

QATAR 2018 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Qatar is a constitutional monarchy in which Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani exercises full executive power. The constitution provides for hereditary rule by men in the Amir's branch of the Al Thani family. The most recent elections were in 2015 for the Central Municipal Council, an advisory and consultative body. Observers considered these elections free and fair. All cabinet members are appointed by the Amir, including the prime minister.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces.

Human rights issues included criminalization of libel; restrictions on peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including prohibitions on political parties and labor unions; restrictions on the freedom of movement for migrant workers' travel abroad; limits on the ability of citizens to choose their government in free and fair elections; and criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual activity. There were reports of forced labor that the government took steps to address.

The government took limited steps to prosecute those suspected of committing human rights abuses.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

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

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

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

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

The constitution and law prohibit torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment.

The government interprets sharia as allowing corporal punishment for certain criminal offenses, including court-ordered flogging in cases of alcohol consumption and extramarital sex by Muslims. Courts typically reduced sentences to imprisonment or a fine.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Aside from the Deportation Detention Center (DDC), prison conditions generally met international standards. In its 2017 report the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), an independent government-funded nongovernmental organization (NGO), investigated one case of an expatriate prisoner who complained about his conditions in the detention facility. The NHRC visited the facility, met with the prisoner and the detention center management, and submitted a list of recommendations to the management about this case. The NHRC recommended updating the official documents of the prisoner and discussed the possibility of lifting the ban on his bank account. The NHRC further recommended that the government publically declare the number of accusations of mistreatment of prisoners reported to it as well as any follow up actions taken. The committee made 177 visits to eight different detention and interrogation facilities across the country during the year and concluded that the facilities met international standards. The NHRC also conducted a training for Ministry of Interior officials on international obligations to refrain from torture of prisoners.

Physical Conditions: There were no major concerns in prisons and detention centers regarding physical conditions.

Administration: No statute allows ombudsmen to advocate for prisoners and detainees.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers and international bodies to all facilities except the state security prison. The government routinely provided foreign diplomats access to state security prisoners. Representatives from the NHRC conducted regular visits to all facilities.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government usually observed these requirements.

Authorities may detain individuals in the state security prison for indefinite periods under the Protection of Society Law and the Combating Terrorism Law. The government limited detention to two months for all DDC detainees, except those facing additional financial criminal charges. The processing time for deportations ranged from two days to 10 months. There were reports that authorities delayed deportations in cases where detainees had to resolve financial delinquencies before they departed the country.

The NHRC 2017 report stated that the committee investigated five cases of citizens and expatriates arrested arbitrarily by security forces and submitted recommendations to security forces in three cases to accelerate the process of referring the detainees to the prosecution.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national police and state security forces maintain internal security. State security forces address internal threats such as terrorism, political disputes, cyberattacks, or espionage while the national police are the regular law enforcement body. The army is responsible for external security. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over police under the Ministry of Interior, state security forces, which report directly to the Amir, and military forces under the Ministry of Defense. The government employed effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption.

There were isolated reports of police aggressively turning away, through threats of physical force, foreign domestic workers seeking assistance with claims against their employers.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Criminal law requires that persons be apprehended with warrants based on sufficient evidence and issued by an authorized official, be charged within 24 hours, and be brought before a court without undue delay.

The law provides procedures that permit detention without charge for as long as 15 days, renewable for up to six months. The law permits an additional six months'

detention without charge with the approval of the prime minister, who may extend the detention indefinitely in cases of threats to national security. The law allows the Ministry of Interior to detain persons suspected of crimes related to national security, honor, or impudence; in these cases, persons detained are generally released within 24 hours or brought before a court within three days of detention. Decisions under this law are subject to appeal to the prime minister only. A provision of this law permits the prime minister to adjudicate complaints involving such detentions. The law permits a second six-month period of detention with approval from the criminal court, which may extend a detention indefinitely with review every six months. The state security service may arrest and detain suspects for up to 30 days without referring them to the public prosecutor.

