

# **QATAR 2015 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 males in the emir's branch of the al-Thani family, which has ruled since 1868. The most recent national elections were in 2015 for the Central Municipal Council, an advisory and consultative body; observers considered them free and fair. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over security forces.

On October 26, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani issued long-anticipated reforms to the kafala (labor sponsorship) system. The reformed law will allow migrant workers who complete the terms of their contracts, which can be up to five years, to change jobs without the permission of their employer. While employees are still required to obtain exit permits from employers before leaving the country, the new law does establish a clear process to circumvent employer objections. In November the government began implementing a February law establishing a new wage protection system for all residents subject to the labor law in order to address rampant labor rights abuses in the form of late or unpaid wages to noncitizen workers.

The principal human rights problems were the inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections, restriction of fundamental civil liberties, and denial of the rights of foreign workers. The monarch-appointed government prohibited organized political parties and restricted civil liberties, including freedoms of speech, press, and assembly and access to a fair trial for persons held under the Protection of Society Law and Combating Terrorism Law.

Other continuing human rights concerns included restrictions on the freedoms of religion and movement, as migrant workers could not freely travel abroad. Trafficking in persons, primarily in the domestic worker and labor sectors, was a significant problem. Legal, institutional, and cultural discrimination against women limited their participation in society. The noncitizen "bidoon" (stateless persons) who resided in the country with unresolved legal status experienced social discrimination.

The government took limited steps to prosecute those who committed abuses. Impunity existed for government officials.

**Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:****a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life**

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 politically motivated disappearances.

**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; there were limited reports of abuse carried out by government officials. There were also reports that authorities kept some detainees, particularly those of interest in cases related to state security, in solitary confinement while in prison.

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. On appeal, courts typically reduced this sentence to imprisonment or a fine. There were no reports of authorities carrying out flogging sentences during the year.

**Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Aside from the Deportation Detention Center (DDC), prison conditions generally met international standards. The state-sponsored National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) criticized the DDC facilities as “extremely crowded, which affects hygiene and safety standards.”

Physical Conditions: Human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) criticized overcrowding in the DDC. In its 2014 report, the NHRC noted overcrowding may have resulted in the death of five prisoners following a September 2014 fire at the DDC, and prisoners reported a “hostile and tense atmosphere” among detainees.

Separate facilities existed for men and women, pretrial detainees, convicted prisoners, and juveniles and adults. The Ministry of Social Affairs has authority over juvenile detainees. It held an average of five or six juveniles at any given time, separately and under the supervision of a government social worker. Conditions for female prisoners were the same as those for men.

Authorities imprisoned women convicted for pregnancy out of wedlock; once born, their children stayed with their mothers. Rights groups reported satisfactory conditions for women and their children in the Central Prison but criticized overcrowding in the DDC. In March, Amnesty International registered concern about availability of mental health services for female detainees as well as services for pregnant women.

Some reports from 2014 characterized the legal process for some foreign detainees as opaque and fraught with complications stemming from language barriers. Detainees complained of a lack of translation and interpretation and inconsistencies in access to legal counsel.

Administration: Prisoners and detainees generally had access to visitors, although prison officials at the state security prison limited access to family and legal counsel. Authorities stated that they investigated prisoner and detainee allegations of inhuman treatment but did not make the results public. By law there is no role for ombudsmen to serve on behalf of 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 occasionally provided foreign diplomats access to state security prisoners at separate locations and did so during the year. Representatives from the NHRC conducted regular visits to all facilities.

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

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions. There were isolated reports, however, that authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained individuals. Authorities detained several human rights investigators and international journalists on trespassing charges while conducting research on labor accommodations. Those detained alleged these detentions were arbitrary and intended to interfere with their investigations.

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, however, 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 also reports that authorities delayed deportations up to 10 months in cases where detainees had to resolve financial delinquencies before being allowed to depart the country.

### **Role of the Police and Security Apparatus**

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police under the Ministry of Interior and state security forces, and the government employed effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. There were no reports of impunity of the security forces.

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

Criminal law requires that persons be apprehended openly with warrants based on sufficient evidence and issued by a duly authorized official, be charged within 24 hours, and be brought before a court without undue delay, although the law empowers the judge investigating the case to extend the total detention period to six months before the case goes to court. The state security service can arrest and detain suspects for up to 30 days without referring them to the public prosecutor.

