

Kuwait 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Kuwait during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by government agents; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners and detainees; serious restrictions on free expression and media freedom, including censorship and the existence of criminal libel laws; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence within the territory of a state and the right to leave the country; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence sexual violence, workplace violence, and other forms of such violence; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, which were enforced;

and crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons.

The government took credible steps in some cases to prosecute and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

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 a law enforcement officer with a possible mental illness committed an unlawful killing. In April, media reported a police officer shot and killed a person in Mubarak al-Kabeer Governorate in unclear circumstances. According to the *al-Qabas* newspaper, the public prosecutor ordered the accused officer detained for 21 days at the central prison. *Al-Qabas* added that during his interrogation the accused said he was mentally ill and claimed that he was not responsible for his actions. He also submitted medical reports showing he was undergoing treatment in a psychiatric hospital.

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 prohibited torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, but media and NGOs reported torture and mistreatment by police and security forces.

Several noncitizens claimed police or Kuwaiti State Security (KSS) force members beat them at police checkpoints or in detention. At least five foreign nationals reported credible cases of abuse or mistreatment during arrest or interrogation by law enforcement officers, including the Ministry of Interior's Drug Enforcement General Directorate (DEGD).

There were credible indications that police, KSS members, and DEGD officers abused prisoners during arrest or interrogation.

In January, a Ministry of Interior officer was arrested for physically assaulting a Bangladeshi national regarding a car-washing disagreement. Subsequently, the officer faced criminal charges, and authorities sent him to central prison for pretrial detention. In February, authorities extended the officer's detention as investigations continued regarding the alleged assault, which left the Bangladeshi national quadriplegic. The accused officer denied the charges, claiming no intent to harm the Bangladeshi national, who the officer claimed had provoked him. The court denied a bail request from the officer's lawyer.

In December, the defense minister ordered an urgent investigation into allegations of illegal arrest and torture by members of the Ministry of Defense intelligence agency. The directive followed member of parliament Marzouq al-Ghanem's inquiry to the defense minister. Al-Ghanem criticized the delayed response, stating a man was subjected to physical and mental torture for false confessions. Subsequently, the National Assembly approved assigning the parliamentary Human Rights Committee to investigate the incident.

Numerous activists representing stateless persons of Arab heritage – known as Bidoon – reported mistreatment at the hands of authorities while in detention. Individuals continued to allege security personnel subjected them to unlawful detention and physical and verbal abuse in police centers and State Security detention centers.

The government investigated complaints against police and took disciplinary action when the government determined it was warranted. As of October, the Ministry of Interior had referred 14 complaints against its staff to the court. The ministry also took internal disciplinary action against 68 additional ministry employees, including issuing warnings, probations, suspensions, demotions, decreases in pay, or termination.

Although government investigations did not often lead to compensation for victims, the victim could use government reports and results of internal disciplinary actions to seek compensation in civil courts.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh due to overcrowding.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Prison overcrowding continued to be a significant problem. According to the Ministry of Interior, the designed capacity of the Central Prison was 2,709 inmates, but it held 3,308 inmates as of October. The designed capacity of the public prison was 856; it held 1,192 inmates as of October.

The Ministry of Interior reported no overcrowding at its deportation center as of October and stated the average period of detention at the center prior to deportation was no more than three days. Local NGOs, however, reported overcrowding at the center throughout the year.

In May, the interior minister suspended the assistant undersecretary for special security and correctional institutions and the director general of the correctional institutions department in response to video footage of the Ministry of Interior Special Forces Department beating prisoners at the Central Prison. The minister also formed a panel to investigate the assaults, according to a statement issued by the ministry. Security sources told the press the minister established a panel to address the situation in the drug prisoners' ward of the Central Prison, specifically the "rampage" that resulted in a clash between inmates and Special Forces, leading to injuries to 12 prisoners. In June the interior minister referred the incident to the public

prosecutor.

As of October, inmates filed 158 complaints of sexual and physical abuse against other inmates and 62 complaints against prison staff. Authorities investigated all complaints, and in most cases, inmates dropped their complaints before investigations were complete.

Administration: Authorities conducted investigations of credible allegations of mistreatment. Some of these investigations resulted in disciplinary actions or terminations, while 14 complaints against ministry staff were referred to the Public Prosecution's Office.

Independent Monitoring: The Ministry of Interior permitted independent monitoring of prison conditions by some nongovernmental observers and international human rights groups, although the ministry required written approval for visits by local NGOs.

Improvements: Observers said sanitation and facilities maintenance had generally improved from previous years.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court, except when related to questions of citizenship or residency status.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

There were numerous reports by NGOs of police arresting and detaining noncitizens without a warrant, allegedly as part of a government effort to deport unlawful residents. There were several reports of arbitrary arrest, including of citizens. Authorities generally informed detainees promptly of the charges against them and allowed access to family members and a lawyer of their choice. For defendants without a lawyer, the state provided one. In some detention cases, authorities permitted lawyers to attend legal proceedings but did not allow them direct contact with their clients outside of the courtroom. Some defendants were sentenced in absentia. Detainees facing “state security” charges were routinely denied access to their lawyers, interpreters, and document translators before hearings. Police investigated most misdemeanor cases and released suspects within 48 hours after paying bail or a fine. For more serious misdemeanors and felonies, police could hold a suspect a maximum of four days on their own authority before referring the case to prosecution. Authorities detained some suspects, especially in drug and state security cases, for up to two weeks without notification of the charges against them. They also did not allow these suspects to make telephone calls or contact lawyers and family members.

There was a functioning bail system for defendants awaiting trial.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were several reports of arbitrary arrest, including of

citizens. In April, many lawmakers, political groups, and activists objected to the detention of former parliamentarian Abdulrahman al-Anjari for his remarks on social media.

In August, authorities detained Fadel Farhan Saket, known as Abu Turki, a prominent advocate for Bidoon rights, for a tweet advocating for Bidoon rights and demanding the abolition of the Central Agency for Resolving the Situation of Illegal Residents (Central Agency). On August 10, Abu Turki appeared before the General Directorate of Criminal Investigation, where the public prosecutor ordered him immediately arrested and detained at the Central Prison for 21 days pending investigation. There were no updates as of the end of the year.

Pretrial Detention: Authorities held some detainees beyond the maximum pretrial detention period of six months. The length of pretrial detention did not equal or exceed the maximum sentence for the crime. NGOs familiar with the judicial system reported they believed the number of judges and prosecutors working at the Ministry of Justice was inadequate to process cases in a timely manner. The law prohibited pretrial detention for defendants in freedom of expression cases. Prolonged detention at the Talha Deportation Center was also a problem, particularly in cases where a noncitizen detainee allegedly owed money to a citizen or lacked in-country diplomatic representation to provide exit documents. The government stated it resolved most deportation cases within three days, but

international organizations reported they could take up to a month to resolve.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law and the constitution provided for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. The Supreme Judicial Council, comprising senior judges, the attorney general, and the deputy justice minister, nominated all prosecutors and judges and submitted nominations to the amir for approval. Freedom House reported the courts frequently ruled in favor of the government in cases related to politics and cited elements of the judicial system that limited its independence. For example, the executive branch approved judicial promotions, and judges who were Kuwaiti citizens were appointed for life, while noncitizens received contracts for up to three years.

The government continued trying to recruit more of its own citizens for the judiciary. Noncitizen residents involved in legal disputes with citizens frequently alleged the courts showed bias towards citizens. Authorities detained and deported some noncitizen legal residents – principally foreign workers – without recourse to the courts.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and the

judiciary generally enforced this right. The Ministry of Justice was required to pay for and provide defendants with an interpreter for the entire judicial process. NGOs claimed that, in some cases, defendants who did not speak or understand Arabic learned of the charges against them only after their trial began, because authorities did not provide an interpreter when charges were presented.

Criminal trials were public unless a court decided the “maintenance of public order” or the “preservation of public morals” necessitated closed proceedings. Most court documents were not publicly accessible.

Defendants had the right to confront their accusers, to confront witnesses against them, and to present their own witnesses, although courts did not always respect these rights.

If foreign workers had no legal representation, the public prosecutor sometimes arranged for it on their behalf, but with little or no involvement by the workers or their families.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were many reports of political prisoners or detainees. These individuals were given the same protections as other detainees and the government permitted human rights groups to visit them. Throughout the year the government continued to arrest individuals on charges such as insulting the amir, leaders of neighboring countries, or the judiciary, or for

“spreading false news.” The courts issued final verdicts for seven cases and 28 nonfinal rulings in cases of individuals charged with insulting the amir. Some defendants were acquitted, while others received prison sentences ranging from one to 15 years.

As of October, the courts issued preliminary rulings in five cases of insulting the amir. Some of the defendants received prison sentences ranging from one to 15 years; the court acquitted one of the defendants. The government actively monitored social media and incarcerated bloggers and political activists for expressing opinions and ideas critical of the government.

In April, the Court of Cassation, the country’s highest court, sentenced a citizen to seven years in prison and two others to 10 years in a state security case for posting tweets on X (formerly known as Twitter). The charges included defaming the amir, disdaining and humiliating a segment of society, and misusing a cell phone, meaning posting “illegal” content on social media.

