

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Arab Emirates is a federation of seven semiautonomous emirates with a resident population of approximately 9.8 million, of whom an estimated 11 percent are citizens. The rulers of the seven emirates constitute the Federal Supreme Council, the country's highest legislative and executive body. The council selects a president and a vice president from its membership, and the president appoints the prime minister and cabinet. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, ruler of Abu Dhabi emirate, is president, succeeding former president Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan after the latter's death in May. The emirates are under patriarchal rule with political allegiance defined by loyalty to tribal leaders, leaders of the individual emirates, and leaders of the federation. A limited, appointed electorate participates in periodic elections for the partially elected Federal National Council, a consultative body that examines, reviews, and recommends changes to legislation and may discuss topics for legislation. The most recent election was in 2019, when appointed voters elected 20 Federal National Council members. Citizens may express their concerns directly to their leaders through traditional consultative mechanisms such as the open *majlis* (forum), but they do not have the right to choose their government in free and fair elections.

Each emirate maintains a local police force called a general directorate, which is officially a branch of the federal Ministry of Interior. All emirate-level general directorates of police enforce their respective emirate's laws autonomously. They also enforce federal laws within their emirate in coordination with one another under the federal ministry. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary arrest and detention, including those involving hostile prison conditions such as incommunicado detention, by government officials; political prisoners; transnational repression against individuals in another country; unlawful government interference with privacy; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including censorship and enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government restrictions or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and outlawing of independent trade unions and significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association.

The government investigated, prosecuted, and punished some officials who committed corruption-related abuses, primarily official financial crimes. There was no publicly available information on whether authorities investigated complaints of other abuses or prosecuted and punished officials in connection with these complaints.

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

Human rights organizations reported instances of disappearances by government authorities. For example, Abdul Rahman al-Nahhas, a Syrian human rights activist sentenced in September 2021 to 10 years in prison on charges of terrorism and insulting the prestige of the state, reportedly was forcibly disappeared, threatened, tortured, held incommunicado, and denied access to his legal representative; he reportedly remained in prison at year's end.

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

The constitution and law prohibit such practices, and there were no credible reports that government officials employed such practices during the year, although there were reports citing examples from previous years. Civil servants can be imprisoned for up to five years for inappropriately punishing a detainee; for up to five months for detaining a prisoner without the authority to do so; and for up to a year for subjecting a prisoner to inappropriate force or threats. If more than one individual is involved in acts of torture or degrading treatment, or if the offense is committed against women and children, the penalty is higher.

The aggrieved parties or their legal counsel may lodge complaints through a dedicated smartphone app. If individuals allege torture or mistreatment, the Ministry of Interior is required to conduct a comprehensive investigation. The law requires that a doctor assess whether an individual was tortured, to determine whether the perpetrator can be prosecuted. There was no available information on whether complaints made in the app were adjudicated or investigated.

Although it is illegal for authorities to use evidence obtained through torture or degrading treatment, human rights groups alleged that abuses took place during interrogations and as inducement for signed confessions. There were reports that police tortured suspects. Based on reports from released prisoners, their family members, diplomatic observers, and human rights organizations, UN human rights

experts found that some individuals imprisoned for suspected state security and criminal offenses were subjected to torture or mistreatment. In July the UN Committee against Torture expressed “particular concern that reports received detail a pattern of torture and ill-treatment against human rights defenders and persons accused of offenses against state security.” In July, two UK nationals, Matthew Hedges and Ali Issa Ahmad, testified before the UN Committee against Torture that they were subjected to torture in 2018 and 2019, including solitary confinement and abuse with an electric-shock baton.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh due to overcrowding, physical abuse, long waits for health-care access, and inadequate sanitary conditions. Prison conditions varied widely among the individual emirates and between regular government-operated prisons (which hold those accused of nonpolitical crimes such as drug trafficking, money laundering, and killings) and state security detention facilities (which hold political activists or those the government defines to be terrorists).

Abusive Physical Conditions: The government did not release statistics on prison demographics and capacity. Diplomatic observers and UN human rights experts reported that in Abu Dhabi, some prisoners reported overcrowding (particularly in drug units), poor temperature control, retaliation for raising complaints to their embassies, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care. According to diplomatic observers, overcrowding was periodically a problem in prisons in Dubai and the northern emirates.

There were reports that individuals in state security detention facilities were mistreated, abused, and tortured. Prisoners complained to diplomatic observers that they witnessed routine abuse of fellow prisoners, including long periods of solitary confinement and imprisonment in noncooled spaces where temperatures could reach upwards of 100 degrees Fahrenheit for most months of the year.

Some prisoners were not permitted exercise or reading materials. There were reports that some prisoners did not have access to outside areas and exposure to

sunlight.

Prison officials attempted to accommodate persons with disabilities based on their specific needs, such as placing wheelchair users on a lower floor. Some reports alleged inconsistencies in providing support for prisoners with mental disabilities. In Dubai and to some extent in Abu Dhabi, prison officials worked with mental-health professionals to provide support and administer needed medication. Training and facilities to accommodate prisoners with mental disabilities were reportedly less well developed in the other emirates. It reportedly was common for authorities to grant a humanitarian pardon in cases where a person with a disability had been convicted of a minor offense.

Administration: Although prisoners had a right to submit complaints to judicial authorities, details about whether any investigations into complaints took place were not publicly available, and there were no independent authorities to investigate allegations of poor conditions. Inmates reported retaliation from authorities after raising issues regarding prison conditions with diplomatic missions.

There were standard weekly visiting hours in regular prisons, but unmarried and unrelated visitors of the opposite sex had to receive permission from a prosecutor. Some prisons throughout the country continued to use teleconferencing measures in lieu of in-person visitations, in response to COVID-19. Some state security detainees were not permitted access to visitors, including consular officials, or had more limited access than other prisoners.

Prison authorities required Muslims to attend weekly Islamic services, and non-Muslims reported some pressure to attend ostensibly nonmandatory lectures and classes regarding Islam. Some non-Muslim clergy raised concerns regarding lack of worship space for non-Muslim prisoners. In some emirates, non-Muslim clergy wishing to visit prisoners faced bureaucratic hurdles, such as opaque and arbitrary responses to access requests, while others were not permitted to visit prisoners at all.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted charitable nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to visit prisons and provide material support on a limited basis. Authorities did not grant access to independent human rights groups, media, or international monitoring bodies, and prohibited regular consular access for State Security Department detainees.

Improvements: In June the Sharjah Central Jail expanded and upgraded the correctional facility with a new wing housing 1,000 male inmates.

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.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law prohibits arrest or search of citizens without probable cause. The law provides the right to remain silent and requires arresting officers to inform the accused of this right and the alleged charges upon arrest or detention. While awaiting a decision on official charges at a police station or the prosecutor's office, a detainee is not entitled to legal counsel. Police usually adhered to the requirement that they report an arrest to the public prosecutor within 48 hours. The public prosecutor must question the accused within 24 hours of notification of arrest but in some cases did not do so.

The government reportedly often held some persons in custody for extended periods without charges or a preliminary judicial hearing. The law allows state security officers to hold detainees for up to 106 days, but indefinite detention for such cases was reported.

Police investigations regularly took up to three months, during which time detainees were often held incommunicado and without public knowledge of their whereabouts. In some cases, authorities did not allow detainees contact with attorneys, family members, or others for indefinite or unspecified periods. Some

detainees reported being monitored during meetings with family members and consular officials, as well as being prevented from discussing their cases or detention conditions. Diplomatic observers also reported monitoring during consular visits.

Authorities rarely notified the appropriate diplomatic officials when a foreign national was detained. For state security detainees, notification was exceptionally rare, and information regarding the status of these detainees was very limited.

The law requires prosecutors to submit charges to a court within 14 days of the police report. Judges may not extend a detention beyond 30 days without charges; however, once charges are brought, judges may renew 30-day extensions indefinitely. Multiple detainees complained that authorities did not inform them of the charges or other details of their case for months at a time. There were also reports of authorities pressuring or forcing detainees to sign documents before having access to attorneys.

The law requires police to furnish a translator when an individual does not understand Arabic. Noncitizen detainees reported that prosecutors presented charges written in Arabic and that translation services were often inadequate.

Authorities treated prisoners arrested for political or security reasons differently from other prisoners, including placing them in separate sections of a prison. The State Security Department handled these cases and, in some instances, held prisoners and detainees in separate undisclosed locations for extended periods prior to their transfer to a regular prison.

