

# **QATAR 2020 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Qatar is a constitutional monarchy in which Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani exercises full executive power. The constitution provides for hereditary rule by men in the amir's branch of the Al Thani family. The most recent elections were in 2019 for the Central Municipal Council, an advisory and consultative body. Observers considered these elections free and fair. All cabinet members, including the prime minister, are appointed by the amir.

The national police and Ministry of Interior forces maintain internal security that addresses, among other matters, terrorism, cyberattacks, and espionage. The national police oversee general law enforcement. The army is responsible for external security. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces. Security forces infrequently committed abuses.

Significant human rights issues included: restrictions on free expression, including criminalization of libel; restrictions on peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including prohibitions on political parties and labor unions; restrictions on migrant workers' freedom of movement; limits on the ability of citizens to choose their government in free and fair elections; lack of investigation of and accountability for violence against women; criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual conduct; and reports of forced labor.

The government took limited steps to prosecute those suspected of committing human rights abuses. The government took steps to address forced labor.

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

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

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

#### **b. Disappearance**

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

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

The constitution and law prohibit torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment.

The government interprets sharia as allowing corporal punishment for certain criminal offenses, including court-ordered flogging in cases of alcohol consumption and extramarital sex by Muslims. Courts typically reduced sentences to imprisonment or a fine. The Ministry of Interior reported 375 sentences that resulted in flogging as a punishment in 2019. In May authorities executed a death sentence by a firing squad against a Nepalese expatriate who was accused of murdering a Qatari citizen in 2017. The court upheld the sentence after the family of the victim had refused the blood money in return for degrading the sentence.

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

Prison conditions generally met international standards. In 2019 the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) conducted 96 field visits to detention and interrogation facilities across the country.

Physical Conditions: In May social media users claimed the spread of COVID-19 among prisoners had created unrest in the Central Prison. Social media users circulated unconfirmed leaked photographs and audio recordings from inside the prison, claiming that there were clashes between prisoners and guards and prisoner strikes. The government denied the allegations. The NHRC conducted a number of visits to detention centers and sent a list of recommendations to the government, including accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), establishing an independent commission within the judiciary to investigate allegations of torture and mistreatment, and replacing corporal punishment with voluntary social work.

Administration: Authorities conducted investigations into credible allegations of mistreatment. No statute allows ombudsmen to advocate for prisoners and detainees.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers and international bodies to all facilities except the state security prison. The government routinely provided foreign diplomats

access to state security prisoners. NHRC representatives conducted regular visits to all facilities. In 2019 the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited Doha at the invitation of the government. Following the visit, the working group stated “there was an urgent need for a paradigm shift to guarantee the right of every individual to personal liberty, as well as independent and effective judicial control over detention.”

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

The constitution 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 usually observed these requirements.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention reported in 2019 that the detainee tracking system did not allow police to determine the number and status of detainees held in any given institution. At some police stations, the register of persons in police custody did not state the date and time when individuals were taken into custody and transferred to the public prosecution. This lack of record keeping made it difficult to determine how long those detainees had been held. The UN Working Group invited authorities to address “shortcomings” in the detainee registers to prevent arbitrary detention.

In October, Amnesty International published a report detailing the 2018 arrest and detention for five months without charge of Mohamed al-Sulaiti and also posted on Twitter comments that criticized the government for imposing a travel ban on al-Sulaiti. In August, Amnesty International published a report regarding four persons, including al-Sulaiti, who were put under a travel ban without trial. Amnesty International alleged that in all of these cases authorities’ actions were conducted purely administratively, without affording any legal recourse by which the affected individuals could contest or appeal the decisions or present their claims to an independent reviewer.

In 2019 the NHRC reported receiving seven complaints of arbitrary detention and added that after examining the cases and contacting the authorities concerned, all detainees were released.

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

The law requires that persons be apprehended with warrants based on sufficient evidence and issued by an authorized official, be charged within 24 hours, and be brought before a court without undue delay.

The law provides procedures that permit detention without charge for as long as 15 days, renewable for up to six months. The law permits an additional six months' detention without charge with the approval of the prime minister, who may extend the detention indefinitely in cases of threats to national security. The law allows the Ministry of Interior to detain persons suspected of crimes related to national security, honor, or impudence; in these cases persons detained are generally released within 24 hours or brought before a court within three days of detention. Decisions under this law are subject to appeal to the prime minister only. The law permits the prime minister to adjudicate complaints involving such detentions. The law permits a second six-month period of detention with approval from the criminal court, which may extend a detention indefinitely with review every six months. The state security service may arrest and detain suspects for up to 30 days without referring them to the public prosecutor.

In most cases a judge may order a suspect released, remanded to custody to await trial, held in pretrial detention pending investigation, or released on bail. Although suspects are entitled to bail (except in cases of violent crimes), allowing release on bail was infrequent.

Authorities were more likely to grant bail to citizens than to noncitizens. Noncitizens charged with minor crimes may be released to their employer (or a family member for minors), although they may not leave the country until the case is resolved.

By law in non-security-related cases, the accused is entitled to legal representation throughout the process and prompt access to family members. There are provisions for government-funded legal counsel for indigent prisoners in criminal cases, and authorities generally honored this requirement. There were no new reported cases invoking either the Protection of Society Law or the Combating Terrorism Law.

By law all suspects except those detained under the Protection of Society Law or the Combating Terrorism Law must be presented before the public prosecutor within 24 hours of arrest. If the public prosecutor finds sufficient evidence for further investigation, authorities may detain a suspect for up to 15 days with the approval of a judge, renewable for similar periods not to exceed 45 days, before

charges must be filed in the courts. Judges may also extend pretrial detention for one month, renewable for one-month periods not to exceed one-half the maximum punishment for the accused crime. Authorities typically followed these procedures differently for citizens than for noncitizens. The law does not specify a time limit on preventive detention, which the NHRC recommended in 2019 be changed.

