

ARMENIA 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Armenia's constitution provides for a parliamentary republic with a unicameral legislature, the National Assembly (parliament). The prime minister, elected by parliament, heads the government; the president, also elected by parliament, largely performs a ceremonial role. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Civil Contract party won 54 percent of the vote and an overwhelming majority of seats in parliament in snap elections held on June 20. According to the October 27 final assessment of the international election observation mission under the umbrella of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, voters were provided with a broad range of options, the elections were generally well managed, and contestants were able to campaign freely. The elections, however, were also characterized by intense polarization and marred by increasingly inflammatory rhetoric. The observation mission noted that "high levels of harsh, intolerant, inflammatory and discriminatory rhetoric in the period leading up to election day tainted the debate." Other shortcomings included incidents of pressure to attend campaign events, allegations of vote buying, blurring of the line between the ruling party and state, alleged misuse of administrative resources, inadequate campaign finance provisions, and the narrow standing allowed for submitting electoral complaints.

The national police force is responsible for internal security, while the National Security Service is responsible for national security, intelligence activities, and border control. The Anticorruption Committee, established on October 23, replaced the Special Investigative Service as an independent agency specializing in preliminary investigation of cases involving alleged corruption by public officials. The Investigative Committee is responsible for conducting pretrial investigations into general civilian and military criminal cases and incorporates investigative services. The National Security Service and police chiefs report directly to the prime minister and are appointed by the president upon the prime minister's recommendation. The cabinet appoints the head of the Investigative Committee upon the prime minister's recommendation. The government appoints the head of

In June 2020 the Ombudsperson's Office released a brief on the nature of labor violation complaints it received in 2019. Reported problems included employers failing to pay what they owed to terminated employees, unjustified dismissals from work, violations of disciplinary action procedures vis-a-vis employees, retaining unjustified amounts of money from the workers' salaries, and transferring workers to other jobs without their consent. The Ombudsperson's Office also identified widespread and systemic violations, such as an absence of signed contracts, forcing employers to submit resignation letters, and failure to pay for overtime work. The NGO Helsinki Citizens Assembly Vanadzor, in a report released in June 2020, noted similar problems based on its monitoring of the labor rights situation in 2019.

Informal Sector: Managers of enterprises that were the primary employers in certain poor geographic areas frequently took advantage of the absence of alternative jobs and did not provide adequate pay or address job safety and environmental concerns. A 2019 World Bank report found that approximately 13 percent of the country's wage employees did not have a written contract and did not have access to any form of benefits related to paid leave, childcare, or sick leave. Informal-sector workers were covered by wage, hour, and occupational safety and health laws; however, they were not covered by inspections. The agricultural orientation of the country's economy tended to drive informal employment.

According to official statistics, the government's anticorruption efforts and active efforts by tax authorities led to a notable increase in the number of officially registered employees in the country. The COVID-19 pandemic spotlighted the problem of informal employment. While the government offered benefits to registered workers or those who had lost their work due to pandemic, unregistered or self-employed workers received much lower benefits. The government admitted there was a problem identifying informal employees and the self-employed due to the absence of a universal income declaration system and ultimately decided to provide assistance to families based on indicators such as the presence of underage children or situations where both parents did not have formal employment before the pandemic. Some of those who lost their livelihoods, however, were not captured by any of the additional assistance programs.