

United Arab Emirates 2023 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in the United Arab Emirates during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killing; cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary detention; political prisoners or detainees; transnational repression against individuals in another country; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including censorship, and enforcement and threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence within the territory of a state and on the right to leave the country; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government restrictions on domestic and international human rights organizations; unenforced laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and prohibiting independent trade unions or

significant or systematic restrictions on workers' freedom of association.

The government did not take credible steps to identify and punish officials who may commit human rights abuses.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

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

There was one report that the government or its agents committed an arbitrary or unlawful killing during the year.

Lebanese press reported Lebanese national Ghazi Ezzedine died in Dubai under interrogation on May 4. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor said he was held in a facility linked to state security as part of a detention campaign targeting more than 10 Lebanese citizens, including two of Ezzedine's brothers, on unspecified charges.

b. Disappearance

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

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading

Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

The constitution and law prohibited torture and “degrading treatment” and there were no credible reports that government officials employed practices it deemed to be unlawful.

Human rights groups reported authorities held detainees in state security-related cases, including for political dissent, in solitary confinement. The law did not explicitly define prolonged solitary confinement as a form of “degrading treatment,” and authorities therefore did not deem the practice unlawful. Amnesty International reported that human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor remained in solitary confinement through the end of the year, facing new charges, midway through a 10-year prison sentence on expression-related charges, and was denied access to books, writing material, and basic hygienic items.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh due to overcrowding, physical abuse, long waits for healthcare access, and inadequate sanitary conditions.

Abusive Physical Conditions: Prison conditions varied widely among the individual emirates and between regular government-operated prisons (which held those accused of nonpolitical crimes such as drug trafficking, money laundering, and killings) and state security detention facilities (which

held political activists or those the government deemed terrorists).

The government did not release statistics on prison demographics or capacity. According to diplomatic observers and UN human rights experts, some prisoners in Abu Dhabi reported overcrowding (particularly in drug units), overheating, lack of ventilation, retaliation for raising complaints to their embassies, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care.

According to diplomatic observers, prison overcrowding was also periodically a problem in Dubai and the northern emirates.

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

Administration: Although under the law prisoners had a right to submit complaints to judicial authorities, details about whether any investigations into complaints took place were not publicly available.

Independent Monitoring: There were no independent authorities allowed to investigate allegations of poor prison conditions. The government permitted charitable 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 political prisoners and other detainees held by the State Security Department.

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 for detainees charged under the criminal system; however, the law allowed individuals detained under state security-related charges to be held for up to 106 days without charges.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law prohibited arrest or search of citizens without probable cause. The law provided the right to remain silent and required arresting officers to inform the accused of this right and the alleged charges upon arrest or detention. The government generally observed these requirements, making exceptions for state security-related cases.

The government reportedly often held persons in custody for extended periods without charges or a preliminary judicial hearing. The law allowed state security officers to hold detainees for up to 106 days without charges.

While awaiting a decision on official charges at a police station or the prosecutor's office, a detainee was 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 was required to question

the accused within 24 hours of notification of arrest, but in some cases did not do so.

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 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, authorities rarely provided notification and provided very limited information regarding the status of these detainees.

The law, based on amendments to the Civil Procedures law issued in November, allowed prosecutors to temporarily detain suspects for up to 14 days before bringing charges against them. Extensions to this temporary detention required a judge's decision and were limited to 30-day increments that judges could renew indefinitely. Multiple detainees complained that authorities did not inform them of the charges or other details of their case for months. There were also reports of authorities pressuring or forcing detainees to sign documents with poor or no translation before having

access to attorneys.

The Emirates Detainees Advocacy Center reported that on December 7, authorities referred 84 individuals, at least 59 of whom were already in detention, to the Abu Dhabi Federal Appeals Court to face new terrorism charges. Amnesty International reported defendants were permitted only minimal contact with their attorneys. During the trial's first hearing, political prisoner Salim al-Shehi told the court that authorities had coerced him into signing a "confession" while in solitary confinement prior to the trial, according to Amnesty International.

The new penal procedures law mandated that all investigation, interrogations, and trial procedures be held in Arabic. The law mandated the use of licensed translators and the use of government-approved technological tools for translation; however, the government rarely observed this requirement.

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

Public prosecutors could hold suspects in terrorism-related cases without

charges for six months. Once authorities charged a suspect with terrorism, the Federal Supreme Court could extend the detention indefinitely. The counterterrorism law provided for the establishment of rehabilitation centers under the Munasaha (counseling) program, which aimed to use psychosocial techniques to reform persons deemed to pose a terrorist threat or convicted of terrorist offenses. An amendment to federal law passed in June authorized courts to place juveniles deemed to be terrorist threats in the Munasaha program. A new law on combating discrimination, hatred, and extremism passed in October and provided for the placement of individuals with what the government considered to be extremist tendencies and charged with a crime related to insulting religions, discrimination, or hatred to be placed in Munasaha centers.

The country had a functioning bail system that did not extend to state security detainees. Authorities could temporarily release detainees who deposited money, a passport, or an unsecured personal promissory statement signed by a third party. Abu Dhabi and Dubai utilized an electronic travel ban system, which allowed 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 could deny pretrial release to defendants in cases involving loss of life, including involuntary manslaughter.

A defendant was legally entitled to an attorney after authorities completed their investigation and filed formal charges. There were allegations authorities sometimes questioned the accused for weeks without permitting access to an attorney. The government sometimes provided counsel at its discretion to indigent defendants charged with felonies punishable by imprisonment.

Arbitrary Arrest: Unlike in previous years, there were no reports the government carried out new arrests without informing the individual of the charge.

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 provided for an independent judiciary and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. Court decisions were subject to review by the political leadership, however, and under the law the executive also controlled the selection, appointment, and promotion of judges. 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 provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right except for defendants charged in state security cases, including against those who faced dissent-related charges.

