

# **Qatar 2023 Human Rights Report**

## **Executive Summary**

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

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: enforced disappearance; arbitrary arrest; political prisoners; serious restrictions on free expression, including the existence of criminal libel laws; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; restrictions on freedom of movement; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully in free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; extensive gender-based violence; existence of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct, which were not systematically enforced; and the prohibition of independent trade unions and significant or systematic restrictions on workers' freedom of association.

The government took limited credible steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

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

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

### **b. Disappearance**

There were reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities. Social media users and human rights activists launched online campaigns in 2021 and during the year demanding authorities reveal the whereabouts of Noof al-Maadeed, a citizen and women's rights defender who had fled the country in 2019. She sought asylum in the United Kingdom but thereafter dropped her asylum request and voluntarily returned to Qatar in 2021. In March she posted videos on her X (formerly Twitter) account complaining of alleged harassment by the security apparatus. Her last online appearance was on March 18, and her whereabouts were unknown as of year's end.

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

The constitution and law prohibited torture and other inhuman or degrading

treatment and punishment, and there were no credible reports that government officials employed them.

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

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

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

**Independent Monitoring:** The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers and international bodies to all facilities except the state security prison. The government routinely provided foreign diplomats access to state security prisoners. The country's National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) reportedly paid regular and unannounced visits to prisons and detention centers, and thereafter presented recommendations to the appropriate authorities. The NHRC did not publish its annual report in 2023 to provide information on the number of visits.

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

The constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of persons to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

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

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

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

In most cases a judge could order a suspect released, remanded to custody to await trial, held in pretrial detention pending investigation, or released on bail. Although suspects were entitled to release on bail except in cases of violent crimes, judges infrequently ordered release on bail.

Authorities were more likely to grant bail to citizens than to noncitizens. Noncitizens charged with minor crimes could be released to the custody of their employer (or a family member for children) pending trial, although they could not leave the country until the case was resolved.

By law in non-security-related cases, the accused was entitled to legal representation throughout the process and prompt access to family members. There were provisions for government-funded legal counsel for indigent prisoners in criminal cases, and authorities generally honored this requirement.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) citizens and residents provided confidential reports of arbitrary detention by law enforcement.

Labor laws permitted employers to report “absconding” laborers. International rights groups reported several cases of employers reporting employees fleeing abusive working conditions as “absconders,” leading to arrests, detention, and deportation. International human rights groups also reported cases of migrant workers being arrested after their employers filed false absconding reports as a form of reprisal for complaining of working conditions. On February 23, international human rights organization Fair Square reported that several, mostly African, food delivery workers who filed complaints against their company were deported to their home countries as a form of retaliation and allegedly before their labor complaints

were settled in court.

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

Although the constitution provided for an independent judiciary, the emir, based on recommendations from the Supreme Judicial Council, appointed all judges, who retained their positions at his discretion. Foreign detainees had access to the legal system, although some complained of opaque legal procedures and complications, mostly stemming from language barriers. Foreign nationals did not uniformly receive translations of legal proceedings, although interpretation was generally provided within courtrooms. Some employers facing lawsuits from foreign employees were able to avoid justice by filing false absconding charges and canceling work contracts, causing workers to lose their legal status. This lack of sponsorship opened workers to deportation before a civil trial could take place.

In October a court sentenced to death eight Indian nationals who had been arrested in August 2022, reportedly for spying. Media reported the men were alleged to be working on behalf of Israel. On December 28, the government commuted their death sentences, although the length of their alternative sentences had not been made public by year's end.

### **Trial Procedures**

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

generally enforced this right.

In matters involving family law, Shia and Sunni judges could apply their interpretations of sharia for their religious groups. In family law matters, a woman's testimony was deemed one-half of a man's testimony.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were reports of political prisoners or detainees. For example, Hazaa Abu Shraydeh al-Marri and Rashid Ali al-Marri remained in prison, serving life sentences for their participation in protests in 2021 against restrictions on their tribe's ability to run and vote in Shura Council elections.

### **f. Transnational Repression**

Not applicable.

### **g. Property Seizure and Restitution**

Not applicable.

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

The constitution and law prohibited such actions. According to media reports, police and security forces monitored telephone calls, emails, and social media posts.

## Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

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

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

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

The constitution provided for freedom of expression and scientific research. Instructors at Qatar University noted they sometimes exercised self-censorship. There were occasional government restrictions on cultural events, including denial of permits without explanation, and some groups



organizing cultural events reported they exercised self-censorship.

