

ALBANIA 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Republic of Albania is a parliamentary democracy. The constitution vests legislative authority in the unicameral parliament (the Assembly), which elects both the prime minister and the president. The prime minister heads the government, while the president has limited executive power. Observers considered that the most recent parliamentary elections, held in April 2021, were well organized and gave voters a choice of candidates who campaigned freely.

The Ministry of Interior oversees the Guard of the Republic and the State Police, which includes the Border and Migration Police. The State Police are primarily responsible for internal security. The Guard of the Republic protects senior state officials, foreign dignitaries, and certain state properties. The Ministry of Defense oversees the armed forces. The State Intelligence Service is responsible to the prime minister, gathers information, and carries out foreign intelligence and counterintelligence activities. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were some allegations of abuses by members of the security forces.

Significant human rights issues included: problems with the independence and integrity of the judiciary; lack of independent media; and persistent corruption in government, law enforcement, and municipal institutions.

The Specialized Anticorruption Body and the justice system continued to make significant progress during the year investigating, prosecuting, and convicting senior officials and organized criminals who engaged in corruption. The government implemented e-services measures to improve transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption, and prosecutors made progress in confronting the country's long-standing culture of impunity.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

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

During the year there were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. Civilian and military law enforcement agencies are mandated by law to investigate whether any civilian or military security force killings are justifiable and to prosecute any cases of unlawful killing should they occur.

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

The constitution and law prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. The Office of the Ombudsman, an independent, constitutional entity that serves as a government watchdog, observed an overall improvement in police practice.

The government made greater efforts to address police impunity. In February a new Police Oversight Agency, fully independent from the Albania State Police (ASP), was established with the mandate to investigate and hold accountable law enforcement at all levels. It conducted independent investigations and received complaints of police abuse and corruption that led to 385 individual investigations, 106 arrests, and 61 suspensions of law enforcement officials from duty.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Poor physical conditions in some prisons continued to be a problem affecting the prison system.

In October the Institute for Activism and Social Change (IANS) reported concerns about the identification, rehabilitation, and reintegration of violent extremist inmates in prison settings due to the lack of standard of practices and appropriate training for prison staff.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Poor prison conditions in older facilities remained a problem. In regular prison inspections, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Albania Helsinki Committee (AHC) identified infrastructure problems in the prisons of Burrel, Durrës, Tepelene, and Lezha. The ombudsman assessed a double standard existed between newly reconstructed prisons and older facilities. The General Directorate of Prisons (GDP) closed Tropoja, Vauqarr, and Saranda prisons in October 2022 due to poor conditions. The ombudsman recommended the Ministry of Justice close the Burrel and Tepelene prisons due to their degraded conditions.

A lack of medical care, particularly for mental-health conditions, was a problem. The Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CTP) in its April report urged the government to build a new facility to provide all forensic psychiatric patients with a therapeutic environment and a multidisciplinary treatment program. The Ministry of Justice closed the Zaharia prison in November 2021 and transferred the inmates to the Shen Koll and Lezha prisons. The AHC reported closing the prison did not solve or improve the condition of inmates with psychiatric issues and did not respect the January 2020 Strasbourg Court ruling in the Strazimiri v. Albania case, which mandated the government create an “appropriate institution” for housing inmates with psychiatric issues.

Except for regional facilities in Tirana, Gjirokaster, Kukes, Fier, and Korca, conditions in prison facilities operated by the Ministry of Interior, such as police stations and temporary detention centers, were poor. Some detention facilities were unheated during the winter and lacked basic hygienic amenities and sanitizers as measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Facilities were cramped, provided limited access to toilets, and had little or no ventilation, natural light, or beds and benches. Camera monitoring systems were insufficient in most police stations. The General Director of State Police reported that the detention facilities it operated – especially in Tirana, Fier, and Durres – were overcrowded following police operations and due to delays in the admission of detainees.

The AHC raised concerns with the May 4 suicide of a detainee in the Kavaja police station. The AHC alleged improper implementation of the Criminal Procedures Code related to the detainee's right to be visited by a doctor, a substandard detention room that allowed for the detainee to hang himself, discrepancies in staff statements, and a failure by authorities to complete necessary records. An internal investigation by the Police Oversight Agency concluded no signs of injuries or evidence of violence occurred. On May 5, the agency arrested three police officers who oversaw the detainee for abuse of duty.

Administration: Authorities conducted investigations of credible allegations of mistreatment. The ombudsman received 22 complaints, four of which were against the state police forces and 18 against prison officials but did not refer any cases for prosecution. The ombudsman reported that prison and police officials generally cooperated with investigations. The GDP reported that it had carried out disciplinary proceedings against 170 prison staff (civilian and security), fired six, and prosecuted six others for corruption. On April 25 the acting Shkoder prison director, Ervis Zika, was arrested on charges of abuse of duty. His predecessor was dismissed in January and charged with forging documents.

Through August six inmates remained under a special legal regime adopted in July 2020 to minimize communications between suspected contacts of organized crime and incarcerated gang members. The IANS reported the implementation of the special regime raised concerns because it could not be independently monitored.

The AHC reported that in April the government revoked anti-COVID-19 measures in prisons, allowing inmates to meet physically with their families. The AHC reported a Kosovan inmate in the Shkoder prison complained because the prison administration did not allow him to exchange all his visitation sessions with virtual ones because his family was not in the country. The prison administration reasoned that the legislation allowed only for one exchange of meetings. The AHC noted although there were no proven instances of corruption in the prison system, some inmates subject to internal transfer called into question the integrity of the transfer practices. The transferred inmates alleged they were transferred to prisons far from their families for disciplinary rather than regulatory reasons.

