

Mexico 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

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

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists and enforcement of or threat of criminal or civil charges in order to limit expression; and violence or threats against labor activists or union members.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses; however, impunity and extremely low rates of prosecution remained a problem for all crimes, including human rights abuses. There were media reports some government agents were complicit with international criminal gangs, and prosecution and conviction rates were low for abuses involving these agents.

Criminal elements, including local and transnational gangs and narcotics traffickers, were significant perpetrators of violent crimes and committed acts of homicide, enforced disappearances, torture, kidnapping, extortion,

human trafficking, human smuggling, bribery, intimidation, and other threats, resulting in high levels of violence and exploitation. The government investigated and prosecuted some of these crimes, but the majority remained uninvestigated and unprosecuted.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were several reports government entities or their agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

Most reports of arbitrary killings involved military and police forces firing on vehicles or structures, resulting in civilian casualties, at times while engaged in firefights with criminal actors. Most incidents did not result in criminal charges. Arbitrary killings were difficult to successfully prosecute.

On March 31, in Chiapas, there was an exchange of gunfire between National Guard agents and an armed group in the community of Niños Héroes. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Human Rights Center and Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez reported 25 individuals were killed, including civilians awaiting ferry transportation; these organizations called for an investigation. Authorities stated a total of 10 individuals, including civilians, were killed. No criminal charges were brought against agents of the National Guard

involved in the incident.

b. Coercion in Population Control

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

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The law provided for freedom of speech, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. NGOs reported President Andres Manuel López Obrador stigmatized journalists or took actions that made some journalists feel unsafe. The government exerted significant pressure on some media outlets through its ability to direct advertising revenue, which at times influenced coverage in local and national media.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

Journalists were killed or subjected to physical attacks, cyberattacks, harassment, and intimidation, especially by state agents and transnational criminal organizations. These attacks limited media's ability to investigate and report, since many of the reporters who were killed covered crime, corruption, and local politics. High levels of impunity, including for killings or

attacks on journalists, resulted in self-censorship and reduced freedom of expression.

According to civil society representatives, at least five journalists were killed during the year: Roberto Carlos Figueroa (in Morelos) on May 3, Víctor Alfonso Culebro Morales (in Chiapas) on July 2, Alejandro Alfredo Martínez Noguez (in Guanajuato) on August 4, Mauricio Cruz Solís (in Michoacán) on October 29, and Patricia Ramírez González (in Colima) on October 30.

As of June, the Secretariat of the Interior registered at least 15 reports of verbal and physical attacks against journalists under the secretariat protection mechanism. The most common forms of aggression against journalists were intimidation and harassment, followed by threats and physical attacks, according to civil society groups.

From January 1 to November 30, 2023, the NGO Communication and Information on Women registered 184 cases of aggression against women journalists for their work. The NGO found the most common attacks against women in journalism were stigmatization, intimidation, and harassment online and in person.

Civil society activists stated unidentified users and bots on X (formerly Twitter) also regularly posted threats against journalists who asked “difficult” questions of government officials during press engagements and in some cases disseminated the journalists’ personal information to other

media outlets and made veiled threats. Activists asserted this behavior resulted in self-censorship in favor of government positions.

An NGO that tracked attacks on journalists reported at least 142 instances of stigmatization of journalists and publication of the personal information of journalists without their consent.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

Human rights groups reported some state and local governments censored media. There were reports of journalists practicing self-censorship due to threats from criminal groups and government officials. Journalists reported altering their coverage due to a lack of government protection, attacks against members of media and media outlets, and threats of retribution against their families, among other reasons.

Advertising contracts were sometimes used as a control mechanism by different levels of government. Freedom of expression advocacy groups reported the government, despite reductions in its advertising budgets, continued to exert strong financial influence over the largest media companies. The civil society group Fundar underscored a lack of federal government transparency or equity in selecting media outlets for public advertising, noting 55 percent of the government's advertising budget went to only 10 media outlets in 2023. From January 1 to March 31, there were

three instances of denials or suspensions of public advertising to media outlets in response to editorial content.