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

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, the amir, based on recommended selections from the Supreme Judicial Council, appoints all judges, who retain their positions at his discretion. Foreign detainees had access to the legal system, although some complained of opaque legal procedures and complications, mostly stemming from language barriers. Foreign nationals did not uniformly receive translations of legal proceedings, although interpretation was generally provided within courtrooms. Dispute settlement committees were established in 2018 to increase the efficiency and speed of decision making in the overloaded labor courts and included court translators who were present throughout all hearings. The establishment of these committees, however, did not shorten the time from complaint to resolution. Some employers filed successful deportation requests against employees who had lawsuits pending against them, thus denying those employees the right to a fair trial. In May the Supreme Judicial Council established a branch of the Enforcement Court at the worker dispute settlement committees to facilitate the process of implementing the committees' verdicts. The enforcement cycle of verdicts continued to last for months.

#### **Trial Procedures**

The law provides for the right to a fair public trial for all residents, and the judiciary generally enforced this right.

The law provides defendants the presumption of innocence, and authorities generally inform defendants promptly of the charges brought against them, except for suspects held under the Protection of Society Law and Combating Terrorism Law. The defendant may be present at his or her trial.

Defendants are entitled to choose their legal representation or accept it at public expense throughout the pretrial and trial process. In matters involving family law, Shia and Sunni judges may apply their interpretations of sharia for their religious groups. The law approves implementing the Shiite interpretation of sharia upon

the agreement and request of the parties involved in the dispute. In family law matters, a woman's testimony is deemed one-half of a man's testimony.

Defendants usually have free language interpretation as necessary from the moment charged through all appeals, while court documents are provided only in Arabic. Defendants have access to government-held evidence, have the right to confront prosecution or plaintiff witnesses and present one's own witnesses and evidence, and have the opportunity to give a statement at the end of their trial. Defendants have the right to appeal a decision within 15 days; use of the appellate process was common.

The Court of Cassation requires a fee to initiate the appeals process. In some cases courts waived fees if an appellant demonstrated financial hardship.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no substantiated reports of political prisoners or detainees.

On September 22, the wife of Sheikh Talal bin Abdelazeez Al Thani, grandson of former amir of Qatar Sheikh Ahmad Al Thani (1960-72), submitted a complaint to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, requesting the release of her husband from prison. He had been serving a 22-year-imprisonment sentence since 2013 on charges of financial violations. Sheikh Talal's wife, who deemed the trial politically motivated, claimed her husband had been in incommunicado detention and was suffering from severe medical conditions he developed in prison.

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

Civil remedies are available for those seeking damages for, or cessation of, human rights violations, but no cases were reported during the year. The law specifies circumstances that necessitate a judge's removal from a case for conflict of interest, and authorities generally observed this provision. Individuals and organizations may not appeal adverse domestic decisions to regional human rights bodies.

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

The constitution and the criminal procedures code prohibit such actions. Police and security forces, however, reportedly monitored telephone calls, emails, and social media posts.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press**

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and press in accordance with the law, but the government limited these rights. Self-censorship remained the primary obstacle to free speech and press.

Freedom of Speech: Citizens did not regularly discuss sensitive political and religious issues in public forums, but they discussed these issues in private and on social media. The law prohibits residents from criticizing the amir. Members of the majority foreign population exercised self-censorship on sensitive topics. The law penalizes by up to three years in prison damaging, removing, or performing an action that expresses hate and contempt to the country's flag, the Gulf Cooperation Council flag, or the flag of any international organization or authority. The use of the national flag without formal permission from authorities, displaying a damaged or discolored flag, or changing the flag by adding photographs, text, or designs to it are also criminalized.

In January the amir approved new provisions in the law that increase penalties for “crimes against internal state security” as the law defines them. Public figures and international organizations criticized the wording of the amendments and associated penalties as interfering with freedom of expression. The new law criminalizes a broad range of speech and publishing activities both on and offline with penalties including up to five years' imprisonment and a substantial fine. Amnesty International noted that the law signaled “a worrying regression from commitments made two years ago to guarantee the right to freedom of expression,” referring to the government's 2018 accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Human Rights Watch called the new regulation “a setback for freedom of expression.”

Freedom of Press and Media, Including Online Media: The law includes restrictive procedures on the establishment of newspapers, their closure, and the confiscation of assets of a publication. The Doha Center for Media Freedom, a government-funded entity known to be vocal on press freedom issues, was closed in 2019 without official explanation.

Members of the ruling family or proprietors who enjoyed close ties to government officials owned all print media. Both private and government-owned television and radio reflected government views, although call-in shows allowed for some citizen criticism of government ministries and policies. While media generally did not criticize authorities or the country's policies, specific ministries and even individual ministers were regular targets of criticism in print media. The government owned and partially funded the Doha-based al-Jazeera satellite television network, which carried regional, international, and theme-based programming. It also partially funded other media outlets operating in the country. Some observers and former al-Jazeera employees alleged the government influenced the content produced by that news outlet.

In July the *al-Arab* daily newspaper announced its closure due to financial struggles, leaving only three local Arabic-language newspapers. Local media outlets faced financial difficulty due to COVID-19 countermeasures and consequently underwent massive job cuts, making them depend primarily on the national news agency for content.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The Qatar Media Corporation, the Ministry of Culture and Sports, and customs officials censored material. The government reviewed, censored, or banned foreign newspapers, magazines, films, and books for objectionable sexual, religious, and political content. Journalists and publishers continued to self-censor due to political and economic pressures when reporting on government policies or material deemed denigrating to Islam, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law criminalizes libel and slander, including “insult to dignity.” A journalist may be fined and imprisoned for one year for defamation and reporting of “false news.” The law restricts the publication of information that slanders the amir or heir apparent; defames the Abrahamic faiths or includes blasphemy; harms the national currency or the economic situation; or violates the dignity of persons, the proceedings of investigations, and prosecutions in relation to family status, and punishes violators with up to seven years’ imprisonment.