Independent Monitoring: Local and international human rights groups, media, and international bodies such as the Committee for the Prevention of Torture reported they were allowed to monitor prisons and detention facilities without any obstacles. Limitations remained on monitoring inmates enrolled in the special regime.

Improvements: The government took steps during the year to improve prison or detention center conditions. In late 2021, the GDP began implementing an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)-funded project to prevent and combat violent extremism in prisons and in the probation service. The GDP and the AHC asserted prison overcrowding was reduced due to some prison reconstruction and redistribution of inmates in the system. Nevertheless, some penitentiary facilities were still overcrowded, especially those with pretrial detainees.

The General Directorate of State Police reported that the government funded and finalized construction of a new “security block” for the Tirana Police Directorate with a capacity of 66 beds. Renovation continued at the Diber Police Commissariat.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

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

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law foresees two possible procedures for arrest. First, a prosecutor may request an arrest warrant from a court after providing sufficient justification and a pretrial detention measure is determined. The court automatically reviews the measure on a regular basis. Second, the police may arrest a suspect who is in the process of committing a crime. The law provides that police must immediately inform a prosecutor of an arrest. The prosecutor may release the suspect or petition the court within 48 hours to hold the individual further. A court must also decide within 48 hours whether to place a suspect in detention, require bail, prohibit travel, or require the defendant to report regularly to police. These rights were respected and there were no reports of secret arrests.

By law and based on a prosecutor’s request, the court has 72 hours to review the pretrial detention status of a court-ordered arrest. Police may detain rather than formally arrest a suspect for a period not exceeding 10 hours. The ombudsman and the AHC reported several procedural irregularities with the detention of individuals for longer than 10 hours.

The constitution requires authorities to inform detainees immediately of their rights

and the charges against them. The law provides for bail, and a system was operational; police frequently released detainees without bail, on the condition that they report regularly to the police station. Courts also often ordered suspects to report to police or prosecutors on a weekly basis. While the law gives detainees the right to prompt access to an attorney, at public expense, the ombudsman reported instances of interrogations taking place without the presence of legal counsel.

Arbitrary Arrest: The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention. The government generally observed these prohibitions.

Pretrial Detention: While the law requires completion of most pretrial investigations within three months, a prosecutor may extend this period. The law provides that pretrial detention should not exceed three years. The ombudsman and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to report a high percentage of prison inmates remained in pretrial detention. Criminal proceedings were generally delayed by shortages of judges and prosecutors. Limited material resources, lack of space, poor court-calendar management, insufficient staff, and the failure of attorneys and witnesses to appear prevented the court system from adjudicating cases in a timely fashion. The GDP reported that as of November, pretrial detainees accounted for 52 percent of the total prison population.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, political pressure, intimidation, corruption, and limited resources prevented the judiciary from functioning fully, independently, and efficiently. In May the High Judicial Council removed all COVID-19 restrictions, allowing journalists or the public to enter court premises and follow trials.

The government continued to implement an internationally monitored process to

vet judges and prosecutors and dismiss those with unexplained wealth or ties to organized crime. According to the vetting institutions, of the 556 judges, prosecutors, and other officials vetting bodies reviewed since 2016, 37 percent passed; 43 percent were dismissed; and 18 percent resigned or retired. By year's end the number of vetted Supreme Court judges grew to 15 of the 19 seats on the court. Appointments of vetted judges were sufficient to enable the Supreme Court to perform all functions. As of June, the Supreme Court had a backlog of 30,786 cases pending adjudication.

From January through September 20 the country's High Justice Inspector (HJI) received 580 new complaints, of which 95 percent were submitted by citizens. The HJI administered 19 disciplinary investigations, six initiated by the HJI and 13 based on a complaint. The HJI also submitted to the High Judicial Council one request for disciplinary proceedings against a judge.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial without undue delay. The law presumes defendants to be innocent until proven guilty. It provides for defendants to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them. Defendants have the right to be present at their trial and to consult an attorney. If they cannot afford one, an attorney is to be provided at public expense. The law provides defendants adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense and access to interpretation free of charge. Defendants have the right to confront witnesses against them and to present witnesses and evidence in their defense. Defendants may not be compelled to testify or confess guilt. Defendants have the right to appeal. The government generally respected these rights, although trials were not always public and access to an attorney was at times problematic. The law requires a prosecutor to petition a preliminary hearing judge and make a request to send the case to trial.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

While individuals and organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights violations through domestic courts or through the ombudsman, instances of judicial corruption, inefficiency, intimidation, and political tampering were reported.

Courts took steps to address the problem by using audio-recording equipment. The government generally complied with domestic court decisions pertaining to human rights. The Office of the Ombudsman and the commissioner for protection from discrimination were sufficiently independent to provide effective remedies for human rights abuses. Despite having a statutory right to free legal aid in civil cases, very few individuals benefitted from such aid during the year according to NGOs. To address the problem, the Ministry of Justice established the Free Legal Aid Directorate, law clinics at state universities, an online platform during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a telephone line to request free legal aid.

Claimants who had exhausted remedies in domestic courts could appeal to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In many cases, authorities did not enforce ECHR rulings, especially when verdicts required compensation. The ombudsman reported that the state's advocate failed to adequately communicate ECHR rulings to her office.

Persons who were political prisoners under the former communist regime continued to petition the government for compensation. The government started disbursing compensation payments in October. The IANS reported there was no consolidated data on the overall amount that the government had paid and still owed to the living political prisoners of the dictatorship (1944-1991) and to their heirs.

