

BULGARIA 2012 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Republic of Bulgaria is a parliamentary democracy. The constitution vests legislative authority in the unicameral National Assembly (Narodno Sabranie). A minority government headed by a prime minister led the country. Observers characterized the 2011 presidential elections as reflecting “a respect for fundamental rights and freedoms” but also noted reports of vote buying and organizational weaknesses. Security forces reported to civilian authorities.

The marginalization of the Romani minority remained the country’s most pressing human rights problem. However, the deterioration of the media environment and increase in media self-censorship due to corporate and political pressure were also problematic. Corruption continued to be a drag on the government’s capabilities and undermined public confidence in the judiciary and other state institutions.

Other human rights problems included alleged mistreatment of prisoners and detainees and harsh conditions in prisons and detention facilities, including overcrowding. There were also long delays in the judicial system; reports of abuse of wiretapping; violence and discrimination against women; violence against children; anti-Semitic vandalism; discrimination against members of the Romani and Turkish ethnic minorities; trafficking in persons; and discrimination against persons with disabilities, against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons, and those with HIV/AIDS.

The government took steps to prosecute and punish officials who committed abuses both in the security services and elsewhere in the government. However, their actions were insufficient, and impunity was a problem.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

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

On July 1, a new law entered into force that introduced more stringent requirements for the use of firearms by officials. Under the law police are allowed to use firearms only when absolutely necessary and while doing everything

possible to preserve the life of the person who is targeted. The amendments prohibit the use of firearms against nonviolent offenders who are not posing a threat.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The constitution and law prohibit such practices. However, there were occasional reports of government officials employing degrading treatment. Working in partnership with domestic human rights organizations, the government passed legislation that restricts the use of force by the police to instances of absolute necessity and prohibits the use of force against minors, pregnant women, and nonviolent offenders. In the first six months of the year, the government investigated 45 cases of police violence. The courts convicted six and acquitted nine police officers. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) claimed that authorities frequently did not properly investigate allegations of police brutality. In August the regional prosecution service in Kardjali dropped its investigation into a 2010 case in which four police officers raided the wrong home, handcuffing its owner Sabahatin Mustafov and injuring his daughter in the process, concluding that no abuse had been committed.

Police can detain persons for 24 hours without charging them. There were again some reports that police sometimes arrested suspects for minor offenses and physically abused them to force confessions, especially in cases involving Romani suspects. In February the regional court in Plovdiv gave suspended sentences to the four police officers, Dobrin Drenski, Pavel Tyutyukov, Dimitar Samarov and Lachezar Mazmanyakov, who beat a 23-year-old student, Stefan Bofirov, in 2010 in an effort to make him confess to a robbery.

In April a video allegedly made six or seven years previously showing the current chief of police for Sofia Region, Nikolay Nikolov, verbally abusing a person at a police station was posted online. The Ministry of Interior stated there was no violation of any legal or ethical standards in the case and did not pursue action.

Human rights groups reported that most detention facilities located outside large cities lacked access to medical services and continued to claim that authorities did

not have medical examinations performed on detainees following reports of police abuse and that officials rarely punished offending officers.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in most prisons were harsh with inadequate toilet facilities, heating, and ventilation.

Physical Conditions: Overcrowding in prisons remained a serious problem. As of October there were 9,904 prisoners, including 77 juveniles and 305 women, in the country's 13 prisons, which had a designed capacity of 8,763 inmates. The daily food allowance was approximately 3.20 leva (\$2.16). NGOs received complaints about both the quality and quantity of food. A report released on December 4 by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment also criticized Burgas and Varna prisons for "disturbing levels of overcrowding," "many allegations of frequent physical ill-treatment" including beatings with truncheons, and unsanitary toilet and food preparation facilities. The report also noted that a lack of health care staff in the two prisons "rendered virtually impossible the provision of health care worthy of the name." Only two of the country's 42 detention facilities met internationally established human rights standards. The government partially renovated a few other detention centers. As of October, 1,092 persons were in detention, including 19 juveniles and 45 women. The total designed capacity of the centers was 1,873 persons.

Through September there were 30 deaths in prisons and three deaths in pretrial detention centers. Prisoners had access to potable water. There were no reports that conditions for women prisoners were worse than those for men. Most of the prison facilities dated from the early 1900s; the government built the newest facility in 1983.

The prison administration received complaints from prisoners about sanctions imposed on them, the poor quality of medical services, living conditions, and mistreatment by prison guards. To reinforce their protests, inmates frequently went on hunger strikes. Foreign prisoners serving longer terms were held in a separate prison in Sofia to provide them with easier access to consular services.

The prison administration estimated 13 percent of the prison population was drug-dependent. Prison authorities experienced difficulties in limiting prisoner access to narcotics and diagnosing and treating the increasing number of drug-dependent inmates.

Administration: There were reports of inadequate medical record keeping. All prisoners have the right to work, and two days of work reduced the prison term by three days. In practice the prison administration offered work to only a limited number of prisoners; work was generally less available due to the economic crisis. Prisoners alleged that the system for determining the type of work regime a prisoner received was corrupt and lacked oversight. Nonviolent offenders could be sentenced to probation, allowing them to stay out of prison as long as they met the conditions of their probation sentence.

While prisoners in principle have the right to receive visitors, in most cases a lack of space to accommodate visitors in the facility made visits impossible. Prisoners of any faith could hold religious observances.

Prisoners reported substandard conditions to the prison administration, national ombudsman, and court system. During the year prisoners filed 650 complaints with the prison administration, claiming improper sanctions, improper transfers to other facilities, substandard medical services, poor conditions, and abuse by prison guards. The prison administration found 458 of those complaints unfounded and investigated the rest of the complaints and imposed sanctions.

Monitoring: During the year the government generally permitted monitoring of prisons by independent observers.

