

COMOROS 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Union of the Comoros is a constitutional, multiparty republic. The country consists of three islands: Grande Comore (also called Ngazidja); Anjouan (Ndzuani); and Moheli (Mwali); and claims a fourth, Mayotte (Maore), that France administers. International observers considered the 2020 legislative elections to be generally free and fair, although the opposition boycotted the elections and did not recognize the results. The 2019 presidential elections were not free and fair, and international and domestic observers noted the elections were marked by significant irregularities. The opposition did not recognize the results due to allegations of ballot stuffing, intimidation, and harassment.

The National Development Army and the Federal Police have responsibility for law enforcement and maintenance of order within the country. The National Development Army includes both the gendarmerie and the Comorian Defense Force. It reports to the president's cabinet director for defense. The Federal Police reports to the minister of interior. The National Directorate of Territorial Safety, which oversees immigration and customs, reports to the minister of interior. The gendarmerie's intervention platoon also may act under the authority of the interior minister. When the gendarmerie serves as the judicial police, it reports to the minister of justice. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over police and other security forces. There were reports members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including violence, threats of violence, and unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly; severe restrictions of religious freedom; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence and sexual violence; trafficking in persons; and laws criminalizing consensual same-sex

sexual conduct between adults, although not enforced.

Impunity for human rights abuses and corruption was widespread. Although the government sometimes arrested or dismissed officials implicated in abuses or corruption, they were rarely tried.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

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

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

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

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

The constitution and law prohibit such practices, and unlike in previous years there were no credible reports government officials employed them.

Impunity was a problem in the security forces, within both police and military. Corruption and reluctance by the populace to bring charges against authorities contributed to impunity. The prosecutor of the republic, under the Ministry of Justice, has the responsibility to investigate abuses.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions remained harsh and life threatening, particularly in the prison on Anjouan, due to overcrowding, inadequate food, water, sanitation, and medical facilities. The national prison in Moroni on Grande Comore was the largest of three prisons in the country. The third was on Moheli. Military detainees were held in military facilities. National or island authorities used various detention facilities as deemed appropriate, and detainees could be transferred from either Anjouan or Moheli to the national prison in Moroni,

depending upon the nature of their offenses.

Authorities used the National Police Academy on Anjouan to house 52 migrants from mainland Africa beginning in October 2021, pending case processing by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). With IOM and UNHCR assistance, the government sought to relocate them to other countries (see section 2.e., Access to Asylum).

Abusive Physical Conditions: Overcrowding was a problem. As of September the Moroni prison held 342 inmates, including 14 children, but according to International Committee of the Red Cross standards, the prison capacity was 60 inmates. The prison on Anjouan held 133 detainees, with three woman and seven children. Its capacity was not known, but prisoners were kept in only one of the two prison buildings, consisting of three rooms each measuring 215 square feet and equipped with a single toilet. The number of prisoners and capacity of the Moheli prison were unknown.

The law provides for juveniles ages 15 to 18 to be treated as adults in the criminal justice system. Juveniles and adult prisoners were held together.

Detainees and prisoners normally received a single meal per day, consisting of 1.8 ounces of rice and one egg (in Moroni), red beans when available (on Anjouan), or a combination of rice and beans (in Moheli). The Red Cross provided weekly meals to prisoners on Anjouan. Those who did not receive additional food from family members suffered food deprivation. Other common problems included inadequate potable water, sanitation, ventilation, lighting, and medical facilities. The prison in Moroni had a nurse on staff and a visiting doctor, while the prison on Anjouan had no nurse on staff but a nurse and doctor who visited prisoners. Prisoners on Anjouan said they were sometimes allowed to leave the prison if they needed medical care. There were no reported deaths attributable to physical conditions.

In July some prisoners at the Moroni prison went on a two-day hunger strike to protest conditions, including food shortages. The strike ended when the Ministry of Justice announced food shortages had been resolved.

