

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES 2019 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven semiautonomous emirates with a resident population of approximately 9.4 million, of whom an estimated 11 percent are citizens. The rulers of the seven emirates constitute the Federal Supreme Council, the country's highest legislative and executive body. The council selects a president and a vice president from its membership, and the president appoints the prime minister and cabinet. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, ruler of Abu Dhabi emirate, is president, although Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi exercises most executive authority. The emirates are under patriarchal rule with political allegiance defined by loyalty to tribal leaders, leaders of the individual emirates, and leaders of the federation. A limited, appointed electorate participates in periodic elections for the partially elected Federal National Council (FNC), a consultative body that examines, reviews, and recommends changes to legislation and may discuss topics for legislation. The last election was in October, when appointed voters elected 20 FNC members. Citizens may express their concerns directly to their leaders through traditional consultative mechanisms such as the open majlis (forum).

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. Each emirate maintained a local police force called a general directorate, which was officially a branch of the federal Ministry of Interior. All emirate-level general directorates of police enforced their respective emirate's laws autonomously. They also enforced federal laws within their emirate in coordination with each other under the federal ministry. The federal government maintained federal armed forces under the Ministry of Defense for external security.

Significant human rights issues included allegations of torture in detention; arbitrary arrest and detention, including incommunicado detention, by government agents; political prisoners; government interference with privacy rights; undue restrictions on free expression and the press, including criminalization of libel, censorship, and internet site blocking; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; the inability of citizens to choose their government in free and fair elections; and criminalization of same sex sexual activity, although no cases were publicly reported during the year. The government did not permit workers to join independent unions and did not effectively prevent physical and sexual abuse of foreign domestic servants and other migrant workers.

The government investigated, prosecuted, and punished officials who committed abuses. There were no public reports of impunity involving officials, but there was also no publicly available information on whether authorities investigated complaints of police abuses, including prison conditions and mistreatment.

The United Nations, human rights groups, and others alleged UAE military operations as part of the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen killed civilians, damaged civilian infrastructure, and obstructed delivery of humanitarian aid. Human rights groups alleged UAE-backed security forces in Yemen committed torture, sexual assault, and mistreatment against detainees. The government rejected allegations that members of its security forces serving in Yemen had committed human rights abuses, and there was no publicly available information on whether the government carried out any investigations into these reported incidents.

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 the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

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

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

The constitution prohibits such practices, but there were some reports of occurrences during the year. Based on reports of released prisoners and their family members, diplomatic observers, and human rights organizations, UN human rights experts believed that some individuals imprisoned for suspected state security and nonstate security violations were subjected to torture or mistreatment. Human rights groups alleged these abuses took place during interrogations and as inducement for signed confessions. UN human rights experts and those released from detention in recent years alleged that authorities used techniques including beatings, forced standing, and threats to rape or kill, including by electrocution. In

some cases, judges ordered investigations, including medical examinations by state-appointed doctors, into allegations of torture or mistreatment.

According to the Gulf Center for Human Rights, during the year prison officials severely beat imprisoned human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor for protesting his prison conditions, leaving visible bruising on his face (see section 1.d., Pretrial Detention).

Sharia (Islamic) courts, which adjudicate criminal and family law cases, may impose flogging as punishment for adultery, prostitution, consensual premarital sex, pregnancy outside marriage, defamation of character, and drug or alcohol charges. Reports of flogging were rare and tended to be confined to only a few jurisdictions.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions varied widely among the individual emirates and between regular prisons, which housed those accused of nonpolitical crimes such as drug trafficking, money laundering, and killings, and state security detention facilities, which hold political activists or those the government defines to be terrorists. There were instances of overcrowding, long waits for health care access, and poor sanitary conditions.

Physical Conditions: The government did not release statistics on prison demographics and capacity. Diplomatic observers and UN human rights experts reported that, in Abu Dhabi, some prisoners complained of overcrowding, poor temperature control, retaliation for raising complaints to their embassies, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care.

There were reports that individuals within state security detention facilities were mistreated, abused, and tortured. Prisoners complained to Western diplomatic missions that they witnessed routine abuse of fellow prisoners, stating that prison guards claimed they were able to erase footage from security cameras.

There were reports of prisoner-on-prisoner violence that led to injury and death. There were also allegations of inmate suicide attempts.

Overcrowding was a major problem in Abu Dhabi, especially in drug units. In one example in 2018, prisoners complained that most detainees had to share beds or sleep on the concrete floor due to lack of mattresses.

According to Western diplomatic missions, overcrowding was at times a problem in prisons in Dubai and the northern Emirates. In particular, prisoners awaiting transfer to Abu Dhabi for federal prosecution experienced longer stays in police holding cells equipped only for short-term incarceration. In March, Dubai opened a new holding facility adjacent to Dubai Central Prison to alleviate overcrowding and provide a more suitable long-term holding facility for those in pre-sentence status for long periods. In addition, several procedural and judicial reforms were implemented in Dubai with the aim of reducing overcrowding. The Smart Bail initiative, jointly piloted by Dubai Police and Dubai Public Prosecution, allowed those charged with misdemeanors and some minor financial crimes to obtain bail online without being incarcerated.

Some prisoners were not permitted exercise or reading materials. There were reports some prisoners did not have access to outside areas and exposure to sunlight. In Abu Dhabi there were also reports of dangerously hot conditions when air conditioners broke during periods of extreme high temperatures.

While medical care was generally adequate in regular prisons, HIV-positive detainees who were not citizens reported not being given regular and uninterrupted access to lifesaving antiretroviral treatment, and to other forms of discrimination, such as being held in segregated units. Other prisoners reported delays of up to six weeks in receiving medical treatment and difficulty obtaining necessary medication, including insulin for diabetics. There were reports of insects in food, poor food handling, and inadequate general hygiene in special detention facilities for drug offenders. Media reports and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) stated some detainees in State Security Department custody did not receive adequate access to medical care. In one instance, human rights groups and the UN claimed the government failed to provide adequate medical care to Alia Abdulnoor, a terminally ill detainee arrested and charged with financing terrorism after raising funds for Syrian refugees. Abdulnoor died in police custody in May.