According to the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), in May the Criminal Court sentenced Salman al-Khalidi, a Kuwaiti student studying in Qatar, in absentia to five years in jail with hard labor for using his X account to spread “false and malicious rumours” about Kuwait, among other related charges. According to the GCHR, in June 2022 the court sentenced him in absentia to five years in prison for insulting Saudi Arabia and spreading false news over

tweets about the role of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The amir pardoned him in January, but the court resented him in May. Al-Khalidi said he believed the reason for the new sentence was his establishment of the Kuwaiti Refugees Association, a United Kingdom-based organization that focused in part on human rights and politics in the country.

The GCHR reported the State Security Criminal Court sentenced al-Khalidi on September 26 to another three years in prison in absentia, related to his use of his X account to defend the rights of Bidoon and prisoners of conscience, in addition to his work as a founding member of the Kuwaiti Refugee Association. He was convicted of “broadcasting false and tendentious news and rumors abroad about the internal situation in the country, insulting publicly and in a public place by saying and writing on the head of the state, and publishing anything that might prejudice the judiciary using his personal account.” In November, the GCHR reported the State Security Criminal Court issued a new ruling on November 19 adding five more years in prison for similar charges.

Amnesty: In November, the Cabinet approved an amiri decree granting amnesty to a number of political prisoners and ordering the restoration of citizenships that were revoked a decade ago for political reasons.

f. Transnational Repression

On June 16, the GCHR reported blogger and internet activist Mohammed Rashid al-Ajmi left the country on June 6 and fled to Turkey via Egypt because he feared for his life due to a physical attack against him in Kuwait in October 2022, followed by another physical attack in Egypt on June 11. Al-Ajmi stated he had evidence that both attacks were carried out on orders issued by authorities in the Ministry of Interior. The GCHR reported the reason behind the attacks on al-Ajmi was his use of X to express his views on public affairs, in particular his rejection of rampant corruption in state facilities and his call for comprehensive reform.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

Not applicable.

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

The constitution and the law prohibited interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence, and there were no reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions. Cybercrime agents within the Ministry of Interior regularly monitored publicly accessible social media sites, however, and sought information regarding owners of accounts, although foreign-owned social media companies denied some requests.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

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

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but authorities imposed serious restrictions on these rights, including censorship and criminal libel laws. The law also imposed penalties on persons who created or sent “immoral” messages or spread “false news.” The law gave the Public Prosecution Office the power to order suspension of communication services on national security grounds.

Freedom of Expression: The law banned certain issues from publication and public discussion, including: insulting religion, in particular Islam; criticizing the amir; endangering relations between Kuwait and friendly countries; insulting members of the judiciary or displaying disdain for the constitution; compromising classified information; sorcery; and publishing information that could lead to a devaluation of the currency or create false economic worries. In general, local activists, academics, journalists, and opposition political figures reported they were sometimes contacted by KSS, Ministry of Information, or Public Prosecution Office officials after they had published opinions deemed contrary to government positions. Authorities did not always take immediate action against citizens’ overseas social media posts

but reserved the right to do so once the author returned to the country. Officials had broad latitude to interpret what constituted a crime in criticizing the amir or the government, and activists could face up to seven years in prison for each count.

In March, the Cybercrimes Department summoned former parliamentarian Bader al-Dahoum to interrogation for offending the judiciary after he criticized the Constitutional Court decision regarding the 2020 National Assembly and the 2022 parliamentary elections. There were no updates on the case as of the end of the year.

In December, the Court of Cassation issued a verdict in the case involving 17 activists accused of insulting the amir, participating in marches, and resisting security forces. The 17 activists received a suspended prison sentence of one year and eight months and a fine of 500 Kuwaiti dinars (KD) (\$1,600).

In November, the Constitutional Court dismissed an appeal challenging the constitutionality of the Cybersecurity Law and Press and Publication Law, affirming the argument alleging that the laws infringed on constitutional freedoms was invalid.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Independent media were active and expressed a variety of views within legally permissible limits. All print media were privately owned, although their independence was limited by law and

self-censorship based on fear of prosecution. The government did not permit non-Islamic religious publishing companies to distribute materials, although several churches published religious materials solely for their congregations' use. The law stipulated large fines and up to 10 years in prison for persons who used any means, including media, to subvert the state.

On April 15, Kuwait News Agency reported the Ministry of Information stated it continuously monitored the publications of all licensed media outlets to ensure their compliance with applicable law. The ministry spokesperson issued a statement declaring authorities could not take legal action against news services unless an interested party or individual filed an official complaint. The statement emphasized the importance in media reporting of obtaining information from credible sources, verifying its authenticity, and refraining from publishing content that might offend others or distort facts. The ministry called upon all news services, media outlets, and media professionals to follow the law.

In December, the Public Prosecution Office warned it would take firm legal measures in line with Article 167 of the constitution against any individual, group, platform, or media outlet reporting or publishing "false news" concerning the health of the amir or the arrangements of the Ruling House. Meanwhile, the assistant undersecretary for press, publishing, and publications affairs at the Ministry of Information stressed that media

outlets were prohibited from publishing, broadcasting, rebroadcasting, sending, or transmitting any content contravening media laws.

According to the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs reviewed books of a religious nature.

Media outlets expressed a range of opinions on topics relating to social problems, but all appeared to self-censor, avoiding critical discussion of topics such as the amir and religion or any discussion of sensitive topics such as sex. Authorities censored most English-language educational materials that mentioned the Holocaust and required educational material either to refer to Israel as “Occupied Palestine” or to remove such references entirely, although they did not censor these topics in the news media. Widely available satellite dishes and virtual private networks allowed unfiltered media access.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law criminalized “defaming Islamic religion” or God in a broader sense. Muslim citizens or residents had the right to file criminal charges against individuals they believed had defamed Islam or God. The constitution stated the amir was “immune and inviolable,” and the law criminalized defamation and criticism of the amir, as well as neighboring countries and their rulers. In February, the Court of Appeals sentenced a blogger to seven years in prison on charges of insulting the amir and Saudi Arabia.

In September, KUNA News Agency, an official state news wire service, reported the Ministry of Interior was monitoring the electronic accounts of individuals who violated public ethics or defamed civil servants, including state security personnel. The law entitled civil servants to protection against defamatory remarks they might face while doing their duty, according to the ministry's General Directorate of Security Relations and Media. Recent surveillance of social media showed that some accounts used libel and morally inappropriate language to defame civil servants, according to the ministry. KUNA added the Department of Electronic and Cyber Crime, an affiliate of the General Directorate of Criminal Investigations, was collecting evidence on the accounts as a prelude to taking legal action against their owners. The statement advised social media users to abide by the law and public ethics to avoid legal liability.

National Security: The law forbade the publication or transmission of any information deemed subversive to the constitutional system on national security grounds. The government prosecuted online bloggers, political activists, and social media outlets under the Cybercrime Law, the Printing and Publications Law, and the National Security Law. The government generally restricted freedom of speech in instances purportedly related to national security, including glorifying Saddam Hussein and references to the "Arabian Gulf" as the "Persian Gulf."

In July, authorities arrested social media activist Hamed Buyabis following a

series of tweets criticizing Saudi Arabia's interior minister. Authorities held Buyabis at the central prison for 21 days on charges of "insulting a neighboring country." The Criminal Court decided not to release Buyabis and to postpone the case hearing until August 31. The Ministry of Interior issued a statement stressing "it does not tolerate abuse and will deal harshly with anyone who begs to harm the relationship between the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." There were no further updates as of the end of the year.

Internet Freedom

The law criminalized certain online activities, including unauthorized access to information technology systems and confidential information, blackmail, support for terrorist activity, money laundering, and support for human trafficking.

The government's E-Licensing program required bloggers and websites that provided news in the country to register with the Ministry of Information and apply for a license or face a fine.

The government monitored online communications, including blogs and discussion groups, for defamation and general security. The Ministry of Communications blocked websites considered to "incite terrorism and instability" and required internet service providers to block websites that "violate [the country's] customs and traditions." The government

prosecuted and punished individuals for the online expression of political or religious views, including by email and social media.

In October, the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) denied the validity of reports regarding the Kuwait International Gateway tender, stressing that it did not allow internet surveillance in the country. The tender sought to increase the capacity of the country's internet data transit ports, but the state's oversight of the tender raised concerns the government would use its oversight ability to monitor and censor internet traffic. The government withdrew the tender later in October. In response to a parliamentary question by parliamentarian Hamad Abdul Rahman al-Olayan, CITRA explained in a memorandum that the project was related to developing the Kuwait International Gateway, and it was an existing and extended project. In each contract, CITRA renewed licenses, and maintained and developed systems capacities in view of the continuous increase in internet capacities in the country. It revealed that 10 local companies had applied to win the tender.

The government filtered the internet primarily to block lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) material (to include advocacy and legal information), sites critical of Islam, and pornography.

CITRA reported blocked websites included content considered offensive to the state and harmful to public morals, in addition to fraud and intellectual copyright violations. According to CITRA, it blocked websites at the request

of the Public Prosecution Office or KSS.