The law recognized the right of defendants to an interpreter, but there were reports authorities did not always provide one or provided poor quality interpretation. There were reports authorities did not grant detainees access to legal counsel, inform them of the charges against them, or inform them of their right to remain silent. Police did not provide detainees or their legal counsel access to case files, and police reportedly imposed travel bans immediately upon arrest. Human rights groups reported authorities did not make public before the trial the indictment and other documents in the mass trial of 84 individuals which began on December 7.

Defendants had the right to be present at their trials and to have legal counsel in court for cases that carried punishment other than a fine, but observers reported this right was not always respected, including for state security-related cases. Some defendants said they did not have adequate time to prepare a defense, including due to limited telephone access or incomplete information from authorities regarding their rights. Verdicts were announced in open court, even for cases 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. Sharia courts covered marriage, divorce, alimony, guardianship, custody and visitation, proof of maturity, and proof of lineage and inheritance. Sharia applied to all nationals except when non-Muslim nationals had specific rules related to their specific religion, creed, or sect. Noncitizen women could choose between applying UAE laws or their country of citizenship’s laws in personal status matters.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were reports of political prisoners or detainees. According to human rights organizations, at least 62 political prisoners due for release during the year remained in detention after completing their sentences for their original charges, including prominent human rights defenders Mohamed al-Mansoori, Nasser bin Ghaith, Mohamed al-Siddiq, and members of the “UAE94” case. They were also among the 84 individuals subjected to new charges in the mass trial that began on December 7 before the Federal Appeal Court in Abu Dhabi, which included 59 persons who remained arbitrarily detained after serving their sentences.

Human rights groups reported authorities invoked article 48 of the

counterterrorism law to extend political prisoner incarcerations past the end of their sentences or indefinitely, by placing someone convicted of a terrorist offense in a Munasaha program in the prison where they were serving their sentence.

The government did not permit human rights organizations to access political prisoners or 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 Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated al-Islah, a government-designated terrorist group.

f. Transnational Repression

Misuse of International Law Enforcement Tools: There was one credible report that the government misused international law enforcement tools for politically motivated purposes against one specific individual located outside the country.

Authorities issued an arrest warrant for Khalaf Abdalrahman Humaid al-Rumaithi, a UAE citizen residing in Turkey, reportedly invoking the bilateral agreements on legal and judicial cooperation of the Arab Interior Minister' Council, the Arab League's network of law enforcement agencies. On May

7, Jordanian authorities detained al-Rumaithi at Amman's international airport when he arrived from Turkey. On May 17, Jordanian authorities extradited al-Rumaithi to the UAE, under what Human Rights Watch alleged were "exceptional circumstances that circumvented Jordan's normal extradition procedures." While the government announced in May al-Rumaithi's arrest and its intent to retry him in accordance with UAE law pertaining to individuals convicted in absentia, his whereabouts while in UAE government custody were unknown for four months until late September. Al-Rumaithi was sentenced in absentia in 2013 to 15 years in prison as part of the "UAE94" trial charging him and other dissidents with fomenting sedition and establishing a secret organization affiliated with the UAE-banned Muslim Brotherhood.

On December 7, authorities brought terrorism charges against al-Rumaithi as part of a mass trial of 84 defendants, which Human Rights Watch reported were most likely related to his involvement with the al-Islah party-affiliated Justice and Dignity Committee. In addition to characterizing al-Rumaithi's extradition and arrest as related to the criminalization of free expression, human rights groups raised concerns that in his case and possibly others, authorities appeared to be violating the principle of double jeopardy.

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, but there were reports that the government regularly failed to respect these prohibitions. The constitution stipulated the freedom and “secrecy” of “corresponding through the post, telegraph, or other means of communication.”

There were reports, however, that the government unlawfully assessed, collected and used private communications or personal data, including targeting individuals based on their exercise of their human rights, monitored and occasionally censored incoming international mail, wiretapped telephones, and monitored outgoing mail and electronic forms of communication.

NGOs highlighted concerns with the country’s use of surveillance capabilities both online and in public spaces, including internet and social media controls, surveillance cameras, biometric data collection, facial recognition, spyware, data analytics, and surreptitious recording devices and location tracking.

i. Conflict-related Abuses

International and Yemeni NGOs and human rights defenders reported the UAE government supported armed groups in Yemen that committed human rights abuses, including forced detention and torture.

For additional information, see the *2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices* for Yemen.

International NGOs also raised concerns regarding press reports indicating UAE government support, including arms transfers, for the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan, which NGOs reported had committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

For additional information See the *2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices* for Sudan.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

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

The government regularly restricted freedom of expression, and human rights organizations reported the government detained political activists and human rights defenders on expression-related charges.

Freedom of Expression: The constitution imposed limits on freedom of expression, including a prohibition on criticism of national rulers and speech that could create or encourage social unrest. Authorities enforced laws prohibiting cursing, rude gestures, and insults and imposed penalties of up to two years in prison, a fine, and deportation.

The law imposed criminal punishments for “spreading rumors or false news” and use of the internet to disseminate information that insulted a foreign country.

According to media reports, in July the Abu Dhabi Public Prosecution Office took “legal measures against a lawyer accused of spreading rumors and false information on social media platforms.” The reports did not identify the lawyer or indicate what legal measures were involved.

The government imposed restrictions on 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 were prosecutable offenses. In February, the Dubai Misdemeanor Court fined a man 1,500 dirhams (\$410) for sending an email containing a phrase offensive to another man during a dispute.

The law provided for a punishment of between 15 and 25 years in prison for persons convicted of insulting or ridiculing the head of state or harming “his

reputation or standing.” It also imposed a five-year prison sentence for anyone who “ridiculed, insulted, or harmed 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.”

The law prohibited 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 was imprisonment and a fine not exceeding 1 million dirhams (\$272,500). The law also penalized the taking and dissemination of pictures of others without permission, including victims of accidents or disasters.

In June, the Abu Dhabi Criminal Court sentenced a woman to a six-month jail term and a fine of 50,000 dirhams (\$13,600) after she was accused of inciting hatred on social media, invading privacy, and verbally assaulting a participant at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair by broadcasting a live video on a social media network. The court ordered confiscation of her device, the permanent closure of her X (formerly Twitter) account, and an additional penalty of 10,000 dirhams (\$2,700) for the offense of insulting.