Property Seizure and Restitution

The AHC reported that problems with the execution of judicial decisions on compensation continued because of the government's inability to financially execute ECHR rulings or find effective solutions to fund compensation. In February 2021, the Constitutional Court repealed as unconstitutional several articles of the law "on the treatment of property and completion of the property compensation process" and the government's 2016 decision, "on determining the rules and procedures for the evaluation and distribution of the financial and physical fund for property compensation." These laws and decisions were previously the legal grounds used to calculate the compensation formula. In its decision, the Constitutional Court obliged the parliament to amend several articles of the law. The AHC reported that as of September the amendments had not been drafted or adopted.

Some business owners, civil society activists, and politicians accused the government of selective application of the law on property seizure for political purposes. In October the NIPT and Albanian State Police forcibly evicted the business office of an opposition member of parliament (MP), citing violation of construction and building occupation requirements. The MP alleged his company was targeted after he repeatedly and publicly accused government officials of corruption. The company filed suit in Tirana Administrative Court requesting a stay pending legal review and access to supporting evidence justifying seizure of the office space it had leased. In November the eviction was lifted.

On December 4, the National Inspectorate for the Protection of Territory (NIPT) demolished a hotel citing gross violations of construction laws. On December 1, the resort's construction company had filed a lawsuit with the Durres administrative court requesting an injunction pending legal review of the NIPT's demolition order. The court did not promptly appoint a judge, and the NIPT

proceeded with the demolition. The owner of the hotel, who also owns several media and other businesses, claimed his hotel was demolished to stifle criticism and dissent. The government asserted it acted in line with applicable laws and that this demolition was part of a broader campaign to eradicate illegal construction in the country.

The country endorsed the Terezin Declaration in 2009 and the Guidelines and Best Practices in 2010. It does not have any restitution or compensation laws relating to Holocaust-era confiscation of private property. Under the law, religious communities have the same restitution and compensation rights as natural or legal persons. The government reported no property claims had been submitted by victims of the Holocaust.

The Department of State's *Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act* report to Congress, released publicly in 2020, can be found on the Department's website at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>

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

The constitution and laws prohibit arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence and there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions. The country experienced two cyberattacks attributed to Iranian state actors and hackers published personal data.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

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

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the

press and other media, and the government usually respected these rights, although defamation is a criminal offense. Observers asserted that the government, political parties, businesses, and criminal groups sought to influence media in inappropriate, nontransparent ways.

There is free media, with proliferation of media outlets, especially online, representing a broad spectrum of views with no accountability, often without attribution. There is little independent media, however, as most media outlets are owned by prominent businesspersons with sprawling interests who use their media outlets to advance their interests including by gaining favor and promoting their interests with political parties. There were credible reports of senior media representatives using media outlets to blackmail businesses by threatening unfavorable media coverage. Political pressure, corruption, and lack of funding constrained independent print media, and journalists reportedly practiced self-censorship. The International Election Observation Mission report following April 2021 national parliamentary elections assessed journalists remained vulnerable to pressure and corruption (see section 3.)

Economic insecurity due to a lack of enforceable labor contracts reduced reporters' independence and contributed to bias in reporting. The Albanian Journalists Union (AJU) continued to report delays in salary payments to reporters at many media outlets, in some cases up to six weeks. Financial problems led some journalists to rely more heavily on outside sources of income, leading to questions regarding the independence and integrity of their reporting. Data leaks of information about salaries in December 2021 and January suggested that several prominent journalists and media outlets received direct payments from companies contracted to build incinerators. The incinerator companies were under investigation for alleged corruption and fraud.

The dramatic growth in online media outlets provided a diversity of views as well

as the potential for corruption. NGOs maintained that professional ethics were a low priority for some of the estimated 900-plus news portals in the country, raising concerns over the spread of false news stories that allegedly benefited specific financial, political, and criminal interests. The AJU also reported a sharp increase in the number of complaints of disinformation and personal attacks by online outlets. During the year there were accusations of media allegedly being used by owners or senior media officials for extortion.

Freedom of Expression: Citizens were free to criticize the government openly, including in traditional and social media, on issues of concern to them and did so. Nevertheless, concern persisted that open criticism of the government might have adverse consequences.

In September, leaked documents appeared in the media following a cyberattack on police systems. On September 9, the prosecution office, which was investigating, issued an order prohibiting the publication of any of the leaked documents, citing national security and investigative secrecy concerns. In a September 20 statement the AJU criticized the order for threatening freedom of information and freedom of speech and creating premises for censorship and self-censorship.

Violence and Harassment: Political and business interests reportedly subjected journalists to pressure. The AJU reported several cases of violence and intimidation against members of the media. In January Tirana municipal police forcefully removed cameraman Ledio Guni while he attempted to film demolitions of houses in a suburb of Tirana. Ledio Guni filed a complaint against municipal police alleging bodily harm, which was referred to the prosecution office for further investigation. In November journalist Adriatik Doçi was attacked by unknown assailants. The AJU condemned the attack and called for those responsible to be apprehended. Police reported an arrest of a suspect in the case.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other

Media, Including Online Media: Journalists often practiced self-censorship to avoid violence and harassment or to ensure employment. The AHC National Barometer of Freedom of the Media for 2021 reported 45.5 percent of journalists acknowledged they were asked not to publish a news story, and 45 percent admitted to self-censoring.

Libel/Slander Laws: The Albanian criminal code contains libel and slander laws as well as laws against insult to private parties or court officials. Albania does not have specific legislation, or any articles addressing blasphemy. The law permits private parties to file criminal charges and obtain financial compensation for insult or deliberate publication of defamatory information. NGOs reported that the fines were excessive and, combined with the entry of a criminal conviction into the defendant's record, undermined freedom of expression. The AJU expressed concern that as of September, there were six lawsuits against journalists, mainly for defamation.