In December, the Criminal Court sentenced blogger Abdulaziz Dhuwaihi bin Rumaih to three years of imprisonment with a suspended sentence. This decision came in response to a complaint from the Turkish Ministry of Interior, stemming from tweets in which bin Rumaih criticized the Turkish Minister of Interior following an incident where a Kuwaiti citizen was assaulted in Turkey.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, but the government restricted these freedoms.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The government required citizens to obtain permits for public gatherings of more than 20 persons. Following Hamas' October 7 terrorist attacks on Israel and the Israeli military response, however, protests comprising hundreds of individuals in support of Palestinians occurred regularly at Irada Square without permits until the 40-day mourning period commenced for the death of previous Amir Nawaf Al Sabah on December 16.

Noncitizens and Bidoon were prohibited from demonstrating. Bidoon activists reported that if they tried to assemble peacefully or organize campaigns advocating for equal rights, authorities harassed them. Some

Bidoon activists said authorities detained them for questioning every time they planned campaigns or protests.

In February, the Criminal Court imposed fines of KD 100 (\$325) and KD 500 (\$1,627) on 21 defendants, both citizens and Bidoon, for calling for and participating in an unlicensed gathering for Bidoon rights in Taima Square in August 2022. In April, the Court of Appeal acquitted 18 defendants in the same case, including five Kuwaiti citizens, and increased the fines against three Bidoon defendants (the first and second defendants were sentenced to one year in jail, while the third defendant was sentenced to two years). The court suspended enforcement of the prison sentences for three years. In December, the Court of Cassation upheld the Court of Appeals verdict that sentenced the three Bidoon activists to imprisonment for periods ranging between one and two years with a suspended sentence and imposed a fine of KD 500 (\$1,627) on the three remaining defendants. The charges included gathering at Taima Square without a permit and broadcasting “false news” regarding the country’s internal situation.

Sentences for organizing public demonstrations among the Bidoon, participating in unlicensed or illegal demonstrations against the country’s ruling system, spreading false news, or criticizing the amir or other leaders on social media ranged from six months in prison to 10 years plus fines for multiple offenses.

Freedom of Association

The law prohibited officially registered NGOs from engaging in political activities. The government used its power to register associations to exert political influence and limit public engagement on controversial topics or proscribed activities. As of October, the Ministry of Social Affairs had approved 20 of 24 new applications for NGO registration, stating the denied applicants offered services already provided by existing NGOs. Dozens of unlicensed civic groups, clubs, and unofficial NGOs operated without legal status, and many chose not to register due to bureaucratic inconvenience.

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 constitution generally provided for freedom of internal movement, but numerous laws constrained foreign travel.

Foreign Travel: Bidoon residents and noncitizen workers faced problems with and restrictions on foreign travel. The government generally did not issue travel documents to Bidoon residents, although it permitted some

Bidoon residents to travel overseas for medical treatment, education, or to visit Saudi Arabia for the Hajj. The Ministry of Interior issued Article 17 passports, temporary documents that did not confer nationality, to some Bidoon for these purposes if the applicants held valid security cards issued by the Central Agency and did not have security restrictions in their file.

In February, the Criminal Court sentenced four Ministry of Interior employees at the Salmi land port to seven years in prison for smuggling out of the country eight Bidoon under travel bans. The court also tried, convicted, and sentenced the eight smuggled Bidoon in absentia.

In July, security sources told media that Bidoon with a valid security card issued by the Central Agency who were children of Kuwaiti mothers, wives of Kuwaiti citizens, military and police personnel, students studying abroad, or sick individuals were eligible to apply for Article 17 passports.

Government representatives also said these were the only Bidoon eligible for passports. The government only issued passports to these groups.

Foreign workers who obtained emergency travel documents from their home country embassy had to obtain permission from the Public Authority of Manpower and the Ministry of Interior to exit the country.

The law permitted authorities to impose travel bans on citizens and noncitizens accused or suspected of violating the law, including for debt nonpayment, and allowed citizens to petition authorities to impose a travel

ban on others. Authorities sometimes imposed this provision arbitrarily, resulting in delays and difficulties for citizens and noncitizens alike trying to leave the country. Human rights activists reported authorities imposed travel bans to prevent them from participating in overseas events for minor infractions, such as failing to pay parking tickets.

In August, the Court of Cassation annulled the Ministry of Interior's decision to revoke a citizen's passport. In its ruling, the court stated that revoking the passport of a citizen was one of the worst restrictions on freedom of movement.

In August, the Ministry of Interior issued a decision banning noncitizens from traveling unless they paid their outstanding traffic fines. Forty-eight hours later, the ministry barred approximately 70 individuals from leaving the country. The ministry later explained that fines for grave traffic violations could not be settled through the electronic payment system at ports of departure. Individuals with these types of violations had to settle their fines in person at the traffic violations department.

In September, the Ministry of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy and the Ministry of Communication followed suit, barring noncitizens from departing the country before paying their electricity, water, and telephone bills.

Human rights activists and legal experts condemned these decisions as

encroaching on the constitutional right to freedom of movement, mobility, and travel. They said the new regulations denied the right to due process, particularly when disagreements emerged over fines or bills. They said the constitution required unbiased, uniform application of the law, regardless of nationality or residency status.

As of October, the government had issued 1,284 travel ban orders for both citizens and expats in penal cases, in addition to 62,286 travel ban orders in civil cases.

Citizenship: The law prohibited the granting of citizenship to non-Muslims, but it allowed non-Muslim male citizens to transmit citizenship to their descendants.

In December, the Council of Ministers restored the citizenship of six individuals, which the government had revoked in 2016 and 2018. The decision also restored the citizenship of any family members who acquired citizenship through them.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government generally cooperated with UNHCR and humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Access to Asylum: The law did not provide for granting asylum or refugee

status, and the government did not have a system for providing protections to refugees. The country was not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 protocols. The constitution prohibited the extradition of applicants for refugee status in third countries.

Determinations of citizenship or residency status were not subject to judicial review. The law allowed government authorities to administratively deport a person without judicial review, but the law required the state to show the person threatened national security or could harm the state's interests. Prosecutors applied the law broadly and subjected noncitizens charged with noncriminal offenses, including some residency and traffic violations, to deportation.

In August, security sources told media that since January authorities had deported approximately 25,000 noncitizens, including 10,000 women, mostly for violating residency and labor laws. The majority of the deportations were administrative. Observers indicated most noncitizens were deported for drug use, fighting, theft, begging, brewing alcohol, and expired residencies.

Access to Basic Services: UNHCR received reports from persons under its care who had problems enrolling their children in schools, particularly those who did not have valid residency permits. Support for children with disabilities was limited and often inaccessible to nonnationals.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Not applicable.

g. Stateless Persons

UNHCR estimated there were 83,000 stateless persons in the country, mostly Bidoon residents considered illegal residents by authorities and denied citizenship. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and international and local media estimated the Bidoon resident population was more than 100,000, while the government reported the Bidoon population was approximately 83,000, based on those who held Central Agency identity cards.

The Central Agency oversaw the status of stateless residents, including Bidoon. Bidoon residents, Bidoon rights advocates, parliamentarians, and human rights activists regularly protested the exclusive role of the Central Agency absent any judicial review, arguing the agency had not managed Bidoon affairs effectively and conditions for Bidoon residents had dramatically deteriorated under the agency's leadership.

The law did not provide stateless persons, including Bidoon, a clear path to acquire citizenship. The law did not give the judicial system authority to rule on the status of Bidoon, leaving Bidoon with no avenue to present evidence

and plead their case for citizenship.

The law's discrimination against women in nationality laws contributed to statelessness, particularly in the case of Bidoon. If a woman citizen married a Bidoon man, their children and subsequent descendants became stateless and would have difficulty accessing basic education and medical services.

Some Bidoon residents said they did not have access to government services because they lacked valid government identification documents needed to apply for birth, death, marriage, and divorce certificates. Bidoon who refused to state they had an alternate nationality were reportedly unable to obtain security cards. In June, the Central Agency instructed the Ministry of Education to halt the waiver that had previously allowed Bidoon with expired security cards to register their children for school. The agency also requested that the ministry direct 31 Bidoon employees to visit the Central Agency to update their legal status and obtain valid cards to renew their employment contracts.

In January, according to international media, authorities at Kuwait International Airport denied entry to Bidoon rights advocate Mona Kareem, interrogated her on her political views, threatened imprisonment if she did not go back to Beirut, and forced her to board a plane back to Lebanon, preventing her from visiting her family. Kareem's family in the country did not have passports, because they were Bidoon. The GCHR condemned the deportation of Kareem and the "violation of her and her family's...right to

freedom of movement.”

In September, the GCHR reported that Mohammed al-Barghash, a Bidoon and a Bidoon rights activist, was arrested by State Security authorities for investigation. The GCHR stated his arrest was due to his peaceful activities on social media, including using his X account. On October 27, the Court of First Instance decided to acquit him of all charges. He was released subsequently after 55 days of detention in the Central Prison.

According to Bidoon advocates and government officials, many Bidoon residents could not provide documentation proving ties to the country sufficient to qualify for citizenship. The government considered Bidoon illegal residents and refused to issue them security cards, which impeded their access to education, medical services, legal employment, and travel documents.

Although Bidoon residents were by law entitled to government benefits – including free health care, education, and ration cards – community members alleged it was often difficult for them to access those services due to bureaucratic requirements. Bidoon residents and international NGOs reported the government did not uniformly provide government services and benefits to Bidoon residents. Some activists alleged they or their family members were denied access to education, health care, and jobs for advocating on behalf of the Bidoon. Like other noncitizens, Bidoon did not have the right to own property. Children of citizen women married to

noncitizen men, including Bidoon, could not inherit their mother's property, including a family home.