Authorities censored books, films, and internet sites for political, religious, and sexual content, as well as vulgar and obscene language.

### **Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other**

**Media, Including Online Media:** The law included restrictive procedures on the establishment of newspaper outlets and granted the government the power to close outlets and confiscate assets of a publication. Members of the ruling family or proprietors who enjoyed close ties to government officials owned all print media. Both private and government-owned television and radio reflected government views, although call-in shows allowed for some citizen criticism of government ministries and policies. While broadcast media generally did not criticize authorities or the country's policies, specific ministries and even individual ministers were sometimes targets of criticism in print media. The government owned and partially funded the Doha-based al-Jazeera satellite television network. The government also partially funded other media outlets operating in the country. Some observers and former al-Jazeera employees alleged the government influenced the content produced by that news outlet. The Qatar Media Corporation, the Ministry of Culture, and customs officials censored material. The government reviewed, censored, or banned foreign newspapers, magazines, films, and books for objectionable political, sexual, and religious content. Journalists and publishers continued to self-censor due to political and economic pressures when reporting on government

policies or material that could be deemed denigrating to Islam, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** The law criminalized libel and slander, including “insult to dignity.” A journalist could be fined and imprisoned for up to five years for defamation or reporting “false news.” The law restricted the publication of information deemed insulting to the emir or heir apparent; blasphemous or defamatory to the Abrahamic faiths; harmful to the national currency or the economic situation; or defaming or damaging the reputation of a private individual, public employee, or their family. Various articles of the law stipulated fines ranging from 1,000 to 10,000 Qatari riyals (\$275 to \$2,750) and three months to two years in prison. There were instances of such laws being acted upon during the year, including administering a fine for libel for criticizing the Shura Council on social media.

## **Internet Freedom**

The government restricted access to the internet or censored online content.

The cybercrime law prohibited any online activity that threatened the safety of the state, its general order, or local or international peace. It also criminalized the spread of “false news,” forced internet providers to block objectionable content, and banned third-party publication of personal or family information. Violation of the cybercrime law could lead to a sentence

of up to three years in prison and a substantial fine.

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

In April a court issued a final verdict against a social media user for slandering the Shura Council, ordering the user to pay a fine of 30,000 Qatari riyals (\$8,240) and the closure of his X account.

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

The government limited the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution provided for freedom of assembly, but this right was

restricted by law, including the Public Meetings and Demonstrations Law and the Associations and Private Institutions Law. Noncitizens, including long-term resident migrant workers, were not protected by constitutional provisions on freedom of assembly. Organizers of public meetings had to obtain approval from the Ministry of Interior to acquire a permit.

### **Freedom of Association**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Foreign Travel:** The government prevented the travel of citizens when they were involved in pending court cases. Women faced gender-based restrictions on foreign travel.

### **e. Protection of Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner

for Refugees in providing protection and assistance to refugees and to assist refugees in other countries. The government helped transit 15,316 Afghans to the United States through Qatar during the year, with 36,000 through Camp As Saliyah and more than 100,000 total since 2021.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status. A committee within the Ministry of Interior handled asylum requests. If granted asylum, the asylee and that individual's family could access a range of free services provided by the government, including travel documents, jobs, monthly allowances, medical and educational services, and housing.

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

Not applicable.

## **g. Stateless Persons**

The country contributed to statelessness through discrimination against women in nationality laws.

There were approximately 2,500 *Bidoon* in the country – persons with Arab heritage who were born in the country but whose families were not included as citizens at the time of the country's independence or shortly thereafter. *Bidoon* were able to register for public services such as education and health care. They were unable to own property, however,

and could not travel without a visa to other Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Official documents did not recognize the term Bidoon but rather referred to these persons as “individuals with temporary Qatari identification documents.”

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

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

The law did not provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The emir exercised full executive powers, including the appointment of cabinet members. The law categorized Qataris into “genuine” citizens who could prove their families had been in Qatar before 1930 and “naturalized” citizens from families who became citizens after 1930. There were no official statistics publicly available on the number of

“genuine” and “naturalized” citizens. Only “genuine” citizens had the right to run and vote in Shura Council elections.

## **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** In June elections were held to select members of the Central Municipal Council (CMC). The Ministry of Interior elections committee enforced the following four eligibility conditions for citizens to vote or run in the CMC elections: Qatari citizens by birth or naturalized more than 15 years ago; older than age 18 to vote and older than 30 to run in the elections; registered as residents in the same district where they wished to vote or run; and police clearance that they had no criminal convictions for a moral crime. The elections committee approved 110 candidates, including four women, to run for office. Of the four women candidates, none managed to win a seat, leading to a CMC lacking women’s representation for the first time since 2003. There were no reports of election interference.

