

GHANA 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ghana is a constitutional democracy with a strong presidency and a unicameral 275-seat parliament. Parties and independent candidates campaigned openly and without undue restrictions in the period preceding the 2016 elections. The campaigns were largely peaceful, although there were reports of isolated instances of violence. Presidential and parliamentary elections conducted on December 7 were peaceful, and domestic and international observers assessed them to be transparent, inclusive, and credible. New Patriotic Party (NPP) candidate Nana Akufo-Addo secured in excess of 53 percent of votes cast, defeating National Democratic Congress (NDC) candidate and incumbent President John Mahama by more than 9 percentage points. President Mahama conceded the election on December 9. NPP candidates won 169 parliamentary seats, with the NDC securing the remaining 106 seats.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

The most serious human rights problems were excessive force by police, including torture that resulted in death and injuries; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; trafficking in persons; and exploitative child labor, including forced child labor.

Other human rights problems included rape by police; prolonged pretrial detention; assault and harassment of journalists; corruption in all branches of government; violence against women and children, including female genital mutilation/cutting; societal discrimination against women, persons with disabilities, persons with HIV/AIDS, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex individuals; politically motivated and vigilante violence.

The government took steps to prosecute and punish officials who committed abuses, whether in the security forces or elsewhere in the government, but impunity remained a problem.

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

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

There were several reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. For example, in May police in Kumasi allegedly beat a suspect to death. Although an autopsy report indicated the suspect died of natural causes, eyewitnesses claimed police used Tasers and the butts of their weapons to assault the suspect until he fell unconscious. Authorities arrested three officers but later released them. The Police Intelligence and Professional Standards Unit (PIPS) recommended the officers involved face a service inquiry.

As of August PIPS had investigated 52 reports of police brutality and one shooting incident.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

While the constitution and law prohibit such practices, there were credible reports police beat, raped, and otherwise abused suspects and other citizens. Beatings of suspects and other citizens occurred throughout the country but were generally unreported in official channels because victims were reluctant to file formal complaints. Police generally denied allegations or claimed the level of force used was justified. The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) received a report alleging military officers tortured a 16-year-old boy in Tamale. As of November the CHRAJ had concluded its investigation, but a final report was pending.

In 2015 UN special rapporteur Juan E. Mendez received reports that torture and other mistreatment occurred with frequency during apprehension, arrest, and interrogation of suspects, and particularly as a means to extract confessions by police. CHRAJ investigations into reports of police beating detainees upon arrest in Ho and Accra were underway as of November.

The United Nations reported that during the year (as of December 20), it received one allegation of sexual exploitation and abuse against Ghana peacekeepers for one alleged incident occurring in 2015. The allegation involved military personnel deployed to the UN Mission in Liberia. According to the United Nations, the allegation was pending investigation by the government of Ghana at year's end.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were generally harsh and sometimes life threatening due to physical abuse, food shortages, overcrowding, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care.

Physical Conditions: Ghana Prisons Service statistics available in October indicated that it held 13,685 prisoners (13,496 men and 189 women) in prisons designed to hold 9,875. Authorities held juveniles separately from adults in the Senior Correctional Center in Accra and housed pretrial detainees in the same facilities as convicts but in separate cells. They held women separately from men. No prison staff specifically focused on mental health, and officials did not routinely identify or offer treatment or other support to prisoners with mental disabilities.

In his 2013 visit, UN special rapporteur Mendez characterized prison overcrowding as “alarming.” Some cellblocks in Nsawam Prison contained 115 convicted prisoners sharing a space of approximately 415 square feet. The pretrial detention sections were often even more congested, with cells so overcrowded (40 in a cell designed for four) prisoners were lying head to toe in a fetal position. Prisoners in Sekondi Prison slept in shifts, sitting up, due to lack of space. Many prisoners slept on the floor without a mattress, mat, or blanket. In his follow-up assessment in 2015, Mendez observed no improvements in these prison conditions. The government made progress in reducing the population at many of the major prisons. Overcrowding remained a serious problem, however, with prisons holding approximately two to four times more prisoners than designed capacity.

The government reported 48 deaths in custody, all from natural causes.

Both guards and other prisoners reportedly physically abused prisoners. Prison guards sometimes allegedly used caning to enforce prison rules, carried out usually by “black coats,” a term referring to model prisoners. While the government acknowledged the existence of “black coats,” it denied it gave them special powers or allowed them to exercise disciplinary functions. The CHRAJ and Ghana Prisons Service reported receiving no complaints of guards physically abusing prisoners.

While prisoners had access to potable water, food was inadequate. Meals routinely lacked fruit, vegetables, or meat, forcing prisoners to rely on their families to supplement their diet. Officials held much of the prison population in buildings

that were originally colonial forts or abandoned public or military buildings, with poor ventilation and sanitation, substandard construction, and inadequate space and light. The Ghana Prisons Service periodically fumigated and disinfected prisons, but sanitation remained poor. There were not enough toilets available for the number of prisoners, with as many as 100 prisoners sharing one toilet, and toilets often overflowed with excrement.

Medical assistants, not doctors, provided medical services, but they were overstretched and lacked basic equipment and medicine. All prison infirmaries had a severely limited supply of medicine. Prisons did not provide dental care. Prison officials referred prisoners to local hospitals to address conditions prison medical personnel could not treat on site. To facilitate treatment at local facilities, the Ghana Prisons Service registered more than half of inmates in the National Health Insurance Scheme. During the year the Ghana Prisons Service acquired additional vehicles and busses to facilitate the transfer of prisoners, including for medical care. The Ankaful Disease Camp Prison held 29 prisoners with the most serious contagious diseases.

Religious organizations, charities, and private businesses and citizens often provided services and materials to the prisons, such as medicine and food. Some organizations reported administrators at the prisons demanded bribes before permitting them to enter.

