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Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2018 - Slovakia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Slovak Republic is a multiparty parliamentary democracy led by a prime minister and a 150-member parliament (Narodna Rada or National Council). Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini heads a three-party coalition that secured a majority of seats in parliament following free and fair parliamentary elections in 2016. In elections considered free and fair, voters elected Andrej Kiska to a five-year term as president and head of state in 2014.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces.

Human rights issues included corruption; violence or hate speech targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons; violence and widespread discrimination and violence against Roma; and security force violence against ethnic and racial minorities that government actions and rhetoric did little to discourage.

The government investigated reports of abuses by members of the security forces and other government institutions, although some observers questioned the thoroughness of these investigations. Some officials engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

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

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

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or

Punishment

The constitution and the law prohibit such practices, and the government mostly respected these provisions.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the civil rights ombudsperson, and members of the Romani community cited a continuing trend of police officers mistreating Romani suspects during arrest and while in custody. Some police officers were convicted in connection with excessive use of force while conducting investigations. The prosecution service indicted a police officer for torture and degrading treatment based on a July 2017 physical attack on a 39-year-old Czech national during a police interrogation at the Senec police station. The man was incapacitated for nine days following the incident. The head of the Senec criminal investigation unit was charged with obstruction of justice after a leaked recording showed that he had advised his subordinates to coordinate their testimony to present a consistent narrative of the incident. The proceedings were ongoing.

A 2014 report by the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) found there were a number of credible allegations of physical mistreatment consisting, mostly of slaps, punches, and kicks immediately following arrest or before and during police interrogations. The Control and Inspection Service of the Ministry of Interior dismissed or discontinued most investigations into cases involving injuries allegedly caused by police. The CPT, the Slovak ombudswoman, and civil society experts continued to question the independence of the Inspection Service, since it answers to the minister of interior, who also oversees the police force.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

There were no significant reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns.

Physical Conditions: In several facilities, juveniles shared cells with adult inmates. Authorities held men and women, and pretrial detainees and convicted prisoners separately. Conditions varied by gender. There were complaints of limited air circulation and poor hygiene conditions. There were reports of small facilities, which authorities often used for prolonged or overnight detention, for the temporary detention of arrested persons at police stations. Media and NGO reports mentioned isolated cases of physical mistreatment, verbal abuse, and racist remarks by prison guards.

In March the ombudsperson, in her annual report, repeated previous findings that police units had established unauthorized spaces where police detained individuals under conditions that were not always in line with the law. The report noted police detained individuals in these spaces for longer periods than authorized and without appropriate medical assistance and meals. The unauthorized spaces included cages, rooms separated with bars, and corridors. The ombudsperson concluded the unofficial detention spaces--which often lacked running water, toilets, or means to request assistance--were degrading.

In 2017 the Police Inspection Service dealt with 172 complaints of excessive use of police force against people in detention. According to police statistics, 82 percent of complaints were dismissed; further disciplinary or criminal proceedings were undertaken in 10 percent of cases, and the remaining cases were pending.

In 2016 two prison guards in Ilava prison allegedly beat a 21-year-old man who suffered serious injuries, including permanent brain damage. Both guards were dismissed, and in June authorities charged one of them with abuse of power. An investigation continued.

In 2017 the ombudsperson reported excessive force was used against a prisoner suffering from mental illnesses. The prisoner was treated in a hospital for concussion and several facial fractures.

Administration: While prisoners were able to file complaints without censorship and a prosecutor or ombudsperson was available to deal with them, several prisoners claimed they were reluctant to complain about mistreatment due to fear of reprisals or because they believed authorities would not act on their complaints.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted visits by independent human rights observers and the CPT.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and the law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court, and the government generally observed these requirements.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national police force has sole responsibility for internal and border security and reports to the Ministry of Interior. The head of the police force reports directly to the minister of interior, who has the authority to appoint and recall his subordinate. A special anticorruption police department, a special prosecution unit, and a specialized criminal court address corruption cases. The Bureau of Border and Alien Police (BBAP), which falls under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, is responsible for external security, including border control and preventing illegal migration and people smuggling, and conducts investigations of related criminal activities. It also exercises limited powers in asylum proceedings.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the national police force and the BBAP. Government mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse, however, were weak, and impunity was a problem. In 2017 the most recent year for which data was available, authorities charged 114 police officers (0.52 percent of the total number of officers) for various criminal activities.

NGOs and the ombudsperson criticized the Police Inspection Service, which oversees police misconduct cases, for lacking independence, since it is subordinate to the minister of interior, who oversees the police force. According to human rights NGOs, the Police Inspection Service was not interested in thoroughly investigating most complaints of police brutality. An NGO claimed that, based on its experience representing individuals in police brutality cases, the inspection service appeared to give more credibility to testimonies of police officers than to those of aggrieved parties and downplayed the importance of medical and psychological reports provided by aggrieved parties.

Human rights training was in the curriculum at police training facilities.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The constitution and law stipulate that authorities may take a person into custody only for explicit reasons and must inform a detainee immediately of the reasons for detention. Persons are apprehended only with warrants issued by a judge or prosecutor based on evidence, and there were no reports of individuals detained without judicial authorization. Suspects in terrorism cases can be held for 96 hours. In other cases a court must grant a hearing to a person accused of a crime within 48 hours (or a maximum of 72 hours in “serious cases,” defined as violent crimes, treason, or other crimes carrying a sentence of at least eight years’ imprisonment) and either release or remand the individual into custody.

The bail system rarely was used. The law gives detainees the right to consult an attorney immediately after authorities submit charges, and authorities must inform them of this right. The law provides counsel to indigent detainees free of charge. The law allows attorneys to visit detainees as frequently as necessary and allows two-hour monthly family visits upon request. There were no reports of suspects detained incommunicado or held under house arrest.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality, but alleged corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of integrity and accountability undermined public trust in the judicial system.