National Security: The law restricts the publication of information that could defame the state or endanger its safety, incite the overthrow of the regime or harm supreme state interests, report official secret agreements, or prejudice heads of state or disturb relations.



## Internet Freedom

The maximum punishments for violations of the cybercrime law are up to three years in prison and a fine. The law prohibits any online activity that threatens the safety of the state, its general order, and its local or international peace. It also criminalizes the spread of “false news,” forces internet providers to block objectionable content, and bans the publication of personal or family information.

The law requires internet service providers to block objectionable content upon request from judicial authorities. Internet providers also are obligated to maintain long-term electronic records and traffic data, which must be made available on request by the government. The government-controlled internet service provider Ooredoo restricted the expression of views via the internet and censored the internet for political, religious, and pornographic content through a proxy server, which monitored and blocked websites, email, and voice over internet protocol (VoIP) platforms, including Skype and FaceTime. Users who believed authorities had mistakenly censored a site could request that the site be reviewed by the Ministry of Transportation and Communication for suitability; there were no reports that any websites were unblocked based on this procedure. The Supreme Judicial Council’s statistics showed that in 2019 the courts handled 595 cases related to cybercrimes, up from 104 cases in the previous year.

In June security forces summoned and interrogated a number of social media users in response to tweets critical of government entities and officials. During questioning, those called in were sometimes asked to sign pledges not to repeat such posts, upon which they were released. In other cases authorities deactivated Twitter accounts. In April internal security summoned a lawyer for posting a video criticizing policies of the Qatar Central Bank. He was charged with disrupting the public interest.

In April security authorities announced that five social media users were arrested and charged with “igniting societal strife.” Those charged were accused of making defamatory comments against certain tribes in response to the government’s public naming of individuals who violated home quarantine. At year’s end no further information was available on the progress of the investigations.

On December 9, former *al-Arab* columnist and social media influencer Faisal Muhamad al-Marzoqi announced that he received a final verdict from the Court of Appeal to serve three months in prison and pay a moderate fine for a tweet that he

had put out criticizing some public figures. Al-Marzoqi added that the verdict stipulated a confiscation of his Twitter account.

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

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and scientific research. Instructors at Qatar University noted they sometimes exercised self-censorship. Instructors at foreign-based universities operating in the country, however, reported they generally enjoyed academic freedom. There were occasional government restrictions on cultural events, including bureaucratic barriers that in some cases resulted in the denial of event permits, and some groups organizing cultural events reported they exercised self-censorship. Authorities censored books, films, and internet sites for political, religious, and sexual content and for vulgar and obscene language.

In February the Qatar Foundation canceled a concert featuring the Lebanese band Mashrou Leila (Leila's Project) hosted by Northwestern University Qatar. The cancellation came as a response to public online backlash against the organizers because of the sexual orientation of the band's lead singer, who was openly gay.

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

The government limited freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

#### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly, but this right is restricted by law, including the General Assembly and Demonstration Law and the Associations and Private Institutions Law. Noncitizens are exempt from the constitutional protections on freedom of assembly. Organizers of public meetings must meet a number of restrictions and conditions and obtain approval from the Ministry of Interior to acquire a permit.

#### **Freedom of Association**

The constitution provides for the right to form groups, defined by the law as professional associations and private institutions, but the government significantly limited this right. In October the amir passed a new law amending articles in the Professional Association and Private Institutions law to facilitate registration, allowed meetings within an association's mandate without requiring prior

government notification and several other provisions aimed at increasing the ability of associations to operate and cooperate with likeminded organizations domestically and abroad. Despite the amendments, some stakeholders complained the changes were insufficient and multiple obstacles remained to freedom of speech, assembly, and association under local law.

Noncitizens are exempt from the constitutional protections on freedom of association. There were no reports of attempts to organize politically. There were no organized political parties, and authorities prohibited politically oriented associations. The government prohibits professional associations and private institutions from engaging in political matters or affiliating internationally. Civil society organizations must obtain approval from the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs, which may deny their establishment if it deems them a threat to the public interest. In 2019 the ministry approved the establishment of seven new associations, bringing the total number to 21 associations working under the ministry's umbrella.

Informal organizations, such as community support groups and activity clubs, operated without registration, but they may not engage in activities deemed political.

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

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

### **d. Freedom of Movement**

The constitution provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government did not fully respect these rights.

In-country Movement: Restrictions on in-country movement for citizens concerned sensitive military, oil, and industrial installations. Although there was less emphasis on setting and enforcing "family-only" times at entertainment areas in Doha, several local malls and markets continued to restrict access to certain areas to foreign workers on weekends and those dressed "immodestly."

As part of the government's COVID-19 countermeasures, approximately 20 square miles of the Industrial Zone, home to thousands of migrant workers, was

completely locked down for two months from March to May. Human rights groups expressed concerns regarding the well-being of workers who were banned from leaving the area, including individuals showing no symptoms of COVID-19, despite reports of limited availability of food and supplies.

Foreign Travel: The government prevented the travel of its citizens only when they were involved in pending court cases. Despite partial exit permit reform, domestic workers were required to obtain permission from employers to exit the country. In 2018 authorities abolished exit permit requirements for 95 percent of the workforce in the private sector, with some exceptions including domestic workers and government employees. Employers may request exit permits for the remaining 5 percent of their workforce not covered by the 2018 law but must provide an explanation to the government justifying why an employee should retain an exit permit restriction. In January the government extended the categories of individuals not required to receive exit permit permission to include government employees and domestic workers. The government retained the right to request that up to 5 percent of private-sector employees and 5 percent of expatriate public-sector employees obtain permits prior to departure. The Ministry of Interior, however, asked domestic workers to notify employers 72 hours before departure from the country. According to the Ministry of Interior, the Exit Permit Grievances Committee received 1,053 complaints from workers who were denied exit permits by their employers. The committee approved 1,039, rejected 10, and archived the remainder.