A study released in August found that as of 2011, 1.6 percent of prisoners in Kumasi, Nsawam, and Sunyani prisons were persons with disabilities, although mental disabilities were likely underreported. Although persons with disabilities reported receiving medicine for chronic ailments and having access to recreational facilities and vocational education, the study found the design of the prisons disadvantaged persons with disabilities, as they had to compete with other prisoners for access to health care and recreational facilities.

Administration: Inadequate recordkeeping contributed to prisoners being held in egregiously excessive pretrial detention, some for up to 10 years. For example, after prisoners destroyed records during a 2015 riot in Kumasi Prison, judicial officials issued new warrants but did not backdate them to the initial date of incarceration. There was no prison ombudsperson or comparable authority to respond to complaints. Authorities investigated few cases of complaints because there was a general reluctance to complain, even when there were allegations of police brutality or use of excessive force. Due to lack of information, few investigations were undertaken of personnel who may be responsible for an offense

under Section 25 of the Prisons Service Act, which prohibits the use of torture or harsh treatment.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted independent monitoring of prison conditions. Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which were independent of government influence, worked on behalf of prisoners and detainees to help alleviate overcrowding, monitor juvenile confinement, and improve pretrial detention, bail, and recordkeeping procedures to ensure prisoners did not serve beyond the maximum sentence for the charged offenses. Local news agencies also reported on prison conditions.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law provide for protection against arbitrary arrest and detention, but the government frequently disregarded these protections.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The police, under the Ministry of the Interior, are responsible for maintaining law and order, but the military continued to participate in law enforcement activities in a support role; for example, in protection of critical infrastructure. A separate entity, the Bureau of National Investigations, handles cases considered critical to state security and answers directly to the Ministry of National Security. Police maintained specialized units in Accra for homicide, forensics, domestic violence, visa fraud, narcotics, and cybercrimes. Police maintained specialized antihuman trafficking units in Accra and some regions. Such services were unavailable outside the capital due to lack of office space, vehicles, and other equipment.

Police brutality, corruption, negligence, and impunity were problems. While the constitution and law prohibit such practices, there were credible reports police beat, raped, and otherwise abused suspects and other citizens. There were delays in prosecuting suspects, reports of police collaboration with criminals, and a widespread public perception of police ineptitude. There were credible reports police extorted money by acting as private debt collectors, setting up illegal checkpoints, and arresting citizens in exchange for bribes from disgruntled business associates of those detained.

The Inspector General of Police, CHRAJ, and PIPS investigate claims security forces used excessive force. PIPS also investigates human rights abuses and police misconduct. As of August PIPS received more than 900 complaints; 25 of these

cases were completed and 749 remained under investigation. Over this period PIPS investigated 200 reports of unprofessional handling of cases, 145 reports of undue delay of investigation, 109 reports of unfair treatment, 52 reports of police brutality, 50 reports of unlawful arrest and detention, 22 reports of extortion, and one report each of stealing, a shooting incident, and robbery. As of August, 66 officers had been dismissed as a result of PIPS investigations, but none had been criminally prosecuted.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires judicial warrants for arrest and provides for arraignment within 48 hours, but police made frequent arrests without warrants and detained individuals without charge for periods longer than 48 hours. Officials detained some prisoners for indefinite periods by renewing warrants or simply allowing them to lapse while an investigation took place. The constitution grants a detained individual the right to be informed immediately, in a language the person understands, of the reasons for detention and of his or her right to a lawyer. Most detainees, however, could not afford a lawyer, and the government is not required to provide legal counsel. The government employed only 21 full-time legal aid lawyers in the country, and they primarily handled civil matters. Defendants in criminal cases who could not afford a lawyer typically represented themselves. The law requires that a detainee who has not been tried within a “reasonable time,” as determined by the court, be released either unconditionally or subject to conditions necessary to ensure the person’s appearance in court at a later date. Officials rarely observed this provision. The government sought to reduce the population of prisoners in pretrial detention by placing paralegals in some prisons to monitor and advise on the cases of pretrial detainees, and by directing judges to visit prisons to review and take action on pretrial detainee cases.

The law provides for bail, but courts often used their unlimited discretion to set bail prohibitively high. In May the Supreme Court struck down a portion of the criminal procedure code that denied bail to those accused of specific serious crimes, including murder, rape, and violations of the Narcotic Drugs Law.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were continued reports of arbitrary arrests by police. Unlawful arrests and detentions accounted for 5.5 percent of all complaint cases PIPS received through August.

Pretrial Detention: Lengthy pretrial detention remained a serious problem. Ghana Prisons Service statistics available in October indicated that 2,295 prisoners, 16.8

percent of all prisoners, were in pretrial status. The length of the pretrial detention exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crime in numerous instances.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court:

Detainees are entitled to challenge in court the legal basis or arbitrary nature of their detention and obtain prompt release and compensation if found to have been unlawfully detained.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

While the constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, it was subject to unlawful influence and corruption. Judicial officials reportedly accepted bribes to expedite or postpone cases, or to “lose” records.

Following the 2015 report by an investigative journalist into corruption in the judiciary, the chief justice constituted a five-member committee headed by a Supreme Court judge to investigate the allegations. By year's end the judiciary dismissed 12 High Court judges, 22 lower court judges, and 19 judicial service staff from their positions as a result of the investigation. No charges or criminal proceedings were initiated against the judges involved.

Despite alternate dispute resolution (ADR) procedures to decongest the courts and improve judicial inefficiency, court delays persisted. Professional mediators were trained to conduct ADR, and they worked in various district courts throughout the country to resolve disputes and avoid lengthy trials. Nevertheless, even in fast-track courts established to hear cases to conclusion within six months, trials commonly went on for years.

