

# **QATAR 2019 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 2019 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.

The national police and ministry of interior forces maintain internal security that addresses, among other matters, terrorism, cyberattacks, and espionage. The national police oversee general law enforcement. The army is responsible for external security. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces.

Significant 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; refusal to grant asylum despite risk of arrest and torture; limits on the ability of citizens to choose their government in free and fair elections; criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual activity; and reports of forced labor.

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

### **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. The Supreme Judicial Council reported six convictions that resulted in flogging sentences in 2018.

According to its latest report, the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), a semi-independent government-funded institution, investigated one case of an expatriate who claimed abuse while detained by Ministry of Interior officials. The NHRC concluded that the individual in detention received the legal and humanitarian treatment applied to all accused at the time of arrest.

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

Prison conditions generally met international standards. In 2018 the NHRC conducted 94 field visits to detention and interrogation facilities across the country and concluded that all met international standards.

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.

In February media reports circulated about a Qatari woman allegedly detained by authorities for posting an Instagram message urging the government to help needy Qataris, which was considered critical of the government. In May an audio recording reportedly by the same woman was leaked to media claiming she had been jailed without trial for several months. No official statements were issued in response to the allegations.

### **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. 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), allowing release on bail was infrequent.

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

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

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

Arbitrary Arrest: A 2018 NHRC report stated that the committee received five complaints of arbitrary detention, all of which were claims of arrests without charge. The NHRC investigated all of the cases and met with those arrested under provisions of the Terrorism Act. The NHRC reported that local authorities released all five individuals.

#### **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 2018 to increase the efficiency and speed of decision making in the overloaded labor courts and included court translators who were present throughout all hearings. The establishment of these committees has not shortened the time from complaint to resolution. 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 one-half that of a man's.

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

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

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no 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 provisions. Individuals and organizations may not appeal adverse domestic decisions to regional human rights bodies.

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

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

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, 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 by up to three years in prison 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. 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, Including Online Media: The law includes restrictive procedures on the establishment of newspapers, their closure, and the confiscation of assets of a publication. The Doha Center for Media Freedom, a government-funded entity known to be vocal on press freedom issues, was closed during the year without official explanation.

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. 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; violates 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, which must be made available on request by 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 voice over internet protocol (VoIP) platforms, including Skype and FaceTime. Users who believed authorities had mistakenly censored a site could request that the site be reviewed by the Ministry of Transportation and Communication for suitability; there were no reports that any websites were unblocked based on this procedure. The Supreme Judicial Council's statistics showed that the courts in 2018 handled 104 cases related to cybercrimes and issued final verdicts in 50 of them.

A 2018 NHRC annual report criticized the cybercrime law, calling it “a challenge to freedom of expression because of the legislation’s use of unclear phrases such as violating public order or general principles.” In August media reported that authorities summoned local women involved in the “Qatari Feminists” Twitter account, which published tweets demanding more freedom for women in the country. The account was shut down following the questioning of its account holders amid conflicting reports about whether they voluntarily closed the platform down or authorities ordered them to do so.

### **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and scientific research. Instructors at Qatar University noted they sometimes exercised self-censorship. Instructors at foreign-based universities operating in the country, however, reported they generally enjoyed academic freedom. There were occasional government restrictions on cultural events, including bureaucratic barriers that in some cases resulted in the denial of event permits, and some groups organizing cultural events reported they exercised self-censorship. Authorities censored books, films, and internet sites for political, religious, and sexual content and for vulgar and obscene language.

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

The government limited freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

## **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly, but this right is restricted by law, including the 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 <https://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 ongoing court cases. Despite partial exit permit reform, domestic workers were required to obtain permission from employers to exit the country. In 2018 authorities abolished exit permit requirements for 95 percent of the workforce in the private sector, with some exceptions including domestic workers and government employees. Employers may still request exit permits for the remaining 5 percent of their workforce not covered by the 2018 law but must provide an explanation to the government justifying why an employee should retain an exit permit restriction. In 2018 the Exit Permit Grievances Committee received 1,869 requests by workers who were denied exit permits by their employers; of the total number of requests, the committee approved 1,850, rejected seven, and archived the remainder, a common practice when a worker leaves the country for any reason during the lengthy adjudication process.

The law prohibits employers from withholding workers’ passports and penalizes employers who do so, but noncitizen community leaders and officials from labor-exporting countries stated that passport confiscation remained a widespread problem with insufficient enforcement of penalties. The Ministry of Interior fined only two individuals in passport-confiscation cases during the year.

Citizenship: The law allows for the revocation of citizenship. In September 2018 representatives from the al-Ghufran tribe submitted a complaint to the Office of the UN 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 revoked but stated that revocations were only for dual citizens.