A constitutional amendment requires that all sitting judges and candidates for judicial positions receive security clearances from the government that attest to their suitability for public office. Proceedings to review the constitutionality of this provision were pending, although the Constitutional Court suspended the application of the amendment to sitting judges. The amendment was criticized by judicial associations, NGOs, and legal experts, who asserted the security clearance process was nontransparent, could be abused for political purposes, and would thereby limit judicial independence and jeopardize the foundations of a fair trial.

With the exception of the Constitutional Court, courts employed a computerized system for random case assignment to increase fairness and transparency. There were reports, however, that this system was subject to manipulation.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial without undue delay, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. There were reports, however, that in individual cases judges failed to act impartially and did not respect basic principles for conducting fair trials.

Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence. They are also presumed innocent during the appeals process, and a person found guilty by a court does not serve a sentence or pay a fine until a final decision on their appeal has been reached. Persons charged with criminal offenses have the right to be informed promptly of the charges against them with free interpretation as necessary. Defendants have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense, to be present at their trial, consult in a timely manner with an attorney (at government expense if indigent), and to obtain free interpretation as necessary from the moment of being charged through all appeals. They can confront prosecution and plaintiff witnesses, and can present witnesses and evidence on their behalf. Defendants have the right to refuse self-incrimination and may appeal adverse judgments. The law allows plea bargaining, which was often applied in practice.

Unpredictability of court decisions and inefficiency remained major problems in the country's judiciary, leading to long trials, which in civil cases discouraged individuals from filing suit. The ombudsperson reported denial of the right to a speedy trial remained one of the most frequent concerns, recording 67 cases in 2017. In the first half of 2018, the Constitutional Court ruled that in 144 cases courts violated the right to proceedings without undue delay.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Citizens had unrestricted access to courts to file lawsuits in civil matters, including human rights violations. Courts that hear civil cases, as with criminal courts, were subject to delays. Public trust in the judiciary continued to be low, with domestic surveys measuring it at 31 percent. The judiciary suffered from an apparent lack of accountability, and the public often perceived it as corrupt.

Administrative remedies were available in certain cases. The National Center for Human Rights has the authority to provide mediation for cases of discrimination and to represent claimants in court. Human rights organizations criticized the center for lack of activity and ineffectiveness. Individuals and organizations may appeal domestic court decisions to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

Property Restitution

Rent-control regulations for apartment owners whose property was restituted after the fall of the communist regime remained a problem. The state has regulated rents in these properties at below-market rates since 1992. In 2014 the ECHR concluded the regulations violated the property owners’ rights in 21 cases and in 2015 ordered the state to pay them 2.17 million euros (\$2.5 million) in damages. In 2016 the ECHR awarded compensation of 476,800 euros (\$548,300) in damages to other property owners. Although authorities took legislative steps to eliminate the discriminatory treatment of the owners, according to the ECHR, property owners should receive specific and clearly regulated compensatory remedies. The ombudsperson reported excessive delays in numerous land property restitution proceedings that have remained unresolved since the fall of the communist regime. In February the ombudsperson presented to parliament a special report that listed 9,198 still unresolved cases.

The country is a signatory to the Terezin Declaration on Holocaust restitution. The government has laws and mechanisms in place, and the Jewish community in the country reported the government made some progress on resolution of Holocaust-era claims, including claims by foreign citizens. For individuals the law provides only for the restitution of immovable property, requires claims to be filed within a certain period, and requires claimants to be Slovak citizens and residents. In 2001 the Jewish community agreed to a blanket settlement with the government to accept 10 percent of the total estimated value as payment for unrestituted Jewish heirless property, which it uses to resolve claims and support the community.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and police must present a warrant before conducting a search or within 24 hours afterwards. There were reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions in some cases. In one example, a report by the ombudsperson on a police raid in the Romani community in Vrhnica in 2015 concluded that officers violated residents’ right to privacy and property. The raid, which included house-to-house searches conducted without warrants, resulted in physical injuries to 19 residents. An official investigation into the raid resulted in charges brought by the Police Inspection Service against the raid’s commanding officer; proceedings in the case were pending at the Michalovce District Court. No charges were brought, however, with respect to the alleged failure of police to obtain a search warrant or the alleged police brutality by individual police officers.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including for the press. While the government generally respected these rights, it impeded criticism and limited access to information to critical press outlets.

Freedom of Expression: The law prohibits the defamation of nationalities and race, punishable by up to three years in prison, and denial of the Holocaust and crimes committed by the fascist and communist regimes, which carry a prison sentence of six months to three years.

Press and Media Freedom: The prohibitions against defamation of nationalities and denial of the Holocaust and crimes committed by the fascist and communist regimes also applied to the print and broadcast media, the publication of books, and online newspapers and journals. According to media organizations, criminal libel provisions restrict freedom of expression, including freedom of media.

The majority of media were privately owned or funded from private sources. Radio and Television Slovakia (RTVS) and the TASR news agency received state funding for specific programming. Observers expressed concern, however, about the increasing consolidation of media ownership and its potential long-term threat to press freedom. NGOs reported most of the country’s private media outlets, including television stations and print publications, were controlled by relatively few financial conglomerates or wealthy individuals.

Members of the cabinet intermittently refused to communicate with two major daily newspapers, claiming their reporting was biased and that the newspapers had refused to apologize for publishing information government officials claimed was untrue.