Administration: Prisoners could submit complaints without censorship, but

investigations and follow-up actions almost never occurred. Some minority religious organizations reported difficulty visiting prisoners.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted the International Committee of the Red Cross and diplomatic missions to monitor prisons. Authorities required nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to request a visit permit from the prosecutor general. The National Commission for Human Rights and Liberties occasionally made unannounced visits to the prisons.

Improvements: The National Commission for Human Rights and Liberties donated 60 new mattresses and two water tanks to the Moheli prison, eight renovated toilets to the Anjouan prison, and made various repairs to the three prisons. In March and April, to relieve overcrowding at the prisons, the minister of justice granted conditional release to 60 prisoners on Grande Comore and 17 on Anjouan. Those released were either older than age 60 or were younger than age 25 and had completed more than half of their sentences with good behavior.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of arrest or detention in court. The government often did not observe these provisions.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires judicial arrest warrants as well as prosecutorial approval to detain persons longer than 24 hours without charge. The law provides for prompt judicial determination of the legality of detention, and for detainees to be informed promptly of the charges against them. A magistrate informs detainees of their rights, including the right to legal representation. These rights were inconsistently respected. The bail system prohibits persons on bail from leaving the country. Some detainees did not have prompt access to attorneys or their families.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were reports of persons being temporarily detained for organizing political demonstrations, expressing their political views, or criticizing the government (see section 1.e., Political Prisoners).

In October gendarmes arrested political activist Hachin Said Hassane following his meeting with a foreign delegation and before he could meet with members of the press corps, the gendarmes telling reporters he did not have permission to speak. Authorities released him several days later and he left for France.

Pretrial Detention: Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem. By law pretrial detainees may be held for no more than four months, although a magistrate or prosecutor may extend this period. Detainees routinely awaited trial for extended periods for reasons including administrative delay, case backlog, and time-consuming collection of evidence. Some extensions continued for several years, and sometimes exceeded the maximum sentences for the alleged crimes.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence. Judicial inconsistency, unpredictability, and corruption were problems. Authorities generally respected court orders.

Trial Procedures

The law provides all defendants with the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right. The right to a timely trial was often denied, as lengthy delays were common. The right to counsel at public expense for indigent defendants was rarely observed. Although the law provides for the assistance of an interpreter, free of charge, for any defendant unable to understand or speak the language used in court, this provision was not generally implemented.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were reports of political prisoners and detainees, including periodic reports of political activists being temporarily detained without being arrested or charged with a crime. The government permitted access by human rights or humanitarian organizations to some political prisoners.

Two prominent men considered by most observers to be political prisoners went on trial during the year. In March, Former Governor of Anjouan Abdou Salami went on trial before the State Security Court after more than three years of pretrial

detention. On March 21, the court found him guilty of undermining national unity, disturbing public order, and participating in an insurrection and sentenced him to 12 years in prison.

In November, Former President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi went on trial before the State Security Court after four years of pretrial detention under house arrest. On November 28, the court found him guilty of high treason and sentenced him to life in prison, forfeiture of his civic and political rights, and confiscation of his possessions. After the first day of the trial, Sambi and his lawyers declared the court illegitimate and refused to participate.

Transnational Repression

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports authorities sought reprisal against individuals outside the sovereign borders of the country.

Bilateral Pressure: In 2019, businessman and opposition politician Inssa Mohamed fled to Madagascar and sought refugee status. In 2020, Comorian authorities charged Mohamed with conspiracy to assassinate President Azali Assoumani. Following pressure from senior Comoros government officials, the Malagasy government returned him to the country later in 2020, and he faced incarceration and criminal charges. Mohamed escaped and returned to Madagascar. UNHCR granted him refugee status. Following renewed pressure, in January 2021, Malagasy authorities again arrested Mohamed and returned him to the country. On March 21, the State Security Court found Mohamed guilty of criminal association and conspiracy and sentenced him to eight years' imprisonment for bringing explosives into the country.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals and organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights abuses through an independent but corrupt court system. By law individuals and organizations may appeal adverse domestic decisions to regional human rights bodies. Court orders on human rights cases were inconsistently enforced.