The law prohibits employers from withholding workers' passports and penalizes employers who do so, but noncitizen community leaders and officials from labor-exporting countries stated that passport confiscation remained a widespread problem with insufficient enforcement of penalties. The Ministry of Interior fined only six individuals in 11 passport-confiscation cases during the year.

Citizenship: The law allows for the revocation of citizenship. According to statistics of the Ministry of Interior, there were 10 cases of citizenship revocations in 2019. The ministry did not clarify the reason for the revocations.

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

Not applicable.

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

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to assist refugees in other countries.

Access to Asylum: In 2018 the government passed legislation to grant political asylum status to asylum seekers, although there were no reports or official announcements confirming that anyone had received asylum through this legislation, and there were examples annually that violated the spirit of the law. The law stipulates the creation of a specialized committee within the Ministry of Interior to handle requests from asylum seekers. Once granted political asylum, the individual and his or her family are entitled to a range of free services provided by the government, including travel documents, jobs, monthly allowances, medical and educational services, and housing. Previously the government accepted such individuals as “guests” on a temporary basis. The government legally classified the small number of persons granted residence on humanitarian grounds as visitors.

The Syrian Opposition Coalition office in Doha reported approximately 60,000 Syrians were living in Doha, of whom approximately 20,000 came to Doha after the start of the civil war and had been granted repeated extensions to their residency status to allow them to remain in the country. The government provided housing and education to these de facto refugees.

#### **g. Stateless Persons**

Citizenship derives solely from the father, and women cannot transmit citizenship to their noncitizen spouse or children. A woman must obtain permission from authorities before marrying a foreign national but does not lose citizenship upon such a marriage. Generally the government did not approve marriage requests between Qatari women and stateless men.

The law allows long-term residents to apply for citizenship after living in the country for 25 consecutive years, but the government rarely approved citizenship applications, which were by law capped at 50 per year. Restrictions and inconsistent application of the law prevented stateless persons from acquiring citizenship. Permanent residents have the right to own property, open businesses without local partners, and receive free education and health services.

According to official statistics provided by the Ministry of Interior, there were 2,461 Bidoon--stateless Arabs residing in the country--although population statistics remained the same since 2018. Official documents do not recognize the term Bidoon but rather “individuals with temporary Qatari identification

documents.” Bidoon are a stateless minority in the Gulf states, born in the country, whose families were not included as citizens at the time of the country’s independence or shortly thereafter. The Bidoon, who are afforded residency with the sponsorship of a Qatari resident, were able to register for public services such as education and health care. Bidoon, however, are unable to own property in the country and cannot travel without a visa to other Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

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

The constitution does not provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The government did not allow the formation of political parties or opposition groups. The amir exercises full executive powers, including the appointment of cabinet members. In 2019 the amir issued a decree extending the term of the appointed Shura Council, the country’s titular legislative body, by two years to the end of June 2021. In November 2019 the amir assigned the prime minister to form and lead a committee to regulate the process of the Shura Council elections and announced elections would be held October 2021. According to the law, not every citizen has the right to participate in elections for the Shura Council. The law categorizes Qataris into “genuine” citizens who obtained their nationality before 1930 and “neutralized” citizens who became citizens after 1930. Only genuine citizens have the right to run and vote in the elections.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

Recent Elections: In 2019 citizens elected the 29 members of the fifth Central Municipal Council, including two women, to four-year terms. The council advises the minister of municipality and environment on local public services. Foreign diplomatic missions noted no apparent irregularities or fraud in the elections, although voter registration was lower than authorities expected, at approximately 9 percent.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The government did not permit the organization of political parties, and there were no attempts to form them during the year. Voting is open to all citizens who are at least 18 years old, including those who have been naturalized for at least 15 years; members of the armed services and employees of the Ministry of Interior may not vote.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: Although traditional attitudes and societal roles continued to limit women's participation in politics, women served in various roles in public office, such as minister of public health, chair of the Qatar Foundation, head of the Qatar Museum Authority, and as ambassadors. In 2017 the amir appointed four women to the Shura Council for the first time in the legislative body's history. There were five female judges and three female assistant judges, according to 2019 statistics of the Supreme Judicial Council. Noncitizen residents are banned from voting or otherwise participating in political affairs, although they serve as judges and staffers at government ministries.

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

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. There were reports, however, of government corruption during the year.

The law gives the State Audit Bureau financial authority and independence and allows it to publish parts of its findings provided confidential information is removed.

Corruption: In October the Attorney General's Office opened investigations on five individuals related to charges of money laundering. The announcement did not include any details of the case or the identities of the accused.

The quasi-governmental commission responsible for the country's World Cup 2022 bid denied new allegations during the year regarding vote buying in the 2010 FIFA bidding process.

Financial Disclosure: There are no legal requirements for public officials to disclose their income and assets, and they did not do so.

#### **Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

Researchers from international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and international unions such as Building and Wood Workers' International and the International Trade Union Confederation continued to visit and report on the country without interference from authorities. The government was often responsive to requests for meetings

and jointly participated in public events hosted by human rights groups, including on sensitive topics such as labor rights.

Several quasi-governmental organizations were under a single entity, Qatar Foundation, which was under the leadership of Sheikha Hind Al Thani, the sister of the amir. These organizations cooperated with the government, rarely criticized it, and did not engage in political activity. Some international NGOs had offices in the country and focused on labor rights with the permission of the government.