Military personnel are tried separately under the criminal code in a military court. Military courts, which provide the same rights as civilian courts, are not permitted to try civilians.

The Chieftaincy Act gives village and other traditional chiefs the power to mediate local matters and enforce customary tribal laws dealing with such matters as divorce, child custody, and property disputes. The authority of traditional rulers continued to erode, however, because of the growing power of civil institutions, including courts and district assemblies.

A judicial complaints unit within the Ministry of Justice headed by a retired Supreme Court justice addressed public complaints, such as unfair treatment by a

court or judge, unlawful arrest or detention, missing trial dockets, delayed trials and rendering of judgments, and bribery of judges.

Trial Procedures

Defendants are presumed innocent and have the right to be informed promptly and in detail of charges against them, with free interpretation as necessary, from the moment charged through all appeals. Defendants have the right to a fair and public trial without undue delay, but trials were often delayed. Defendants have a right to be present at their trials, be represented by an attorney, have adequate time and facilities to prepare their defense, present witnesses and evidence, and confront prosecution or plaintiff witnesses. Defendants have the right not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt, although generally defendants are expected to testify if the government makes a sufficient case. Defendants do not have the right to access government-held evidence, although there are judicial decisions that indicate the defense is entitled to evidence in the possession of the prosecution. In practice, however, prosecutors customarily resisted providing such access unless defense counsel requested it. Defendants have the right to appeal. Authorities generally respected these safeguards, and the law extends these rights to all citizens.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is an independent and impartial judiciary in civil matters, and citizens had access to a court to bring lawsuits seeking damages for, or cessation of, human rights violations.

Fast-track ADR courts and “automated” commercial courts, whose proceedings were expedited through electronic data management, continued efforts to streamline resolution of disputes, although delays were common. Authorities established additional automated courts across the country, and selecting their judges randomly helped curb judicial corruption.

The constitution states the Supreme Court is the final court of appeal. Defendants, however, may seek remedies for allegations of human rights violations at the Economic Community of West African States Court of Justice.

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

The constitution prohibits such actions, and there were no reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech and press, and the government generally respected these rights.

Violence and Harassment: Government authorities and security officials sometimes assaulted and harassed journalists throughout the country. In one instance the Supreme Court fined and sentenced a radio presenter and two on-air panelists to four months' imprisonment for what the court alleged were threats against judges in a pending case. The court order also fined the radio station and insisted the broadcaster take steps to prevent such comments' being broadcast in the future. A presidential reprieve released the imprisoned radio presenter and panelists after one month.

Local media widely carried allegations police officers in Gomoa Ojobi in Central Region assaulted and detained a reporter from a local television and radio station. In another example, media carried stories alleging a journalist was arrested for taking photographs of a police officer soliciting a bribe from a bus driver.

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. The internet was accessible in Accra and other large cities. There was limited but growing internet access in other areas. According to the International Telecommunication Union, approximately 23 percent of the population used the internet in 2015.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

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

b. Freedom 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.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

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

The constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, or other persons of concern.

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: Sexual and gender-based violence remained problems. According to UNHCR, as of December there were 42 incidents of sexual or gender-based violence reported from refugee camps, including attempted rape, defilement (rape of a child), sexual abuse of adults and children, physical assault, and psychological assault. UNHCR worked with personnel of the Department of Social Development and Ghana Health Service psychosocial counselors to provide medical, psychosocial, security, and legal assistance where necessary to all the cases reported. UNHCR reported one of the physical assault cases to police, resulting in the removal of the victim to a shelter and the arrest of a suspect who was later released on bail. At year's end the court had yet to issue a ruling on the case. Challenges to holding perpetrators of sexual or gender-based violence accountable for acts conducted in the camps included ineffective access to civil and criminal legal counseling and representation for the alleged perpetrator and the presumed victims.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. The law allows rejected asylum seekers to appeal and remain in the country until

an appeal is adjudicated. A four-member Appeals Committee, appointed by the minister of interior, is responsible for adjudicating the appeals, but the process continued to be subject to delays.

Employment: Refugees could apply for work permits through the same process as other foreigners; however, work permits generally were issued only for employment in the formal sector, while the majority of refugees worked in the informal sector.

Durable Solutions: In 2011 nearly 18,000 residents of Cote d'Ivoire fled to Ghana because of political instability following Cote d'Ivoire's disputed 2010 presidential election. During the year, UNHCR assisted in the voluntary repatriation of 52 Ivoirian refugees. Although Ivoirian refugees were granted prima facie refugee status during the initial stages of the emergency, by the end of 2012 the government had transitioned to individual refugee status determination for all Ivoirians entering thereafter.

In 2012 UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration assisted with the voluntary repatriation of more than 4,700 Liberians from Ghana. Approximately 3,700 Liberians opted for local integration. UNHCR and the Ghana Refugee Board continued to work with the Liberian government to issue them passports enabling them to subsequently be issued a Ghanaian residence and work permit. At year's end fewer than 1,000 individuals were still awaiting Liberian passports. The Ghana Immigration Service also supported the process by issuing reduced-cost residency permits, including work permits for adults, to locally integrating former Liberian refugees.

According to UNHCR's Multipurpose Enhanced Registration Exercise, at year's end, the country hosted 11,865 refugees and 1,371 asylum seekers totaling 13,236 persons of concern. This figure included refugees and asylum seekers from Cote d'Ivoire (6,453 refugees; 504 asylum seekers), Togo (3,299 refugees; 87 asylum seekers), Liberia (1,358 refugees; six asylum seekers), and other countries (755 refugees; 774 asylum seekers).

