

Oman 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

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

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including censorship and criminal libel and blasphemy laws; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; and laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, although the government did not actively enforce such laws.

The government took credible steps to identify 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 were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

b. Disappearance

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

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

The law prohibited such practices and there were no credible reports that government officials employed them.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

There were no significant reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns.

Administration: The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), a government-funded entity, conducted prison and detention center site visits and reviewed written complaints in conjunction with prison administrators, but the frequency of such visits was not known. The OHRC reported on human rights conditions to the sultan via the State Council. There was no

ombudsperson to serve on behalf of prisoners and detainees; this responsibility fell under the jurisdiction of the public prosecution, which maintained an office in Sumail Central Prison.

Independent Monitoring: The law permitted monitoring visits by independent nongovernmental observers. There were no reports of independent monitoring.

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. The government generally observed these requirements; however the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) Omani Centre for Human Rights, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, and MENA Rights Group reported the government arbitrarily arrested peaceful activists whose public criticism of the government violated the law.

According to the United Kingdom-based Omani Centre for Human Rights, in December 2022, security authorities abducted lawyer Majid al-Rahili in the Muscat Governorate. Authorities held him for weeks without clarifying his place of detention or allowing him to communicate with his family or legal representation. On January 4, authorities released al-Rahili without bringing any charges against him.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law did not allow police to arrest or detain a person “without an order to this effect from a concerned legal authority” unless caught in the act. The law stipulated that police had to either release the person or refer the matter to the public prosecution within 48 hours. The law required those arrested be informed immediately of the charges against them. There was a functioning bail system. Detainees generally had prompt access to a lawyer of their choice and the state generally provided public attorneys to indigent detainees, as required by law. There were reports the government prevented some activists from promptly accessing legal representatives. Diplomatic missions reported police sometimes failed to notify the local embassy of noncitizen detainees.

Arbitrary Arrest: The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention. The government generally observed these requirements, but NGOs reported the government arbitrarily arrested peaceful activists whose public criticism of the government violated the law.

On August 9, authorities detained local businessperson Hani al-Sarhani for his activities on social media platforms and his criticism of the government, including his support for Taleb al-Mamari, whose social media post criticizing the government received significant attention. A court tried al-Sarhani on October 19, sentencing him to two years in prison on charges of inciting public opinion and misuse of information technology. According to

the Omani Centre for Human Rights, he was released on bail and at year's end was waiting for the trial date for his appeal hearing to challenge the two-year sentence.

On August 16, authorities detained imam Masoud al-Maqbali for public comments criticizing the government, according to the Omani Centre for Human Rights. On August 24, authorities released al-Maqbali.

On September 30, the Omani Centre for Human Rights reported the government summoned and detained Talal Salmani for a video he posted online criticizing the government's position on electricity subsidies. Social media users used the Arabic hashtag "Freedom for Talal Salmani" to draw attention to his case, but he remained in detention at year's end.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provided for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. The sultan could act as a court of final appeal and exercise his power of pardon as chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, the country's highest legal body, which was empowered to review all judicial decisions. In August, a court sentenced Maryam al-Nuaimi for a variety of related misdemeanors, but in December the charges were dismissed on appeal. Al-Nuaimi was convicted of blasphemy in June 2022, although Sultan Haitham pardoned her in April. Her codefendant in the 2022 blasphemy case, Ali al-Ghafri, remained in

prison at year's end.

Trial Procedures

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

The judiciary enforced these rights for citizens; however, human rights organizations, including the Lebanon-based Gulf Centre for Human Rights and the Omani Centre for Human Rights, expressed concerns that occasionally activists were denied prompt access to legal representation. Some foreign embassies reported rights were not always uniformly enforced for their citizens, particularly migrant workers.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were credible reports of political prisoners or detainees. No accurate number of total detainees could be obtained due to lack of official publicly available information either from the government or NGOs. The Germany-based Omani Association of Human Rights reported on 14 cases of politically motivated summons, arrests, or other similar actions during the year. Most of the reported cases were related to freedom of expression. The government did not permit access to political prisoners by human rights or humanitarian organizations. Freedom House reported that “ordinary” detainees were generally provided with access to legal representation but that security forces did not always adhere to rules on arrest and pretrial

detention, especially in vaguely defined so-called security cases. Several human rights organizations, including the Gulf Centre for Human Rights and the Omani Centre for Human Rights, expressed concerns that some activists may have been denied prompt access to legal representation.

f. Transnational Repression

Not applicable.

g. Property Seizure and Restitution

Not applicable.