Improvements: In 2011 the government made repairs to the prisons in Sofia, Plovdiv, Vratsa, and Stara Zagora as well as the detention facilities in Sofia and Burgas to improve the living conditions. In September the government received funding from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism to repair two facilities near Burgas and Varna, thereby freeing up space in the two most crowded prisons.

In May the National Assembly passed amendments designating the ombudsman as the national preventive mechanism within the meaning of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. During the year the ombudsman conducted 92 inspections in penitentiary facilities and received 161 complaints from prisoners, mainly concerning their living conditions and access to health services.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and the law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention. However, there were reports that police at times abused their arrest authority.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The Ministry of Interior is responsible for law enforcement. The State Agency for National Security (DANS), which reports to the Prime Minister's Office, is responsible for counterintelligence, domestic intelligence analysis, and investigation of corruption. The National Intelligence Service is responsible for foreign intelligence, and the National Protective Service is responsible for VIP security; both answer to the president. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police and security services, and the government had effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption.

Muslim religious leaders continued to complain of harassment and intimidation by members of the security services, who would periodically question them about religious radicalism and fundamentalism. In April a DANS agent confiscated the passport of Imam Ergin Ahmed from the village of Prelez, telling him that it would expire soon and that he had been placed under surveillance and could not leave the country. Ahmed was not otherwise accused of wrongdoing or charged with a crime. In reaction to a complaint by the chief mufti's office, DANS demoted the agent in rank.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

While not legally required, police normally obtained a warrant from a prosecutor prior to apprehending an individual. Police may hold a detainee for 24 hours without charge; detention can be extended an additional 72 hours when authorized by a prosecutor. A court must approve detention longer than 72 hours; such detention can last up to two years. Prosecutors may not arrest military personnel without the defense minister's approval. Authorities generally observed these laws, although police sometimes exceeded the 24-hour detention period.

The law provides for bail, and it was widely used.

The law provides for the right to counsel from the time of detention, and authorities generally ensured detainees had access to legal counsel no later than two hours after detention and that a lawyer had access to the detainee within 30 minutes of his or her arrival at the police station. The law provides state-funded legal aid for low-income defendants. However, an Open Society Institute (OSI)

report indicated detainees often had to make an arbitrary choice of a public defender based on recommendations from the police, a practice that made the process insufficiently transparent.

Pretrial Detention: Long delays awaiting trial remained a problem, and there was a large backlog of outstanding investigations. Statutory time limits for investigations often resulted in hasty indictments that judges returned for additional investigation, during which time persons accused of serious crimes were released on bail.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and the law provide for an independent judiciary; however, corruption, inefficiency, and lack of accountability continued to be pervasive problems. Public trust in the judicial system remained extremely low based on the perception that magistrates are susceptible to political pressure and render unequal justice.

The Supreme Judicial Council appoints, promotes, disciplines, and dismisses judges, investigators, and prosecutors. It also investigates complaints of judicial misconduct and recommends disciplinary action. Managing magistrates can also impose minor punishments. Observers criticized the lack of clearly stated motives and justification in the council's disciplinary decisions. As of November the council opened 13 new disciplinary cases; imposed 23 sanctions, including three cases of dismissal and four of reduced pay; and revoked five of the 20 punishments previously imposed by chief judges and prosecutors.

Judicial and investigative backlogs remained a problem in larger jurisdictions, and long delays for criminal trials were common.

Trial Procedures

The law presumes defendants are innocent until proven guilty and allows them ample time to prepare a defense. All court hearings are public except for cases involving national security, endangerment of public morals, and the privacy of juvenile defendants. Defendants have the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them, with free translation if necessary.

Juries are not used. In cases involving serious crimes, two lay judges join a professional judge. If a crime carries a sentence of more than 15 years' imprisonment, two professional judges and three lay judges hear the case. In such

circumstances a majority vote determines verdicts. A defense attorney is mandatory if the alleged crime carries a punishment of 10 or more years in prison; if the defendant is a juvenile, foreigner, or person with mental or physical disabilities; or if the accused is absent. Defendants have the right to be present at their trial and can demand a retrial if they were convicted in absentia, unless they were evading justice at the time of the first trial. Defendants have the right to confront witnesses, examine evidence, and present their own witnesses and evidence. The law provides for the right of appeal, which was widely used. Trial procedures apply equally to all defendants.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The law provides for an independent and impartial judiciary in civil matters; however, the same long delays as for criminal cases affected court action on civil cases. Individuals may file allegations of human rights abuses with courts and with the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, which could impose fines on violators. Individuals could appeal decisions involving alleged human rights abuses by the state to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

Regional Human Rights Court Decisions

In April the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe announced that the country had not complied with 9 percent of the ECHR judgments under special supervision. In June the National Assembly amended the law to create a domestic mechanism for reviewing and compensating citizens who had won complaints over slow justice. The measure was intended to reduce the number of cases filed with the ECHR while at the same time providing a proportionate but quicker resolution. The amendments entered into force on October 1.

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

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and the government generally respected these provisions in practice.

In May the permanent National Assembly subcommittee overseeing the use of specialized investigative techniques (SITs), which included techniques such as

wiretapping, outdoor surveillance, controlled deliveries, and undercover agents, reported that SITs were authorized 13,624 times in 2011. The government used 747, or 5 percent of SITs, as evidence in court. NGOs commented that law enforcement had turned SITs from an exceptional into a conventional tool.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and press, and the government generally respected these rights. However, concerns persisted about deterioration of the media environment due to corporate and political pressure that, combined with the growing concentration of media ownership, gravely damaged media pluralism.