The government alleged most Bidoon residents concealed their "true" nationalities and were not stateless. Central Agency officials offered incentives to Bidoon who declared an alternate nationality, including priority employment and the ability to obtain a driver's license.

Bidoon leaders alleged that when some members of the Bidoon community attempted to obtain government services from the Central Agency, officials required Bidoon individuals to sign a blank piece of paper to receive the necessary paperwork. Later, Bidoon activists reported the agency would write a letter on the signed paper purportedly stating the Bidoon individuals held another nationality. The Central Agency operated an electronic renewal service for security cards on its website, as well as online services including health insurance, marriage, divorce, and inheritance certificates. Bidoon reported that while they were able to obtain an electronic security card, the Central Agency still required them to sign a blank paper prior to receiving the card.

The Central Agency granted and revoked government identification, birth, death, and marriage certificates, recommendations for employment, and other official documentation, but many Bidoon and activists on their behalf continued to accuse the Central Agency of not complying with the law and failing to implement court rulings requiring it to register Bidoon residents

and issue them required documents.

The government allowed the Bidoon sons of soldiers who were killed, missing in action, or had served in the military for 30 years to join the military.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

Citizens did not have the ability to choose their government. The constitution provided for a 50-member National Assembly, popularly elected on a formally nonpartisan basis, because political parties were not officially legalized. The monarchy held executive power and dominated most state institutions, while the elected parliament played an influential role in passing the national budget and holding the government accountable. The amir and the Constitutional Court had the power to dissolve the legislature, and the executive could determine the timing of elections.

Elections and Political Participation

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: National parliamentary elections were widely reported to be fair and free of abuses and irregularities.

In March, the Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional the amir's decree dissolving the 2020 National Assembly. The court's decision voided all actions that followed the invalidated amiri decree, including the September 2022 National Assembly election results. The court also restored the 2020 National Assembly. In May, at the prime minister's request, the amir dissolved the reinstated 2020 National Assembly and called for new elections, which took place on June 6. Following the Constitutional Court's ruling, there were reports of government displeasure with the decision and pressure on Justice Mohamed bin Naji, who held multiple judicial positions, to resign. In April, bin Naji submitted his resignation to the Supreme Judicial Council, but the council, during an emergency session, rejected the resignation and reaffirmed judicial independence according to Article 163 of the constitution. The council also expressed disapproval of alleged government attempts to interfere with the judiciary.

In May, the Council of Ministers authorized four local NGOs to monitor the parliamentary elections: the Kuwait Transparency Society, the Kuwait National Integrity Society, the Kuwait Journalists Society, and the Society for Monitoring the National Assembly. Observers generally considered the June parliamentary election free and fair and reported no serious procedural problems.

A total of 207 candidates including 13 women competed for the 50 seats in five constituencies. The remaining 15 seats in the assembly were reserved

for the appointed cabinet. Opposition politicians won 29 of the legislature's 50 seats. One woman was elected. In July the Constitutional Court rejected all challenges to the constitutionality of the June elections. A wide range of current and former lawmakers, led by opposition MPs, accused the Constitutional Court of political interference by dissolving the assembly. They noted it was not the first time the court had dissolved an opposition-led assembly.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Although no law formally banned political parties, the government did not officially recognize political parties or allow their formation. National Assembly candidates had to nominate themselves as individuals. Well organized, unofficial blocs operated as political groupings inside the National Assembly, and parliamentarians formed loose alliances.

In May, local media reported the Ministry of Interior's Election Affairs Department disqualified seven registered candidates from running in the June elections due to prior criminal convictions. Some of the disqualified candidates challenged the ban in administrative court, but the court upheld their disqualification.

Prosecutors and judges from the Ministry of Justice supervised election stations. The Ministries of Interior and Justice annually purged from voter registration lists the names of those convicted of felonies, serious crimes, or insulting the amir. Authorities arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced several

citizens, including former parliamentarians and candidates during the year on vote-buying charges and for participating in outlawed informal tribal primary elections for National Assembly candidates.

In June, the Court of Cassation rejected appeals submitted by 14 persons convicted of participating in tribal primaries, including two former parliamentarians, and upheld their two-year imprisonment. The court also affirmed that those convicted were ineligible to run in future elections.

In November, the Cabinet approved an amiri decree granting amnesty to approximately two dozen tribesmen, including a former lawmaker, sentenced to two years for holding outlawed tribal primary elections. These elections were annulled by the constitutional court ahead of the 2022 general polls. The amnesty also restored citizenship to Ahmad al-Jabr, the owner of a local television station that supported opposition groups. Al-Jabr's citizenship, revoked a decade ago for backing the opposition, was among many affected by the decree.

On July 26, the National Assembly approved amendments to the law that rescinded the Constitutional Court's power to nullify parliamentary elections.

On August 1, the National Assembly approved a new election law establishing for the first time a General Election Commission to manage and oversee the electoral process. The law was signed by the amir and

published in the Official Gazette in October. The Commission would comprise five appointed Kuwaiti judges and be supervised by the minister of justice. The Commission would monitor election campaign financing and set spending ceilings, which the previous law did not provide for. The Ministry of Interior previously managed the electoral process. The commission had not been established by year's end and was pending the issuance of the executive regulations to help implement the relevant provisions of the law.

The new law lifted a lifetime voting ban imposed in 2016 on citizens convicted of insulting God, the prophets, or the Amir, following completion of a rehabilitation period. The new law required all voters and candidates to “abide by the constitution, law, and Islamic sharia regulations.”

In November, the Criminal Court ruled to imprison former parliamentarian Mubarak al-Aro and other defendants for two years due to alleged vote buying prior to 2022 National Assembly elections.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable

Groups: LGBTQI+ individuals did not run for the National Assembly while openly acknowledging their orientation. Although women gained the right to vote and run for office in 2005, they continued to face cultural, social, and financial barriers to full political participation. Cultural norms often led to the exclusion of women from local gatherings (*diwanias*), which candidates attended to lobby for support from influential leaders and voters.

Thirteen women candidates ran in the June election. One woman from Kuwait's Shia community was elected as a member of parliament. Analysts attributed low rates of female representation in this outcome to widespread discomfort with women in leadership roles, women candidates' exclusion from financing and the traditionally male-dominated social gatherings where much political campaigning took place, and an electoral system that minimized the likelihood of voters allocating their one vote per slate to a woman candidate.

Section 4. Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials; the government generally did not implement the law effectively. There were numerous reports of government corruption. Civil society organizations and other observers believed officials engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

Corruption: Numerous cases of serious corruption, including government corruption, occurred. The Anticorruption Authority, known as *Nazaha* (integrity), was charged with receiving and analyzing complaints and forwarding them to the appropriate authorities in either the Public Prosecution Office or police for further investigation or other action. Nazaha referred government officials involved in corrupt practices, including officials of the Ministries of Interior and Defense, to the Public Prosecution

Office for further action. Nazaha generally lacked legal authority to carry out robust anticorruption actions, such as covert surveillance, executing search warrants, arresting suspects, or enforcing compliance with investigatory demands, according to legal experts and several NGOs. Investigations uncovered widespread use of false academic credentials by citizens and foreign residents in the public and private sectors, exposing fraud and a lack of transparency in official hirings and promotions.

There were many reports that individuals had to pay intermediaries to receive routine government services. Police corruption was a problem, especially when one party to a dispute had a personal relationship with a police official involved in a case. There were several reports of corruption in the procurement and bidding processes for lucrative government contracts.

In March, the Criminal Court sentenced the son of a former prime minister to 10 years' imprisonment for money laundering in the Malaysian Fund case, the largest money laundering case in the history of the country. The defendants were found guilty of forming an organized criminal group that committed money laundering involving Chinese currency, sourced from stolen funds and investments of the Malaysian Sovereign Fund. The court also convicted the partner of the former prime minister's son and two expatriates, sentenced them to 10 years each, and sentenced a lawyer to seven years' imprisonment. The court fined the defendants KD 183 million (\$592 million) and ordered the confiscation of the contents of their bank

accounts. In July, the Court of Appeals upheld the Criminal Court's ruling.

In November, the Court of Cassation refrained from penalizing former Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber al-Mubarak and a codefendant in the "Army Fund" case, instead imposing a KD 15 million (\$48.8 million) fine on each.

Additionally, Jaber al-Mubarak and two others were jointly fined KD 8 million (\$26 million). Meanwhile, former Minister of Defense and Interior Sheikh Khaled al-Jarrah and five codefendants received a seven-year prison sentence and fines totaling approximately KD 290 million (\$940 million).

For additional information concerning corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

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

The government imposed limits on the operations of domestic and international human rights groups, although officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to the views of those groups. The law permitted the existence of NGOs, but the government continued to deny registration to some and imposed arduous registration requirements for all. To register,

NGOs were required to demonstrate they advanced the public interest, conducted business beneficial to the country, had at least 50 citizen members and a board composed entirely of citizens, and did not undermine cultural values and norms as defined by the government. NGOs could not engage in political activity or encourage sectarianism.