In February investigative journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée, Martina Kusnirova, were killed in their home. Kuciak regularly reported on allegations of high-level corruption and documented tax fraud schemes. As of October authorities had arrested and charged four suspects in the case. Nationwide public protests following the killings prompted the resignation of then interior minister Robert Kalinak, then prime minister Robert Fico, and then police president Tibor Gaspar. After the resignations Fico accused media and NGOs of using the killings to foment a “coup.” In May police seized the mobile telephone of journalist Pavla Holcova, who had worked with Kuciak, and stated the seizure was part of their investigation into the Kuciak murder. Holcova objected, citing her obligation to protect her sources. Publishers, editors in chief, and NGOs protested the seizure, and in June police returned the telephone to Holcova in exchange for a copy of electronic communications between her and Kuciak. Holcova stated she suspected authorities might have attempted to access the contents of her telephone illegally.

After the installation in August 2017 of a new director of the public broadcaster RTVS and personnel changes that followed, some journalists claimed the service had become subject to political interference. In May, 12 television newsroom journalists left the institution.

Libel/Slander Laws: Media organizations criticized a criminal libel provision in the Criminal Code as restricting freedom of expression. Kosice-based journalist Lukas Milan faced libel charges for reporting on corruption suspicions involving former speaker of parliament Pavol Paska. A trial court sentenced him to a suspended 18 months prison term with three years of probation and a reporting ban of the same duration. In May the Prosecutor General’s Office withdrew the indictment.

Financial elites targeted the press in a number of civil defamation lawsuits, which often required the press to pay large sums of money in penalties or legal costs. The International Press Institute Slovakia and other observers expressed concern this financial risk and the administrative burden of constantly contesting lawsuits could lead to media self-censorship. In May an appellate court dismissed one of numerous libel lawsuits by the financial group Penta Investment against the daily newspaper *DennikN*. Penta disputed a statement in a *DennikN* article saying that the Penta-owned company might get a defense ministry maintenance contract for Black Hawk helicopters.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. Police, however, monitored websites containing hate speech and attempted to arrest or fine the authors. According to Eurostat, approximately 80 percent of the country’s population used the internet in 2016.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provide for freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/ (<http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>).

d. Freedom of Movement

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. There were no reports of government authorities exerting pressure on refugees to return to the country they had fled.

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, asylum seekers, stateless persons, or other persons of concern.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has an established system for providing some protection to refugees. Some organizations criticized the Migration Office for granting asylum only in a very limited number of cases. As of August the government had received 104 asylum applications and granted asylum to one individual. The government granted asylum to 29 individuals in 2017.

NGOs reported asylum seekers had only limited access to qualified, independent legal advice. The contract for legal assistance to asylum seekers did not cover asylum seekers in detention, so these persons could access free legal assistance only in the second, appellate-level, hearing on their asylum application process. Migration Office staff allegedly endeavored to provide legal advice to some asylum applicants, even though they were also interviewing the asylum seekers and adjudicating their asylum applications.

There was no independent monitoring by local NGOs of access to asylum procedures on the country's borders and only limited monitoring of access to asylum by UNHCR.

In July the country extradited a foreign national to Russia before officially closing his asylum process. The foreign national, who had applied for international protection in the country in 2011 citing fear of torture and inhumane treatment in his home country, was wanted in Russia on terrorism-related charges. The Justice Ministry asserted that the man had to be extradited as he posed a national security threat and would have to be released from custody within 60 days. Human rights NGOs and the UN Commission for Human Rights protested the extradition and called it a dangerous precedent for an asylum seeker to be extradited before a final decision on his asylum case had been made. In August the Constitutional Court turned down an appeal by the asylum seeker, asserting it lacked jurisdiction in the case.

In April the country's media reported on the possible involvement of government officials in the 2017 abduction of a Vietnamese asylum seeker from Germany to Vietnam by the Vietnamese intelligence services. Based on information from German law enforcement officials, media reported that a Slovak government aircraft was used to transport the abducted Vietnamese national out of the Schengen area immediately following an official meeting between former Slovak interior minister, Robert Kalinak,

and the Vietnamese minister of public security in July 2017 in Bratislava. In August the prosecution service launched official investigations into alleged government involvement in the abduction. The case remained pending.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: The country denied asylum to applicants from a safe country of origin or transit. The law requires authorities to ensure the well-being of individual asylum seekers is not threatened if deported to a non-EU “safe country.” Some observers criticized the BBAP for lacking the information necessary to determine whether a country would be safe for persons facing deportation there.

Freedom of Movement: NGOs reported the BBAP unnecessarily detained migrants, including asylum seekers whom police believed made false asylum claims, and that police failed to use adequately alternatives to detention, such as supervised release or financial bonds. In 2017 one in four asylum seekers in the country was placed in immigration detention rather than accommodation centers. NGOs reported it was routine practice to issue detention orders and place asylum seekers with children in the immigration detention center in Secovce, where they often faced degrading treatment.

Access to Basic Services: There were reports persons granted subsidiary protection had only limited access to health care. The Ministry of Interior issued health-coverage documentation directly to persons with subsidiary protection, which in some instances created confusion among health-care providers, who often did not know which medical procedures the policy would cover.

NGOs reported schools generally did not make use of available government support for language and integration assistance for foreign students.

Durable Solutions: The Migration Office accommodated refugees processed at the UNHCR emergency transit center in Humenne for resettlement to a permanent host country. The refugees were moved to Slovakia from other countries due to security and humanitarian concerns. The center was permitted to accommodate up to 250 refugees at a time for up to six months.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary “subsidiary protection” to individuals who might not qualify as refugees but could not return to their home countries and granted it to approximately seven persons as of August. Subsidiary protection is initially granted for one year, with possible extensions. NGOs said this created uncertainty regarding the refugee’s status in the country and significantly hindered their integration prospects.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

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

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Observers considered the parliamentary elections held in 2016 and the regional elections in November 2017 to be free and fair.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws limit the participation of women and members of minorities in the political process, and they did participate. A 2017 survey by the European Institute for Gender Equality placed the female political participation gap at the national level at 57 percent.