In June former prosecutor Elizabeta Imeraj filed a criminal lawsuit against journalist Isa Myzyraj for defamation. Myzyraj reported he had received multiple threats, which he claimed were Imeraj's reaction to his social media comments during a vetting process that resulted in her removal from office on April 27 after allegations about her wealth and integrity. Myzyraj also claimed censorship and self-censorship occurred by other media outlets during the vetting process of Imeraj. At year's end the case remained pending at the District Court of Elbasan.

The government withdrew an anti-defamation legislative package that had provisionally passed in 2019, following criticism by journalists, media organizations, and the Venice Commission.

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.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

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

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly: The Albanian Constitution and law provide for freedom of peaceful assembly and association. The government generally observed these rights. Nevertheless, in March during protests against price increases, police arrested 50 demonstrators and charged 150 others with protesting illegally. Media footage showed uniformed and nonuniformed individuals pushing protesters inside police vans. Media reported 34 protesters were later released by the courts after determining the arrests were illegal. The ombudsman and civil society organizations publicly raised concerns about the detention of peaceful protesters.

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, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

In-country Movement: To receive government services, citizens changing place of residence within the country must transfer their civil registration to their new community and prove the legality of their new domicile through property ownership, a property rental agreement, or utility bills. Many individuals could not

provide documentation and thus lacked access to public services. Other citizens, particularly Roma and Balkan-Egyptians, lacked formal registration in the communities where they resided. The law does not prohibit their registration, but the process was often difficult to complete. Many Roma and Balkan-Egyptians lacked the financial means or necessary information to register.

e. Protection of Refugees

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

In 2021 the government, began accepting Afghan evacuees seeking protection following the change of the Afghanistan government. Temporary protection status continued for Afghans relocated to the country. Since August 2021, the government has granted over 2,800 Afghans temporary protection status.

The government granted blanket temporary protection status for at-risk Ukrainians who entered the country. UNHCR reported 2,780 Ukrainians entered the country, although none requested asylum.

NGOs Terre des Hommes and Nisma ARSIS asserted the country was increasingly becoming a transitory route for unaccompanied and separated children fleeing emergencies and needing humanitarian assistance. Nisma ARSIS supported 69 unaccompanied foreign children identified at the Albanian-Greece border. NGOs reported the government lacked experience and resources to provide adequate support to unaccompanied minors arriving in the country to include custody, safe sheltering and appropriate care services for assessment, treatment, and family reunification.

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

In April the Albanian Helsinki Committee sent an open letter to the Ministry of Interior about the November 10, 2021, removal of the AHC from the membership of the National Commission for Asylum and Refugees and the government's failure to inform the committee. The AHC stated their removal represented a regression in terms of standards of transparency, responsibility, and accountability. The AHC noted civil society should be represented in the composition of the National Commission for Asylum and Refugees which, following their removal, only had government representatives. The commission, an appeal body for asylum cases, was solely under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior following the change.

Police allowed UNHCR, the Office of the Ombudsman, and the NGO Caritas to conduct independent monitoring. Monitors reported prescreening procedures were often curtailed, raising concerns about access to asylum and identification of potential victims of trafficking. The ombudsman and Caritas were also allowed to monitor the detention of migrants.

UNHCR reported some cases of border police returning migrants to Greece despite the migrants' indicating an intention to seek asylum. UNHCR and partners noted that the pre-screening procedure was inadequate and raised concerns about access to asylum as well as the identification of persons with specific needs, including potential victims of trafficking. Per UNHCR, returns to Greece were done without due guarantees as foreseen in the EU-Albania Readmission Agreement for Albanian or Greek citizens. Third-country nationals arriving from Greece did not have an agreement to protect them while being sent back to Greece.

Migrants who claimed asylum were housed at the Babrru National Reception Center for Asylum Seekers. Many of the migrants placed in Babrru were later

apprehended multiple times attempting to cross into Montenegro or Kosovo if they did not remain in the country to pursue asylum requests. Due to increased government and UNHCR funding in 2021, the reception conditions in the Babrru Reception Center generally improved.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: NGOs reported concerns regarding unaccompanied foreign and separated children who faced increased risk of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation due to the lack of a strong protection system.

Access to Basic Services: The law provides refugees access to public services, including education, health care, housing, law enforcement, courts and judicial procedures, and legal assistance. UNHCR reported access to social care and services remained a challenge, despite legal obligations to ensure nondiscriminatory treatment for asylum seekers and refugees. This was mostly due to conflicting laws and bylaws. UNHCR noted there was limited knowledge regarding entitlements of refugees to public relief and social protection, which led to denial of services. The May government decision to offer most public services online increased the challenges of accessing services for refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom did not have the proper electronic ID enabling registration and access to the local platform.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

g. Stateless Persons

The government reported it did not have data regarding the total number of stateless persons or persons at risk of statelessness in the country.

According to UNHCR there were 710 persons at risk of statelessness between

January 2021 and July. Of these, 460 were in the process of registering with the National Register of Civil Status via the court system. The law establishes a statelessness determination procedure, and grants free legal assistance to vulnerable individuals, including stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness. UNHCR and its partners provided technical support to the government with the implementation of the law.

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: The most recent national parliamentary elections were held on April 25, 2021. An International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) was formed as a common endeavor of the OSCE Office for Democracy and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and issued a final report on July 26, 2021, stating that the elections were generally well organized and noted the Central Election Commission “managed to adequately fulfill most of its obligations, including complex new ones related to electronic voter identification. Overall, the election administration at all levels enjoyed the trust of stakeholders.” The IEOM reported, “the ruling party derived significant advantage from its incumbency, including through its control of local administrations, and from misuse of administrative resources. This was amplified by positive coverage of state institutions in the media.” The mission also highlighted several deficiencies, including credible allegations of pervasive vote buying by political parties and the illicit extraction and use of sensitive personal data. The report found that

journalists remained vulnerable to pressure and corruption (see section 2.a.).