According to UN experts, imprisoned human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor was allegedly being held in prolonged solitary confinement at al-Sadr prison in Abu Dhabi with no bed or water in his cell and with no access to a shower.

Prisons attempted to accommodate persons with disabilities based on their specific needs, such as placing wheelchair users on a lower floor. Some reports alleged inconsistencies in providing support for prisoners with mental disabilities. In Dubai and to some extent in Abu Dhabi, prison officials worked with mental health

professionals to provide support and administer needed medication. Training and capabilities to accommodate prisoners with mental health disabilities were allegedly less well developed in the other emirates. It was reportedly common for authorities to grant a humanitarian pardon in cases where a person with a disability had been convicted of a minor offense.

Within prisons the authorities required Muslims to attend weekly Islamic services, and non-Muslims reported some pressure to attend ostensibly nonmandatory lectures and classes about Islam. In some of the emirates, Christian clergy were not able to visit Christian prisoners.

Administration: Some state security detainees did not have access to visitors or had more limited access than other prisoners. Although prisoners had a right to submit complaints to judicial authorities, details about investigations into complaints were not publicly available, and there were no independent authorities to investigate allegations of poor conditions. Inmates reported retaliation from authorities after raising issues about prison conditions with diplomatic missions. There was also no publicly available information on whether authorities investigated complaints about prison conditions. Dubai maintained a website where individuals could obtain basic information about pending legal cases, including formal charges and upcoming court dates. Western embassies reported a similar website in Abu Dhabi but said, in many instances, cases could not be located in the system or the site would not function. There were standard weekly visiting hours in regular prisons, but unmarried and unrelated visitors of the opposite sex had to receive permission from a prosecutor.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted charitable NGOs to visit prisons and provide material support on a limited basis. Members of the government-sanctioned Emirates Human Rights Association (EHRA) met with prisoners during regular visits to detention facilities and reported their findings to federal Ministry of Interior officials. Their reports were not publicly available. Authorities did not grant regular consular access for State Security Department detainees.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. The government, however, reportedly often held persons in custody for extended periods without charge or a preliminary judicial hearing. The law permits indefinite detention, including incommunicado detention, without appeal. In some cases, authorities did

not allow detainees contact with attorneys, family members, or others for indefinite or unspecified periods. Some detainees reported being monitored during meetings with family members and consular officials, as well as being prevented from discussing their cases or detention conditions.

In cases of foreign nationals detained by police, which in view of the country's demographic breakdown were the vast majority of cases, the government often did not notify the appropriate diplomatic missions. For state security detainees, notification was exceptionally rare, and information about the status of these detainees was very limited.

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

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), during the year authorities continued to hold two activists who completed their sentences in 2017. Khalifa al-Rabea and Ahmad al-Mulla were charged with joining a secret organization. Both activists were affiliated with al-Islah, a Muslim Brotherhood affiliated organization designated by the government as a terrorist organization.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Police stations received complaints from the public, made arrests, and forwarded cases to the public prosecutor. The public prosecutor then transferred cases to the courts. The law prohibits arrest or search of citizens without probable cause. Within 48 hours police must report an arrest to the public prosecutor, and police usually adhered to the deadline. The public prosecutor must then question the accused within 24 hours of initial arrest. Authorities did not consistently provide consular notification for arrests.

Police investigations can regularly take up to three months, during which time detainees are often publicly unaccounted. The law requires prosecutors to submit charges to a court within 14 days of police report and to inform detainees of the charges against them. Judges may grant extensions to prosecutors, sometimes resulting in extended periods of detention without formal charges. Multiple detainees complained that authorities did not inform them of the charges or other details of their case for months at a time. Noncitizen detainees reported that when

the prosecutor presented the charges, they were written in Arabic with no translation, and no translator was provided. There were also reports of authorities pressuring or forcing detainees to sign documents before they were allowed to see attorneys.

Public prosecutors may order detainees held as long as 21 days without charge and this can be extended by court order. Judges may not grant an extension of more than 30 days of detention without charge; however, with charge, they may renew 30-day extensions indefinitely. As a result, pretrial detention sometimes exceeded the maximum sentence for the crime charged. Public prosecutors may hold suspects in terrorism-related cases without charge for six months. Once authorities charge a suspect with terrorism, the Federal Supreme Court may extend the detention indefinitely. Diplomatic sources reported detentions of more than two years without charges for crimes not related to state security.

Authorities may temporarily release detainees who deposit money, a passport, or an unsecured personal promissory statement signed by a third party. In November 2018 Dubai authorities announced that a pilot program to use electronic travel bans in lieu of confiscating the passports of defendants released on bail was expanded to all Dubai police stations. However, law enforcement officials still routinely held detainees' passports until sentencing. Authorities may deny pretrial release to defendants in cases involving loss of life, including involuntary manslaughter. Authorities released some prisoners detained on charges related to a person's death after the prisoners completed *diya* (blood money) payments. Once an accused is found guilty of death under criminal procedure, judges may grant *diya* payments as compensation to the victim's family in an amount determined to be in accordance with sharia. In July an Abu Dhabi court upheld a lower court's ruling awarding a 200,000 UAE Dirham (\$54,447) *diya* payment to the family of an electrician who died while working at a construction site.

A defendant is entitled to an attorney after authorities complete their investigation. Authorities sometimes questioned the accused for weeks without permitting access to an attorney. The government may provide counsel at its discretion to indigent defendants charged with felonies punishable by provisional imprisonment. The law requires the government to provide counsel in cases in which indigent defendants face punishments of life imprisonment or the death penalty.

Authorities held some persons incommunicado, particularly in cases involving state security.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were reports the government carried out arrests without informing the individual of the charge, notably in cases of alleged violations of state security regulations. In these cases, authorities did not give notice to the individual or to family members regarding the subject of the inquiry or arrest.