#### **e. Internally Displaced Persons**

Not applicable.

#### **f. Protection of Refugees**

Access to Asylum: In September 2018 the government passed legislation to grant political asylum status to asylum seekers, although to date no one has received asylum through this legislation. The 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 are entitled 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. During the year a Yemeni national’s claim for asylum was not granted despite credible fears of arrest and persecution if he were to return to Yemen. The government instead requested that the individual and his family seek refuge in a third country, despite the September 2018 law.

The Syrian Opposition Coalition office in Doha reported approximately 60,000 Syrians were living in Doha, of whom approximately 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. The government provided housing and education to these de facto refugees.

#### **g. 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 such a 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. Permanent residents have the right to own property, open businesses without local partners, and receive free education and health services.

According to official statistics provided by the Ministry of Interior, there were 2,461 Bidoon--stateless Arabs residing in the country--although the official documents do not recognize the term Bidoon but rather “individuals with temporary Qatari identification documents.” Bidoon are a stateless minority in the Gulf, born in the country, whose families were not included as citizens at the time

of the country's independence or shortly thereafter. 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.

### **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. During the year the amir issued a decree extending the term of the appointed Shura Council, the country's titular legislative body, by two years to end in June 2021. In November the amir assigned the prime minister to form and lead a committee to regulate the process of the Shura Council elections.

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

### **Elections and Political Participation**

Recent Elections: During the year citizens elected the 29 members of the fifth Central Municipal Council, including two women, to four-year terms. The council advises the minister of municipality and environment on local public services. Foreign diplomatic missions noted no apparent irregularities or fraud in the elections, although voter registration was lower than authorities expected, at approximately 9 percent.

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, and permanent representative to

the United Nations. In 2017 the amir appointed four women to the current Shura Council for the first time in the legislative body's history. There are five female judges and three assistant judges according to 2018 statistics of the Supreme Judicial Council. Noncitizen residents are banned from voting or otherwise 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.

Corruption: The law gives the State Audit Bureau financial authority and independence and allows it to publish parts of its findings provided confidential information is removed. 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 nongovernmental organizations (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.

In November the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention carried out its first official visit to the country to assess the situation regarding deprivation of liberty. Following the visit, the group stated, “Existing laws that allow prolonged administrative detention without judicial control and due process guarantees ought to be abolished, as these place individuals outside the protection of the law.” The Working Group called on authorities to “immediately repeal the Protection of Community Law, the State Security Law, and the Law on Combating Terrorism.”

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 illegal. Sexual assault and other gender-based crimes are rarely reported, mostly due to social taboos. 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, whether against spouses or against any member of a household including children and domestic workers. According to the NHRC, authorities may prosecute spousal violence as “general” violence under the criminal law. 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.

According to Human Rights Watch, 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); however, press reports indicated jail sentences and flogging are rare in such cases. The PSRC reported there were 353 cases of adult women and 130 cases of minors who suffered various forms of physical or physiological violence in 2018.

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

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. Sharia, as implemented in the country, discriminates against women in judicial proceedings, freedom of movement, marriage, child custody, and inheritance.

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

Under the Nationality Law, female citizens face legal discrimination, since they, unlike men, are not permitted to transmit citizenship to their noncitizen spouses or to children born from marriage to a noncitizen. Citizen women are unable to pass on citizenship to their offspring. A 2018 residency permit law allows children of citizen mothers to gain permanent status in country, even if the father is not a Qatari national. Citizens must obtain government permission to marry foreigners, which is sometimes not granted for female citizens. Male citizens may apply for residency permits and citizenship for their foreign wives, but female citizens may apply only for residency for their foreign husbands and children, not citizenship. In 2018 per official statistics, there were 232 requests by citizens to marry foreigners, of which one was rejected, 19 were still under processing, and the remainder were approved.

A non-Muslim wife does not have the automatic right to inherit from her Muslim husband. She receives an inheritance only if her husband wills her a portion of his estate, and even then, she is eligible to receive only one-third of the total estate. A

female heir generally receives one-half the amount of a male heir; for example, a sister would inherit one-half as much as her brother. In cases of divorce, children generally remain with the mother until age 13 for boys and 15 for girls at which time custody reverts to the husband's family, regardless of her religion.

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

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

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, regardless of the religion of the mother.

Men may prevent adult female family members from leaving the country by seeking and securing a court order. There were no reports that the government prevented women older than age 18 from traveling abroad, even under court order.

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

## **Children**

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

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

Child Abuse: There were limited cases of reported child abuse, family violence, and sexual abuse. The PSRC report mentioned 130 cases of violence against minors in 2018.

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/reported-cases.html>.

