

SLOVAKIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Slovak Republic is a multiparty parliamentary democracy led by a prime minister and a 150-member Narodna Rada (National Council). Voters elected the head of government, Prime Minister Iveta Radicova of the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union, to a four-year term in 2010. President Ivan Gasparovic, the head of state, was reelected for a five-year term in 2009. Both elections were considered free and fair. Six political parties, four of which formed the governing coalition, participate in the National Council. In October the government fell to a no-confidence vote. Security forces reported to civilian authorities.

Notable human rights problems during the year included abuse of power by judicial figures and a lack of checks and balances within the judicial system; continued societal discrimination and violence against Roma; and government corruption.

Other human rights problems included prison overcrowding and targeting of the press for civil defamation suits by members of the political and business elite.

The government investigated reports of abuses by members of the security forces and elsewhere in government. Some officials engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

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

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

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

In May 2010 a Romani man died several days after being arrested in Tornala by local police, who allegedly resorted to the excessive use of pepper spray. Criminal proceedings were initiated but halted in September 2011, based on expert opinion that the pepper spray in question could not have caused death. An organization representing the individual's family appealed the decision.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The constitution and the law prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment, and the government mostly respected these provisions in practice.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and members of the Romani community cited a continuing trend of mistreatment of Romani suspects by police officers during arrest and while in custody.

The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) conducted a monitoring visit in 2009. The CPT noted that the situation in the country had improved from that observed during previous visits, notwithstanding recurring complaints from detainees about excessive use of force by authorities. The CPT urged the government to investigate all allegations of involuntary sterilization of Romani women promptly and thoroughly and to educate doctors about their criminal liability for performing sterilization without consent.

In 2010 prosecutors charged 10 police officers with abusing six Romani boys (ranging in age from 11 to 16) in Kosice in 2009 following the alleged theft by the boys of a purse. Videotapes of the incident, leaked to the media in 2009, showed the officers forcing the boys to strip naked, kiss, and hit each other. The trial started in November 2010. A second court hearing scheduled for November 2011 was postponed due to the inability of one of the accused to attend the hearing for medical reasons. New charges were filed against police officers who were present but failed to intervene when the alleged abuse took place.

Romani advocacy groups lobbied the government to acknowledge and compensate victims for past involuntary sterilization practices on Romani women in public health facilities. While the law requires patients to submit written sterilization requests at least 30 days before such procedures are performed, criminal charges for alleged violations cannot be filed for offenses that took place prior to 2005, when the law entered into force.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions met most international standards, but overcrowding continued to be a problem. During the year on average 9,118 persons were in prison, 1,407 of whom were in pretrial detention. Of that total, 8,560 were men and 558 women; 132 were under the age of 18. Men and women were held separately, as were underage prisoners and adults unless there was a reasonable justification for placing adults and juveniles together.

Prisoners were able to express complaints without censorship, and a public defender of rights, or ombudsman, was available for their legal aid. The ombudsman was elected by the National Council but did not report any political interference in his work.

There was sufficient access to potable water in all prisons. Prisoners were allowed to practice their religion and observe their faiths freely, and were given adequate space to do so.

The government permitted visits by independent human rights observers. Observers expressed concern that no independent group or NGO regularly monitored prison conditions.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and the law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national police force has sole responsibility for internal and border security and reports to the Ministry of Interior. The head of the police force reports directly to the interior minister, who has the authority to recall any member of the police. A special anticorruption police department, a special prosecution unit, and a specialized criminal court address corruption cases and have increased their combined effectiveness.

The most common charge authorities brought against police officers was abuse of power; other charges included battery, assault and battery, and illegal intrusion into private homes. During the year authorities charged 122 police officers with 167 crimes; in 47 of these cases, the crime was abuse of power. Other crimes involved corruption (11 cases) and obstruction of justice (seven cases). Disciplinary action ranged from fines to expulsion from the police force.

Human rights training remained in the curriculum at police training facilities.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

The constitution and the law stipulate that a person can only be taken into custody for explicit reasons and must be informed immediately of the reasons for detention. A written court warrant is required for arrest. The court must grant a hearing to a person accused of a crime within 48 hours (or a maximum of 72 hours for “serious cases,” defined as violent crimes, treason, or other crimes with a sentence of at least eight years) and either release or remand the individual. A bail system functioned effectively. Detainees have the right to consult an attorney immediately and must be notified of this right. The law allows monthly family visits upon request.

Attorneys are allowed to visit detainees as frequently as necessary, and the government provides free counsel to indigent detainees. However, the CPT’s report on its 2009 monitoring visit noted that the majority of persons interviewed claimed to have been informed of their right to an attorney only at the time of the first court hearing, when an ex officio counsel was appointed. The CPT found that in very few cases did detained persons have an opportunity to consult an attorney from the outset of their police detention, let alone request that an attorney be present during the interrogation or initial questioning.

If remanded by a court, the accused is entitled to an additional hearing within 48 hours, at which time the judge must either release the accused or issue a written order placing the accused in custody. Authorities respected these provisions in practice.

Criminal court procedures mandate that the total time of detention (pretrial plus trial) cannot exceed 12 months in the case of minor offenses, 24 months for regular crimes, 36 months for severe crimes, and five years for crimes in which the expected sentence is 25 years to life. In addition pretrial detention cannot account for more than half of the total detention time. In cases with extenuating circumstances, the Supreme Court may extend pretrial detention to four years. Delays in court procedures and investigations frequently led to lengthy detention during both the pretrial and trial periods.

The law allows plea bargaining, which continued to reduce the backlog of court cases. During 2010 plea bargaining resolved 7,619 cases, compared with 6,856

cases in 2009. Between January and September, 4,898 cases were resolved through such arrangements.

In 2010 criminal charges were brought against 4,925 juveniles, of whom 1,822 were between the ages of 14 and 15, nearly three times the number of those charged in 2009.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary; however, in practice problems with corruption, official intimidation of judges, inefficiency, and a lack of integrity and accountability continued to undermine judicial independence. In some cases judges believed they were subjected to pressure aimed at influencing their decisions as well as to intimidation through disciplinary actions.