Major local NGOs dedicated to human rights included the Kuwait Society for Human Rights and the Kuwaiti Association of the Basic Evaluators of Human Rights. Most registered NGOs focused on the rights or welfare of specific groups, such as women, children, prisoners, and persons with disabilities. These organizations operated with little government interference, but some suffered from a lack of government cooperation. A few dozen local unregistered human rights groups also operated discreetly but ran the risk of legal sanction if they were too vocal in publicizing alleged abuses. The government and various National Assembly committees met occasionally with local NGOs and generally responded to their inquiries.

In May, 12 NGOs issued a joint statement in which they condemned what they described as undue restrictions on civil society by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Earlier in May, the ministry issued a ban on NGOs conducting activities, including publishing materials, without prior government approval. It also mandated that NGOs provide the ministry with work plans for the next six months. NGOs stated these measures restricted their freedom and independence and contradicted international standards of

transparency, freedom, justice, and equality.

In April, the Court of Cassation upheld the March 2022 acquittal of Safaa Zaman, president of the Kuwait Association for Information Security, on three counts of broadcasting false news, disturbing the public order, and threatening Kuwait's relationship with a friendly country, Egypt.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: Authorities sometimes targeted human rights defenders (HRDs) for exercising their civil and political rights. HRDs faced official complaints on ambiguous grounds, most often accusations their public statements insulted the amir or judiciary. The government imposed travel restrictions, detention without charge, and judicial harassment as punishment. Online activists faced similar reprisals.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The National Assembly's Human Rights Committee operated independently of the government. The committee primarily heard individual complaints of human rights abuses and worked with plaintiffs and relevant stakeholders to reach a mutual settlement. The committee had adequate resources and was considered effective.

In January, the chairman of the board of directors of the quasi-governmental National Diwan for Human Rights informed the press the term of the sitting board, comprising 11 members including the president, had expired in September 2022. The amir had not since appointed a new board of directors and the outgoing board handled only urgent matters during the

interim period.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalized rape of women and men. The law did not specifically include provisions on spousal rape, intimate partner rape, or other forms of domestic and sexual violence, including so-called corrective rape of LGBTQI+ persons. The crime carried a maximum penalty of death, which the courts occasionally imposed. The court distinguished between cases of rape and other forms of sexual assault.

Authorities did not effectively enforce laws against rape. The law continued to allow a rapist to avoid punishment if he married the survivor and her male guardian consented. Police typically arrested perpetrators and investigated allegations of rape when reported and, in a limited number of cases, prosecuted the accused. There were reports alleging some police stations did not take seriously reports of sexual assault and domestic violence, which service providers stated contributed to a culture of underreporting by rape and domestic violence survivors.

Violence against women was prevalent. The 2020 Law on Protection from Domestic Violence provided penalties for violating protection orders but did not set out penalties for domestic violence as a separate crime. In August,

the cabinet approved a decree issuing regulations for implementing the law. The regulations included more details concerning requesting and implementing protection orders. They also stipulated the court could issue an alternative punishment to the penalties imposed on the aggressors, obliging them to perform community service. The regulations included details on establishing a fund to provide care for victims of domestic violence and developing means of preventing the crime.

The regulations limited the alternative penalty to a period of not less than three months and not to exceed six months, renewable for similar periods. In all cases, the alternative penalty could not exceed the duration of the original penalty. The bylaws also included details for establishing a fund to provide care for victims of domestic violence and to develop ways to combat and prevent the crime.

In December, statistics from the Public Prosecution Office revealed 779 new domestic violence cases were registered in court during the first nine months of the year. Legal sources pointed out that many cases before the courts often ended in small financial fines.

In December, the Criminal Court sentenced a citizen to four years in prison for physically assaulting his wife and infant and ordered the civil case to be referred to the civil court.

In December, the Court of Cassation upheld a 10-year prison sentence

against a Kuwaiti citizen found guilty of sexual assault and engaging in rape of an Asian woman who later took her own life.

In June, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs Maryam al-Azmi announced that an estimated 20 employees, including researchers and lawyers, had completed training as judicial police officers. The new officers could enforce laws, regulations, and decisions related to preventing domestic violence.

In March, the Public Prosecution Office announced it had ordered the pretrial detention of a Bidoon man accused of kidnapping two noncitizen women, withholding their freedom, and raping them. There were no further updates available.

Sentences in cases of violence against women ranged from imprisonment for one year up to life imprisonment and the death penalty.

Local NGOs reported cases of domestic violence against women. In August, media reported that according to statistics published by the Ministry of Justice, domestic violence cases totaled 1,216 in the first half of the year.

In December, Kuwait University researchers, in collaboration with the Asia Research and Statistical Consulting Company, conducted a study on violence against women, assessing the need for a shelter, counseling center, and hotline for abused women in the country. The study, involving 10,000 women of diverse backgrounds and ages, revealed that first-degree relatives

were the primary aggressors. In terms of types of abuse, verbal violence ranked highest at 6.9 percent, followed by psychological abuse at 4.8 percent, physical violence at 4.3 percent, and mental abuse at 3.7 percent. The majority of those surveyed supported a 24/7 hotline for reporting emergencies, 98 percent of those surveyed expressed the need for a day counseling center, and 86 percent affirmed the need for a women's shelter for those threatened by abuse.

Service providers observed that domestic violence was significantly underreported to authorities, but media publicized some high-profile cases.

In May, the Court of Appeals upheld the death sentence imposed on a man for the 2020 killing of his sister and her unborn child in a hospital. The court also reduced the prison sentence of his brother and codefendant from life to 15 years.

In February, the minister of social affairs and community development – who also served as the minister of state for women and children's affairs – informed the parliamentary Committee on Women, Children, and Family Affairs, in her capacity as president of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, that although a domestic violence shelter was officially opened last year, it faced administrative, technical, and security obstacles, in addition to shortage of specialized staff.

NGO members reported shelter staff applied coercive measures to residents

and lacked adequate training to appropriately support domestic violence survivors. Advocates called for full implementation of the domestic violence law to allow the shelter to align its operations with international best practices.

A woman could petition for divorce based on injury due to spousal abuse, but the law did not provide a clear legal standard regarding what constituted injury. In domestic violence cases, a woman had to produce a report from a government hospital to document her injuries, in addition to having at least two male witnesses (or a male witness and two female witnesses) attest to the abuse. Advocates reported that women who reported abuse to police rarely received help because officers were not adequately trained to deal with domestic violence cases. Survivors were generally sent back to their male guardians, who in some instances were their abusers.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C was not explicitly criminalized, but authorities considered it illegal under general provisions prohibiting physical violence and abuse. NGOs reported its practice in some expatriate communities. Parents and doctors found to be participating in FGM/C could be fined, but there were no known instances of fines imposed during the year.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: The law provided reduced penalties for a man who killed a woman who allegedly engaged in

an adulterous act, which NGOs asserted legalized “honor killings.” The government reported the Ministry of Justice did not track cases or publish data regarding honor killings. According to the Ministry of Justice, courts did not review any cases under Article 153 (the honor killing article) of the penal code during the year.

Human rights groups characterized sexual harassment in the workplace as a pervasive and unreported problem. The penal code criminalized sexual harassment, but many activists, legal experts, and MPs were dissatisfied with the legal sanctions available. The law criminalized “encroachment on honor,” which encompassed everything from touching persons against their will to rape, but police enforced this law inconsistently. The government deployed women police officers to combat sexual harassment in shopping malls and other public spaces. Perpetrators of sexual harassment and sexual assault faced fines and imprisonment.

Discrimination: The law did not provide women the same legal status, rights, and inheritance provisions as men. Women experienced discrimination in most aspects of family law, including divorce and child custody, as well as in the basic rights of citizenship, the workplace, and in certain circumstances the value of their testimony in court. Sharia courts had jurisdiction over personal status and family law cases for Sunni and Shia Muslims. As implemented in the country, sharia discriminated against women in judicial proceedings, marriage, child custody, and inheritance.

There were no reported cases of official or private-sector discrimination in accessing credit, owning or managing a business, or securing housing, but no official government system existed to track this.

In March, the Public Authority for Housing Welfare confirmed that wives could directly obtain ownership documents for half of a government-provided house without requiring a committee review.

Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred against citizen and noncitizen women.

Employment advertisements frequently specified the desired gender and nationality of potential employees. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred against citizen and noncitizen women. Women domestic workers were at particular risk of discrimination or abuse due to the isolated home environment in which they worked.

The law stated a woman should receive “remuneration equal to that of a man provided she does the same work,” although it prohibited women from working in “dangerous industries” in trades “harmful” to health, such as mining, oil drilling, construction, factories, and agriculture, or in those that “violate public morals,” such as professions that provide services exclusively to men. In September 2022, the Public Authority of Manpower amended the regulations to open several new employment fields to women, including the oil sector, provided the position did not require “strenuous physical

effort.”

In November, a government report issued by the National Center for Development Research, affiliated with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, stated the salary gap between male and female workers in the government sector was 30 percent.

In October, the government approved granting a child allowance to working women in the private sector if their husbands were unable to earn an income and did not receive a regular salary, pension, or assistance from the government. The decision, announced by the Government Communication Center, aimed to support working women in the private sector and matched the allowance provided to women in the public sector.

Civil courts allowed any person to testify and considered the testimony of men and women equally, but in sharia courts the testimony of a woman equaled half that of a man.