## **Anti-Semitism**

The country does not have an indigenous Jewish community and there are no official data on the number of Jewish expatriates in the country. Periodic cartoons and opinion articles in local papers carried anti-Semitic messages. In May the Arabic-language daily *al-Raya* published an op-ed by a Jordanian journalist denying the Holocaust and arguing that the Jews used the “alleged” Holocaust “to blackmail the West.” Also in May the state-funded al-Jazeera news channel disseminated links to a video report on its AJ+ official social media platforms about the Holocaust. The four-minute video questioned the number of Jewish Holocaust victims and accused Israel of using “Nazi justifications” to “annihilate” the Palestinians. The network revoked the links later and announced the suspension of two staff journalists for producing the video. The Ministry of Culture and Sports removed anti-Semitic material from some stands at the Doha International Book Fair after international complaints and pledged to take a more proactive approach to prohibiting anti-Semitic content.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

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

### **Persons with Disabilities**

The law prohibits discrimination against--and requires the allocation of resources for--persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, the judicial system, and other government services or other areas. The government is charged with acting on complaints from individuals, and the NHRC has responsibility for enforcing compliance.

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.

The NHRC 2018 annual report reiterated calls to amend the current law concerning persons with disabilities. The report mentioned that 9,928 persons with disabilities have registered in the Family Management Database. The report criticized the lack of information or published reports on disability in the country. It highlighted certain challenges facing persons with disabilities in the country, including lack of support for postprimary level education, job opportunities, and the need to oversee the compliance by government and private entities with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (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 age 16 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.

In addition to banning sex outside marriage for Muslims, the law provides penalties for any male, Muslim or not, who “instigates” or “entices” another male to commit an act of sodomy or immorality. Under the penal code, “leading,

instigating or seducing a male anyhow for sodomy or dissipation” and “inducing or seducing a male or a female anyhow to commit illegal or immoral actions” is punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment.

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 persons. 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 2018 report did not record any LGBTI-related complaints.

### **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 May the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs issued a decision regulating the formation of the “joint labor committees” within the private sector. In organizations with more than 30 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. Under the umbrella of this agreement and as of August, at least five joint committees have initiated operation and held elections to choose employee representatives. Following the formation of “joint committees,” the ILO provided extensive trainings to the committee members on how to manage the committees, how to establish open channels of communications with workers and management, and the mechanisms to submit complaints to the competent authorities.

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 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. In August several thousand migrant workers staged a strike against delayed wage payment and blocked a highway in a remote area outside the capital Doha. The government dispersed the protests and convinced the company to pay the workers one-half of their wages within 48 hours, and the remainder of their wages within the week. There were no reports of security forces arresting or clashing with the protesters.

### **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. During the year Amnesty International reported multiple cases of slow access to justice after three medium-sized companies refused to pay wages, withheld passports, and refused to appear in court. The ILO noted the law allows for the imposition of forced labor on those who hold political views ideologically opposed to the established political and social system.

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 in the private sector to switch employers at the end of their contract, which can be up to five years, without the permission of their employer. Employees may also switch employers in cases of failure to pay, violation of contract, mutual agreement, filing of a legal case in court, and bankruptcy or death of employer. In 2018 the exit visa requirement for most workers covered under the labor law was rescinded. The law does not extend to domestic workers, who are required to obtain 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.

During the year the government opened the first trafficking-in-persons shelter. The government arrested and prosecuted individuals for suspected labor law violations. The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, and the NHRC conducted training sessions and distributed to migrant laborers multilingual written explanations of their rights under local labor and sponsorship laws. To combat 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, but enforcement was inconsistent.

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, to help eliminate the practice, a government electronic contracting system exists in several third countries where workers are hired. Embassies of labor-sending countries reported this new system helped significantly reduce contract substitution and the number of workers who arrive in Doha without contracts.

The Residency Affairs Prosecution received 1,164 complaints for nonpayment in 2018, of which 1,155 were referred to courts and nine complaints were archived.

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

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

The law 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. The law prohibits all of the worst forms of child labor. 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. Penalties were sufficient to deter violations.

### **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. 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. 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**

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.

Responsibility for laws related to acceptable conditions of work fell primarily to the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs as well as to 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. Penalties were not sufficient to deter violations.

The government took limited action to prevent violations and improve working conditions. In March 2018 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. In 2018 the committees issued final verdicts in 1,339 cases, archived 1,088 cases for no-show of workers, and settled 93 cases amicably.

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, after inspectors reportedly checked companies' payrolls and health and safety practices, they returned one month later to ensure any recommended changes were made. If a company had not remedied 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. Official statistics showed that the Ministry's inspectors conducted 43,366 visits to work sites and 2,515 visits to labor accommodations in 2018.

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. Violators faced penalties that were insufficient to deter violations. 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. The government did not effectively enforce these laws. 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 which were insufficient to deter violations. 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 property owners 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.