Political Parties and Political Participation: Media outlets reported allegations of the use of public resources for partisan campaign purposes in the 2021 parliamentary elections, and there were reports of undue political influence on media. There were also reports of limited access to voting for persons with disabilities.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit the participation of women and members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by public officials and prohibits individuals with criminal convictions from serving as mayors, parliamentarians, or in government or state positions. The government generally implemented the law effectively. The judicial system, which is undergoing reforms supported by the United States and European Union, continued to make some progress in breaking the cycle of impunity.

Corruption: Corruption existed in all branches and levels of government, including through public procurement and public-private partnerships, though authorities made progress during the year in combatting corruption and ending impunity. In August, the Special Prosecution Against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK) secured the final conviction of former Minister of Interior Saimir Tahiri on charges of abuse of office, secured the final conviction of a judge and a prosecutor on charges of corruption, and sent to trial a corruption case against another prosecutor. Former Deputy Minister of Interior Rovena Voda was sentenced to 10 months in prison and former mayor Fatos Tushe was convicted to

two years and four months for abuse of office. SPAK also investigated public-private contracts for waste incinerators in the cities of Tirana, Elbasan, and Fier, which allegedly illegally steered 29,036,925 ALL (\$271.5 million) to government officials and contractors. The investigation led to the arrests of a former Minister of Environment, Lefter Koka, in December 2021, and former member of parliament Alqi Bllako in March.

In October 2021, the government consolidated all preventative anti-corruption agencies into one Anti-Corruption Directorate under the Ministry of Justice. The agencies previously reported to the prime minister's office. The Anti-Corruption Directorate reported investigations resulted in 261 administrative measures against officials/employees and other criminal charges were referred for prosecution.

In April the Supreme Court rejected a request to suspend the prison sentence of former Prosecutor General Adriatik Llalla convicted on corruption-related charges in September 2021. Llalla was originally sentenced to two years of imprisonment and had four plots of land and one seaside apartment, worth 106,950,000 ALL (\$1 million), confiscated and transferred to the state's ownership.

The High Inspectorate for the Declaration of Assets and Conflict of Interest reported that through August it had referred six new cases for prosecution, involving one member of parliament, one prosecutor, three directors in the government agencies, and one administrator in a government company. Charges included refusing to declare assets, hiding assets, or falsifying asset declarations; money laundering; and tax evasion.

Police corruption remained a problem. Through August the Police Oversight Agency received 1,707 complaints or allegations of police corruption.

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

Rights

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

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Office of the Ombudsman is the main independent constitutional institution for promoting and enforcing human rights. It is authorized by law to monitor and report on prisons and detention centers and conduct administrative investigation of complaints from citizens. Although the Office of the Ombudsman lacked the power to enforce decisions, it acted as a monitor of alleged human rights abuses, and institutions made efforts to meet its recommendations. The GDP reported establishing ad hoc working groups to follow up on each ombudsman recommendation concerning prison conditions.

The Assembly has committees on legal issues, public administration, and human rights that review the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman. The committee was engaged and effective in legislative matters. During the year the parliament started procedures to elect a new ombudsman.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape, including spousal rape and the rape of a person, regardless of gender, is a crime; the law also includes provisions on sexual assault. Penalties for rape and sexual assault depend on the age of the survivor. For rape of an adult, the penalty is three to 10 years in prison. The government did not enforce the law effectively. Authorities did not disaggregate data on prosecutions for spousal rape. The concept of spousal rape was not well

understood, and authorities often did not consider it a crime.

Domestic or intimate partner violence is a crime, with penalties up to three years' imprisonment. The law on domestic violence extends protection to survivors and provides for issuance of a protective order that automatically covers children as well. The government enforced the law effectively. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection conducted several trainings on domestic violence with police officers, prosecutors, judges, and social services to enhance the human capacity of the 50 local referral mechanisms for domestic violence. Police operated an automated application issuance process within the police case management system that allowed for rapid issuance of protective orders and produced a record of orders issued.

As of September, police reported 4,136 cases of alleged gender-based violence, including other domestic crimes. In 2,402 cases the police requested protection orders to assist survivors. NGOs reported high levels of gender-based violence, including domestic violence. As of September, seven women had been killed by their partners or family members.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection reported as of October, there was a total of 87 cases of domestic violence receiving services at the National Reception Center for Domestic Violence. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection reported that starting in January survivors of domestic violence who had protection orders received increased economic assistance from the government. Families with three or more children received double economic aid compared with the previous year.

Nisma ARSIS reported an increase in the number of mother and child survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse from the previous year. Nisma ARSIS assisted 117 cases of children and women survivors of domestic violence in 2021-2022. Nisma ARSIS also reported assisting 63 children who fled to police stations after

experiencing or witnessing physical violence at home.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment, but officials rarely enforced it. The commissioner for protection from discrimination generally handled cases of sexual harassment and could impose fines. Police reported 33 cases of sexual harassment as of September.