In some regions, criminal groups exercised significant influence over media outlets and reporters, threatening individuals who published views critical of criminal groups. Concerns persisted regarding criminal groups' use of physical violence in retaliation for information posted online, which exposed bloggers and social media users to the same level of violence faced by traditional journalists. In its report released in February, Article 19 identified 57 attacks against journalists in 2023 perpetrated by individuals associated with transnational criminal organizations.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, collectively bargain, and conduct legal strikes, and prohibited antiunion discrimination.

During the year, 2019 labor law reforms continued to facilitate the ability to organize unions and bargain collectively. In addition to providing workers with the right to freely elect union representatives and approve collective bargaining agreements through a secret ballot process, the reforms continued to provide a path to block registration of collective bargaining

agreements that “yellow” or management-controlled unions had negotiated and signed without the knowledge of workers.

The reforms also established an expedited, impartial and more transparent judicial process for unions, which allowed unions to obtain previously denied collective bargaining rights and created independent conciliation centers and labor courts to replace corrupt and ineffective Conciliation and Arbitration Boards (CABs). At year’s end, tens of thousands of cases remained before the CABs as they heard cases filed prior to the implementation of the 2019 labor law reform that transformed the labor justice system.

Federal labor law required a minimum of 20 workers to form a union. To receive government recognition, unions and their leaders were required to file for registration with the Federal Center.

By law, a union could call for a strike or bargain collectively in accordance with its own statutes. Under the labor reform, to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement, the union had to first obtain a certificate of representation from the Federal Center demonstrating it had support from at least 30 percent of workers to be covered by the agreement, or 50 percent plus one as part of a secret ballot if there was a competing union.

A workplace could have more than one union. Before a strike could take place, a union had to file a notice to strike with the appropriate labor court.

Workers, the employer, or an interested third party could request the court rule on the legality of the strike, and the court could find the strike illegal.

Federal labor law prohibited antiunion discrimination and prohibited employers from intervening in union affairs or interfering with union activities, including through implicit or explicit reprisals against workers. The law allowed for the reinstatement of workers if the court found the employer fired the worker without just cause and the worker requested reinstatement; however, the law also exempted broad categories of employees from this protection, including “trusted employees” with managerial responsibilities and workers in the job for less than one year.

The government did not effectively enforce labor laws related to freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike, although it improved its capacity to do so. Penalties for violations of these laws were commensurate with those for analogous violations such as civil rights violations but were rarely applied against violators. Labor experts reported that penalties against companies or unions were rarely applied, including in priority sectors covered by the United States-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement, except those for cases raised through the Rapid Response Mechanism of that agreement.

According to several NGOs and unions, many workers faced violence and intimidation perpetrated by employers, other workers, union leaders, and vigilantes hired by companies to suppress opposition in an existing union

leadership election prior to a bargaining-rights negotiation.

Some employers attempted to influence these elections through the illegal hiring of temporary or fake employees immediately prior to the election to vote for the company-controlled union. There were also reports of employers firing workers who attempted to organize independent unions, according to multiple interviews with workers and union leadership.

Observers from grassroots labor rights groups, international NGOs, and multinational apparel brands reported employers in export-oriented supply chains increasingly used hiring methods that weakened job security. For example, manufacturers commonly hired workers on one- to three-month contracts and then waited a period of days before rehiring them on new short-term contracts to avoid paying severance and to prevent workers from accruing seniority, in violation of federal law. Employers could decide not to rehire workers who attempted to organize a union. NGOs and unions reported this ploy was a way to restrict workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

As part of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement's Rapid Response Mechanism, labor officials continued to review cases of alleged denial of freedom of association and collective bargaining rights. Some of these cases were resolved and resulted in the reinstatement of workers with back pay, recognition of an independent union as the legitimate representative of workers, or both.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The labor law provided for a minimum wage for all sectors, with a tripartite National Minimum Wage Commission responsible for establishing minimum wages. The minimum wage was above the official estimated monthly poverty line's monetary level.

Federal law set six eight-hour days and 48 hours per week as the legal workweek. Any work of more than eight hours in a day was considered overtime, for which a worker was to receive double pay. After accumulating nine hours of overtime in a week, a worker earned triple the hourly wage. The law prohibited compulsory overtime. In June, the human trafficking law was amended to impose criminal penalties and fines on employers when workers exceeded a nine-hour weekly limit on overtime work.