The new law adopted in October on combating discrimination, hatred, and extremism restricted freedom of expression in cases related to blasphemy, discrimination, or hate speech. The new law reduced prison sentences and fines for many offenses and added clauses on extremist tendencies and

placement in Munasaha centers.

Under the new law, extremism was defined as any act carried out by one or more persons or a group based on ideas, ideologies, values, or principles that affect public order, lead to the defamation of religions, or promote discrimination or hate speech. Regarding crimes related to extremism, the new law stated that individuals could be placed in Munasaha centers based on a judgement from a court from a request submitted by the prosecution. Munasaha centers were mandated to provide quarterly reports to public prosecutors, who in turn present recommendations to the courts on whether to release offenders or to extend their detention. Additional measures such as travel bans, surveillance, or restrictions on residence could be imposed by the court. Breach of these measures could result in a custodial sentence of up to one year.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: The law imposed restrictions on media activities. Media outlets also conformed to additional, unpublished government guidelines; editors and journalists avoided crossing government “red lines” for acceptable media content and reported commonly practicing self-censorship on socially sensitive topics such as government criticism and human rights violations.

International NGOs categorized the press, both in print and online, as not free. The government owned and controlled most newspapers, television

stations, and radio stations, except for regional media outlets located in Dubai's and Abu Dhabi's free-trade zones.

Regulations for electronic media, including rules for publishing and selling advertising, print, video, and audio material, required those benefitting monetarily from social media advertising to purchase a license from the Media Regulatory Office (MRO).

By law, the MRO licensed and censored all publications, including those of private associations, and removed any criticism of the government, ruling families, or friendly governments. The MRO often removed online content without transparency or judicial oversight. Domain hosts or administrators were liable if their websites were 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 extended to statements and media content that “threatens social stability” and materials considered pornographic or excessively violent.

Authorities did not authorize the release of the animated film *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* in May, which some NGOs reported was likely due to the government authorities' objections to a scene featuring a “Protect Trans Lives” flag. The Media Council said in June that it would “not allow the circulation or publication of content that violates the values and principles of the UAE and the media content standards in force in the country.”

Government and private institutions had to obtain a license before publishing or broadcasting any media or advertising content. This requirement applied to any person or entity that issued 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.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law criminalized libel, slander, and blasphemy. The government used libel and slander laws to suppress criticism of its leaders and institutions. Violating the law could result in hefty fines or a prison sentence. The law also criminalized any form of expression the government interpreted as blasphemous or offensive toward “divine recognized religions,” inciting religious hatred, or insulting religious convictions.

The Abu Dhabi Criminal Court in July sentenced a woman to five years in prison, a fine of 500,000 dirhams (\$136,000), and deportation for allegedly posting a video online insulting men and domestic workers.

National Security: Authorities often cited the need to protect national security as the basis for laws that prohibited and punished criticism of the government or expression of dissenting political views. The law included 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.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet as a whole, but human rights groups reported widespread online censorship. Freedom House reported authorities blocked websites of regional human rights groups and selected sites disseminating news on political prisoners and prison conditions, as well as those the government alleged to be affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Cybercrime laws imposed 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.” Federal laws defined 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; 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 imposed fines and sentences up to life imprisonment depending on the nature of the alleged offense.

In July, the Federal Prosecution for Combating Rumors and Cybercrimes ordered the detention of an Asian resident pending investigations into a video he posted of himself online wearing Emirati dress and throwing money inside a luxury car showroom. He was charged with provoking public opinion, harming the public interest, violating media content standards, and ridiculing Emirati nationals. The Public Prosecution also summoned but did not charge the owner of the venue where the video was filmed.

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) were permitted for use by companies, institutions, and banks for internal purposes only; use by private individuals was forbidden. Use of VPN technology for illegal means was considered a serious offense under the law. Authorities censored selected content on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter). Authorities threatened to imprison

individuals for misusing the internet. Self-censorship was widely practiced on social media, with Freedom House reporting in March “state security agencies engage in extensive surveillance and hacking activities aimed at perceived opponents of the government,” and authorities “monitor public and private online communications for critical speech and are believed to use advanced commercial spyware products.”

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. Blocked material included websites with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) content, atheist material, negative critiques of Islam, testimonies of former Muslims who converted to Christianity, gambling, promotion of illegal drug use, pornography, and posts explaining how to circumvent proxy servers. The country’s internet providers filtered the content of international media sites.

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority operated with no oversight or transparency in regulating online activity and blocking websites. Service providers did not have the authority to unblock websites 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. Convictions for unauthorized use of VPNs or VoIPs through VPNs could lead to significant fines, imprisonment, or both.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government restricted the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law limited the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and through it, the government imposed significant restrictions, including applying criminal penalties.

The government did not allow protests or demonstrations. The law prohibited unauthorized demonstrations or the expression of opinions deemed “false, or hurtful to the country’s public image.” The law restricted the right of peaceful assembly, including by prohibiting operation of a website for the purpose of planning, organizing, or promoting protests or demonstrations. Conviction was punishable by imprisonment or a fine of not less than 500,000 dirhams (\$136,000) and not more than 1 million dirhams (\$272,500).

The law imposed 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” if the accused disobeyed an order to disperse. The penalty increased to a minimum of five years in prison if the gathering resulted in rioting or a disruption of peace or public security. The law imposed a life sentence for anyone who called for, promoted, or led 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 required a government-issued permit for organized public gatherings. Some residents reported 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 imposed severe restrictions on the freedom of association, and the government significantly restricted this freedom.

Political organizations, political parties, and trade unions were illegal. All associations and NGOs were required to register with the Abu Dhabi-based 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 nonpolitical purposes. NGOs tracking human rights abuses or issuing reports critical of the government were not allowed to operate.