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

### **Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable**



**Groups:** No laws prevented women or historically marginalized groups from voting. Traditional attitudes and societal roles continued to limit women's participation in politics, but women served in various roles in public office. For example, in March the emir appointed Lolwah al-Khater Minister of State for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Noncitizen residents were banned from voting or otherwise participating in political affairs, although they served as judges and staffers at government ministries.

## Section 4. Corruption in Government

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

**Corruption:** In May the Ministry of Interior announced that several top ministry officials were under investigation on charges of corruption. The official announcement did not provide further details regarding the case. In August the Ministry of Interior announced the arrests of employees in its General Directorate of Passports, and in September it ordered two officers to appear before a criminal court for embezzlement.

The government reported investigating a police officer for allegedly coercing individuals to work for the private company he owned and using his authority as a law enforcement officer to intimidate them from reporting

the situation. The case was referred to courts and remained under review at year's end; the alleged perpetrator remained in custody.

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

A number of international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction to monitor or investigate human rights conditions or cases and publish their findings. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to the views of these groups.

Researchers from international nongovernmental organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch continued to visit and report on Qatar without interference from authorities. The government was often responsive to requests for meetings and jointly participated in public events hosted by human rights groups, including on sensitive topics such as labor rights.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** Under a mandate from the cabinet, the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Interior and the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were responsible for observing, reporting on, and providing training on human rights matters. The NHRC was generally considered effective. The cabinet mandated the

NHRC, whose members by law had immunity and operated as an independent body, to issue an annual report on human rights conditions in the country. By year's end, the NHRC had not published an annual report for 2022 and gave no explanation for the delay.

## Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

### Women

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalized rape but did not specifically recognize rape of men, spousal rape, or so-called corrective rape of LGBTQI+ persons. Sexual assault and other gender-based crimes were rarely reported, mostly due to social taboo. The penalty for rape was life imprisonment, regardless of the age or gender of the survivor. If the perpetrator was a nonspousal relative, teacher, guardian, or caregiver of the survivor, the penalty was death. The government enforced the law against rape; however, a survivor of rape could face criminal prosecution for extramarital sexual conduct if authorities decided the survivor consented at any point during the crime. Survivors could be forced to produce witnesses to prove they were raped in cases where the survivor knew their rapist.

No specific law criminalized domestic violence, whether against spouses or other members of a household, including domestic workers. According to the NHRC, authorities could prosecute spousal violence as “general” violence under the criminal law.

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

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

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

By law, women citizens were not permitted to transmit citizenship to their noncitizen spouses or to children born from marriage to a noncitizen. The law allowed children of citizen mothers to apply for permanent status in country, even if the father was not a Qatari national. Qatari women had to apply for citizenship for their children in cases where the father was not a Qatari citizen, however, and applications were typically rejected. Citizens had to obtain government permission to marry foreigners, which was

sometimes not granted for female citizens. Male citizens could apply not only for residency permits but also for citizenship for their foreign wives; female citizens could apply only for residency for their foreign husbands and children, not for citizenship. A non-Muslim wife did not have the automatic right to inherit from her Muslim husband, receiving an inheritance only if her husband willed her a portion of his estate; even then, she was eligible to receive only one-third of the total estate. A female heir generally received one-half the amount of an equivalent male heir; for example, a sister would inherit one-half as much as her brother. In cases of divorce, children generally remained with the mother until age 13 for boys and 15 for girls, at which time custody reverted to the father's family, regardless of the mother's religion.

The housing law, which pertained to the government housing system, also discriminated against divorced women and women married to noncitizen men. While Qatari men were entitled to government-provided plots of land, divorced women were eligible for lands only after five years without remarrying. Women married to noncitizen men were not entitled to such privilege.

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

Single women younger than age 25 required the permission of their male

“guardian” to travel outside the country. Male relatives could prevent married or single adult female family members from leaving the country by seeking and securing a court order.

Adult women customarily could be barred from leaving their homes without approval from a male “guardian,” including to work outside the home; however, this was rarely enforced.

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

The labor law did not allow women to work in jobs deemed hazardous, dangerous, or morally inappropriate, or in other jobs specified by the Ministry of Labor. By law women were entitled to equal pay for equal work but did not always receive it, and they often lacked access to decision-making positions in management of private companies and in the public sector. Gender-based violence and harassment occurred in the workplace.