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

or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech, including for the press although not explicitly for other media. Authorities imposed restrictions.

Freedom of Expression: Individuals may not criticize the government or raise matters of public interest without constraint. Authorities reportedly detained individuals for making public statements, including online statements, critical of the president.

Violence and Harassment: Some journalists were subjected to harassment by government authorities due to their reporting (see section 2.b., Freedom of Peaceful Assembly).

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Independent media were active and expressed a variety of views, but with a growing level of restriction and self-censorship due to government reprisal. Some journalists practiced self-censorship due to the risk of violence and harassment, and other journalists, fearing retribution, self-censored discussions of political matters.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law criminalizes libel. Authorities did not enforce the law. The law also prohibits the propagation of non-Islamic beliefs to Muslims. This prohibition was not enforced.

Actions to Expand Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Media: On January 18, President Azali promulgated a new law on information and communication, addressing the regulation of journalists and setting forth the qualities, duties, and rights of journalists. The law established a press card

allocation commission at the recommendation of the independent National Press and Audiovisual Council; strengthened journalists' right to protect confidential sources; established protections regarding publication of children's identities or pictures; and provided the right of professional associations to assist journalists abused for exercising their profession, among other provisions.

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, although it was widely suspected they did so.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government restricted the freedom of peaceful assembly.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution and law provide for the freedom of assembly, but the government often did not respect it. Protest organizers were required to secure permits and other approvals for demonstrations of any kind, or risk detention and potential arrest for staging an "illegal" protest.

In June citizens attempted to organize a rally to protest the high cost of fuel, food, and overall rising inflation. Before the demonstration could take place in Independence Square in Moroni, the gendarmerie and military sealed off the square and prevented the protest from taking place. One journalist attempting to cover the demonstration had his cell phone smashed by the gendarmerie. Authorities later temporarily detained a student who posted remarks concerning the smashed cell phone on his Facebook page.

Also in June a group of lawyers attempted to organize a sit-in at the court in Moroni to protest the suspension of one of their colleagues. Gendarmerie stopped the sit-in at the court before it could begin. When the lawyers attempted to march together to return to their headquarters, the gendarmerie interfered and instructed them to march one by one rather than in a group while they crossed Independence

Square.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement and foreign travel, and the government generally respected these rights. No specific constitutional or legal provisions deal with emigration and repatriation.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government regularly cooperated, with some exceptions, with UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a system for providing protection to refugees. UNHCR conducted refugee status determination interviews either in person or remotely for asylum seekers.

In October 2021, 52 African migrants arrived by boat in Anjouan, thinking they had reached Mayotte, a nearby French island. The IOM conducted initial screening, while authorities held them at the Anjouan Police Training Academy dormitories. The IOM referred the migrants to UNHCR, which assisted most of them to resettle in other countries or their country of origin.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: In February or March, the remaining migrants held at the police academy protested their inability to leave the compound and problems with the food supply. Several migrants became violent, demanding their release and scuffling with local police. When violence escalated, more police arrived. Several inmates escaped, police arrested several others, and severely beat one migrant. Authorities released the remaining migrants at the academy into the

general population or placed them in the care of local NGOs. After intervention by UN officials, authorities released the arrested migrants, and at least one received asylum in Mayotte.

Employment: There were credible reports the government imposed restrictions on the ability of refugees to work after their status became official, as the law does not allow them to receive residence visas or work permits, documents necessary to secure employment.