Registration rules required that all voting organizational members, as well as boards of directors, 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). The law required individuals and entities to obtain a license from the CDA to engage in fundraising activities or collect donations, which they were permitted to do no more than four times a year. Penalties under the law included substantial fines and deportation of noncitizens. Similar organizations in Abu Dhabi were also required to register with the appropriate local authorities.

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

LGBTQI+ individuals were unable to openly engage in advocacy for their rights due to social norms and the risk of prosecution or reprisal.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

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

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, emigration, and repatriation. While the government generally respected these rights, 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 or residents involved in legal disputes under adjudication or noncitizens under investigation to travel out of the country. Authorities sometimes arrested individuals with outstanding debts or legal cases who transited an international airport. Abu Dhabi and Dubai maintained a system allowing individuals to verify whether they were subject to a travel ban related to unsettled debts or pending legal action. In some cases, travelers could settle debts directly at the airport to lift their travel ban. Debtors could also

challenge travel bans in court.

Emirate-level prosecutors had 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. In some cases, family, friends, local religious organizations, or other concerned individuals helped pay the debt to allow the indebted foreign national to depart the country.

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

A parent could impose a travel ban on their children to prevent the other parent from absconding with them if the applicant could satisfy a civil court that there was a real fear of abduction.

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

e. Protection of Refugees

The government cooperated with 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 operated under the umbrella of the World Food Program. The government worked with UNHCR on a case-by-case basis to address refugee matters. The government informally permitted persons seeking protection to remain in the country temporarily on an individual basis. This nonpermanent status sometimes presented administrative, financial, and social hardships, including the need to frequently renew visas.

Access to Asylum: The law did not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government did not have a formal system for providing protection to refugees and asylum seekers. While the government extended informal protection from return to refugees and asylum seekers in some cases, any persons lacking legal residency status were technically subject to local laws on unauthorized 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 supported efforts to resettle or relocate to other countries individuals relocated from Afghanistan.

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. The government provided persons fleeing

conflict with one-year visas that allowed them to find employment.

Access to Basic Services: Access to education and other public services, including healthcare, was based on an individual's status as a legal resident. Some refugee families, particularly from Iraq and Syria, reportedly did not have access to healthcare 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.

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

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 derived citizenship generally from the father, *Bidoon* children born within the country's territory remained stateless. Without passports or other forms of identification, *Bidoon* found

their movement restricted, both within the country and internationally.

The committee responsible for reviewing mothers' citizenship applications for their children also reviewed citizenship applications from Bidoon who could satisfy certain legal conditions to be eligible for naturalization and subsequently gain access to education, healthcare, and other public services. There were few reports of stateless persons receiving citizenship. Authorities reportedly issued passports to some Bidoon for travel purposes but did not recognize them as citizens.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law did not provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage.

Federal executive and legislative power were in the hands of the Federal Supreme Council, a body composed of the hereditary rulers of the seven emirates. Decisions at the federal level generally were taken by consensus among the rulers, their families, and other leading families. The ruling families, in consultation with other prominent tribal figures, chose rulers of the emirates.

Elections and Political Participation

Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections: National elections were held for one half (20 members) of the Federal National Council (the other half were appointed), and while the elections were reportedly free of procedural abuses, they were neither fair nor free as only voters selected by the rulers were eligible to participate.

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

In October, an appointed electorate of 398,879 members elected 20 members of the Federal National Council, a 40-member consultative body with some legislative authority. Each emirate received seats in the FNC based on population. In November, and in a nontransparent process, each emirate ruler appointed that emirate's portion of the other 20 FNC members.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups: No laws explicitly limited participation of women in the political process, but the appointment of the electorate could have limited the participation of members of minority groups.

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

Section 4. Corruption in Government

The law provided for criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were no reports of systemic government corruption.

Corruption: 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.

The law gave the attorney general the power to investigate officials, issue travel bans, and freeze officials' assets. Officials could be removed from their job for administrative or financial misdeeds. The law also included provisions to hold officials accountable after resignation or removal from their position. The public prosecutor's office was the designated body to receive complaints against senior officials and had the authority to investigate them in coordination with the cabinet.

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

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards

International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

The government generally did not permit domestic or international organizations to investigate or report on domestic political or human rights conditions or publish their findings. Government officials rarely cooperated with or were responsive to these groups.

The government directed, regulated, and subsidized participation by NGO members attending 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.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: There were numerous reports of threats or violence against human rights defenders (HRDs). According to Front Line Defenders' *Global Analysis 2022* report, released on April 4, the government persecuted and retaliated against HRDs who had completed their long-term sentences, either by extending their sentences or by retrying them to prolong their detention. Human rights lawyer Mohamed al-Roken remained incarcerated despite having served his 10-year prison sentence and was retried as part of the mass trial starting on December 7.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The National Human Rights Committee acted as the main liaison between human rights bodies in the country and supervised the implementation of a comprehensive national human rights plan. The Human Rights Office at the emirate-level Abu Dhabi Judicial Department (ADJD) had the authority to investigate human rights complaints submitted in English or Arabic, provided there was a pending case before the ADJD courts.

Three recognized local human rights organizations existed: the National Human Rights Institution, mandated to “promote and protect” human rights, which received an annual budget from the government and had a board that included current or previous government officials; the quasi-governmental Emirates Human Rights Association (EHRA), which focused on human rights abuses and complaints regarding labor conditions, stateless persons’ rights, and prisoners’ well-being and treatment; and the Emirates Human Rights Studies Center (EHRSC), which focused on human rights education for lawyers and legal consultants. The EHRA claimed it operated independently without government interference, apart from requirements that applied to all associations in the country, but several EHRA members were government officials and the organization received government funding. The EHRSC 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 criminalized rape, which was defined as coerced sexual intercourse with a woman or sodomy with a man. Under the law, rape was generally punishable by life imprisonment and by death in certain cases. The law required hospitals to report rape cases to police, and they did so. Hospitals furnished medical reports for rape survivors if they wanted to report their case to police.

The law did not explicitly prohibit spousal rape. In sharia courts, which were 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 of employers raping or sexually assaulting employees. The government rarely prosecuted these cases, and prosecuted cases led to few convictions.