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

The law prohibited such actions. There were reports from previous years that the government accessed private communications and personal data including cell phone, email, and social media exchanges, including the information used to prosecute Maryam al-Nuaimi's 2022 blasphemy case, but no new cases were reported during the year.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the

Press and Other Media

The law provided for limited freedom of expression for citizens and members of the press and other media, including citizen journalists, but authorities did not always respect even these constrained rights.

Journalists, high-profile figures, and writers reportedly exercised self-censorship.

Freedom of Expression: The law prohibited criticism of the sultan in any form or medium, as well as any “provocative propaganda to undermine the prestige of the state,” electronic communication that “might prejudice the public order or religious values,” and “defamation of character.” The law prohibited insulting the sultan, his wife, and children. It was illegal to insult a public official or private citizen. Authorities prosecuted individuals for writing about the sultan in a way the government perceived to be negative. The law prohibited statements hostile to Islam or denigrating Islamic values, and authorities prosecuted individuals for comments insulting religion. The government censored publicly shown films, primarily for sexual content and nudity, and placed restrictions on performances in public venues. The law also prohibited dancing in restaurants and entertainment venues without a permit.

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights and the Omani Association for Human Rights reported that four internet activists faced a new trial August 23 in the

case known as “Ghaith spaces.” The activists (Ali al-Ghafri, Maryam al-Nuaimi, Ghaith al-Shibli, and Abdullah al-Muqbal) were sentenced in 2022 to three years in prison for “using the Internet and information technology means to produce what would prejudice religious values and public order” and “inviting [people] to participate in a meeting for the sake of opposing the Islamic religion and defaming the foundations on which it is based.” The new charges were dismissed in December.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: Media did not operate freely. Authorities tolerated very limited criticism in privately owned newspapers and magazines, and editorials generally were consistent with the government’s views. Authorities required journalists to obtain a license to work; freelance journalists and citizen journalists were ineligible for a license and not recognized as journalists under the law.

Headlines in both public and private print media outlets were subject to an official review and approval before publication, but specific details regarding the review process were not disclosed. Journalists and writers reported they exercised self-censorship. The law permitted the Ministry of Information to review all media products including books produced within or imported into the country. The ministry occasionally prohibited or censored material from domestic and imported publications viewed as politically, culturally, or sexually offensive.

In March, independent news outlet WAF permanently shut down, with widespread speculation that the owner quit because of onerous government limitations on published content.

Libel/Slander Laws: Libel and blasphemy were enforced as criminal offenses. Freedom House, for example, noted the penal code's seven-year maximum prison sentence for slandering the sultan, his wife, or his children.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted access to the internet and censored online content. The government blocked most voice over internet protocol sites, monitored telecommunications service providers, and blocked access to numerous websites considered pornographic, or culturally or politically sensitive.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government restricted the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law provided for limited freedom of assembly, but the government restricted this right. Gatherings of 10 or more persons in a public place were unlawful if they “endangered the public security or order” or “influenced the

function of authorities.” Human rights organizations expressed concern that overly broad provisions in the penal code could further restrict the work of human rights activists and limit freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

In contrast to the government’s general restriction on freedom of assembly, authorities permitted regular protests once or twice a week across the country following the Israeli military operations in response to Hamas’ October 7 terrorist attacks.

Freedom of Association

The law provided for limited freedom of association for undefined “legitimate objectives and in a proper manner.” The government limited freedom of association by prohibiting associations whose activities it deemed “inimical to the social order” or otherwise inappropriate. Citizens joining groups deemed “harmful to national interests” could be subject to revocation of citizenship.

The government required registration and approval of all association bylaws to determine whether a group served the interest of the country. The time required to register an association ranged from two months to two years. Approval time varied based on the level of preparedness of the applying organization, the subject matter of the organization, its leadership, and the organization’s mission. The law limited formal registration of nationality-

based associations to one association for each nationality and restricted their activities. The government sometimes denied permission for associations to form.

The law prohibited associations from fundraising without government approval, including for charitable causes. Foreign diplomatic missions were required to request meetings with nongovernmental associations through the Foreign Ministry by diplomatic note. Associations could not meet with foreign diplomatic missions and foreign organizations without prior approval from the Foreign Ministry. The government enforced this law, and all foreign-funded educational and public diplomacy programs required government review.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

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

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. Freedom House reported that some foreign workers could not leave the country without permission from their employer and risked deportation

if they changed employers without documentation releasing them from their previous contract, during the time of their initial contract, typically two years.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government generally did not allow asylum seekers to remain in the country. Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) personnel occasionally visited the country but did not maintain an office locally. According to UNHCR, the Omani Committee for International Humanitarian Law considered matters of refugees and displaced persons. During the year, UNHCR reported 716 previous refugee and asylum seekers mostly from Iraq but also from Syria, Pakistan, and Sudan remained in Oman.

