

# **DOMINICA 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Dominica is a multiparty parliamentary democracy. The prime minister is the head of government. The House of Assembly elects the president, who serves as the head of state. In the 2019 election, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit's Dominica Labour Party prevailed over the opposition United Workers Party by a margin of 18 seats to three. Election observers from the Organization of American States, United Nations, and Caribbean Community found the election generally free and fair.

The Ministry of Justice, Immigration, and National Security oversees the police, the country's only security force. The Financial Intelligence Unit reports to the Ministry of Legal Affairs; some of its officers have arrest authority. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were no credible reports that members of the security forces committed significant abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: an alleged unlawful killing, the criminalization of libel, and the criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, although there were no reported cases of enforcement during the year.

The government took steps to prosecute officials who committed human rights abuses, but some cases remained unresolved. During the year the government did not open an official investigation into allegations of corruption.

### **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

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

There was one report that the government or its agents allegedly committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. In July the superintendent of police was charged with the murder of Kerwin Prosper, who died on February 15 while in police custody. The family alleged that while in police custody, Prosper was severely

beaten by officers, ultimately causing his death. At year's end several additional police officers remained under investigation for Prosper's death.

## **b. Disappearance**

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

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

The constitution prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them. There were no reports that impunity in the security forces was a significant problem.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

There were some reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns. In September the general secretary of the Dominica Public Service Union reported to media that the Dominica State Prison, the country's sole prison, was understaffed.

**Physical Conditions:** There were no major concerns in the prison and detention centers regarding physical conditions or inmate abuse.

By September the number of COVID cases in the prison had exceeded the quarantine unit's capacity. On September 28, employees of the prison conducted a protest action to express their concern regarding medical care and COVID prevention efforts for prisoners and staff.

**Administration:** Authorities investigated credible allegations of mistreatment.

**Independent Monitoring:** An independent committee composed of the chief welfare officer, justices of the peace, chaplains, youth welfare officers, social workers, and senior retired civil servants visited the prison monthly to investigate complaints and monitor prison and detention center conditions. Prisoners could request meetings with the superintendent to lodge complaints. The government

permitted visits by independent human rights observers.

**Improvements:** During the year the prison created a quarantine unit with a capacity of 20 beds to safeguard other inmates from COVID-19. Prison officials upgraded facilities to include two virtual courtrooms and an area for visitors to speak with inmates by telephone. The prison expanded its carpentry training program for inmates. Additional fencing was constructed.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

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

#### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

Police used warrants issued by a judicial authority to apprehend persons. The law requires that authorities inform detainees of the reasons for their arrest within 24 hours and bring them to court within 72 hours. Authorities generally observed these requirements. If authorities are unable to bring a detainee to court within the requisite period, the person may be released and rearrested later. There was a functioning bail system. Criminal detainees had prompt access to counsel and family members. The state provides a lawyer for indigent defendants only in murder cases.

**Pretrial Detention:** Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem due to judicial staff shortages. According to prison management, prisoners remained on remand status for months or even years. An estimated 40 percent of inmates were awaiting trial.

#### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality.

Inadequate prosecutorial and police staffing, outdated legislation, and a lack of

magistrates resulted in backlogs and other problems in the judicial system.

### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Defendants have the right to a presumption of innocence; prompt and detailed information about charges; a trial without undue delay; personal presence at their trial; communication with an attorney of their choice; adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense; free assistance of an interpreter; the ability to challenge prosecution or plaintiff witnesses; present their own witnesses and evidence; not be compelled to testify or confess guilt; and appeal.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

There was an independent, impartial judiciary to which one may bring lawsuits seeking civil remedies for human rights abuses. Individuals and organizations may not appeal adverse domestic decisions to regional human rights courts for a binding decision; however, individuals and organizations may present petitions to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

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

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

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

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

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

press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for members of the media.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** Defamation is a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment or fines. There were no active defamation suits against local journalists. Media representatives reported that public and private threats of lawsuits were made against media outlets and individual reporters, leading to some self-censorship.

### **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority.

### **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

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

### **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

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

Clashes between police and protesters occurred during an April 12 demonstration by a group of bus drivers who blocked a public roadway to advocate against a rise in fuel prices and for COVID-19 stimulus relief. Witnesses reported to media that police used excessive force to break up the demonstrations by firing rubber bullets and beating, kicking, and choking protesters. On July 15, police filed charges of assault, battery, obstruction of justice, and resisting arrest against bus driver Esrome George, alleging George assaulted a member of the police force during the protest. George, who pled not guilty, maintained he was a victim of police

brutality.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

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

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

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. Individuals residing outside the Carib-Kalinago community must apply to the Carib Council for special access if they wish to live in the Kalinago Territory.

