

QATAR 2017 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Qatar is a constitutional monarchy in which Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani exercises full executive power. The constitution provides for hereditary rule by men in the emir'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 the elections free and fair.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces.

The most significant human rights issues included restrictions on freedoms of speech and press, including criminalization of libel; restrictions on assembly and 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 male same sex sexual activity. There were reports of forced labor that the government made efforts to eliminate.

The government took limited steps to prosecute those who committed 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 during the year.

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 National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) investigated three

allegations of torture and beatings by security forces in its 2016 report, but found no evidence to substantiate those claims.

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. The 2016 report of the NHRC stated that the committee paid 22 surprise visits to various detention and interrogation facilities across the country in 2016 and concluded that the facilities 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.

Improvements: In January the government expanded the capacity of the deportation center for women to host up to 250 inmates, and provided additional access to health care, food, and recreational facilities.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government usually observed these prohibitions. There were isolated reports that authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained some individuals.

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.

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 the police under the Ministry of Interior, state security forces, which report directly to the emir, and military forces under the Ministry of Defense. The government employed effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption.

There were no reports of security force impunity.

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, 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. Authorities usually did not afford suspects detained under the Protection of Society Law and the Combating Terrorism Law access to counsel and delayed access to family members.

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.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: Persons arrested or detained, regardless of whether on criminal or other grounds, are entitled to challenge in court the legal basis or arbitrary nature of their detention and obtain prompt release and compensation if found to have been unlawfully detained.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, the emir, based on recommended selections from the Supreme Judicial Council, appoints all judges, who hold 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. The government stated that courts

provided translations of the legal procedures and trial documents in 2,466 cases through October. The 2016 NHRC report criticized the lack of “good” interpretation and translation service for non-Arabic speakers at all stages of the lawsuit, including the investigation stage. 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, except for suspects held under the Protection of Society Law and Combating Terrorism Law.

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 or worth is not weighed equally with that of a man. In some cases a woman’s testimony is deemed half of a man’s, and in some cases a female witness is not accepted.

Defendants usually have free interpretation as necessary from the moment charged through all appeals. Defendants have the right to confront and question witnesses against them and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants have access to government-held evidence and have the right to confront prosecution or plaintiff witnesses and present one’s own witnesses and evidence. Defendants 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 reports of authorities arresting or detaining individuals based upon political activity during the year.

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 generally is 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. The NHRC stated it had received two complaints this year from Qataris that authorities denied requests to marry non-Qataris.

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 discuss sensitive political and religious issues in public forums, but citizens discussed these issues in private and on social media. In July the country hosted an international conference on freedom of expression, including representatives from international nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs) such as Human Rights Watch (HRW). HRW was not prevented from making remarks critical of the country's cybercrime law, the closure of the *Doha News* website, or women being unable to transmit citizenship to their children. The law prohibits residents from criticizing the emir. 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, closure, and confiscation of assets of a publication. It also 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."

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; they generally did not criticize authorities or the country's policies. 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. Since November 2016 authorities blocked access to *Doha News*, a website that had received significant domestic criticism for its coverage of socially sensitive issues ranging from labor rights to homosexuality. The government did not make an official statement on the closure, but it maintained that the blocking of the website was a result of registration and fund-raising violations under the law.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The Qatar Media Corporation, the Ministry of Culture and Sports, and customs officials censored material. There were no specific reports of political censorship of foreign broadcast news media or foreign programs. 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. Shortly after Saudi

Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt broke diplomatic relations with and closed borders, ports and airspaces to Qatar on June 5, the Qatari government reportedly instructed newspaper editors to avoid inflammatory language targeting the disputant countries. In September the Doha-based daily *al-Watan* refused to publish a commentary by a known local author that contained criticism of a prominent religious figure in Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, the author posted the commentary on his personal blog and later disseminated it via other media outlets.

Libel/Slander Laws: Laws restrict the publication of information that could incite the overthrow of the regime or harm supreme state interests; slander the emir or heir apparent; report official secret agreements; defame the Abrahamic faiths or include blasphemy; prejudice heads of state or disturb relations; harm the national currency or the economic situation; violate the dignity of persons, the proceedings of investigations, and prosecutions in relation to family status; or defame the state or endanger its safety.

Internet Freedom

The maximum punishments for violations of 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, even if true.

The law requires internet service providers to block objectionable content based on a request from judicial entities. 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 censored a site mistakenly could submit the website address to have the site reviewed for suitability; there were no reports that any websites were unblocked based on this procedure. The Ministry of Transportation and Communication is responsible for monitoring and censoring objectionable content on the internet.

