

QATAR 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Qatar is a constitutional monarchy in which Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani exercises full executive power. The constitution provides for hereditary rule by men in the amir's branch of the Al Thani family. Qatar held elections in October for the Shura (Consultative) Council, Qatar's legislative body with limited authorities, which were the first such elections in the country's history. Voters chose 30 representatives of the 45-member body, with the amir appointing the other 15 members. Observers considered these elections free and fair with 63 percent turnout, but with election laws that disenfranchised some tribal groups. The amir appoints all cabinet members, including the prime minister.

The national police and Ministry of Interior forces maintain internal security and are responsible, among other matters, for preventing terrorism, cyberattacks, and espionage. The national police oversee general law enforcement. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces. There were infrequent reports of abuses committed by security forces.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: restrictions on free expression, including the existence of criminal libel laws; 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 migrant workers' freedom of movement; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully in free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation, including prohibitions on political parties; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence; existence of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct; and prohibitions on independent trade unions.

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

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.

b. Disappearance

In August security forces arrested Haza bin Ali, a local lawyer belonging to the al-Murra tribe, after he posted a series of videos expressing dissatisfaction with the elections law. In one of the videos, bin Ali addressed the amir in a challenging tone. Following the release of this video, hundreds of al-Murra tribe members staged a sit-in at bin Ali's house, where he announced that the tribe would hold peaceful protests and not clash with security forces unless attacked. Security forces consequently arrested bin Ali's two brothers and dozens of tribesmen and put them in solitary confinement for expressing their rejection of the elections law. As of December the Ministry of Interior has not commented on the incident or disclosed the whereabouts of any detainees.

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

The constitution and law prohibit torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment. There were no reports of torture during the year.

The government interprets sharia as allowing corporal punishment such as court-ordered flogging for certain criminal offenses, including alcohol consumption and extramarital sex. No statistics were available regarding rates of corporal punishment during the year.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

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

Physical Conditions: The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) reported that the prisons were overcrowded and lacked the appropriate environment to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among prisoners.

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

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers and international bodies to all facilities except the state security prison. The government routinely provided foreign diplomats access to state security prisoners. The NHRC reported conducting 82 field visits to detention and interrogation facilities in 2020, down from 96 in 2019. More recent statistics were unavailable at year's end.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government usually observed these requirements. The NHRC received four complaints of arbitrary arrests in 2020 (the most recent figures available by year's end). The committee reported that the four defendants were arrested pending investigation by the State Security Prosecution, had access to legal representation, were allowed to contact their families, and were subsequently released.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires that persons be apprehended with warrants based on sufficient evidence and issued by an authorized official. By law all suspects except those detained under the Protection of Society Law or the Combating Terrorism Law must be presented before the public prosecutor within 24 hours of arrest. If the public prosecutor finds sufficient evidence for further investigation, authorities may detain a suspect for up to 15 days with the approval of a judge, renewable for similar periods not to exceed 45 days, before charges must be filed in the courts. Judges may also extend pretrial detention for one month, renewable for one-month periods not to exceed one-half the maximum punishment for the accused crime. Authorities typically followed these procedures differently for citizens than for

noncitizens. The law does not specify a time limit on preventive detention; the government has not acted on a 2019 recommendation by the NHRC to set such a time limit.

The law permits the prime minister to extend detention indefinitely in cases of threats to national security and to adjudicate complaints involving such detentions. The state security service may arrest and detain suspects for up to 30 days without referring them to the public prosecutor.

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

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

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

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, the amir, based on recommendations from the Supreme Judicial Council, appoints all judges, who retain their positions at his discretion. Foreign detainees had access to the legal system, although some complained of opaque legal procedures and complications, mostly stemming from language barriers. Foreign nationals did not uniformly receive translations of legal proceedings, although interpretation was generally provided within courtrooms. The government established the Labor Dispute Settlement Committees in 2018 to increase the efficiency and speed of decision making in the overloaded labor courts and included court translators at all hearings.

The existence of these committees reportedly has not shortened the time from complaint to resolution, nor has the Supreme Judicial Council's 2020 establishment of a branch of the Enforcement Court to facilitate implementation of the committees' verdicts. Some employers facing lawsuits from non-Qatari employees were able to have plaintiffs deported before a trial could take place.