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

Women were routinely required to present a marriage certificate when seeking prenatal care. Unmarried individuals who reported pregnancies risked prosecution for extramarital sexual relations. Although hospitals generally assisted in the birth of children of unwed mothers regardless of their marital status, there were cases of hospitals reporting unwed mothers to authorities. Emergency contraception and postexposure prophylaxis

were not available as part of clinical management of rape.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The constitution stipulated that “all persons are equal before the law and there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of sex, race, language, or religion.” Local custom, however, outweighed government enforcement of nondiscrimination laws. Penalties were not commensurate with laws related to civil rights. The constitution did not prohibit discrimination based on political opinion, national origin, social origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, or HIV-positive status.

Discrimination in employment, particularly based on national origin, was not explicitly prohibited in labor laws and conventions. International human rights groups and the International Labor Organization (ILO) strongly urged explicit language in labor codes outlawing discrimination in employment. The government discriminated against noncitizens in employment, education, housing, and health services. The government prohibited lower-paid non-citizen male workers from residing in specific “family” residential zones throughout the country. For cultural and religious considerations, single expatriates were not allowed to commingle with families in residential areas, transportation, or health clinics.

## Children

**Birth Registration:** The government generally registered all births immediately; however, due to legal prohibitions and social stigma surrounding sex outside of marriage, obtaining birth registration for children born out of wedlock was typically not possible.

**Child Abuse:** The law criminalized child abuse. The government enforced the law effectively. There were limited cases of reported child abuse and sexual abuse of children.

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

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law criminalized the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Article 7 of Law No. 14 for 2014 on Combating Cyber Crimes criminalized the production, importation, sale, circulation, transfer, dissemination, and possession of child pornography. Article 2 of Law No. 15 for 2011 criminalized the exploitation of children in acts of prostitution and pornography. The government enforced the law.

No specific law set a minimum age for consensual sex. The law prohibited sex outside of marriage. The penalty for sexual relations of an adult with a



person younger than 16 was life imprisonment. If the individual was a nonspousal relative, guardian, caretaker, or servant of the victim, the penalty was death.

## **Antisemitism**

The country did not have an indigenous Jewish community, and there was no official data on the number of Jewish foreign residents in the country. Cartoons, opinion articles, and certain news coverage in local newspapers and other media outlets periodically carried antisemitic content.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

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

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

**Criminalization:** The law prohibited consensual same-sex sexual conduct between men but did not explicitly prohibit same-sex sexual relations between women. The law was not systematically enforced. A man convicted of having consensual same-sex sexual relations could receive a sentence of seven years in prison. Under sharia, homosexuality was

punishable by death; there were no reports of executions for this reason.

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

**Violence and Harassment:** There were confidential reports of arbitrary detention of LGBTQI+ persons, including the use of violence and being held without access to legal representation.

**Discrimination:** LGBTQI+ persons faced discrimination under the law and in practice. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination, nor were there antidiscrimination laws to protect LGBTQI+ individuals targeted on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. In July the Ministry of Interior released an extension of its Metrash2 app, permitting anonymous reporting of perceived violations of “public morals, negative phenomena, being threatened, violations in tourist places, administrative corruption.” Social media users publicly interpreted this announcement as a means for them to report gender-nonconforming individuals.

Information was not available on official or private discrimination in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or access to education or health care based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

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

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices:** State-sponsored and private institutions offered behavioral health services for adults and minors. There was limited information detailing if all services offered were voluntary. There were no reports that medically unnecessary and irreversible “normalization” surgeries were performed on children or on nonconsenting adult intersex persons.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:** Due to social and religious conventions, there were no LGBTQI+ organizations, Pride marches, or LGBTQI+ rights advocacy events.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The law prohibited discrimination against, and required the allocation of resources for, persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, the judicial system, and other government services or other areas. By law, persons with disabilities had the right to equal access to education, health services, public

buildings, and transportation. The government was charged with acting on complaints from individuals; the NHRC had responsibility for enforcing compliance and generally did so. Few public buildings met the required standards of accessibility for persons with disabilities, and new buildings generally did not comply with standards.

Private schools and government-funded schools under the Qatar Foundation generally provided most of the required services for students with disabilities. There were also government-sponsored centers for children with disabilities that offered services but not school diplomas.

The law required reserving two percent of jobs in government agencies and public institutions for persons with disabilities. Private-sector businesses with 25 or more employees also were required to hire persons with disabilities as at least two percent of their staff. Employers who violated these employment provisions were subject to moderate fines. There were no reports of either infractions or government enforcement of the hiring quota requirement during the year.