Access to Basic Services: The government did not grant recognized refugees access to essential services.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

g. Stateless Persons

The country contributes to statelessness through laws which do not protect persons born in the country to unknown or stateless parents from becoming stateless.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and 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: In 2020, the government held legislative elections observers deemed generally free and fair, although the opposition boycotted the elections, did not recognize the results, and government did not allow them to hold meetings during the elections. In 2019, the country held a presidential election, and the Supreme Court declared Azali Assoumani the winner with 59 percent of the vote. International and domestic observers considered the election neither free nor fair, and noted the election was marked by significant irregularities. Opposition groups did not recognize the results of the election and made allegations of ballot stuffing,

intimidation, and harassment.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Opposition parties faced some restrictions in organizing public rallies.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit participation of women, persons with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons, or members of minority groups in the political process and they did participate. Some observers believed traditional and cultural factors prevented women from participating in political life on an equal basis with men.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were numerous reports of government corruption.

Corruption: Resident diplomatic, UN, and humanitarian agency personnel reported corruption was commonplace at all levels of the civil service and security forces. Businesspersons reported corruption and a lack of transparency. Citizens paid bribes to evade customs regulations, to avoid arrest, and to obtain falsified police reports.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A few domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials often were cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: By law the governmental National Commission for Human Rights and Liberties is mandated to investigate human rights abuses and to make recommendations to concerned authorities. It was

independent but lacked effectiveness.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape regardless of age or gender is illegal and punishable by five to 10 years' imprisonment or up to 15 years if the survivor is younger than age 15. The law does not specifically address spousal rape but being married to a survivor does not exonerate the perpetrator. Authorities prosecuted perpetrators if survivors filed charges; otherwise, authorities rarely enforced the law. There were reports families or village elders settled many allegations of sexual violence informally through traditional means and without recourse to the formal court system.

The law treats domestic violence as an aggravating circumstance, including crimes committed by one domestic partner against an existing or former partner. Penalties include prison sentences up to five years and fines. Authorities sometimes enforced the law. According to the United Nations and the Ministry of Health, approximately 17 percent of women had at least one incident of physical or sexual violence in their lives.

In January, March, and June, the government conducted awareness raising activities regarding violence against women including explaining the laws against such abuses.

In May authorities found Kamal Oussein guilty of raping his daughter, age 14, and sentenced him to 20 years in prison.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is illegal and punishable by fines and imprisonment. Although rarely reported due to societal pressure, such harassment was nevertheless a common problem, and authorities did not effectively enforce the law.

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

Barriers impeding access to sexual and reproductive health services included reduced access to and use of contraception due to insufficient awareness of their utility, the influence of religious and cultural beliefs, the noninvolvement of men in reproductive health programs, and low education levels. Other barriers included low levels of awareness of available resources, reducing skilled health attendance during pregnancy and childbirth. It was unclear if emergency contraception was available as part of family planning method mix.

The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services, including counseling and legal and medical support, for survivors of sexual violence through government-funded “listening centers” on all three islands. Emergency contraception was available as part of the clinical management of rape cases.

According to the general population and housing census published in 2020, the maternal mortality rate was 195 deaths per 100,000 live births. The UN Fund for Population Activities office in the country put the number at 72 deaths per 100,000 live births. Major factors in the maternal mortality rate included a lack of access to skilled obstetric care and modern medical facilities, low levels of awareness of available resources, and difficulty traveling to available facilities.

In rural areas lack of access to menstrual health care and hygiene, including schools without indoor plumbing, negatively affected girls’ education.

Discrimination: The law provides for equality of persons without regard to gender, creed, belief, origin, race, or religion, and authorities generally enforced the law effectively. Societal discrimination against women was most apparent in rural areas, where women were mostly limited to farming and child-rearing duties, with fewer opportunities for education and wage employment (see section 7.d.). For cultural and religious reasons, women were also not as active in the urban workforce as men. While men may transmit citizenship to their wives, the law does not permit women to transmit citizenship to their husbands. Inheritance and property rights practices, however, favored women. Local cultures are traditionally matrilineal, and all inheritable property was in the legal possession of women.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

While the law provides for the equality of persons based on race and origin group, it does not recognize any minority based on race or ethnicity nor provide protections against violence.