Public prosecutors may hold suspects in terrorism-related cases without charges for six months. Once authorities charge a suspect with terrorism, the Federal Supreme Court may extend the detention indefinitely. The counterterrorism law provides for the establishment of rehabilitation centers under the *Munassaha* program, which aims to use psychosocial techniques to reform persons deemed to pose a terrorist threat or those convicted of terrorist offenses. The law stipulates that program administrators provide reports on detainees' status every three months and

that the public prosecutor submit a final opinion on the outcome of rehabilitation to inform the court's decision on whether to release the individual. An amendment to federal law passed in June authorizes courts to place juveniles deemed to be terrorist threats in the Munassaha program.

Authorities may temporarily release detainees who deposit money, a passport, or an unsecured personal promissory statement signed by a third party. Abu Dhabi and Dubai utilize an electronic travel ban system, which allows authorities to prevent individuals involved in pending legal proceedings from departing the country without physically confiscating their passport. Nonetheless, officials routinely held detainees' passports until sentencing. Authorities may deny pretrial release to defendants in cases involving loss of life, including involuntary manslaughter. Authorities released some prisoners detained on charges related to a person's death after the prisoners completed *diya* (blood money) payments. Once an accused is found criminally liable for a death, judges may grant diya payments as compensation to the victim's family in an amount determined to be in accordance with sharia. For example, in March the ruler of Sharjah paid the diya on behalf of an individual who had sponsored a worker who died in an accident. In June an Ajman court awarded 200,000 dirhams (AED) (\$54,450) in diya to the family of a woman killed in a bus accident.

A defendant is legally entitled to an attorney after authorities complete their investigation and file formal charges. There were allegations that authorities sometimes questioned the accused for weeks without permitting access to an attorney. The government may provide counsel at its discretion to indigent defendants charged with felonies punishable by imprisonment. The law requires the government to provide counsel in cases in which indigent defendants face punishments of life imprisonment or the death penalty.

There were reports authorities delayed or limited an individual's access to an attorney and failed to schedule prompt court appearances or provide consular notification, both for ordinary prisoners and in state security cases. Diplomatic observers reported this was a particular problem for foreign residents who were

vulnerable to loss of job and home and accrual of debt due to unlawful detention. There were no known reports of courts finding individuals eligible for compensation based on unlawful detention.

According to human rights organizations, Amina al-Abdouli and Maryam al-Balushi – women who were arrested in 2016 and 2015, respectively, for alleged state security crimes – remained detained despite completing their sentences.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were reports the government carried out arrests without informing the individual of the charge, notably in cases of alleged violations of state security regulations.

Pretrial Detention: Lengthy pretrial detention occurred, especially in cases involving state security. Diplomatic observers noted cases where the time defendants spent waiting for a court date surpassed the maximum sentence for the crime.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, court decisions remained subject to review by the political leadership. Authorities often treated noncitizens differently from citizens. The judiciary consisted largely of contracted foreign nationals subject to potential deportation, further compromising its independence from the government.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right. Abu Dhabi and other emirates maintained virtual court systems, which allowed detainees and prisoners to participate in hearings and trials remotely and afforded continued access to the justice system despite pandemic-related restrictions. Dubai maintained a website where individuals could obtain basic information concerning pending legal cases, including formal charges and upcoming court dates. Diplomatic observers noted that in many instances a

similar website in Abu Dhabi did not function effectively.

The law requires all court proceedings to be conducted in Arabic but mandates that an interpreter be provided when the individual being questioned does not speak Arabic. Despite the defendant's procedural right to an interpreter, there were reports that authorities did not always provide one or provided poor-quality interpreting services. There were reports that detainees were not granted access to legal counsel, were not informed of their alleged crime, were not offered a translator, and were not informed of their right to remain silent. Furthermore, detainees and legal counsel had no access to case files at the police level, and police reportedly imposed travel bans immediately upon arrest.

Although defendants have the right to be present at their trials and to have legal counsel in court for cases that carry punishment other than a fine, observers reported that this right was not always respected. Some defendants said they did not have adequate time to prepare a defense, sometimes due to limited telephone access or incomplete information from authorities regarding their rights. Verdicts were announced in open court, even if the case was heard in a closed session.

When authorities suspected a foreigner of crimes of "moral turpitude," they sometimes deported the individual without recourse to the criminal justice system.

Women continued to face legal discrimination because of the government's interpretation of sharia (see section 6, Women).

Political Prisoners and Detainees

During the year there were reports of persons held incommunicado and without charge because of their political views or affiliations, which often involved alleged links to Islamist organizations. The government restricted the activities of organizations and individuals critical of the government, as well as those allegedly associated with al-Islah, a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate and a group the government designated a terrorist organization. According to a human rights organization, at least 40 political detainees due for release in the summer remained

in detention after completing their sentences.

In January Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that Ahmed Mansoor, a human rights activist convicted in 2018 under the cybercrime law of insulting the “status and prestige of the United Arab Emirates and its symbols” and of seeking to damage the country’s relationship with its neighbors by publishing information critical of those governments on social media, faced retaliation following the publication of a letter he wrote in 2021 alleging mistreatment in detention and unfair trial procedures. According to the HRW report, prison authorities “moved Mansoor to a smaller and more isolated cell, denied him access to critical medical care, and confiscated his reading glasses.”

Human rights organizations continued to call upon the government to release political prisoners. Mohammed al-Roken, sentenced to 10 years in 2012 for “plotting against the government,” completed his sentence in July but remained incarcerated at year’s end. International NGOs stated that he was imprisoned for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression and association, including his work as a human rights lawyer.

Transnational Repression

Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion: According to human rights groups, government authorities continued to engage in efforts to intimidate or exact reprisal against individuals outside of the country, particularly relatives of political prisoners detained in the country and dissidents living abroad. There were reports that the government conducted online surveillance and hacking against perceived critics outside the country (see section 2.a., Internet Freedom).

In May the UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders alleged that the government engaged in an online harassment campaign against U.S. resident Jenan al-Marzouqi, the daughter of political detainee Abdelsalam al-Marzouqi, in response to her social-media advocacy for human rights.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Citizens and noncitizens had access to the courts to seek damages for, or cessation of, human rights abuses. Courts lacked full independence, often delaying proceedings.

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

The constitution prohibits entry into a home without the owner's permission, except when police present a lawful warrant. Officers' actions in searching premises were subject to review by the Ministry of Interior, and officers were subject to disciplinary action if authorities judged their actions irresponsible; however, there were no reports of such action during the year.

The constitution stipulates the freedom and "secrecy" of "corresponding through the post, telegraph, or other means of communication." There were reports, however, that the government monitored and occasionally censored incoming international mail, wiretapped telephones, and monitored outgoing mail and electronic forms of communication without following appropriate legal procedures. Media reported in January and April that the government had used Israeli-developed spyware to surveil foreign leaders and domestic targets in prior years.

g. Conflict-related Abuses

International and Yemeni NGOs and human rights defenders continued to report that the government supported armed groups in Yemen that were reported to have committed human rights abuses including forced detention and torture. For further information see the Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Yemen, section 1, Respect for the Integrity of the Person.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

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

Other Media

The constitution provides for limited freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but the law prohibits criticism of national rulers and speech that may create or encourage social unrest. Legal changes enacted in January impose additional restrictions on freedom of expression by creating criminal punishments for “spreading rumors or false news.” The law also penalizes the use of the internet to disseminate information or data that insults a foreign country. The government regularly restricted freedom of speech, and human rights organizations reported that the government continued to detain political activists and human rights defenders on expression-related charges. Media outlets conformed to unpublished government guidelines. Editors and journalists were aware of government “red lines” for acceptable media content, stipulated in federal libel and slander laws, and commonly practiced self-censorship on socially sensitive topics such as government criticism and human rights violations.

In January a consortium of 15 international civil society organizations published a joint statement condemning the new cybercrime law for “severely threaten[ing] and unduly restrict[ing] the right to freedom of expression (both online and offline) and the rights to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly.” The group stated that the new text contained vague terminology, particularly on issues related to “national security,” and provided authorities with excessive discretion to criminalize and impose lengthy prison sentences on individuals exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The consortium asserted that the law further enabled the criminalization of the work of journalists, whistleblowers, activists, and peaceful critics, subjecting those engaged in lawful activities to harsh prison sentences and excessive fines. They called on authorities to “repeal the law or sufficiently amend its provisions so that it is brought into line with international human rights standards.”

Freedom of Expression: The government continued to make arrests and impose other restrictions for speech related to and in support of Islamist political activities,

calls for democratic reforms, criticism of or perceived insults against the government and government institutions, and, in rarer cases, criticism of officials and private citizens. Both verbal and written insults online are prosecutable offenses.