In April the International Research and Exchanges Board highlighted editorial bias and sale of news content as additional major problems for the quality of journalism in the country. In September the European commissioner for digital agenda, Neelie Kroes, stated that media ownership and financing lacked transparency. Journalists revealed in an anonymous survey that they were discouraged from doing investigative reporting and exercised self-censorship, as it was routine practice for owners to dictate the media's editorial content and political slant. During the year the media market saw further concentration of media ownership.

Freedom of Speech: Individuals criticized the government without official reprisal. However, in rural areas offering fewer employment opportunities, individuals were more hesitant to criticize local governments.

The penal code provides for one to four years' imprisonment for incitement to "hate speech." The law defines hate speech as speech that instigates hatred, discrimination, or violence based on race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, marital or social status, or disability.

Freedom of Press: The process of media consolidation continued with more regional outlets being acquired by the larger groups. Both print and electronic media were criticized domestically and internationally for lack of ownership and financial transparency as well as for susceptibility to economic and political influence. In June an alleged recording from a private meeting of one of the owners of Media Group Bulgaria Holding, Lyubomir Pavlov, portrayed him as asserting that he has been using his media resources to steer political decisions.

Pavlov did not deny the recording was his voice but said it was taken out of context.

Violence and Harassment: In August Marin Mitev, a co-owner of TIM Holding, in what the Association of European Journalists – Bulgaria called an act of “direct pressure,” mailed Sun Tzu’s book *The Art of War* to Economedia journalist Spas Spasov. Spasov had published critical articles regarding the corporation’s plans to undertake construction projects in Varna’s Sea Garden. Mitev included a note quoting from the book, “You should avoid those you can’t either defeat or befriend.”

The investigation into the 2011 bombing of the car of Sasho Dikov, director of the cable television channel Kanal 3, failed to uncover the perpetrator and was terminated without results in April.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: There were reports from journalists that political parties, including members of the ruling party, pressured media and threatened to destroy their business if they published certain articles, leading to the practice of self-censorship.

Libel Laws/National Security: Libel is legally punishable. Usually the courts interpreted the law in a manner favoring journalistic expression. Journalists’ reporting about corruption or mismanagement prompted many defamation cases; the most frequent plaintiffs were government officials and other persons in public positions.

In June the Ruse Regional Court convicted Asya Pencheva, a journalist for the local newspaper *Utro*, for publishing an article about the physical abuse of children in a local orphanage. The orphanage employee who had given the journalist information and whose conversation had been recorded filed a libel claim against Pencheva. In September the district court vacated the conviction on grounds of procedural violations and returned the case for retrial in the lower court, where it was thrown out on October 15.

Nongovernmental Impact: In June, during an environmental protest in downtown Sofia, protesters attacked and seriously injured the cameraman of the bTV crew covering the events, also damaging his equipment. A Media Democracy Foundation report released in July commented that the incident demonstrated a radical trend among young people who believe that mainstream/traditional media

are serving the interests of those in power and blame mainstream media outlets for declining democratic values in the country.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms without appropriate legal authority. According to International Telecommunications Union statistics, approximately 51percent of the population used the Internet in 2011.

The security services could access electronic data with judicial permission when investigating cyber and serious crimes. However, NGOs criticized gaps in the law that allow the prosecution service to request such data directly from the service providers without court authorization. There were no reports that the government attempted to collect personally identifiable information in connection with a person's peaceful expression of political, religious, or ideological opinions or beliefs.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

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

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly, and the government generally respected this right in practice. The law requires groups requesting a permit for gatherings to give 48 hours' notice. The law prohibits public gatherings within a security zone (16 to 66 feet) around the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers, and Presidency buildings. Mayors can prohibit, dismiss, or suggest an alternative site for a gathering they believe poses a threat to public order, security, or traffic.

Freedom of Association

The constitution and law provide for freedom of association, and the government generally respected this right in practice. The law prohibits groups, including political parties, that endanger national unity; promote racial, national, or religious hatred; violate the rights of citizens; or seek to achieve their objectives through

violent means. The government generally respected the rights of individuals and groups to establish political parties or other political organizations. However, NGOs may not engage in political activity.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/j/drl/irf/rpt.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The constitution and law provide for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

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

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law provides for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for protecting refugees.

Refoulement: The government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedoms would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The UNHCR stated the risk of genuine refugees receiving a rejection was limited. However, some exceptions occurred. In September the Veliko Turnovo Appellate Court granted extradition to Russia for Chechen citizen Mohmad Gadamauri, detained earlier in July at the border on an Interpol red notice, disregarding that he was a recognized refugee in both Germany and Poland and possibly at risk in Russia. The ECHR froze the extradition until it reviewed the case. The review had not been completed, and Gadamauri remained in jail at year's end.

Refugee Abuse: The law requires that persons seeking refugee status file an application within "a reasonable time" after entering the country. Even though by

regulation border police are no longer required to detain asylum seekers who enter the country illegally in a temporary center, that practice continued. The low institutional capacity of the government to process requests and transfer applicants to shelters became even more evident with the increased inflow of refugees from Syria. In August, 25 Syrian refugees, including children, who had been held for months in the detention center in Lyubimets went on a hunger strike to demand expeditious resolution of their cases.

The refugee transit center in Pastrogor near the border with Turkey operated without a permanent office of the State Agency for Refugees to review applications and grant asylum. As a result officials transferred most of the asylum cases to the center near Sofia, creating inefficiency and delay.

Although the law sets a maximum six-month period of detention for illegal immigrants and asylum seekers, there were reports of detentions exceeding six months.

Durable Solutions: On June 13, the country joined the EU resettlement program, starting with a pilot group of 20 refugees in 2014.

Temporary Protection: The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. As of October the government provided it to 139 persons.