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

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

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

By law all suspects except those detained under the Protection of Society Law or the Combating Terrorism Law must be presented before the public prosecutor within 24 hours of arrest. If the public prosecutor finds sufficient evidence for further investigation, authorities may detain a suspect for up to 15 days with the approval of a judge, renewable for similar periods not to exceed 45 days, before charges must be filed in the courts. Judges may also extend pretrial detention for one month, renewable for one-month periods not to exceed half of the maximum punishment for the accused crime. Authorities typically followed these procedures differently for citizens than for noncitizens. The NHRC called on the government to amend the Criminal Procedures Code to set a maximum period for preventive detention, as the law does not specify a time limit for pretrial detention.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, the Amir, based on recommended selections from the Supreme Judicial Council, appoints all judges, who retain their positions at his discretion. Foreign detainees had access to the legal system, although some complained of opaque legal procedures and complications mostly stemming from language barriers. Foreign nationals did not uniformly receive translations of legal proceedings, although interpretation was generally provided within courtrooms. Worker Dispute Settlement Committees were established in March to increase the efficiency and speed of decision making in the overloaded labor courts and included court translators who were present throughout all hearings. Some employers filed successful deportation requests against employees who had pending lawsuits against them, thus denying those employees the right to a fair trial.

Trial Procedures

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

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

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

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

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

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no substantiated reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

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

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

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

Citizens must obtain government permission to marry foreigners, which is sometimes not granted for female citizens. Male citizens may apply for residency permits and citizenship for their foreign wives, but female citizens may apply only for residency for their foreign husbands and children, not citizenship.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and press in accordance with the law, but the government limited these rights. Self-censorship remained the primary obstacle to free speech and press.

Freedom of Expression: Citizens did not regularly discuss sensitive political and religious issues in public forums, but citizens discussed these issues in private and on social media. The law prohibits residents from criticizing the Amir. Members of the majority foreign population exercised self-censorship on sensitive topics.

The law penalizes damaging, removing, or performing an action that expresses hate and contempt to the country's flag, the Gulf Cooperation Council flag, or the flag of any international organization or authority by up to three years in prison. The use of the national flag without formal permission from authorities, displaying a damaged or discolored flag, or changing the flag by adding photographs, text, or designs to it are also criminalized.

Press and Media Freedom: The law includes restrictive procedures on the establishment of newspapers, their closure, and the confiscation of assets of a publication.

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

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The Qatar Media Corporation, the Ministry of Culture and Sports, and customs officials censored material. The government reviewed, censored, or banned foreign newspapers, magazines, films, and books for objectionable sexual, religious, and political content. In July international media reported that the local distributor of *The New York Times* censored a number of articles covering lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) issues. The Government Communication Office issued a statement in July explaining that "the government shall examine the issue of the removed articles with the local distributor and take corrective action if needed." Journalists and publishers continued to self-censor due to political and economic pressures when reporting on government policies or material deemed denigrating to Islam, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law criminalizes libel and slander, including insult to dignity. A journalist may be fined up to 100,000 Qatari riyals (QAR) (\$27,500) and imprisoned for a year for defamation and reporting of "false news." Laws restrict the publication of information that slanders the Amir or heir apparent;

defames the Abrahamic faiths or includes blasphemy; harms the national currency or the economic situation; violate the dignity of persons, the proceedings of investigations, and prosecutions in relation to family status; and punishes violators with up to seven years' imprisonment.

National Security: Laws restrict the publication of information that could defame the state or endanger its safety; incite the overthrow of the regime or harm supreme state interests; report official secret agreements; or prejudice heads of state or disturb relations.

Internet Freedom

The maximum punishments for violations of the cybercrime law are up to three years in prison and a fine of 500,000 QAR (\$137,500). The law prohibits any online activity that threatens the safety of the state, its general order, and its local or international peace. It also criminalizes the spread of "false news," forces internet providers to block objectionable content, and bans the publication of personal or family information.

The law requires internet service providers to block objectionable content upon request from judicial authorities. Internet providers also are obligated to maintain long-term electronic records and traffic data for the government. The government-controlled internet service provider Ooredoo restricted the expression of views via the internet and censored the internet for political, religious, and pornographic content through a proxy server, which monitored and blocked websites, email, and chat rooms. 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.

More than 99 percent of households were connected to the internet.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and scientific research. Instructors at Qatar University noted that they sometimes exercised self-censorship. Instructors at foreign-based universities operating in the country, however, reported they generally enjoyed academic freedom. There were occasional government restrictions on cultural events, and some groups organizing cultural events reported

they exercised self-censorship. Authorities censored books, films, and internet sites for political, religious, and sexual content and for vulgar and obscene language.