Changes to the penal code that took effect in January provide for between 15 and 25 years in prison for anyone who “insults or ridicules the head of the state or harms his reputation or standing.” The amended penal code also reduces the punishment from 10 to 5 years in prison for anyone who “ridicules, insults, or harms the reputation or prestige of the state, its institutions, its founding leaders, the state’s flag, national emblem or anthem, or any of its national symbols.” In April the Abu Dhabi Public Prosecution ordered the prosecution and pretrial detention of a woman on charges of “disturbing public order, disobeying a state official and resisting arrest” after she allegedly was “shout[ing] racist and discriminatory remarks against the UAE” in a hotel lobby, according to news reports.

Cyber-related laws impose criminal penalties for “spreading rumors, false news, or content that derides or damages the reputation of the state, or any of its institutions, via any information network or technology.” The law prohibits any person from “publishing any information, news, caricatures or any other kind of pictures that would pose threats to the security of the state and to its highest interests or violate its public order.” The punishment for such offenses is imprisonment and a fine not exceeding AED 1 million (\$272,500).

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, including Online Media: International NGOs categorized the press, both in print and online, as not free. Except for regional media outlets located in Dubai’s and Abu Dhabi’s free-trade zones, the government owned and controlled most newspapers, television stations, and radio stations. The country has no specific media law; however, the penal code contains provisions relating to media, particularly regarding defamation, as does the Cybercrime Law regarding digital communications. Journalists reported the government maintained unpublished

guidelines for unacceptable media content.

Regulations for electronic media, including rules for publishing and selling advertising, print, video, and audio material, require those benefitting monetarily from social media advertising to purchase a license from the Media Regulatory Office (MRO), a government body responsible for managing and regulating media activities and media-related free zones. The law also penalizes the taking and dissemination of pictures of others without permission, including victims of accidents or disasters.

By law the MRO, whose chair the president appoints, licenses, and censors all publications, including those of private associations. Domestic and foreign publications were censored to remove any criticism of the government, ruling families, or friendly governments. Online content was often removed without transparency or judicial oversight. Domain hosts or administrators are liable if their websites are used to “prompt riot, hatred, racism, sectarianism, or damage the national unity or social peace or prejudice the public order and public morals.” Censorship also extends to statements that “threaten social stability” and materials considered pornographic or excessively violent. Government authorities announced in January the implementation of standards for media content, mandating that such content should “refrain” from offending God and Islamic beliefs and respect other “heavenly religions.” The standards list various topics that content creators should not publish, to include “harming national unity and social cohesion or violating the sanctity of public morals.” In May the MRO and TikTok jointly closed a number of accounts, citing inappropriate or offensive content. Authorities announced in June that the Disney movie *Lightyear*, which includes two same-sex cartoon characters kissing, would not be licensed for public screening due to its “violation” of media content standards. Also in June, the MRO allegedly withdrew copies of a locally published children’s magazine for “offending social values” for showing a rainbow-colored cartoon character perceived to speak in support of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) equality.

Government and private institutions must obtain a license before publishing or broadcasting media or advertising content, or face penalties. This requirement applies to any media or advertising activity and to any person or entity that issues any type of publication, including clubs, associations, diplomatic missions, foreign centers, and movie theaters.

Government officials allegedly issued warnings to journalists who published or broadcast material deemed politically or culturally sensitive. Editors and journalists commonly practiced self-censorship due to fear of government retribution, particularly since most journalists were foreign nationals and risked deportation. Authorities did not allow importation or publication of some books they viewed as critical of the government, Islam, or local culture, as well as books that the government perceived as supporting the Muslim Brotherhood or its ideology.

Internet and television providers continued to block Qatari-funded al-Jazeera's website and most Qatari broadcasting channels at the direction of government authorities.

Libel/Slander Laws: The Cybersecurity Law that came into effect in January mandates imprisonment or a fine of not less than AED 250,000 (\$68,100) and not exceeding AED 500,000 (\$136,200) for persons who insult others online or use an electronic site for accusations that may subject another to punishment or contempt. Insult or slander against public employees is considered an aggravating circumstance.

The government used the threat of libel and slander laws to suppress criticism of its leaders and institutions.

The law also criminalizes any form of expression the government interprets as blasphemous or offensive toward "divine recognized religions," inciting religious hatred, or insulting religious convictions.

National Security: Authorities often cited the need to protect national security as

the basis for laws that prohibit and punish criticism of the government or expression of dissenting political views. The law includes broad limitations on using electronic means to promote disorder or “damage national unity.” Human rights groups criticized these laws for excessively restricting freedom of expression.

Legal changes enacted in January allow the government to punish citizens and foreigners for committing or being accomplices to crimes occurring outside the country. Allegations categorized as state security cases, violations of the constitutional system, premeditated murder, or insults to the country or its symbols can warrant prosecution.

The government may deport residents deemed to pose a national security threat. In such cases, a government commission reviews deportation orders, and an individual can be deported only if an extradition agreement exists with the destination state.

Internet Freedom

Federal laws define broad categories of online activities as illegal, including: defaming or disrespecting others and other countries, contempt of religion; promotion of disorder, hate, racism or sectarianism, and damage to national unity, social peace, public order, and public decency; promotion of demonstrations without license; violating privacy; entering an electronic site illegally and without permission; filming persons or places and posting these videos without permission; spreading false news and rumors; manipulating personal information; engaging in blackmail and threats; establishing websites or accounts that violate local regulations; posting work-related confidential information; collecting donations without a license; and conducting surveys without obtaining security approval. The law imposes fines and sentences up to life imprisonment depending on the nature of the alleged offense.

Federal prosecutors in January issued warnings that individuals mocking COVID-19 rules were subject to administrative and penal sanctions.

In April a Lebanese physician was detained for three weeks, allegedly over tweets written several years ago that the government deemed offensive to the country, including one that made jokes about naming conventions in the country and Lebanon.

The government restricted access to some websites and conducted widespread surveillance of social media, instant messaging services, and blogs with little to no judicial oversight. Virtual private networks (VPNs) are permitted for use by companies, institutions, and banks for internal purposes only; use by private individuals is forbidden. Use of VPN technology for illegal means is considered a serious offense under the law. Authorities threatened to imprison individuals for misusing the internet. Self-censorship was widely practiced on social media.

There were numerous reports of online surveillance to track dissidents in the country and abroad. NGOs and media outlets reported that the government targeted activists, journalists, politicians, and dissidents in systematic hacking campaigns.

The country's two internet service providers, both majority-owned by the government's sovereign wealth fund, used a proxy server to block materials deemed inconsistent with the country's values, as defined by the Ministry of Interior and overseen by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRO). Blocked material included some sites with LGBTQI+ content; atheist material; negative critiques of Islam; testimonies of former Muslims who converted to Christianity; gambling; promotion of illegal drug use; pornography; the al-Jazeera.com news site; and postings that explained how to circumvent proxy servers. International media sites, accessed using the country's internet providers, contained filtered content. The government also blocked some sites containing content critical of the government or laws of the country, and other states in the region.

The TRO operated with no oversight or transparency in identifying which sites it blocked. Service providers did not have the authority to unblock sites without

government approval. The government also blocked most voice-over-internet-protocol (VoIP) applications, the use of VoIPs through VPNs, and the use of VPNs through internet service providers. A temporary exception was in place for VoIP applications to support teleworking and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Convictions for unauthorized use of VoIPs can lead to significant fines, imprisonment, or both.

The Federal Public Prosecution for Information Technology Crimes investigated criminal cases involving use of information technology, including the use of the internet with intent to “damage public morals,” the promotion of “sinful behavior,” illegal collection of donations, trafficking in persons, calling for or abetting the breach of laws, and the organization of demonstrations.

Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom, including speech both inside and outside the classroom by educators, and censored academic materials for schools. The government required official permission for conferences and submission of detailed information on proposed speakers and topics of discussion. The same procedure applied to on-campus events at private schools. Some organizations found it difficult to secure meeting space for public events that dealt with contentious topics.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government restricted the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law provides limited freedom of assembly, although in practice the government imposed significant restrictions, including criminal penalties.

Protests and demonstrations are prohibited. The law restricts the right of assembly by, for example, prohibiting operation of an electronic site for the purpose of planning, organizing, or promoting protests or demonstrations. Conviction brings

imprisonment or a fine of not less than AED 500,000 (\$136,200) and not more than AED 1 million (\$272,500).

The law imposes a penalty of between one and three years in prison for “participating in a gathering of at least five people in a public space with the intention of rioting or disrupting the implementation of laws and regulations,” but only if the accused disobeys an order to disperse. The penalty increases to a minimum of five years in prison if the gathering results in rioting or a disruption of peace or public security. Additionally, the law provides a life sentence for anyone who calls for, promotes, or leads a gathering in a public space “with the intent of rioting, preventing or disrupting the implementation of laws and regulations, or disturbing public security, even if his call is not accepted.”