Trial Procedures

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

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

Defendants are entitled to choose their legal representation or accept it at public expense throughout the pretrial and trial process. In matters involving family law, Shia and Sunni judges may apply their interpretations of sharia for their religious groups. The law approves implementing the Shia interpretation of sharia upon the agreement and request of the parties involved in the dispute. In family law matters, a woman's testimony is deemed one-half of a man's testimony.

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

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

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

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

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

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

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

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

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, in accordance with the law, but the government limited these rights. Self-censorship was prevalent.

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

Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: The law includes restrictive procedures on the establishment of

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

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

Libel/Slander Laws: The law criminalizes libel and slander, including "insult to dignity." A journalist may be fined and imprisoned for up to five years for defamation or reporting "false news." The law restricts the publication of information deemed insulting to the amir or heir apparent; blasphemous or defamatory to the Abrahamic faiths; harmful to the national currency or the economic situation; or infringing upon the dignity of persons, the proceedings of investigations, and prosecutions in relation to family status, and it punishes violators with up to seven years' imprisonment.

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

In May authorities arrested Malcolm Bidali, a Kenyan labor rights activist working

as a security guard for a private company and took him to an unknown location for 15 days. Authorities then disclosed his whereabouts and officially charged him with receiving funds from a foreign entity to spread misinformation regarding the country. Bidali was kept in solitary confinement prior to his release in early June pending trial. In July the criminal court sentenced him to a fine of 25,000 riyals (\$6,800) and had his mobile phone and social media accounts on Twitter and Instagram seized by authorities. The International Trade Union Confederation paid Bidali's fine, and he departed the country.

In November the Norwegian Broadcasting Company reported that two of its journalists were detained and questioned regarding their investigation of working and living conditions of migrant laborers constructing venues for the 2022 World Cup. The journalists, who maintained that they had obtained the permits necessary to film, were permitted to leave the country after approximately 36 hours in custody but were required to delete their footage.

Internet Freedom

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

The law requires internet service providers to block objectionable content upon request from judicial authorities. Internet providers also are obligated to maintain long-term electronic records and traffic data, which must be furnished to the government upon request. The government-controlled internet service provider, Ooredoo, censored political, religious, and pornographic internet content through a proxy server, which monitored and blocked websites, email, and voice over internet protocol (VoIP) platforms, including Skype and FaceTime. Users who believed authorities had mistakenly censored a site could request that the site be reviewed by the Ministry of Transportation and Communication for suitability; there were no reports that any websites were unblocked based on this procedure.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and scientific research. Instructors at Qatar University noted they sometimes exercised self-censorship. Instructors at foreign-based universities operating in the country, however, reported they generally enjoyed academic freedom. There were occasional government restrictions on cultural events, including denial of permits without explanation, and some groups organizing cultural events reported they exercised self-censorship. Authorities censored books, films, and internet sites for political, religious, and sexual content and for vulgar and obscene language.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government limited freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

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

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for the right to form groups, defined by the law as professional associations and private institutions, but the government significantly limited this right. Noncitizens are exempt from the constitutional protections on freedom of association. There were no reports of attempts to organize politically. There were no organized political parties, and authorities prohibited politically oriented associations. The government prohibited professional associations and private institutions from engaging in political matters or affiliating internationally. Civil society organizations must obtain approval from the Ministry of Social Development and Family, which may deny their establishment if it deems them a threat to the public interest. Informal organizations, such as community support groups and activity clubs, operated without registration, but they may not engage in activities deemed political.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

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

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

In-country Movement: Restrictions on in-country movement for citizens concerned sensitive military, oil, and industrial installations. Although the practice of setting and enforcing “family-only” times at entertainment areas in Doha was no longer common, several local malls and markets continued to restrict access to certain areas by foreign workers on weekends and by those dressed “immodestly.”

Foreign Travel: The government prevented the travel of its citizens only when they were involved in pending court cases. Single women younger than age 25 require the permission of their male guardian to travel outside the country, although the requirement was rarely enforced. Male relatives may prevent married or single adult female family members from leaving the country by seeking and securing a court order.