Internet access was widespread, and more than 98 percent of households were connected to the internet, according to a 2016 UN report.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and scientific research. Instructors at Qatar University noted that they often 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.

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. Religious groups are required to register with the government; however, authorities did not harass groups that worship in private.

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 (MADLSA), which may deny their establishment if it deems them a threat to the public interest. There were 26 professional and private organizations in the country.

Administrative obstacles, including the slow pace of procedures required to form professional associations and private institutions, and strict conditions on their establishment, management, and function, restricted their recognition. The minister

of administrative development, labor, and social affairs must approve applications, and the number of noncitizens cannot exceed 20 percent of the total membership without approval by the ministerial cabinet. The law stipulates that the ministry may reject an application within 30 days from the date of submission. A failure to reply is considered a rejection.

Professional societies must pay 50,000 QAR (\$13,750) in licensing fees and 10,000 QAR (\$2,750) in annual fees, and have 10 million QAR (\$2.75 million) in capital funds. Private institutions must also have 10 million QAR (\$2.75 million) in capital funds, but the Council of Ministers may waive this requirement. Registrations expire after three years, and an association must reregister.

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 January authorities placed a local human rights lawyer on the travel-ban list, and it renewed the travel ban in June despite a court order to lift the ban in May. The lawyer claimed the travel ban was politically motivated. The government's sponsorship system restricted foreign

travel for noncitizens, although reforms introduced in December 2016 and January eased these restrictions and allowed for a grievance mechanism in cases of unjustified employer travel restrictions. A new agreement signed with the International Labor Organization in November includes provisions to allow free movement of all employees not working in “sensitive” positions.

Government officials stated publicly that employees should be able to leave the country free from interference, unless blocked by a court order or an outstanding debt. 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 the Saudi Arabia-owned *al-Arabiya.net* news website said that the Qatari government revoked the citizenship of approximately 55 members of the al-Murrah tribe, all of whom also have Saudi citizenship and reside in Saudi Arabia, and froze their assets in a crackdown on dissent. In October non-Qatari media, including the *Saudi Gazette* and *The Arab Weekly*, stated that several other Qatari dual citizens, including the head of the Shaml al-Hawajer tribe, lost their Qatari citizenship under similar circumstances. The Qatari government confirmed that a number of dual citizens did have their citizenship removed. In doing so, it noted that Qatar does not recognize dual-national status and all the individuals who had their nationality revoked were also citizens of Saudi Arabia.

Protection of Refugees

Refoulement: On May 25, authorities deported to Saudi Arabia Mohammed al-Otaibi, a Saudi human rights defender, as he was en route to Norway to take up an offer of political asylum. According to Amnesty International, authorities in Saudi Arabia reportedly placed Otaibi on trial and held him without access to a lawyer.

Access to Asylum: The law does not explicitly provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, but occasionally 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 there were approximately 60,000 Syrian refugees living in Doha.

Stateless Persons

Citizenship derives solely from the father, and Qatari 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.

According to the NHRC 2016 statistics, approximately 2,000 bidoon, stateless residents, in the country suffered some social discrimination. *Meem Magazine*, an online publication that addresses issues faced by Arab women, estimated the bidoon population at 1,300 individuals. 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. Their main complaints revolve around the inability to own property in the country and to travel freely to other Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

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 August the cabinet approved a law granting “permanent residencies” to the children of Qatari women married to non-Qatari husbands, individuals who perform “great service” to the country, and individuals with “special skills.” Permanent residency provides free health and education in addition to giving recipients priority in applying for jobs with the government.

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 emir exercises full executive powers, including the appointment of cabinet members. In July 2016 the emir issued a decree extending the term of the appointed Shura Council, the country’s titular legislative body, by three years. For the first time, during his annual speech at the opening of the Shura Council in November, the emir made explicit his desire for passage of new legislation to pave the way for open elections in 2019.

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 May 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 General Authority for Museums, permanent representative to the United Nations, and ambassadors to Croatia and the Holy See. In November the emir 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 2015 the emir issued a law increasing penalties for corrupt officials. In October 2016 the emir 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. Local media reported the court system prosecuted at least 14 cases of embezzlement during the year.

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

Several quasi-governmental organizations are under a single entity, Qatar Foundation, which is under the leadership of Sheikha Hind Al Thani, sister of the emir. 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.

Researchers from other NGOs such as Amnesty International and HRW continued to visit and report on the country with limited interference from authorities. In January the NHRC prematurely terminated a contract with Solidarity Center without a prenotification or providing clear reasons.

The NHRC, an independent government-funded nongovernmental organization, provided some mild criticism of abuses and conducted its own investigations into human rights violations. A 2015 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 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.

HRW 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.

