrying older Arab/Palestinian men, according to government and NGO sources. According to media reports, some Jewish Haredi girls were coerced by their families into marrying older Jewish Haredi men.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibited the sale and use of children for commercial sexual exploitation and set a penalty of seven to 20 years in prison. The law prohibited the possession of child pornography (by downloading) and accessing such material (by streaming). Authorities enforced the law. The Ministry of Public Security operated a hotline to receive complaints of activities that sought to harm children online, such as bullying, dissemination of hurtful materials, extortion, sexual abuse, and pressure to commit suicide.

The minimum age for consensual sex was 16. Sexual relations with a child between the age of 14 and 16 constituted statutory rape, punishable by five years' imprisonment.

ANTISEMITISM

Jews constituted close to 74 percent of the population, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. The government often treated crimes targeting Jews as nationalistic crimes relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rather than as resulting from antisemitism.

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: No laws criminalized consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults.

Violence and Harassment: On January 4, Prime Minister Netanyahu appointed parliamentarian Avi Maoz of the ultraconservative Noam Party as deputy minister in the Prime Minister's Office and as head of the Jewish Identity Authority. Maoz and other coalition members made anti-LGBTQI+ statements during the year. For example, on June 20, member of Knesset Yitzhak Pindrus of United Torah Judaism said homosexual relations were more dangerous than the Islamic State, Hizballah, and Hamas. LGBTQI+ NGOs argued such statements, combined with the government's efforts towards a judicial overhaul, contributed to an increase in violence against LGBTQI+ persons.

According to local LGBTQI+ umbrella organization the Aguda, the number of reported anti-LGBTQI+ incidents from January to March increased fourfold compared with the same period in 2022; 20 percent of such incidents included physical violence. According to the Aguda, violent incidents occurred both in rural communities and in Tel Aviv, which was considered a safer environment for the LGBTQI+ community. On August 27, prosecutors filed an indictment against the brother of Druze woman Sarit Ahmed and two other individuals for her murder on June 9 near Yarka due to her sexual orientation. According to the indictment, Ahmed's brother hired two gunmen to kill her and led her to a location, where the gunmen hit her car and fired 11 bullets at her as she tried to escape. Ahmed's two brothers were previously convicted and served prison sentences for making threats against her.

Discrimination: The law prohibited discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation in providing goods and services and prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment. The government generally enforced the law, although some discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons persisted. The law did not allow for same-sex marriage, and LGBTQI+ couples experienced discrimination in matters related to parenthood, including adoption, parental registration, and birth certificates.

During an August 2 Supreme Court hearing on a petition demanding equality in adoption for LGBTQI+ couples, the government argued that amending the law to allow such adoptions was not politically possible but suggested the court rule in favor of adoption by LGBTQI+ couples. On December 28, the Supreme Court ruled LGBTQI+ couples could adopt children, reinterpreting the language of the law allowing only "a man and his wife" to adopt to include any family unit of two parents. LGBTQI+ groups also petitioned to have both partners in LGBTQI+ couples listed on their children's birth certificates, which the government opposed. The petition remained pending at year's end.

On February 27, a district court overturned a decision by the Ministry of Education and prevented the transfer of a transgender boy from his religious elementary school in the middle of the school year due to demands of other parents. According to the NGO Ma'avarim, transgender individuals experienced discrimination in health services due to their gender identity or expression, including intrusive and irrelevant questions, refusal to respect patients' pronouns, and offensive remarks.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Transgender persons were able to change their gender identity marker on legal and identifying documents following sex reassignment surgery or following approval by a medical committee. The option of identifying as "nonbinary/intersex/gender nonconforming" was not available.