Section 3. Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The constitution and the law provide citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens generally exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections based on universal suffrage. Watchdog organizations and opposition parties alike reported that government-affiliated local businesses resorted to intimidation and pressure to ensure electoral support for the ruling party, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), in the 2011 local and presidential elections.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Despite concerns about the effectiveness of law enforcement and the judiciary and allegations of vote buying that negatively affected the election environment, observers widely regarded the results of the 2011 local and

presidential elections to be free and fair. The final report of the limited election observation mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) found the election generally was conducted in accordance with OSCE commitments and Council of Europe standards.

The law prohibits campaigning in languages other than Bulgarian. In its report on the 2009 elections, ODIHR noted that this requirement, as well as the absence of official voter information in minority languages, limited the ability of some members of the Romani and Turkish minority groups to understand the election rules and to participate effectively in the election process. In June the National Assembly voted against a proposed amendment allowing campaigning in languages other than Bulgarian.

In the first nine months of the year, prosecutors filed 118 cases and the courts convicted 20 persons for election-related violations in the local and presidential elections in 2011.

Political Parties: The law requires a political party to have 2,500 members to register officially. Even though the constitution does not allow for the establishment of political parties along ethnic lines, in practice this prohibition did not appear to weaken the role of some ethnic minorities in the political process, and a number of parties represented various ethnic minority groups.

Participation of Women and Minorities: As of October there were 56 women in the 240-seat National Assembly. There were four female ministers out of 16 ministers in total. Women held key positions in the National Assembly, including those of speaker of the assembly, one deputy speaker, and chairperson of seven of the 20 standing committees.

There were 29 members of minority groups – 26 ethnic Turks, two Pomaks (descendants of Slavic Bulgarians who converted to Islam under Ottoman rule), and one Roma representative – in the National Assembly. There was one ethnic Turkish minister in the cabinet. While the ethnic Turkish minority was well represented, Roma were underrepresented, particularly in appointed leadership positions. Ethnic Turks, Roma, and Pomaks held elected positions at the local level.

Section 4. Official Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials. However, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials in all branches of government often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. World Bank governance indices indicated that corruption was a problem. Corrupt practices included bribery, conflict of interest, elaborate embezzlement schemes, procurement violations, and influence trading.

In July the European Commission's Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) report expressed disappointment with the results of both investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption cases in the country, pointing to a significant drop in high-level corruption cases in 2011 from the preceding two years. The report further stated that the judiciary demonstrated overall poor results in pursuing corruption among its own ranks. There were reports that random case-assignment software was manipulated to steer certain cases to specific judges. In both the executive branch and judiciary, NGOs reported that corrupt officials were pressured to quit or retire, or most often were reassigned, rather than prosecuted on corruption-related charges. The overly formal judicial system made it difficult to prosecute high-profile organized crime and corruption cases effectively. Legal and procedural limitations on the use of sting operations, plea bargaining, and cooperating witnesses made it difficult to pursue corruption cases.

In another corruption analysis published in June, the Center for the Study of Democracy gauged an increase in administrative corruption in the last few years, estimating there was an average of 150,000 such corrupt transactions occurring monthly. The Center also noted that law enforcement agencies lacked the capacity and efficiency to tackle the scale of corruption in the country and without administrative reform would still fail to stop corruption within its own ranks. The report also stated that the authorities had neglected attacking political corruption, focusing instead on the lower to middle levels of the administration.

In July the prosecutor general reported in the National Assembly that the prosecution service had shown no progress in its anticorruption efforts. He attributed the failure to an outdated criminal code and inefficient law enforcement agencies.

In September 2011 the minister of interior prohibited individual and corporate donations to the ministry after heavy criticism of the practice in the CVM report. However, the ministry could still receive donations from municipalities, government companies, and foreign entities. In October 2011 the ministry created a public register of all donations.

In 2011 the prosecution dropped charges in three of the five corruption cases against former ministers begun in 2010; during the year the court acquitted the rest. While high-profile cases generally continued to end in acquittals, there were also some successful prosecutions. On July 19, the Sofia City Court brought new charges against Dimitar Avramov, a member of the National Assembly from the ruling party GERB, who was fined by the Supreme Cassation Court in 2011 under the conflict of interest law. Avramov was accused of requesting two bribes from a businessman from his district totaling 100,000 leva (\$67,385) in addition to 3,000 decars (741 acres) of land in the northwestern region of Montana. As of October the investigation continued.

Lower level prosecutions also occurred. On May 3, law enforcement authorities caught 32 customs officials at the border checkpoint Kapitan Andreevo in the middle of sharing the ill-gotten gains from bribes throughout the day. The prosecutors brought charges against eight of them, and as of October the investigation was in progress.

On July 16, the Sofia City Court found Varna Administrative Court judge Anelia Tsvetkova guilty of receiving a 10,000 leva (\$6,738) bribe and gave her a three-year suspended sentence.

The law mandates that government officials declare any circumstances in which they could be accused of using their position for personal profit. High-level public officials who fail to submit a financial disclosure declaration can be fined as much as 1,500 leva (\$1,011). According to the National Audit Office, during the year 10 of 6,480 officials covered by the law did not submit their annual declarations by the statutory deadline, compared with 34 of 6,533 officials in 2011. The July CVM report consistently criticized the authorities for their lack of a system for sanctioning false declarations and detecting unexplained wealth.

The law provides the right of public access to government information. However, NGOs continued to complain the government did not implement the law effectively. While the courts allowed greater access to government information, the government rarely complied with these decisions. In September the Sofia Administrative Court sustained a National Assembly decision to refuse a television journalist access to information regarding the budget subsidy for independent assembly members, asserting that revealing the information would also reveal the political affiliation of the members, which should be protected as personal data.