Approximately 3,500 persons of concern were awaiting verification at year's end. They were primarily Togolese, exempted Liberian refugees, Rwandan refugees, and few exempted Sierra Leonean refugees.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

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

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Parties and independent candidates campaigned openly and without undue restrictions in the period preceding the 2016 elections. The Electoral Commission took steps to ensure the elections were free and fair, including by conducting a public voter registration verification exercise. The campaigns were largely peaceful, although there were reports of isolated instances of violence. For example, attackers ransacked Electoral Commission offices in Suhum and Asunafo South in September. There were also reports of violence between NPP and NDC supporters and party-affiliated vigilante groups. Presidential and parliamentary elections conducted on December 7 were peaceful. Domestic and international observers, such as the European Union Election Observation Mission and the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers, assessed the election to be transparent, inclusive, and credible. Seven candidates vied for the presidency, including one independent candidate. NPP candidate Nana Akufo-Addo secured more than 53 percent of votes cast, defeating NDC candidate and incumbent President John Mahama by more than 9 percent. President Mahama conceded the election on December 9. NPP candidates won 169 parliamentary seats, with the NDC securing the remaining 106 seats. The Ghana Integrity Initiative, Ghana Center for Democratic Development, Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition, Citizen's Movement against Corruption, and European Union Election Observation Mission noted concerns over the misuse of incumbency and unequal access granted to state-owned media during the campaign. Reports also noted a regional bias in elections coverage, with Greater Accra and Ashanti regions receiving significantly more attention than other regions.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws prevent women or minorities from voting, running for office, serving as electoral monitors, or otherwise participating in political life on the same basis as men or nonminority citizens. Women, however, held fewer leadership positions than men, and some observers believed cultural and traditional factors limited women's participation in political life. Women held 30 seats in the outgoing 275-member parliament. The 2016 elections resulted in 37 women being elected to parliament. Presidential candidates included one woman and one disabled person. Reports indicated female candidates received substantially less media coverage than their male counterparts.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, but the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Corruption was present in all branches of government, according to media and NGOs, and various reputable national and international surveys such as the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators and Afrobarometer highlighted the prevalence of corruption in the country. More than 91 percent of respondents to a 2015 survey by the Institute of Economic Affairs said overall corruption was high or very high.

Corruption: As a result of the 2015 investigation into widespread corruption in the judiciary, two High Court judges were dismissed in April and one in June, bringing the total number of judges dismissed to 23. In June an investigative journalist revealed evidence President Mahama had accepted a vehicle in 2012 from an individual who had been awarded two government contracts. The CHRAJ determined in September that, while the president had contravened the gift policy under the code of conduct for public officers, his actions were not in violation of the applicable rules on conflicts of interest and the gift did not constitute a bribe. In September the opposition NPP accused the government of corruption in the issuance of several sole-source contracts, including the renovation of Kumasi airport's runway and a city bus branding project.

Financial Disclosure: The constitution's code of conduct for public officers establishes an income and asset declaration requirement for the head of state, ministers, cabinet members, members of parliament, and civil servants. All elected and some appointed public officials are required to make these declarations every four years and before leaving office. Financial disclosures can also be requested through court order, but only the auditor general is allowed to review documents so obtained. Financial information typically was not disclosed to the public.

Public Access to Information: The constitution provides for public access to government information, but obtaining such access was difficult. Government offices kept poor records, many official records were missing, and requests for information often received no reply. The country is a party to the Open Government Partnership--an international initiative signed in 2011 to enhance transparency, citizen participation, accountability, and technology and innovation within government--but implementation of its commitments under this initiative was uneven.

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

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

Government Human Rights Bodies: The CHRAJ, which mediated and settled cases brought by individuals against government agencies or private companies, operated with no overt interference from the government; however, since it is itself a government institution, some critics questioned its ability independently to investigate high-level corruption. Its biggest obstacle was a lack of adequate funding, which resulted in low salaries, poor working conditions, and the loss of many of its staff to other governmental organizations and NGOs. Public confidence in the CHRAJ was high, resulting in an increased workload for its staff.

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

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape but not spousal rape. Convicted rapists may be punished with prison sentences ranging from five to 25 years. Rape and domestic violence was significantly underreported and remained a serious problem. The Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Police Service worked closely with the Department of Social Welfare, the national chapter of the International Federation of Women Lawyers, the Legal Aid Board, and several other human rights NGOs to address domestic violence. In 2015, the latest year for which data were available, the DOVVSU received 322 reports of rape and reported 127 arrests and three convictions. At the end of 2015, 237 cases remained under investigation.

Although the law prohibits domestic violence, it continued to be a problem. Survey data released in August suggested 27.7 percent of women and 20 percent of men had experienced at least one type of domestic violence in the 12 months prior to the study. In accordance with local law and international definitions, the study analyzed the incidence of social, physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence. The law stipulates that a person in a domestic relationship who engages in misdemeanor domestic violence is liable on summary conviction to a fine, a