In November 2019 the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention carried out its first official visit to the country to assess the situation regarding deprivation of liberty. Following the visit, the group stated, “Existing laws that allow prolonged administrative detention without judicial control and due process guarantees ought to be abolished, as these place individuals outside the protection of the law.” The Working Group called on authorities to “immediately repeal the Protection of Community Law, the State Security Law, and the Law on Combating Terrorism.”

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Interior and the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are mandated to observe, report, and handle human rights issues. The NHRC is mandated by the cabinet to issue an annual report pertaining to the human rights conditions in the country. The NHRC provided mild criticism of abuses and conducted its own investigations into human rights violations. A law regulating the work of the NHRC granted the committee “full independence” in practicing its activities and providing immunity to the committee’s members. The NHRC typically handled petitions by liaising with government institutions to ensure a timely resolution to disputes.

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

### **Women**

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape. Spousal rape is not illegal. Sexual assault and other gender-based crimes were rarely reported, mostly due to social taboo. The penalty for rape is life imprisonment, regardless of the age or gender of the victim. If the perpetrator is a nonspousal relative, teacher, guardian, or caregiver of the victim, the penalty is death. The government enforced the law against rape.



No specific law criminalizes domestic violence, whether against spouses or against any member of a household, including children and domestic workers. According to the NHRC, authorities may prosecute spousal violence as “general” violence under the criminal law. According to the Protection and Social Rehabilitation Center shelter (PSRC), rape and domestic violence against women continued to be a problem. Police treated domestic violence as a private family matter rather than a criminal matter and were reluctant to investigate or prosecute reports.

According to Human Rights Watch, extramarital sex is punishable by up to seven years in prison, flogging (for unmarried persons), or the death penalty (for married persons). A woman who gives birth out of wedlock receives a 12-month jail sentence, on average, which could also include deportation, and even corporal punishment (lashings); however, press reports indicated jail sentences and flogging were rare in such cases. On October 2, authorities at the Hamad International Airport deplaned more than a dozen female foreign nationals from an outbound flight and subjected them to gynecological examinations after a live infant was found in an airport restroom. Human rights groups and several foreign governments condemned the actions of the authorities and requested an investigation into the government’s handling of the situation. The Government Communication Office released a statement expressing regret for the incident and explained that authorities aimed to locate and arrest the mother promptly and prosecute her before she was able to leave the country. Officials underscored that the exams went against protocol and promised that those responsible would be referred to the Public Prosecutor’s Office. The PSRC reported receiving 277 cases of physical violence against women and children and 155 cases of psychological violence in 2019, including 36 cases of sexual harassment. The center hosted 45 survivors at its shelter during the year and provided legal representation of eight victims in courts. Per the center’s statistics, they referred 10 cases to courts and 20 to the Public Prosecutor’s Office. The center said one court case received a final verdict during the year.

In August authorities deported a Yemeni woman and her child to Djibouti, from where they could be returned to Yemen. The woman accused the government in a video posted online of kidnapping her and her child and forcefully deporting them to Djibouti. She called on the international community to help her and stop authorities in Djibouti from sending her and her child to Yemen because of the danger she would face there. The woman received a court ruling granting her divorce and custody of her child; however, she was threatened with repatriation to Yemen and separated from her child following the cancellation of her residency.

An online campaign encouraged the management of the main Qatari shelter to host them for a short time, but authorities deported them to Djibouti.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is illegal and carries penalties of imprisonment or fines. In some cases sponsors sexually harassed and mistreated foreign domestic workers. The Ministry of Interior reported 13 cases of violence against domestic workers and four cases of rape against them in 2019, all of which were under judicial processing at year's end.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Discrimination: The constitution asserts equality between citizens in rights and responsibilities, but social and legal discrimination against women persisted. Sharia, as implemented in the country, discriminates against women in judicial proceedings, freedom of movement, marriage, child custody, and inheritance.

In line with local social norms, male relatives generally represented female relatives in court, although women have the legal right to attend court proceedings and represent themselves. The value of a woman's testimony is in some cases considered one-half a man's testimony.

Under the Nationality Law, female citizens face legal discrimination, since they, unlike men, are not permitted to transmit citizenship to their noncitizen spouses or to children born from marriage to a noncitizen. Citizen women are unable to pass citizenship to their offspring. A 2018 residency permit law allows children of citizen mothers to gain permanent status in country, even if the father is not a Qatari national. Citizens must obtain government permission to marry foreigners, which is sometimes not granted for female citizens. Male citizens may apply for residency permits and citizenship for their foreign wives, but female citizens may apply only for residency for their foreign husbands and children, not citizenship. According to official statistics, in 2018 there were 232 requests by citizens to marry foreigners, of which one was rejected, 19 were under processing, and the remainder were approved.

A non-Muslim wife does not have the automatic right to inherit from her Muslim husband. She receives an inheritance only if her husband wills her a portion of his estate, and even then, she is eligible to receive only one-third of the total estate. A female heir generally receives one-half the amount of a male heir; for example, a sister would inherit one-half as much as her brother. In cases of divorce, children

generally remain with the mother until age 13 for boys and 15 for girls, at which time custody reverts to the husband's family, regardless of her religion.

To receive maternity care, a woman is required to present a marriage certificate, although in practice hospitals will generally assist in the birth of children of unwed mothers regardless. There were cases of hospitals reporting unwed mothers to authorities.

The housing law, which pertains to the government housing system, also discriminates against women married to noncitizen men and against divorced women.

A non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim, but many did so. The government documents children born to a Muslim father as Muslims, regardless of the religion of the mother.

Single women younger than age 25 require the permission of their male guardian to travel outside the country, although the requirement was rarely enforced. There were sporadic reports via social media that airport authorities prevented women older than 25 from traveling abroad without the approval of the male guardian, although the law allows women older than 25 to travel without a guardian's permission. Male relatives may prevent married or single adult female family members from leaving the country by seeking and securing a court order.