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, involuntary sterilization, or other coercive population control methods. Estimates on maternal mortality and contraceptive prevalence are available at: www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/monitoring/maternal-mortality-2015/en/.

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. In some cases a woman's testimony is deemed half that of a man's, and in some cases a female witness is not accepted at all.

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.

Women typically received equal pay for equal work, but they often lacked access to decision-making positions.

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. Female citizens cannot transmit citizenship to their noncitizen husbands or children.

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.

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 in conformity with religious and cultural norms. These norms include the need to obtain consent from the legal guardian to ensure that both prospective partners consent to the union and apply for permission from a competent court. Underage marriage was very 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 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 travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html.

Anti-Semitism

The country does not have an indigenous Jewish community.

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.

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

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons faced discrimination under the law and in practice. The law prohibits same-sex sexual

conduct between men but does not explicitly prohibit same-sex 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 preferences in public due to an underlying pattern of discrimination toward LGBTI. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination nor are there antidiscrimination laws.

Due to social and religious conventions, there were no LGBTI organizations, gay pride marches, or gay 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.

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 (MADLSA) may mediate a solution. An agreement signed between the MADLSA and the International Labor Organization (ILO) includes provisions to create these committees with ILO supervision and assistance.

The law requires approval by the MADLSA for worker organizations to affiliate with groups outside the country. The government did not respect freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

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 strikes generally ended after these shows of force. In most 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 MADLSA 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. A law enacted in December 2016 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. From December 2016 to September, 10,485 workers transferred to new employers according to official statistics. Law 1 of 2017 clarified that a foreign worker still requires the consent of his employers to leave the country. If consent is not granted, the worker can submit a complaint to a grievance committee that must make a decision in three days. The grievance committee reported receiving 2,958 cases through September 20, of which all but two were ruled in the employee's favor. 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; labor inspections during the first half of the year resulted in 687 infringement reports against companies and 523 suspensions of company licenses to operate. In total during the first half of the year, the MADLSA reportedly penalized 26,083 companies including 22,460 for violations of the Wage Protection System. The ministry also reported receiving 4,230 worker complaints for violations of the labor law, of which 2,720 were settled through reconciliation and 745 cases were referred to the judiciary. The MADLSA, 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 MADLSA. 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 for forced labor under the restrictive sponsorship system. 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. The Ministry of Interior reported receiving 184 complaints of worker passport confiscation in the first half of the year. Among these, 169 were then referred to public prosecution. Contract substitution remained a problem according to representatives of the migrant worker community; however, a new government electronic contracting system is being piloted to help eliminate the practice. Law No. 21 of 2015 reduced exit barriers but did not eliminate them.

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 MADLSA 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

There is no minimum wage. 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 the emir ratified a new 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 MADLSA as well as the Ministry of Energy and Industry 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. As of October there were 397 inspectors in the MADLSA.

The government took limited action to prevent violations and improve working conditions. In the first half of the year, labor courts handed down judgements in 2,575 out of 21,343 total cases presented. In August the emir signed an amendment to the Labor Law to establish new labor dispute resolution committees (LRDCs), replacing existing labor courts. The LRDCs will operate under the MADLSA. The committees are chaired by judges and designed to process new worker complaints within three weeks.

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 MADLSA 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 reported that there are 338 registered recruitment agencies in the country. The ministry inspectors paid 170 inspection visits to the agencies in the first semester of the year resulted in filing infringement reports and sending warning letters to 27 companies.

MADLSA inspectors conducted 19,463 inspection visits to work and labor housing sites in the first semester of the year. Inspectors found that 68.7 percent of companies received no violations, 18.5 percent received warnings, 3.5 percent received infringement reports, 2.6 percent were discontinued, and 6.4 percent received safety guidance and advice. 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 MADLSA. 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 their overtime or annual leave. According to MADLSA statistics, among the 4,230 complaints received by workers in the first half of the year, 86.6 percent involved failure of the employer to pay for a return ticket home, 80.9 percent involved wages in arrears, 77.1 percent involved failure to pay end-of-service bonus, and 77 percent involved a failure to pay for holiday allowance. While the practice continued, the frequency of these abuses was reportedly declining. Employers housed many unskilled foreign laborers in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water, electricity, or adequate food. In 2016 the government began serving eviction notices to landlords whose buildings were not up to code. The government also began signing contracts for higher-standard worker accommodations, which have begun accepting workers from the inadequate housing options. Throughout the year international media alleged some abusive working conditions existed, including work-related deaths of young foreign workers, especially in the construction sector. Government statistics show that during the first half of the year, 245 workers were injured while on the job and 64 workers were killed while working.

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.