

2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Côte d'Ivoire

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Cote d'Ivoire during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including censorship.

The government did not consistently take credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

Section 1.

Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

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 constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but the government restricted this right. The law prohibited incitement to violence, ethnic hatred, and rebellion, as well as insulting the head of state or other senior members of the government. Sometimes the government took steps to remove such content from social media.

In August, Kando Soumahoro and Mamadou Traoré, two supporters of the self-exiled former President of the National Assembly Guillaume Soro, were tried, convicted, and sentenced to two years in prison and five years of "deprivation of civil rights." Soumahoro was accused of "public disorder" after signing an August 9 joint declaration by the opposition calling for electoral reforms and the opening of a political dialogue with the government on behalf of the defunct Generation

and Solidarity People political party. Traoré was accused of “public disorder and dissemination of false information” following a social media post in which he claimed military equipment displayed during the August 7 Independence Day military parade had been “rented to the [European] ‘Takuba’ force expelled from Mali.”

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

In February, press reported that Ismaël Saturin Paré and Madou Ouédraogo, two Burkinabe journalists, were arrested at the Ivoirian border. Ivoirian law enforcement suspected a security threat as they had not been informed by the Burkinabe authorities of the presence of the journalists. They were released after intervention by the Ivoirian Ministry of Defense.

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

There were public and private radio and television stations. The government influenced news coverage and program content on some of them. Independent journalists and journalists affiliated with the state-owned media reported they regularly exercised self-censorship to avoid sanctions or reprisals from government officials. The government appointed some managers of government-affiliated outlets. The National Press Authority (ANP), the government’s print media regulatory body, briefly suspended or reprimanded newspapers and journalists for statements it contended were false, libelous, or perceived to incite xenophobia and hate. Human rights organizations reported the threat of legal action had a chilling effect on media coverage of certain topics, and media often only published stories critical of the government after the same reporting had appeared in international publications.

In June, the ANP announced a 26-issue suspension of *Le Béliér*, a daily newspaper with close ties to the opposition Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire and suspended for 30 days the writing privileges of Michel Beta, an editor of the same newspaper. The ANP’s decision followed the publication of an article criticizing a potential fourth term for President Ouattara. According to the ANP, the article violated the press law and the media code of ethics by “unfounded accusations, insults to the President of the Republic, the institutions of the Republic and the people who embody them, as well as incitements to revolt and hatred that constitute a breach of social ethics.”

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law, including related regulations and statutory instruments, provided for the right of workers, except members of police and military services, to form or join unions of their choice, provided for the right to conduct legal strikes and bargain collectively, and prohibited antiunion discrimination by employers or others against union members or organizers. The law prohibited firing workers for union activities and provided for the reinstatement of dismissed workers within eight days of winning a wrongful dismissal claim. The law allowed unions to conduct their activities without interference. Worker organizations were independent of the government and political parties. Authorities required the union win at least 30 percent of valid ballots cast representing at least 15 percent of registered electors. For broader organizations, the government required the trade union have the support in one or more enterprises together employing at least 15 percent of the employees working in the occupational and geographical sector concerned. Foreigners were required to obtain residency status, which took three years, before they could hold union office.

The law required a protracted series of negotiations and a six-day notification period before a strike could take place, making legal strikes difficult to organize and maintain. Authorities required workers to maintain a minimum coverage in services whose interruption could: endanger lives,

security, or health; create a national crisis that would threaten the lives of the population; or affect the operation of equipment. Additionally, if authorities deemed a strike to be a threat to public order, the president had broad powers to compel strikers to return to work under threat of sanctions. Illegally striking workers could be subjected to criminal penalties, including forced labor. The president also could require that strikes in essential services go to arbitration, although the law did not describe what constituted essential services.

Although all workers could unionize, formal unions existed only in the formal sector. Collective bargaining agreements were negotiated only in the formal sector, and many major businesses and civil service sectors had them. Some worker organizations in the informal sector attached themselves to formal sector trade unions to better protect their rights. The law allowed employers to refuse to negotiate, but there were no reports of this by unions to the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection.

In 2022 the minister of public service signed a new, five-year (2022-2027) social truce with eight trade unions. In the agreement, the government provided assurances that it would improve the working conditions of civil servants and committed to spending an additional 227 billion CFA francs (\$375.42 million) per year to implement the agreement. In return, and so long as the government followed the stipulated time frame for implementation of the planned improvements, the trade unions would cease protesting and striking for improvements. The government praised this truce and related union contributions to “maintaining social peace”; however, some union leaders and activists expressed concern that their right to strike and freedom of association were increasingly “trampled” by certain government actors and business leaders. They indicated that, particularly in the private sector, employees choosing to strike would frequently be subject to illegal retaliation including termination of employment. They further reported cases of employers replacing striking employees with contractors or individuals in a union not affiliated with the striking union. The government rarely applied penalties against violators of the right to strike and freedom of association.

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 law provided a minimum wage for all sectors. The minimum wage varied by sector but exceeded the government’s estimated poverty level in all sectors. The standard legal workweek was 40 hours. The law required overtime pay for additional hours and provided for at least one 24-consecutive-hour rest period per week. The law provided workers the right to refuse employer requests to work overtime without threat of termination.

Sectors in which alleged violations of wage, hour, and overtime laws were common included domestic work, residential and commercial security, and day labor.