The law criminalized sexual assault by coercion, threat, or deceit, and covered instances where the victim was incapable of providing consent due to mental incapacity. Persons accused of sexual relations with a person younger than the age of consent (18) faced charges of sexual molestation, punishable by a prison term of 10 to 25 years. If the perpetrator was related to the victim, responsible for their upbringing or care, or had authority over them, the punishment could be up to life imprisonment. The law prohibited

multiple forms of domestic abuse, including mental, sexual, and financial abuse. Public prosecutors could issue protective orders for victims, and abusers could be subject to prison or monetary fines. The government rarely applied these laws.

Survivors of domestic abuse could 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 survivors of domestic abuse were turned away at police stations or were advised to attend mandatory mediation sessions at the Family Prosecution Office. There were domestic abuse centers in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ras al-Khaimah, and Sharjah.

The government had not fully implemented the Family Protection Policy, designed to protect women, children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities from any type of violence and abuse, as of year's end. 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): The law prohibited FGM/C, and the Ministry of Health forbade hospitals and clinics from performing the procedure, but private clinics and ritual or traditional circumcisers

reportedly continued to carry it out, most commonly on infants and children. Some tribal groups practiced FGM/C. It was reportedly declining as a traditional custom, but little information was available regarding its prevalence. Foreign residents from countries where FGM/C was common undertook the practice.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: The country employed judicial supervision for individuals considered at risk from relatives threatening to commit so-called honor crimes or otherwise harming them, typically included providing housing and family mediation and reconciliation.

Discrimination: Women in general faced legal and economic discrimination, with noncitizen women at a particular disadvantage. The government's interpretation of sharia applied in personal status cases and family law. Muslim women in most emirates were required to have the consent of their guardians to marry. Local interpretations of sharia prohibited 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, offered civil marriages for noncitizens, including some Muslims, outside these interpretations of sharia. The law permitted a man to have as many as four wives, but women could not have more than one husband. Women normally inherited less than men, and a son's inheritance could be

double that of a daughter under sharia. Federal laws entitled some noncitizen women to larger inheritances.

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

Women continued to face legal discrimination because of the government's interpretation of sharia. Sharia courts covered marriage, divorce, alimony, guardianship, custody and visitation, proof of maturity, and proof of lineage and inheritance. Sharia applied to all nationals except when non-Muslim nationals had specific rules related to their specific religion, creed, or sect. Noncitizen women could choose between applying UAE laws or their country of citizenship's laws in personal status matters.

To obtain a divorce with a financial settlement, a woman was required to 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 required medical reports and two male witnesses. A judge could exercise discretion in considering women as full witnesses or half witnesses. Alternatively, women could divorce by paying compensation or surrendering their dowry to their husbands. Noncitizens, including some Muslims, could obtain a civil divorce without having to prove the infliction of harm.

The strict interpretation of sharia did not apply to child custody cases, and

courts applied the “best interests of the child” standard. According to federal law, a divorced woman could lose custody of her children to their father once daughters reached age 13 and sons reached age 11. Women were permitted to file for continued custody until a daughter was married or a son finished his education. Federal law for non-Muslim residents enacted in February granted parents joint custody, unless a parent waived the right or submitted 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 was subject to penalty if the husband or legal guardian filed a complaint. In addition, only the husband or legal guardian had the power to drop the charges. Emirate-level laws and punishments based on sharia regarding adultery and consensual extramarital sex also applied.

The law mandated equal access to education for all, and education was mandatory for citizens, including children of Emirati women married to foreign men, from primary through secondary school, but education was compulsory for noncitizens only in primary stages. Coeducation was offered in public schools and some public universities, and many private institutions were coeducational.

The children of citizen mothers married to foreigners did not receive citizenship automatically.

The government's Gender Balance Council engaged with women citizens, but not noncitizens, who worked outside the home. The labor law prohibited discrimination based on sex and pregnancy and stipulated equal wages for women and men. Muslim women public-sector employees were entitled to four months and 10 days of paid leave if their spouse died, compared to only five days for non-Muslim women workers in the private and public sectors. Women who worked in the private sector, and especially noncitizens, rarely received equal benefits and reportedly faced discrimination in promotions and equality of wages.

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

Pregnancy outside marriage was punishable by two years' imprisonment for both parents unless they married or one or both acknowledged the child and obtained identification papers and travel documents in accordance with the laws of the country of which either parent was a national. The law allowed unmarried parents to obtain a birth certificate for a child born out of wedlock. The law also provided for a specialized court to order issuance of a birth certificate for children whose father was unknown, upon the application of the mother. Some courts denied such applications.

There were restrictions to health care access based on health insurance. Although the government provided free health care to citizens, including access to contraception, obstetric and gynecologic services, prenatal care,

and delivery care to married citizen women, 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 were able to use public hospitals for a fee and sometimes relied on charity to cover these costs. Access to pharmacological contraception options was available in most pharmacies, and on some occasions only through medical prescription, and not covered by health insurance providers. Emergency contraception was reportedly available with a doctor's prescription and in some cases required spousal consent. Rape survivors, regardless of citizenship, received medical care, including examination, medication, and emergency contraceptives. Most health insurance plans did not cover insertion and removal of intrauterine devices or contraceptive implants.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

Racial discrimination was illegal, but the government did not effectively enforce these protections and discrimination remained common in areas such as employment. The new law on combating discrimination, hatred, and extremism imposed prison sentences of not less than one year and a fine of 500,000 dirhams (\$136,147) in crimes related to hate-speech, and a minimum prison sentence of two years and a fine of 500,000 dirhams (\$136,147) in crimes related to discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sect, color, gender, and origin. Job postings could list ethnic

preferences, and the government took no action to mitigate such discrimination in the workplace. Employers occasionally applied different pay rates based on the nationality of employees.