A series of legislative amendments proposed by Justice Minister Lucia Zitnanska received harsh criticism by the former justice minister and current Supreme Court president, Stefan Harabin. The amendments included measures to strengthen judicial accountability, such as publishing court decisions on the Internet, making public selection procedures for judges and court chairmen, standardizing performance evaluations for judges, and allowing public access to judicial council sessions. These proposals were a reaction to nontransparent actions in the judiciary, including the nepotistic selection of new judges; difficulties in the public's access to court verdicts, especially controversial ones; allegedly unfair promotion and demotion processes; and the manipulation of the electronic random case assignment system. While the public and rule-of-law experts generally welcomed these changes (both those implemented and those only proposed), only a small number of members of the judicial community expressed their support. Harabin and opposition leader Robert Fico called the changes unconstitutional and in breach of judicial independence.

There were reports that higher levels of the judicial hierarchy misused their power by issuing instructions to individual judges on how to decide specific cases.

Disciplinary actions against judges for delays in completing cases appeared to be highly inconsistent. In some cases, judges faced suspension for delaying cases, while in similar cases no action was taken. In several cases disciplinary action was clearly used to intimidate judges into making judicial decisions favored by their superiors or to punish them for their critical statements. Suspension was considered a severe action, since suspended judges were prohibited from entering

the court building, received only one-third of their salary, and had their cases assigned to other judges. These practices led to an atmosphere of general mistrust in the judiciary.

District court judge Juraj Babjak, a former judge of the Slovak Constitutional Court and author of several critical articles about the state of the judiciary, faced disciplinary action for alleged delays in 2010. Although he had communicated to the president of his district court that it was impossible to deal with his caseload because of its size and complexity, the court's president filed disciplinary action against him, proposing to demote him to a lower court. On April 6, a disciplinary panel demoted Judge Babjak from the regional court to the district court. Babjak appealed the verdict, and in October the appellate disciplinary panel overruled the original verdict, highlighting the case's numerous flaws. The case was dropped in December.

Judge Miroslav Gavalec, spokesman for the organization For Open Judiciary, which consisted of judges favoring reforms, faced two disciplinary actions, one for "insufficient education" and the other for critical articles he wrote on the state of the judiciary. According to Supreme Court President Harabin, Gavalec's "ungrounded" and "untrue" statements harmed the reputation of the judiciary. Harabin proposed that Gavalec be removed from his position. The case against Gavalec was pending before a disciplinary panel at year's end.

In June 2010 a judicial disciplinary panel ruled that a veteran judge be demoted for allegedly prohibiting the recording of court proceedings in one of her cases. Consequently, the Judicial Council, also presided over by Supreme Court President Harabin, decided that the judge be reassigned from her home city to a distant district court. The judge chose to retire instead. Nevertheless, she lodged a successful complaint in June to the Constitutional Court, which ruled that the Supreme Court's disciplinary panel violated her right to a fair trial. She asserted that the real motive for her demotion was her unwillingness to decide in favor of Harabin in a libel case he brought against the daily newspaper *SME*.

In June the Constitutional Court found Harabin guilty of violating his responsibilities by repeatedly disallowing a Finance Ministry audit of the Supreme Court.

With the exception of the Constitutional Court, courts employed a computerized system for random case assignment to increase transparency. There were reports that this system was subject to manipulation. The watchdog NGO Fair Play

Alliance filed a criminal and disciplinary motion against the president and the vice president of the Supreme Court for allegedly manipulating the electronic assignment system, and the justice minister filed her own case against Supreme Court President Harabin for the same reason. The disciplinary case was pending before the Constitutional Court at year's end.

In 2008-10 more than 500 judges (of a total of 1,400) submitted claims of "wage discrimination." According to media reports, the judges' claims were organized by senior officials in the judiciary. Former justice minister Viera Petrikova and Supreme Court President Harabin publicly supported the judges' claims. The large number of judges submitting claims raised serious concerns about the ethics of some members of the country's judiciary as well as the potential impact on the state budget. Adjudication of the cases was inconsistent. A small number were dismissed, but in some others, district courts awarded judges compensation of up to 90,000 euros (\$117,000). In August Justice Minister Zitnanska filed a motion in the Constitutional Court to remove Harabin from office for failing to appeal a verdict awarding 11 Supreme Court judges more than one million euros (\$1.3 million) as compensation for alleged discrimination. Zitnanska claimed that, by not filing an appeal, Harabin did not uphold his duty as Supreme Court president to protect the interests of the court.

Trial Procedures

Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence. They are also presumed innocent during the appeals process, meaning that a person found guilty by a court does not serve his sentence or pay any fine until the final decision on appeal has been reached. Persons charged with criminal offenses are entitled to fair and public trials and have the right to be informed of the charges against them. The law does not provide for jury trials. A panel of three judges is obligatory in criminal cases and in civil cases at the regional court and Supreme Court levels. However, NGO observers stated that judicial corruption often resulted in lengthy court delays and improper handling of police investigations. Defendants have the right to be present at their trial, consult in a timely manner with an attorney (at government expense if indigent), access government-held evidence, confront prosecution witnesses, and present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants have the right to refuse self-incrimination and may appeal adverse judgments.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Regional Human Rights Court Decisions

During the year there were 553 new complaints filed against the state with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The ECHR dealt with a total of 1,052 cases against Slovakia during the year, declaring 694 to be inadmissible. In the 21 admissible cases on which the ECHR ruled in 2011, the court found one or more violations of the European Convention on Human Rights in 19. The court found a total of 28 violations of the state's commitments under the convention, including one violation involving inhuman or degrading treatment, 12 regarding the right to liberty and security, two regarding the right to a fair trial, five regarding the length of proceedings, one involving nonexecution of a court decision, two regarding the right of respect for private and family life, one involving freedom of expression, three regarding the right to an effective remedy, and one involving the prohibition of discrimination.