Pretrial Detention: Lengthy pretrial detention occurred, especially in cases involving state security. The speed with which these cases were brought to trial increased, as it did the previous year, with a higher number of State Security Court acquittals and convictions in comparison with recent years. In May the Ras al-Khaimah and Abu Dhabi emirates announced the process of electronically tagging low risk offenders, including prisoners on parole or defendants facing trial, as an alternative to pretrial detention and imprisonment. There was no estimate available of the percentage of the prison population in pretrial status. In December 2018 the State Security Court at the Federal Supreme Court upheld a 10-year prison sentence and fine of one million AED (\$272,000) issued in May 2018 against citizen and human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor. Mansoor spent more than a year in pretrial detention leading to the initial verdict. Mansoor was convicted under the cybercrime law of insulting the “status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols” and of seeking to damage the country’s relationship with its neighbors by publishing false information on social media. According to human rights organizations, Mansoor was held in solitary confinement without access to lawyers and granted only a limited number of family visits. Mansoor remained in prison at year’s end.

Detainee’s Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: There were reports authorities sometimes delayed or limited an individual’s access to an attorney and did not give prompt court appearances or afford consular notification, both for the average prisoner and in state security cases. There were no reports of courts finding individuals to have been unlawfully detained and eligible for compensation. Diplomatic observers reported that this was a particular problem for foreign residents who were vulnerable to loss of job, home, and accrual of debt due to unlawful detention.

In May the UAE Federal Court issued a verdict in the case of eight Lebanese men, sentencing one to life in prison, two to 10 years and acquitting five others on terrorism charges. According to Amnesty International, the trial was marred by lack of due process. The eight men were allegedly held in solitary confinement for over a year and denied access to lawyers during the pre-trial interrogation and investigation phase. Once the trial began, Amnesty International alleged the

defendants were not allowed to meet with their lawyers outside of court, and several of the men claimed that they had been tortured to sign confessions.

Osama al-Najjar, convicted in 2014 of making unlawful postings on social media and having links to al-Islah, was scheduled to be released in March 2017 after completing a three-year prison sentence and paying a 500,000 AED (\$136,000) fine. The Federal Supreme Court, however, issued an order in 2017 to keep him in detention on grounds that he still represented a danger to society and required additional “guidance.” In August President Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan pardoned and ordered the release of al-Najjar and two other detainees after they condemned and renounced their membership in al-Islah.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, court decisions remained subject to review by the political leadership. Authorities often treated noncitizens differently from citizens. The judiciary consisted largely of contracted foreign nationals subject to potential deportation, further compromising its independence from the government.

Trial Procedures

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

The law presumes all defendants innocent until proven guilty. By law a defendant enjoys the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges. The law requires all court proceedings be conducted in Arabic. Despite the defendant’s procedural right to an interpreter, there were reports authorities did not always provide an interpreter or that quality was sometimes poor. In February the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department announced that Hindi would be an official language used in the Abu Dhabi court system, alongside English and Arabic. In October it announced a new pilot digital platform that will issue translation of judgements in English, Hindi, Filipino, Russian, and Urdu.

Defendants’ rights were circumscribed in national security cases or cases the judge deemed harmful to public morality. Defendants have the right to be present at their trials and have a right to legal counsel in court for cases that carry punishment other than a fine. While awaiting a decision on official charges at a police station or the prosecutor’s office, a defendant is not entitled to legal counsel. In cases

involving a capital crime or possible life imprisonment, the defendant has a right to government-provided counsel after charges have been filed. The government may also provide counsel, at its discretion, to indigent defendants charged with felonies punishable by provisional imprisonment. The law provides prosecutors discretion to bar defense counsel from any investigation. Defendants and their attorneys may present witnesses and question witnesses against them. Defendants may not be compelled to testify or confess. Some defendants said they did not have adequate time to prepare a defense, sometimes due to limited phone access, and requested additional time. Diplomatic observers noted cases where the time defendants spent waiting for a court date surpassed the maximum sentence for the crime. Verdicts were announced in open court, even if the case was heard in a closed session.

Both local and federal courts have an appeals process. The appeals process consists of up to two stages: Appeals are first heard by each emirate's court of appeals and can be escalated to a higher court if necessary. In Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Ras al-Khaimah, appeals are escalated to the respective emirate's court of cassation. For those emirates which lack a court of cassation (Ajman, Sharjah, Umm al Quwain, and Fujairah), appeals are escalated to the Federal Supreme Court in Abu Dhabi. Convicted defendants may also appeal death sentences to the ruler of the emirate in which the offense was committed or to the president of the federation. In murder cases, the victim's family must consent to commute a death sentence. The government normally negotiated with victims' families for the defendant to offer diya payments, compensation in accordance with sharia, in exchange for forgiveness and a commuted death sentence. The prosecutor may appeal acquittals and provide new or additional evidence to a higher court. An appellate court must reach unanimous agreement to overturn an acquittal.

In state security cases, the Federal Court of Appeals serves as a court of first instance. State security cases may be appealed to the higher Federal Supreme Court.

In May President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan issued a pardon for former leader of al-Islah, Abdulrahman bin Subaih, accused of plotting to overthrow the government in 2013. Bin Subaih was convicted in absentia and sentenced to 15 years in prison before being arrested in Indonesia and extradited to the UAE in 2015. Prior to his release, bin Subaih appeared on local television condemning al-Islah and Qatari attempts at utilizing the group to destabilize domestic politics.

When authorities suspected a foreigner of crimes of "moral turpitude," authorities sometimes deported the individual without recourse to the criminal justice system.

At the judge's discretion, foreigners charged with crimes may be granted bail and allowed to remain in the country to defend themselves.

The penal code also requires all individuals to pay diya to victims' families in cases where accidents or crimes caused the death of another person, and media reported multiple cases of courts imposing this punishment. Diya was granted by the judge in criminal cases at the time of sentencing. Standard diya for the death of a man was 200,000 AED (\$54,500) and 100,000 AED (\$27,225) for the death of a woman. In some cases, sharia courts imposed more severe penalties during the month of Ramadan.

Women faced legal discrimination because of the government's interpretation of sharia (see section 6).

Political Prisoners and Detainees

During the year there were reports of persons held incommunicado and without charge because of their political views or affiliations, which often involved alleged links to Islamist organizations. Since 2011 the government has restricted the activities of organizations and individuals allegedly associated with al-Islah, a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate and government-designated terrorist organization, and others critical of the government. Similar restrictions were placed on Osama al-Najjar (see section 1.d.).