Citizenship: The law allows for the revocation of citizenship, such as when a citizen acquires another nationality.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

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

Access to Asylum: The law governs granting of political asylum status to asylum seekers. A committee within the Ministry of Interior handles asylum requests.

According to the NHRC, the ministry granted one asylum request in 2020 and rejected 24 others. Once granted political asylum, an individual and his or her family have access to a range of free services provided by the government, including travel documents, jobs, monthly allowances, medical and educational services, and housing. Previously the government accepted such individuals as “guests” on a temporary basis. The government legally classified the small number of persons granted residence on humanitarian grounds as visitors.

g. Stateless Persons

Bidoon, a stateless minority in the Gulf states, are individuals born in the country but whose families were not included as citizens at the time of the country’s independence or shortly thereafter. The Bidoon, who numbered approximately 2,500 in the country, were able to register for public services such as education and health care. They are unable to own property, however, and cannot travel without a visa to other Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Official documents do not recognize the term Bidoon but rather “individuals with temporary Qatari identification documents.”

The law allows long-term residents to apply for citizenship after living in the country for 25 consecutive years, but the government rarely approved citizenship applications, which were by law capped at 50 per year. Restrictions and inconsistent application of the law prevented stateless persons from acquiring citizenship. Permanent residents have the right to own property, open businesses without local partners, and receive free education and health services. Generally, the government did not approve marriage requests between Qatari women and stateless men.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution does not provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The government did not allow the formation of political parties or opposition groups. The amir exercises full executive powers, including the appointment of cabinet members. The law categorizes Qataris into “genuine” citizens who obtained their nationality before 1930 and “naturalized” citizens who

became citizens after 1930. Only “genuine” citizens have the right to run and vote in Shura Council elections. There were no official statistics publicly available on the number of “genuine” and “naturalized” citizens.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In October citizens voted to choose 30 members in the first-ever partially elected Shura Council, while the amir appointed the remaining 15 in the 45-member consultative body. Approximately 63 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the election.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The government did not permit the organization of political parties, and there were no attempts to form them during the year. Voting is open only to citizens at least 18 years old who can prove that their family resided in Qatar before 1930 or that their grandfather was born in Qatar.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: Although traditional attitudes and societal roles continued to limit women’s participation in politics, women served in various roles in public office. In October the amir appointed women as the minister of social development and family and the minister of education and higher education. Including the minister of public health, the cabinet has three female members – the highest number in the country’s history. Women also occupied top positions such as the deputy foreign minister, chair of the Qatar Foundation, head of the Qatar Museum Authority, chairwoman of the National Human Rights Committee, and ambassadorships. In October the amir appointed two women to the Shura Council, one of whom was elected vice speaker. Noncitizen residents are banned from voting or otherwise participating in political affairs, although they served as judges and staffers at government ministries.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were isolated reports, however,

of government corruption.

The law gives the State Audit Bureau financial authority and independence and allows it to publish nonconfidential findings.

Corruption: In May the attorney general ordered the arrest of the minister of finance pending investigation into alleged misuse of public funds and abuse of power. An amiri decree relieved the minister of his responsibilities. Authorities arrested several businessmen allegedly involved in the matter. The case was still under investigation, but the whereabouts of the former minister and the businessmen remained unknown as of the end of the year.

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

Researchers from international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and international unions such as the Building and Wood Workers' International and the International Trade Union Confederation continued to visit and report on the country without interference from authorities. The government was often responsive to requests for meetings and jointly participated in public events hosted by human rights groups, including on sensitive topics such as labor rights.

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

Government Human Rights Bodies: Under a mandate from the cabinet, the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Interior and the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are to observe, report, and handle human rights matters. The cabinet mandates the NHRC, whose members by law have immunity and operate as an independent body, to issue an annual report on human rights conditions in the country. The 2021 NHRC report provided a list of

recommendations including amending the Penal Code's articles on freedom of expressions, improving prison conditions, and signing the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The NHRC typically handled petitions by liaising with government institutions to ensure timely resolution of disputes.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

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

No specific law criminalizes domestic violence, whether against spouses or against any member of a household, including children and domestic workers. According to the NHRC, authorities may prosecute spousal violence as “general” violence under the criminal law.