The law requires a government-issued permit for organized public gatherings. While there was no uniform standard for the number of persons who could gather without a permit, some residents reported that authorities asked groups of four or more to disperse if they did not have a permit. The government did not interfere routinely with informal, nonpolitical gatherings held without a government permit in public places unless there were complaints. The government generally permitted political gatherings that supported government policies. Hotels, citing government regulations, sometimes denied permission for groups such as unregistered religious organizations to rent space for meetings or religious services.

Freedom of Association

The law provides limited freedom of association, but in practice the government significantly restricted this freedom.

Political organizations, political parties, and trade unions are illegal. All associations and NGOs are required to register with the Ministry of Community Development, and many of those that registered received government subsidies. Domestic NGOs registered with the ministry were mostly citizens’ associations for economic, religious, social, cultural, athletic, and other purposes. NGOs tracking

human rights abuses or issuing reports critical of the government were not allowed to operate (see section 5).

Registration rules require that all voting organizational members, as well as boards of directors, must be citizens. This requirement excluded almost 90 percent of the population from fully participating in such organizations. In Dubai, volunteer organizations were required to register with the Community Development Authority (CDA) and obtain its approval before conducting fundraising activities. The law mandates that individuals and entities must obtain a license from the CDA to engage in fundraising activities or collect donations, which they may do no more than four times a year. Penalties under the law may include substantial fines and deportation of noncitizens. Similar organizations in Abu Dhabi are also required to register with the appropriate local authorities.

In Abu Dhabi all exhibitions, conferences, and meetings require a permit from the Tourism and Culture Authority. To obtain a permit, the event organizer must submit identification documents for speakers along with speaker topics.

LGBTQI+ individuals could not openly engage in advocacy for LGBTQI+ rights due to social norms and possible prosecution or reprisal (see section 6).

c. Freedom of Religion

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

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

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, emigration, and repatriation. While the government generally respected the right to freedom of internal movement, emigration, and repatriation, it imposed certain legal restrictions on foreign travel. The lack of passports or other identity documents restricted the movement of stateless persons, both within the country and internationally.

Foreign Travel: Authorities generally did not permit citizens and residents

involved in legal disputes under adjudication and noncitizens under investigation to travel abroad. In addition, authorities sometimes arrested individuals with outstanding debts or legal cases while in transit through an international airport. Abu Dhabi and Dubai maintain a system that allows individuals to verify whether they are subject to a travel ban related to unsettled debts or pending legal action. In some cases, travelers can settle debts directly at the airport and have their travel ban lifted. Debtors also may challenge travel bans in court.

Emirate-level prosecutors have the discretion to seize the passports of foreign citizens and restrict foreign travel during criminal or civil investigations. These measures posed problems for noncitizen debtors who, in addition to being unable to leave the country, were usually unable to find work without a passport and valid residence permit, making it impossible to repay their debts or maintain legal residency. In some cases, family, friends, local religious organizations, or other concerned individuals helped pay the debt and enabled the indebted foreign national to depart the country. In April Ajman police authorized the release of 103 prisoners after resolution of their debts using funding from charities. In July Dubai Islamic Bank paid the debts of 46 prisoners to facilitate their release.

Citizens targeted for reasons of state security, including former political prisoners, encountered difficulties renewing official documents, resulting in implicit travel bans.

A husband may impose a travel ban on his children to prevent the mother from absconding with them.

Citizenship: The government may revoke naturalized citizens' passports and citizenship status for criminal or "politically provocative" actions.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government allowed the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations to provide protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other

persons of concern.

UNHCR lacked formal legal status in the country separate from the UN Development Program. The government nevertheless worked with UNHCR on a case-by-case basis to address refugee issues. The government informally granted refugee status or asylum to aliens seeking protection and allowed some asylum seekers to remain in the country temporarily on an individual basis. This nonpermanent status often presented administrative, financial, and social hardships, including the need to frequently renew visas and the inability to access basic services such as health care and education.

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a transparent, codified system for providing protection to refugees. While the government extended informal protection from return to refugees in some cases, any persons lacking legal residency status were technically subject to local laws on illegal immigrants, and authorities could detain them. In some cases, authorities confined individuals seeking protection at an airport to a specific section of the airport while they awaited resettlement in another country. The government continued to support efforts to resettle or relocate to other countries individuals relocated from Afghanistan since August 2021.

Employment: Access to employment was based on an individual's status as a legal resident, and persons who lacked legal residency status, including those with either short-term visitor visas or expired visas, were generally not eligible for legal employment.

Access to Basic Services: Access to education and other public services, including health care, was based on an individual's status as a legal resident. As a result, some families, particularly from Iraq and Syria, reportedly did not have access to health care or schools. The government provided or allowed access to some services on a case-by-case basis, often after the intervention of UNHCR representatives. Some hospitals were willing to see patients without the mandatory

insurance but required full payment up front.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

g. Stateless Persons

Informal estimates suggested 20,000 to 100,000 *Bidoon*, or persons without citizenship, resided in the country. The government estimated the population at 10,000. Most Bidoon lacked citizenship because they did not belong to one of the tribes granted citizenship when the country was established. Others entered the country legally or illegally in search of employment. Because children derive citizenship generally from the father, Bidoon children born within the country's territory remained stateless. Without passports or other forms of identification, Bidoon find their movement restricted, both within the country and internationally.

The committee that reviews mothers' citizenship applications for their children also reviews citizenship applications from Bidoon who could satisfy certain legal conditions to be eligible for naturalization and subsequently could gain access to education, health care, and other public services. There were few reports of stateless persons receiving Emirati citizenship. Some Bidoon reportedly are issued UAE passports for travel purposes but are not recognized as Emirati nationals or citizens.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law does not provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage. Federal executive and legislative power are in the hands of the Federal Supreme Council, a body composed of the hereditary rulers of the seven emirates. The council selects from its members the country's president and vice president. Decisions at the federal level generally are by consensus among the rulers, their families, and other leading families. The ruling families, in consultation with other prominent tribal

figures, also choose rulers of the emirates.

Citizens may express their concerns directly to their leaders through an open majlis, a traditional consultative mechanism. On occasion, women were permitted to attend a majlis. If a majlis was closed to women, men sometimes expressed concerns as proxies on behalf of women. In addition, authorities sometimes held a women-only majlis or a majlis focused specifically on women's issues.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The Federal Supreme Council, composed of the rulers of the seven emirates, unanimously elected Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan as the country's president on May 14. In 2019 an appointed electorate of more than 330,000, representing just under one-quarter of the total citizen population, elected 20 members of the Federal National Council (FNC), a 40-member consultative body with some legislative authority. Approximately 35 percent of eligible voters participated. The size of the appointed electorate increased by approximately 50 percent from the 2015 election. Each emirate receives seats in the FNC based on population. In a nontransparent process, each emirate ruler appoints that emirate's portion of the other 20 FNC members. Female representation in the FNC stands at 50 percent, to include both directly elected and appointed members.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Citizens did not have the right to form political parties, which are prohibited by law.

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

Except in the judiciary and military, members of non-Muslim and racial minority groups did not serve in senior federal positions. Many judges were contracted foreign nationals.

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. The government investigated, prosecuted, and punished some officials who committed corruption-related abuses, primarily official financial crimes.

Nepotism and conflict of interest in government appointments and contract allocations existed.

Corruption: The law gives the attorney general the power to investigate officials, issue travel bans, and freeze officials' assets. Officials can be removed from their job for administrative or financial misdeeds. The law also includes provisions to hold officials accountable after resignation or removal from their position. The public prosecutor's office is the designated body to receive complaints against senior officials and has the power to refer them for investigation in coordination with the cabinet.

In May the Abu Dhabi Accountability Authority launched an online platform that allows employees, customers, and suppliers of government-related entities in Abu Dhabi confidentially to report unlawful or harmful financial and administrative practices and corruption.

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

The government generally did not permit domestic or international organizations to focus on domestic political or human rights issues.