Access to Asylum: The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status and the government had established a system for providing protection to refugees. The Royal Oman Police system for granting asylum and resettlement was not transparent, and the law did not specify a timeframe in which authorities were required to adjudicate an asylum application. It was an official policy not to recognize refugees from conflict zones such as Yemen, although Yemenis traveled to Oman regularly, and the government provided temporary admissions to certain Yemeni citizens seeking medical care.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to an unknown number of individuals who may not qualify as refugees. There were reports that Yemeni citizens who demonstrated they could not receive adequate care in Yemen received emergency medical care. These Yemenis and one accompanying family member per patient were offered temporary resident status in Oman during the treatment period on an ad hoc basis.

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

Not applicable.

g. Stateless Persons

The country contributed to statelessness through discrimination against women in nationality laws. Citizenship was passed only through the father. The country's law permitted mothers to transmit citizenship to their children only if the father was unknown or the father was a former Omani national. The government could grant citizenship to a minor child born from an Omani mother and a foreign father in limited circumstances.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law did not provide citizens the ability to choose their government in

free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage. The sultan retained ultimate authority on all foreign and domestic matters. Except for the military and other security forces, all citizens age 21 or older had the right to vote for candidates for the Majlis al-Shura and municipal councils.

Elections and Political Participation

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: National elections were widely reported to be fair and free of abuses and irregularities. In October approximately 500,000 citizens participated in elections for the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council), or lower house of parliament. Electoral commissions reviewed potential candidates against a set of objective educational and character criteria (at least a high school education and no criminal history or mental illness) before they allowed candidates' names on the ballot. The Ministry of Interior administered and closely monitored campaign materials and events. There were no notable or widespread allegations of fraud or improper government interference in the voting process. The government did not allow independent monitoring of the elections, but invited some international journalists to report on election day events. The OHRC stated it was a member of the Main Elections Committee and a key partner in overseeing the electoral process.

In June, the Omani Centre for Human Rights reported that the government

excluded several candidates from the Shura Council elections for undisclosed reasons, including Majid al-Rahili, Awad al-Suwafi, and former council member Ahmed al-Haddabi.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The law prohibited political parties. The law allowed the revocation of citizenship for anyone who joined an organization, including political parties, deemed harmful to national interests, but there were no reports the law was applied.

Section 4. Corruption in Government

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively.

Corruption: Isolated reported allegations of government corruption included government procurement offices and state-owned enterprises. 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

No domestic or international human rights groups operated without government restriction to monitor or investigate human rights conditions or cases and publish their findings. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to the views of UN representatives and UN-recognized regional organizations, but they were rarely cooperative and responsive to the views of independent NGOs.

International NGOs reported the government restricted access and operations in the country, and there was no presence of local, regional, or international human rights organizations. Two of the main Omani human rights organizations, the Omani Centre for Human Rights and the Omani Association for Human Rights, were based in the United Kingdom and Germany respectively. They reported they were not allowed to conduct their work within Oman and they had legal disputes with Omani authorities. The Lebanon-based Gulf Centre for Human Rights reported the same regarding their lack of access to the country. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House, and other international NGOs reportedly relied heavily on the Omani Centre for Human Rights, the Omani Association for Human Rights, and Gulf Centre for Human Rights for information.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The OHRC, a government-funded commission made up of members from the public, private, and academic

sectors, reported on human rights to the sultan via the State Council. The OHRC also published an annual report summarizing the types of complaints it received and how it handled those complaints.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalized rape with penalties of up to 15 years in prison and the government generally enforced the law effectively. The law did not criminalize spousal rape. The law criminalized assault, battery, and aggravated assault, which carried a maximum sentence of three years in prison; however, the law did not specifically address domestic violence, and judicial protection orders prohibiting domestic violence did not exist. The government operated a hotline for reporting incidents of domestic violence and a shelter for survivors. Reports from the Ministry of Social Development indicated police responded promptly and professionally. Media and the Omani Centre for Human Rights reported that Hayam al-Shukili was killed by her husband, who then burned her body inside their car, on January 1 or 2. Police arrested the husband on January 2, but no other details were available at year's end.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Instances of FGM/C were reportedly rare. The law prohibited health practitioners from conducting "traditional practices," including FGM/C, that were harmful to a child's

health. The 2019 Executive Regulations for the Child Law included “disfiguring female genital organs” as one of these harmful practices and the law was generally enforced.