Adult women were not allowed to leave home without a guardian's approval. This included a need to obtain their male guardian's permission to work outside the home, although the requirement was rarely enforced.

There was no specialized government office devoted to women's equality.

## **Children**

Birth Registration: Children derive citizenship only from the father. Citizen mothers are unable to transmit citizenship to their children. The government generally registered all births immediately.

Education: Education is free and compulsory for all citizens through age 18 or nine years of education, whichever comes first. Education is compulsory for noncitizen children, but they pay a nominal fee. Islamic instruction is compulsory for Muslims and non-Muslims attending state-sponsored schools.

Child Abuse: There were limited cases of reported child abuse, family violence, and sexual abuse. The PSRC report mentioned 130 cases of violence against minors in 2018.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: By law the minimum age for marriage is 18 for boys and 16 for girls. The law does not permit marriage of persons below these ages except with consent from the legal guardian and with permission from a judge. Underage marriage was rare.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: No specific law sets a minimum age for consensual sex. The law prohibits sex outside of marriage. In the criminal law, the penalty for sexual relations with a person younger than 16 is life imprisonment. If the individual is the nonspousal relative, guardian, caretaker, or servant of the victim, the penalty is death; there were no reports this sentence was ever implemented. No specific law prohibits child pornography because all pornography is prohibited, but the law specifically criminalizes the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

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>.

## **Anti-Semitism**

The country does not have an indigenous Jewish community, and there are no official data on the number of Jewish expatriates in the country. Periodic cartoons and opinion articles in local papers carried anti-Semitic messages. In May the government-owned *al-Jazeera* news channel hosted Dr. Abduljabbar Saeed, head of the Quran and Sunnah Department at the Faculty of Sharia at Qatar University, on one of its talk shows. During the interview the host made negative statements against “the Jews” when discussing Israel.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The law prohibits discrimination against--and requires the allocation of resources for--persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, the judicial system, and other government services or other areas. The government is charged with acting on complaints from individuals, and the NHRC has responsibility for enforcing compliance.

Private and independent schools generally provided most of the required services for students with disabilities, but government schools did not. Few public buildings met the required standards of accessibility for persons with disabilities, and new buildings generally did not comply with standards.

The NHRC 2019 report called on authorities to accelerate the issuance of a new law on the rights of persons with disabilities to replace the 2004 law. The report stated the draft law was submitted to authorities in 2015 but had never been issued. The report stated the country became a signatory of International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 but needed to apply Article 33 of the Convention on the “implementation and monitoring at the national level” in relation to guaranteeing the rights of persons with disabilities under the convention.

## **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons faced discrimination under the law and in practice. The law prohibits consensual same-sex sexual conduct between men but does not explicitly prohibit same-sex sexual relations between women. Under the law a man convicted of having sexual relations with a boy younger than age 16 is subject to a sentence of life in prison. A man convicted of having same-sex sexual relations with a male 16 years of age or older may receive a sentence of seven years in prison.

In addition to banning sex outside marriage for all persons, the law provides penalties for any male, Muslim or not, who “instigates” or “entices” another male to commit an act of sodomy or immorality. Under the penal code, “leading, instigating, or seducing a male anyhow for sodomy or dissipation” and “inducing or seducing a male or a female anyhow to commit illegal or immoral actions” is punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment.

There were no public reports of violence against LGBTI persons, who largely hid their sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics due to an underlying pattern of discrimination toward LGBTI persons. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination, nor are there antidiscrimination laws to protect LGBTI individuals on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics.

Due to social and religious conventions, there were no LGBTI organizations, pride marches, or LGBTI rights advocacy events. Information was not available on official or private discrimination in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or access to education or health care based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

### **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

There was discrimination against HIV-positive patients. Authorities deported foreigners found to be HIV positive upon arrival. Mandatory medical examinations were required for residents. Since health screenings are required for nonresidents to obtain work visas, some HIV-positive persons were denied work permits prior to arrival. The government quarantined HIV-positive citizens and provided treatment for them.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

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

The law does not allow workers to form and join independent unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively, which made the exercise of these rights difficult. The law provides local citizen workers in private sector enterprises that have 100 citizen workers age 18 and older a limited right to organize, strike, and bargain collectively. The law does not prohibit antiunion discrimination or provide for reinstatement of workers fired for union activity.

The law excludes government employees, noncitizens, domestic workers, drivers, nurses, cooks, gardeners, casual workers, workers employed at sea, and most workers employed in agriculture and grazing from the right to join worker committees or the national union, effectively banning these workers from organizing, bargaining collectively, or striking.

The law permits the establishment of “joint committees” with an equal number of worker and management representatives to deal with a limited number of workplace problems. Foreign workers may be members of joint labor-management committees. The law offers a means to file collective disputes. If disputes are not settled internally between the employees and employer, the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs may mediate a solution. An agreement signed between the ministry and the International Labor Organization (ILO) includes provisions to create these committees with ILO supervision and assistance. Under the umbrella of this agreement and as of August, at least five joint committees initiated operations and held elections to choose employee representatives. Following the formation of “joint committees,” the ILO provided extensive training to the committee members on how to manage the committees, how to establish open channels of communications with workers and management, and the mechanisms to submit complaints to the competent authorities.

The law requires approval by the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs for worker organizations to affiliate with groups outside the country. The government did not respect freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining outside of the joint committees.

The government did not effectively enforce applicable laws or levy penalties commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights, such as discrimination. For those few workers covered by the law protecting the right to collective bargaining, the government circumscribed the right through its control over the rules and procedures of the bargaining and agreement processes. The labor code allows for only one trade union, the General Union of Workers of Qatar (General Union), which was composed of general committees for workers in various trades or industries. Trade or industry committees were composed of worker committees at the individual firm level. The General Union was not a functioning entity.