In January, the government issued a new decree on agricultural workers that mandated employers provide a written contract, food, housing, access to medical services, education for workers and their families, transportation, child care, training and personal protective equipment for dangerous tasks,

rest breaks, a work environment free of discrimination and violence, and protections for pregnant workers. The decree obligated the government to set the minimum wage for agricultural workers and to conduct labor inspections at least once a year to verify compliance.

According to labor rights NGOs, employers in all sectors sometimes used the illegal “hours bank” approach – requiring long hours when the workload was heavy and cutting down hours when it was light – to avoid compensating workers for overtime. This was a common practice for manufacturers near the U.S.-Mexico border, commonly referred to as the maquiladora sector, in which employers forced workers to take leave at low moments in the production cycle and obliged them to work in peak seasons, including the year-end holiday period, without the corresponding triple pay mandated by law for voluntary overtime on national holidays.

News reports indicated poor working conditions in some factories. These included wages lower than what the law stipulated, contentious labor management, long work hours, unjustified dismissals, a lack of social security benefits, unsafe workplaces, and no freedom of association.

Outsourcing practices made it difficult for workers to identify their legally registered employer, thus limiting their ability to seek redress of labor grievances. Some employers also had workers sign undated resignation letters to avoid paying legally mandated severance when a worker was terminated.

The situation of agricultural workers remained particularly precarious, with similar patterns of exploitation throughout the sector. Labor recruiters enticed families to work during harvests with verbal promises of decent wages and a good standard of living. Rather than receiving daily wages once a week, as mandated by law, day laborers had to meet certain harvest quotas to receive the promised wage. Wages were illegally withheld until the end of the harvest to ensure workers did not leave. Civil society organizations alleged workers were also prohibited from leaving by threats of violence. Workers had to buy food and other items at the company store at high markups, at times leaving them with no money at the end of the harvest after settling debts.

Civil society groups reported families living in inhuman conditions, with inadequate and cramped housing, no access to clean water or bathrooms, insufficient food, and without medical care. With no access to schools or childcare, many workers took their children to work in the fields. Many farmworkers were also hired as day laborers, with no checks on their ages and no contributions to their social security or other legally mandated entitlement programs. Workers on contract were often paid in cash with no contributions to the entitlement programs.

Occupational Safety and Health

The law required employers to observe occupational safety and health (OSH) regulations appropriate for the main industries, issued jointly by the

Labor Secretariat and Institute for Social Security. Legally mandated joint management and labor committees set standards and were responsible for overseeing workplace standards in plants and offices. Individual employees or unions could complain directly to inspectors or safety and health officials. Inspectors proactively identified unsafe conditions and responded to workers' OSH complaints. By law, workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment.

In April, the government announced a new standard for manual handling of loads, which established 55 pounds as the maximum weight workers could lift. The government also published a new catalog for the assessment of occupational illnesses that allowed labor authorities to determine the capacity a worker had following an accident or occupational illness, based on their quality of life and work skills.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government did not effectively enforce the minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws, although it improved its capacity to do so. Civil society organizations reported the number of labor inspections was not sufficient to secure compliance. Criminal cases related to such violations were rare. Penalties for violations regarding hours, minimum wage, and OSH laws were commensurate with those for other similar crimes such as fraud or negligence but were rarely applied against violators.

A voluntary reporting system allowed formally registered businesses to enroll and self-identify as compliant with the program's requirements related to working conditions. Registered businesses deemed to be complying according to documentation submitted were exempt from routine labor inspections for one year, although this did not prevent the Labor Secretariat from conducting complaint-based labor inspections in these businesses. The Labor Secretariat had the authority to order labor inspections at any time in the event of labor law violations, imminent risk to employees, or workplace accidents. In May, the Labor Secretariat launched a new case management system for inspections. The system used predictive analytics to identify employers at high risk of labor violations, allowing the secretariat to better target its inspections.

According to the National Statistics Institute, informal-sector workers represented nearly 50 percent of total workers in the country. The government generally did not enforce labor laws in this sector.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were reports of numerous enforced disappearances by criminal groups, sometimes with allegations of collusion with authorities.

Investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of enforced disappearance crimes were rare. Enforced disappearance was a persistent problem

throughout the country, especially in areas with high levels of cartel- or gang-related violence. According to NGO reports, disappearances were a generalized and systematic practice.

Federal and state databases tracking enforced disappearances were incomplete and had data-sharing problems; forensic systems were highly fragmented among the local, state, and federal levels; and the volume of unsolved cases was far greater than the forensic systems were capable of handling. In its data collection, the government often merged statistics on forcibly disappeared persons with missing persons not suspected of being victims of enforced disappearance, making it difficult to compile accurate statistics on the extent of the problem.

The National Search Commission maintained a National Registry of Missing and Unlocated Persons, which contained information on more than 115,000 enforced disappearances and missing persons. Members of the Mechanism for Truth and Historical Clarification, a panel of five independent experts, noted the Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA) refused to grant access to certain information.

Civil society organizations and families who searched for disappeared persons did so at great personal risk, including death. According to media reports, on January 15, an armed group entered the home of Lorenza Cano Flores, a member of United Salamanca Searching for Disappeared, a group of families searching for missing family members and others. The group

killed Cano's son and spouse, and Cano was reported missing following the January incident. Cano had received several threats for searching for her brother José Francisco, who disappeared in 2018.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem, and authorities did not always promptly release those detained unlawfully. The law provided time limits and conditions on pretrial detention, but federal authorities sometimes failed to comply with those time limits and conditions. Caseloads far exceeded the capacity of the federal judicial system. Abuses of time limits on pretrial detention were endemic in state judicial systems.

In June, Brenda Quevedo, who was accused of kidnapping and homicide, was released from prison after more than 15 years in preventive detention without being tried. An investigation by the National Human Rights Commission found Quevedo was tortured while in pretrial detention.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

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

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Federal law prohibited torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as the admission of confessions obtained through illicit means as evidence in court. Despite these prohibitions, there were reports security forces abused detainees. Additionally, according to information provided by the National Registry of the Crime of Torture, cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment and sexual exploitation by government agents were reported in detention facilities.

Civil society groups reported torture was a generalized practice. According to official information published by the National Registry of the Crime of Torture, which collected information from the federal government and 28 of the 32 states, there were 1,465 investigations initiated for the crime of torture from January 1 to June 30.

Civil society organizations stated individuals in migratory detention reported cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, including the provision of spoiled food, sensory deprivation, and sleep interruptions due to lights being turned on full time. According to the National Registry of

the Crime of Torture, 2,044 instances of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment were logged from January to July in detention facilities. Civil society groups also reported sexual abuse during detention.

The institutions with the highest number of complaints were the Mexican Institute of Social Security and SEDENA with eight, and the Decentralized Administrative Body for Prevention and Social Readaptation of the Secretariat of Security and Civilian Protection with seven. The civil society group Fundar reported impunity for torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment was prevalent among the security forces.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

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/>.

Child Marriage

The legal minimum marriage age was 18, but enforcement was inconsistent across the states. In some states, with a judge's consent, children could marry at younger ages. In 2022, according to the National Statistics Institute, 237,175 girls ages 12-17 were married or living with their partners.

c. Protection to Refugees

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

Provision of First Asylum

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protections to refugees.

Resettlement

Refugees could naturalize after five years; for Latin American nationals the period was three years. UNHCR reported the high cost of the naturalization fee was a problem for refugees. UNHCR also reported the centralization of the naturalization procedure was an obstacle, since there were only five offices that provided this service and transportation could be costly.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The Jewish population numbered 58,876, according to the 2020 National Statistics Institute survey. Starting in October 2023, the community experienced an increase in antisemitic rhetoric, including in public graffiti and on social media. Civil society organizations reported a campaign on

Instagram to boycott restaurants and businesses owned by Jewish community members. Protests and other events supporting Palestinians increased, with organizers at times reportedly supporting violence and hate speech against Jewish persons. Some of the pro-Palestinian events turned violent. On May 28, protesters outside the Israeli embassy in Mexico City injured 18 police officers and damaged property in the embassy's vicinity.

Jewish community representatives reported good cooperation with the government in addressing instances of antisemitic acts.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.