Children

Birth Registration: Any child having a citizen parent is considered a citizen, regardless of where the birth takes place. Children of foreign parents may apply for citizenship if they have at least five years' residency at the time they apply. Authorities did not withhold public services from unregistered children, and they adjudicated birth registration in a nondiscriminatory manner.

Education: Universal education is free and compulsory from ages three to 16, but parents must partially fund lessons and provide supplies. No child younger than age 14 may be prevented from attending school. An approximately equal number of girls and boys attended public schools at the primary and secondary levels, but fewer girls graduated (see section 6, Women, Reproductive Rights).

Child Abuse: The law punishes child abuse. The government-affiliated NGO Listening and Counseling Service, funded by the government and UNICEF, had offices on all three islands to provide support and counseling for abused children and their families. The NGO routinely referred child abuse cases to police for investigation. Police conducted initial investigations of child abuse and referred cases to the Morals and Minors Brigade for further investigation and referral for prosecution. If evidence was sufficient, authorities routinely prosecuted cases.

In January and June authorities trained more than 30 law enforcement officers and doctors on investigation of child sexual abuse and established a special courtroom to hear cases related to those abuses.

In March authorities arrested Youssouf Ahamada Bachir, the former National Technical Director of the Comoros Football Federation, for alleged sexual assault of 10 male children. He was in pretrial detention as of year's end.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age of marriage is 18

for both boys and girls. The government engaged in prevention and mitigation efforts.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law considers unmarried persons younger than age 18 to be children and prohibits sexual exploitation, commercial sex, child sex trafficking, and involvement in pornography; it does not specifically address sale, grooming, or use for commercial sex. All forms of child sex trafficking could also be addressed under provisions criminalizing child sexual exploitation. Since there were no official statistics regarding these matters and no reports in local media of cases, prosecutions, or convictions under these laws, it was unclear if authorities consistently enforced the law. The law states 18 is the minimum age for consensual sex.

In July authorities on Moheli launched an investigation of a former teacher at an Alliance Francaise school, suspected of publishing pornographic videos containing children. Authorities also closed the school.

Antisemitism

There was no known Jewish population, and there were no reports of antisemitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, Or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The law forbids sexual acts “against nature.” This provision is widely understood to apply to consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults.

Authorities reported no arrests or prosecutions and did not actively enforce the law.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: There were no reports of violence against

LGBTQI+ persons.

Discrimination: No laws prohibit discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons. LGBTQI+ persons experienced cultural discrimination and could have certain rights curtailed, such as seeking employment or educational opportunities,

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: The government does not allow individuals to change their gender identity markers on legal and identifying documents.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: There were no known cases of involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices specifically targeting LGBTQI+ individuals.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: LGBTQI+ persons generally did not publicly reveal their sexual orientation due to societal pressure. There were no local LGBTQI+ organizations.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities cannot access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal footing with others. The law mandates access to buildings, information, communication, education, and transportation for persons with disabilities. The law also prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Despite the absence of appropriate accommodation for children with disabilities, such children attended mainstream schools, both public and private. Disabled persons faced discrimination in employment and occupation (see section 7.d.).

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements. The law

does not prohibit antiunion discrimination by employers in hiring practices or other employment functions, and it does not require reinstatement of workers fired for union activity.

Unions have the right to bargain collectively, although no regulatory structure exists for collective bargaining in either the public or private sector. The law includes a mandatory conciliation process for resolving labor disputes with recourse to the courts. Labor disputes may also be brought to the attention of the Labor Tribunal. The law provides for the right to strike but requires an eight-day notification period and a declaration of the reason for the strike and its duration. Civil servants must provide 15 days' notice. Strikes are restricted to work-related topics. Some categories of workers are prohibited from striking, such as members of the military, magistrates, and senior officials. The law empowers the government to order striking workers back to work if they provide services indispensable to the public. The law does not protect strikers from retribution.

The government did not effectively enforce the law. Penalties for violations, including ordering employers to pay indemnities and damages to employees, were commensurate with those for similar violations but seldom applied.