As part of its security and counterterrorism efforts, the government applied restrictive laws--such as the 2014 antiterrorism law and the 2012 cybercrimes law--and monitored and blocked activities, including the use of the internet and social media. Numerous observers criticized these laws as extending beyond security concerns by also outlawing activities and speech of a political nature.

During the year human rights organizations called for the government to release Mohammed al-Roken. Al-Roken is a lawyer, academic and human rights defender, who authorities allegedly arbitrarily detained in 2012.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Citizens and noncitizens had access to the courts to seek damages for, or cessation of, human rights violations. The civil courts, like all courts, lacked full independence. In some cases, courts delayed proceedings.

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

The constitution prohibits entry into a home without the owner's permission, except when police present a lawful warrant. Officers' actions in searching premises were subject to review by the Ministry of Interior, and officers were subject to disciplinary action if authorities judged their actions irresponsible.

The constitution provides for free and confidential correspondence by mail, telegram, and all other means of communication. There were reports, however, that the government monitored and, in some cases, censored incoming international mail, wiretapped telephones, and monitored outgoing mail and electronic forms of communication without following appropriate legal procedures. According to media reports, the government has engaged in systematic campaigns to target journalists and activists using spyware and hackers. Some of those whom the government reportedly targeted in online surveillance campaigns, such as the human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor, were subsequently arrested and allegedly abused in detention (see also section 2.a., Internet Freedom).

Local interpretation of sharia prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims and Muslim men from marrying women "not of the book," generally meaning adherents of religions other than Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

The country employs judicial supervision for individuals considered at risk from relatives threatening to commit honor crimes against or otherwise harming them. Judicial supervision typically included providing housing to individuals for their safety and well-being and family mediation and reconciliation.

g. Abuses in Internal Conflict

In 2015, in response to a request from Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi for Arab League/Gulf Cooperation Council military intervention, Saudi officials announced the formation of a Coalition to counter the 2014 overthrow of the legitimate government in Yemen by militias of the Ansar Allah movement (also known colloquially as "Houthis") and forces loyal to former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh. The Saudi-led Coalition, which included the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Senegal for part or all of the year, conducted air and ground operations. UAE forces continued an active military role in Yemen, including conducting ground operations along the western coast and in and around Hudaydah city early in the year, and against al-

Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State in southern Yemen throughout the year. In July the government announced plans to withdraw its military forces in Yemen, which it largely had completed by year's end.

Killings: The UN, NGOs such as HRW and Amnesty International, and some Yemeni sources voiced concerns about Coalition activities in Yemen, alleging some Saudi-led Coalition air strikes have been disproportionate or indiscriminate, and appeared not to sufficiently minimize impact on civilians.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: The UN Panel of Experts and Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (Group of Experts), human rights organizations, and some press reports alleged that UAE and UAE-supported local Yemeni forces abducted, arbitrarily detained, and tortured individuals as part of counterterrorism efforts in southern Yemen. In their September report, the UN Group of Experts reported to have found reasonable ground to believe that the UAE and affiliated Security Belt Forces were responsible for at least 10 killings.

The UN Group of Experts released a September report stating it had investigated individual cases of allegations of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, rape, and other mistreatment involving UAE and UAE-backed forces from September 2014 through June 2019. Media sources and human rights organizations continued to publish articles and reports alleging torture in UAE-controlled secret prisons in Yemen, with Yemeni guards working under the direction of Emirati officers, and prisoners being held without charge or trial. Reports alleged that those prisoners were subjected to sexual violence, electric shocks, and beatings. The UAE government denied that it maintained any secret prisons in Yemen or that it tortured prisoners.

In July the Mwatana Organization for Human Rights, a Yemen-based independent human rights organization focusing on the human rights situation in Yemen, reported on alleged violations by Emirati, Saudi, and Yemeni parties to the conflict, including indiscriminate air and ground attacks against civilians and medical facilities, and the obstruction of humanitarian access and supplies.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: International humanitarian organizations said Saudi-led Coalition actions in Yemen, continued to hamper their ability to respond to the crisis, impeded the import of necessary food and fuel, and slowed the delivery of aid. In order to facilitate commercial cargo flows into Yemeni Red Sea Ports, Coalition officers carried out an inspection and approval regime coordinated with the UN via the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for

Yemen and the Saudi-led Coalition's Evacuation and Humanitarian Operations Committee (EHOC). During some periods, EHOC has barred fuel and some categories of materials, including those provided by humanitarian relief agencies, from entering the key Houthi-held Yemeni port of Hudaydah. The Mwatana Organization of Human Rights cited incidents of obstruction of humanitarian access and humanitarian supplies to include attacks on relief supplies and water projects.

For additional details see the Department of State's *Country Report on Human Rights* for Yemen.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press. However, the law prohibits criticism of national rulers and speech that may create or encourage social unrest. The government restricted freedom of speech and press. The media conformed to unpublished government guidelines. Editors and journalists are aware of government "red lines" for acceptable media content, enshrined in federal libel and slander laws. On other socially sensitive issues, they commonly practice self-censorship.

Freedom of Expression: After the onset of widespread regional turmoil in 2011, authorities severely restricted public criticism of the government and individual ministers. The government continued to make arrests or impose other restrictions for speech related to and in support of Islamist political activities, calls for democratic reforms, criticism of or perceived insults against the government and government institutions, and, in rarer cases, criticism of individuals. In November 2018 the Supreme Court ruled that both online verbal and written insults are a prosecutable offense.

In other cases, authorities brought individuals to trial for posting material on social media platforms. The material was considered a violation of privacy or personally insulting to acquaintances, colleagues, employers, or religions. In April Dubai police arrested a man for allegedly publishing a video on social media that mocked the traditional dress of Emiratis.

After the government severed diplomatic ties with Qatar in 2017, the General Prosecutor declared that showing any sympathy with Qatar or objecting to the

government's position against Qatar in written, visual, or verbal form, would be punishable by three to 15 years in prison or a minimum fine of 500,000 AED (\$136,000). These restrictions continued to apply to social media users in the country. The government continued to block Qatari-funded *al-Jazeera's* website and most Qatari broadcasting channels. During the year there were no confirmed arrests under the declaration.