Extramarital sex is punishable by up to seven years in prison, flogging (for unmarried persons), or the death penalty (for married persons). A woman who gives birth out of wedlock receives a 12-month jail sentence, on average, and may also be subject to corporal punishment (lashings) or, in the case of foreign residents, deportation. Press reports indicated jail sentences and flogging were rare in such cases, however.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is illegal and carries penalties of imprisonment or fines. In some cases sponsors sexually harassed and mistreated foreign domestic workers. The government prosecuted nearly 100 trafficking-related cases, of which 13 involved instances of violence against domestic workers; in three of those cases it issued verdicts under the penal code.

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

government interference in the rights of married couples to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children. It is illegal to have children out of wedlock, and unmarried female foreign residents may risk jail time and deportation if they do. Due to the legal prohibitions and social stigma surrounding sex outside of marriage, obtaining documentation for children born out of wedlock was typically not possible.

Women were routinely asked for marriage certificates when seeking prenatal care. Unmarried individuals who reported pregnancies risked prosecution for extramarital sexual relations. Emergency contraception, in the form of pills, IUDs, condoms, and contraceptive injections, was available in public and private health centers. Birth control pills and condoms were available at pharmacies without a prescription. The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. In rape cases with pregnancy, authorities provided all the required services to the victims.

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

In line with local social norms, male relatives generally represented female relatives in court, although women have the legal right to attend court proceedings and represent themselves. Judges have discretion to consider a woman's testimony one-half that of a man's.

Under the Nationality Law, female citizens face legal discrimination, since they, unlike men, are not permitted to transmit citizenship to their noncitizen spouses or to children born from marriage to a noncitizen. Female citizens are unable to pass citizenship to their offspring. The law allows children of citizen mothers to gain permanent status in country, even if the father is not a Qatari national. Citizens must obtain government permission to marry foreigners, which is sometimes not granted for female citizens. Male citizens may apply for residency permits and citizenship for their foreign wives, but female citizens may apply only for residency for their foreign husbands and children, not citizenship. A non-Muslim wife does not have the automatic right to inherit from her Muslim husband. She

receives an inheritance only if her husband wills her a portion of his estate, and even then, she is eligible to receive only one-third of the total estate. A female heir generally receives one-half the amount of a male heir; for example, a sister would inherit one-half as much as her brother. In cases of divorce, children generally remain with the mother until age 13 for boys and 15 for girls, at which time custody reverts to the father's family, regardless of the mother's religion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The constitution stipulates that "all persons are equal before the law and there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of sex, race, language, or religion," although the 2005 electoral law restricts eligibility to vote in Shura Council

elections (see section 3). The government enforced the law effectively. There were no reports of violence stemming from tribal, racial, or ethnic discrimination.

Children

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

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

Child Abuse: The law criminalizes child abuse. There were limited cases of reported child abuse, family violence, and sexual abuse of children.

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

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

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

The country does not have an indigenous Jewish community, and there were no official data on the number of Jewish foreign residents in the country. Cartoons and opinion articles in local newspapers periodically carried anti-Semitic messages.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against, and requires the allocation of resources for, persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, the judicial system, and other government services or other areas. According to the law, persons with disabilities have the right to equal access to education, health services, public buildings, and transportation. The government is charged with acting on complaints from individuals; the NHRC has responsibility for enforcing compliance and generally did so. Few public buildings met the required standards of accessibility for persons with disabilities, and new buildings generally did not comply with standards.

There are 34 entities in the country offering services to children with disabilities. Private and independent schools generally provided most of the required services for students with disabilities, but government schools did not. According to the NHRC's 2020 report, the government worked to rehabilitate 68 public schools to facilitate access for students with disabilities. Official statistics were not available concerning students with disabilities in elementary and secondary schools.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

There was discrimination against HIV-positive individuals. Authorities deported foreigners found to be HIV-positive upon arrival. Mandatory medical examinations were required for residents. Since health screenings are required for

nonresidents to obtain work visas, some HIV-positive persons were denied work permits prior to arrival. The government quarantined HIV-positive citizens and provided treatment for them.

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

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons faced discrimination under the law and in practice. The law prohibits consensual same-sex sexual conduct between men but does not explicitly prohibit same-sex sexual relations between women. Under the law a man convicted of having sexual relations with a boy younger than age 16 is subject to a sentence of life in prison. A man convicted of having same-sex sexual relations with a male 16 years of age or older may receive a sentence of seven years in prison. Under sharia law homosexuality is punishable by death; there were no reports of any executions for this reason.