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

Numerous domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Human rights observers reported uneven levels of cooperation from various national and local government officials.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The ombudsman reviews complaints of individuals against the government for violations of rights or freedoms. The ombudsman can request information from authorities, act as an intermediary in resolving disputes, make proposals for terminating existing practices, refer information to the prosecution service, and request the Constitutional Court to abolish legal provisions as unconstitutional. During the year the ombudsman received 5,331 complaints of violations of citizens' rights and freedoms. The majority of complaints concerned quality of public services, social assistance programs, and property problems. The authorities sometimes acted in response to recommendations from the ombudsman.

A permanent National Assembly committee oversees human rights, religious denominations, and citizens' complaints and petitions.

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

The law prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, social status, and sexual orientation; however, the law does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of language. Societal discrimination continued, particularly against persons with disabilities; ethnic minorities; and LGBT persons. Trafficking in persons continued to be a problem.

The government investigated complaints of discrimination, issued rulings, and imposed sanctions against violators. The law allows individuals to pursue a discrimination case through the court system or through the CPD. In the first 10 months of the year, the CPD received 728 complaints, up from 685 in 2011. The majority of the complaints concerned multiple allegations of discrimination, mostly based on personal status and disability, particularly with regard to employment. The commission found 230 cases of discriminatory practices and imposed fines totaling 7,250 leva (\$4,885) on violators.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape, and the authorities generally enforced its provisions when violations came to their attention. However, the penal code justifies statutory rape if it is followed by marriage. While spousal rape can be prosecuted under the general rape statute, authorities rarely prosecuted it in practice. Sentences for rape range from two to eight years in prison (from three to 10 years if the victim is under 18 years or a lineal descendant). When rape results in serious injury or attempted suicide, sentences range between three and 15 years' imprisonment and, when the victim is a minor, between 10 and 20 years. According to NGOs the social taboo experienced by rape victims discouraged them from reporting the crime and was a far more serious obstacle to prosecution than police reluctance to investigate. As of October the prosecution service filed 200 rape cases and pursued 58 prosecutions, and the court sentenced 87 persons.

The law defines domestic violence as any act of, or attempted act of, sexual violence or physical, psychological, emotional, or economic pressure against members of one's family or between cohabiting persons. It empowers the court to impose fines, issue restraining or eviction orders, or require special counseling. Noncompliance with a restriction order is subject to imprisonment of up to three years or 5,000 leva (\$3,369) fine. The law requires the government to adopt an annual action plan to prevent and protect against domestic violence and requires the state to fund it.

Observers noted the law generally was enforced in cases of physical violence but that authorities did not pay much attention to other types of domestic abuse. Although there were no precise statistics, NGOs estimated that one in four women was a victim of domestic violence.

The government's 2012 national program for prevention of and protection against domestic violence focused on developing minimum standards for social services provided to victims of domestic violence. The government had not finished establishing a victim support coordination mechanism, which was supposed to have been created in 2011.

A local NGO operated a free 24-hour hotline for women in crisis, and other NGOs provided short-term protection and counseling to victims in 17 crisis centers and shelters throughout the country. Police and social workers referred victims of domestic violence to NGO-run shelters, but NGOs complained that local authorities rarely provided financial assistance for operational costs. Women's

rights organizations continued to insist that the government lacked strong gender equality and domestic violence policies, despite the annual action plans encouraging gender equality.

Sexual Harassment: The law identifies sexual harassment as a specific form of discrimination; if prosecuted as coercion it is punishable by up to six years in prison. The abuse remained an underreported problem; less than 1 percent of complaints received by the CPD concerned sexual harassment.

Reproductive Rights: The government generally respected the right of couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children, and to have the information and means to do so free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. Women generally had good access to contraception and skilled attendance during childbirth and to prenatal care, including essential obstetric and postpartum care. Women in poor rural areas had less access to contraception due to poverty and lack of education; skilled attendance at childbirth was sometimes less available due to lack of health insurance.

Discrimination: The law provides women with the same rights as men; however, women faced some discrimination in hiring and pay. According to a March report by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC), the pay gap between men and women rose during the last few years; in 2010 women's salaries were 15.7 percent lower than men's. The Global Alliance for Protection of Children's Health and Natural Nutrition in Bulgaria announced in July that approximately 19 percent of mothers lost their jobs when their employers discovered their pregnancies. Women also were disproportionately underrepresented in government; only 16 percent of mayors were women. The National Council on Equality between Women and Men, headed by the minister of labor and social policy under the Council of Ministers, is responsible for safeguarding the rights of women. Primarily a consultative body, the council is charged with promoting cooperation and coordination among NGOs and government agencies.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived from one's parents. Children are immediately registered upon birth in the country.

Education: Public education is compulsory to the age of 16 and free through the 12th grade, but authorities did not effectively enforce attendance requirements.

According to the National Statistical Institute, nearly 19,000 children dropped out of school in 2011. However, the Education Ministry estimated the number of dropouts at around 6,000, explaining that many students left the country's schools to emigrate. NGOs consider both figures to be inaccurate and estimated that the actual number of dropouts was between these figures. School drop-out rates were disproportionately high among ethnic minorities, particularly the Romani population, who lacked affirmative incentives to complete secondary education. According to official government data for 2011, while secondary school was the highest level of education completed by 52.3 percent of the Bulgarian population, only 29.7 percent of the Turkish and 9 percent of the Romani populations had completed that level. The proportion of the groups that never completed any level of education ranged from 0.9 percent for Bulgarians to 7.5 percent of Turks and 21.8 percent of Roma.

Child Abuse: Violence against children was a problem. According to the State Agency for Child Protection, there was an increase in the number of child abuse cases in the previous few years. In 2011 there were 2,175 cases reported, up from 2,155 in 2010. Violence in the home continued to be the most prevalent form of violence (79 percent), while 9 percent of the cases occurred on the street and only 5 percent in school.