Press and Media, Including Online Media: International NGOs categorized the press, both in print and online, as not free. Except for regional media outlets located in Dubai and Abu Dhabi's free trade zones, the government owned most newspapers, television stations, and radio stations. Journalists reported the government maintains unpublished guidelines for acceptable media content. The government also influenced privately owned media through the National Media Council (NMC), which directly oversaw all media content. Satellite-receiving dishes were widespread and provided access to uncensored international broadcasts. In 2018 the NMC issued regulations for electronic media, including rules for publishing and selling advertising, print, video, and audio material. The regulations required those benefitting monetarily from social media advertising to purchase a license from the NMC.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: By law the NMC, whose chair the president appoints, licenses and censors all publications, including private association publications. In practice, domestic and foreign publications were censored to remove criticism of the government, ruling families, or friendly governments. Censorship also extends to statements that "threaten social stability," and materials considered pornographic, excessively violent, derogatory to Islam, or supportive of certain Israeli government positions. In July Ajman authorities referred a resident to the Ajman criminal court for insulting Islam during a family gathering. The law also criminalizes as blasphemy acts that provoke religious hatred or insult religious convictions through any form of expression, including broadcasting, printed media, or the internet. Government and private institutions must obtain a license before publishing or broadcasting media or advertising content, or face penalties. This applies to any media or advertising activity and to any person or entity that issues any type of publication, including clubs, associations, diplomatic missions, foreign centers, and movie theaters.

Government officials reportedly warned journalists when they published or broadcast material deemed politically or culturally sensitive. Editors and journalists commonly practiced self-censorship due to fear of government retribution, particularly as most journalists were foreign nationals and could be

deported. Authorities did not allow some books they viewed as critical of the government, Islam, and local culture, as well as books that supported the Muslim Brotherhood or its ideology.

Libel/Slander Laws: The government used libel and slander laws to suppress criticism of its leaders and institutions. The law criminalizes acts that defame others online or through information technology, including communication applications such as WhatsApp. In February a British woman was fined 10,000 AED (\$2,722) and ordered deported by the Criminal Court of Ajman on defamation charges when she insulted her former husband on WhatsApp and Facebook years prior.

Those convicted of libel face up to two years in prison. The maximum penalty for libel against the family of a public official is three years in prison.

National Security: Authorities often cited the need to protect national security as the basis for laws that curb criticism of the government or expression of dissenting political views. For example, the country's cybercrime laws include broad limitations on using electronic means to promote disorder or "damage national unity." Human rights groups criticized these laws for excessively restricting freedom of speech, particularly in statements at the United Nations Human Rights Council in response to the country's most recent Universal Periodic Review.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted access to some websites and conducted widespread surveillance of social media, instant messaging services, and blogs with little to no judicial oversight. Authorities stated they could imprison individuals for misusing the internet. Self-censorship was apparent on social media, and there were reports the Ministry of Interior monitored internet use. There are numerous documented instances of online surveillance used to track dissidents in the UAE and abroad. This includes reports that the government has purchased spyware and employed foreign hackers in systematic campaigns to target activists and journalists.

In December the *New York Times* and other media outlets reported that the UAE government was utilizing the mobile messaging and voice-over-internet-protocol application "ToTok" to track the conversations, locations, calendars, and address books of its users. According to media reports, "ToTok" is affiliated with DarkMatter, an Abu-Dhabi cyber-intelligence firm. Although the UAE Telecommunications Regulatory Authority issued a response stating its

information security laws prohibit data breaches and unlawful interception, Google and Apple continued to block “ToTok” from their application stores through December.

The country’s two internet service providers, both linked to the government, used a proxy server to block materials deemed inconsistent with the country’s values, as defined by the Ministry of Interior. Blocked material included pornographic websites and a wide variety of other sites deemed indecent, such as those dealing with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) issues; Judaism and atheism; negative critiques of Islam; testimonies of former Muslims who converted to Christianity; gambling; promotion of illegal drug use; and postings that explained how to circumvent the proxy servers. International media sites, accessed using the country’s internet providers, contained filtered content. The government also blocked some sites containing content critical of ruling families in the UAE and other states in the region. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority was responsible for creating lists of blocked sites. Service providers did not have the authority to remove sites from blocked lists without government approval. The government also blocked most voice-over-internet-protocol applications. In 2017 the government blocked Skype and in January 2018 reportedly blocked an online petition protesting that move. The voice and video functions on WhatsApp and other voice-over-internet-protocols have also been blocked from use in country or with phone numbers registered in the country.

The Federal Public Prosecution for Information Technology Crimes investigated criminal cases involving use of information technology, including the use of the internet with the intent to damage public morals, the promotion of sinful behavior, insults to Islam and God, illegal collections of donations, trafficking in persons, calling for or abetting the breach of laws, and the organization of demonstrations.

The law explicitly criminalizes use of the internet to commit a wide variety of offenses and provides fines and prison terms for internet users who violate political, social, and religious norms. The law provides penalties for using the internet to oppose Islam; to proselytize Muslims; to abuse a holy shrine or ritual of any religion; to insult any religion, belief, sect, race, color, or ethnic group; to incite someone to commit sin; or to contravene family values by publishing news or photographs pertaining to a person’s private life or family.

The 2012 cybercrimes decree and the 2015 Antidiscrimination Law provide for more severe penalties for violations, including sentences up to life imprisonment and fines depending on severity and seriousness of the crime. In August 2018 the

penalties for violating the cybercrimes law were strengthened, including an increase in the maximum fines to four million AED (\$1,089,000). These laws added to existing online communication limitations on freedom of speech to include prohibitions on criticism or defamation of the government or its officials; insults based on religion, belief, sect, race, color, or ethnic origin; insults directed at neighboring countries; and calls for protests and demonstrations. In April the Ras al-Khaimah police warned residents that posting or circulating “fake news” on social media was punishable by fines up to one million AED (\$272,000).

Dubai Police reported in May that they had received 9,000 cybercrime reports through the Dubai Police’s E-Crime platform since its launch in 2018. The NMC requires social media influencers who accept payment in money or high-value goods and services in return for endorsing products to join a social media management agency or obtain an e-commerce license for 30,000 AED (\$8,167) and a trade license, for which the price varies by emirate. In June the NMC warned that unlicensed paid social media influencers face a fine of 5,000 AED (\$1,361).