Children

Birth Registration: The children of citizen mothers married to foreigners did not receive citizenship automatically but authorities granted them equivalent education and health benefits. The government registered noncitizen births, including of Bidoon. The law allowed single mothers to register children born out-of-wedlock provided that at least one of the parents provided identification documents and passports for the newborn, but authorities did not widely enforce the law.

Education: Education was compulsory through the 12th grade for citizens and through 6th grade for noncitizens. The government provided free education to citizens only. 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. The law imposed a fine of 2,000 to 50,000 dirhams (\$550 - \$13,600) parents or guardians who failed to enroll their children in school.

Child Abuse: The law prohibited child abuse, and the government took steps to increase awareness of the problem, including the Ministry of

Interior's child protection online program. Child abuse could be reported on different platforms across the country.

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

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law criminalized the sexual exploitation of children, with a minimum penalty of 10 years in prison. The penalty for sex with children younger than 18 was life imprisonment. Distribution and consumption of child pornography was illegal. In May, the Prosecution Office referred a suspect to the Minor Criminal Court on charges of indecent assault and sexual exploitation of a child. The court convicted the accused on all charges and sentenced him to imprisonment of 20 years and eight months and a fine of 200,000 dirhams (\$54,400), including court costs.

Antisemitism

There was no indigenous Jewish community; although specific numbers varied, local community members estimated the size of the country's noncitizen Jewish population at less than 10,000. While a permanent synagogue was established in Abu Dhabi Emirate with the opening of the Abrahamic Family House, in Dubai the CDA required a Jewish umbrella association to renew its temporary license every three months, pending establishment of a permanent synagogue, the formal authorization for

which had been pending for more than a year. There were reports of a rise in antisemitic incidents on social media and in schools following the October 7 Hamas attacks against Israel and the subsequent Israel-Hamas conflict.

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

Trafficking in Persons

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

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

Criminalization: The law criminalized consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults. The penalty for individuals who engaged in “consensual sodomy with a man” was a minimum prison sentence of six months if the individual’s partner or guardian filed a complaint. There were no known reports of arrests or prosecutions for consensual same-sex sexual conduct. LGBTQI+ identity, real or perceived, could be deemed an act against

“decency or public morality,” but there were no reports during the year of persons prosecuted under these provisions.

The law criminalized men who dressed as women or entered a place designated for women while “disguised” as a woman. The punishment could be up to one year in prison and a fine of up to 10,000 dirhams (\$2,700). The law also penalized “public indecency” with a jail sentence or fine of 1,000 dirhams to 10,000 dirhams (\$270-\$2,700).

Violence and Harassment: There were no reports of police or other government violence against LGBTQI+ individuals or of nonstate actor violence targeting LGBTQI+ individuals or those reporting such abuse.

Discrimination: The law did not prohibit discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination. LGBTQI+ persons were provided no rights or protections based on their sexual or gender identity and could face arrest based on their conduct. Although there were no reports of such prosecutions or of employment discrimination during the year, LGBTQI+ individuals were at risk of harassment and discrimination.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Although there was no legal framework allowing individuals to change their gender identity marker on legal and government identification documents to bring them into

alignment with the individual's gender identity, some citizens who received gender-affirming surgery overseas reportedly were able to amend official documents to match their gender. There were reports of travelers being denied entry into the country when airport immigration inspectors suspected that their biological sex did not match their expressed gender or the gender indicated on their passport.

The law permitted doctors to perform sex-reassignment surgery when there were "physiological" signs of gender and sex disparity, as determined by a recognized medical body. The penalty for performing a "sex correction" surgery a medical professional or medical authority deemed unwarranted was four to 10 years in prison, a fine of 10,000 dirhams to 500,000 dirhams (\$2,700 to \$136,000), or both.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: There were no reports of such practices during the year.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: The law did not explicitly restrict these freedoms for LGBTQI+ individuals or groups, but LGBTQI+ organizations refrained from operating openly or holding advocacy events or Pride marches due to social conventions, general restrictions on assembly and association, and the threat of criminal prosecution.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibited discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, or the provision of other state services. Legal provisions in effect since July required the public sector to create jobs for persons with disabilities and provide all means necessary for them to carry out their duties. The government effectively enforced the law, and persons with disabilities were able to find employment in both the public and private sector, with no reports of employment discrimination. Children with disabilities were 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, although many of the facilities were reserved for citizens.

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

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Noncitizens (and to a lesser extent citizens) with HIV or AIDS faced discrimination. Citizens had legal protections against employment and education discrimination for individuals with HIV or AIDS, as well as free access to HIV treatment and care programs, but noncitizens did not have these rights. The government did not grant residency or work visas to persons with certain communicable diseases, including HIV and AIDS. In some cases, the minister or the head of the health authority was authorized to waive HIV testing as a precondition for obtaining or renewing residency. Noncitizens who tested positive for HIV or AIDS could be detained and deported. Doctors were 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 did not grant workers the right to organize or bargain collectively or permit them to form or join unions. Given the absence of unions, there were no reports of government enforcement of laws regarding their establishment or operation.

The law explicitly prohibited strikes by public-sector employees, security

guards, and migrant workers, and private-sector workers had access to a labor-dispute process that did not recognize work suspension as a form of protest or bargaining. Workers who walked off the job were 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.

The country had separate labor laws for the private sector, public sector, the armed forces, security agencies, and free and export-processing zones. Domestic workers spread over approximately 20 job functions ranging from housemaid and cook to private coaches and agricultural engineers were subject to a separate law. The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization regulated the private and domestic worker sectors, enforcing legal provisions, conducting inspections, and serving as the initial arbitrator of labor complaints, noting in July it amicably settled 81 percent of the complaints it received. Persons who lacked legal residency status, including those with either short-term visitor visas or expired visas, were generally not legally eligible for employment.

All private sector foreign workers and domestic workers had the right to file labor-related grievances with the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization. Reports on the length of administrative procedures varied, with workers citing both speedy and delayed processes. The ministry sometimes intervened in foreign workers' disputes with employers and

helped negotiate private settlements.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization referred unresolved collective disputes – those filed by 50 or more private sector employees of the same entity – to a specialized committee whose decisions were final.