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 approval of the prime minister, who can 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 can extend a detention indefinitely with review every six months.

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 citizens bail than noncitizens. Noncitizens charged with minor crimes may be released to their citizen sponsor, although they cannot leave the country until the case is resolved.

By law in nonsecurity-related cases, the accused is entitled to legal representation throughout the process and prompt access to family members. There are provisions for state-funded legal counsel for indigent prisoners in criminal cases, and authorities generally honored this requirement. Authorities generally 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. The NHRC reported it had evidence that authorities did not refer some individuals arrested under the Protection of Society Law to the public prosecutor.

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 can 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 followed these procedures differently for citizens than noncitizens.

Arbitrary Arrest: The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and, with few exceptions, the government observed these prohibitions.

Pretrial Detention: With few exceptions, nearly all suspected criminals go to trial within a month of arrest.

Amnesty: During Ramadan and on National Day, the emir granted amnesty to a number of prisoners, including at least 90 noncitizens.

#### **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. Approximately 55 percent of the judges were foreign citizens dependent on residency permits. 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. Some employers filed successful deportation requests against employees who had pending lawsuits against them, thus denying those employees the right to a fair trial. After visiting the country in January, the UN special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers expressed concern on the government's "interference" in judicial procedures, particularly in cases involving high-profile individuals or businesses, as well as violations of due process and the failure of the judiciary to meet international fair trial standards.

### **Trial Procedures**

The law provides for the right to a fair 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. According to a 2014 NHRC report, in some cases authorities did not adequately inform foreign detainees of charges pending against them, did not always provide access to legal counsel, and did not always offer interpreters who spoke the detainee's language. Judges give verdicts, and trials are open to the public, but the presiding judge can close the courtroom to the public if the case is deemed sensitive.

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. 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 at all.

Defense attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases once the government files the case in court. Defendants have the right to confront and question witnesses against them and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. 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, and 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**

There are civil remedies 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.

### **f. Arbitrary 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, e-mails, and social media posts. The government prohibits membership in political organizations.

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

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:**

### **a. Freedom of Speech and 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 Speech and Expression: Citizens did not discuss sensitive political and religious issues in public forums, but these issues were discussed in private and on social media. The law prohibits residents from criticizing the emir. Members of the majority foreign population censored themselves publicly on sensitive topics. In November the government issued a law increasing penalties for 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. A 2013 law criminalizes the use of the national flag without formal permission from the authorities, displaying a damaged or discolored flag, or changing the flag by adding photographs, text, or designs to it.

Press and Media Freedoms: The law provides for restrictive procedures on the establishment of newspapers, closure, and confiscation of assets of a publication. It also criminalizes libel and slander, including injury to dignity. In 2013 the government-funded Doha Center for Media Freedom published a report asserting that the law “notably restricted” the press corps and that newspapers and radio and television stations were “strongly aligned” with the government.

Members of the ruling family or proprietors who enjoyed close ties to government officials owned all print media. Both private and state-owned television and radio reflected government views; they generally did not criticize authorities or the country's policies or foreign policy. 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. Reporting on labor issues continued to be controlled and handled as politically sensitive; several international journalists claimed to have been detained and questioned by authorities after visiting a labor site without government authorization. The Government Communications Office had invited these and other international journalists on a tour of newly renovated labor sites.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Journalists and publishers continued to self-censor due to political and economic pressures when reporting on government policies or material deemed hostile to Islam, the ruling family, and relations with neighboring states. The Qatar Media Corporation, the Ministry of Culture, 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. In August local columnist Muhsin al-Hajiri claimed that local media refused to publish an opinion piece critical of Gulf Cooperation Council politicians' relations with Iran. The article was later published online with no negative consequences.



Libel/Slander Laws: Laws restrict the publication of information that could incite the overthrow of the regime, abuse the regime, or harm supreme state interests; slander the emir or heir apparent; report official secret agreements; ridicule or express contempt for one of the Abrahamic faiths; 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.

National Security: In some cases courts ordered news outlets to refrain from covering high-profile trials.

### **Internet Freedom**

In 2014 the government approved a new cybercrime law that severely limits online expression. The maximum punishments are up to three years in prison and a fine of QAR 500,000 (\$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. Amnesty International assessed this law to pose a serious threat to freedom of expression. In October media reported that a noncitizen was convicted in absentia and sentenced to a six-month jail sentence and a QAR 20,000 (\$5,500) fine for insulting her landlord on a social media messaging platform.