Changing one's name was possible under the law, but a clause in the law stated previous names had to remain on the identity card's addendum for seven years. This requirement forced some transgender persons to come out as transgender to third parties such as employers or landlords, according to Ma'avarim. A 2022 petition to the Supreme Court seeking to end this practice was pending at year's end.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: The law did not prohibit so-called conversion therapy, but a Ministry of Health directive prohibited health professionals from providing conversion therapy. The directive did not address so-called conversion therapy conducted

by religious officials and uncertified individuals, who continued the practice, mainly within Jewish and Muslim religious communities. According to the Center to Combat Conversion Therapy, dozens of individuals practiced so-called conversion therapy on hundreds of LGBTQI+ persons in the country during the year. According to the Center, the Ministry of Education sponsored school programs offered by NGOs supporting conversion therapy.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: There were no reported restrictions on these freedoms specific to LGBTQI+ organizations, individuals, or topics.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The law protected the rights of persons with disabilities, including their access to education, employment, health services, information, communications, public buildings, and transportation. The government generally enforced these laws. Starting on August 10, the Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities was authorized to impose financial sanctions on public and private bodies that violated accessibility or adequate representation laws. Not all government buildings were accessible, despite the deadline set by the Knesset for making all government buildings accessible to persons with disabilities expiring at the end of the year with no new extension, five years after the originally mandated deadline.

The law required that at least 5 percent of employees of every government body with more than 100 workers be persons with disabilities. In 2022, the most recent year for which data was available, however, only 67 percent of government bodies met this requirement. According to rights groups, Arab/Palestinian persons with disabilities suffered disproportionately from a lack of access to housing, public buildings, transportation, higher education, policing, health care, and information in Arabic from the government regarding their rights.

On July 6, the Jerusalem District Court acquitted an Israeli Border Police officer for killing Eyad al-Hallaq, an unarmed and autistic Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem in 2020. Hallaq was on his way to a center for persons with disabilities when police shot repeatedly in his direction, first hitting him in the leg and then in the chest. The accused officer said he believed Hallaq was carrying a weapon and made suspicious movements. The Police Investigation Department and the State Attorney's Office decided not to appeal the court's ruling. On September 5, Adalah and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights filed a petition to the Supreme Court on behalf of the parents of Eyad al-Hallaq against that decision.

In the 2022-23 school year, 41 percent of students with disabilities studied in segregated programs. According to disability rights NGOs, a law designed to encourage mainstreaming of persons with disabilities did not include sufficient support to properly integrate students into the general education system.

On August 20, in response to a petition by Alut, the Israeli Society for Autistic Children, the Supreme Court rejected a government move to shorten the school day for children on the autism spectrum due to staffing shortages.

OTHER SOCIETAL VIOLENCE OR DISCRIMINATION

On May 18, as part of Jerusalem Day celebrations, a Flags March took place in Jerusalem in which approximately 50,000 Israeli marchers entered the Old City of Jerusalem through the Damascus Gate, the main entry to the Muslim Quarter, according to press reports. Crowds danced and chanted "the nation of Israel lives, may your villages burn," and "death to Arabs," according to reports, while some individuals spat at Palestinians and reporters, beat on shop doors in the Palestinian neighborhoods, and spray-painted and affixed anti-Palestinian slogans to Palestinian property. Police blocked surrounding streets and forcibly removed Palestinian protestors from the route, according to international observers and media reporters.

According to press reports, on October 28, a mob of hundreds of Jewish extremists stormed Netanya's Academic College's dormitories to target Arab students while chanting "Death to Arabs." The rioters, some of whom were armed, accused Arab students of throwing eggs at worshippers in a nearby Shabbat prayer service and playing loud Arabic music. The rioters attacked the dormitory building, trying to harm Arab students inside, according to press reports. Following the incident, the mayor of Netanya requested the college administrator to evacuate the dorms and identify who was responsible for alleged harassment of Jewish worshippers. No arrests were made, either of perpetrators of the alleged harassment of Jewish worshippers or of the rioters harassing Arab students. After a lawsuit was filed by attorney Nayef Zidani and the Mossawa Center, the Arab students were reinstated to their dormitories at Netanya College, according to the Mossawa Center.

Section 7.

Worker Rights

A. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination. A labor court had discretionary authority to order the reinstatement of a worker fired for union activity.

The government generally enforced all applicable laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike, including prohibitions on antiunion discrimination. The government sometimes levied penalties against violators. Penalties for violations were commensurate with other laws related to civil rights. Worker unions reported some employers actively discouraged union participation, delayed or refused to engage in collective bargaining, or harassed workers attempting to form a union.