Occupational Safety and Health

The law established occupational safety and health (OSH) standards that applied to both the formal and informal sector. The law provided for the establishment of committees of occupational, safety, and health representatives responsible for verifying protection and worker health at workplaces. Such committees were to be composed of union members. The chair of a committee could report unhealthy and unsafe working conditions to the labor inspector without penalty. By law all workers

had the right to remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. They could utilize the inspection system of the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection to document dangerous working conditions. Authorities effectively protected employees in this situation working in the formal sector.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The government did not effectively enforce minimum wage and overtime laws. The Ministry of Employment and Social Protection enforced wage and hour protections only for salaried workers employed by the government or registered with the social security office. Labor unions contributed to effective implementation of the minimum salary requirements in the formal sector. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar crimes but were seldom applied. Human rights organizations reported numerous complaints against employers, such as improper dismissals, excessive hours, uncertain contracts, failure to pay the minimum wage, and the failure to pay employee salaries. The failure to enroll workers in the country's social security program and pay into it the amount the employer deducted from the worker's salary was also a problem. Resources and inspections were not sufficient to enforce compliance. Administrative judicial procedures were subject to lengthy delays and appeals.

The government did not effectively enforce OSH laws. The number of labor inspectors was not sufficient to enforce compliance with the law, and inspectors lacked specialized training. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections, but they were not authorized to assess penalties. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar crimes, but labor inspectors reportedly accepted bribes to ignore violations. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators.

Human rights organizations reported that working conditions at illegal gold-mining sites were poor and dangerous due to the unregulated use of chemicals and large detonations that could result in deadly mudslides. Other sectors in which violations and accidents were common included construction and agriculture.

The government and the World Bank estimated 80 to 90 percent of the total labor force worked in the informal economy where labor standards were not enforced. Employment law theoretically extended to the informal sector, but it was poorly enforced due to the lack of official structures and records.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

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

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention, but both reportedly occurred. Although detainees had the right to challenge in court the lawfulness of their detention, most detainees were unaware of this right.

The law allowed the state to detain a suspect for up to 48 hours without charge, subject to renewal only once for an additional 48 hours. The law specified a maximum of 18 months of pretrial detention for misdemeanor charges, subject to judicial review every six months, and 24 months for felony charges, subject to judicial review every eight months.

Police sometimes arrested individuals and held them without charge beyond the legal limit. While the law provided for informing detainees promptly of the charges against them, human rights

organizations reported that this did not always occur, especially in cases concerning state security or involving the National Surveillance Directorate. A bail system existed but was used solely at the discretion of the trial judge. Authorities generally allowed detainees access to lawyers, but in national security cases authorities sometimes impeded access to legal representation and family visitation rights. The government sometimes provided lawyers to those who could not afford them, but other suspects had no lawyer unless they retained one themselves. Public defenders occasionally refused to accept indigent client cases because they reportedly had difficulty being reimbursed by the government, as prescribed by law, or because they were overwhelmed by their workload. Human rights organizations reported multiple instances in which detainees were transferred to detention facilities outside their presiding judge's jurisdiction, in violation of the law.

Media and human rights organizations reported the continued influx of refugees and asylum seekers from Burkina Faso and the threat of violent extremism in the country's northern areas led to increased suspicion of the Fulani (also known as the Peuhl), an ethnic group frequently stereotyped as affiliated with violent extremist organizations. Fulani were often the subject of harassment, arrest without cause, and extended detention with numerous administrative barriers to contact with family and counsel.

Human rights organizations reported cases of the Gendarmerie in the Northeast unjustly accusing, arresting, and detaining Fulani individuals on suspicion of terrorism. In most instances, the suspects were arrested and released before formal charges were brought, making the cases difficult to investigate.

The law did not permit arbitrary arrest, but authorities reportedly made such arrests on occasion. Human rights organizations reported authorities arbitrarily detained persons without charge.

Prolonged pretrial detention was a major problem. In some cases, the length of detention equaled or exceeded the sentence for the alleged crime. Inadequate staffing in the Ministry of Justice, judicial inefficiency, and authorities' lack of training or knowledge of legal updates contributed to lengthy pretrial detention. The National Human Rights Council reported 12,056 detainees had spent more than 18 months in pretrial detention as of mid-June. There were reports of pretrial detainees receiving convictions in absentia.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/international-religious-freedom-reports/>.

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

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports government officials employed them.

Human rights organizations reported detainees and prisoners were routinely subjected to violence and abuse, including beatings and extortion, by members of the security forces and prison officials. Human rights organizations reported mistreatment of detainees between arrest and being booked into prison.

Prison authorities acknowledged abuse might happen and go unreported, since prisoners feared reprisals.

Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that impunity was an occasional problem in the security forces. Local NGOs reported prison guards, who answered to the Ministry of Justice, as the branch of the security forces most often implicated in impunity.

The law prohibited female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) but it remained a problem. A human rights organization shared that tracking cases of FGM/C became more difficult as perpetrators modified their methods to evade prosecution. During the year, the organization reported that FGM/C was sometimes performed at birth.

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 law established the minimum age for marriage at 18. The law prohibited marriage for individuals younger than age 18 without parental consent. The law specifically penalized anyone who forced a child younger than age 18 to enter a religious or customary matrimonial union. Nevertheless, reports of child marriage persisted. The government did not enforce the law effectively, especially in rural areas where traditional customs often superseded formal laws.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of 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

Although there was no national asylum law, the country provided for asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees. Asylum seekers awaiting adjudication of their application enjoyed a full set of basic rights, including freedom of movement, health care, and education. Asylum seekers were not entitled to work until they received refugee status.

Continued instability and violent extremist attacks in neighboring Burkina Faso pushed thousands of Burkinabe residing in border villages to enter the country as asylum seekers. In September, the estimated Burkinabe refugee population was 65,000, of which approximately 57,000 were registered by UNHCR as asylum seekers.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The country's Jewish community numbered fewer than 150 persons, including foreign residents and local converts. There were no reports of antisemitic incidents.