## **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

There was discrimination against HIV-positive individuals. Authorities deported foreigners found to be HIV-positive upon arrival. Mandatory medical examinations were required for residents. Since health screenings were required for nonresidents to obtain work visas, some HIV-positive

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

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

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

The law did not provide for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively.

The law permitted the establishment of voluntary “joint committees” with an equal number of worker and management representatives to deal with a limited number of workplace problems. Foreign workers could join these joint labor-management committees. The law offered a means to file collective disputes. If disputes were not settled internally between the employees and employer, the Ministry of Labor could mediate a solution or refer to a labor dispute settlement committee. A 2017 agreement between the ministry and the ILO included provisions to create these committees with ILO supervision and assistance. Following the formation of joint committees, the ILO provided extensive training to the committee members on how to manage committees, establish open channels of communication with workers and management, and submit complaints to the competent authorities. There were documented reports of onerous, six-month-plus

timelines for Labor Dispute Settlement Committees to settle labor complaints.

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

Due to the absence of independent trade unions, there were no reports of government enforcement of laws respecting their establishment or operation. For the few workers covered by the law protecting the right to collective bargaining, the government circumscribed the right through its control over the rules and procedures of the bargaining and agreement processes. The labor code allowed for only one trade union, the General Union of Workers of Qatar (General Union), which was composed of representative groups known as general committees for workers in various trades or industries. Trade or industry committees were composed of worker committees at the individual firm level. The law excluded all noncitizens and government employees from the right to join general committees that then consolidated into the General Union, effectively banning these workers from bargaining collectively or legally striking. The General Union did not operate during the year.

Employees could not freely practice collective bargaining, and there were no workers under collective bargaining contracts. Although the law recognized

the right to strike for some workers, restrictive conditions made the likelihood of a legal strike extremely remote. The law required approval for a strike by three-fourths of the general committee of the workers in the trade or the industry, and potential strikers also were required to exhaust a lengthy dispute resolution procedure before a lawful strike could be called. Civil servants and domestic workers did not have the right to strike; the law also prohibited strikes at public utilities and health or security service facilities, including in the gas, petroleum, and transportation sectors. The Complaint Department of the Ministry of Labor, in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, had to preauthorize all strikes, including approval of the time and place.

The International Labor Organization had an office in Doha. Several Global Union Federations, including Building and Wood Workers' International, the International Domestic Workers Federation, the International Trade Union Federation, and the International Transport Workers Federation, had official representatives in the country and focused on labor rights with the permission of the government.

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

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

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

## Employment

The law prohibited and criminalized all the worst forms of child labor and provided for the protection of children from exploitation in the workplace, including limitations on working hours, occupational safety, and health restrictions. The law set the minimum age for employment at 16 and stipulated children between ages 16 and 18 could work with parental or guardian permission. Children could not work more than six hours a day or more than 36 hours a week. Employers had to provide the Ministry of Labor with the names and occupations of their child employees and obtain permission from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to hire a child. The Education Ministry prohibited the employment of children in jobs judged dangerous to their health, safety, or morals. The government generally enforced the applicable law, but penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping. There were no confirmed reports during the year of the worst forms of child labor.

### **d. Discrimination (see section 6)**

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

**Wage and Hour Laws:** In 2020 the country introduced a monthly minimum wage, which came into force in 2021. As of year's end, these reforms had



not yet been fully enforced. The labor law provided for a 48-hour workweek with a 24-hour rest period and paid annual leave days. The labor law and provisions for acceptable conditions of work, including overtime pay provisions, did not apply to workers in the public sector or agriculture, or to domestic workers. Some employers did not pay workers for overtime or annual leave. Penalties for abuses were less than those for similar crimes, such as fraud.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, such as construction, but the government did not always enforce them.

Responsibility for laws related to acceptable conditions of work fell primarily to the Ministry of Labor as well as to the Ministry of Municipality and the Ministry of Public Health. The law did not provide workers the right to remove themselves from a hazardous workplace without jeopardizing their employment, with the exception of a 2020 ministerial decision allowing workers to leave worksites in case of heat stress. Authorities did not effectively provide protection to employees exercising this right.

Some elements of the *kafala* employer-based sponsorship system – such as the exit requirement and legal requirement for the no objection certificate – were removed in 2020, but the sponsorship system gave employers broad control over foreign workers, and the government did not consistently implement reforms and ensure access to justice.