While there were small but increasing numbers of Romani mayors and members of local councils, Roma were severely underrepresented in communal, provincial, and national elective bodies.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials. The government did not always implement the law effectively, and some officials engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. According to a special October 2017 Eurobarometer report on corruption, 85 percent of citizens perceived corruption as widespread, particularly in the health sector, political parties, and the courts. The business sector perceived nepotism in public institutions, financing of political parties in exchange for future government contracts, and bribery and kickbacks as the most widespread corruption problems. High-level officials rarely were prosecuted for corruption, despite a series of high-profile corruption cases involving government officials.

Investigative journalists and NGOs documented cases of well connected businesspersons siphoning off state finances through tax fraud. In the last article written by investigative journalist Jan Kuciak and published after his killing in February, Kuciak documented Italian mafia connections to high-level politicians that were allegedly designed to abuse EU agricultural subsidies. Observers blamed political influence over police and the prosecution services for blocking or hampering anticorruption investigations.

There were also concerns, particularly in the business sector, about private-sector influence over judicial decisions, and some NGO governance experts reported court proceedings had become a contest between vested interests and persons with connections to the judiciary. According to the 2018 *EU Justice Scoreboard* published by the European Commission, less than 30 percent of citizens perceived the judiciary as independent. NGOs claimed the justice system was inefficient and that judges remained divided on the need for reform and lacked the will to implement ethical standards. There were serious allegations that corrupt actors manipulated the case assignment system, and court verdicts were often poorly justified. In 2017 the judicial selection process was reformed to eliminate nepotism, apply standardized selection criteria, and make judicial appointments more flexible.

Corruption: Court cases between 2014 and 2017 involving bribery mostly dealt with petty bribes of 20 to 500 euros (\$23 to \$575). In May the prosecution service terminated its investigation into the 2014 overpriced purchase of medical equipment for the Piestany hospital, claiming it was not a crime.

There were reports of law enforcement retribution against whistleblowers in the military intelligence service. In 2013 the former director of the military intelligence service, Roman Mikulec, documented that someone was siphoning money and assets from the service. Authorities, however, terminated the criminal investigation into the case as unsubstantiated and charged Mikulec with breach of confidentiality based on documents found in his car that he claimed were planted to discredit him. In June after five years of criminal investigation, a trial court acquitted Mikulec.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires income and asset disclosure by appointed and elected officials and mandates a parliamentary conflict of interest committee to monitor and verify such disclosures. The government made a general summary of the declarations publicly available, and there were penalties for noncompliance. NGOs and some politicians maintained the financial disclosure forms were vague and did not clearly identify the value of the declared assets, liabilities, and interests. Limited authority and inadequate human and technical resources made financial disclosure processing dysfunctional.

Enforcement of financial disclosure violations was not effective and enabled members of parliament (MPs) to block sanctions against violators. Criminal sanctions for noncompliance were not applied in practice.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were sometimes cooperative, although NGOs reported that at times government officials appeared to view their activities with suspicion or mistrust.

In March, Robert Fico, an MP who chaired the coalition-member Smer-SD party, claimed countrywide public protests that led to the resignation of his cabinet when he was prime minister were financed and organized from abroad as part of a “coup” against his government. He asserted philanthropist George Soros and NGOs supported by the Open Society Foundation coordinated the effort. In August, Fico published an op-ed article calling the antigovernment protest organizers “children of Soros” and demanding tougher rules on financing of NGOs since “many of them are clearly funded from abroad.”

Some government officials, including Andrej Danko, the speaker of parliament and chair of the coalition-member Slovak National Party (SNS), and Anton Hrnko, an MP and the deputy chair of the SNS, criticized the ombudsperson’s attempts to raise awareness

about the rights of LGBTI persons. In July Danko appeared in person to accept the “Homophobe of the Year” award from a local NGO and repeated his statements that homosexuality is a choice.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The justice minister headed the Government Council on Human Rights and National Minorities, an advisory body including government officials and civil society representatives.

Maria Patakyova headed the Office of the Public Defender of Rights (ombudsperson) and submitted an annual report on human rights problems to the parliament. Human rights activists credited Patakyova with raising the profile of fundamental rights problems in the country, despite criticism and obstruction from politicians.

Parliament has a 12-member Human Rights and National Minorities Committee that held regular sessions during the year. NGOs criticized it for failing to address serious human rights issues. Committee members included an MP from the far-right People’s Party-Our Slovakia (LSNS) party who participated in a 2015 attack against a Saudi family during antirefugee demonstrations, denied the legitimacy of the Holocaust, and praised Hitler on social media. He also made defamatory statements against the Romani minority and Muslim refugees for which he faced prosecution. The committee also included an MP who was fired as a television news presenter in 2015 for posting antirefugee content on social media.

The Slovak National Center for Human Rights acted as the country’s national human rights institution and as the dedicated equality body, but it was criticized for inactivity by NGOs and members of the Government Council on Human Rights and National Minorities.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law prohibits rape and sexual violence, which carry a penalty of five to 25 years in prison. The law does not specifically define spousal rape, but the criminal code covers spousal rape and spousal sexual violence under the crime of rape and sexual violence. NGOs and rape victims criticized police for sometimes failing to enforce the law effectively and for often failing to communicate appropriately with rape victims. Rape and domestic violence victims had access to shelters and counseling offered by NGOs and government-funded programs. NGO service providers complained that authorities provided only a small portion of necessary funding, forcing many centers to close or fundraise additional resources from private and international donors.

Domestic violence against women is punishable by three to eight years’ imprisonment. Domestic violence was widespread, and activists claimed official statistics failed to capture the magnitude of the issue. NGOs also asserted the government did not

enforce the law effectively. Experts complained there were no written procedures for referring battered women to counselling centers or shelters and no services for batterers. The lack of affordable public housing or rent-controlled housing often forced victims to return to abusive households.