Employees could not freely practice collective bargaining, and there were no workers under collective bargaining contracts. While rare, when labor unrest occurred, mostly involving the country’s overwhelmingly foreign workforce, the government reportedly responded by dispatching large numbers of police to the work sites or labor camps involved; the government also requested the assistance of the embassies for the nationals involved. Strikes generally ended after these shows of force and the involvement of embassies to resolve disputes. In many cases the government summarily deported the workers’ leaders and organizers.

Although the law recognizes the right to strike for some workers, restrictive conditions made the likelihood of a legal strike extremely remote. The law requires approval for a strike by three-fourths of the General Committee of the workers in the trade or the industry, and potential strikers also must exhaust a lengthy dispute resolution procedure before a lawful strike may be called. Civil servants and domestic workers do not have the right to strike; the law also prohibits strikes at public utilities and health or security service facilities, including the gas, petroleum, and transportation sectors. The Complaint Department of the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs, in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, must preauthorize all strikes, including approval of the time and place. In May, several hundred migrant workers staged a protest over unpaid salaries. Security forces surrounded the location of the protest but did not disperse the protesters. The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs released a statement the following day assuring that the ministry would pay salaries in full.

In May the government gave the private sector the right to alter employee contracts without legal liability due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies forced workers to take a combination of unpaid leave, decreased salaries, or premature contract terminations, negatively affecting tens of thousands of workers. In June the Ministry of Finance instructed government ministries, institutions, and state entities to reduce monthly costs for non-Qatari employees by 30 percent, by either cutting salaries or laying off workers with a two-month notice.

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

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes. International media and human rights organizations alleged numerous abuses against foreign workers, including withheld wages, unsafe working conditions, poor living accommodations, employers who routinely confiscated worker passports, and a sponsorship system that gave employers inordinate control of workers. In February, National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking statistics recorded the average fine for physical and psychological violence against domestic workers in 2019 as 2,000 Qatari riyals (\$550) and a penalty of one month in prison. There were 812 convictions for abuse. During the year Amnesty International reported multiple cases of slow access to justice after three medium-sized companies refused to pay wages, withheld passports, and refused to appear in court. The ILO noted the law allows for the imposition of forced labor on those



who hold political views ideologically opposed to the established political and social system.

The government made efforts to prevent and eliminate forced labor but did not in all cases effectively enforce the law; the restrictive sponsorship system left some migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation. The law allows employees in the private sector to switch employers at the end of their contract, which can be up to five years, without the permission of their employer. Employees may also switch employers in cases of failure to pay, violation of contract, mutual agreement, filing of a legal case in court, and bankruptcy or death of employer. Legal changes during the year extended the elimination of exit visa requirements to 95 percent of government workers and all domestic workers. In August the country abolished restrictions on migrant workers changing jobs without their employer's permission and introduced a monthly minimum wage of 1,000 Qatari riyals (\$275) as a basic salary. While the abolishment of the no-objection certificate was effective immediately, the implementation of the minimum wage provision was scheduled to come into force in March 2021. If fully implemented, these laws will protect migrant workers, who are prone to exploitation in the *kafala* system.

Workers who are still required to seek their employers' permission to leave the country may request an exemption from a Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs jointly operated grievance committee in case of the employers' refusal to grant the permission.

In 2019 the government opened the first trafficking-in-persons shelter, which had assisted 10 victims as of July. On October 27, the Criminal Court sentenced two expatriates to a 10-year prison term, a substantial fine, and deportation for trafficking-in-persons offenses, among other crimes. This was the country's first conviction since 2016 under its antitrafficking law.

The government arrested and prosecuted individuals for suspected labor law violations. The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, and the NHRC conducted training sessions and distributed to migrant laborers multilingual written explanations of their rights under local labor and sponsorship laws. To combat late and unpaid wages, the government mandated that employers pay wages electronically to all employees subject to the labor law through a system subject to audits by an inspection division at the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs. Employers who failed to pay their workers faced penalties, but enforcement was inconsistent.

There were continuing indications of forced labor, especially among migrant workers in the construction and domestic-labor sectors. Exorbitant recruitment fees incurred abroad entrapped many workers in long-term debt, making them more vulnerable to exploitation. Some foreign workers who voluntarily entered the country to work had their passports, ATM cards, and pay withheld and worked under conditions to which they had not agreed. One migrant worker told an NGO that his employer threatened him and nearly 1,000 other employees with deportation if they refused to sign new contracts with substantially lower wages. Another migrant worker said his company had not paid its workers in five months. Contract substitution remained a problem, according to representatives of the migrant worker community; however, to help eliminate the practice, a government electronic contracting system existed in several third countries where workers are hired. Embassies of labor-sending countries reported this new system helped significantly reduce contract substitution and the number of workers who arrived in Doha without contracts.

Although the country witnessed a nearly total precautionary lockdown of all official and commercial activities from mid-March until mid-June, FIFA World Cup-related facilities continued construction despite crowded worksites and the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Human rights groups and international media condemned the exemption of World Cup projects from the precautionary countermeasures.

The Ministry of Interior received 817 reports of nonpayment of wages, down from 1,164 in the year before, 810 of which were referred to the Office of the Public Prosecutor. Courts issued final verdicts in 495 cases; the rest were under review at year's end.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

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

The law sets the minimum age for employment at 16 years and stipulates that minors between the ages of 16 and 18 may work with parental or guardian permission. The law prohibits all of the worst forms of child labor. Minors may not work more than six hours a day or more than 36 hours a week. Employers must provide the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs with the names and occupations of their minor employees and obtain

permission from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to hire a minor. The education ministry may prohibit the employment of minors in jobs judged dangerous to their health, safety, or morals. The government effectively enforced the applicable law, but penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes.

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

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, language, and religion, but not political opinion, national origin, social origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, or HIV-positive status. Local custom, however, outweighed government enforcement of nondiscrimination laws, and legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination existed against women, noncitizens, and foreign workers. The labor law does not allow women to work in jobs deemed hazardous, dangerous, or morally inappropriate.