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without government interference. Worker organizations are independent of the government and political parties. Workers exercised their labor rights, and strikes occurred in the public sector (education, workers at the port of Anjouan, health, and road transport) as well as in the private sector (taxi drivers). There were no reports of retribution against strikers. Common problems included failure to pay salaries regularly or on time, mostly in the government sector, and unfair and abusive dismissal practices, such as dismissing employees without giving proper notice or paying the required severance pay.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, with certain exceptions for military service, community service, and during accidents, fires, and disasters. During times of national emergency, the government's civil protection unit may compel persons to assist in unpaid disaster recovery efforts if it is unable to obtain

sufficient voluntary assistance. The law criminalizes all forms of labor trafficking.

The law requires prisoners who received labor as part of their sentencing to work. Children were especially vulnerable to forced labor on informal work sites. Poor rural families frequently sent their children to live with wealthier relatives or acquaintances in urban areas for access to schooling and other socioeconomic benefits; these children were vulnerable to forced labor in domestic servitude. Children who studied at informal neighborhood Quranic schools headed by private instructors could be vulnerable to forced labor as field hands or domestic servants as payment for instruction.

The government did not consistently enforce the law. Inspections and remediation were inadequate. The government did not identify any cases of forced labor, although it began an investigation early in the year of a woman allegedly forced to work without pay in a restaurant in Moroni.

Also see the Department of State's *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings> and the Department of Labor's List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor at www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation based on race, skin color, sex, religion, political opinion, national ancestry, social origin, disability, or actual or presumed state of health (such as HIV and AIDS). The law does not address sexual orientation. Discrimination cases are received by the Ministry of Labor and passed to the courts if not resolved.

The government did not effectively enforce the law. Penalties were not commensurate with those for other violations. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

In rural areas women tended to be relegated to certain types of work, and the UN Development Program reported women were underrepresented in leadership roles. Persons with disabilities faced discrimination in employment and access to worksites.

The law does not address gender pay disparities, and there were reports of pay gaps in the private sector.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law does not provide for a minimum wage. The Ministries of Finance and Labor set wages in the large public sector and imposed a minimum wage in the small, formal private sector. The existing minimum wage established by the government was greater than the poverty line, but it was only a guideline. The law provides for a 40-hour workweek, except in the agriculture sector, where it sets the maximum hours of work at 2,400 per year (equivalent to 46 hours per week). There are no sectors or groups of workers excluded from these laws within the formal sector, but the law does not apply to the informal sector.

Occupational Safety and Health: The law includes a chapter on appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) requirements but not explicitly for the main industries in the country. OSH experts did not actively identify unsafe working conditions. Workers may remove themselves from situations endangering health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. The law provides labor inspectors may remove workers from such situations, but this was not effective since labor inspectors generally did not visit worksites. There were no known industrial accidents, but workers in construction, ports, public works such as road construction, fishing, and agricultural sectors sometimes experienced hazardous working conditions. Fishing was considered the most hazardous work. Mostly self-employed, fishermen often worked from unsafe canoes, and sometimes died while fishing in rough seas.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government did not effectively enforce wage, hour, and OSH laws. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar violations. Penalties were rarely applied against violators. The

Ministry of Youth, Employment, Labor, Sport, and Cultural Arts was responsible for enforcement.

The number of inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance; there were four labor inspectors, two on Grande Comore and one each on Anjouan and Moheli, but they did not have adequate training to perform their duties. Inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections and to initiate financial sanctions. Wage arrears were common, including in the public sector.

Informal Sector: According to the World Bank, the informal sector was estimated to be 73 percent of the total workforce, but there were no official statistics. Common types of informal work included housekeeping, mechanics, bricklayers, electricians, agriculture, and fishing. Workers in the informal sector and those working part time are not covered by wage, hour, OSH, or other labor laws and inspections. The government did not provide operational support for labor inspections of informal work sites.