In January the regional court in Kosice confirmed a 23-year prison sentence for a former police officer who in 2016 stabbed his fiancée to death and burned her remains in Spisska Nova Ves.

In March a 22 year-old man attacked his girlfriend and her three friends, breaking her nose and causing other injuries. The woman immediately reported the incident to police, who reportedly failed to provide first aid to the victims, downplaying the incident. The assailant was later found guilty and sentenced to a fine. After intense media coverage, the regional prosecutor’s office in Banska Bystrica announced it would reexamine the case.

In September the regional court in Banska Bystrica confirmed a 16-year prison sentence for a man who stabbed his wife to death in July 2017 while she sat in the back seat of a police patrol car that had responded to her domestic disturbance call. The man gained access to the patrol car by telling police he wanted a chance to apologize to his wife. As of October the two police officers who failed to prevent the attack awaited trial on charges of criminal negligence.

According to a 2017 report on gender equality and domestic violence by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family, more than 21 percent of adult women had experienced violence at the hand of their partner.

Sexual Harassment: The law defines sexual harassment as unlawful discrimination, subject to civil penalties. Victims usually avoided legal action due to fear of reprisal, lengthy court proceedings, and lack of accessible legal services. A coordination center for gender-based and domestic violence under the Labor, Social Affairs and Family Ministry implements and coordinates countrywide policy to prevent and eliminate violence against women (including sexual harassment) and coordinates education and training efforts for the public and professionals. The government operates a 24/7 hotline for women subjected to violence.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: The law provides the same legal status for women as for men. Discrimination against women remained a problem, particularly in the labor market, where women were less likely to be offered employment than men with equal qualifications, and faced a 20 percent gender pay gap.

Children

Birth Registration: Children acquire citizenship by birth to at least one citizen parent, regardless of where the child is born. Each domestic birth is recorded at the local vital statistics office, including for children born to asylum seekers, stateless persons, and detained migrants.

Child Abuse: Child abuse remained a problem according to child advocates. A 2013 government study (the latest available) showed that 23 percent of 13- to 15-year-old persons suffered physical abuse, 20 percent emotional abuse, and 7 percent sexual abuse. Domestic abuse carries basic penalties of three to eight years’ imprisonment.

The government continued implementing and annually updating the *National Action Plan for Children* for 2013-22, funded through the government budget. Government bodies provided financial support to crisis centers for abused children and to NGOs that worked on child abuse. The Labor and Social Affairs Office had dedicated departments for overseeing childcare and operated a national coordination body for dealing with violence against children, which collected data, provided information on domestic violence and abuse of minors, helped refer victims to service providers, and ran a national helpline.

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age for marriage is 18. In exceptional cases, based upon request of one of the marrying couple, a competent court may allow marriage of a person as young as 16, if both parents consent. Women from marginalized Romani communities were transported to the United Kingdom by force or deception to marry foreign citizens attempting to avoid deportation by marrying an EU citizen and might consequently have been subjected to trafficking in persons.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: Rape and sexual violence against a child carry basic penalties of five to 10 years’ imprisonment. The law establishes 15 as the minimum age for consensual sex. In addition to prohibiting trafficking in persons, the law criminalizes the prostitution of children. These abuses were not common, and there were no obstacles to enforcement of the law.

The production, distribution, or possession of child pornography is a crime with penalties ranging from two to 20 years’ imprisonment.

Institutionalized Children: Reports published by the ombudsperson during the year and in 2013 found that juvenile offenders at educational rehabilitation centers regularly endured hunger and were subjected to degrading treatment, including compulsory gynecological examinations of girls after their trips outside the facility. The reports also found substandard levels of education at the centers.

In February the regional prosecutor in Trencin indicted a former employee of the private juvenile rehabilitation facility Cisty Den for sexual abuse and causing bodily harm to a minor. The facility lost its official Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family accreditation in September 2017 after a series of allegations of severe malpractice and misconduct. Experts criticized the labor minister for failing to protect the children housed in Cisty Den after suspicions regarding the facility first surfaced more than a year before the center’s accreditation was revoked.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State’s *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data.html> (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data.html>).

Anti-Semitism

Jewish community leaders estimated, and the 2011 census data indicated, the size of the Jewish community was 2,000 persons.

Organized neo-Nazi groups with an estimated 500 active members and several thousand sympathizers occasionally spread anti-Semitic messages. Latent anti-Semitic attitudes characterizing Jewish people as greedy or secretly influencing world affairs were widespread, even beyond neo-Nazi groups and their sympathizers. Polls revealed increased support for the neo-Nazi LSNS, polling at 11 percent or higher.

In July the Special Prosecutor’s Office indicted LSNS leader and MP Marian Kotleba for his charitable donation of 1,488 euros (\$1,710) to three families at a 2017 event marking the founding of the Nazi-allied wartime Slovak state (The number 1,488 refers to a white supremacist 14-word slogan and a numeric representation of HH, for “Heil Hitler.”). Also in July, the Specialized Criminal Court acquitted LSNS MP Stanislav Mizik of extremism charges in a case concerning a January 2017 Facebook post in which he criticized President Kiska for giving state awards to persons of Jewish origin. The judge ruled there was insufficient evidence to prove that Mizik wrote the statement. The Special Prosecutor’s Office appealed the verdict, and the case remained pending. In February LSNS MP Milan Mazurek verbally attacked an expert witness during a court hearing at his trial, saying the witness was “not impartial, since he is a Jew.”

While direct denial of the Holocaust was relatively rare, expressions of approval for the World War II-era Slovak fascist state, which deported tens of thousands of Jews, Roma, and others to death camps, occurred frequently. Throughout the year, far-right groups organized small events to commemorate dates associated with the Slovak fascist state and its president, Jozef Tiso. On March 14 and April 19, the LSNS organized commemorations of the creation of the fascist Slovak state in 1939 and Tiso’s execution in 1947.