By law women are entitled to equal pay for equal work, but this did not always happen, and they often lacked access to decision-making positions in management of private companies and in the public sector. Gender-based violence or harassment occurred in the workplace. In 2019 there were reports of rape, but the outcomes of those cases were pending. The government prohibited lower-paid male workers from residing in specific “family” residential zones throughout the country. The government discriminated against noncitizens in employment, education, housing, and health services (see section 6). Other forms of discrimination targeted certain nationalities in the country. In January the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs gave orders to all private security companies to terminate immediately security guards with Egyptian nationality, causing hundreds of Egyptian residents to lose their jobs. Egyptian residents also reported discrimination in denial of the right to transfer employment, apply for bank loans, and request family visas.

The law requires reserving 2 percent of jobs in government agencies and public institutions for persons with disabilities, and most government entities appeared to conform to this law. Private-sector businesses employing a minimum of 25 persons are also required to hire persons with disabilities as 2 percent of their staff. Employers who violate these employment provisions are subject to moderate fines. There were no reports of violations of the hiring quota requirement during the year.

In December 2019 the UN rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance highlighted the “remarkable

and commendable progress” the country had made to end discrimination but raised concerns regarding discrimination against domestic workers and workers from South Asian and sub-Saharan African countries.

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

The labor law provides for a 48-hour workweek with a 24-hour rest period and paid annual leave days. The government sets occupational health and safety standards including restrictions on working during the hottest hours of the day during the summer and general restrictions related to temperature during the rest of the day as well. The labor law and provisions for acceptable conditions of work, including overtime pay provisions, do not apply to workers in the public sector or agriculture, or to domestic workers.

Responsibility for laws related to acceptable conditions of work fell primarily to the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs as well as to the Ministry of Municipality and Environment and the Ministry of Public Health. The government did not effectively enforce standards in all sectors; working conditions for citizens were generally adequate, because government agencies and the major private-sector companies employing them generally followed the relevant laws. Enforcement problems were in part due to insufficient training and lack of personnel. Penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous violations of civil rights.

The government took limited action to prevent violations and improve working conditions. In 2018 the worker dispute settlement committees assumed their duties, chaired by first-instance judges appointed by the Supreme Judicial Council and members of the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs. In 2019 the committees received a total of 4,922 complaints and issued final 2,781 final verdicts, up from 1,088 in 2018. More than three-quarters of verdicts favored workers.

The Labor Inspection Department conducted monthly and random inspections of foreign worker camps. When inspectors found the camps to be below minimum standards, the operators received a warning, and authorities ordered them to remedy the violations within one month. For example, after inspectors reportedly checked companies’ payrolls and health and safety practices, they returned one month later to verify any recommended changes were made. If a company had not remedied the violations, the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs imposed fines, blacklisted the company, and on occasion referred

the matter to the public prosecutor for action. Inspections in 2019 fell by nearly half compared with 2018; inspections in 2020 were further limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fear of penalties such as blacklisting appeared to have had some effect as a deterrent to some labor law violations. Blacklisting is an administrative hold on a company or individual that freezes government services such as processing new visa applications from the firms. Firms must pay moderate fine to be removed from the list--even if the dispute is resolved--and the ministry reserves the right to keep companies on the list after the fine is paid as a punitive measure.

The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs inspectors continued to conduct inspection visits to work and labor housing sites. The number of inspectors was not sufficient to enforce compliance. Officials from the ILO joined labor inspectors on several inspections and assisted in the formation of a new strategic plan for strengthening the Labor Inspections Unit. Violators faced penalties that were insufficient to deter violations.

Employers must pay their employees electronically to provide a digital audit trail for the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs. Employers who failed to pay their workers faced penalties. By law employees have a right to remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, but authorities did not effectively provide protection to employees exercising this right. Employers often ignored working-hour restrictions and other laws with respect to domestic workers and unskilled laborers, the majority of whom were foreigners.

The government did not effectively enforce these laws, and penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous crimes. Violations of wage, overtime, and safety and health standards were relatively common, especially in sectors employing foreign workers, in which working conditions were often poor. Some employers did not pay workers for overtime or annual leave. Employers housed many unskilled foreign laborers in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water, electricity, or adequate food. The government continued to serve eviction notices to property owners whose buildings were not up to code. Throughout the year international media alleged some abusive working conditions existed, including work-related deaths of young foreign workers, especially in the construction sector. A Kenyan worker said his employer required him to work unpaid overtime, seven days a week, paid wages months late, and provided insufficient personal protective equipment despite a risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Domestic workers often faced unacceptable working conditions. Many such workers frequently worked seven days a week and more than 12 hours a day with few or no holidays, no overtime pay, and limited means to redress grievances. Some employers denied domestic workers food or access to a telephone, according to news reports and foreign embassy officials.

International NGOs found that foreign workers faced legal obstacles and lengthy legal processes that prevented them from seeking redress for violations and exploitative conditions. Noncitizen community leaders also highlighted migrant workers' continued hesitation to report their plight due to fear of reprisals. On June 11, Amnesty International reported that a contracting company constructing the World Cup 2022 al-Bayt Stadium failed to pay the salaries of hundreds of its workers for seven months. On August 24, Human Rights Watch published testimonies of 93 foreign workers who alleged nonpayment of wages, forced labor, manipulation, or fraud.

On October 4, both the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs published the *National Policy on Occupational Safety and Health*, which aims to prevent accidents, injuries, and diseases arising out of, linked with, or occurring in the course of work. In March the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the body responsible for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, announced that nine laborers working on the World Cup facilities died in 2019, bringing the number of deaths on World Cup projects to 34, since construction began six years ago. According to the committee, 31 of the deaths were classified as “nonwork related.”