A 2020 legal change eliminated exit visa requirements for 95 percent of government workers and all domestic workers. The abolishment of the no-objection certificate was effective immediately; however, media sources, Human Rights Watch, and the NGO Migrant Rights reported employers still required no objection certificates, which were included in official job change requests in the Ministry of Labor portal. Media also reported on several instances of employers retaliating against employees who initiated a transfer by canceling their visa or filing an absconding charge, rendering the worker out of legal status and at increased risk of exploitation, detention, or deportation. Employers could request the Ministry of Interior require up to 5 percent of the company's employees obtain approval before leaving the country due to their type of work. These workers who were still required to seek their employers' permission to leave the country could request an exemption from a grievance committee jointly operated by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labor in cases where an employer refused to grant permission.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The government did not effectively enforce wage, overtime, and OSH laws in all sectors. Despite a system to monitor for payment abnormalities (the Wage Protection System), workers reported cases of wage theft and difficulty obtaining restitution of wages through mediation or courts. Working conditions for citizens were generally adequate because government agencies and the major private-sector companies employing them generally followed the relevant laws.

The lack of full enforcement of the minimum wage law exposed migrant workers, especially domestic workers, to potential abuse. In August the Gender in Geopolitics Institute reported on the persistent lack of attention paid to abuses suffered by domestic workers, in contrast to the more visible work done by other foreign workers, such as in construction or other public spaces.

The government restricted work during the hottest hours of the day during the summer, and general restrictions related to temperature during the rest of the day as well. Employers often ignored working-hour restrictions and other laws with respect to domestic workers and unskilled laborers, the majority of whom were migrants. Penalties for violations of occupational safety and health laws were less than those for crimes such as negligence. The government took limited action to prevent abuse. If a company had not brought conditions up to standard within one month of being notified of the need for action, the Ministry of Labor imposed fines, blacklisted the company, and on occasion referred the matter to the public prosecutor for action. Blacklisting referred to an administrative hold freezing government services such as processing new visa applications from a company or individual. Firms had to pay a moderate fine to be removed from the list, even if the dispute was resolved, and the ministry reserved the right to keep companies on the list as a punitive measure after the fine was paid.

Ministry of Labor personnel conducted inspection visits to work and labor

housing sites. Officials from the ILO joined labor inspectors on several inspections. A strategic plan for strengthening the Labor Inspections Unit, developed with ILO assistance, went into effect in 2020 and focused on upgrading inspectors' skills in evaluating living accommodations and raising awareness regarding heat stress; however, there was no concrete output to report as of year's end. Employers in most categories had to pay their employees electronically via the Wage Protection System to provide a digital audit trail for the Ministry of Labor. Employers who failed to pay their workers faced penalties, but the government did not effectively enforce these laws, and penalties were less than those for similar crimes. Infractions of wage, overtime, and OSH standards were relatively common, especially in sectors employing foreign workers in which working conditions were often poor. The government served eviction notices to property owners whose residential and commercial buildings were not up to code. Throughout the year international media reported the existence of abusive working conditions, including work-related deaths of young foreign workers, particularly in the construction and delivery sectors.

The government prosecuted business owners and executives for suspected labor law infractions. The Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Interior, and the NHRC conducted training sessions and distributed multilingual, written explanations of migrant workers' rights under local labor and sponsorship laws. Compliance by employers was lacking in attaching contract terms and rapid access to data when addressing labor disputes.

The law prohibited employers from withholding workers' passports and penalized employers who did so, but noncitizen community leaders and officials from labor-exporting countries stated that passport confiscation remained a widespread problem with insufficient enforcement of penalties. Employers housed many unskilled foreign laborers in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water, electricity, or adequate food. The government did not enforce labor laws in the informal sector, particularly for domestic workers.

Domestic workers often faced unacceptable working conditions. Many such workers frequently worked seven days a week and more than 12 hours a day with few or no holidays, no overtime pay, and limited means to redress grievances. Some employers denied domestic workers food or access to a telephone, including their own cell phones, according to news reports and foreign embassy officials. NGOs found that foreign workers faced legal obstacles and lengthy legal processes that prevented them from seeking redress for abuses and exploitative conditions. Noncitizen community leaders also highlighted migrant workers' continued hesitation to report their plight due to fear of reprisals. This included threats by employers to report workers as "absconding" and not renew local identification documents, forcing workers out of legal status and raising their risk of being deported.

The size of the informal economy was estimated to be 16.5 percent. The

government did not enforce labor laws in this sector.