### **e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons**

Not Applicable.

### **f. Protection of Refugees**

No information was available on the government's cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provides for granting asylum and refugee status, but the government has not established systems for determining when to grant asylum or protect refugees.

## **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

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

### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** In the 2019 general election, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit's Dominica Labour Party prevailed over the opposition United Workers Party by a margin of 18 seats to three. The Caribbean Community, Organization

of American States, and UN election observers assessed the election as generally free, fair, and transparent.

In February more than 35 organizations were invited to make written submissions as part of an electoral reform process promised by the government. From April 26 to June 9, the public was invited to participate in a nationwide electoral reform survey, and in June the Dominica Business Forum provided recommendations from the private sector and civil society on electoral reform in the country. The opposition political party was consulted during the process. By year's end a final report with electoral reform recommendations remained pending.

On March 9, the Caribbean Court of Justice dismissed an appeal filed by the government on behalf of ruling Dominica Labour Party (DLP) candidates who were successful in the 2014 elections and reinstated complaints filed against them for the charge of treating (providing free food and beverages) and bribery. In May, 12 elected DLP members pleaded not guilty to providing free concerts in the period preceding the 2014 election. On July 9, a magistrate dismissed the case after the director of public prosecution notified the court of her decision to discontinue the matter.

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

## **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government implemented the law inconsistently. According to civil society representatives and members of the political opposition, officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices.

**Corruption:** In April the deputy labor commissioner was charged with nine fraud-related charges over accusations that he forged work permits and documentation for Haitian nationals in the country. The case had not gone to trial

by year's end.

Opposition leadership in the House of Assembly and some opposition-aligned local media raised allegations of corruption within the government, including in the Citizenship by Investment program.

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

Several domestic and international human rights and advocacy organizations generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views.

At the June 24 the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP) regional summit in Venezuela, Prime Minister Skerrit accused nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of being used in attempts to overthrow democratically elected governments and stated, "We have to fight against NGOs to expose them because they are not friends of the peoples of this region."

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** According to the constitution, a parliamentary integrity commissioner has responsibility for investigating complaints against the government.

## **Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses**

### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalizes rape of men and women, including spousal rape, and the government enforced the law. Although the maximum sentence for sexual molestation (rape or incest) is 25 years' imprisonment, the usual sentence was five to seven years. Whenever possible, female police officers handled rape cases involving female victims. Women were reluctant to report domestic violence to police. The only shelter for victims of

gender-based violence remained closed after suffering damage during Hurricane Maria in 2017.

Civil society reported that sexual and domestic violence were common. According to civil society groups, the general population did not acknowledge gender-based violence and domestic violence as problems, but the government recognized these forms of violence as both problematic and prevalent. Although no specific laws criminalize spousal abuse, spouses may bring battery charges against their partner.

The law allows abused persons to appear before a magistrate without an attorney and request a protective order. Some persons requested protective orders.

**Sexual Harassment:** The law does not prohibit sexual harassment. Civil society groups reported it was a pervasive problem.

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

Contraception was widely available. There were no legal barriers to accessing contraception, but some religious beliefs and cultural barriers limited its usage. The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence through the Ministry of Health's Welfare Division and the National Council of Women. Other government departments, including the Bureau of Gender Affairs, Social Welfare Department, Adult Education Division, and Health Services and Housing Division, also assisted victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Survivors of sexual violence could access services from any public hospital, but emergency contraception for survivors of rape and incest was not routinely available.

**Discrimination:** The constitution provides women with the same legal rights as men. The government generally enforced the law effectively, but property deeds continued to be given to heads of households, who were usually men. The law requires equal pay for civil service positions, but not for other positions. Women and men generally received equal salaries for comparable jobs. Women are excluded from working in some industries, including mining, construction, energy, water, and transportation. No laws prohibit gender discrimination or sexual

harassment in employment.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The constitution expressly prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, place of origin, political opinions, color, or creed. There were no reports of governmental or societal violence or discrimination against members of racial, ethnic, or national minorities during the year.

## **Indigenous Peoples**

The population of the Kalinago (Carib) indigenous group was approximately 3,000, most of whom lived in the 3,782-acre Kalinago Territory. The government recognizes their special status, and the Kalinagos' rights are protected in law and practice. The law establishes the Kalinago Territory and assigns management authority over the territory to the local council, which has veto power over new infrastructure projects in the territory. Some societal discrimination against the Kalinago existed, most notably against Kalinago children when they attended schools outside the territory. There was no secondary school inside the territory. During the year the government began or completed construction of more than 100 homes in five different locations for Kalinago residents.

## **Children**

**Birth Registration:** Citizenship is derived by birth within the country's territory or to a citizen parent. Parents received birth certificates on a timely basis. Failure to register births resulted in denial of access to public services except emergency care.