The law requires internet service providers to block objectionable content based on a request from judicial entities. Internet providers are also 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, e-mail, and chat rooms. A user 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 Information and Communications Technologies is responsible for monitoring and censoring objectionable content on the internet.

### **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 some government restrictions on cultural events, although 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. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

### **Freedom of Assembly**

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly, but this right is restricted by legislation, including the General Assembly and Demonstration Law and the Associations and Private Institutions Law. Noncitizens are also exempt from the constitutional protections on freedom of assembly and association. Organizers for a public meeting must meet a number of restrictions and conditions and obtain approval from the Ministry of Interior to acquire a permit. In February authorities permitted a peaceful rally to take place in solidarity with three Muslim American students murdered in North Carolina. Media reports estimated approximately 1,000 residents attended the event. Religious groups are required to register with the government, and non-Abrahamic groups are barred from registration.

### **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. There were no reports of attempts to organize politically. There were no organized political parties, and authorities prohibited politically oriented associations. Twenty-six professional and private organizations existed. 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 Labor and Social Affairs, which can deny their establishment if it deems them a threat to the public interest.

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 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.

Professional societies must pay QAR 50,000 (\$13,750) in licensing fees, pay QAR 10,000 (\$2,750) in annual fees, and have QAR 10 million (\$2.75 million) in capital funds. Private institutions must also have QAR 10 million (\$2.75 million) in capital funds, but the Council of Ministers may waive this requirement. Registrations expire after three years; subsequently, 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/](http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/).

### **d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons**

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 Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees generally did not ask the government 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 souks (markets) continued to restrict access to certain areas to foreign workers on weekends. Police also limited foreign workers' access to National Day celebrations on the main thoroughfare along Doha's waterfront.

Foreign Travel: The government prevented the travel of its citizens only when they were involved in court cases in progress. The government's sponsorship system severely restricted foreign travel for noncitizens, which principally affected foreign workers. Courts could order travel bans for individuals in cases involving delinquent payments. All noncitizens require an exit permit from their employer to leave the country. Although the law provides an administrative procedure for obtaining an exit permit without an employer's approval, the process was burdensome. Foreign embassies and foreign citizen community leaders reported

that the process was ineffective, and they continued to receive requests to mediate disputes concerning exit permits between foreign workers and their sponsors.

In October the government issued a new law, to be implemented in late 2016, stating that the government must make a decision on whether to allow noncitizens to leave the country within 72 hours after an employee claims an employer failed to grant permission to leave. 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 the new law increases penalties for employers who continue this process, but foreign citizen 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. There were no reported cases of citizenship revocation during the year. According to a 2014 NHRC report, authorities failed to reinstate citizenship for some former Qataris who revoked their nationality and petitioned the government to return.

### **Protection of Refugees**

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 country is not a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees. The Syrian population numbered approximately 54,000, a number of whom were de facto refugees. The government provided housing and education to these de facto refugees.

### **Stateless Persons**

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

According to the NHRC, there were approximately 2,000 stateless bidoon residents in the country; in 2012 Human Rights Watch estimated the number at 1,200 to 1,500. They suffered some social discrimination. The bidoon were able to register for public services such as education and health care.

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 are reportedly capped at 50 per year. Restrictions and uneven application of the law prevented stateless persons from acquiring citizenship.

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

The constitution does not provide citizens the ability to choose their government through free and fair elections. In 2013 the former emir sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani issued a decree extending the term of the appointed advisory (“shura”) council by three years. The government did not allow the formation of political parties or opposition groups. The emir exercises full executive powers, including appointment of cabinet members. The shura council, whose members the emir appointed, plays an advisory role only.

The constitutional provisions for electing two-thirds of the body and initiation of legislation by the shura council remained unimplemented. The strong influence of family and conservative tribal traditions dampened support for democratic reform.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

Recent Elections: On May 13, citizens elected the 29 members of the fourth Central Municipal Council 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. There were an estimated 150,000 eligible voters and 21,735 registered voters. Of the voters who registered, 15,171 (69.8 percent) went to the polls.

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 or employees of the Ministry of Interior may not vote.

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.