In November the ECHR ruled in favor of a Romani woman who alleged she had been sterilized in 2000 without her full consent. She was awarded 31,000 euros (\$40,300) in damages. The court found that the plaintiff was not fully informed about her health condition, the proposed sterilization, and available alternatives. The court also found that the medical personnel left the plaintiff no option but to agree to the procedure and that the law at the time did not sufficiently protect the plaintiff's reproductive health as a Romani woman. At year's end, three sterilization-related cases against Slovakia were pending in the ECHR.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Citizens have unrestricted access to an independent judiciary to bring lawsuits in civil matters, including human rights violations. Courts that hear civil cases were subject to the same delays as criminal courts and were often perceived by the public as corrupt. Administrative remedies are available in certain cases. The National Center for Human Rights has the authority to provide mediation for cases of discrimination and to represent claimants in court.

The Office of the Public Protector of Rights (ombudsman) determined that 176 of the approximately 2,517 complaints received in 2010 constituted violations of the rights of the claimants, most of which involved delays in court proceedings. The ombudsman's office continued providing free legal services throughout the country by holding traveling legal clinics in cooperation with individual municipalities.

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

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

Police must present a warrant before conducting a search or within 24 hours afterwards.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

Status of Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of speech and press. While the government generally respected these rights in practice, in some instances it limited these rights to impede criticism and limit actions of groups it considers extremist. The law prohibits the defamation of nationalities, punishable by up to three years in prison, and denying the Holocaust, which carries a sentence of six months to three years in prison.

Freedom of Press: The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views, although media, especially state-owned television, were subject to political influence. In January STV (television) and Radio SRo were merged into a single entity, Radio and Television Slovakia, which, along with TASR news agency, were the two public media outlets that received state funding for specific programming.

Libel Laws/National Security: Criminal penalties for defamation exist under the penal code but were rarely used. In June the National Council amended a 2008 media law that required publishers to print responses to any “statement of fact that impinges on the honor, dignity, or privacy of a natural person, or the name or good reputation of a legal entity.” The amendment, which went into effect September 1, significantly eased this “right of reply” provision and strengthened the notion that public officials deserved greater scrutiny in their work.

Members of the government, judiciary, and political elites targeted the press in a number of civil defamation lawsuits, which often required the press to pay large sums of money. However, the number of cases and damages sought was lower than in previous years. The International Press Institute and other observers

expressed concern that this financial risk could still lead to media self-censorship. Courts made multiple decisions in favor of political elites, despite compelling evidence of the veracity of the reports for which media outlets were being sued.

In July 2010 the Bratislava District Court ruled against former prime minister Fico in his case against Petit Press, the parent company of the leading daily *SME*, alleging damages incurred by publication of a cartoon on its opinion page. Fico's appeal of the verdict was dismissed by the appellate court in November.

In November the Bratislava Regional Court issued a final verdict in a libel case filed by former prime minister Fico against the economic weekly *Trend*. The court ordered the weekly to apologize to Fico for publishing a photograph of him on the front page of its magazine with the caption "Thief of Future Pensions." The front page and related articles, published in 2007, criticized intended changes to pension legislation under Fico's government that *Trend* claimed would decrease the value of private pensions. The court ruled that the articles breached Fico's right to "protect his personality" and ordered that the apology be published on *Trend's* front page.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mails or Internet chat rooms; however, police monitored Web sites hosting hate speech and attempted to arrest or fine the authors. Individuals and groups could otherwise engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

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

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of assembly, and the government generally respected this right in practice.

Freedom of Association

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of association, and the government generally respected this right in practice. The law requires organizations to pay a nominal registration fee and stipulates that those registering as foundations have “substantial” financial resources of 6,000 euros (\$7,800).

c. Freedom of Religion

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

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

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has an established system for providing some protection to refugees. While the asylum law gives officials broad authority to reject applicants based on technical errors in their applications, in practice this was not a problem.

The government provided “subsidiary protection,” which is granted if asylum is denied and the individual is not eligible for deportation to his or her country of origin due to administrative problems or fear for the person's safety. In 2011, 91 persons were granted subsidiary protection, compared with 57 in 2010. The Alien and Border Police can also grant “tolerated residency.” During the first half of the year, 128 individuals were granted tolerated residency, compared with 160 during the first half of 2010.

A criticism of the subsidiary protection system related to the periods for which it was granted. The law requires aliens with subsidiary protection to renew their status every year, which in practice, given procedural requirements, meant renewing their status every 10 months. Critics argued that the uncertainty created

by the relatively short periods of temporary residence granted each time could cause problems with finding stable employment.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: Consistent with EU legislation, the country employs the concept of a safe country of origin and transit, but authorities are required to ensure that the well-being of individual asylum seekers is not threatened if they are deported to a non-EU “safe third country.” Slovakia has been criticized for including on its “safe third country” list countries where sexual acts between same-sex individuals are illegal. The Alien and Border Police have been criticized for lacking the information necessary to determine whether a given country would be safe for persons facing deportation there.

Nonrefoulement: In April 2010 the government extradited an Algerian national and alleged terrorist to Algeria despite an interim measure issued by the ECHR that specifically stated that he should not be expelled to Algeria until he exhausted all legal avenues for his asylum claim, including the Constitutional Court. The Algerian was extradited before he had time to appeal to the Constitutional Court.

Access to Basic Services: The government operated a network of facilities for refugees and asylum seekers. The Border and Alien Police operated several holding facilities for individuals caught illegally crossing the border. The migration office operated several facilities throughout the country, including a reception facility where asylum seekers spent approximately 30 days following the filing of their asylum claim, before being transferred to other facilities while their application was processed and eventually into integration facilities. A reception facility in Humenne provided accommodation and services for transit asylum seekers en route to asylum residency in a third country. NGOs had access to refugees and asylum seekers residing in Interior Ministry facilities and participated in the provision of social and support services. NGOs also provided legal support and representation in the asylum process.