Unresolved individual labor complaints were referred to a specialized labor court. Public-sector employees could file an administrative grievance or a case in a civil court to address a labor-related dispute or complaint.

Administrative remedies were available for labor complaints, and authorities commonly applied them to resolve problems such as delayed wage payments, unpaid overtime, or substandard housing. Public information on government action remained limited, however.

The law mandated deportation of noncitizen public-sector workers for “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 labor protests or strikes, but it dispersed such protests and sometimes deported noncitizen participants. The law permitted employers to reduce wages or place workers on unpaid leave with workers’ consent in “extraordinary emergency situations” determined by the cabinet.

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. The Ministry of Community Development was required to license and approve professional associations, which was necessary 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 could join local professional associations but did not have voting rights and could not serve on association boards. In Dubai, the CDA regulated and provided licensing services to nonprofit civil society organizations and associations that organized social, cultural, artistic, or entertainment activities. All voluntary organizations and individual volunteers were required to register with the CDA within six months. In addition, all voluntary activities required a CDA permit, but there were no prescribed penalties for noncompliance.

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

There were no confirmed reports during the year of the worst forms of child labor.

The law contained provisions prohibiting the worst forms of child labor.

The minimum age for employment was 15. Conditions for employing juveniles – those older than 15 but younger than 18 years of age – included guardian consent, medical clearance, insurance, a six-hour limit on shifts, a prohibition on evening and overnight work, and a ban on work that might harm their health, safety, or morals.

d. Discrimination (see section 6)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: There was no national minimum wage for citizens or foreign residents. There was limited information on average domestic, agricultural, and construction worker salaries in addition to limited information on public-sector salaries. In some sectors, minimum wages were determined by workers' nationality and years of experience. The private sector labor law capped the workweek at 48 hours and limited daily work hours to eight, beyond which the law provided for workers to receive overtime pay. Overtime could not exceed two hours a day unless the work required would prevent serious loss or accidents. If a ministerial decision

deemed work in an area had to be continuous, workweeks could extend to 56 hours. Domestic workers, however, were legally required to work eight to 12-hour days and were entitled to one weekly rest day or an alternative day off or cash in lieu of that day. The law protected them from being required to relinquish their weekly rest day for two consecutive weeks; however, enforcement of these laws was ineffective. The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization mandated that domestic workers and employers sign standardized, two-year contracts that detailed job requirements, salaries, working hours, overtime, and time off.

In the public sector, the law capped the work week at 40 hours and 48 hours for employees working fulltime or rotating shifts, respectively. It stipulated overtime for additional hours worked during the week, and only compensatory time in lieu of hours worked during rest days and national holidays. It allowed employees to file complaints regarding their work environment but legally forbade employees from objecting to work hours, salaries, and bonuses.

Domestic and construction workers and other manual laborers were the groups most likely to experience excessive work hours, uncompensated overtime, delayed wage payments, and withheld rest days and leave entitlements. Domestic workers frequently worked more than 12 hours a day, seven days a week, with few or no holidays. Some employers forced workers to compensate them for hiring expenses such as visa fees, health

exams, and insurance, which the law required employers to pay, by withholding passports and wages or having these costs deducted from their contracted salary. For low-skilled laborers, these expenses were as high as the equivalent of a year's pay.

Employees of free zones – like the Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) and Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC) – were subject to their respective zone's internal employment regulations. Provisions dealing with discrimination, harassment and coercion, probation and notice periods, weekly work hours, end of service benefits, maternity leave and pay, workplace safety, and access to grievance procedures were comparable to private sector labor law. Free-zone employees received less annual leave and fewer paid sick days and could not take their grievances to the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization or the court system. ADGM regulations contained provisions on overtime hours and pay and excessive work hours, but DIFC regulations did not.

Workers in agriculture and other categories overseen by the Ministry of Interior were subject to a different regulatory regime. These workers were not covered by private and public sector labor law but had 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 were often weak, however, leaving these workers more vulnerable to substandard work conditions.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, such as construction. All industrial establishments and construction companies employing more than 100 workers were legally required to hire at least one OSH officer.

Government OSH standards required employers to provide employees with a safe work and living environment; conduct periodic safety inspections, assessments, and training; cover all treatment costs for injuries that were not a worker's fault; and pay a worker partially or in full for up to one year while undergoing treatment. The law entitled employees to compensation if left with disabilities from work-related injuries and protected them from termination before receiving such compensation. OSH experts actively identified unsafe working conditions, and workers were permitted to walk off the job in response to dangerous conditions.

The law mandated a two-and-one-half-hour midday break between June 15 and September 15 for laborers working in exposed open areas such as construction sites. Companies were required to provide water, vitamins, supplements, and shelter for all outdoor workers during the summer. Exemptions were permitted for projects that could not be delayed for emergency or technical reasons, such as laying asphalt or concrete and repairing damaged water pipes, gas lines, or electrical lines. Motorcycle delivery drivers reported they were often ineligible for periodic breaks as

they were not classified as outdoor laborers.

Employers with 50 or more employees making 1,500 dirhams (\$400) or less a month were required to provide living accommodations that met standards for ventilation, air conditioning, sanitation, and on-site medical services.

Part-time and temporary workers in the private sector were subject to the labor law and were covered by Wages Protection System (WPS) and OSH protections. Employers were required to provide health insurance coverage for their employees.

The law required employers to provide domestic workers with adequate means of protection against occupational injuries and diseases. Some employers denied domestic workers food or access to a telephone. While such actions were illegal, the relevant laws were not effectively enforced. Although workplace inspection was permissible under the law, there was a significant cultural barrier to entering and inspecting private households (particularly those of citizens) where domestic workers were employed. The law therefore required a public prosecutor's permission coupled with a complaint or evidence of a violation. Regulations introduced in January authorized inspectors to request that workers be medically examined and that work conditions be assessed for potential health and safety risks. Obstructing the work of these inspectors using force or threats carried a prison sentence of up to six months and a fine of 20,000 to 100,000 dirhams

(\$5,450 to \$27,200).