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted academic freedom, including speech both inside and outside the classroom by educators, and censored academic materials for schools. The government required official permission for conferences and submission of detailed information on proposed speakers and topics of discussion. This was also required at private schools for events on campus. Some organizations found it difficult to secure meeting space for public events that dealt with contentious issues.

Cultural institutions avoided displaying artwork or programming that criticized the government or religion. Self-censorship among cultural and other institutions, especially for content presented to the public, was pervasive and generally directed at preventing the appearance of illegal works, including those deemed as promoting blasphemy or addressing controversial political issues.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution provides for the freedoms of assembly and association, but the government did not always respect these rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The law provides limited freedom of assembly. The government imposed significant restrictions in practice.

The law requires a government-issued permit for organized public gatherings. Authorities dispersed impromptu protests such as labor strikes and at times arrested participants. While there was no uniform standard for the number of persons who could gather without a permit, civil society representatives in the past have reported authorities could ask groups of four or more to disperse if they did not have a permit. The government did not interfere routinely with informal, nonpolitical gatherings held without a government permit in public places unless there were complaints. The government generally permitted political gatherings that supported its policies. Hotels, citing government regulations, sometimes denied permission for groups such as unregistered religious organizations to rent space for meetings or religious services.

Freedom of Association

The law provides limited freedom of association. The government imposed significant restrictions on freedom of association in practice.

Political organizations, political parties, and trade unions are illegal. All associations and NGOs are required to register with the Ministry of Community Development (formerly Social Affairs), and many that did received government subsidies. Domestic NGOs registered with the ministry were mostly citizens' associations for economic, religious, social, cultural, athletic, and other purposes. Registration rules require that all voting organizational members, as well as boards of directors, must be local citizens. This requirement excluded almost 90 percent of the population from fully participating in such organizations. In Dubai volunteer organizations were required to register with the Community Development Authority (CDA) and were required to obtain approval from the CDA before conducting fundraising activities.

Associations must follow the government's censorship guidelines and receive prior government approval before publishing any material. In Abu Dhabi all exhibitions, conferences, and meetings require a permit from the Tourism and Culture Authority. To obtain a permit, the event organizer must submit identification documents for speakers along with speaker topics. The government denied permits if it did not approve of the topic or speaker. If the event or speaker continued without an approved permit, the government imposed fines.

In December UAE authorities detained and subsequently deported Serbian investigative journalist Stevan Dojcinovic at the Abu Dhabi International Airport after denying him entrance into the UAE, where he was scheduled to speak at the eighth session of the Conference of the State Parties to the UN Convention Against Corruption. According to Dojcinovic, UAE authorities said he was placed on a travel “black-list” by an undisclosed foreign government other than the UAE. Human rights organizations and foreign journalists linked the UAE government’s actions to Dojcinovic’s investigative reporting on corruption and the Serbian government’s ties to the UAE.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement

The law generally provided for freedom of internal movement, emigration, and repatriation. While the government generally respected these rights, it imposed certain legal restrictions on foreign travel. The lack of passports or other identity documents restricted the movement of stateless persons, both within the country and internationally. The government allowed the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations to provide protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

Foreign Travel: Authorities generally did not permit citizens and residents involved in legal disputes under adjudication and noncitizens under investigation to travel abroad. In addition, authorities sometimes arrested individuals with outstanding debts or legal cases while in transit through an airport.

At the sole discretion of emirate-level prosecutors, foreign nationals had their passports taken or travel restricted during criminal and civil investigations. Some individuals were also banned from foreign travel. These measures posed particular problems for noncitizen debtors, who in addition to being unable to leave the country, were usually unable to find work without a passport and valid residence permit, making it impossible to repay their debts or maintain legal residency. In some cases, family, friends, local religious organizations, or other concerned individuals helped pay the debt and enabled the indebted foreign national to depart

the country. According to media reports, the president pardoned 669 prisoners ahead of Eid al-Adha and pledged to settle financial obligations of released prisoners. Rulers across the emirates pardoned over 1,800 prisoners ahead of national day. In May a Dubai-based businessperson cleared the debts of 600 prisoners to honor the holy month of Ramadan.

Travel bans were placed on citizens and noncitizens. For example, citizens of interest for reasons of state security, including former political prisoners, encountered difficulties renewing official documents, resulting in implicit travel bans. Authorities did not lift travel bans until the completion of a case in the judicial system. In complex cases, particularly in the investigation of financial crimes, travel bans remained in place for three years or more. In January Dubai's Rental Dispute Center launched a smart system that allows rent defaulters with travel bans to settle their dues at the airport. Under the system, defaulters may present their case virtually to a judge and settle part of the amount owed prior to traveling.

In June the International Court of Justice rejected the UAE's request for immediate measures against Qatar, ruling that the rights claimed did not fall under the antidiscrimination treaty. The UAE requested that the court bring provisional measures against Qatar to include that Qatar stop its national bodies and its State-owned, controlled and funded media outlets from disseminating false accusations regarding the UAE. In 2017 the government and several other regional countries severed diplomatic ties with Qatar and enacted a blockade on air, sea, and land traffic to and from Qatar. Qatari citizens were given two weeks to leave the UAE and were banned from traveling to and transiting the UAE. Emirati citizens were banned from visiting or transiting through Qatar. The UAE Ministry of Interior established a hotline to assist blended Qatari-Emirati families, allowing them to remain in the UAE on a case-by-case basis.

Custom dictates that a husband may prevent his wife, minor children, and adult unmarried daughters from leaving the country by taking custody of their passports.

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

e. Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

UNHCR lacked formal legal status in the country separate from the UN Development Program. The government nevertheless worked with UNHCR on a case-by-case basis to address refugee issues. The government did not formally grant refugee status or asylum to aliens seeking protection, but it allowed some refugees to remain in the country temporarily on an individual basis. This nonpermanent status often presented administrative, financial, and social hardships, including the need frequently to renew visas and the inability to access basic services such as health care and education for children. In June 2018 the government announced that citizens of war-torn countries who were living in the UAE and had overstayed their visas would be permitted to apply from August 1 to October 31 of that year for a permit to legally remain in the UAE for one additional year. These applicants were also exempted from immigration fines. According to foreign observers, as of September the government had not issued instructions on how to extend the permits issued in August 2018, which expired in August 2019, or whether this would be allowed.