According to the Social Activities and Practices Institute, one in eight children becomes a victim of sexual violence. In 85 percent of sexual violence cases, there is a close relationship between the victim and the abuser. The Animus Association Foundation stated that, while sexual violence against children had increased in the past few years, discussion of it remained a social taboo. In July the State Agency for Child Protection inspected 51 child care institutions and uncovered 46 cases of abuse. The agency noted that the conditions and organization in some of the institutions, such as those in Veliki Preslav, Shumen, and Isperih, had created an environment that was conducive to violence. In May the government adopted a national plan for prevention of violence against children that aimed to improve the professional capacity of experts working with children and raise public awareness of the problem. According to the National Statistical Institute, 1,803 children were victims of serious crimes in 2011, down from 2,090 victims in 2010.

The government funded an NGO-operated 24-hour free helpline that children could call for counseling, information, and support as well as to report abuse. During the first nine months of the year, helpline counselors carried out 14,772 consultations. Nearly 13 percent of the calls concerned family problems and

violence that prompted investigations that sometimes resulted in the removal of children from abusive homes and the prosecution of abusive parents. Hotline administrators referred 206 reports to child protection authorities for handling.

Child Marriage: The minimum age for marriage is 16. Although no official statistics were available, NGOs reported that child marriage was common in Romani communities. According to a 2010 study by the Romani NGO Amalipe, 20 percent of 16-year-old Roma and 50 percent of 18-year-old Roma were either married or cohabiting, which resulted in school dropouts, early childbirths, poor parenting, and spreading poverty. The youngest reported case of cohabitation among Roma involved a child who was 12.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The penal code provides for two to eight years' imprisonment and a fine of 5,000-15,000 leva (\$3,369-\$10,108) for forcing children into prostitution, as well as three to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of 10,000-20,000 leva (\$6,738-\$13,477) for child sex trafficking. The legal minimum age for consensual sex is 14. The law prohibits child pornography and provides for up to six years in prison and a fine of up to 8,000 leva (\$5,391).

Institutionalized Children: The BHC and other NGOs criticized the prosecution service for terminating many of the investigations into the 238 deaths and other abuses discovered in 2010 in the specialized institutions for children. The government continued to inspect the institutions, uncovering numerous malpractices and mistreatment of the children placed there. Many institutions continued to accept children both with and without disabilities. The number of institutionalized children dropped by more than 30 percent between 2009 and 2011, declining from 6,730 to 4,755 at the end of 2011. A 2011 report by the European Roma Rights Center and the BHC stated that Romani children accounted for 63 percent of all institutionalized children, while Roma accounted for 5 percent of the total population. Most children in state institutions were not orphans; courts institutionalized children when they determined that their families were unable to provide them adequate care.

The government continued implementing the first stage of its deinstitutionalization program, targeting 31 facilities for children up to the age of three and 24 facilities for children ages three and older. The government reported evaluating 1,797 institutionalized children with disabilities and drew up an individual deinstitutionalization plan for each. As of August 300 children had been reintegrated with their families, adopted, placed in foster care, or relocated to a

center providing individualized care for six to eight children in a simulated family environment.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information see the Department of State's report on compliance at http://travel.state.gov/abduction/resources/congressreport/congressreport_4308.html.

Anti-Semitism

The 2011 census identified only 1,130 Jews in the country. Local Jewish organizations estimated the actual number at 5,000 to 7,000.

Defacement of Jewish memorials and buildings, both public and private, persisted, and Jewish organizations remained concerned over the government's passivity in addressing all hate crimes. While in the past Web site administrators deleted anti-Semitic comments under online media articles, they gradually stopped the practice. Internet social networks have become increasingly popular with anti-Semitic groups, especially after the July terrorist bombing of Israeli tourists in the Black Sea port city of Burgas, and in connection with the upcoming 70th anniversary of the saving of Bulgarian Jews from deportation to Nazi camps.

During the year prosecution service authorities refused to take action against extreme right-wing Ataka party leader Volen Siderov for his anti-Semitic books. The nationalist party Internal Revolutionary Macedonian Organization (VMRO) increased its anti-Semitic character, adopting neo-Nazi rhetoric.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, and the provision of other state services. However, the government did not effectively enforce these provisions in practice. The government focused most of its efforts on providing various social services

but lacked sufficient funding to adjust the infrastructure and implement active policies to improve public awareness. Societal discrimination against persons with disabilities persisted.

The law requires improved access to buildings for persons with disabilities, and most new public works projects took this requirement into account. However, enforcement of this law lagged in existing, unrenovated buildings. The law promotes the employment of persons with disabilities, providing employers with subsidies covering 30 to 50 percent of insurance benefits and the cost of adjusting and equipping workplaces to accommodate persons with disabilities. However, enforcement was poor and employers did not feel encouraged enough, and as a result more than 73 percent of the economically active persons with disabilities were unemployed. Other factors such as lack of access to adequate education, lack of skills, and lack of accessible transportation also contributed to that rate of unemployment. Only 17 percent of the municipalities provided adequate public transportation infrastructure.

The constitution provides for the right of all citizens to vote, and the law provides specific measures for persons with disabilities to have access to the polls, including mobile ballot boxes. The country's generally poor infrastructure for disabled persons provided them with inadequate access to education, health care, and social services. Individuals with mental and physical disabilities often were separated from the rest of society in institutions located for the most part in remote places, which prevented the hiring of qualified staff and hampered access to timely medical assistance. Despite some incremental improvements, conditions in the 81 institutions for persons with mental, physical, and sensory disabilities in the country remained poor. NGOs criticized the government for not moving toward an inclusive, community-oriented model of education, socialization, and health care for persons with disabilities.

Authorities placed children with varying types and degrees of disability in the same institution. The government operated 72 institutions for parentless children, 31 for medical and social care, 24 for children and youth with mental disabilities, and 73 family-type residence centers. At the end of 2011, the total number of children in these institutions was 2,636. According to the CPD, less than 10 percent of the schools provide access for children with disabilities.