The law allowed marriage between Muslim men and non-Muslim women (of Abrahamic religious groups only), but it prohibited marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men. The law did not require a non-Muslim woman to convert to Islam to marry a Muslim man, but many non-Muslim women faced strong economic and societal pressure to convert. In the event of a divorce between a Muslim father and non-Muslim mother

who did not convert to Islam, the law granted the father or his family sole custody of the children. A non-Muslim woman married to a Muslim male citizen was also ineligible for naturalization and could not inherit her husband's property unless specified as a beneficiary in his will.

Inheritance was governed by sharia, which varied according to the specific school of Islamic jurisprudence. In the absence of a direct male heir, a Shia woman could inherit all property, while a Sunni woman inherited only a portion, with the balance divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased.

The government contributed to statelessness through discrimination against women in nationality laws. Women did not enjoy the same citizenship rights as men. Women citizens could not transmit citizenship to their noncitizen husbands or children. In exceptional cases, the amir granted citizenship to some children of widowed or divorced women citizens, but this was a discretionary act. Women citizens could sponsor residency permits for their noncitizen husbands and children only if the husband and children were unemployed and not naturalized citizens.

Male citizens married to female noncitizens did not face such discrimination, and their children were accorded the full legal protections of citizenship. Individuals could petition the Ministry of Interior to include their names on a list of proposed naturalizations for approval by the Council of Ministers and signature by the amir, but this provision was only occasionally implemented.

The law required segregation by gender of classes at all public universities and secondary schools, although it was not always enforced.

According to a July Human Rights Watch report, male guardians and other family members could report women to the police for being “absent” from their homes, which could lead to their arrest and forcible return home or administrative detention, and some state universities required women to show they had male guardian permission before they could go on field trips or stay at or leave campus accommodations or grounds. Human Rights Watch also reported women faced discrimination when trying to rent apartments if they were not married or lacked a male guardian’s permission and that hotels prevented some women from renting a room without a male guardian.

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

Social and cultural attitudes prevented unmarried women from seeking reproductive health information, and some physicians were reluctant to administer certain procedures, such as pap smears, to unmarried women despite there being no law against it. Many stateless Bidoon and unmarried women reportedly had difficulty accessing nonemergency reproductive health care.

While the government did not provide any formal family planning programs,

contraceptives were available via pharmacies without prescription regardless of nationality or age or marital status. Clinics were prohibited by law from providing any advice on contraceptives to unmarried women, however. Cultural stigmas discouraged unmarried women from accessing contraceptives. It was illegal to give birth out of wedlock, and a mother who gave birth out of wedlock could be imprisoned along with her child. Fathers of children born out of wedlock could also be imprisoned. If an unmarried woman was pregnant, authorities at times summoned her partner for interviewing, requested the suspected father submit to a paternity test, and asked for a marriage certificate backdated nine months for the mother and father to avoid arrest. Mothers giving birth out of wedlock in public or government-run hospitals often faced obstacles obtaining identity documents for their children. NGOs and medical professionals reported families pressured unmarried pregnant women to claim falsely they had been raped to avoid imprisonment and the stigma associated with sexual relations prior to marriage.

In July, the government implemented a new policy that required all women visitors to the country to submit a “certificate of nonpregnancy” to obtain an entry e-visa. According to the government, the policy was instituted to prevent pregnant travelers from entering the country to give birth for free in government hospitals. The government rescinded the policy in August.

The government provided some access to sexual and reproductive health

services for survivors of sexual violence, but these services were largely inadequate. Emergency contraception was available. Postexposure prophylaxis was available as part of clinical management of rape. A large percentage of survivors of sexual violence had little access to health services. According to the Ministry of Health, rape kits were provided only to the Ministry of Interior's forensic medical department, which handled cases of sexual assault. The Ministry of Health reported it cooperated with a specialized team in the Department of Forensic Medicine within the Ministry of Interior mandated to handle such cases, take samples, and preserve physical evidence for laboratory analysis. The Ministry of Health stated it provided medical treatment and services to all survivors of sexual assault, whether Kuwaiti, non-Kuwaiti, or Bidoon. Publicly available information was limited on the required procedures needed to request a rape kit. Expatriate survivors of sexual violence often had even less access to such services, particularly if they were illegal residents or their employer did not provide adequate medical coverage.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law stated all forms of expression that promoted hatred against any category of society, incited sectarian strife, or called for the supremacy of any one ethnic or religious group were prohibited. The law prohibited employers from discriminating based on gender, age, pregnancy, or social status in the oil and private sectors, but its implementation was

inconsistent. According to the Public Authority for Civil Information, approximately 68 percent of the country's residents were noncitizens as of August, with many originating from other parts of the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and South and Southeast Asia. Societal discrimination against noncitizens was prevalent and occurred in most areas of daily life, including employment, education, housing, social interaction, and health care. There were numerous allegations in media that police favored citizens over noncitizens. The Ministry of Interior used administrative deportation, not subject to judicial review, to deport noncitizens for minor offenses, such as operating a taxi without a license.

In August, media reported authorities administratively deported 11 food delivery workers who were found driving motorbikes on pedestrian bridges. Media also reported the Ministry of the Interior had announced noncitizens found sheltering or aiding illegal residents would also face deportation.

As of September, the government had administratively deported 25,943 nonresidents. The deportation drive was allegedly part of the Ministry of Interior's effort to reduce the number of marginal laborers and migrants living in the country illegally.

There were credible indications of unequal treatment of persons based on race, religion, and citizenship during arrests and investigations by the Ministry of Interior.

Children

Birth Registration: Bidoon parents, and in a few cases citizen women married to Bidoon or foreigners, were sometimes unable to obtain birth certificates for their children, even after completing extensive administrative procedures. Lack of a birth certificate prevented these children from obtaining security cards and accessing public services such as education and health care.

Education: Education was neither free nor compulsory for noncitizens. Credible reports estimated hundreds of children were unable to attend school as a result. In March, local media reported that according to the annual statistics of UNESCO, 221,820 children of school age did not enroll in schools for the current school year. Educational sources reported this number included citizen and noncitizen children.

The government did not fully implement the law mandating public education for Bidoon residents. Lack of security cards sometimes prevented Bidoon resident access to education even at private schools. The Education Ministry set annual quotas for the number of Bidoon residents who could attend public schools, with priority given to those with citizen mothers.

Since citizen children were given priority to attend public school, only a small minority of Bidoon children whose families could afford it enrolled in substandard for-fee private schools. Charitable organizations offered tuition

support to some but not all of these students. During the year, the Central Agency announced in a press statement that 34,266 Bidoon students had enrolled in public and private schools for the academic year, with expenses paid through a government charitable fund. Citizen mothers married to Bidoon husbands and Bidoon mothers alike reported they were unable to access medical care easily or reliably for their children.

Medical Care: Lack of security cards restricted Bidoon children's access to free medical care.

Child Abuse: The law provided protections for abused children, including noncitizen children. Authorities generally enforced the law effectively. The Child Protection Office of the Ministry of Health oversaw cases of child abuse. Most abuses occurred within the family, and cases were approximately split evenly among boys and girls. In instances of reported child abuse, children were admitted to a hospital for medical assessment pending legal proceedings.

In February, the public prosecutor ordered the detention of an Asian noncitizen after receiving reports of the kidnapping and indecent assault of four children.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal marriage age was 17 for boys and 15 for girls, but tradition and family expectations sometimes resulted in girls marrying at a younger age within some tribal groups. Authorities

generally enforced the law effectively.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibited commercial sexual exploitation, sale, grooming, and offering or procuring children for commercial sexual exploitation. There was no minimum age for consensual sex. There were no laws specific to child pornography because all pornography was illegal. There was no statutory rape law. Premarital sexual relations were illegal. The authorities generally enforced the law. The Child Protection Office handled cases of sexual assault of children and provided medical, social, and psychological services for such cases, whether the child was a citizen or noncitizen.

A Child Protection Office policy held families of children age 13 or younger responsible for the use of social media applications that might be unsuitable for young children or could expose them to sexual predators.

Antisemitism

There were no known Jewish citizens and an estimated few dozen Jewish foreign resident workers. Antisemitic rhetoric generally originated from self-proclaimed Islamists or conservative opinion writers. There were reported cases of clerics and others making statements that perpetuated negative stereotypes of Jews. Columnists often conflated Israeli government actions or views with the Jewish religion. The government did not recognize Israel's existence, and authorities instructed teachers to

expunge any references to Israel or the Holocaust from English-language textbooks.

In October, 45 members of the National Assembly issued a statement supporting the Palestinian people and rejecting efforts to normalize with Israel because “Jews usually renege on their promises.”

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, please see the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The law criminalized consensual same-sex sexual activity between men older than age 21 with imprisonment of up of to seven years; those engaging in consensual same-sex sexual activity with men younger

than age 21 could be imprisoned for up to 10 years. The government enforced the law. No laws criminalized same-sex sexual activity between women.

Media reported arrests of several individuals, especially Asians working in massage parlors, for cross dressing, imitating the opposite sex, or “engaging in activities contrary to public morals.”

Violence and Harassment: Police incited, perpetrated, condoned, and tolerated violence against LGBTQI+ individuals. Transgender persons reported cases of repeated harassment, detention, abuse, and rape by police, who blackmailed and raped them without fear of reprisal. Many members of the LGBTQI+ community chose not to reveal their gender identity publicly, for fear they would be harassed for their appearance and choice of dress. Multiple transgender individuals reported cases of rape and physical and verbal abuse by prison officials.