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 communications and information technology, chair of the Qatar Foundation, vice president of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs (SCFA) with ministerial rank, head of the General Authority for Museums, permanent representative to the United Nations, ambassadors to Croatia and the Holy See, and president of Qatar University. Two women served on the Central Municipal Council, and there were three female judges on the Court of First Instance. 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 November the emir issued a new law increasing penalties for corrupt officials. Local media reported that the court system had prosecuted at least 14 cases of embezzlement during the year. In July the criminal court sentenced two senior officials to five years in prison for accepting QAR three million (\$824,000) in bribes.

Corruption: In November local press reported that courts had reviewed 14 cases of corruption and/or bribery cases, with the accused allegedly having embezzled QAR 4,885,564 (\$1.34 million). The cases included both Qatari citizens and noncitizens.

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

Public Access to Information: The law does not provide for public access to government information beyond the requirement that the government publish laws in the official gazette. Information on the government, such as the budget, expenditures, or draft laws, was generally not available.

#### **Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights**

Several quasi-governmental organizations are under a single entity, the Qatar Foundation for Protection and Social Rehabilitation (QFPSR), which is ultimately responsible to the legally designated founder, the emir's mother, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser al-Misnid. The NHRC remained a government-funded, quasi-independent human rights body outside the sphere of the QFPSR. These organizations

cooperated with the government, rarely criticized it (with the exception of the NHRC), and did not engage in political activity.

There were no NGOs focusing on human rights or humanitarian issues registered in the country.

Researchers from other NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch continued to visit and report on the country with limited interference from the authorities. Several NGO employees reported that authorities initially prevented them from entering the country before ultimately relenting and allowing them to continue their work.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The NHRC investigated local human rights conditions. The NHRC reported that it handled 1,609 petitions for assistance in 2014, 104 of which were from citizens and 1,505 from noncitizens. Petitions for assistance often concerned unpaid wages, employer sponsorship transfer issues, and other labor law complaints. The NHRC typically handled petitions by liaising with government institutions to ensure a timely resolution to disputes.

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

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, language, and religion, but it did not effectively enforce these prohibitions. The law does not prohibit discrimination based upon political opinion, national origin or citizenship, social origin, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, age, language, HIV-positive status or other disease status. Local custom outweighed government enforcement of nondiscrimination laws. Legal, cultural, and institutional discrimination existed against women, noncitizens, and foreign workers. The UN special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants reported salaries were sometimes calculated on the basis of nationality rather than experience or qualification levels.

### **Women**

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape, but not spousal rape. 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, but victims generally feared social stigma and underreported the crime. In March an appeals

court upheld the death sentence for Badr Hashim Khamis Abdullah al-Jaber, for the 2013 rape and murder of a British citizen.

There is no specific law criminalizing domestic violence. According to the NHRC, authorities may prosecute domestic violence as “general” violence under the criminal law. According to the QFPSR, rape and domestic violence against women continued to be a problem. There were neither arrests nor convictions for family domestic violence among citizens publicized in the press, although there were reports of cases involving noncitizens. Police maintained a women-only division that received in-person complaints freely but had limited access to homes. In 2014, 315 cases of domestic abuse against women were reported to the foundation. No data on sexual abuse was available from foreign embassies on abuses of their citizens in Qatar. In the past police treated domestic violence as a private family matter rather than a criminal matter. There was police and judicial reluctance to act.

Resources for female victims of violence were limited. The SCFA operated a shelter under the supervision of the QFPSR to accommodate abused women and children. The shelter provided a variety of services, including financial assistance, legal aid, and psychological counseling. The QFPSR also opened an office in the Attorney General’s Office to improve case coordination with the public prosecutor.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is illegal and carries penalties of imprisonment or fines. In some cases sponsors sexually harassed and mistreated foreign domestic servants. In a 2014 report, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed “deep concern” at the “high prevalence of domestic and sexual violence against women and girls, including women migrant domestic workers.” Most domestic servants did not press charges due to fear of losing their jobs. In 2014 the QFPSR reported 28 cases of sexual harassment. When the domestic employees brought harassment to the attention of authorities, the employees were occasionally deported, and the government did not file charges against the employer.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of government interference in the right of couples and individuals to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children; manage their reproductive health; and have access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. Non-married individuals who report unwanted pregnancies risk prosecution by authorities for extramarital sex. There was no government support for access to means of contraception, but contraceptives were freely available without a prescription at



major retailers. Licensed medical professionals attended mothers at birth, and maternal care was readily available.