On September 9, government officials commemorated the Day of the Victims of the Holocaust and of Racial Violence at the Holocaust Memorial in Bratislava. The coalition government undertook initiatives to promote Holocaust education in schools and funded school field trips to Auschwitz and the Slovak Holocaust Museum in Sered. Government leaders including President Kiska and Speaker of Parliament Danko denounced the anti-Semitic rhetoric of the far right.

Representatives of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia noted the number of anti-Semitic comments and hate speech on the internet and social media increased following statements in March by then prime minister Robert Fico (Smer-SD), in which he accused philanthropist George Soros, who is Jewish, of instigating a coup against his government.

In January the ministers of finance and culture commemorated International Holocaust Remembrance Day by visiting the Holocaust Museum in Sered where they announced a subsidy of one million euros (\$1.15 million) to complete the museum’s campus.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/ (<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>).

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, the judicial system, other transportation, or the provision of other public services.

Psychiatric institutions and hospitals, which fall under the purview of the Ministry of Health, used cage beds to restrain patients. The law prohibits both physical and nonphysical restraints in social care homes managed by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family.

No broadcaster complied with laws requiring television stations to provide audio descriptions for viewers who are blind or have impaired vision. While the law defines mandatory standards for access to buildings, NGOs noted they were not fully implemented, although access to privately owned buildings improved more rapidly than access to public buildings.

The government’s Council on Human Rights, National Minorities, and Gender Equality operated a committee on persons with disabilities. The council served as a governmental advisory body and included representation from NGOs working on disability problems. The country’s first national human rights strategy included a chapter on the rights of persons with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

According to the 2011 census, approximately 458,000 ethnic Hungarians lived in the country. The law provides for the imposition of fines on government institutions, civil servants, and legal entities that do not provide information required by law in Slovak. Members of the ethnic Hungarian minority criticized the provision as discriminatory and a restriction on their right to free speech. The Ministry of Transport and Construction

continued placing dual language signs at train stations serving Hungarian minority populations. In February the ministry changed a decree to allow the use of dual-language traffic signs.

Societal discrimination against Roma and individuals of non-European ethnicity was common. As much as 53 percent of the Romani population resided in marginalized communities. The UN Development Program has identified 231 segregated rural settlements located, on average, less than one mile from neighboring municipalities.

There were reports of violence against members of ethnic minorities during the year. In May a Filipino man with permanent residency status died after being brutally beaten for protecting his female colleagues from unwanted sexual advances on the streets of Bratislava. Authorities initially released the attacker from custody after the prosecutor's office stated it saw no risk of him committing similar attacks. Following intense public pressure, the prosecutor reversed the decision and detained the alleged attacker, who faces a possible 12 years in prison. Media cited witnesses who reported the attacker was likely motivated by the victim's skin color and perceived sexual orientation.

In July, three Romani boys from the northern city of Zilina were chased and attacked by a group of violent hooligans. Police pressed charges against three individuals, who remained in pretrial detention. Police and prosecutors initially refused to confirm the attack was racially motivated, but media outlets published testimony of eyewitnesses who claimed the assailants shouted, “Gypsies, we will kill you!” while hurling stones and bottles and chasing the boys.

Marginalized Romani communities continued to be subjected to controversial police raids and brutality. In November 2017 media reported on a police raid in the Romani community in the village of Jarovnice. Several police officers, including a special operations unit and a K9 unit, allegedly ransacked a house looking for three men wanted for petty larceny. While no one was injured during the raid, human rights activists questioned the appropriateness and proportionality of the police response. In May the Ministry of Interior Inspection Service terminated an investigation into the 2017 police raid in Zborov and concluded police officers did not break the law. Released video footage from the Zborov raid appeared to show police chasing, threatening, and beating numerous community residents, including children and elderly persons, who did not appear to be resisting police. Three residents required medical assistance.

Authorities' investigation of violent incidents involving police was inconsistent and varied by jurisdiction. In 2016 the Ministry of Interior Inspection Service Department brought charges against the police officer who commanded a 2015 raid in a Romani community in the village of Vrbnica. According to reports, a group of 15 officers entered the community, allegedly to locate and arrest individuals evading arrest warrants, and severely beat, mistreated, and harassed a number of Romani residents. The investigation remained pending. At the same time, the investigation into several other police officers involved in the raid was halted, allegedly due to lack of evidence.

In November 2017 the Constitutional Court dismissed a motion protesting police brutality during a 2013 raid in a Romani settlement in the town of Moldava nad Bodvou as unsubstantiated. Six witnesses who had testified about excessive force used by police faced prosecution on charges of perjury. In June the district court in Kosice found two of the witnesses guilty in an accelerated procedure and sentenced them to suspended sentences. Both appealed the ruling and the cases remained pending. An expert testifying for the prosecution claimed the witnesses had a “Romani mentality,” which he claimed made them less trustworthy.

In May the Kosice regional court overturned for the second time a lower court ruling that acquitted all of the police officers accused in the 2009 case of police abuse against a group of six Romani boys between the ages of 11 and 15. The case was returned to the Kosice district court for the third time.

The LSNS continued to organize marches and gatherings against “asocial Gypsies.”

Police generally responded quickly to gatherings targeting the Romani community and prevented crowds from entering Romani communities or inciting confrontations.

In January during a visit to a Romani settlement in eastern Slovakia, then interior minister Robert Kalinak (Smer-SD) announced a new legislative package that included collecting statistics on “Roma crime,” greater police powers, and a constitutional amendment eliminating social benefits for persons who did not take appropriate care of their children. NGOs and the government plenipotentiary for Romani communities criticized the interior minister, claiming he incited hatred against the minority by portraying the Roma as a security and public order threat.