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

While there are no legal barriers to access to contraceptives, which were provided free of charge to insured women, women and girls often did not access services for a variety of reasons, including fear of stigma from health-care service providers and members of their community. Some women and girls, particularly those living in remote areas, faced significant challenges in accessing essential sexual and reproductive health services. Women from historically marginalized communities, including women with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons, Roma, and Balkan-Egyptian women, were often unaware of their entitlement to reproductive health services.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection operated the Lilium Center in Tirana with the support of the UN Development Program to provide integrated services to survivors of sexual violence. The center was in a hospital setting and provided health-care services including emergency contraception, social services, and forensic examinations at a single location by professionals trained in cases of sexual violence. Survivors in remote areas of the country did not have many options for assistance and support in their areas. Unless they were identified by authorities and transported to Tirana, they were typically referred to shelters for survivors of trafficking. The government established two other centers during the year, specialized in sexual violence and severe forms of violence against children, in Fier and Shkoder.

Discrimination: The law provides the same legal status and rights for women as for men including under family, religious, personal status, and nationality laws as well as laws related to labor, property, inheritance, employment, access to credit, and owning or managing businesses or property. Women were underrepresented in many fields at the highest levels. The law mandates equal pay for equal work, although many private employers did not fully implement this provision. In many communities, women experienced societal discrimination based on traditional social norms subordinating women to men.

Gender-biased Sex Selection: According to official figures, in 2021 the ratio of boys to girls at birth was 108 to 100.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

There were allegations of discrimination targeting members of the Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, including in housing, employment, health care, and education. As of August, the commissioner for protection from discrimination received 17 complaints of discrimination on grounds of race and ethnicity, ruling in favor of the complainant in five cases.

The law provides official minority status for nine national minorities without distinguishing between national and ethnolinguistic groups. The government defined Greeks, Macedonians, Aromanians (Vlachs), Roma, Balkan-Egyptians, Montenegrins, Bosnians, Serbs, and Bulgarians as national minorities. The law provides for minority-language education and dual official-language use for the local administrative units in which minorities traditionally reside or in which a minority group comprised at least 20 percent of the total population. The government generally enforced these provisions effectively.

Children

Birth Registration: An individual acquires citizenship by birth in the country, from a citizen parent, by origin or naturalization. There were no reports of denial of or discrimination in birth registration, but onerous residency and documentation requirements for registration made it more difficult for the many Romani and Balkan-Egyptian parents who lacked legally documented places of residence to register their children.

Nisma ARSIS and Terre des Hommes reported difficulties in the registration process for children who were entitled to citizenship but born outside of the country. Digitalization of services using the e-Albania platform was an obstacle for families lacking access to technology or the necessary skills to utilize the portal for administrative procedures.

Education: School attendance is mandatory through the ninth grade or until the age of 16, whichever occurs first, but many children, particularly in rural areas, left school earlier to work. Parents were often required to purchase supplies, notebooks, uniforms, and space heaters for some classrooms; these were prohibitively expensive for many families, particularly Roma and members of other minorities.

On September 22, the government closed the Mehmet Akif Ersoy girls' high school run by the Gulistan Foundation, allegedly because the Ministry of Education had not approved its location. The minister of education denied credible allegations of selective application of the law under pressure from the government of Türkiye because of the Gulistan Foundation's alleged ties to the so-called Gulen (or *Hizmet*) movement. The Ministry of Education closed on similar grounds the Zubeyde Hanim kindergarten owned by the Turgut Ozal Education Company, also allegedly affiliated with the Gulen movement. Both the foundation and the company challenged the decision, but an appeals court upheld the closures.

Parents of the children attending the kindergarten filed a separate lawsuit against the government's decision, which again upheld the government's closure. The Albanian Helsinki Committee condemned the closures, stating that "they did not meet the standards of due process, resulting in the issuing of a harsh, hasty, disproportionate, and harmful decision."

On August 31, the European Court of Human Rights found the government guilty of segregating Roma and Egyptian children at the Naim Frashëri school in Korça and required payment of EUR 4,500 (\$4,206) to the five families who filed the lawsuit in 2017. The court said that authorities failed to take steps to avoid the concentration of Roma and Egyptian children in the school, despite a binding 2015 decision of the commissioner for protection from discrimination finding that the school's Roma and Egyptian students were experiencing indirect discrimination due to their overrepresentation in the school.

Child Abuse: The law criminalizes any form of abuse or neglect against children. The penalties include up to life imprisonment in cases of child rape and trafficking of children.

Nisma ARSIS alleged that police sometimes reacted late or not at all when a protection order was violated, especially in cases involving Romani or Balkan Egyptian families. Child survivors of domestic violence in Nisma ARSIS's emergency center reported psychological violence, parental neglect, and economic exploitation as the most common forms of child abuse. Terre des Hommes reported Roma children were commonly sent by their parents to beg in the street. Many dropped out of school and did not receive public support services. Terre des Hommes also asserted most municipalities did not offer child-friendly options for children in need of alternative care. Care programs were designed to serve orphaned children rather than survivors of abuse or neglect.

World Vision Albania (WVA) reported domestic violence and violence against

children continued to be major problems in the country. An August 2021 WVA report estimated 58 percent of surveyed children were exposed to violence and abuse, especially from other family members and friends, with boys more likely to be physically abused.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age for marriage is 18, however the law does allow for individuals under 18 years old to marry if they have parental consent. Authorities did not always enforce the law. Nisma ARSIS and Terre des Hommes noted that underage marriages often occurred with Romani and Balkan-Egyptian children who fled home. During the year Nisma ARSIS reported 24 cases of early marriages of children in the Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, many of whom were identified at the police station in the interviewing process. Terre des Hommes identified 21 minors in the towns of Levan and Driza and offered assistance and services. Two other cases were reported in Kukes girls, age 16, married to adults. The State Agency for the Protection of Children and the state police did not maintain statistics on cases of early marriage.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation, sale, grooming, or using children for commercial exploitation, including child sex trafficking. Penalties for the commercial sexual exploitation of a child range from eight to 15 years' imprisonment. The country has a statutory rape law; the minimum age for consensual sex is 14. The penalty for statutory rape is a prison term of five to 15 years. In aggravated circumstances the penalty may increase to life imprisonment. The law prohibits making or distributing child pornography, which is punishable by imprisonment for three to 10 years. Possession of child pornography is illegal.