In October the Doha branch of an American university faced backlash from Qatari social media users, including threats of violence against campus staff, following publicity of an advertisement for a discussion titled “This House Believes That Major Religions Should Portray God as a Woman.” The event was eventually cancelled by campus management who stated that the organizers had failed to follow standard operating procedures to obtain permission to hold the event.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

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

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for the right to form groups, defined by the law as professional associations and private institutions, but the government significantly limited this right. Noncitizens are exempt from the constitutional protections on freedom of association. There were no reports of attempts to organize politically. There were no organized political parties, and authorities prohibited politically oriented associations. The government prohibits professional associations and private institutions from engaging in political matters or affiliating internationally. Civil society organizations must obtain approval from the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs, which may deny their establishment if it deems them a threat to the public interest.

Informal organizations, such as community support groups and activity clubs, operated without registration, but they may not engage in activities deemed political.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement

The constitution provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government did not fully respect these rights. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to assist internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

In-country Movement: Restrictions on in-country movement for citizens concerned sensitive military, oil, and industrial installations. Although there was less emphasis on setting and enforcing “family-only” times at entertainment areas in Doha, several local malls and markets continued to restrict access to certain areas to foreign workers on weekends and those dressed “immodestly.”

Foreign Travel: The government prevented the travel of its citizens only when they were involved in court cases in progress. In September new legislation abolished the exit requirements for 95 percent of the workforce in the private sector, with some exceptions including domestic workers. Government employees are also not exempted. Employers may still request exit permits for up to 5 percent of their workforce but must provide an explanation to the government for why they believe any employee should retain an exit permit restriction, such as access to sensitive information.

The law prohibits the practice of employers withholding workers' passports and increases penalties for employers who continue to do so, but noncitizen community leaders and officials from labor-exporting countries confirmed it remained a common problem with insufficient enforcement.

Citizenship: The law allows for the revocation of citizenship. In September representatives from the Al-Ghufran tribe submitted a complaint to the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, accusing the government of arbitrarily revoking the citizenship of 6,000 members of the tribe. Representatives from the government and the NHRC acknowledged that the citizenship of some of the tribe's members was previously revoked but stated that revocations were only for dual-citizens, which the country does not recognize, and denied any new revocations during the year.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: In September the government passed legislation to grant political asylum status to asylum seekers. The new law stipulates the creation of a specialized committee within the Ministry of Interior to handle requests from asylum seekers. Once granted political asylum, the individual and his or her family have access to a range of free services provided by the government, including travel documents, jobs, monthly allowances, medical and educational services, and housing. Previously, the government accepted such individuals as “guests” on a temporary basis. The government legally classified the small number of persons granted residence on humanitarian grounds as visitors. The government provided housing and education to these de facto refugees. The Syrian Opposition Coalition office in Doha reported approximately 60,000 Syrians were living in Doha of which roughly 20,000 came to Doha after the start of the civil war and have been granted repeated extensions to their residency status to allow them to remain in country.

Stateless Persons

Citizenship derives solely from the father, and women cannot transmit citizenship to their noncitizen spouse or children. A woman must obtain permission from authorities before marrying a foreign national but does not lose citizenship upon marriage.

The law allows long-term residents to apply for citizenship after living in the country for 25 consecutive years, but the government rarely approved citizenship applications, which were by law capped at 50 per year. Restrictions and inconsistent application of the law prevented stateless persons from acquiring citizenship. In September the government passed a new law to regulate granting permanent residencies to some categories of non-Qataris. The law caps the number of new permanent residents to 100 per year. The intended beneficiaries of the new law are the children of Qatari women with non-Qatari fathers, husbands of Qatari women, and individuals with special skills or who offered remarkable services to the country.

The NHRC estimated that during the year there remained between 1,000 and 2,000 Bidoon, stateless residents in the country, and that they suffered some social discrimination. The Bidoon, who are afforded residency with the sponsorship of a Qatari resident, were able to register for public services such as education and

health care. Bidoon, however, are unable to own property in the country and cannot travel freely to other Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Permanent residents have the right to own property, open businesses without Qatari partners, and receive free education and health services.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution does not provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The government did not allow the formation of political parties or opposition groups. The Amir exercises full executive powers, including the appointment of cabinet members. In 2016 the Amir issued a decree extending the term of the appointed Shura Council, the country's titular legislative body, by three years.