There were instances of public officials at every level defaming minorities and making derogatory comments about Roma. In April, MP Milan Mazurek (LSNS) was found guilty of anti-Roma hate speech for his remarks during a public radio broadcast in 2016. The Specialized Criminal Court in Banska Bystrica fined Mazurek 5,000 euros (\$5,750) and gave him a suspended six-month prison sentence that he would serve should he fail to pay the fine.

Widespread discrimination against Roma continued in employment, education, health care, housing, loan practices, restaurants, hair salons, and public transportation.

In April the Kosice regional court issued a final decision affirming lower court rulings in favor of a Romani woman who was unjustly denied a job as a social worker in the town of Spisska Nova Ves, which must pay the woman 2,500 euros (\$2,880) in compensation. In July a Presov district court ruled that the Sabinov municipality and the Transport Ministry had discriminated against local Sabinov Roma by moving them out of public housing in the center of the town and into substandard housing on the city’s periphery.

In May a Romani mother with her children was not allowed to participate in a celebration of Children’s Day in the eastern Slovak village of Velka Ida due to her ethnicity. The local mayor stated this was not discrimination because there were

separate events for Roma and a separate Children’s Day event in a preschool. He implied that diseases in the local Romani settlement made it unsuitable for Romani children to attend the larger Children’s Day celebration.

Local authorities continued to use regulatory obstacles, such as withholding of construction permits, to discourage the legal establishment of Romani settlements. In August the Partizanske municipality demolished a dilapidated apartment building inhabited by Roma. NGOs criticized the city leadership for failing to provide replacement housing and pushing Roma inhabitants out of the city limits. The Kosice municipality advanced plans of demolitions of apartment buildings in the marginalized Romani district of Lunik IX but finalized documentation for new housing for the Lunik inhabitants.

NGOs reported Romani women faced multiple forms of discrimination in reproductive health care, including segregation in maternity departments, verbal harassment, and maltreatment by medical personnel. The hospitals claimed they grouped persons according to their levels of hygiene and adaptability, not by race. While there were no reported cases of forced or coerced sterilizations, NGOs continued to express concerns over the way in which medical personnel obtained informed consent from patients. Romani women continued to pursue compensation through the courts for past involuntary sterilization, and NGOs called on the government to establish an independent investigative body to determine the scope of the practice.

Romani children from socially excluded communities faced educational segregation and were disproportionately enrolled in “special” schools or placed in segregated classrooms within mainstream schools. A report issued during the year by the ombudsperson established that Romani children received an inferior education compared with their non-Romani peers. The report found a disproportionately high share (88 percent) of Romani children in “special” primary schools for children with mental disabilities and schools with special classes for Romani children. Only 15 percent of the Romani children surveyed had received preschool education, compared with 78 percent for the general population. The ombudsperson’s investigation also confirmed systemic discrimination against Romani children in academic and psychological testing, where authorities failed to consider personal and special circumstances of the individuals who were tested.

The Government Council on Human Rights, National Minorities, and Gender Equality operated a Committee for the Prevention and Elimination of Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism, and Other Forms of Intolerance.

The law bans the spreading of profascist propaganda and hatred in public, including on social media and hate speech against LGBTI individuals.

In June parliament adopted a resolution expressing deep concern over growing extremism and hatred in the country and stressing that the country must remain “built on values such as democracy, freedom and tolerance.”

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual

Orientation and Gender Identity

The law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, education, state social services, health care, and access to goods and services and identifies sexual orientation as a hate crime motivation that warrants stiffer sentences.

LGBTI organizations reported the law requires that persons seeking legal gender recognition provide confirmation from a medical practitioner that a person has undergone a “gender change” to obtain new identity documents; however, the law does not define “gender change.” In practice authorities required confirmation that a person had undergone permanent sterilization before issuing new identity documents.

The law does not allow educational establishments to reissue educational certificates with a new first name and surname to transgender individuals after they have transitioned. The law does allow institutions to issue such individuals new birth certificates reflecting the name with which they identify.

NGOs reported violence and online harassment of LGBTI persons. In June a group of 10 men attacked two gay 17-year-old boys for holding hands in public in the western Slovak city of Trencin. The group attacked the teenagers in front of a nightclub, kicking and punching them while shouting homophobic slurs. Afraid to reveal their names, the boys refused to report the incident to police or press charges. A widely publicized attack on a Filipino man, who died in June after being brutally beaten for protecting his female colleagues from unwanted sexual advances in Bratislava, was also reportedly accompanied by antigay slurs.

In July SNS deputy chair Anton Hrnko criticized ombudsperson Maria Patakyova for giving a speech at Bratislava Rainbow Pride and accused her of contributing to the spread of “neoliberal gender ideology” which aimed “to dismantle the traditional family.”

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

NGOs reported violence and online hate speech towards refugees.

Government officials at all levels and leaders from across the political spectrum, including the opposition, engaged in rhetoric portraying refugees and Muslims as a threat to society.

In January then prime minister Fico stated he rejected the creation of Muslim communities in the country. On another occasion, Fico remarked that tourists wanted to come to the country because they did not have to fear explosions and know Muslims will not bother them in public squares.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The right to strike is embedded in the constitution. The law, including related regulations and statutory instruments, provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions of their choice. The law also provides for unions to conduct their activities without interference, including the right to organize and bargain collectively, and workers exercised these rights. The law recognizes the right to strike with advance notice, both when collective bargaining fails to reach an agreement and in support of other striking employees' demands (solidarity strike). Civil servants in essential services, judges, prosecutors, and members of the military do not have the right to strike. The law prohibits dismissing workers who legally participate in strikes but does not offer such protection if a strike was illegal or unofficial. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. The law does not state whether reinstatement of workers fired for union activity is required.