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

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

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

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

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

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

The law permits the establishment of “joint committees” with an equal number of worker and management representatives to deal with a limited number of workplace problems. Foreign workers may be members of joint labor-management committees. The law offers a means to file collective disputes. If disputes are not settled internally between the employees and employer, the Ministry of Labor may mediate a solution. A 2017 agreement between the ministry and the International Labor Organization (ILO) includes provisions to create these committees with ILO supervision and assistance. Under the umbrella of this agreement and as of August, at least five joint committees initiated operations and held elections to choose employee representatives. Following the formation of “joint committees,” the ILO provided extensive training to the committee members on how to manage committees, establish open channels of communications with workers and management, and submit complaints to the competent authorities.

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

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

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

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

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping. International media and human rights organizations alleged numerous abuses against foreign workers, including withheld wages, unsafe working conditions, poor living accommodations, and employers who routinely confiscated workers' passports under an employer-based sponsorship system known as kafala that gave employers inordinate control over foreign workers. The government made efforts to prevent and eliminate forced labor but did not in all cases effectively enforce the law; the kafala system left migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation.

The law allows employees in the private sector to switch employers at the end of their contract, which can be up to five years, without the permission of their employer. Employees may also switch employers in cases of failure to pay, breach of contract, mutual agreement, filing of a legal case in court, and bankruptcy or death of employer. A change to the law in 2020 extended the elimination of exit visa requirements to 95 percent of government workers and all domestic workers. In 2020 the country abolished restrictions on migrant workers changing jobs without their employer's permission and introduced a monthly minimum wage as a basic salary. The abolishment of the no-objection certificate was effective immediately; however, media sources and NGOs reported several instances of employers retaliating against employees who initiated a transfer by canceling their visa or filing an absconding charge, rendering the worker illegal and at increased risk of exploitation, detention, or deportation. The implementation of the minimum wage provision came into force in March. These reforms have not yet been fully implemented and enforced, exposing migrant workers, especially domestic workers, to potential abuse.

Workers who are still required to seek their employers' permission to leave the country may request an exemption from a grievance committee jointly operated by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labor in cases where an employer refuses to grant permission. In 2020 the committee received 228 requests, of which it approved 218, the latest data available at year's end.

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

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

Construction of FIFA World Cup-related facilities continued despite crowded worksites and the high risk of COVID-19 transmission. Human rights groups and international media condemned the exemption of World Cup projects from precautionary countermeasures.

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits and criminalizes all the worst forms of child labor and provides for the protection of children from exploitation in the workplace, including limitations on working hours, occupational safety, and health restrictions. The law sets the minimum age for employment at 16 years and stipulates minors between the ages of 16 and 18 may work with parental or guardian permission. Minors may not work more than six hours a day or more than 36 hours a week. Employers must provide the Ministry of Labor with the names and occupations of their minor employees and obtain permission from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to hire a minor. The education ministry may prohibit the employment of minors in jobs judged dangerous to their health, safety, or morals. The government generally enforced the applicable law, but penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, ethnicity, and religion, but not political opinion, national origin, social origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, or HIV-positive status. Local custom, however, outweighed government enforcement of nondiscrimination laws. Penalties were not commensurate with laws related to civil rights, such as election interference.

Legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination existed against women, noncitizens, and foreign workers. The labor law does not allow women to work in jobs deemed hazardous, dangerous, or morally inappropriate, or in jobs specified by a decision of the Ministry of Labor.