The Interagency Council for Integration of Persons with Disabilities was responsible for developing the policy supporting persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, through its executive agency for persons with

disabilities, was responsible for protecting the rights of such persons and worked with government-supported national representative organizations to that end. However, human rights groups remained concerned about the lack of vision and transparency regarding financial and other support to the national representative organizations as well as the lack of interagency coordination on disability issues.

In June the government approved a two-year action plan for providing equal opportunities to persons with disabilities that fleshed out the existing government strategy.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

According to the 2011 census, there were 325,345 Roma in the country, or less than 5 percent of the population. Ethnic Turks numbered 588,318, or less than 9 percent of the population. Observers asserted that these figures were inaccurate, since more than 600,000 persons did not answer the census question about their ethnic origin and officials did not conduct a proper count in most Romani communities, but rather either made assumptions or failed to include them altogether.

Societal discrimination and popular prejudice against Roma and other minority groups remained a problem, and the media resorted to discriminatory and abusive language when referring to them. In February a group of 55 citizens, including journalists, civic activists, and other professionals, petitioned the prosecutor general and the CPD to initiate legal action in response to a press article in *Novinar* newspaper by Kalin Rumenov (a pseudonym) entitled *Ungrateful Gypsy Racists*. The petition alleged the article incited racial and ethnic hatred and racial discrimination. As of October the prosecution service refused to provide any information on the case other than that it was waiting for materials from another government agency.

The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee stated that neo-Nazi gangs would frequently turn one specific area in downtown Sofia into a “no-go area” for individuals with different skin color. On October 5, a group of 12 neo-Nazis attacked and severely beat two Afghan refugees, one of whom was hospitalized in a coma. Two weeks earlier neo-Nazis attacked and injured four German citizens in the same area. As of October police were investigating the incidents.

On June 29, a bomb placed in a bag exploded in Sandanski in front of a Romani cafe and club, whose owner was also the local leader of political party Evroroma.

The first person to pick up the bag, Malin Iliev, was severely injured from the blast and died a month later in a hospital. The police arrested four suspects, charging them with a racially motivated crime. As of October the investigation continued.

In March the National Assembly approved a National Roma Integration Strategy 2012-20 with an action plan that outlines specific measures to improve the situation of the Roma community in terms of housing, health care, education, employment, nondiscrimination, and media coverage.

Many Roma continued to live in appalling conditions. The 2011 census indicated that 55.4 percent of the Romani population lived in urban areas, and NGOs estimated that 50 to 70 percent of their housing was illegally constructed. Many municipalities continued to initiate legal proceedings to demolish illegally built houses. In September the town of Maglizh started the demolition of approximately 100 illegal Roma houses, and in July in Peshtera dozens of families were left homeless after their homes were demolished. In August the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in partnership with the National Council for Ethnic Integration launched a six-month project aimed at mapping Romani ghettos in the country to identify their specific problems. The project involved 600 members of municipal administrations to build their capacity to work with marginalized communities.

Workplace discrimination against minorities continued to be a problem. General public mistrust, coupled with their low level of education, made locating work more difficult for Roma. The national strategy estimated that the employment rate among adult Roma was 19.4 percent, with 14.4 percent receiving pensions. According to a survey by the OSI, 35 to 38 percent of Roma were employed and only 20 percent received contributory pensions.

Romani children often attended de facto segregated schools where they received inferior education. There were cases of schools becoming segregated after Bulgarian students left them. NGOs criticized the national strategy for not providing specific school desegregation measures. As a result of many projects working toward decreasing the drop-out rate among Romani students, in most places it was less than 1 percent for elementary school students. Retaining Romani students beyond the age of 10 remained a challenge for the government, which also lacked effective programs for reintegrating students who had dropped out.

Romani access to health services continued to be a problem and in some cases was subject to discrimination. In January the OSI released a survey that estimated 45 percent of Roma lacked health insurance. In addition the quality of medical care

given Roma by medical personnel and social workers was very low. According to a health survey released in 2011 by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 56 percent of Roma over the age of 15 suffered from hypertension and 47.5 percent of Romani children, and 23.9 percent of adults suffered from diabetes and asthma. Bronchitis, cardiovascular disease, peptic ulcers, arthritis, rheumatism, prostate, and menopause problems were chronic in many Romani communities. A partnership program involving the National Network of Health Mediators and central and local government was one successful model for addressing Romani access to health services. Since its inception the program has trained more than 100 health mediators appointed to full-time positions in 57 municipalities to work with high-risk and vulnerable groups.

Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, but the government did not effectively enforce this prohibition. While reports of violence against LGBT persons were rare, societal discrimination, particularly discrimination in employment and public speaking, remained a problem. Most LGBT persons did not “come out” to family due to the fear of the relationship being severed. NGOs stated that it was not uncommon for persons suspected of being gay to be fired, and such individuals were reluctant to seek redress in the courts due to fear of being openly identified as belonging to the LGBT community.

On June 30, the fifth annual gay pride parade took place in downtown Sofia. In the weeks before the parade, the media sensationalized the comments of Father Evgeni Yanakiev of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, who called for the stoning of parade participants. The Church refused to condemn Yanakiev’s statements opining that homosexuality was an unnatural passion that harms the individual, the family, and society. The parade attracted approximately 500 participants and went on largely without incident. Even though it did not publicly support the event, the municipal government showed tangible good will by waiving fees for park use and security. The police provided heavy security in the vicinity of the parade and in the wider area, which effectively deterred aggressive behavior from skinheads and others who traditionally caused some problems. However, following the march police detained 30 individuals for rowdy behavior, all of whom were later released without charge. One person reported being attacked by skinheads outside the vicinity of the event but did not report the incident to the police. On the same day, extremist parties Ataka and VMRO sponsored an antigay rally that drew approximately 350 demonstrators against homosexuality.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

According to a Positive Monitoring-First Step project study assessing the medical services provided to persons with HIV/AIDS, patients faced inadequate conditions in medical facilities and discrimination due to some doctors' refusal to provide treatment because of a fear of contracting the disease. Patients typically did not contest these situations in court because of the social stigma attached to having HIV/AIDS. Nearly one-fifth of patients reported hiding the fact that they were HIV-positive in order to receive emergency medical care or avoid being transferred to a nonspecialized unit where they could receive inadequate help.