The government directed, regulated, and subsidized participation by all NGO members in events outside the country. All participants were required to obtain government permission before attending such events. The government also

restricted entry to the country by members of international NGOs. There were no transparent standards governing visits from international NGO representatives. The antidiscrimination law, which prohibits multiple forms of discrimination and criminalizes acts or expression the government interprets as provoking religious hatred or insulting religion, was used as a legal basis for restricting events such as conferences and seminars. The law also criminalizes the broadcasting, publication, and transmission of such material by any means, including audiovisual and print media or via the internet, and prohibits conferences or meetings the government deems to promote discrimination, discord, or hatred.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The National Human Rights Committee acts as the main liaison between human rights bodies in the country and supervises the implementation of a comprehensive national human rights plan. The federal law establishing the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) describes it as an independent body mandated to “promote and protect” human rights and “fundamental freedoms” in accordance with the constitution, federal laws and legislation, and relevant international conventions. The NHRI receives an annual budget from the government, and its board includes individuals who are current government officials or who previously served in government roles.

The Human Rights Office at the emirate-level Abu Dhabi Judicial Department (ADJD) has the authority to investigate human rights complaints submitted in English or Arabic, provided there is a pending case before the ADJD courts.

Three recognized local human rights organizations existed: the NHRI; the quasi-governmental Emirates Human Rights Association (EHRA), which focused on human rights problems and complaints regarding labor conditions, stateless persons’ rights, and prisoners’ well-being and treatment; and the Emirates Center for Human Rights Studies (ECHRS), which focused on human rights education for lawyers and legal consultants. The EHRA claimed it operated independently without government interference, apart from requirements that apply to all associations in the country, but several EHRA members were government officials, and the organization received government funding. The ECHRS was established

under the Emirates Association for Lawyers and Legal Advisers, a professional association led primarily by government officials.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape, which is defined as coerced sexual intercourse with a woman or sodomy with a man. Under the law, rape is generally punishable by life imprisonment and by death in certain cases. Hospitals must report rape cases to police.

The law does not prohibit spousal rape. In sharia courts, which are primarily responsible for civil matters between Muslims, the extremely high burden of proof for a rape case contributed to a low conviction rate. There were reports employers raped or sexually assaulted foreign domestic workers. The government rarely prosecuted these cases, and those which it did led to few convictions.

The law criminalizes sexual assault by coercion, threat, or deceit, and covers instances where the victim is incapable of providing consent due to mental incapacity. Persons accused of sexual relations with a person younger than the age of consent (18) face charges of sexual molestation, punishable by a prison term of 10 to 25 years. If the perpetrator is related to the victim, responsible for their upbringing or care, or has authority over them, the punishment may be up to life imprisonment. The law prohibits multiple forms of domestic abuse, including mental, sexual, and financial abuse. Public prosecutors may issue protective orders for victims, and abusers may be subject to prison or monetary fines.

Survivors of domestic abuse may file complaints with police units stationed in major public hospitals. Social workers and counselors also maintained offices in public hospitals and police stations. There were reports that victims of domestic abuse were turned away at police stations or were advised to attend mandatory mediation sessions at the Family Prosecution Office. There are domestic abuse centers in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ras al-Khaimah, and Sharjah.

While the government had not fully implemented the Family Protection Policy, adopted in 2019, it coordinated with social organizations to increase awareness of domestic violence, conduct seminars, educational programs, symposiums, and conferences. The Dubai Foundation for Women and Children sought to increase awareness of domestic violence through social media, television, radio programming, advertising, hosting workshops, and sponsoring a hotline. The Aman Shelter for Women and Children in Ras al-Khaimah also maintained a hotline for domestic abuse survivors.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Although the law prohibits FGM/C, and the Ministry of Health forbids hospitals and clinics from performing the procedure, private clinics and ritual/traditional circumcisers reportedly continued to carry out the procedure. The FGM/C most prevalent in the country was performed during infancy and childhood. Some tribal groups practiced FGM/C. Little information was available about its indigenous prevalence, but it was reportedly declining as a traditional custom. Foreign residents from countries where FGM/C is prevalent undertook the practice.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence: The country employs judicial supervision for individuals considered at risk from relatives threatening to commit so-called honor crimes against or otherwise harming them. Judicial supervision typically included providing housing to individuals for their safety and well-being and family mediation and reconciliation.

Sexual Harassment: The government prosecuted cases of sexual harassment. The legal definition of sexual harassment includes repetitive harassment through action, words, or signs, and acknowledges that men can be victims of sexual harassment. The law stipulates punishment by a prison term of at least one year, a fine of AED 100,000 (\$27,250), or both. Criminal judgements against a foreigner include a prison term followed by deportation.

Conviction of “disgracing or dishonoring” a person in public is punishable by a minimum of one year and up to 15 years in prison if the victim is younger than age

14. Conviction for “infamous” acts against the rules of decency is punishable by a penalty of six months in prison, and “dishonoring a woman by word or deed on a public roadway” is also a punishable offense. The government generally enforced this law.

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

Pregnancy outside marriage is punishable by two years’ imprisonment for both parents unless they marry or one or both acknowledge the child and obtain identification papers and travel documents in accordance with the laws of the country of which either parent is a national. In October the government issued a new federal law on the “Regulation of Births and Deaths Registration” allowing unmarried parents to obtain a birth certificate for a child born out of wedlock. The law also provides a mechanism for mothers to obtain birth certificates for children in cases where the father is unknown. Previously, obtaining a birth certificate required presentation of a marriage certificate for the parents. The new law requires only a notarized confirmation of parenthood. In cases where the father is unknown, a specialized court can issue an order for the issuance of the birth certificate.

While reproductive health care is available, it was more problematic to access for unmarried and noncitizen women, who represented a significant majority of the female population. Additionally, there were restrictions to health-care access based on health insurance. Although the government provides free health care to citizens, including access to contraception, obstetric and gynecologic services, prenatal care, and delivery care to married female citizens, insurance plans for unskilled laborers often did not offer prenatal or postnatal care, and the government did not provide free postnatal care for noncitizen pregnant women. Foreign residents with no health insurance benefits were able to use public hospitals for a fee and sometimes relied on charity to cover these costs. Access to limited pharmacological contraception options was available only through medical prescription. Emergency contraception was reportedly available with a doctor’s

prescription and in some cases required spousal consent. Rape victims were usually provided with medical care. Oral contraceptive prescriptions are legal for single women as treatment for menstrual issues. Most health insurance plans did not cover insertion and removal of intrauterine devices and contraceptive implants.

Discrimination: Women in general faced legal and economic discrimination, with noncitizen women at a particular disadvantage.

The government's interpretation of sharia applies in personal status cases and family law. Muslim women in most emirates must have the consent of their guardians to marry. Local interpretations of sharia prohibit Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims and Muslim men from marrying women "not of the book," generally meaning adherents of religions other than Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The Abu Dhabi Judicial Department, however, offers civil marriages for noncitizens, including some Muslims, outside these interpretations of sharia. The law permits a man to have as many as four wives, but women may not have more than one husband. Women normally inherit less than men, and a son's inheritance may be double that of a daughter under sharia. Laws in Abu Dhabi entitle some noncitizen women to larger inheritances than in other emirates.

The law does not require a woman to obtain a man's consent to apply for a passport and allows women to be recognized as the head of household.

To obtain a divorce with a financial settlement, a woman must prove her husband inflicted physical or moral harm upon her, abandoned her for at least three months, or did not provide for her or their children's upkeep. Physical abuse claims require medical reports and two male witnesses. It is up to the judge's discretion to consider women as full witnesses or half witnesses. Alternatively, women may divorce by paying compensation or surrendering their dowry to their husbands. In Abu Dhabi, noncitizens, including some Muslims, can obtain a civil divorce without having to prove the infliction of harm.

The strict interpretation of sharia does not apply to child custody cases, and courts applied the "best interests of the child" standard. According to federal law, a

divorced woman may lose custody of her children to their father once daughters reach age 13 and sons reach age 11. Women are permitted to file for continued custody until a daughter is married or a son finishes his education. Under federal law, fathers are permitted to seek custody of a son younger than age 11 if they believe the child has become “too soft.” The family law for noncitizens in Abu Dhabi grants parents joint custody, unless a parent waives the right or submits a request to deny the other parent custody on grounds of “ineligibility,” potential danger to the child, or failure to perform parental duties.

Adultery or consensual premarital sex is subject to penalty if the husband or legal guardian files a complaint. In addition, only the husband or legal guardian has the power to drop the charges. Emirate-level laws and punishments based on sharia regarding adultery and consensual extramarital sex also remain applicable,

While the law mandates equal access to education for all, federal law prohibits coeducation in public universities, except in the United Arab Emirates University’s executive MBA program and in certain graduate programs at Zayed University. Many private schools, private universities, and institutions, however, were coeducational. According to officials, local women represented more than 70 percent of national higher education students.

The government excluded women from certain social and economic benefits, including land grants for building houses, notwithstanding provisions in federal law permitting women to be legal heads of households.