The government effectively enforced applicable laws and remedies, and penalties for violations were effective. These procedures were, however, occasionally subject to delays and appeals.

Workers and unions generally exercised these rights without restrictions. The government generally respected their rights.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. Police are responsible for investigating forced labor but faced challenges in effectively enforcing the law. The law provides strong penalties for labor traffickers, including imprisonment for terms of four to 25 years, depending on the seriousness of the case. The Ministry of Interior, together with the International Organization for Migration, trained government officials in identifying victims subjected to trafficking for forced labor.

There were reports of Ukrainian, Moldovan, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Vietnamese men and women forced to work in the country in the retail and construction sectors or in domestic servitude. Underemployed and undereducated Roma from socially segregated rural settlements were disproportionately vulnerable to trafficking in persons for forced labor. The government carried out extensive awareness raising campaigns on the dangers of trafficking in persons with a focus on forced labor and organized joint inspections of business entities to identify illegal employment, forced labor, and trafficking in persons. Courts continued to issue light and suspended sentences for the majority of convicted traffickers that failed to deter trafficking offenses or protect victims.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/ (<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>).

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The minimum age for employment is 15, although younger children may perform light work in cultural or artistic performances, sports events, or advertising activities if it does not affect their health, safety, personal development, or schooling. The National Labor Inspection Service (NLI) and the Public Health Office must approve, determine the maximum hours, and set conditions for work by children younger than 15. The law does not permit children younger than 16 to work more than 30 hours per week on average and restricts children under 18 years of age to 37.5 hours per week. The law applies to all children who are high school or full-time university students. The provision excludes part-time university students above 18 years of age. The law does not allow children under the age of 18 to work underground, work overtime, or perform labor inappropriate for their age or health. The violation of child and juvenile labor rules is punishable by a financial penalty of up to 100,000 euros (\$115,000). Courts issued mild and suspended sentences in most forced labor cases, but the NLI did not report serious violations of laws relating to child labor.

Regional inspection units, which were under the auspices of the NLI, received and investigated child labor complaints. Apart from regional inspection units, the state Social Insurance Company was also responsible for monitoring child labor law compliance. If a unit determined that a child labor law or regulation had been broken, it transferred the case to the NLI, which may also impose fines on employers and individuals that fail to report such incidents adequately.

The government generally enforced the law effectively. Resources, inspections, and remediation were generally adequate. The law defines sufficient penalties for violations, but the application of those penalties was not always sufficient to deter violations.

There were reports Romani children in some settlements were subjected to trafficking for commercial sex (see section 6, Children). NGOs reported that family members or other Roma exploited Romani victims, including children with disabilities. Child labor in the form of forced begging was a problem in some communities and sometimes rose to the level of trafficking in persons.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination regarding age, religion, ethnicity, race, sex, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation, social status, or “other status” but does not specifically prohibit discrimination based on HIV status. Relevant inspection bodies provide for the protection of migrant workers against abuses from private employment agencies. The Central Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family and the Trade Business Office may cancel or suspend the business license of violators and impose a penalty of more than 30,000 euros (\$34,500). Employers discriminated against members of the Romani minority (see section 6).

The government continued implementing a program to increase the motivation of the long-term unemployed Roma to find jobs. The *Operational Program--Human Resources* for 2014-20 included as one of its priorities the integration of marginalized Romani communities in the labor market through educational measures. Activists frequently alleged that employers refused to hire Roma, and an estimated 80 to 90 percent of Roma from socially excluded communities were unemployed. NGOs working with Roma from such communities reported that, while job applications by Roma were often successful during the initial phase of selection, in a majority of cases employers rejected the applicants once they found they were Roma. Rejected job applicants rarely pursued discrimination cases through the courts.

Despite having higher levels of educational attainment compared to men, women faced an employment gap of approximately 13 percent and only 33 percent of entrepreneurs were female. Experts noted motherhood negatively affected career prospects due to long maternity and parental leave and a lack of preschool facilities and flexible work arrangements. Women earned on average 18 percent less than their male colleagues according to a 2017 survey by personnel agency Trexima.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

On January 1, the government increased the minimum wage from 435 euros (\$500) to 480 euros (\$550) per month. As of July the minimum living standard (an official estimate of the poverty income level) was 205.07 euros (\$236) per month.

The law mandates a maximum workweek of 48 hours, including overtime, except for employees in the health-care sector, whose maximum workweek is 56 hours, including overtime. Worker overtime generally could not exceed 150 hours per year, with the exception of health-care professionals, who in specific cases and under an agreement with labor unions could work up to 250 hours overtime. Employees who worked overtime were entitled to a 25 percent premium on their hourly rate. Employees who work under conditions that endanger their health and safety are entitled to “relaxation” leave in addition to standard leave and an additional 35 percent of their hourly wage rate. Employees who work during government holidays are entitled to an additional 50 percent of their hourly rate. Employers who fail to follow overtime rules face fines that were adequate to deter violations. If employers fail to pay an employee, they may face imprisonment of one to five years.

Trade unions, local employment offices, and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family monitored observance of these laws, and authorities effectively enforced them.

The law establishes health and safety standards that the Office for Labor Safety generally enforced. Workers could generally remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, and authorities effectively protected employees in this situation.

Minimum wage, hours of work, and occupational safety and health standards were appropriate for the main industries and effectively enforced. The number of labor inspectors was sufficient to ensure compliance with the law. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family may impose financial penalties on companies found to be noncompliant. In serious cases of labor rights violations, the NLI may withdraw an employer's license. If there are safety and security concerns found at a workplace, the inspectors may require companies to stop using equipment that poses risks until they meet safety requirements. In cases of “serious misconduct” at a workplace, the law permits labor inspectors to impose additional financial penalties.

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