The constitutional provisions for electing two-thirds of the Shura Council members and initiation of legislation by the Shura Council remain unimplemented.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In 2015 citizens elected the 29 members of the fourth Central Municipal Council, including two women, to four-year terms. The council advises the minister of municipality and urban affairs on local public services. Foreign diplomatic missions noted no apparent irregularities or fraud in the elections, although voter registration was lower than authorities expected.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The government did not permit the organization of political parties, and there were no attempts to form them during the year. Voting is open to all citizens who are at least 18 years old, including those who have been naturalized for at least 15 years; members of the armed services and employees of the Ministry of Interior may not vote.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Although traditional attitudes and societal roles continued to limit women's participation in politics, women served in various roles in public office, such as minister of public health, chair of the Qatar Foundation, head of the Qatar Museum Authority, permanent representative to the United Nations, and ambassadors to Croatia and the Holy See. In November 2017 the Amir appointed four women to the Shura Council for the first time in the legislative body's history. Noncitizen residents are banned from participating in

political affairs, although they serve as judges and staffers at government ministries.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. There were reports, however, of government corruption during the year. In 2016 the Amir signed legislation giving the State Audit Bureau more financial authority and independence and allowing it to publish parts of its findings, provided confidential information is removed, something it was not previously empowered to do. Official statistics from 2017, the last officially released numbers, showed 10 cases of embezzlement of which five had been closed.

Financial Disclosure: There are no legal requirements for public officials to disclose their income and assets, and they did not do so.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

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

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

The NHRC provided some mild criticism of abuses and conducted its own investigations into human rights violations. A law regulating the work of the NHRC granted the committee "full independence" in practicing its activities and providing immunity to the committee's members. The NHRC typically handled petitions by liaising with government institutions to ensure a timely resolution to disputes.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Interior and the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are mandated to observe, report, and handle human rights issues. The NHRC is mandated by the cabinet to issue an annual report pertaining to the human rights conditions in the country.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape. Spousal rape is not explicitly criminalized, but a woman may file a complaint. The penalty for rape is life imprisonment, regardless of the age or gender of the victim. If the perpetrator is a nonspousal relative, teacher, guardian, or caregiver of the victim, the penalty is death. The government enforced the law against rape.

No specific law criminalizes domestic violence. According to the NHRC, authorities may prosecute domestic violence as “general” violence under the criminal law. According to the Protection and Social Rehabilitation Center shelter (PSRC), rape and domestic violence against women continued to be a problem. Police treated domestic violence as a private family matter rather than a criminal matter and were reluctant to investigate or prosecute reports.

Human Rights Watch reported that extramarital sex is punishable by up to seven years in prison, flogging (for unmarried persons), or the death penalty (for married persons). A woman who gives birth to a baby out of wedlock receives a 12-month jail sentence, on average, which could also include deportation, and even corporal punishment (lashings), according to news reports. The PSRC reported there were a total of 366 cases of adult women and 78 cases of minors who suffered various forms of physical or physiological violence in 2017.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is illegal and carries penalties of imprisonment or fines. In some cases, sponsors sexually harassed and mistreated foreign domestic servants.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: The constitution asserts equality between citizens in rights and responsibilities, but social and legal discrimination against women persisted. For example, the housing law, which governs the government housing system, discriminates against women married to noncitizen men and against divorced women.

Under the Nationality Law, female citizens face legal discrimination, since they are unable to transmit citizenship to their noncitizen husbands and to children born from a marriage to a noncitizen.

To receive maternity care, a woman must have a marriage certificate, although in practice hospitals will assist in the birth of children of unwed women.

Traditions of sharia also significantly disadvantage women in family, property, and inheritance law and in the judicial system generally. For example, a non-Muslim wife does not have the automatic right to inherit from her Muslim husband. She receives an inheritance only if her husband wills her a portion of his estate, and even then she is eligible to receive only one-third of the total estate. Sisters inherit only one-half as much as their brothers. In cases of divorce, young children usually remain with the mother, regardless of her religion, unless she is found to be unfit.