There were reports of aliens granted subsidiary protection having limited access to healthcare. Health insurance documentation was issued directly to aliens with subsidiary protection by the Ministry of Interior. This created some instances of confusion among health providers who often did not know which medical procedures would be covered by the policy.

Temporary Protection: The provision of temporary protection is defined by European Commission Directive 2001/55, regarding the minimum standards for

providing temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons. There was no use of this provision in 2011.

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

The constitution and the law provide citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections based on universal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent elections: The most recent parliamentary elections were held in June 2010. Citizens voted six political parties into the National Council in free and fair elections. Four of the six parties formed the governing coalition, led by the country's first female prime minister, Iveta Radicova.

Communal elections were held in November 2010. The elections were accompanied by allegations of vote buying, particularly in Romani communities in Eastern Slovakia, and other infractions. Consequently, 20 councils were required to repeat their elections in June.

Participation of Women and Minorities: There were 24 women in the 150-seat National Council, 41 women on the 81-seat Supreme Court, and two women in the 15-member cabinet, including the prime minister.

Because the law prohibits collecting information on ethnicity, it was not possible to determine the precise number of members of minority groups in government. The party Most-Hid ("bridge"), which promotes greater cooperation between the country's Hungarian minority and ethnic Slovaks, held 14 seats in the National Council, seven of which were occupied by ethnic Hungarians. Some ethnic Romani individuals and parties were successful in gaining representation at the local and regional levels. However, Roma were consistently underrepresented in government service, and no Roma sat on the National Council.

Section 4. Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, the government did not always implement the law effectively, and some officials engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were also concerns, particularly

in the business sector, about the “privatization of justice,” and some NGO governance experts reported that court proceedings had become a contest of vested interests and persons with connections to the judicial powers. While the country has financial disclosure laws, compliance was the exception rather than the rule. The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators also reflected that corruption remained a problem.

Instances of police corruption and misconduct were also reported, primarily the extortion of bribes during traffic stops. Headed by a director who reports directly to the interior minister, the Bureau for the Inspection Service of the Police Corps is responsible for investigating police abuses. Cases may be initiated by the inspection service, the police corps, the police department's organized crime unit, and individual citizens, among others.

International companies reported multimillion-dollar losses that they settled out of court simply for lack of a credible legal remedy, and cronyism was cited as the country's primary competitive disadvantage. For example, the government faced allegations of cronyism in connection with a rental agreement, overseen by the finance minister, for tax office space in the eastern city of Kosice. The company that won the tender to rent space to the Finance Ministry was owned by an official of the Slovak Democratic Christian Union (SDKU), the party to which the finance minister belonged. Following public complaints over perceived cronyism, the tender was readvertised several times. The tender was ultimately awarded to the same SDKU-affiliated company.

Possible weaknesses in the electronic auction system revealed other possible cases of cronyism, including one involving the sale of platinum by the State Material Reserves, a government body that controls the use and sale of raw materials. The State Material Reserves sold via electronic auction special platinum sieves for a price far below their market value to a company allegedly linked to politicians. Newswires reported the auction was not announced properly and that the company made its bid literally one second before the bidding closed. Although the prime minister announced that the cabinet would do everything it could to invalidate the contract, the government's actions were limited, because the sieves were sold immediately afterward by the purchasing company.

In both of the aforementioned cases, mid-level government officials were forced to resign, but no other legal consequences ensued. The government proposed a legislative amendment aimed at narrowing the space for the manipulation of electronic auctions and rental agreements as means of financing political parties.

In December a leaked document (code named “Gorilla”), allegedly originating with the Intelligence Services, appeared to reveal corrupt practices between business interests and political parties in 2005-06. The investigations of, and public reaction to, the file and its circumstances continued at year’s end.

Following its formation in July 2010, the government launched its reform agenda by requiring online disclosure of all contracts, invoices, and financial transactions involving public funds and introducing electronic auctions as a mandatory form of procurement. However, the government has not prosecuted even the most egregious cases of corruption that had emerged under its predecessors.

In April 2010 the European Commission formally questioned whether the winner of the National Highway Company’s (NDS) tender to build an electronic toll-collection system had enjoyed an “unfair advantage.” The NDS had awarded the tender to the highest bidder, SanToll-Ibertax, a Slovak entity, for 852 million euros (\$1.1 billion). The case was pending before the European Court of Justice at year’s end.

In May 2010 Slovak investigators met their foreign counterparts to discuss their findings in the investigation of the sale of Slovak surplus carbon dioxide emission quotas that might have resulted in a loss of at least 40 million euros (\$52 million). The case was pending at year’s end.

The Ministry of Interior is responsible for developing the government's overall strategy for combating corruption, with a specific focus on investigation and enforcement. The Special Court is responsible for most prosecution efforts. The general prosecutor, who is appointed by the National Council and independent of the executive and judicial branches, also plays a leading role in prosecuting corruption. The Government Office of the Slovak Republic, which oversees the state administration and answers to the prime minister, also plays a role in developing anticorruption legislation and regulations.

In June the governing coalition elected a new prosecutor general, Jozef Centes, to fill the post that had remained vacant since the previous prosecutor general completed his term in February. The vote was mired in political and procedural complications, resulting in several rounds of voting before the final June vote. Since that final vote, however, President Ivan Gasparovic has refused to appoint Centes to his elected post, claiming the need to wait for a pending Constitutional Court decision on the legality of the vote. President Gasparovic also said that he was not convinced that Centes would be proper for the position, based on his

perception of Centes' previous actions and decisions as deputy prosecutor general. The media and the governing coalition criticized the president for his inaction, asserting that he is legally obliged to appoint elected candidates and does not have the right to evaluate Centes' personality beyond the criteria stipulated by the constitution. Gasparovic countered such criticisms by arguing that the constitution does not set any specific deadline for appointing elected candidates.

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. Most NGOs were independent, although the Slovak National Center for Human Rights receives its budget from the National Council and was thus semi-independent. Government officials were generally cooperative, although NGOs reported that at times government officials seemed to view their activities with suspicion or mistrust.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The country has an 11-member parliamentary Human Rights Committee. The committee held regular sessions during the year but was not particularly active on Roma-related legislation.