term of imprisonment not to exceed two years, or both. The court also may order the offender to pay compensation directly to the victim. Inadequate resources and logistical capacity in the DOVVSU and other agencies, however, hindered the full application of the law. Unless specifically called upon by the DOVVSU, police seldom intervened in cases of domestic violence, in part due to a lack of counseling skills, shelter facilities, and other resources to assist victims. In many cases victims were discouraged from reporting abuse and from cooperating with prosecutors because they were aware of long delays in bringing such cases to trial. Victims frequently did not complete their formal complaints due to fees associated with physicians' documentation for police medical forms. Victims also did not report domestic violence or rape because of fear of retaliation. According to the DOVVSU, of the 264 rape and assault cases the unit sent to court in 2015, only 17 resulted in convictions. The DOVVSU reported receiving reports of 5,520 assault suspects and referred 186 cases to court.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Several laws include provisions prohibiting FGM/C. It was rarely performed on adult women, but the practice remained a serious problem for girls under 18 years of age. According to the 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 4.2 percent of women and girls were victims of some form of FGM/C. FGM/C was most prevalent in the Upper West and Upper East regions, where 41 percent and 28 percent, respectively, of girls and women between the ages of 15 and 49 had undergone the procedure. Type II FGM, defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as excision of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora, was most commonly practiced. According to the 2011 MICS, the vast majority of girls face this procedure prior to age five. Intervention programs were partially successful in reducing the prevalence of FGM/C, particularly in the northern regions. Local NGOs continued educational campaigns to encourage abandonment of FGM/C and to train practitioners for alternative employment.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: The constitution prohibits practices that dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a person. In the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions, where adherence to indigenous religious beliefs remained strong, rural women and men suspected of "witchcraft" were banished by their families or traditional village authorities to "witch camps." At these villages in the north populated by suspected witches, some of those interned were accompanied by their families. Such camps were distinct from "prayer camps," to which persons with mental illness were sometimes sent by their families. Most accused witches were older women, often widows, whom fellow villagers accused of being the cause of difficulties, such as illness, crop failure, or

financial misfortune. Some persons suspected of witchcraft were also killed. NGOs provided food, medical care, and other support to residents of the camps. The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection monitored witch camps. The CHRAJ had an office in the Northern Region that monitored three witch camps and supported efforts to protect the rights of those accused of being witches. According to the CHRAJ, the Kukuuo camp had a population of 123, the Tindaan Shayili-Kpatinga camp 34, and the Gnani camp 20.

The law criminalizes harmful mourning rites, but such rites continued, and authorities did not prosecute any perpetrators. In the north, especially in the Upper West Region, widows are required to undergo certain indigenous rites to mourn or show devotion for the deceased spouse. The most prevalent widowhood rites included a one-year period of mourning, tying ropes and padlocks around the widow's waist, forced sitting by the deceased spouse until burial, solitary confinement, forced starvation, shaving the widow's hair, and smearing clay on the widow's body. If a widow engages in work or economic activity after the spouse's death, she may be regarded as adulterous, considered the cause of the spouse's death, or be declared a witch. In these instances the widow may be forced to undergo purification rites or leave her home.

Sexual Harassment: No law specifically prohibits sexual harassment, although authorities prosecuted some sexual harassment cases under provisions of the criminal code. Women's advocacy groups, including the Ark Foundation, reported sexual harassment remained a widespread problem.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide freely the number, spacing, and timing of their children, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence, but often lacked the information to do so. According to the 2014 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), use of modern contraceptive methods by married and sexually active unmarried women rose from 17 percent in 2008 to 22 percent in 2014. The UN Population Division estimated 25.1 percent of girls and women ages 15-49 used a modern method of contraception.

According to 2015 WHO estimates, there were between 216 and 458 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. While more than 95 percent of women received some prenatal care, the quality of that care was widely perceived to be inadequate, contributing to the high maternal mortality ratio. The 2014 DHS found 74 percent of deliveries occurred with the assistance of a skilled health-care provider, likely due to free pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum care being included in benefits under the National Health Insurance Scheme. Postpartum care indicators showed

that 78 percent of women had a postnatal checkup in the first two days after birth. Health organizations, however, reported nearly 60 percent of all pregnant women were anemic, and both women and their developing fetuses frequently experienced increased susceptibility to malaria. The 2014 DHS found anemia contributed to perinatal and maternal mortality. According to the survey, factors preventing women from seeking medical care included the inability to get money for treatment (42 percent) and the distance to a health facility (25 percent).

Discrimination: The constitution and law provide for the same legal status and rights for women as for men under family, labor, property, nationality, and inheritance laws. Traditional practices and societal norms, however, often denied women their statutory entitlements to inheritance and property, a legally registered marriage with associated legal rights, and the right to adequate resources to maintain and exercise custody of children. Women often did not have property or assets to use as collateral for loans, thus effectively preventing them from gaining access to credit. Rural families often focused on educating male children at the expense of female children since females typically married into other families. Women also continued to experience discrimination in access to employment, pay, and housing.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived by birth in or outside the country if either of the child's parents or one grandparent is a citizen; however, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that more than four in 10 children were not registered at birth, citing related vulnerability to exploitation, trafficking, and early and forced marriage. Children unregistered at birth or without identification documents may be excluded from accessing education, health care, and social security. The lack of a birth certificate or other proof of identity and age also constitutes a barrier to ensuring children receive appropriate protection, assistance, and fair treatment, for example when in contact with the justice system as victims, offenders, or witnesses. If children are separated from their families during natural disasters, conflicts, or as a result of exploitation, reuniting them is made more difficult by the lack of official documentation. Some children were reportedly denied education because their births were not registered, although having a birth certificate is not a legal precondition to attend school. The country launched an automated birth registration system during the year, aimed at enhancing the ease and reliability of registration.

Education: The constitution provides tuition-free, compulsory, and universal basic education for all children from kindergarten through junior high school. Approximately half of students completing junior high school and the Basic Education Certificate Examination continued on to senior high school. Parents incurred other costs associated with children attending school, such as uniforms and materials. Girls in rural and the northern regions were less likely to attend school due to negative social perceptions about girls and formal education, prioritization of boys' education over girls' education, distances between home and school, lack of dormitory facilities, and concerns over generally poor educational outcomes. The 2014 DHS showed the greatest disparity in education in the Northern Region, where 66 percent of women and 47 percent of men have no education--compared with 19 percent and 9 percent nationwide, respectively. A 2014 Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection report stated that in the Upper West Region teachers instructed girl students to fetch water, cook, wash their clothes, and sweep their rooms. In the Western Region, sexual abuse of female students reportedly increased during exams, when students travel for the five-day exam period to examination centers in nearby communities.