Women may attend court proceedings and represent themselves, but a male relative generally represented them. A woman's testimony is deemed half that of a man's.

A non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim, but many did so. The government documents children born to a Muslim father as Muslims. Men may prevent adult female family members from leaving the country, but only by seeking and securing a court order. There were no reports that the government prevented women over age 18 from traveling abroad.

By law women are entitled to equal pay for equal work, but this did not always happen in practice and they often lacked access to decision-making positions in management of private companies and in the public sector.

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

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive citizenship from the father. The government generally registered all births immediately.

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

Child Abuse: There were limited cases of reported child abuse, family violence, and sexual abuse. A PSRC report mentioned 78 cases of violence against minors in 2017.

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

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

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

Anti-Semitism

The country does not have an indigenous Jewish community. Sporadic cartoons in local papers carried anti-Semitic messages every few months, linking Israel or stereotypical Jewish figures to the decision by the Quartet (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt) to sever diplomatic ties and place an embargo on Qatar or to Palestinian issues. In May, for example, *Al-Arab* newspaper posted a cartoon depicting the Quartet as serving the "Palestinian cause" in the shape of a peace dove to a Jewish claw.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against--and requires the allocation of resources for--persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, the judicial system, and other government services or other areas. The government is charged with acting on complaints from individuals, and the NHRC has responsibility for enforcing compliance. The NHRC stated that they have received 17 complaints from those with disabilities in 2017. The NHRC report listed a number of challenges facing individuals with disabilities, including the lack of updated statistics for this group, the need for better legislation to ensure absolute equality in having access to government services and job opportunities, and the scarcity of efficient institutions that can provide services to disabled citizens and expats.

Private and independent schools generally provided most of the required services for students with disabilities, but government schools did not. Few public buildings met the required standards of accessibility for persons with disabilities, and new buildings generally did not comply with standards.

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

LGBTI persons faced discrimination under the law and in practice. The law prohibits consensual same-sex sexual conduct between men but does not explicitly prohibit same-sex sexual relations between women. Under the law, a man convicted of having sexual relations with a boy younger than 16 years is subject to a sentence of life in prison. A man convicted of having same-sex sexual relations with a man 16 years of age or older may receive a sentence of seven years in prison.

There were no public reports of violence against LGBTI persons, who largely hid their sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics due to an underlying pattern of discrimination toward LGBTI. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination nor are there antidiscrimination laws that protect

LGBTI individuals on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics.

Due to social and religious conventions, there were no LGBTI organizations, Pride marches, or LGBTI rights advocacy events. Information was not available on official or private discrimination in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or access to education or health care based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The NHRC reported no LGBTI-related complaints in the past year.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

There was discrimination against HIV-positive patients. Authorities deported foreigners found to be HIV positive upon arrival. Mandatory medical examinations were required for residents. Since health screenings are required for nonresidents to obtain work visas, some HIV-positive persons were denied work permits prior to arrival. The government quarantined HIV-positive citizens and provided treatment for them.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

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

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

In organizations with more than 50 workers, the law permits the establishment of “joint committees” with an equal number of worker and management representatives to deal with a limited number of workplace problems. Foreign workers may be members of joint labor-management committees. The law offers a

means to file collective disputes. If disputes are not settled internally between the employees and employer, the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs may mediate a solution. An agreement signed between the ministry and the International Labor Organization (ILO) includes provisions to create these committees with ILO supervision and assistance. Several pilot committees have begun operation and held elections during the year to determine the representatives for the workers.

The law requires approval by the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs 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.

For those few workers covered by the law protecting the right to collective bargaining, the government circumscribed the right through its control over the rules and procedures of the bargaining and agreement processes. The labor code allows for only one trade union, the General Union of Workers of Qatar (General Union), which was composed of general committees for workers in various trades or industries. Trade or industry committees were composed of worker committees at the individual firm level. The General Union was not a functioning entity.