The government has a Gender Balance Council to promote a greater role for female citizens, but not noncitizens, working outside the home. The law stipulates equal wages for women and men, including noncitizens, in the private sector.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

Racial discrimination is illegal, but the government did not effectively enforce these protections, and discrimination remained common in areas such as employment. Job postings may list ethnic preferences, and the government took

no action to mitigate such discrimination in the workplace. Employers occasionally apply different pay rates based on the nationality of an employee.

Children

Birth Registration: Children generally derive citizenship from their parents. The children of citizen mothers married to foreigners do not receive citizenship automatically but are granted equivalent education and health benefits in accordance with a June presidential declaration. The government registered noncitizen births, including of Bidoon.

Education: Education is compulsory through the 12th grade or until the age of 18, whichever occurs first; however, the law was not enforced, and some children did not attend school, especially children of noncitizens. The government provided free primary education only to citizens. Noncitizen children could enroll in public schools only if they scored more than 90 percent on entrance examinations, which authorities administered in Arabic, and if one of the parents worked in a government entity, among other criteria. All public schools are coeducational from the first to fifth grades.

Child Abuse: The law prohibits child abuse, and the government took steps to increase awareness of the issue, including the Child Safety Campaign, which reinforced the role of media in protecting the rights of children. In March, 21 parents were penalized in Sharjah for failing to supervise their children at home. In June the al-Ain Federal Court of First Instance fined a father AED 5,000 (\$1,400) for neglecting his son, who was scalded by hot water.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal age of marriage for both men and women is 18, unless a judge gives approval for an earlier marriage.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law criminalizes the sexual exploitation of children, with a minimum penalty of 10 years in prison. The penalty for conviction of sex with children younger than 14 is life imprisonment. Distribution and consumption of child pornography is illegal. In September the Dubai Juvenile

Court charged two adult men and a 17-year-old of kidnapping and molesting a 15-year-old boy at a Dubai construction site. The 17-year-old was sentenced to three months in prison, while the alleged adult offenders were to stand trial at Dubai Criminal Court at a later date. In September Umm Al Quwain Misdemeanor Court sentenced a man to 10 years in prison for molesting and undressing two girls younger than 18.

Antisemitism

There is no indigenous Jewish community. There were no synagogues, but Abu Dhabi was constructing the country's first purpose-built synagogue as part of the larger government-sponsored Abrahamic Family House, scheduled to open in 2023. The small foreign Jewish population conducted regular and holiday prayer services in rented spaces. Dubai's resident Jewish community must renew a temporary license from the CDA every three months, pending establishment of a permanent synagogue. Antisemitic remarks on social media were rare.

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 and Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: Both civil law and sharia criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults. The penalty for individuals who engage in "consensual sodomy with a man is a minimum prison sentence of six months" if a complaint is filed by the partner or the guardian. There were no known reports of arrests or prosecutions for consensual same-sex sexual conduct.

The law criminalizes men who "dress as women," or who enter a place designated for women while "disguised" as a woman. The punishment can be up to one year

in prison and a fine of up to AED 10,000 (\$2,700). The law permits doctors to perform sex-reassignment surgery when there are “physiological” signs of gender and sex disparity, as determined by a recognized medical body. The penalty for performing a “sex correction” surgery that a medical professional or medical authority deems unwarranted is four to 10 years in prison, a fine from AED 10,000 (\$2,700) up to AED 500,000 (\$136,200), or both.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: There were no reports of police or other government violence against LGBTQI+ individuals or of nonstate actor violence targeting LGBTQI+ individuals.

Discrimination: The law does not extend antidiscrimination protections to LGBTQI+ individuals based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination. LGBTQI+ persons are provided no protection based on their sexual or gender identity and could face arrest, since homosexual activities are illegal. Although there were no reports of prosecutions as of year’s end, LGBTQI+ individuals were susceptible to harassment and discrimination.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Thai transgender model Rachaya Noppakaron claimed in a March 16 Facebook post that immigration authorities interrogated her for several hours at Dubai airport and ultimately denied her entry to the country because her passport listed her as “male.” Transgender individuals reported that they generally did not experience problems at the airport if their gender expression, particularly attire, matched the gender listed in their passport. Citizens who received gender-affirming surgery overseas reportedly had difficulty amending official documents to ensure they matched their gender.

Media reported in July that authorities demanded Amazon restrict search results for materials with an LGBTQI+ theme, threatening the company with penalties unless it complied. Amazon appeared to comply with the request.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: There were no reports of such practices

during the year.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:

No restrictions specifically targeted LGBTQI+ individuals or groups. Due to social conventions and general restrictions on assembly and association, however, LGBTQI+ organizations did not operate openly or hold advocacy events or Pride marches.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, or the provision of other state services. The government enforces the law, and children with disabilities are integrated into the school system. Most public buildings provided some form of access for persons with disabilities.

Public and private facilities provided education, health services, sports, and vocational rehabilitation for persons with disabilities. Many of the facilities were reserved for citizens.

The Ministry of Community Development is the central body responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and raising awareness at the federal and local level. The government continued to raise public awareness of societal inclusivity through its *National Strategy for Empowering People with Special Needs*.

Dubai issued a new law in January creating a permanent Higher Committee to Protect the Rights of People of Determination (the country's term for persons with disabilities). In July Dubai approved AED 44 million (\$12 million) in new social benefits for persons with disabilities, including coverage for the cost of educational fees, personal assistants and sign language interpreters, and assistive devices and technologies.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Noncitizens and, to a lesser extent, citizens with HIV or AIDS faced discrimination. Legal protections against employment and education discrimination for individuals with HIV or AIDS, as well as free access to HIV treatment and care programs, existed for citizens; however, noncitizens did not have these rights. The government does not grant residency or work visas to persons with certain communicable diseases, including HIV and AIDS. The cabinet issued a decree in August allowing health authorities to waive HIV testing as a precondition for obtaining or renewing residency. Noncitizens who test positive for HIV or AIDS may be detained and deported. Doctors are required to inform authorities of HIV or AIDS cases, reportedly discouraging individuals from seeking testing or treatment.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law neither provides for the right to organize or bargain collectively nor permits workers to form or join unions. It forbids strikes by public-sector employees, security guards, and migrant workers. A new labor law came into effect in February that does not explicitly prohibit strikes in the private sector and removes language permitting an employer to suspend an employee for striking. It does, however, require private-sector workers to participate in a labor dispute process that does not accommodate employee work suspensions as a form of protest or bargaining. Workers who walk off the job are therefore subject to disciplinary measures ranging from temporary suspensions to wage deductions and full termination depending on their employer's assessment of the strike's financial and reputational impact.

In the private sector, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization (Human Resources Ministry) must approve and register individual employment contracts. The labor law does not apply to public-sector employees, the armed forces,

security agencies, free zones, or export-processing zones. Domestic workers, which labor laws categorize as a group of approximately 20 job functions ranging from housemaid and cook to private coaches and agricultural engineers, fall under a separate law but are also regulated by the Human Resources Ministry. Persons who lacked legal residency status, including those with either short-term visitor visas or expired visas, were generally not legally eligible for employment.

In May legal provisions came into effect requiring the Human Resources Ministry to refer unresolved collective disputes to a Collective Labor Disputes Committee, formed by a cabinet decree but overseen by the ministry, the decisions of which would be final. As of June, groups of 50 or more private-sector employees may file collective employment dispute complaints with the ministry, which by law acts as mediator between the parties. Public-sector employees may file an administrative grievance or a case in a civil court to address a labor-related dispute or complaint. Administrative remedies are available for labor complaints, and authorities commonly applied them to resolve issues such as delayed wage payments, unpaid overtime, or substandard housing. Public information on government action remained limited, however.

All private-sector foreign workers have the right to file labor-related grievances with the Human Resources Ministry. Reports on the length of administrative procedures varied, with workers citing both speedy and delayed processes. In August local media reported that the Abu Dhabi Labor Court resolved a collective labor dispute in under two months and awarded 5,800 workers a total of AED 43 million (\$11.5 million) in unpaid wages. The ministry sometimes intervened in foreign workers' disputes with employers and helped negotiate private settlements. The law prohibits unauthorized demonstrations, or the expression of opinions deemed "false, or hurtful to the country's public image." The law mandates deportation of noncitizen public-sector workers "refusing to work."

The threat of deportation discouraged noncitizens from expressing work-related grievances. Nonetheless, occasional protests and strikes took place. The government did not always punish workers for nonviolent protests or strikes, but it

dispersed such protests and sometimes deported noncitizen participants. The government repealed regulations passed during the COVID-19 pandemic that gave employers the ability to reduce wages or place workers on unpaid leave with workers' consent. It included those provisions in the new labor law and expanded their application to "extraordinary emergency situations" determined by the cabinet. There were instances of employers exploiting these changes illegally to reduce salaries or furlough workers without their consent.