**Child Abuse:** The law prohibits child abuse, but according to the government and civil society, it remained a pervasive problem. The government maintained a Child Abuse Prevention Unit responsible for protecting children from all forms of abuse. The unit supported victims by providing counseling, psychological assessments, and other services such as financial assistance to abused children and to family members.

Civil society representatives noted that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer,

and intersex (LGBTQI+) children were at particular risk of abuse.

Underage children were often required to testify directly in court against their abusers, who were also physically present, instead of providing prerecorded testimony from more private and secure spaces. Additionally, cases sometimes wended through the court system for years, with children repeatedly being required to attend hearings. Publicly available lists of offenders did not exist. Advocates claimed that the justice system discouraged prosecution of child abuse, discouraged victims from seeking justice, and allowed repeat offenders to continue the cycle of abuse.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The legal minimum age for marriage is 18 for both men and women, but marriage is permitted at age 16 with parental consent.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The age of consent for sexual relations is 16. The law prohibits using children for commercial sexual exploitation, including child sex trafficking, and related activity may be prosecuted under laws against prostitution or trafficking. The law protects all persons from “unlawful sexual connection,” rape, procurement for prostitution, and incest. It prohibits sexual intercourse between a child and an adult and increases the penalty to 25 years of imprisonment for an adult who rapes a child whom the adult employs or controls, or to whom the adult pays wages. The law criminalizes behaviors such as voyeurism.

The maximum sentence for sexual intercourse with a person younger than age 14 is 25 years in prison. When victims are ages 14 to 16, the maximum sentence is 14 years.

No laws or regulations explicitly prohibit the use of children in pornography or pornographic performances.

**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 Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child->

[Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html](http://Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html).

## **Anti-Semitism**

There is no organized Jewish community in the country, and there were no reports of discrimination or anti-Semitic acts.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

There were no confirmed reports during the year that Dominica was a source, destination, or transit country for victims of human trafficking.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The law does not specifically prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities. There were no reports of discrimination against persons with disabilities. The government provided partial financial support for a civil society organization focused on advocating for and improving the lives of persons with disabilities.

There is no legal requirement mandating access to buildings for persons with disabilities. Few buildings, including public buildings, provided access for persons with physical disabilities.

Children with physical disabilities and those with hearing and vision disabilities were integrated into mainstream schools. The government provided stipends to cover educational expenses in private, segregated schools for children with intellectual or mental disabilities. Representatives of civil society organizations reported that accessibility problems existed in the physical environment of schools and with educational accommodations for persons with disabilities.

## **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

Reports from civil society indicated individuals with HIV feared job discrimination if their HIV status became public. This fear resulted in some patients not seeking medical treatment.

## **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on**

## **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

Consensual same-sex sexual conduct for both men and women is illegal under indecency statutes. The law also prohibits anal intercourse between males. The government reported it rarely enforced either statute, with no instances of the law being enforced through the end of November. Indecency statutes carry a maximum penalty of 12 years in prison, and same-sex sexual conduct between consenting men carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, with the possibility of forced psychiatric confinement upon release.

No laws prohibit discrimination against a person based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics in employment, housing, education, or health care.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that strong societal and employment discrimination were common against persons due to their real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics. Civil society representatives reported that LGBTQI+ victims of violence or harassment avoided notifying police of abuse because of social stigma and fear of harassment. Representatives further reported that in cases where police were notified of attacks against LGBTQI+ persons, police either rejected or poorly investigated some claims.

Civil society representatives reported that some LGBTQI+ individuals were denied access to housing, lost employment, were bullied in schools, or were denied educational and institutional support. Stigma and fear of abuse and intimidation prevented LGBTQI+ organizations from developing their membership or conducting activities such as Pride marches.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes; workers exercised these rights. Workers exercised the right to collective bargaining primarily in the nonagricultural sectors of the economy, including in the civil service. The law

prohibits antiunion discrimination.

The government enforced applicable labor laws, and penalties were commensurate with those of other laws involving denial of civil rights such as discrimination. Employers must reinstate workers who file a complaint of illegal dismissal, pending review of the complaint, which can cover termination for engaging in union activities. When essential workers conducted strikes, generally they did not suffer reprisals. Employers generally reinstated or paid compensation to employees who obtained favorable rulings by the ministry following a complaint of illegal dismissal.

The law designates emergency, port, electricity, telecommunications, and prison services, as well as the banana, coconut, and citrus fruit cultivation industries, as “essential,” limiting the right to strike in those industries. The International Labor Organization noted the list of essential services is broader than international standards. The procedure for essential workers to strike is cumbersome, involving appropriate notice and submission of the grievance to the labor commissioner for possible mediation. Strikes in essential services can be subject to compulsory arbitration.