Employees could not freely practice collective bargaining, and there were no workers under collective bargaining contracts. While rare, when labor unrest occurred, mostly involving the country's overwhelmingly foreign workforce, the government reportedly responded by dispatching large numbers of police to the work sites or labor camps involved; the government also requested the assistance of the embassies for the nationals involved. Strikes generally ended after these shows of force and the involvement of their embassies to resolve disputes. In many cases, the government summarily deported the workers' leaders and organizers. International labor NGOs were able to send researchers into the country under the sponsorship of academic institutions and quasi-governmental organizations such as the NHRC.

Although the law recognizes the right to strike for some workers, restrictive conditions made the likelihood of a legal strike extremely remote. The law requires approval for a strike by three-fourths of the General Committee of the workers in the trade or the industry, and potential strikers also must exhaust a lengthy dispute resolution procedure before a lawful strike may be called. Civil servants and domestic workers do not have the right to strike; the law also prohibits strikes at public utilities and health or security service facilities, including the gas, petroleum,

and transportation sectors. The Complaint Department of the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs, in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, must preauthorize all strikes, including approval of the time and place.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. International media and human rights organizations alleged numerous abuses against foreign workers, including forced or compulsory labor, withheld wages, unsafe working conditions, poor living accommodations, employers who routinely confiscated worker passports, and a sponsorship system that gave employers inordinate control of workers.

The government made efforts to prevent and eliminate forced labor, although the restrictive sponsorship system left some migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation. The law allows employees to switch employers at the end of their contract, which can be up to five years, without the permission of their employer. Employees may also switch in cases of failure to pay, violation of contract, mutual agreement, filing of a legal case in court, and bankruptcy or death of employer. Law 13 of 2018 eliminated the exit visa requirement for most workers covered under the labor law. The law does not extend to domestic workers who continue to require their employers' permission to leave the country. All workers subjected to exit permit requirements are allowed to seek the removal of such restrictions through a Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs jointly operated Grievance Committee.

The government also inaugurated several new government-funded labor accommodation sites designed to replace unsafe temporary housing for migrant workers. The government arrested and prosecuted individuals for suspected labor law violations. Since opening its office in Doha in April, the ILO has collaborated with the government to receive worker complaints and as of October had facilitated the submission of 52 worker complaints to Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs involving more than 320 workers. The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, and the NHRC conducted training sessions for migrant laborers to educate them on their rights in the country. The three entities also printed and distributed pamphlets that included pertinent articles of the labor and sponsorship laws in multiple languages to educate migrant workers on their rights. To combat the problem of late and unpaid wages, the government mandated that employers pay

wages electronically to all employees subject to the labor law through a system subject to audits by an inspection division at the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs. Employers who failed to pay their workers faced penalties of 2,000-6,000 QAR (\$550-\$1,650) per case and possible prison sentences.

There were continuing indications of forced labor, especially in the construction and domestic labor sectors, which disproportionately affected migrant workers. Exorbitant recruitment fees incurred abroad entrapped many workers in long-term debt, making them more vulnerable to exploitation. Some foreign workers who voluntarily entered the country to work had their passports and pay withheld and worked under conditions to which they had not agreed. Contract substitution remained a problem according to representatives of the migrant worker community; however, a new government electronic contracting system was being piloted to help eliminate the practice.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law sets the minimum age for employment at 16 years and stipulates that minors between the ages of 16 and 18 years may work with parental or guardian permission. Minors may not work more than six hours a day or more than 36 hours a week. Employers must provide the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs with the names and occupations of their minor employees and obtain permission from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to hire a minor. The ministry may prohibit the employment of minors in jobs judged dangerous to their health, safety, or morals. The government generally enforced relevant laws effectively, and child labor rarely occurred.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, language, and religion, but not political opinion, national origin, social origin, disability, sexual orientation, age, or HIV-positive status. Local custom, however, outweighed government enforcement of nondiscrimination laws, and legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination existed against women, noncitizens, and foreign workers. The government prohibited lower-paid male workers from residing in specific "family" residential zones throughout the country. The government discriminated

against noncitizens in employment, education, housing, and health services (see section 6).