Society stigmatized women who were diagnosed and treated for sexually transmitted diseases.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law protects the right of all workers to form or join independent trade unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements. The law also provides for the right to strike; however, key public-sector employees (primarily military and law enforcement personnel) were subject to a blanket prohibition against striking. These employees were able to take the government to court as a means of ensuring due process in protecting their rights.

The law provides a national legal structure for collective bargaining. When employers and trade unions reach a collective agreement at the sectoral level, they can jointly request the Minister of Labor extend it to cover all enterprises in the sector. The law denies public servants the right to collective bargaining. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and includes a provision for a six-month salary payment as compensation for illegal dismissal. Complaints of discrimination based on union affiliation can be filed with the CPD, but there were no reports of such complaints during the year.

In general the government effectively enforced the laws, including with effective remedies and penalties. However, union leaders complained that court proceedings for reinstatement of unfairly dismissed workers often took years to resolve and were not a strong deterrent of antiunion discrimination.

Workers exercised the right to organize and join unions as well as the right to strike. Unions were independent of the government and political parties. In general the government allowed unions to conduct their activities without interference. However, unions continued to report some cases of employers' relocating, firing, and demoting union leaders and members. In June in the middle of a strike over delayed wage payments, the management of a factory producing reinforced concrete fired two trade union leaders headlining the protest. Labor unions also alleged that some employers failed to bargain in good faith or adhere to agreements. Union leaders stated that some employers set a condition for hiring new employees that they would not establish or join unions.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. The government's General Labor Inspectorate asserted that the government effectively enforced those prohibitions. However, there were some reports of children being forced to work for their families or criminal organizations.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law sets the minimum age for employment at 16 and the minimum age for dangerous work at 18. To employ children under the age of 18, employers must obtain a work permit from the General Labor Inspectorate of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Employers can hire children under the age of 16 with special permits for light work that is not risky or harmful to the child's development and that does not interfere with the child's education or training. The General Labor Inspectorate inspected the working conditions at all companies seeking and holding child work permits.

Employment of children without a work permit is a criminal offense and entails a punishment of up to six months in prison. The government generally enforced child labor laws in the formal sector.

The General Labor Inspectorate reported a slight increase in child employment during the year. As of October the inspectorate granted 1,532 requests for employment of children between the ages of 16 and 18 years. The inspectorate granted 92 requests for work permits for children under the age of 16. In 2011 the

inspectorate uncovered 84 violations related to child employment. Half of the cases involved hiring a child for prohibited work; the majority of the others referred to nighttime work and violating the parameters of the work permits. According to the inspectorate, once corrected, employers did not repeat the violations.

The government continued programs to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, mounted educational campaigns about their effects, and intervened to protect, withdraw, rehabilitate, and reintegrate children engaged in the worst forms of child labor.

NGOs continued to report that children were exploited in certain industries (particularly small family-owned shops, textile production, restaurants, construction businesses, and periodical sales) and by organized crime (notably for prostitution, pickpocketing, and the distribution of narcotics). Besides child sex trafficking, the worst forms of child labor included heavy physical labor and labor on family tobacco farms, a significant health hazard.

The government continued to report a declining trend in the number of children detained by police for vagrancy and begging. During the year 151 children were detained by the police for vagrancy, compared with 246 from January through October of 2011. Many believed adults exploited these children, who were primarily engaged in begging, prostitution, or washing car windows. When such children were apprehended, police generally placed them in protective custody for up to 24 hours or in crisis centers for longer periods, unless remanded to protective custody by a prosecutor. Subsequently, authorities sent many children to state-run institutions.

d. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The national minimum wage was 290 leva (\$195) per month. In October the government set the poverty line at 241 leva (\$162). According to the National Statistical Institute, in 2010 1,565,000 Bulgarians lived under the poverty income level, which was 295 leva (\$199) per month.

The law provides for a standard workweek of 40 hours with at least one 24-hour rest period per week; the law prohibits excessive compulsory overtime. The law prohibits overtime work for children under age 18, pregnant women, and women with children up to age six. The law stipulates that the pay premium for overtime cannot be less than 150 percent during workdays, 175 percent during weekends,

and 200 percent during 12 official holidays. A national labor safety program, with standards established by law, gives employees the right to healthy and nonhazardous working conditions.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is responsible for enforcing both the minimum wage and the standard workweek. The law penalizes labor violations with fines ranging from 1,500 (\$1,011) to 15,000 leva (\$10,108), which according to the General Labor Inspectorate acted as a deterrent to violations. To avoid penalties companies started replacing civil contracts with the required labor contracts, which provide for all guarantees of the law for full-time employment. The General Labor Inspectorate is responsible for monitoring and enforcement of occupational safety and health requirements. Enforcement was generally effective in the government sector but weaker in the private sector. However, with a significant grey market economy, many informal workers are not covered by legal protections or government inspections. In 2011 the government increased the number of labor inspectors by approximately 30 percent in an effort to reduce extensive grey market employment, although statistics were not available. There were 337 labor inspectors. In the first nine months of the year, there were 2,206 work-related accidents.

Conditions in some sectors, particularly construction, mining, chemicals, and transportation, continued to pose risks for workers. As of October, there were 60 work-related deaths, mainly in the transportation sector.