According to a February report by NGO Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), transgender women had long reported multiple forms of abuse at the hands of the police while in detention, including degrading and humiliating treatment, such as being forced to strip and being paraded around police stations, being forced to dance for officers, sexual humiliation, verbal taunts and intimidation, solitary confinement, and emotional and physical abuse that could amount to torture.

Discrimination: Societal discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity frequently occurred. There were reports that officials practiced discrimination when they discovered that persons stopped for a traffic violation did not conform to the expectations of the gender indicated on their identification cards.

According to a February report by DAWN, the judiciary had a transphobic bias, reflected in the courts' consistently denying applications for legal gender recognition. According to DAWN, the government did not recognize any LGBTQI+ rights and laws openly targeted LGBTQI+ persons, including morality-based laws that could criminalize any acts deemed "immoral" by society. The report stated that transgender Kuwaitis could also face discrimination in accessing employment, health services, and education and that gender-affirming health care was not available in the country, forcing those who wanted to receive it to travel abroad.

Kuwait did not allow changing gender identification in official and government documents.

After the Constitutional Court ruled unconstitutional Article 198 of the penal code in 2022, government authorities could no longer deport anyone for imitating the opposite sex, but they could still deport them administratively for violating public morals or for the public interest.

Several local media reported the Ministry of Interior continued to deport

foreign “impersonators of women” and “homosexuals, crossdressers and transgender” residents of Kuwait.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Legal gender recognition or the option to identify as nonbinary, intersex, or gender nonconforming in official documents was not available.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: The government did not mandate coercive medical or psychological practices for LGBTQI+ individuals, including so-called conversion therapy, but it did not combat these practices. LGBTQI+ individuals reported families often forcibly sent LGBTQI+ individuals to mental health institutions or religious centers to “cure homosexuality.” Some LGBTQI+ individuals reported on well-known therapists who specialized in conversion therapy, including using electric shock therapy, medicating against the patient’s will, and forcing patients to listen to the Quran. There were no known reports of medically unnecessary or irreversible “normalization” surgeries being performed on children or on nonconsenting adult intersex persons.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: No registered NGOs focused on LGBTQI+ matters, although unregistered groups existed. Due to social convention and potential repression, LGBTQI+ organizations refrained from operating openly or holding LGBTQI+ advocacy events or Pride marches.

In June, international media reported authorities abruptly and without explanation removed the movie *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* from cinema screenings, apparently due to the inclusion of a transgender flag printed with the words “Protect Trans Kids” in the background of one frame.

In August, the Ministry of Information banned showing the Barbie movie to protect “public ethics and social traditions.” The ministry did not specify what led to the decision, but many believed the ban was due to the presence of LGBTQI+ actors in the cast. A ministry spokesperson told local media the government banned the movie in its entirety rather than censor particular scenes because it “promulgate[s] ideas and beliefs that are alien to Kuwaiti society and public order.”

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibited discrimination against persons with permanent physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, or the provision of other government services. It imposed penalties on employers who refrained without reasonable cause from hiring persons with disabilities. The law also mandated access to buildings for persons with disabilities. The government enforced some of these provisions. Citizens with disabilities had equal access to public health services and transportation. While some forms of public transportation, such as buses, were accessible for persons

with disabilities, many roads and sidewalks were not accessible, complicating access to public transportation. The government provided benefits to citizens with disabilities, including monthly allowances, loans, early retirement with full salary, and exemptions from all government fees. The law obligated government agencies to have a workforce that included at least 4 percent of employees with disabilities. Noncitizens with disabilities were banned from entering government-operated facilities or received stipends paid to citizens with disabilities that covered transportation, housing, and social welfare costs. The government did not fully implement social and workplace programs to assist persons with physical and vision disabilities.

In November, the National Assembly amended the law regarding persons with disabilities, focusing on education rights for individuals with autism and Down syndrome. The changes included transferring oversight of schools for persons with disabilities from the Public Authority for Disability Affairs to the Ministry of Education. The amendments also mandated government-provided training workshops for persons with disabilities and their caregivers. Notably, the revisions extended coverage to non-Kuwaiti children with disabilities of Kuwaiti mothers and the non-Kuwaiti spouses with disabilities of Kuwaiti citizens, groups not previously covered by legislation.

Students with physical disabilities the government did not consider severe

could attend mainstream public schools, whereas students with severe physical disabilities and mental disabilities attended separate public and private schools specifically for students with disabilities.

Authorities did not provide noncitizens with disabilities the same educational opportunities as citizens. Citizens could attend public schools that offered some accommodations for children with disabilities, but noncitizen students had to pay to attend private school to receive such accommodations. Noncitizen students attended private schools only, which generally lacked accessible materials and reasonable accommodations.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Unmarried persons, particularly foreign workers, continued to face housing discrimination and eviction based on marital status, income, and national origin. Authorities frequently raided apartment blocks housing foreign worker “bachelors” and reportedly shut off water and electricity to force single men workers out of accommodations. Local authorities evicted single foreign male workers to make room for citizen families, citing the presence of single men as the reason for increased crime, a burden on services, and worsening traffic. In June, the acting director general of Kuwait Municipality affirmed the municipality’s intention to protect the community identity and reduce the number of bachelors living in private and model housing areas to limit “negative effects.”

In November, the acting director general of the municipality reported municipal teams disconnected electricity to 415 houses in private residential areas across governorates in the first half of the year due to illegally accommodating bachelors in family-only residences.

Authorities maintained a policy banning noncitizens from sponsoring or bringing their family members into the country.

Many foreign workers, particularly domestic workers and workers earning lower salaries, were unable in practice to access personal banking and financial services.

In March, media reported the Consumer Protection Association criticized a number of cooperative-society shops – public organizations that set up in each city district to provide discounted grocery store shopping – for banning noncitizens from shopping during the holy month of Ramadan, under the pretext they were buying up discounted Ramadan products that were intended for citizens. The association stressed that preventing noncitizens from entering shops and restricting products to citizens only was in accordance with “the law.” Some cooperative societies maintained this ban even after the end of Ramadan.

Local human rights NGOs reported limited accounts of societal violence or discrimination against persons with HIV or AIDS, but persons with HIV or AIDS did not generally disclose their status due to social stigma associated

with the disease.

In May, the head of the AIDS office and the national liaison officer for AIDS at the Ministry of Health confirmed HIV treatment was provided free of charge to all citizens, although noncitizens who had HIV were obligated by law to leave the country.

Shia citizens continued to report government discrimination based on religion. Shia rarely held leadership positions in the security forces. Some Shia continued to allege a glass ceiling prevented them from obtaining leadership positions in public-sector organizations, including the security services. In the private sector, Shia were generally represented at all levels in proportion to their percentage of the population. According to Shia representatives, Shia citizens represented an estimated 30 percent of the total population of Kuwaiti nationals, while non-Shia sources said Shia citizens constituted no more than 17 to 20 percent.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provided for the right of citizen workers to form and join trade unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes, with significant restrictions. Unions were independent of the government but were

required to register with the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM). The government did not generally interfere with or discriminate against trade unions; however, the law prohibited trade unions from conducting any political activities.

The law stipulated any new union had to include at least 100 workers and that at least 15 had to be citizens. Union rights were limited for foreign workers, who constituted more than 80 percent of the workforce. They could join unions only as nonvoting members after completing five years of work in the sector the union represented and obtaining a certificate of good conduct and moral standing from the government. They could not run for seats or vote in board elections. Foreign workers had the right to bargain collectively at their workplace and could participate in unions, but they were not permitted to form trade unions, vote, or run for union offices. The International Labor Organization and the International Trade Union Confederation criticized the citizenship requirement for discouraging unions in sectors that employed few citizens, such as construction and most other private-sector employment.

The labor law did not apply to domestic workers or maritime employees. Separate labor laws set work conditions in the public, private, domestic worker, and oil sectors. The law permitted multiple unions within enterprises. Public-sector employees could unionize, but the government authorized only one public-sector labor federation, the Kuwait Trade Union

Federation.

The law provided for collective bargaining with no minimum number of workers required to form a bargaining unit. There were limits on the right to strike. Citizens in the private sector had the right to strike, but cumbersome provisions calling for compulsory negotiation and arbitration in the case of disputes limited that right in practice. The law did not prohibit retaliation against striking workers or prevent the government from interfering in union activities, including the right to strike.

The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and employer interference with union functions. The law provided for reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The law empowered the courts to dissolve a union for violating labor laws or for threatening “public order and morals,” although a union could appeal such ruling. PAM, among other agencies and citizens, could request the Court of First Instance to dissolve a union. Additionally, the amir could dissolve a union by decree. The government treated union worker actions by citizens and foreign workers differently. Citizens faced no government-imposed penalties for their role in union or strike activities, but companies threatened foreign workers calling for strikes with termination and deportation.

The government generally enforced freedom of association provisions but placed restrictions on the right to strike. Penalties were commensurate with those for other laws involving denial of civil rights, such as discrimination.

Complaint proceedings for Kuwaiti citizens did not involve lengthy delays or appeals. Complaint proceedings for foreign workers generally took longer than for citizens, although the duration also depended on the nature of the complaint.