Child Abuse: The law prohibits defilement (sex with a child younger than 16 years with or without consent), incest, and sexual abuse of minors. In 2015, the latest year for which data was available, the DOVVSU received 1,195 complaints of suspected defilement and 15 cases of attempted defilement; the true number of cases was believed to be much higher. Statistics on defilement are reported separately from other cases of rape. There continued to be reports of male teachers sexually assaulting and harassing both female and male students. Female and male victims often were reluctant to report these incidents to their parents, and social pressure often prevented parents from going to authorities.

Early and Forced Marriage: The minimum legal age for marriage for both sexes is 18 years. Early and forced child marriage, while illegal, remained a problem. According to the DHS, 21 percent of women ages 20-24 were first married or in a union before the age of 18 in 2014, the latest year for which data was available. This survey indicated child marriage was most prevalent in the Northern (36 percent), Upper West (33 percent), Upper East (29 percent), and Eastern (25 percent) regions. Child marriage disproportionately affected girls, with only 2 percent of men ages 20-24 married before the age of 18, compared with 21 percent of women. Girls from rural areas were twice as likely to become child brides as those from urban areas. The Child Marriage Unit of the Domestic Violence Secretariat of the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection led governmental efforts to combat child marriage, for example, by setting up an e-

mail platform of government and civil society child marriage stakeholders (including the government, civil society, traditional and religious leaders, and youth organizations) in the country and leading public outreach through social media. The National Advisory Committee to End Child Marriage, with participation from key government and civil society stakeholders, provided strategic guidance and supported information sharing on child marriage.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: See information on girls under 18 in Women section above.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation of children. The minimum age for consensual sex is 16 years, and defilement is punishable by imprisonment for seven to 25 years. There is no legislation specific to child pornography, but it can be prosecuted as an “offense against public morals” and is punishable by imprisonment for a period not to exceed three years and/or a fine ranging from 120 to 600 cedis (\$30-\$150). UNICEF, with local and international NGOs, such as Rescue Foundation Ghana, Child Rights International, and Challenging Heights, worked with the government to promote children’s rights and were somewhat successful in sensitizing communities about protecting the welfare of children.

Displaced Children: The migration of children to urban areas continued due to economic hardship in rural areas. Children were often forced to support themselves to survive, contributing to both child prostitution and the school dropout rate. Girls were among the most vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation while living on the streets.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State’s *Annual Report on International Parental Abduction* at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html.

Anti-Semitism

The Jewish community had a few hundred members. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

The law explicitly prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, judicial proceedings, or the provision of other state services, but the government did not effectively enforce the law. The law provides that persons with disabilities have access to public spaces with “appropriate facilities that make the place accessible to and available for use by a person with disability,” but inaccessibility to schools and public buildings continued to be a problem. Children with disabilities attended specialized schools that focused on their needs, in particular schools for the deaf, but few adults with disabilities had employment opportunities.

Persons with both mental and physical disabilities, including children, were frequently subjected to abuse and intolerance. Psychiatric hospitals were overcrowded and unsanitary, and the country had a severe shortage of mental health professionals. Children with disabilities who lived at home were sometimes tied to trees or under market stalls and caned regularly; families reportedly killed some of them. The Ghana Education Service, through its Special Education Unit, supported education for children who are deaf or hard of hearing or have vision disabilities through national schools for deaf and blind students. Diagnosis and adaptive instruction for students with disabilities remained a challenge.

Thousands of persons with mental disabilities, including children as young as seven, were sent to spiritual healing centers known as “prayer camps,” where mental disability was often considered a “demonic affliction.” Residents were typically chained for weeks against their will in these environments with little challenge to their confinement, denied food and water often for seven consecutive days, and physically assaulted. While the country passed a Mental Health Act in 2012, officials took few steps to implement the legislation.

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

The law criminalizes the act of “unnatural carnal knowledge,” which is defined as “sexual intercourse with a person in an unnatural manner or with an animal.” It is a misdemeanor offense if the individuals involved are 16 years of age or older and

a felony offense if one of the individuals is under 16. The offense applies to persons engaged in same-sex male relationships and those in heterosexual relationships, but not to individuals in same-sex female relationships. The law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons faced widespread discrimination in education and employment. They also faced police harassment and extortion attempts. There were reports police were reluctant to investigate claims of assault or violence against LGBTI persons. Gay men in prison were often subjected to sexual and other physical abuse. The trial of an individual charged with assaulting a gay man because of his sexual orientation, which took place in 2015 in Nima, Accra, was underway at year's end.

While there were no reported cases of police or government violence against LGBTI persons during the year, stigma, intimidation, and the attitude of the police toward LGBTI persons were factors in preventing victims from reporting incidents of abuse.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS remained a problem. In the 2014 DHS, only 8 percent of women and girls and 14 percent of men and boys ages 15-49 expressed accepting attitudes on four indicators of stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. The 2014 national HIV Stigma Index Study also identified cases of stigma and discrimination towards persons with HIV: One-fifth of respondents reported abuse of their rights as persons with HIV, yet three-quarters of them did not seek redress. The study attributed this mainly to a lack of knowledge on the part of persons with HIV concerning their rights and lack of supportive policies.

Fear of being stigmatized continued to discourage persons from being tested for HIV infection and those who tested positive from seeking timely care. HIV-positive persons faced discrimination in employment and often were forced to leave their jobs or houses. The government and NGOs subsidized many centers that provided free HIV testing to citizens, although high patient volume and the physical layout of many clinics often made it difficult for the centers to respect confidentiality.

According to UNAIDS Ghana, continuing mandatory pre-employment HIV screening in security agencies impeded efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination.

Security agencies, including the military and police service, used HIV status as a screening criterion in their recruitment processes and peacekeeping assignments.