Delivery drivers staged protests in May over long working hours, inadequate safety conditions, lack of medical insurance, and predatory third-party agencies charging illegal visa fees. Drivers are reportedly responsible for funding their own medical care without assistance from their employment agencies. Drivers told international media that third-party employment agencies often did not reimburse them for work permits in violation of labor laws. One delivery company responded by cancelling planned wage cuts for its motorcycle delivery force and launching an investigation into third-party agencies. Some drivers reported receiving messages from their employment agencies demanding them to return to work and warning against partaking in any "illegal activity."

Abu Dhabi police directed private security personnel at several camps for laborers to surveil gatherings of laborers and report if they discussed security, social, and religious-related concerns.

Professional associations were not independent, and authorities had broad powers to interfere in their activities. For example, the Ministry of Community Development must license and approve professional associations, which are required to receive government approval for international affiliations and travel by members. The government granted some professional associations with majority citizen membership a limited ability to raise work-related matters, petition the government for redress, and file grievances.

Foreign workers may join local professional associations; however, they do not have voting rights and cannot serve on association boards. Apart from these

professional associations, in a few instances, some foreign workers came together to negotiate with their employers on issues such as housing conditions, nonpayment of wages, and working conditions. In Dubai the CDA regulates and provides licensing services to nonprofit civil society organizations and associations that organize social, cultural, artistic, or entertainment activities. All voluntary organizations and individual volunteers are required to register with the CDA within six months. In addition, all voluntary activities require a CDA permit, but there are no prescribed penalties for noncompliance.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but the government did not effectively enforce the law, particularly in the domestic-worker sector.

The government took steps to prevent forced labor through continued implementation of the Wages Protection System (WPS) in the private sector. Upon recruiting a new employee, the employer has the option either to submit a bank guarantee on behalf of the employee or to insure them for two and one-half years. In case of a company's bankruptcy or failure to pay benefits, employees receive insurance coverage for end-of-service benefits, vacation allowance, overtime allowance, unpaid wages, return air tickets, and compensation for any work injuries certified by a court ruling. Some employers subjected migrant domestic workers, and to a lesser degree construction workers and other manual laborers, to conditions indicative of forced labor. Contract substitution remained a problem. Workers experienced nonpayment of wages, unpaid overtime, failure to grant legally required time off, withholding of passports, threats, and in some cases psychological, physical, or sexual abuse.

Contrary to the law, employers routinely withheld employees' passports, thus restricting their freedom of movement and ability to leave the country or change jobs. Media reported that employees were coerced to surrender their passports for "safekeeping" and sign documentation that the surrender was voluntary. In labor

camps it was common practice for passports to be kept in a central secure location, accessible with 24 to 48 hours' notice. In most cases individuals reported they were able to obtain their travel documents without difficulty when needed, but this was not always the case. Employers often withheld the passports of domestic workers, most of whom originate from African or Asian countries. This practice was difficult to police on account of social sensitivities surrounding household privacy and procedural hurdles that prevent unannounced inspections of homes.

Community leaders reported that employers refused to apply for a residency visa for their domestic workers, rendering them undocumented and thus more vulnerable to exploitative labor practices. According to Human Resources Ministry Resolution 47, workers subject to the labor law may request termination of a work permit without an employer's approval if the employer is fraudulent and if the Human Resources Ministry fails to reach the business owner or employer within five days from the date the worker files a complaint. Workers may file labor cases within 30 days from the instance the employer declines commitment. The ministry must take necessary steps to resolve individual cases within 14 days from the date of the complaint or refer the complaint to court after 14 days have elapsed if no resolution is reached.

Some employers subjected migrant workers in the domestic and agricultural sectors into debt bondage by forcing workers to compensate them for hiring expenses such as visa fees, health exams, and insurance, which the law requires employers to pay, by withholding passports and wages or having these costs deducted from their contracted salary. Some employers did not pay their employees contracted wages even after they satisfied these "debts," which could be as high as the equivalent of a year's pay for low-skilled laborers.

Although charging workers recruitment fees is illegal, workers in both the corporate and domestic sectors often borrowed money to pay such fees in their home countries, and as a result they spent most of their salaries trying to repay home-country labor recruiters or lenders. These debts limited workers' options to leave a job, sometimes trapped them in exploitive work conditions, and increased

their vulnerability to forced labor through debt-based coercion. There were reports that domestic workers were at times expected to work extended hours and waive rest days without compensation. In March the Human Resources Ministry announced that it would begin licensing private agencies for recruiting domestic workers. New licensing requirements obligate agencies to temporarily provide meals and lodging accommodations for workers pending their placement with employers. The regulations also reiterate employers' obligations to provide safe working conditions and honor the type of work and number of work hours agreed upon with agencies as stipulated in the employment contract. According to TAMM, an online government services platform, the one-stop Tadbeer Centers overseen by the Human Resources Ministry charged higher recruitment and sponsorship transfer fees for domestic workers of certain nationalities, including those from Indonesia and the Philippines.

Also 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/child-labor/findings/>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

A new labor law effective in February prohibits discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, nationality, ethnicity, or disability. It does not explicitly ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, political belief and status, or HIV status. In free-trade zones, individualized laws govern employment requirements. Notwithstanding the law's provisions, domestic worker job advertisements requesting applications only from certain nationalities were common and not regulated. Only Emirati nationals may own and manage domestic worker recruitment agencies.

The law prohibits discrimination in jobs with the same functions, promotes equal

opportunities and access to the labor market, and explicitly guarantees women equal pay and prohibits discrimination or termination based on pregnancy.

The law, however, stipulates that rules and regulations that aim to enhance the participation of Emirati citizens in the labor market do not constitute discrimination. The government requires all private-sector establishments to achieve a 10 percent rate of Emiratization of high-skill jobs by 2026 or risk annual fines.

Muslim female public-sector employees are entitled to four months and 10 days of paid leave if their spouse dies, but non-Muslim employees in the private and public sector are entitled to only five days of paid bereavement leave in the event of a spouse's death. Additionally, Muslim public-sector employees are afforded 15 days of leave to perform the Hajj pilgrimage, but no similar provisions exist for adherents of other religions.

Various departments within the Ministries of Human Resources, Education, and Community Development are responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, and the government enforced these rights in employment, housing, and entitlement programs. Enforcement was effective for jobs in the public sector, and the government made efforts to encourage private-sector hiring of persons with disabilities. Some emirates and the federal government included statements in their human resources regulations emphasizing priority for hiring citizens with disabilities in the public sector and actively encouraged the hiring of all persons with disabilities.

The law grants women equal pay for "work of equal value" in the private sector. Work of "equal value" is to be determined by rules and regulations approved by the cabinet based on recommendations from the Human Resources Ministry. Women who worked in the private sector, and especially nonnationals, however, regularly did not receive equal benefits and reportedly faced discrimination in promotions and equality of wages. According to a study sponsored by the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and released in June, women held 8.9 percent of

board positions in companies listed on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange and Dubai Financial Market, up from 3.5 percent in 2020.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: There is no national minimum wage. There was very limited information on average domestic, agricultural, or construction worker salaries or on public-sector salaries. In some sectors, minimum wages were determined by workers' nationality and years of experience. The new law stipulates a 48-hour workweek and paid annual and sick leave, expands maternity leave benefits, and introduces compassionate leave for grieving employees. The law states daily work hours must not exceed eight hours in day or night shifts and provides for overtime pay to employees working more than eight hours in a 24-hour period. It caps daily overtime at two hours unless the work required would prevent serious loss or accidents. If a ministerial decision deems work in an area must be continuous, workweeks may extend to 56 hours.

Amendments to the WPS expanded the grace period for employers to pay overdue salaries before punitive measures apply and reduced the total number of employees companies must pay in order to be WPS-compliant from 90 to 80 percent. The WPS requires private institutions registered with the Human Resources Ministry to pay workers electronically via approved banks, exchange bureaus, and other financial institutions to assure timely and full payment of agreed wages and overtime within 15 days of payment due date. After 16 days of nonpayment, an employer becomes ineligible for new work permits from the ministry and, if employing more than 50 persons, is subject to inspection. If the nonpayment persists past 45 days for entities with more than 50 employees, the ministry refers the case to local and federal authorities for legal action; and if an entity already facing litigation over unpaid wages repeats violations within six months, it will face administrative fines.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, such as

construction, and were expanded through the new labor law and government resolutions. Government OSH standards require that employers provide employees with a safe work and living environment; conduct periodic safety inspections, assessments, and training; cover all treatment costs for injuries that are not a worker's fault; and pay a worker partially or in full for up to one year while the person receives treatment. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remains with OSH experts and not the workers, although workers are permitted to walk off the job in objection to dangerous conditions.