The government generally enforced the applicable laws such as labor laws in addition to the constitutional civil rights provisions. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators. Worker organizations were independent of the government, political parties, employers, or employers' associations.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

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 prohibited the worst forms of child labor and employment of persons below age 15. The law also limited working hours, provided occupational safety and health restrictions for children, and set a minimum employment age for children working in all sectors. Persons ages 15 to 18 could work if they received a medical examination and were not employed in sectors considered hazardous or harmful to their health. Persons 15 to 18

were permitted to work for a maximum of six hours per day and for no more than four hours straight, followed by a break of at least one hour. This age group could not work overtime hours, on weekly rest days, on official holidays, or from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m.

The government effectively enforced the child labor law, and penalties were commensurate with or less than those for analogous serious crimes.

Penalties were regularly applied against violators. There were no confirmed reports of the worst forms of child labor. Youth younger than 15 were sometimes seen selling food and small gifts at stop lights and other public places throughout the country.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law set a national monthly minimum wage in the oil and private sector and a minimum monthly wage for domestic workers. The minimum wage for expat workers in the domestic/household and private labor sectors was KD 75 (\$244). The minimum wage for expat workers in the government sector was KD 320 (\$1,041). The minimum wage was above the World Bank poverty income level. Most low-wage employees lived and worked in the country without their families, and employers generally provided at least some form of housing.

The law limited the standard workweek to 48 hours (40 hours for the petroleum industry) and gave private-sector workers 30 days of annual leave. The law also forbade requiring employees to work more than 60 hours per week or 10 hours per day. The law provided for 13 designated national holidays annually. Workers were entitled to 125 percent of base pay for working overtime and 150 percent of base pay for working on their designated weekly day off.

Occupational Safety and Health: The government issued occupational safety and health (OSH) standards that were appropriate for the main industries. The government periodically inspected enterprises to raise awareness among workers and employers and to assure that they abided by safety rules, controlled pollution in certain industries, trained workers to use machines safely, and reported violations. Workers were responsible for identifying and reporting unsafe situations to PAM. They could file a complaint against an employer with PAM if they believed their safety and health were at risk. Workers could also report violations to their embassies, the Kuwait Trade Union Federation, Kuwait Society for Human Rights, or the Labor Disputes Department. Noncompliant employers faced warnings, fines, and forced suspensions of company operations.

OSH inspectors were required to monitor conditions and take appropriate actions when violations occurred. PAM stated it completed an inspection campaign from June 1 to August 31 and issued warnings to 362 companies,

with no repeat violations identified. PAM confirmed that companies were sanctioned for violating the noon work ban, not workers. PAM stated repeat offenders would face legal action and could be charged with fines ranging from KD 100 to KD 200 (\$325 to \$650) per worker.

The law provided that all outdoor work stop between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. during June, July, and August, or when the temperature rose to more than 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, a prohibition termed the “noon work ban.” In July, PAM issued 148 warnings to employers for violating the noon work ban. PAM added the inspection team would continue checking open work sites in all governorates until August 31.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: PAM and the Domestic Workers Employment Department (DWED) were responsible for enforcement of minimum wage, overtime, and OSH regulations of workers. The government generally enforced minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for similar crimes such as fraud or negligence. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators.

According to PAM, as of October, there were 245 labor inspectors, 123 OSH inspectors, 42 investigators, and eight DWED investigators. It was assessed that amount was not sufficient to enforce compliance due to the large number of workers in the labor sector. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

Domestic workers and other low-skilled foreign workers in the private sector frequently worked more than 48 hours a week, with no day of rest. The law required workers to earn an established monthly wage to sponsor their family to live in the country, although certain professions were exempted, including teachers and imams. As a result, most low-wage employees were not able to bring their families to the country.

Although the law prohibited the withholding of workers' passports, the practice remained common among sponsors and employers of foreign workers, particularly domestic workers. The government did not consistently enforce this prohibition. Domestic workers had little recourse when employers violated their rights, except to seek admittance to the domestic workers' shelter, where the government mediated between sponsors and workers. The government then either assisted the worker in finding an alternate sponsor or in obtaining voluntary repatriation.

At times, PAM intervened to resolve labor disputes between foreign workers and their employers. The authority's labor arbitration panel sometimes ruled in favor of foreign laborers who claimed employer violations of work contracts. The government was more effective in resolving unpaid salary disputes involving private-sector laborers than those involving domestic workers. In March, hundreds of noncitizen workers gathered in front of the Kuwait Society for Human Rights to protest the refusal of their employers to pay their salaries for eight months, according to *al-Qabas*. Representatives

of the workers told reporters they had made numerous unsuccessful attempts to force company officials to pay their salaries, but the company repeatedly postponed the payments without justification.

The government made inconsistent efforts to implement and enforce labor reforms, such as educating households and foreign workers regarding the legal prohibition on passport confiscation and nonpayment of wages. Some employers denied workers their right to a weekly day of rest or to leave their work location. Workers who fled abusive employers faced legal charges for “absconding,” had difficulty retrieving their passports, and were deported in most cases.

There were numerous media reports throughout the year of sponsors abusing domestic workers or injuring them when they tried to escape, including some incidents which allegedly resulted in workers’ deaths. Women domestic workers were particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. Police and courts were reluctant to prosecute citizens for abuse in private residences but prosecuted some serious cases of abuse, particularly when raised by source country embassies. The DWED had jurisdiction over domestic worker matters and enforcement of domestic labor working standards. PAM operated a shelter for women domestic workers, abuse survivors, or persons who were otherwise unwilling to continue to work for their employers and preferred to leave the country. The shelter had a 500-bed capacity. PAM reported the shelter accommodated a total of 1,179

occupants.

Al-Durra, a government-owned recruiting company launched in 2017 to mitigate abuses against domestic workers, reported it had recruited 403 new domestic workers from the Philippines, India, and Sri Lanka during the year. Al-Durra's services included worker insurance, a 24/7 abuse hotline, and follow-up on allegations of labor rights violations. The government regularly conducted information awareness campaigns in Arabic, English, and three other languages via media outlets and public events and encouraged public and private recruiting companies to comply with labor laws.

Media reported on fraudulent residency permits or "visa trading," in which companies and recruitment agencies colluded to sell visas to prospective workers. Often the jobs and companies mentioned in these visas did not exist, and workers were vulnerable to exploitation on the black market or in the informal sector, where they were forced to repay the cost of their fake visa. Some noncitizen workers reportedly told the Public Prosecution Office they had paid approximately KD 1,500 (\$5,000) each to travel to the country for work. Since workers could not freely or easily change jobs under the *kafala* system (employer-based sponsorship), many were unwilling to leave their initial job, even if visa middlemen had misled them regarding their position or employment conditions. Workers who left their employers due to abusive treatment, nonpayment or late payment of wages, or

unacceptable working conditions risked charges of illegal residency and deportation.

Authorities attempted to crack down on visa middlemen who recruited foreign workers and failed to provide them with jobs. In May, media reported PAM had referred to the public prosecutor 139 cases of illegal visa trading over the previous four years.

Also in May, media reported PAM decided to suspend registration of 16,848 companies that lacked valid civil addresses, a decision that affected tens of thousands of workers registered with those companies. Subsequently, PAM allowed noncitizen workers registered with the suspended companies to transfer to other companies.

In November, the Court of Cassation ruled to uphold the imprisonment of three citizens, one of whom worked at PAM, for a period of four years in a case of visa trading and forging licenses of fake companies that emerged during the pandemic.

Reports indicated employers forced domestic workers to work overtime without additional compensation. The government usually limited punishment for abusive employers to administrative actions, such as fines, shutting employment firms, issuing orders for employers to return withheld passports, or requiring employers to pay back wages.

Some domestic workers did not have the ability to remove themselves from

an unhealthy or unsafe situation without endangering their employment. There were reports of domestic workers' dying or attempting to commit suicide due to abuse, including sexual violence or poor working conditions. Legal protections for domestic workers include a formal grievance process managed by the DWED. Workers who were not satisfied with the department's arbitration decision had the right to file a case in the labor court.

Several source country embassies with large domestic worker populations experienced varying degrees of success in pressing the government to prosecute serious cases of domestic-worker abuse. Severe cases included significant, life-threatening injuries or death.

According to the law, all foreign workers had to register in formal positions with local sponsors, but in practice foreign workers also worked in the informal sector. Citizens did not generally work in the informal sector. Workers in the informal sector were often victims of visa trading or trafficking, in which they were promised a job that did not exist or employment conditions differed significantly from those agreed. Some domestic workers and cleaners were known to work additional hours outside of their contract with other households and workplaces, a practice which could either be voluntary or forced. Workers in the informal sector typically worked as cleaners, day laborers, food delivery workers, drivers, street vendors, shepherds, other agricultural jobs, and in nail and massage

parlors. Workers in the informal sector typically received very low wages and worked in unsafe conditions, making them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

The Joint Committee, led by PAM, apprehended a total of 5,504 violators of residence and labor laws from January to October. Some detainees admitted paying KD 1,500 to 2,000 (\$4,900 to \$6,500) to business owners for job placements, leading to legal actions for their deportation.

The law did not establish OSH standards for workers in the informal economy because the government denied having an informal sector. The government did not publish estimates of the number of workers in the informal sector. The informal sector was estimated to be tens of thousands of workers.