Authorities generally enforced laws against rape and sexual exploitation of minors effectively, but NGOs reported that they rarely enforced laws prohibiting child

pornography and the online sexual exploitation of children.

The Ministry of Interior reported that, as of July, 40 of the 60 identified victims or potential victims of trafficking were minors. During the year Nisma ARSIS identified 30 child survivors of sexual abuse. The NGO reported some child victims were sexually harassed on social media. Girls ranging from ages 14 to 16 were routinely tricked by abusers into running away from home for days. Terre des Hommes reported similar patterns of abuse, noting recruiters from Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Italy lured girls through social media for future victimization.

Displaced Children: At year's end an Amber Alert system, pending since a 2020 international workshop organized by Child Right Center Albania and the Global Center for Missing and Exploited Children, had not been implemented. There was a large population of unaccompanied, displaced children who were homeless, particularly in the Romani community. Some children begged, and some became trafficking victims. Since the law prohibits the prosecution of children younger than 14 for burglary, criminal gangs at times used displaced children to burglarize homes. There was no specialized police unit for missing persons. Nisma ARSIS reported the number of children on the streets had increased from the previous year, mostly in the capital.

Institutionalized Children: The National Therapeutic and Rehabilitation Center for Children reopened on April 13 after being damaged by the November 2019 earthquake, and provided diagnostic services, treatment, education, and assistance with the development and rehabilitation of children up to age six. In addition, the government maintained a dedicated department of Child and Teenage Psychiatry Service at the Mother Tereza public hospital in Tirana that offered residential psychiatric health care services for children and teenagers.

During the year Nisma, ARSIS, and UNICEF completed an assessment of children

resident in public residential institutions from 2021-2022. The assessment of 68 children in four public institutions found that more than two-thirds of institutionalized children had living biological families and parents and the reasons for separation from their families were often related to abuse, mistreatment, exploitation, abandonment, or economic hardship. In addition, 70 percent of children assessed were identified with untreated trauma and showed developmental delays. Following the assessment, the National Plan of De-institutionalization was integrated in the 2021-2023 Social Fund Program, committing the government to establish and financially support alternative childcare services in the Vlora and Korça municipalities. Those services had yet to be established.

NGOs reported the child-protection system was generally functioning, although law enforcement entities lacked appropriate facilities and training for age-appropriate interrogation techniques of juveniles at police stations and prosecution offices. Children usually remained in institutions for long periods of time due to legal ambiguities and lengthy procedures regarding child custody. Institutions lacked specialized services, such as psychotherapists and speech therapists. There was a shortage of qualified psychologists, social workers, and supervision of care staff.

Antisemitism

The Jewish population was estimated to be between 40 and 50 persons. 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: There are no laws criminalizing consensual same-sex relationships or sexual conduct, nor were there reports of disproportionate or arbitrary arrests on unjustified charges.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: The shelter service NGO Streha reported LGBTQI+ individuals underreported targeted violence to the police or commissioner for protection from discrimination for fear of being outed, lack of trust in the institutions, and fear for their own safety. Streha reported local government officials – such as social workers, school psychologists, and domestic violence police officers – lacked knowledge and skills to properly serve the LGBTQI+ community, particularly in rural regions outside Tirana.

Reports indicated that LGBTQI+ persons continued seeking asylum in EU countries.

Discrimination: The law prohibits discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, including in employment. The law does not recognize same-sex civil unions or marriages, nor does the civil registry recognize same-sex parenting. Sexual orientation and gender identity are among the classes protected by the country's hate crime law. Enforcement of the law was generally weak. The *National Action Plan for LGBTQI+* for 2021-27 was adopted in November 2021. As of August, the commissioner for protection from discrimination had received three cases of hate speech against the LGBTQI+ community. In one case, the commissioner ruled against the perpetrator while the other cases were dismissed.

The shelter service NGO Streha said societal discrimination against the LGBTQI+ community was common. Incidents of discrimination, however, were

underreported to the State Police or commissioner for protection from discrimination. As of November, Streha provided shelter to 65 LGBTQI+ young persons facing physical and psychological violence or family pressure. The Ministry of Health increased support to the shelter by funding the costs of shelter staff salaries. Donors covered other shelter costs, including food, medication, and shelter rent.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: The law does not foresee or regulate the consequences that may arise from legal gender recognition. Although the antidiscrimination law regulates nondiscrimination in relation to gender identity, sexual orientation, and sex characteristics, it does not guarantee the individual's right to self-determination of gender.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: On May 15, 2020, the Albanian Order of Psychologists issued a statement prohibiting licensed psychologists from carrying out so-called conversion therapy and noted that the practice infringed on the rights, freedoms, and integrity of every individual.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: There were no reported restrictions of freedom of expression, association, or peaceful assembly. During the year Streha held its sixth Annual Charity Gala fundraising event, which was attended for the first time by government officials including the Minister of Interior, Minister of State for Standards and Services, and mayor of Tirana. Several activities were organized during the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) with all LGBTQI+ organizations united in coordination for the first time in several years. The annual Pride march saw record participation, exceeding 200. The ombudsman and the commissioner for protection from discrimination participated, although no government officials did. All activities were peaceful.

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution and laws prohibit discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities. Nevertheless, employers, schools, health-care providers, and providers of other state services at times engaged in discrimination. The law mandates that public buildings, education, health services and transportation be accessible to persons with disabilities on an equal basis, but the government only sporadically enforced the statutes. The government began implementation of the *National Action Plan on Disability 2021-2025*, with accessibility as one of the main priorities.