In March the government created the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society, an advisory body in matters related to strengthening engagement by citizens and their position in relation to the state. The government also has a committee for nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations.

The government's Council on Human Rights, National Minorities, and Gender Equality, headed by one of the deputy prime ministers, fulfills an advisory role on human rights issues, and consists of state administration and civil society representatives. In March the council set up several committees as focal points for specific human rights issues. The council held three sessions during the year, but most of its activities were devoted to procedural and administrative matters. The council may issue statements or recommendations on legislative issues relevant to human rights.

The office of the ombudsman was headed by Pavel Kandrak, who submits an annual report on human rights problems to the president. The annual report for the period February 2010 to March 2011 outlined the ombudsman's areas of focus,

including court delays, children's rights, and procedural shortcomings by institutions. For the most part, the ombudsman's office did not comment on Roma issues, serious problems in the judiciary, or other human rights violations. In general the ombudsman's work was not subject to executive interference. However, human rights activists did not consider his office to be very effective.

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

The constitution and the law prohibit discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status; the government made efforts to enforce these prohibitions in practice. All government agencies are required to create special favorable conditions for groups who are victims of discrimination, including but not limited to, employment, education, and vocational training.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law prohibits rape, including spousal rape. Although the government enforced the law effectively, rape was an underreported problem according to NGOs and academics. During the year 150 rapes and 542 cases of sexual abuse were reported. Rape victims had access to shelters and counseling offered by NGOs and government-funded programs.

Domestic violence against women continued to be a problem. While the law prohibits domestic violence, it was widespread, and activists claimed that the government did not enforce the law effectively. A joint study carried out by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family and the Public Policy Institute concluded that one in five women was a victim of domestic violence. The law specifically prohibits suspected offenders from reentering the victim's home for 48 hours after an incident was reported. As of November authorities had recorded 321 cases of abuse of a member of household during the year. The law provides stricter sentences for violence directed toward members of the same household and allows for continued criminal prosecution even when a spouse drops charges. Domestic violence is punishable by two to 12 years' imprisonment. According to local NGOs, domestic violence often was underreported due to the social stigma associated with being a victim; crime statistics did not adequately reflect the extent of the problem.

Under a national action plan to combat violence against women for 2009-12, government ministries and local authorities were tasked with increasing awareness

about domestic violence through public media campaigns and the training of health practitioners to identify domestic violence victims.

Sexual Harassment: The law defines sexual harassment as unlawful discrimination. There were few statistics available to measure the frequency or severity of the problem.

Reproductive Rights: The government recognized the basic right of couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children. Contraception was widely available, but the costs must be covered by the individual, not the public health services. According to NGOs, the high cost of oral contraception in the country and the lack of public subsidization constituted a significant barrier to access. According to the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), 66 percent of married women between the ages of 15 and 49 used modern methods of contraception. Between the ages of 15 and 18, women must have the approval of their parents and gynecologist to obtain a prescription for oral contraception. Child mortality rates were very low. According to the PRB, 100 percent of births were attended by skilled attendants. The law on public health care coverage provides comprehensive reproductive health services for women.

Sexual education is offered at all levels of schools, and the government's goal is to reduce unwanted youth pregnancies by 50 percent. However, NGOs noted that the quality of sexual education was very low, and the subject is not mandatory. The country has a low incidence of HIV/AIDS infection. Women and men were treated equally for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Discrimination: Women and men are equal under the law, including family law, property law, and in the judicial system; however, discrimination against women remained a problem in practice. Although women are legally protected from discrimination in the labor market, NGOs reported that many women were dismissed from their jobs upon becoming pregnant. The Government Council on Human Rights includes a committee on gender equality. However, the committee only held its first session in July, and at year's end it had not dealt yet with substantive gender-related issues. The National Center for Human Rights continued to receive a limited number of gender discrimination cases; underreporting, however, remained a concern. The Ministry of Labor operated a gender equality department. In the wake of organizational restructuring in August, the department had not yet begun to implement policy initiatives. According to the statistical office, in 2010 the gender pay gap was 24.7 percent. According to outside experts and the Ministry of Labor, the reported wage differences were due

to low participation of women in higher-paid management positions and large numbers of women working in low-paid occupations such as education, healthcare, social work, and light industry. The Ministry of Labor also noted that the wage gap was not due to differences in base wages, but to bonuses, which were provided in a less transparent manner.

NGOs continued to advocate increased opportunities for the political participation of women, who were underrepresented in almost all spheres of public life. During the year women accounted for 16.7 percent of senior government officials, 15.3 percent of the National Council, and a similar proportion of officials in regional bodies. According to the statistical office, women constituted 44.6 percent of the workforce in 2010.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is acquired by birth to at least one citizen parent, regardless of where the child is born. Each domestic birth is recorded at the local vital statistics office. If the child is born in a foreign country, the foreign birth certificate must be notarized, translated, and submitted to a special vital records office administered by the Ministry of Interior.

Education: While education is universal, free through the postsecondary level, and compulsory until the age of 15, Romani children exhibited a lower attendance rate than other children. Although Romani children comprised only 15 percent of the total number of children under the age of 16, they were disproportionately enrolled in “special” schools for children with mental disabilities, despite diagnostic scores that were often within the average range of intellectual capacity. In many special schools, the registered student body was nearly 100 percent Roma, according to NGO reports.

The government did not provide data on the percentage of these students who were Roma, as it does not collect data on ethnicity. As of September, 23,951 students were enrolled in special schools and 10,510 enrolled in special classes within regular schools in the public education system. According to a September 2010 report by Amnesty International, Romani children comprised 85 percent of the students in special schools. Regular schools in the same communities had very few Romani students, especially at the secondary school level. A special school education did not provide Romani children the knowledge or certification necessary to pursue higher education.