Refoulement: The family of Abudujilili Supi, a Uighur man from China legally residing in the UAE, reported to media that Supi was detained by local police in 2018 after he left afternoon prayers at the Abdullah bin Rawaha mosque in Sharjah. Supi's wife, who witnessed the arrest, was given no explanation why he was arrested. Supi called her from detention three days later informing her that he was told he would be forced to return to China involuntarily by UAE authorities. His whereabouts remained unknown. The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) addressed a letter to the government in January stating that the expected deportation to Pakistan of Rashid Hussain Brohi (see section 1.e.) "would appear to be in contravention of the principle of nonrefoulement."

According to Amnesty International and the WGEID, authorities arrested Rashid Hussain Brohi, a Pakistani activist in the Baloch National Movement, without a warrant. Reports claimed that Brohi, who fled to the country after allegedly receiving threats from Pakistani security forces, was held incommunicado from December 2018 until his deportation to Pakistan in June. The WGEID addressed a letter to the government in January stating that deportation of Brohi to Pakistan "would appear to be in contravention of the principle of nonrefoulement."

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had not established a transparent, codified system for

providing protection to refugees. While the government extended informal protection from return to refugees in some cases, any persons lacking legal residency status were technically subject to local laws on illegal immigrants, and authorities could detain them. In some cases, authorities confined individuals seeking protection at an airport to a specific section of the airport while they awaited resettlement in another country.

Employment: Access to employment was based on an individual's status as a legal resident, and persons with a claim to refugee status but who lacked legal residency status, including those with either short-term visitor visas or expired visas, were generally not eligible for employment.

Access to Basic Services: Access to education and other public services, including health care, is based on an individual's status as a legal resident. As a result, some families, particularly from Iraq and Syria, reportedly did not have access to healthcare or schools. The government provided or allowed access to some services on a case-by-case basis, often after the intervention of UNHCR representatives. Some hospitals were willing to see patients without the mandatory insurance but required full payment up front.

g. Stateless Persons

Informal estimates suggested 20,000 to 100,000 *Bidoon*, or persons without citizenship, resided in the country. Government statistics estimated the population at 10,000. Most *Bidoon* lacked citizenship because they did not have the preferred tribal affiliation used to determine citizenship when the country was established. Others entered the country legally or illegally in search of employment. Because children derive citizenship generally from the father, *Bidoon* children born within the country's territory remained stateless. Without passports or other forms of identification, the movement of *Bidoon* was restricted, both within the country and internationally. In recent years the government purchased a number of passports from Comoros and issued them to *Bidoon*. The documents conferred economic Comoran citizenship on the recipients and legalized their status in the UAE.

The government has a naturalization process, and individuals may apply for citizenship. Children of female citizens married to noncitizens do not acquire citizenship automatically at birth, but their mothers may obtain citizenship for the children after submitting an application, which a government committee reviews and generally accepts, once the child is 18 years old. A foreign woman may

receive citizenship after 10 years of marriage to a citizen. Anyone may receive a passport by presidential fiat.

The committee that reviews mothers' citizenship applications for their children also reviews citizenship applications from Bidoon who could satisfy certain legal conditions to be eligible for naturalization and subsequently could gain access to education, health care, and other public services. There were no reports, however, of stateless persons receiving Emirati citizenship.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law does not provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage. Federal executive and legislative power is in the hands of the Federal Supreme Council, a body composed of the hereditary rulers of the seven emirates. It selects from its members the country's president and vice president. Decisions at the federal level generally are by consensus among the rulers, their families, and other leading families. The ruling families, in consultation with other prominent tribal figures, also choose rulers of the emirates.

Citizens could express their concerns directly to their leaders through an open majlis, a traditional consultative mechanism. On occasion women attended a majlis. If a majlis was closed to women, men sometimes voiced concerns as proxies on behalf of women. In addition, authorities sometimes held a women-only majlis or a majlis focused specifically on women's issues.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: In October an appointed electorate of more than 330,000, representing just under a quarter of the total citizen population, elected 20 members of the Federal National Council (FNC), a 40-member consultative body with some legislative authority. The size of the electorate increased by approximately 50 percent from the 2015 election. Each emirate receives seats in the FNC based on population. In a nontransparent process, each emirate ruler appoints that emirate's portion of the other 20 FNC members. Approximately 35 percent of eligible voters participated, electing seven women to the council. In December 2018 the government decreed that women's representation in the FNC would be raised to 50 percent during the 2019 election cycle.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Citizens did not have the right to form political parties.

Participation of Women and Minorities: Although some traditional practices discouraged women from engaging in political life, no laws limit participation of women or members of minorities in the political process. The government prioritized women's participation in government. There were nine female ministers in the 31-member cabinet, an increase of two women from the previous cabinet, and 20 women in the FNC (seven elected).

Except in the judiciary and military, religious and racial minorities (including Shia) did not serve in senior federal positions. Many judges were contracted foreign nationals.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption.

Nepotism and conflict of interest in government appointments and contract allocations existed. The Ministries of the Interior and Justice and the state audit institutions are responsible for combating government corruption.

Corruption: In July the Ras al-Khaimah Criminal Court sentenced a government employee to six months in jail and a fine of 104,000 AED (\$28,312) for embezzling public funds and forging documents.

Authorities also prosecuted cases of police corruption. In July a Dubai police officer was charged with illegally arresting a victim, abetting a crime, and illegally providing official information after he arrested a visitor on behalf of a businessman who forced the detainee to sign a promissory note.

Financial Disclosure: There are no financial disclosure laws, regulations, or codes of conduct requiring officials to disclose their income and assets. The operating instructions for the FNC elections did require all candidates to disclose sources of funding for their campaigns.

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

The government generally did not permit domestic or international organizations to focus on domestic political or human rights issues.