By law women are entitled to equal pay for equal work but did not always receive it, and they often lacked access to decision-making positions in management of private companies and in the public sector. Gender-based violence or harassment occurred in the workplace. The government prohibited lower-paid male workers from residing in specific “family” residential zones throughout the country. The government discriminated against noncitizens in employment, education, housing, and health services (see section 6). Other forms of discrimination targeted certain nationalities in the country such as Egyptians working for private security

companies who were deported from the country in June 2020. The law prohibits employers from withholding workers' passports and penalizes employers who do so, but noncitizen community leaders and officials from labor-exporting countries stated that passport confiscation remained a widespread problem. The law requires reserving 2 percent of jobs in government agencies and public institutions for persons with disabilities, and most government entities appeared to conform to this law. Private-sector businesses employing a minimum of 25 persons are also required to hire persons with disabilities as two percent of their staff. Employers who violate these employment provisions are subject to moderate fines. There were no reports of infractions of the hiring quota requirement during the year.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The labor law provides for a 48-hour workweek with a 24-hour rest period and paid annual leave days. The labor law and provisions for acceptable conditions of work, including overtime pay provisions, do not apply to workers in the public sector or agriculture, or to domestic workers. Some employers did not pay workers for overtime or annual leave. Penalties for abuses were not commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, such as construction, but the government generally did not enforce them. Responsibility for laws related to acceptable conditions of work fell primarily to the Ministry of Labor as well as to the Ministry of Municipality and the Ministry of Public Health. In November the ILO published a detailed report regarding OSH conditions in the country and urged the government to exert more efforts in collaboration with employers to meet OSH standards and develop mechanisms to collect data on work injuries and fatalities. The report stated that occupational injuries in 2020 included 50 fatalities, 506 severe injuries, and 37,601 mild or moderate injuries. The law does not provide workers the right to remove themselves from a hazardous workplace without jeopardizing their employment, with the exception of a 2020 ministerial decision allowing workers to leave worksites in case of heat stress. Authorities did not effectively provide protection to employees exercising this right.

The government did not effectively enforce standards in all sectors. Working conditions for citizens were generally adequate because government agencies and the major private-sector companies employing them generally followed the relevant laws. The government sets restrictions on working during the hottest hours of the day during the summer and general restrictions related to temperature during the rest of the day as well. Employers often ignored working-hour restrictions and other laws with respect to domestic workers and unskilled laborers, the majority of whom were migrants. Penalties for violations of occupational safety and health laws were not commensurate with those for crimes like negligence.

The government took limited action to prevent abuse. If a company had not brought conditions up to standard within one month of being notified of the need for action, the Ministry of Labor imposed fines, blacklisted the company, and on occasion referred the matter to the public prosecutor for action. Fear of penalties such as blacklisting appeared to have had some effect as a deterrent to some labor law infractions. Blacklisting is an administrative hold freezing government services such as processing new visa applications from a company or individual. Firms must pay a moderate fine to be removed from the list, even if the dispute is resolved, and the ministry reserves the right to keep companies on the list as a punitive measure after the fine is paid.

Ministry of Labor personnel continued to conduct inspection visits to work and labor housing sites. Officials from the ILO joined labor inspectors on several inspections. A strategic plan for strengthening the Labor Inspections Unit, developed with ILO assistance, went into effect in 2020 and focuses on upgrading inspectors' skills in evaluating living accommodations and raising awareness regarding heat stress. Employers must pay their employees electronically to provide a digital audit trail for the Ministry Labor. Employers who failed to pay their workers faced penalties.

The government did not effectively enforce these laws, and penalties were not commensurate with those for similar crimes. Infractions of wage, overtime, and safety and health standards were relatively common, especially in sectors employing foreign workers in which working conditions were often poor. The government continued to serve eviction notices to property owners whose

buildings were not up to code. Throughout the year international media reported the existence of abusive working conditions, including work-related deaths of young foreign workers, particularly in the construction sector.

Informal Sector: The law prohibits employers from withholding workers' passports and penalizes employers who do so, but noncitizen community leaders and officials from labor-exporting countries stated that passport confiscation remained a widespread problem with insufficient enforcement of penalties. Employers housed many unskilled foreign laborers in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water, electricity, or adequate food. Domestic workers often faced unacceptable working conditions. Many such workers frequently worked seven days a week and more than 12 hours a day with few or no holidays, no overtime pay, and limited means to redress grievances. Despite partial exit permit reform, domestic workers were required to obtain permission from employers to leave the country. Some employers denied domestic workers food or access to a telephone, including their own cellphones, according to news reports and foreign embassy officials. NGOs found that foreign workers faced legal obstacles and lengthy legal processes that prevented them from seeking redress for abuses and exploitative conditions. Noncitizen community leaders also highlighted migrant workers' continued hesitation to report their plight due to fear of reprisals.