NGOs continued to implement educational programs through community centers operated by local councils to reduce the number of Romani children who were enrolled in special schools or special classes. These programs included preschool and after-school work to improve basic motor and other skills and habits in neglected children, thereby avoiding their referral to diagnostic centers and ultimately special schools. Social workers also worked with parents in socially excluded families to help them understand the importance of attending a regular school, as Romani children were often placed in special schools with the explicit agreement or at the request of parents themselves. These projects, however, depended on the good will, initiative, and budgetary flexibility of local councils and NGOs and have not yet achieved wide coverage. Reportedly the extra funding that special schools or classes received for each student, compared to regular schools or classes, may have led to an unnecessary number of children, and particularly Romani children, being enrolled in such schools and classes.

Romani children from socially excluded communities also faced segregation in regular educational establishments. There were reports of schools having predominantly or almost exclusively Romani pupils from several surrounding municipalities. This meant that, in practice, non-Romani children often attended a different school than Roma from the same village. In some predominantly Romani municipalities the segregation of Roma and non-Roma in schools was further entrenched by the parents of non-Romani children, who preferred that their children attend a different school with non-Roma. There were reports of local councils' intentionally assigning certain schools to mostly Romani areas, thereby concentrating Romani students in them.

In a landmark decision in December, a district court ruled that segregation of Romani children in a school in eastern Slovakia was illegal. The school had asserted that Romani children were separated due to hygiene concerns and their lack of basic skills, not their ethnicity. The school further claimed that segregation did, in fact, benefit socially excluded children, as teachers could give them special attention. While acknowledging the human rights dimension, the media gave extensive space to arguments supporting segregation. The school's appeal of the district court decision was pending.

In August 2010 the government adopted a program calling for an end to segregation of Romani children in special schools. A 2008 law had addressed some of the problems through reform and new programs, including attendance-based financial incentives. It also provided for the creation of "zero year" classes, which offer one year of state-funded prekindergarten education to children from

socially disadvantaged families. During the 2009-10 school year, 3,134 children participated in the “zero year” program, an increase of 25 percent over the previous year. NGO observers expressed the view that the program was a successful model but that it needed to be expanded further to be effective.

Child Abuse: Child abuse remained an underreported problem according to child advocates. A number of children’s foundations operated programs for abused children.

The government's National Action Plan for Children for 2009-12, funded through the government budget, focused on training social workers and other professionals dealing with children, as well as public education campaigns against corporal punishment and sexual abuse of children.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: Child prostitution is prohibited; however, according to the UN, it remained a problem in the poorest Romani settlements. Most of the perpetrators were other Roma. The criminal code establishes 15 as the minimum age for consensual sex. Rape and sexual violence carry penalties of five to 25 years’ imprisonment, depending upon the injury or harm caused the victim and the motive.

The production, distribution, or possession of child pornography is also a crime; the penalties for breaking the law range from two to 20 years’ imprisonment.

Institutionalized Children: As of June there were approximately 5,000 children in institutional care, the majority of whom were Roma. Of the 4,100 children in long-term care, nearly 800 were with foster families, a proportion that increased steadily during the previous decade. According to law children under the age of three must be cared for by foster families rather than being placed in orphanages. For older children, orphanages served as long-term care facilities rather than short-term residences. Activists claimed that orphans had difficulty integrating into society at age 18 and faced an elevated risk of falling victim to trafficking. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs operated small-group homes for young adults aging out of foster care.

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

Anti-Semitism

Jewish community leaders and 2001 census data estimated the size of the Jewish community at approximately 3,000 persons.

Organized neo-Nazi groups, with an estimated 500 active members and several thousand additional sympathizers, promoted anti-Semitism and harassed and attacked other minorities. Jewish community leaders expressed concern that some media coverage in the country exhibited anti-Semitic undertones.

The criminal code provides penalties of two to six years' imprisonment for membership in an extremist group and three to eight for production of extremist materials.

While direct denial of the Holocaust was uncommon, expressions of support for the World War II-era Slovak fascist state, which deported tens of thousands of Slovak Jews, Roma, and others to their deaths in concentration camps, occurred during the year.

At the beginning of the year, the Rajec local council reapproved the placement of a statue of Ferdinand Durcansky in the town square. Durcansky was a controversial figure who played a key role during the initial phases of the World War II collaborationist Slovak state. Durcansky was behind numerous pieces of anti-Semitic legislation that introduced Aryanization and the exclusion of Jews from economic and social life. The placing of the statue was subject to extensive criticism, suggesting that council members lacked sufficient information about Durcansky's anti-Semitic activities. The Rajec local council justified its decision on the grounds that Durcansky was primarily a champion of Slovak independence and not directly responsible for the deportation of Jews in 1942.

The People's Party-Our Slovakia (LS-NS) group, which expressed support for, and used the symbols of, the World War II-era fascist Slovak state, organized numerous marches and gatherings throughout the year. In March approximately 250 persons gathered in front of the presidential palace in Bratislava to commemorate the 72nd anniversary of the founding of the wartime fascist Slovak state in 1939 and to pay respect to its president, Jozef Tiso, who was executed for treason after the war.

The Nation's Memory Institute (UPN) provided access to previously undisclosed records of the Slovak regimes from 1939-89, prompting efforts in the past by

politicians such as the far-right Slovak National Party Chairman Jan Slota to abolish it. The UPN supervisory board is led by Arpad Tarnoczy, former chairman of the Union of Anti-Communist Resistance (ZPKO) and known for his pro-Tiso sentiments. ZPKO published a newsletter, *Svedectvo* (Testimony), that Jewish community officials criticized for praising the wartime fascist state. Jewish community leaders asserted that UPN publications about the 1939-45 period appeared to express sympathy for prominent regime figures, especially when portrayed as victims of the subsequent communist regime.

The Ministry of Interior pursued violent extremist groups, and police monitored Web sites posting hate speech.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or the provision of other state services. Persons with disabilities were able to vote and participate in civic affairs. In practice, however, experts reported that access to buildings and higher education remained a problem, and laws to provide assistance to students with disabilities have not been implemented with regard to school facilities or educational materials. There were reports that persons with severe physical disabilities received less than the minimum wage in some instances.