The law requires reserving 2 percent of jobs in government agencies and public institutions for persons with disabilities, and most government entities appeared to conform to this law. Private-sector businesses employing a minimum of 25 persons are also required to hire persons with disabilities as 2 percent of their staff. Employers who violate these employment provisions are subject to fines of up to 20,000 QAR (\$5,500). There were no reports of violations of the hiring quota requirement during the year.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

In November 2017 the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs announced a temporary minimum wage for migrant workers worth 750 QAR (\$200) per month. The ministry and the ILO Office in Doha are currently conducting surveys and studies to set an appropriate permanent minimum wage for workers. The labor law provides for a 48-hour workweek with a 24-hour rest period and paid annual leave days. The law requires premium pay for overtime and prohibits excessive compulsory overtime. Employees who work more than 48 hours per week or 36 hours per week during the month of Ramadan are entitled to an overtime pay supplement of at least 25 percent. The government sets occupational health and safety standards including restrictions on working during the hottest hours of the day during the summer and general restrictions related to temperature during the rest of the day as well. The labor law and provisions for acceptable conditions of work do not apply to workers in the public sector or agriculture, or to domestic workers. In August 2017 the Amir ratified a law regulating service workers in the home. The law provides for a maximum 10-hour workday, one day a week off, and allows for overtime. Poverty among citizens was very low, and the government did not track poverty statistics among migrant workers.

Responsibility for laws related to acceptable conditions of work fell primarily to the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs as well as the Ministry of Municipality and Environment and the Ministry of Public Health. The government did not effectively enforce standards in all sectors; working conditions for citizens were generally adequate, because government agencies and the major private sector companies employing them generally followed the relevant laws. Enforcement problems were in part due to insufficient training and lack of personnel.

The government took limited action to prevent violations and improve working conditions. In March the Worker Dispute Settlement Committees assumed their duties, chaired by first-instance judges appointed by the Supreme Judicial Council and members of the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs. As of July the committees reported seeing over 120 cases per night and rulings were on behalf of employees in the over 70 percent of cases.

The Labor Inspection Department conducted monthly and random inspections of foreign worker camps. When inspectors found the camps to be below minimum standards, the operators received a warning, and authorities ordered them to remedy the violations within one month. For example, inspectors reportedly checked companies' payrolls and health and safety practices, returning after one month to ensure any recommended changes were made. If a company did not remedy the violations, the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs imposed fines, blacklisted the company, and on occasion referred the matter to the public prosecutor for action.

Fear of penalties such as blacklisting appeared to have had some effect as a deterrent to some labor law violations. Blacklisting is an administrative hold on a company or individual that freezes government services such as processing new visa applications from the firms. Firms must pay a 3,000 QAR (\$825) fine to be removed from the list--even if the dispute is resolved--and the ministry reserves the right to keep companies on the list after the fine is paid as a punitive measure.

The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs inspectors continued to conduct inspection visits to work and labor housing sites. Officials from the ILO joined labor inspectors on several inspections and assisted in the formation of a new strategic plan for strengthening the Labor Inspections Unit expected to begin implementation in 2019. Violators faced penalties of up to 6,000 QAR (\$1,650) and 30 days' imprisonment in the most serious cases, but labor observers reported that most safety and health violations were handled through administrative fines or blacklisting. The ministry maintained an office in Doha's industrial area, where most unskilled foreign workers resided, to receive complaints about worker safety or nonpayment of wages.

Violations of wage, overtime, and safety and health standards were relatively common, especially in sectors employing foreign workers, in which working conditions were often poor. Employers must pay their employees electronically to provide a digital audit trail for the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor,

and Social Affairs. Employers who failed to pay their workers faced penalties of 2,000-6,000 QAR (\$550-\$1,650) per employee and possible prison sentences. By law employees have a right to remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, but authorities did not effectively provide protection to employees exercising this right. Employers often ignored working-hour restrictions and other laws with respect to domestic workers and unskilled laborers, the majority of whom were foreigners.

Some employers did not pay workers for overtime or annual leave. Employers housed many unskilled foreign laborers in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water, electricity, or adequate food. The government continued to serve eviction notices to landlords whose buildings were not up to code. Throughout the year international media alleged some abusive working conditions existed, including work-related deaths of young foreign workers, especially in the construction sector.

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, according to news reports and foreign embassy officials.

International NGOs found that foreign workers faced legal obstacles and lengthy legal processes that prevented them from seeking redress for violations and exploitative conditions. Noncitizen community leaders also highlighted migrant workers' continued hesitation to report their plight due to fear of reprisals.