As of August, the commissioner for protection from discrimination had received 44 complaints of alleged discrimination against individuals with disabilities and ruled in favor of the complainants in eight cases. On June 13 the commissioner ruled against the local post offices of Durres and Shijak for lacking accessibility. In another case, on May 26, the commissioner ruled against the Divjaka Regional Education Directorate for discriminating against a young disabled person and impeding his access to attend school. There were no known reports of violence, harassment, or physical abuse against those with disabilities during the year.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

The law prohibits discrimination against and stigmatization of individuals with HIV or AIDS. The Association of People Living with HIV or AIDS (APLHIV) reported that stigma and discrimination caused individuals to avoid getting tested for HIV, leading to delayed diagnosis and consequently delayed access to care and support. The APLHIV reported service delays and other problems after the Infectious Disease Clinic was converted into a COVID-response hospital. APLHIV reported that since 2021, HIV-appropriate tests were no longer freely available at public hospitals. Persons with HIV or AIDS faced employment

discrimination and issues with professional reintegration, and children living with HIV faced discrimination in school.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law and related regulations and statutes provide the right for most workers to form independent unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and provides for the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity.

The law prohibits members of the military and senior government officials from joining unions and requires that a trade union have at least 20 members to be registered. The law provides the right to strike for all workers except indispensable medical and hospital personnel, persons providing air traffic control or prison services, water supply services, electricity supply services, and fire brigades. Strike action is prohibited in “special cases,” such as a natural catastrophe, a state of war, extraordinary situations, and cases where the freedom of holding or participating in elections are at risk.

The law provides limited protection to domestic and migrant workers. Labor unions were generally weak and politicized. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Penalties were rarely enforced and were not commensurate with those under other laws related to the denial of civil rights. Of 93 fines that were imposed, 24 were appealed in different instances and 17 upheld as of July. Administrative and judicial procedures were subject to lengthy delays and appeals. Arbitration procedures allowed for significant delays that limited worker protections against antiunion activity.

Civilian workers in all fields have the constitutional right to organize and bargain

collectively, and the law establishes procedures for the protection of workers' rights through collective bargaining agreements. Unions representing public-sector employees negotiated directly with the government. Effective collective bargaining remained difficult because employers often resisted union organizing and activities. In this environment, collective bargaining agreements, once reached, were difficult to enforce.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but the government did not always effectively enforce the law. Lack of coordination among ministries and the sporadic implementation of standard operating procedures hampered enforcement.

The Labor Inspectorate reported no cases of forced labor in the formal sector during the year.

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>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits employment discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, color, sex (including pregnancy), ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, HIV or AIDS status, or refugee or stateless status. The government did not consistently enforce the law, and penalties for violations were not commensurate with those under other laws related to denials of civil rights. The commissioner for protection from discrimination reported that most allegations of discrimination involved race, sexual orientation, economic status, or

disability.

There are laws prohibiting women from engaging in work that requires lifting more than 44 pounds. In addition, several government decisions regulate the work of pregnant women and women who have just given birth.

Women were underrepresented in many fields at the highest levels. The law mandates equal pay for equal work, although many private employers did not fully implement this provision. In many communities, women experienced societal discrimination based on traditional social norms subordinating women to men.

There were reports of discrimination in employment. Through August the commissioner for protection from discrimination received 12 complaints of gender-based discrimination and started two cases on its own. The commissioner ruled in favor of one case of gender-based discrimination against the Durres Regional Police Directorate. In February, the commissioner asked the police to reinstate the officer to a position equal to the rank she had held. The Regional Police Directorate has appealed.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The national minimum wage was higher than the national poverty threshold.

While the law establishes a 40-hour workweek, individual or collective agreements typically set the actual workweek. The law provides for paid annual holidays, but only employees in the formal labor market had rights to paid holidays. Many persons in the private sector worked six days a week. The law requires rest periods and premium pay for overtime, but employers did not always observe these provisions. Violations of wage laws occurred most frequently in the textile, footwear, construction, and mining industries.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries, although enforcement was lacking. Experts did not actively identify unsafe conditions in addition to responding to worker's complaints.

Violations of OSH standards occurred most frequently in the textile, footwear, construction, and mining industries.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The State Inspectorate of Labor and of Social Services (SILSS) and tax authorities are responsible for enforcing the minimum wage and hour laws. Enforcement agencies lacked the tools to enforce collection and consequently rarely charged violators. The number of inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance. Resources for conducting inspections and remedying violations were not adequate. The labor inspectorate inspected 7 percent of businesses in the country. Inspectors did have the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. The government rarely enforced laws related to maximum work hours, limits on overtime, or premium pay for overtime, especially in the private sector. These laws did not apply to migrant workers or workers in the informal sector.

The SILSS is also responsible for OSH standards and regulations. The government did not effectively enforce OSH laws. Resources and inspections were not adequate, and penalties were not commensurate with those of other similar crimes. Penalties were rarely applied against violators. Workers often could not remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardizing their employment. Employers did not effectively protect employees in this situation.

Informal Sector: Workers in the informal sector made up 57 percent of the economy, according to the International Labor Organization's *2019 Overview of the Informal Economy in Albania*. Informal workers are not covered by wage,

hour and occupational safety and health laws and the government did not provide social protections for informal workers. Government enforcement of labor laws remained largely ineffective, in part due to the extent of informal employment.

The State Labor Inspectorate noted the highest rate of informal employment was in manufacturing enterprises; hotels, bars, and restaurants; and construction.