Discrimination: The law prohibited gender-based discrimination against citizens, but the law did not always provide for the same legal status and rights for women as for men. Local interpretations of Islamic law and practice of cultural traditions in social and legal institutions discriminated against women. In some personal-status cases, such as divorce, a woman’s testimony was equal to half that of a man. The law favored male heirs in adjudicating inheritance. Despite legal protections for women from forced marriage, deeply embedded tribal practices often controlled women’s choice of spouse.

Until April, the Ministry of Interior required both male and female citizens to obtain permission to marry most foreigners. A royal decree adopted in April allowed citizens to marry foreign nationals without the state’s permission; however, local culture and tradition, particularly the role of male guardian, reportedly made it much more difficult for women to marry foreign nationals than for men.

The law provided for transmission of citizenship at birth if the father was a citizen, if the mother was a citizen and the father was unknown, or if a child of unknown parents was found in the country. Women married to noncitizens could not transmit citizenship to their children and could not

sponsor their noncitizen husband's or children's presence in the country.

The law provided that any adult, male or female, could become a citizen by applying for citizenship and subsequently residing legally in the country for 20 years, or for 15 or 10 years for foreign husbands or wives of citizens, respectively, if they had a son.

Government policy provided women with equal opportunities for education. According to the Special Categories Bulletin for the year 2022 issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (the most recent information available), the previous gender gap in higher educational attainment had been inverted as women earn 60 percent of bachelor's or higher degrees.

Although some educated women held positions of authority in government, business, and media, many women faced job discrimination, including in hiring, advancement, and treatment in the workplace. For example, a woman lawyer reported in several instances judges told her to leave the courtroom because she did not wear a *hijab*, or headscarf. The law entitled women to paid maternity leave and equal pay for equal work. The government, the largest employer of women, observed such regulations, as did many private sector employers. Labor laws did not allow women to work in jobs deemed hazardous or arduous, although no specifically named occupations were closed to women.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or

involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. Unmarried women did not always have access to family planning and information. Health clinics disseminated information on family planning under the guidance of the Ministry of Health. Some forms of birth control, including condoms, were available at pharmacies and supermarkets; however, medically prescribed contraceptives were generally not available for unmarried women. Menstrual health care was available for citizens and menstrual care products were readily available in pharmacies and grocery stores. The government provided free childbirth services to citizens within the framework of universal health care. Prenatal and postnatal care was readily available and used. Abortion was illegal unless the mother's life was in danger. While survivors of sexual violence could seek medical treatment at public health-care facilities, the government did not provide emergency contraception or dedicated sexual and reproductive health services to survivors; postexposure prophylaxis was widely available in the medical system but was not necessarily provided as part of the clinical management of rape.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law stated that all citizens were equal and prohibited discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, language, religion, sect, domicile, or social status. The government generally enforced the law effectively.

The country was an ethnically diverse society. There were no reports of racial or ethnic violence.

Children

Child Abuse: There were laws against child abuse, and the government enforced the laws effectively. According to the law, any concerned citizen was required to report child abuse, and each governorate had an interagency committee that would meet to discuss the allegations and remove the child from parental custody if appropriate until the allegations were investigated. The government operated a child abuse hotline.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The age of legal marriage was 18 and the government generally enforced the law. The courts permitted a person to marry younger if deemed in their interest. There were reports that child marriage sometimes occurred in rural communities.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibited sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. The minimum age of consensual sex was 18. There were no known reports of sexual exploitation of children.

Antisemitism

There was no remaining indigenous Jewish population in the country. There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents. After the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent Israeli operation in Gaza, local press

carried antisemitic articles and caricatures.

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 conduct between adults and cross-dressing. The government did not actively enforce such laws.

Neutral laws were not disproportionately applied to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons. There were no credible efforts to rescind discriminatory laws that targeted LGBTQI+ persons.

Violence and Harassment: There were no known reports that police or other government agents incited, perpetrated, condoned, or tolerated violence or harassment against LGBTQI+ individuals or those reporting such abuse. There were no known instances of violence or harassment by nonstate actors against LGBTQI+ persons or those reporting such abuse.

Discrimination: The law did not prohibit discrimination by state and

nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics, but due to prevailing religious and culture norms, there was little data on discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons. The law did not explicitly recognize LGBTQI+ couples and their families or grant them rights equal to those of other persons. In January, the Grand Mufti, Ahmed al-Khalili, sent a message to his followers encouraging anti-LGBTQI+ forces to push back against civilizations that spread homosexuality “with all force, including on children.”