NGOs reported limited resources for psychiatric care outside of Bratislava, a lack of community-based psychiatric care, and an absence of mechanisms to monitor human rights violations against persons with such disabilities. Psychiatric institutions and hospitals, which fall under the purview of the Ministry of Healthcare, continued to use cage beds to restrain patients. The law prohibits both physical and nonphysical restraints in social care homes, managed by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family. Several NGOs conducted public education campaigns on mental illness and worked cooperatively with the health ministry.

Legislation requiring television stations to provide voiceover for blind viewers has not been implemented by any Slovak broadcaster. While by law mandatory

standards for access to buildings are defined, NGOs noted they were not fully implemented, although access to privately owned buildings improved more rapidly than access to state buildings.

The Government Council on Human Rights, National Minorities, and Gender Equality operated a committee for persons with disabilities. The council served as a governmental advisory body and NGOs working on disability issues are represented. The committee's first session, held in June, dealt with procedural and status issues.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Government and societal discrimination against Roma and individuals of non-European ethnicity was common. Roma were the second largest ethnic minority with a population of 90,000 according to the 2001 census. Experts estimated that the Romani population was actually between 350,000 and 500,000. The discrepancy was attributed to Roma identifying themselves as Hungarians or Slovaks. Results of the most recent census, conducted in May, were not available at year's end.

NGOs reported racially motivated attacks on minorities (Roma and others) throughout the year, but authorities' investigation of such incidents varied by jurisdiction. During the year four cases of racially motivated attacks resulting in bodily harm were reported. Roma were singled-out for violence, and police detained numerous individuals for racially motivated attacks against Roma.

Several non-Romani minorities as well as foreigners were also victims of racially motivated attacks. In July a small group of right-wing extremist sympathizers verbally and physically attacked a man of African descent in Bratislava. The man's girlfriend called police, but because he suffered only minor injuries, the attack was handled as an administrative offense. Eventually, criminal proceedings were initiated on the grounds that the attackers were part of a group that supported the repression of rights and freedoms.

Extreme rightist, nationalist, and neo-Nazi groups continued to hold events designed to intimidate minority groups. Dressed in uniforms similar to those of the Hlinka Guards (the fascist wartime militia), the groups' members held marches and rallies to commemorate the wartime fascist state and to spread messages of intolerance against ethnic and religious minorities. In the first nine months of the year, the LS-NS organized 13 public gatherings throughout the country. In

addition to commemorating historical events and figures associated with the World War II Slovak fascist state, the LS-NS organized anti-Roma public gatherings in locations where there were tensions between Roma and non-Romani population. While the nature of the gatherings was often thinly disguised under such euphemisms as fighting for social justice, security, or equal application of the law to all citizens, their anti-Romani character was sometimes more open, as during a protest against "gypsy extremists and gypsy parasitic criminality" that was held in Zilina in April.

An alleged 2006 attack and subsequent perjury charges against Hedviga Malinova, an ethnic Hungarian university student in Nitra, continued to draw media attention. Two young men allegedly physically assaulted Malinova after hearing her speak Hungarian. The district prosecutor discontinued the investigation after two weeks, concluding that Malinova had lied about the attack. In October 2010 the National Council's Human Rights Committee convened a hearing to question the prosecutor general about delays in the case. In November the ECHR accepted an agreement between Malinova and the government and subsequently dropped the case pending before it. The agreement provided for the government, among others, to express regret over Malinova's case through a press release. As of year's end, the press release had not been published.

Widespread discrimination against Roma continued in employment, education, healthcare, housing, and loan practices.

Roma continued to face discrimination in accessing a wide variety of commercial services, including restaurants, hair salons, and public transportation. NGOs asserted that the cases of discrimination reported to organizations operating legal help lines represented only a fraction of discrimination cases in practice. In many cases, Romani individuals from socially excluded communities did not report discrimination and simply accepted refusal of access to commercial services as an everyday reality.

Activists frequently alleged that employers refused to hire Roma, with an estimated 80-90 percent of Roma from socially excluded communities being unemployed. NGOs working with Roma from socially excluded communities reported that, while job applications by Roma were often successful during the initial phase of selection, in a majority of cases, these applicants were excluded once the employer found out they were Roma. Cases of discrimination in hiring were rarely pursued through the courts.

Local authorities and groups forced evictions of Romani inhabitants or blocked them from obtaining construction permits or purchasing land. There were reports of local residents purchasing property to prevent it from being acquired by Romani families.

During 2010 several municipalities, mainly in eastern Slovakia, built walls to create a physical barrier between Romani and non-Romani communities. Local councils often justified such walls as measures to reduce theft and criminality, reduce disruption of the peace, or reduce noise. The walls were criticized for further segregating Romani communities and limiting their access to communal facilities.

NGOs reported persistent segregation of Romani women in maternity wards in several hospitals in Eastern Slovakia, where they were accommodated separately from non-Romani women and not permitted to use the same bathrooms and toilets. Hospitals claimed that women were grouped according to their levels of hygiene and adaptability, not along racial lines.

Romani children from socially excluded communities faced educational segregation, both in terms of their disproportionate enrollment in special schools but also in schools in some municipalities, which were predominately attended by either Romani or non-Romani children (see section 6, Children).

Anti-Romani sentiments permeated public and political discourse. NGOs engaged in monitoring activities noted that media reports concerning Roma overwhelmingly focused on crime or other problems associated with socially excluded communities. Political discourse also contained sentiments or policies which discriminated against Roma, both in the form of derogatory remarks, such as during election campaigns (see section 3), or through often-populist policies that placed Roma at a disadvantage.

Following the 2010 parliamentary elections, the Ministry of Interior created the position of Advisor on Roma Criminality. Activists criticized the decision for implying causality between ethnicity and criminality. The ministry was also criticized for populist policies that claimed to get tough on criminality in areas bordering socially excluded Romani settlements but failed to address the causes of criminality or tackle crime issues within excluded settlements.