The CHRAJ managed an online reporting platform to improve the reporting and tracking of cases of stigma and discrimination experienced by persons with HIV/AIDS and key populations, in particular female sex workers and men who have sex with men. As of November there were 75 cases reported using the online platform. Primary complaint categories include disclosure of protected health information (17), blackmail/extortion (15), harassment/threats (14), and violence/physical abuse (11).

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Unlike in prior years, there were no reports of ritual killings. Chieftaincy disputes, which frequently resulted from lack of a clear chain of succession, competing claims over land and other natural resources, and internal rivalries and feuds continued to result in deaths, injuries, and destruction of property.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers--except for members of the armed forces, police, the Ghana Prisons Service, and other security and intelligence agency personnel--to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements. The law requires trade unions or employers' organizations to obtain a certificate of registration and be authorized by the chief labor officer, who is an appointed government official.

The law provides for the right to conduct legal strikes but restricts that right for workers who provide "essential services." The minister of employment and labor relations designated a list of essential services, which included many sectors falling outside the International Labor Organization's (ILO) essential services definition. The list included services carried out by utility companies (water, electricity, etc.), ports and harbors, medical centers, and the Bank of Ghana. In these sectors the parties to any labor disputes are required to resolve their differences within 72 hours; the deadline is intended to put pressure on employers and employees to operate efficiently with limited interruptions. The right to strike can also be restricted for workers in private enterprises whose services are deemed essential to the survival of the enterprise by a union and an employer. A union may call a legal

strike only if the parties fail to agree to refer the dispute to voluntary arbitration or if the dispute remains unresolved at the end of arbitration proceedings.

Additionally, the Emergency Powers Act of 1994 grants authorities the power to suspend any law and prohibit public meetings and processions, but it was unclear if the law applies to labor disputes.

The law provides a framework for collective bargaining. Only unions that represent the majority of workers in a given company, however, can obtain a collective bargaining certificate, which is required to engage in collective bargaining. In cases where there are multiple unions in an enterprise, the majority or plurality union generally receives the certificate and conducts the bargaining. The certificate holder generally includes representatives from the smaller unions. The armed forces, police, the Ghana Prisons Service, and other security and intelligence personnel do not have the right to bargain collectively. Workers in decision-making or managerial roles are not provided the right to collective bargaining under the Labor Act, but they may join unions and enter into labor negotiations with their employers.

The National Labor Commission is a government body with the mandate of ensuring employers and unions comply with labor law. It also serves as a forum for arbitration in labor disputes.

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference and provides reinstatement for workers dismissed under unfair pretenses. The labor law also prohibits antiunion discrimination by employers and provides for reinstatement for workers fired for union activity. It protects trade union members and their officers against discrimination if they organize within the free zones.

The government generally protected the right to form and join independent unions and to conduct legal strikes and bargain collectively, and workers exercised these rights. Although the Labor Act makes specified parties liable for violations, specific penalties are not set forth. An employer who resorts to an illegal lockout is liable to pay the unpaid wages of the workers. While there were no instances of employers who refused to bargain, bargained with unions not chosen by workers, or hired workers without bargaining rights, some instances of subtle employer interference in union activities occurred. Many unions did not follow approved processes for dealing with disputes, reportedly due to the unfair and one-sided application of the law against the unions. The National Labor Commission faced challenges in enforcing applicable sanctions against both unions and employers,

including inadequate resources, limited ability to enforce its mandate, and insufficient oversight.

Trade unions engaged in collective bargaining for wages and benefits with both private and state-owned enterprises without government interference. No union completed the dispute resolution process involving arbitration, and there were numerous unsanctioned strikes during the year.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. Provisions of various laws prescribe imprisonment and an obligation to perform prison labor as punishment for violations. For employers found guilty of using forced labor, the law provides for fines of no more than 250 penalty units (each unit is assigned a monetary value adjusted for the fluctuating inflation rate).

The government did not effectively enforce the law. Resources were insufficient to enforce legislation prohibiting forced labor. No fines were levied during the year, and no legal cases were brought that resulted in imprisonment. Data on the number of victims removed from forced labor were not available. Information also was not available regarding government efforts to bring labor laws into conformity with the ILO convention on forced labor, as recommended by the ILO in 1994.

There were indications of compulsory labor affecting both children and adults in the fishing sector, as well as child labor in informal mining and agriculture. According to the 2003 Child Labor Survey Report, more than 49,000 children were involved in fishing: 87 percent were boys and 13 percent girls. Twenty five percent were children five to nine years of age, 41 percent 10-14 years of age, and 34 percent 15-17 years of age. The International Justice Mission estimated that up to 60 percent of the 800 children they observed working on Lake Volta during a 2013 investigation might have been victims of trafficking. Boys paddled canoes, pulled fishing nets, drained canoes of water, carried loads, ran errands, and cooked for adult fishers. Girls generally engaged in fish picking, sorting, packing, transporting, smoking, and selling, as well as cooking, farm work, and errands. In July police reportedly rescued five children who had been trafficked and forced into fishing on Lake Volta. Some children, unable to leave their employers, continued working without pay.

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law sets the minimum employment age at 15 years, or 13 years for light work unlikely to be harmful to a child or to affect the child's attendance at school. The law prohibits night work and certain types of hazardous labor for those under age 18 and provides for fines and imprisonment for violators. The law allows for children age 15 and above to have an apprenticeship under which craftsmen and employers have the obligation to provide a safe and healthy work environment along with training and tools.

Inspectors from the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations were responsible for enforcing child labor regulations, and district labor officers and the social services subcommittees of district assemblies were responsible for assuring the relevant provisions of the law were observed through annual workplace visits and spot checks in response to allegations of violations. Those convicted of violating the child labor regulations of the Children's Act could be subjected to a fine of up to 500 cedis (\$125), a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year, or to both. Inspectors were required to provide employers with information about child labor violations and effective means to comply with provisions of the law. The government, however, did not provide sufficient resources to law enforcement and judicial authorities to carry out these efforts.