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Legal gender recognition was not available.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: There were no reports that forced or involuntary so-called conversion therapy was practiced on adults or children to try to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. There were no reports that surgeries were performed on nonconsenting adult intersex persons.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: Public discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity remained a social taboo. There were no known LGBTQI+ organizations active in the country, although regional human rights organizations focused on the human rights of LGBTQI+ citizens. Authorities took steps to block LGBTQI+-related internet content as well as international films that featured LGBTQI+ characters. The Consumer Protection Agency confiscated school supplies

and toys with rainbow colors, citing a threat to public morals.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities had access to education, employment, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis. The law required such access, and the government generally enforced the law effectively, although some older buildings, including government buildings and schools, did not fully conform to the law.

Children with disabilities attended school through the secondary level. Most attended segregated schools, but some children with disabilities attended school with peers without disabilities.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Health-care facilities were required by law to report the results of HIV tests to the government. Citizens with HIV or AIDS were provided with medical care. While they did not face official repercussions, social stigma due to their medical status remained if it became public. Foreigners seeking residency and employment in the country were tested for HIV and AIDS; those who tested positive would be denied residency permission and required to leave the country, but there were no known reports of such the policy being enforced.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provided for workers to form and join unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes, and prohibited antiunion discrimination, but with restrictions. The law provided for one general federation, the General Federation of Oman Workers, to which all unions were required to affiliate, and which represented unions in regional and international fora. No independent organized labor unions existed. The law required a minimum of 25 workers to form a union, regardless of company size. The law required an absolute majority of an enterprise's employees to approve a strike with notice to employers three weeks in advance of the intended strike date. Strikes were not permitted in the gas and oil industries. The law prohibited employers from firing or imposing other penalties on employees for union activity; however, employers rarely faced penalties for dismissing workers for organizing efforts. It was difficult to legally prove that the firing was for union organizing, and the law did not require reinstatement for workers fired for union activity. Government-approved unions were open to all legal workers regardless of nationality; however, the law prohibited members of the armed forces, other public security institutions, government employees, domestic workers, as well as individuals convicted of criminal activity or acts

against the security of the country or national unity from forming or joining unions.

The law prohibited unions from accepting grants or financial assistance from any source without the government's approval. The government generally enforced applicable laws effectively and respected the rights to collectively bargain. Penalties were commensurate with those for other laws involving civil rights but were rarely enforced.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at:

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law provided for minimum wage for citizens but not for noncitizens. The minimum wage did not apply to small businesses

employing fewer than five persons, dependent family members working for a family firm, and some categories of manual labor. The minimum wage exceeded the World Bank International Poverty Line. The law provided for a regular workweek of 40 hours reduced from 45 hours by a new labor law issued in July. The law continued to require 125 percent of regular pay for overtime work and 150 percent of regular pay for overtime night work.

Occupational Safety and Health: There were occupational safety and health (OSH) standards generally appropriate for the main industries in the country. The government proactively identified unsafe conditions and carried out inspections. Workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. There were reports the government did not always enforce standards for low-wage foreign workers.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government effectively enforced the minimum wage, hour, and OSH laws for citizens, but neither wage and hour nor occupational safety and health regulations applied to domestic workers. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud, and were sometimes applied against violators.

The Ministry of Labor was the agency that enforced wage, hour, and OSH laws. The number of labor inspectors was sufficient to enforce compliance and inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

Foreign workers were vulnerable to poor, dangerous, or exploitative working conditions. There were reports that migrant laborers in some firms and households worked more than 12 hours a day without a day off for below-market wages. Employers often canceled the employment contracts of seriously sick or injured foreign workers, forcing them to return to their countries of origin or remain in the country illegally. Some labor inspections focused on enforcing visa violations and deporting those in an irregular work-visa status rather than verifying safe and adequate work conditions. Employers had a great deal of control over workers in the informal sector, particularly domestic workers who were not covered by existing labor laws. Although expatriates were not legally required to obtain a “no-objection certificate” to secure new work upon completion or termination of their employment contracts, workers who left their jobs without the consent of their employer could be punished with fines, deportation, or re-entry bans.

There were no maximum workhour limits for domestic workers nor any mandatory rest periods, although the contract between the employer and worker could specify such requirements. There were some reports that domestic workers were forced to work without adequate rest periods. Separate domestic employment regulations obligated the employer to provide domestic workers with free local medical treatment throughout the contract period. Penalties for noncompliance with health regulations were insufficient to deter violations. Some domestic workers were subjected to abusive conditions.

World Economics estimated the size of the country's informal economy was approximately 20 percent of GDP. The government did not publish statistics on informal employment; however, some workers were employed informally in making handicrafts, small scale retail, and on family farms. The government did not monitor or enforce labor laws for the informal sector.