Employers are required to schedule minimum rest periods and limit the number of hours worked, depending on the nature of the work. For example, the law mandates a two-and-one-half-hour midday break between June 15 and September 15 for laborers who work in exposed open areas, such as construction sites. Companies are required to provide water, vitamins, supplements, and shelter for all outdoor workers during the summer months to meet health and safety requirements. Employers who do not comply are subject to fines and suspension of operations. The government may exempt companies from the midday work break if the company cannot postpone the project for emergency or technical reasons. Such projects included laying asphalt or concrete and repairing damaged water pipes, gas lines, or electrical lines. Despite being exposed to the heat, delivery drivers reported they were often ineligible for these breaks as they were not classified as outdoor laborers. Employers with 50 or more employees making 1,500 AED (\$400) or less must provide them with living accommodations.

Workers may leave work without notice if employers fail to resolve risks associated with fire, electrocution, hazardous chemicals, excessive temperatures and noise levels, and radiation. There were cases in which workers were injured or killed on job sites; however, authorities typically did not disclose statistics of workplace injuries and deaths or discuss the adequacy of safety measures despite a requirement that companies report all labor injuries and cases of occupational disease.

A government resolution issued in February requires all industrial establishments

and construction companies that employ more than 100 workers to hire at least one OSH officer. In addition, Dubai requires construction companies and industrial firms to appoint safety officers accredited by authorized entities to promote greater site safety. Reports of vehicle-accident deaths of delivery workers in Dubai highlighted the lack of protections for migrant laborers, whose demand increased significantly due to the pandemic. Dubai police and the Road and Transport Authority organized a safety awareness campaign in April targeting delivery drivers in response to a 25 percent increase in motorcycle accidents in 2021.

There was one report of a migrant worker suicide but no information on precipitating circumstances. Dubai police and the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children, a quasi-governmental organization, conducted training programs aimed at decreasing suicidal behavior.

Sailors pursuing grievances against employers received prompt attention from authorities but struggled to receive adequate compensation. A legal amendment in July added seamen to the professions excluded from the WPS system. Ship owners and operators who fail to pay crews for more than two months are liable to fines, denied access to state waters, and revoked licenses. The government may also seize and sell derelict and unseaworthy ships and use the proceeds to compensate unpaid crews. Part-time and temporary workers in the private sector fall under the labor law and are covered by WPS and OSH protections.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government conducted site visits to address wage payment issues, and its implementation of the WPS and fines for noncompliance discouraged employers from withholding foreign workers' salaries under the jurisdiction of the Human Resources Ministry. Local media periodically reported on court verdicts in favor of thousands of workers complaining of unpaid wages. In May, 3,806 workers in Abu Dhabi received AED 107 million (\$29 million) in unpaid wages that had been awarded in cases during the first three months of the year. A judge in the Dubai Labor Court stated in June that almost 90 percent of the 13,338 labor cases heard by Dubai courts in 2021 were about unpaid wages, "which remain on top of the list of this year's cases as well."

In February the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure fined the company managing the MV *Project Trader* cargo ship approximately \$8,000 and banned it from UAE waters for three months for failing to comply with an order to pay overdue wages to 12 crew members. This government action occurred just one month after the ship was abandoned and followed an intervention by the International Transport Workers' Federation. Eleven of the crew reportedly agreed with the managing company on partial wage payment but did not indicate whether the country's authorities or courts played a role in these settlements.

The government enforced fines for employers who entered incorrect information into the WPS or made workers sign documents falsely attesting to receipt of benefits. Media and diplomatic sources continued to report that some companies retained foreign workers' bank cards or accompanied them to withdraw cash, coercively shortchanging the employees even though the WPS showed the proper amount paid. Such cases were difficult to prove in labor courts. The WPS payment requirement does not apply to foreign workers under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, such as agricultural workers, or to domestic laborers, although employers of the latter were encouraged to utilize the system.

The Human Resources Ministry was responsible for enforcing laws governing acceptable conditions of work for workers in professional and semiskilled job categories but did not do so in all sectors, including the informal sector. To monitor the private sector, the ministry as well as other entities, such as local municipalities, had active departments for inspection, OSH, and wage protection. Workplace inspection is legally mandated.

Under laws and resolutions passed during the year, inspectors may conduct unannounced inspections at any time, summon and question employers and workers, access documents, and take samples of materials suspected of being to be harmful to workers.

The Human Resources Ministry and local regulators conducted inspections of labor camps and workplaces such as construction sites, routinely fined employers

for violating the midday break rule, and published compliance statistics. Nevertheless, some low-wage foreign workers faced substandard living conditions, including overcrowded apartments or unsafe and unhygienic lodging in labor camps. Local media reported in August that the Abu Dhabi Municipality inspected 300 construction sites during the summer, ultimately fining nine firms and issuing warnings to 155. The report did not detail the violations or the fines, but it suggested that most were related to the midday break.

During some inspections of labor camps, the ministry employed interpreters to assist foreign workers in understanding employment guidelines. The ministry operated a toll-free hotline in several languages spoken by foreign residents through which workers were able to report delayed wage payments or other abuses. The ministry's mobile van units visited some labor camps to inform workers of their rights. The Abu Dhabi Judicial Department and Dubai courts also employed buses as mobile courts, which traveled to labor camps to allow workers to register legal complaints. Abu Dhabi's mobile courtroom was used for cases involving large groups or those who encountered difficulties attending court.

Emirate-level officials across the country developed programs aimed at verifying the protection of workers' rights, security, and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Abu Dhabi workers residing in labor camps and industrial cities received free COVID-19 testing. Quarantine facilities and free health care were provided to those who tested positive.

Abu Dhabi courts granted workplace injury compensations ranging from 100,000 AED (\$27,000) for a 70 percent disability in one leg, to 1.2 million AED (\$325,000) for compound head and facial injuries. Laws do not provide for specific monetary fines for different health and safety violations, and in one case where an injured worker was awarded 240,000 AED (\$65,000) in damages, the company and its safety officer were fined 15,000 AED (\$4,000) for negligence and failing to comply with safety measures.

Informal Sector: There was no official information available on the informal

economy, legal enforcement within this sector, or an estimate of its size; however, anecdotal reports indicated it was common for individuals to enter the country on a nonwork visa and join the informal job sector, subjecting them to exploitative conditions. The Human Resources Ministry requires that residents sponsoring a domestic worker meet an income standard sufficient to pay the employee a living wage. Workers in agriculture and other categories overseen by the Ministry of Interior come under a different regulatory regime. These workers are not covered by private- and public-sector labor law but have some legal protections regarding working hours, overtime, timeliness of wage payments, paid leave, health care, and the provision of adequate housing. Enforcement of these rules was often weak, however. As a result, these workers were more vulnerable to substandard work conditions.

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. The law prohibits employers from withholding foreign 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. Some employers denied domestic workers food or access to a telephone, although such actions are illegal. Employers are not required to pay these workers via the WPS but may do so voluntarily as of January, with the service being offered by wire-transfer service providers.

Despite a government-mandated contract for domestic workers spelling out requirements for working hours, time off, overtime, health care, and housing, some originating countries contended that they were unable to review and approve their citizens' labor contracts. Domestic workers may lodge labor complaints with the Human Resources Ministry and pursue legal action, and they may leave work without notice if attacked, denigrated, or sexually harassed by employers. The government allowed foreign workers to switch jobs without a letter of permission from their employer once all contractual obligations were filled. Labor regulations

provide foreign employees the option to work without an employment contract or, in cases in which a contract was in force, to change employer sponsors after two years, as well as within the first two years within the terms of the contract. The government designed this regulation to improve job mobility and reduce the vulnerability of foreign workers to abuse. New labor regulations require employment contracts for all types of work, ban open-ended contracts, and limit contract durations to three years. Workers may change jobs and sponsors during probation periods, following an amicable contract termination, or in cases of sexual and physical assault, persistent contract violations, or workplace dangers. To mitigate against potential labor abuse under the employer-based sponsorship system known as *kafala*, domestic workers have the right to terminate their employment if an employer fails to meet contractual obligations or if the employee is subject to sexual harassment or physical or verbal abuse by the employer. Despite legal measures allowing workers to change sponsors or terminate their employment, regulatory enforcement remained a problem.