The law prohibits defamation of nationalities in public discourse; however, authorities enforced this law only when other offenses, such as assault or

destruction of property, were also committed. There were instances during the year of public officials at every level defaming minorities and making derogatory comments about Roma. Inflammatory speech by government officials also continued to increase tensions between ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Slovaks.

The law provides for the imposition of fines on government institutions, civil servants, and legal entities that did not provide information required by law in Slovak. The law authorizes the Ministry of Culture to levy fines of up to 5,000 euros (\$6,500) for noncompliance. Members of the ethnic Hungarian minority criticized the provision as discriminatory and a restriction on their right to free speech.

During the year the government made efforts to address violence and discrimination against Roma and other minorities, although some observers expressed concern that judges lacked sufficient training in relevant laws and court cases involving extremism and often did not handle cases properly. The government continued to implement its action plan against xenophobia and intolerance, which included monitoring of extremist activities by a special police unit. A commission consisting of NGOs, police, and government officials advised police on minority issues.

During the year the government made only limited progress on its national minority strategy, which incorporated a wide range of education, employment, housing, and social integration policy recommendations from the Romani advocacy community. While the government allocated approximately 200 million euros (\$260 million) of EU structural funds to projects addressing the needs of the Romani community, NGOs complained that the funds had not been successfully distributed and the government lacked a comprehensive approach to Romani integration.

In August 2010 the government appointed Miroslav Pollak, a non-Roma with extensive NGO experience in social work, as the plenipotentiary for Romani affairs. The plenipotentiary maintained five regional offices to supervise the implementation of governmental policy on Romani issues, support infrastructure development, and cooperate with municipalities and villages to improve interaction between Romani and non-Romani populations. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family assigned specially trained social workers to Romani settlements to assist with government paperwork and to advocate the importance of education and preventive health care. The Government Council on Human Rights, National Minorities, and Gender Inequality operated a Committee for the

Prevention and Elimination of Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism, and Other Forms of Intolerance.

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

According to gay rights advocates, prejudice and official and societal discrimination persisted, although no official cases were available for citation.

In May 2010 the first gay pride parade in Bratislava was marked by attacks by skinhead groups, forcing the organizers to alter the route. The government blamed the organizers for failing to provide adequate protection for the parade. A second Bratislava gay pride parade in June demonstrated more effective cooperation between police and organizers, and no major incidents were reported.

A statement of support for the parade jointly published by several Bratislava-based embassies was met with substantial criticism in the media and from politicians. Apart from the Slovak National Party (SNS), known for its inflammatory remarks about minorities, members of the governing Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) as well as former KDH members criticized the parade and the public support offered by the embassies. SNS chairman Jan Slota stated, “Just like other sick people, I view these people with a certain respect, because no one chooses their illness. Someone who has cancer certainly does not go around celebrating that fact. Neither do they march in the streets. These people are sick. I am not taking away their space to live. But it bothers me that they present it on the streets. It’s a sick performance.”

Organizations for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons operated without impediments and lobbied for legal rights, particularly equal rights in nonheterosexual partnerships.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

There were no reports of discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides workers with the right to form and join independent unions of their choice except in the armed forces. The law also provides for unions to conduct their activities without interference, including the right to organize and bargain collectively, and workers exercised these rights in practice. The law provides unions the right to strike with advance notice when collective bargaining fails to reach an agreement or in support of other striking employees' demands (solidarity strike). The unions generally exercised these rights in practice without restrictions. The law prohibits dismissing workers legally participating in strikes; however, strikers were not ensured protection if a strike was considered illegal or unofficial. Civil servants in essential services and members of the military may not strike.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred. Police are responsible for investigating forced labor.

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law provides for the protection of children from exploitation in the workplace; however, there were reports that Romani children in some settlements were exploited for commercial sex. NGOs reported that most Romani victims, including children with disabilities, were exploited by family members or other Roma.

The minimum age for employment is 15, although younger children may perform light work in cultural or artistic performances, sports events, or advertising activities if it does not affect their health, safety, or schooling. The National Labor Inspectorate and Public Health Office must approve, determine the maximum hours, and set conditions for work by children younger than 15. Children younger than 16 may not work more than 30 hours per week; children who are 16 and 17 are limited to 37.5 hours per week. Children under the age of 18 are not allowed to work underground, work overtime, or perform labor inappropriate for their age or health.

District inspection units received and investigated child labor complaints. If a unit determined that a child labor law or regulation had been broken, it turned the case

over to the National Labor Inspectorate. Enforcement was consistent across all communities.

Child labor in the form of begging was a problem in some communities; there were also isolated reports of children forced into prostitution, often by family members.

d. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The minimum wage was 317 euros (\$412) per month. The minimum living standard (an estimate of the poverty income level) was 190 euros per month (\$247).

The law mandates a maximum workweek of 48 hours including overtime, with 30-minute breaks after six hours of work or after four hours for employees younger than 18, and rest periods of at least 12 hours between shifts. Employees who work under conditions that endanger their health and safety are entitled to “relaxation” leave in addition to standard leave. Trade unions, local employment offices, and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family monitored observance of these laws, and authorities effectively enforced them.

The law establishes health and safety standards that the office of labor safety generally enforced. Workers have the right to refuse to work in situations that endanger their health and safety and may file complaints against employers in such situations. In August 2010, 20 miners died in an underground methane gas explosion in Handlova. The leadership of the mine remained unchanged. Three teams, one from the district mining authority in Prievidza, the second from the Ministry of Economy and Construction, and the third from the police, investigated the explosion but did not release their findings during the year.

Approximately 290 labor inspectors had responsibility for the entire country and were charged with investigating companies for compliance with the law. The Ministry of Labor may impose financial penalties on companies found to be noncompliant. If there are safety and security concerns at a workplace, the inspectors can require companies to stop using equipment that poses risks until safety conditions are met. During the year the law on labor inspection was amended to increase the rights of labor inspectors in cases where “serious misconduct” is found at workplaces. In such cases labor inspectors can impose additional financial penalties on noncompliant companies.