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. The law requires five years of residency from the date of divorce before female citizens may obtain their housing entitlement. Women married to noncitizens or to bidoon must reside in the country with their husbands for five consecutive years before applying for the housing benefit.

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

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. The proportion that women inherit depends upon their relationship to the deceased; in the cases of siblings, 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 who are granted guardianship over their children by law receive their financial rights and associated right of residence.

Women may attend court proceedings and represent themselves, but a male relative generally represented them. In cases involving financial transactions, the testimony of two women equals that of one man.

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 the age of 18 years from traveling abroad.

According to the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in 2012 women constituted approximately 13 percent of business owners, mainly operating design companies, fashion establishments, training centers, and beauty centers. Women constituted 36 percent of the overall workforce but only 7 percent of senior officials and managers. Women served in the workforce as university professors, public school teachers, medical professionals, and police. Illiteracy among citizen women largely was eliminated, and women made up 83 percent of higher education students. Women typically received equal pay for equal work, but they often lacked access to decision-making positions. Men typically received more generous packages than women because of their positions. Married couples were limited to one benefits package for education and housing and almost always chose the more generous package.

There is 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 the age of 18 years or nine years of education, whichever comes first. Education is compulsory for noncitizen children, but they pay a nominal fee. Noncitizen residents on work visas generally must send their children to local private schools. 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. In 2014 the QFPSR reported that it received 249 cases involving abuse of children.

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 is very rare.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: There is no specific law establishing 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. There is no specific law prohibiting child pornography as all pornography is prohibited, but the law specifically criminalizes the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

The QFPSR conducted awareness campaigns on the rights of the child and maintained a special hotline in Arabic and English that allowed both citizen and noncitizen children to call with questions and concerns ranging from school, health, and psychological problems to sexual harassment. The hotline operated in conjunction with the family abuse hotline.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information see the Department of State's report on compliance at [travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html) and country-specific information at [travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/Qatar.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/country/Qatar.html).

### **Anti-Semitism**

The country does not have an indigenous Jewish community. On occasion some of the privately owned Arabic-language newspapers carried cartoons with offensive caricatures of Jews and Jewish symbols. These occurred primarily in the daily newspapers *al-Watan*, *al-Sharq*, *al-Arab*, and *al-Raya* and drew no government response. In February a Saudi imam who had regularly lectured in Qatar delivered an anti-Semitic sermon from the Grand Mosque. Following the incident, authorities denied the imam future engagements.

### **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://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, and other state services or other

areas. Information on whether there were patterns of abuse at education facilities, mental health facilities, or prisons was not available. The government is charged with acting on complaints from individuals and the NHRC and enforcing compliance (see section 7.d.).

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 SCFA is responsible for verifying compliance with the rights and provisions mandated under the law, but compliance was not effectively enforced.

### **National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities**

Legal and social discrimination against noncitizen workers was a problem. The government discriminated against noncitizens in employment, education, housing, religious affiliation, and health services. The special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants reported that migrant workers in the country were often seen as their employer's property rather than as human beings with human rights equal to those of citizens.

Noncitizens were required to pay for electricity, water, and some secondary and higher education (services provided without charge to citizens). Noncitizens were eligible for medical coverage at a nominal fee. Noncitizens generally could not own property, but the law provides for property ownership in three designated areas. Cultural, linguistic, and religious differences and divergent economic status accentuated social discrimination between citizens and migrant workers. Bidoon, or stateless persons, also experienced social discrimination.

### **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 subjected 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. The number of such cases before the courts during the year was unknown.

There were no public reports of violence against LGBTI persons. LGBTI individuals largely hid their sexual preferences in public due to an underlying pattern of discrimination toward LGBTI persons based on cultural and religious values prevalent in the society. 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, nor were there 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. Victims of such discrimination, however, were unlikely to come forth and complain because of the potential for further harassment or discrimination.

### **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

There was discrimination against HIV-infected patients. Authorities deported foreigners found to be HIV positive upon arrival; mandatory medical examinations required for residents diagnosed their conditions. 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 workers in private sector enterprises that have 100 citizen workers who are 18 years of age 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, and domestic workers, including persons working as 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.

For those few workers covered by the law protecting the right to collective bargaining, the government circumscribed the right to bargain collectively 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.

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

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 issues. 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 Labor and Social Affairs can mediate a solution.

The law requires Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs approval for worker organizations to affiliate with groups outside the country.