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The government did not effectively enforce wage, hour, and OSH laws and standards, and penalties were not commensurate with analogous abuses such as civil rights violations. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators. The WPS required private institutions registered with Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization 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. Defaulting employers were initially ineligible for new work permits from the ministry and, if employing more than 50 persons, were subject to inspection. If the nonpayment persisted past 45 days for entities with more than 50 employees, the ministry referred the case to local and federal authorities for legal action; if an entity already facing litigation over unpaid wages repeated violations within six months, it could face administrative fines. Employers were considered compliant with WPS requirements if more than 80 percent of total wages – not total employees – were paid. WPS registration was not compulsory for individuals operating taxis and boats owned by nationals or for employees of banks and houses of worship.

The government expanded WPS coverage in April to cover five of the 19 classes of domestic workers. Housekeepers and nannies, who constituted the majority of domestic workers, were among the remaining classes whose

registration in the WPS by their employers remained optional. Regulations introduced in January stipulated that failure to register a worker in the WPS or nonpayment of wages could result in a modest fine. New regulations imposed a six-month hiring ban on employers who withheld domestic worker wages for longer than two months. Non-labor-related financial crimes carried stricter punishment, comparable to that for fraud, which, under the penal code, was punishable with a jail sentence not exceeding two years and a modest fine.

A compulsory unemployment insurance program introduced in January provided employees three payouts equaling 60 percent of their monthly basic salary in the event of job loss, with total compensation capped at 20,000 dirhams (\$5,450). The program excluded domestic workers and employees who resigned or were fired for disciplinary reasons.

The government enforced the WPS and issued fines for noncompliance to discourage employers from withholding foreign workers' salaries.

In June, a Dubai court convicted a construction company owner of withholding the salaries of 215 employees for two months and fined him 5,000 dirhams (\$1,360) per employee, for a total of 1,075,000 dirhams (\$293,000). 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 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 did not apply to foreign workers under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, such as agricultural workers, or to most domestic workers.

Community leaders reported that some employers refused to apply for a work permit for their domestic workers, rendering them undocumented and denying them access to labor legal protections. This violation carried a fine of 5,000 dirhams (\$1,360) per illegal domestic worker.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization reported it acted against four unlicensed domestic worker recruitment agencies in al-Ain in October. The ministry stated it closed the agencies, referred them to the Public Prosecutor's Office, and fined their owners 50,000 dirhams (\$13,600) each, but did not list the violations committed. It also provided temporary accommodation for the domestic workers at the violating establishments and was working on transferring them to approved recruitment agencies.

The WPS excluded seamen, but ship owners and operators who defaulted on wages for more than two months were liable to fines, loss of access to state waters, and revocation of licenses. The government could also seize and sell derelict and unseaworthy ships and use the proceeds to compensate unpaid crews. There were no such penalties reported by year's end. The domestic workers law, in effect since December 2022, did not

carry over previous provisions granting workers an end-of-service bonus equivalent to two-weeks' salary for each year of service. Instead, it required the cabinet to adopt rules and regulations for calculation and payment of these gratuities, but no such regulations were in place at year's end.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization 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 workplace inspection, which was legally mandated, and for OSH and wage protection.

In March, the Abu Dhabi Municipality conducted a four-day fire safety campaign at construction sites in the city, during which its inspectors issued warnings and unspecified fines for failing to implement environmental, health, and safety guidelines and other site codes.

Under legal reforms enacted during the year, inspectors could conduct unannounced inspections at any time, summon and question employers and workers, access documents, and take samples of materials suspected of being harmful to workers, but could not initiate sanctions. Employers who did not comply with OSH regulations were subject to fines and suspension of operations. The Abu Dhabi Municipality and Sharjah Labor Standards Development Authority launched separate campaigns to raise worksite

awareness of health, environment, and safety problems, including fire prevention and heat stress.

There were cases in which workers were injured or killed on job sites, but 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. An October report by NGO FairSquare found that in September, migrant construction workers on Dubai's COP28 site were put to work outdoors in extreme and potentially fatal heat, in clear violation of laws designed to protect outdoor workers from the country's harsh climate. A November report from the NGO Equidem found that based on their research interviewing hundreds of workers in the country's renewable and gig sectors, workers were subjected to widespread physical abuse, wage theft, heat stress, exploitation, and nationality-based discrimination at five renewable energy firms and at Dubai's COP28 site at Expo City.

Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization 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. The ministry reported in September that it conducted 113,000 inspections from mid-June to mid-September and found 96 establishments in violation of the midday break but did not specify its response to these violations. An August report spoke of "necessary action"

against violators but did not specify if the ministry levied any fines, which were set at 5,000 dirhams (\$1,360) per employee with a cap of 50,000 dirhams (\$13,600). Nevertheless, some low-wage foreign workers faced substandard living conditions, including overcrowded apartments or unsafe and unhygienic lodging in labor camps. During some camp inspections, the ministry employed interpreters to assist foreign workers in understanding employment guidelines. It operated a multilingual, toll-free complaints hotline, and its 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 to allow workers to register legal complaints on site.

The Abu Dhabi Judicial Department offered lectures on the new labor law to thousands of workers in the emirate's labor camps, focused on, among other things, recruitment and travel expenses, leaving work, salary delays, occupational health and safety, and the complaints process.

Abu Dhabi courts granted two workers 100,000 dirhams (\$27,000) each in compensation for major workplace injuries and ordered their employers to cover the workers' legal expenses. Laws did not provide for specific monetary fines for different health and safety violations, and in one case the company was fined 10,000 dirhams (\$2,700) for negligence and failing to provide safety gear.

Dubai Police and the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children, a quasi-governmental organization, conducted training programs aimed at decreasing suicidal behavior.

Failure to protect domestic workers against occupational injury or illness could incur a small fine per case, while failure to compensate the worker for work injuries and diseases could also be fined. There were no reports of domestic worker occupational safety violations during the year.

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 seek informal employment, subjecting them to exploitative conditions.