The ILO, government representatives, Trade Union Congress, media, international organizations, and NGOs continued efforts to increase institutional capacity to combat child labor.

The government continued to work closely with NGOs, labor unions, and the cocoa industry to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the industry. Through these partnerships the government created several community projects, which promoted sensitization, monitoring, and livelihood improvement.

Authorities did not enforce child labor laws effectively or consistently, and law enforcement officials, including judges, police, and labor officials, were sometimes unfamiliar with the provisions of the law that protected children.

Children as young as seven were subjected to forced labor in agriculture and mining, including informal gold mines, and as domestic laborers, porters, hawkers, and quarry workers. In the fishing industry in the Lake Volta Region, child laborers engaged in hazardous work, such as diving into deep waters to untangle

fishing nets caught on submerged tree roots. In April, Human Rights Watch indicated child labor continued to be prevalent in artisanal mining. Children also engaged in fetching firewood, bricklaying, food service and cooking, and collecting fares. A report released in May by Understanding Children's Work found 1.9 million children ages five-17, approximately 22 percent of this age group, were involved in child labor. A report released by Tulane University in July that assessed data collected during the 2013-14 harvest season estimated the cocoa sector employed approximately 918,500 child laborers, of which 95.7 percent were engaged in hazardous work in cocoa production. Children also engaged in fetching firewood, bricklaying, food service and cooking, begging, livestock herding, and collecting fares.

Children were also forced to work, sometimes after being sold, leased, or given away by their parents to work in fishing villages, shops, or homes. It was difficult to determine the extent of forced and bonded labor of children. Children in small-scale mining reportedly crushed rocks, dug in deep pits, carried heavy loads, operated heavy machinery, sieved stones, and amalgamated gold with mercury.

Child laborers were often poorly paid, physically abused, and received little or no health care.

Also see the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination in employment or occupation on grounds of gender, race, color, ethnic origin, religion, political opinion, social or economic status, or disability. The law does not prohibit discrimination on the grounds of age, language, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, HIV-positive status, or having other communicable diseases.

The government did not effectively enforce prohibitions on discrimination. The law provided for penalties for violations, including compensation for lost earnings and reinstatement of terminated workers; however, penalties were not adequate to deter violations. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to women, persons with disabilities, HIV-positive persons, and LGBTI persons (see section 6). For example, reports indicated few companies could accommodate the special needs of persons with disabilities in the workplace. Many companies ignored or turned down such individuals who applied for jobs.

Women in urban centers and those with skills and training encountered little overt bias, but resistance persisted to women entering nontraditional fields.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

A National Tripartite Committee composed of representatives of the government, labor, and employers set a daily minimum wage, which was seven cedis (\$1.75). The Ghana Statistical Service determined the lower poverty line for an equivalent adult in January 2013 based on prices of Greater Accra Region was 792.05 cedis (\$198) per year, or 2.17 cedis (\$0.54) per day. The study considered those earning less than this amount to be in extreme poverty. The maximum workweek is 40 hours, with a break of at least 48 consecutive hours every seven days. Workers are entitled to at least 15 working days of leave with full pay in a calendar year of continuous service or after having worked at least 200 days in a particular year. Such provisions, however, did not apply to task workers or domestic workers in private homes, or elsewhere in the informal sector. The law does not prescribe overtime rates and does not prohibit excessive compulsory overtime.

The government sets occupational safety and health regulations. By law workers can remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. This legislation only covered workers in the formal sector, which employed less than 20 percent of the labor force.

The Factories Department within the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations is responsible for imposing sanctions on violators of the standards. Employers who fail to comply are liable to a fine not exceeding 1,000 penalty units, imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years, or both. The law requires that employers report occupational accidents and diseases no later than seven days from the date of occurrence.

The Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations was unable to enforce the wage law effectively. The government also did not effectively enforce health and safety regulations. The law reportedly provided inadequate coverage to workers due to its fragmentation and limited scope. In October nurses at Accra psychiatric hospital went on strike over dangerous working conditions. There was widespread violation of the minimum wage law in the formal economy across all sectors. The minimum wage law was not enforced in the informal sector. Legislation governing working hours was largely followed in the formal sector but widely flouted and not enforced in the informal sector.

The Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations employed 97 safety inspectors. Inspectors were poorly trained and lacked the resources to respond to violations effectively. Inspectors did not impose sanctions or otherwise respond to violations during the year. There were no reports of specific government action taken during the year to prevent violations or improve wages and working conditions.

The law provides for compulsory participation in the Social Security and National Insurance Trust Pension Scheme as well as the National Health Insurance Scheme; however, the government did not always enforce compliance, particularly in the informal sector. The law provides for work injury insurance and maternity insurance. The law does not provide for unemployment insurance.

According to the 2014 Ghana Living Standards Survey, approximately 88 percent of the working population was employed in the informal sector, including small to medium-scale businesses such as producers, wholesale and retail traders, and service providers made up of contributing family workers, casual waged workers, home-based workers, and street vendors. Most of these workers were self-employed persons. In December a gas station in Accra exploded, killing at least 12. Media reported that the National Petroleum Authority indicated the accident was a result of “irresponsible human error.” The Chamber of Petroleum Consumers Ghana accused the National Petroleum Authority and the Environmental Protection Agency of ineffectively enforcing safety standards. Later in December after the explosion, the Ghana National Fire Service shut down two filling stations in Accra citing safety and licensing concerns.

According to media reports, in January a mineworker in Talensi district, Upper East region, reportedly died from being buried alive under a stockpile of gold ore.