The government did not respect freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. 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 peacefully 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. In November local media reported that several hundred construction workers went on strike to protest unpaid wages. According to a global union federation representative, police mediated the dispute and ensured that workers could remain in their accommodations and were provided with food until the dispute was settled.

### **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 existence of the restrictive sponsorship system left some migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation. In October the government issued reforms to the kafala system. The new law allows employees to switch employers at the end of their contract, which can be up to five years, without the permission of their employer--a current driver of forced labor practices. 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; two cases each of forced labor and bonded labor were before courts in 2014. In October authorities announced that they had revoked the licenses of 15 manpower recruitment agencies for violating labor laws. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Interior, and 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. In 2014 the government received 119 complaints of "visa selling," a practice that contributed to potential forced labor conditions. The government prosecuted 62 of the complaints. Violators of visa selling were imprisoned for up to three years. To combat the problem of late and unpaid wages, in February the government issued a law mandating electronic payment to all employees subject to the labor law. By November 2, the government required all employers to open bank accounts for their employees and pay wages

electronically through a system subject to audits by a new inspection division at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Employers who failed to pay their workers faced penalties of QAR 2,000-6,000 (\$550-\$1,650) per employee per day 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, were refused exit permits, and worked under conditions to which they had not agreed. In 2014 worker delegates filed a complaint against the government alleging nonobservance of the forced labor convention. The case was pending at year's end.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://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 can work with parental or guardian permission. Minors may not work more than six hours a day or more than 36 hours a week. Employers must provide the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs with the names and occupations of their minor employees and obtain permission from the Ministry of 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 or 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 carry out 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 QAR 20,000 (\$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 law requires equal pay for equal work in the private sector. 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. The labor law and provisions for acceptable conditions of work do not apply to workers in the public sector, agriculture, or to domestic workers. Poverty among citizens was very low, and the government did not track poverty statistics among migrant workers.

Responsibility for laws related to acceptable conditions of work fell primarily to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs as well as the Ministry of Energy and Industry and the Ministry of Health. The government did not effectively enforce standards in all sectors; working conditions for citizens were generally adequate, as government agencies and the major private sector companies employing them generally followed relevant laws. Enforcement problems were in part due to insufficient training and lack of personnel. As of September 1, there were approximately 296 inspectors in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

The government took limited action to prevent violations and improve working conditions and claimed it resolved 68 percent of the 44,126 complaints filed by workers in the first half of the year. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs resolved 2,807 cases and referred 461 cases to the labor courts for judgment. The labor courts referred a limited number of labor complaints to the criminal courts, but statistics were not publicly available.

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 enacted. If a company did not remedy the violations, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs 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 QAR 3,000 (\$824) 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 reportedly blacklisted 1,555 firms as of August 1.

During the first half of the year, inspectors conducted 34,900 observations of work and labor housing sites. Inspectors found that 90 percent of companies complied with the administrative aspects of the law, such as timely payment of salaries and work regulations, and that 70 percent complied with safety standards. Violators faced penalties of up to QAR 6,000 (\$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. In November the government implemented the new Wage Protection System, a law mandating that employers pay their employees electronically to provide a digital audit trail for the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to inspect. Employers who failed to pay their workers faced penalties of QAR 2,000-6,000 (\$550-\$1,650) per employee per day 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, although 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. Reports from news outlets and human rights organizations, however, alleged that employers did not pay many workers for their overtime or annual

leave. Employers housed many unskilled foreign laborers in cramped, dirty, and hazardous conditions, often without running water, electricity, or adequate food. In May the government announced plans to build seven worker cities to house 258,000 laborers built to safe international accommodation standards, and in October it opened the first site to house up to 100,000 workers. 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 no effective means to redress grievances.

The consensus among international NGOs was 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 for fear of reprisals. The sponsorship law was widely considered the root of these violations. Under the country's sponsorship system, most employees cannot leave the country without permission and are prevented from switching jobs without a "no objection letter" from their employer. Employees leaving the country without such a letter are barred from reemployment in the country for two years. Under the new law, issued in October and set to be implemented in late 2016, employees will no longer be required to have a "no objection letter" to switch to a new employer at the end of their contracts, although they will need a letter to switch jobs during the course of an existing contract, which can be up to five years. Employees who have completed their contract will no longer be required to leave the country for two years before seeking reemployment.