According to the worker's rights NGO Kav LaOved, many workers in education, social work, security, cleaning, and caregiving were employed as contract workers, which infringed on their right to form or join a union, bargaining power, and access to labor protections.

B. PROHIBITION OF FORCED OR COMPULSORY LABOR

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/>.

D. DISCRIMINATION (SEE SECTION 6)

E. ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS OF WORK

Wage and Hour Laws: The law provided for a national minimum wage for all sectors of the economy. The minimum wage was above the poverty income level for individuals. The law allowed a maximum 42-hour workweek at regular pay and provided for paid annual holidays. According to Kav LaOved, violations of wage, hour, and overtime laws were common in the fields of agriculture, construction, caregiving, and cleaning. A law specifying rights regarding hours of work and rest did not apply to noncitizen domestic caregivers. According to Kav LaOved, hundreds of thousands were employed on an hourly basis, which reduced their social rights, benefits, and protections.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) regulations were insufficient for some industries in the country, particularly construction and agriculture. The law did not specifically provide for the right of workers to remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. During the year, 82 workers died in work-related accidents, according to Kav LaOved.

A dedicated police unit responsible for investigating workplace accidents resulting in death or severe injuries, mainly at construction sites, only had the resources to work on high-profile cases.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government did not effectively enforce minimum wage, overtime, and OSH law. Authorities rarely enforced penalties for violators, which were not commensurate with those for similar crimes such as fraud or negligence. The Administration for the Regulation and Enforcement of Labor Laws was responsible for enforcing wage and hour laws, and the number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. The Occupational Health and Safety Administration of the Ministry of Economy was responsible for enforcing OSH laws. Penalties for OSH violations were sometimes enforced.

According to Kav LaOved, PIBA enforcement efforts focused on sanctioning employers of irregular migrants rather than on the protection of workers' rights.

Workers in agricultural sites usually did not have sirens or proper bomb shelters in their place of work. In May, a Palestinian construction worker from Gaza was killed and five migrant and Palestinian workers in construction and agriculture were injured from rocket fire by PIJ to Israeli territory.

On October 7, at least 52 migrant workers, agriculture students, and interns from Thailand, Nepal, Cambodia, and Tanzania, at least three construction workers from China, and seven caregivers from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Moldova were killed and many more were injured during Hamas' attack, according to Kav LaOved and media reports. Among the 34 migrant workers and agriculture students taken hostage, 24 of them were released in November, and at least one was reported to have been killed in captivity, while 10 remained in captivity in Gaza at year's end, according to Kav LaOved and media reports. On October 8, PIBA issued a directive to private agencies employing migrant workers in agriculture not to place new workers near the Gaza border and to allow workers to move to other regions. Evacuation of migrant workers was implemented mainly by the Thai embassy and civil initiatives.

After October 7, the government blocked the vast majority of Palestinian workers from entering Israel, according to Kav LaOved. Reportedly, some Palestinian workers faced unpaid wages for their work in Israel or in Israeli settlements in the West Bank since September, as their September salary wasn't set for payment until after October 7. According to the International Labor Organization, approximately 182,000 Palestinians from Gaza and 160,000 Palestinians from the West Bank either lost jobs or were at risk of losing them "as a result of restrictions imposed on Palestinians' access to the Israeli labor market and the closures of crossing from the West Bank into Israel and the settlements."

According to the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel, the informal sector constituted 10 percent of the country's GDP in 2018, the most recent year for which data was available. Government policies on the legality of work forced many foreign nationals and asylum seekers to work in unofficial positions, including an estimated 31,000 Palestinians prior to October 7, making

them more susceptible to abuse, poor treatment, and exploitative employment practices. PIBA did not have an external body to which asylum seekers could file complaints if subjected to violence, according to HRM. Informal-sector and part-time workers were covered by wage, hour, OSH, and other labor laws and inspections.

(For information on detention, abuse, and disappearance of Palestinian workers from Gaza in Israel, see section 1.i.).