The government and employers generally respected freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. The government generally enforced applicable laws, and penalties generally were sufficient to deter violations. Administrative and judicial procedures were not subject to lengthy delays or appeals, and there were no such problems during the year. Few disputes escalated to strikes or sickouts. A company, a union representative, or an individual may request mediation by the Ministry of Justice, Immigration, and National Security.

In recent years mediation by the Office of the Labour Commissioner in the Ministry of Justice, Immigration, and National Security resolved approximately 70 percent of strikes and sickouts, while the rest were referred to the Industrial Relations Tribunal for binding arbitration.

Small, family-owned farms employed most agricultural workers, and workers on such farms were not unionized.

In May Dominica State College faculty and staff took action over their grievances

regarding the negotiation of a new collective bargaining agreement with the staff's union to address discrepancies in their contracts. A few days later, Dominica Public Service Union representatives met with relevant authorities and reached an agreement since the government committed to address the workers' concerns, which included salary reductions and unpaid wages.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The constitution prohibits most forms of forced or compulsory labor, but the law does not prescribe penalties for forced labor. The law also does not criminalize forced labor except when it results from human trafficking. The government effectively enforced the law. The penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous crimes such as kidnapping.

## **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The law prohibits some of the worst forms of child labor, and in general the government effectively enforced these laws. The law provides for some limitations on age, safety conditions, and working hours, especially during the school year.

The legal minimum age of employment is 12 if children work in family-run businesses and farms, if the work does not involve selling alcohol. The law allows children aged 14 and older to work in apprenticeships and regular jobs that do not involve hazardous work. The law prohibits employing any child younger than age 16 during the school year but makes an exception for family-owned businesses. The law does not protect children from exploitative work outside of the school year, and the government has not determined the types of hazardous work prohibited for children. The country lacks prohibitions against the use of children in pornography or pornographic performances, and the use of children in illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs.

There is no minimum age for hazardous work. While the government does not have a comprehensive list of hazardous work prohibited for children, the Ministry of Justice, Immigration, and National Security considers jobs such as mining and seafaring as hazardous. Additionally, children younger than age 18 are prohibited

from working at night and from working on ships. Safety standards limit the type of work, conditions, and hours of work for children older than age 14, most of whom worked in services or hospitality.

Children may not work more than eight hours a day. The law provides for sentences to deter violations of child labor law, and the government generally enforced the law. The government did not perform comprehensive inspections; however, the laws and penalties generally were adequate to remove children from illegal child labor but with penalties less stringent than for analogous crimes such as kidnapping. Although research found no evidence that child labor existed, in 2020 the government made no advancement in efforts to prevent the worst forms of child labor.

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

#### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

The constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, place of origin, skin color, creed, or political opinion. The government generally enforced this provision. There are legal restrictions on employment of women in working at night and in certain industries such as mining, construction, factories, energy, water, and transportation. There were no government programs to prevent discrimination in the workplace and no penalties to deter violations.

Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred against women and persons with disabilities (see section 6). Discrimination occurred based on sexual orientation. The law permits employers to pay lower wages to persons with disabilities.

#### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The law establishes no universal minimum wage but instead sets base wages depending on the category of worker. No reliable recent data indicated whether average minimum wages were above or below the poverty

level.

In September, following a multiyear review of the minimum wage across all wage categories, the government significantly increased the minimum wage for retail, service, agricultural, construction, and tourism workers, as well as for trainees. The government also created new categories with corresponding wage rates, including for workers in the hospitality and construction industries.

The law provides for overtime pay for work above the standard workweek of 40 hours. The law does not specifically prohibit forced or compulsory overtime. The law mandates that overtime wages be paid at a minimum of 1.5 times an employee's standard wage and that the employee must give prior agreement to work overtime. There were no prosecutions reported for violations of overtime regulations.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** The law ensures occupational health and safety standards are consistent with international standards. Workers have the right to remove themselves from unsafe work environments without jeopardizing their employment, and authorities effectively enforced this right.

Enforcement is the responsibility of the labor commissioner within the Ministry of Justice, Immigration, and National Security. This enforcement includes the informal sector, where workers were not commonly unionized. Inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections, but the government did not enforce the law effectively. The penalties for violations were insufficient to ensure compliance.

Quarry workers faced hazardous conditions. Some reports claimed that workers entered mines before adequate time elapsed after blasting, which exposed them to hazardous chemicals.

There were no reported workplace accidents causing fatalities or major injuries during the year.

**Informal Sector:** The informal sector was a significant part of the economy, but credible data on the informal workforce were unavailable. No social protection was provided to persons in the informal sector beyond social security benefits for

maternity leave, sickness, disability, or death. Domestic workers are not covered by labor law and do not receive social protections.