The government directed, regulated, and subsidized participation by all NGO members in events outside the country. All participants had to obtain government permission before attending such events. The government also restricted entry to the country by members of international NGOs. The Antidiscrimination Law, which prohibits multiple forms of discrimination and criminalizes acts the government interprets as provoking religious hatred or insulting religion through any form of expression, provides a legal basis for restricting events such as conferences and seminars. The law also criminalizes the broadcasting, publication, and transmission of such material by any means, including audio/visual or print media, or via the internet, and prohibits conferences or meetings the government deems promote discrimination, discord, or hatred.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government did not allow international human rights NGOs to maintain offices in the country but did allow their representatives to visit on a limited basis. There were no transparent standards governing visits from international NGO representatives.

Government Human Rights Bodies: Two recognized local human rights organizations existed: The government-supported the EHRA, which focused on human rights problems and complaints on matters such as labor conditions, stateless persons' rights, and prisoners' well-being and treatment; and the Emirates Center for Human Rights Studies, which focused on human rights education for lawyers and legal consultants. Several EHRA members worked in the government and the organization received government funding. The EHRA claimed it operated independently without government interference, apart from requirements that apply to all associations in the country. In September 2018 the EHRA accused HRW and Amnesty International of disseminating incorrect and misleading information regarding the human rights situation in the country.

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

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape, which is punishable by death under the penal code. The penal code does not address spousal rape.

The penal code allows men to use physical means, including violence, at their discretion against female and minor family members. Punishments issued by courts in domestic abuse cases were often minimal. In some cases, police shared a victim's contact information with her or his family, which sometimes reached the assailant.

In general, the government did not enforce domestic abuse laws effectively, and domestic abuse against women, including spousal abuse, remained a problem. For example, in February local and international media reported the case of Hind Albolooki, an Emirati woman who fled the UAE and attempted to claim asylum in Macedonia after allegedly receiving threats from family members for wanting a divorce from her abusive husband. Albolooki, who faced deportation after the asylum claim was denied, remained in an immigration detention center in Macedonia at year's end while the European Court of Human Rights processed her case. There were reports employers raped or sexually assaulted foreign domestic workers. These cases rarely went to court, and those that did led to few convictions. In one such conviction in December 2018, a man was sentenced to a suspended three-month jail term and deportation after sexually assaulting two domestic workers. In sharia courts, which are primarily responsible for civil matters between Muslims, the extremely high burden of proof for a rape case contributed to a low conviction rate. In addition, female victims of rape or other sexual crimes faced the possibility of prosecution for consensual sex outside marriage instead of receiving assistance from authorities.

Victims of domestic abuse may file complaints with police units stationed in major public hospitals. Social workers and counselors, usually female, also maintained offices in public hospitals and police stations. There were domestic abuse centers in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ras al-Khaimah, and Sharjah.

The government, in coordination with social organizations, sought to increase awareness of domestic violence, conducting seminars, educational programs, symposiums, and conferences. The Dubai Foundation for Women and Children increased awareness of domestic violence through social media, television, radio programming, and advertising; by hosting workshops; and sponsoring a hotline.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law does not address FGM/C, although the Ministry of Health prohibits hospitals and clinics from performing the procedure. FGM/C is practiced by some tribal groups and was reportedly declining as a traditional custom, yet little information was available. Foreign residents from countries where FGM/C is prevalent undertook the practice.

Sexual Harassment: The government prosecutes harassment via the penal code. Conviction of “disgracing or dishonoring” a person in public is punishable by a minimum of one year and up to 15 years in prison if the victim is younger than age 14. Conviction for “infamous” acts against the rules of decency is punishable by a penalty of six months in prison, and “dishonoring a woman by word or deed on a public roadway” is also a punishable offense. The government generally enforced this law.

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

Discrimination: Women in general faced legal and economic discrimination, with noncitizen women at a particular disadvantage.

The government’s interpretation of sharia applies in personal status cases and family law. Muslim women must have the consent of their guardians to marry. Local interpretation of sharia forbids Muslim women to marry non-Muslims. In addition, the law permits a man to have as many as four wives, women normally inherit less than men, and a son’s inheritance may be double that of a daughter.

For a woman to obtain a divorce with a financial settlement, she must prove her husband inflicted physical or moral harm upon her, abandoned her for at least three months, or had not provided for her or their children’s upkeep. Physical abuse claims require medical reports and two male witnesses. It is up to the judge’s discretion to consider women as full witnesses or half witnesses. Alternatively, women may divorce by paying compensation or surrendering their dowry to their husbands.

The strict interpretation of sharia does not apply to child custody cases, and courts have applied the “the best interests of the child” standard since 2010. According to sharia a divorced woman may lose custody of her children to their father once daughters reach 13 years of age and sons 11 years of age. Women are permitted to file for continued custody until a daughter is married or a son finishes his education. Under federal law, fathers are permitted to seek custody of an under-11-year-old son if they feel the child has become “too soft.”

The law provides for corporal punishment for sexual relations and pregnancy outside of marriage. The government may imprison and deport noncitizen women who bear children out of wedlock. In February a Fujairah court sentenced an

unmarried woman to three months in prison and deportation after a medical visit revealed she was having complications associated with pregnancy.

Women who worked in the private sector, and especially nonnationals, regularly did not receive equal benefits and reportedly faced discrimination in promotions and pay (see section 7.d.). Labor law prohibits women from working in hazardous, strenuous, or physically or morally harmful jobs.

In July the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship announced a change to the main condition for acquiring residency, replacing the previous employment requirement with a minimum income requirement. While foreign men working in the country and earning a salary between 3,000 AED (\$820) and 4,000 AED (\$1,100) could obtain residency permits for their families for three years, a foreign woman would need to earn 10,000 AED (\$2,700) a month to sponsor her husband or 4,000 AED (\$1,100) to sponsor her children. The previous requirements allowed foreign women to obtain a one-year, renewable permit for her family only if she was working in a job deemed rare or with a specialty such as health care, engineering, or teaching.

While education is equally accessible, federal law prohibits coeducation in public universities, except in the United Arab Emirates University's Executive MBA program and in certain graduate programs at Zayed University. A large number of private schools, private universities, and institutions, however, were coeducational. According to officials, local women represent more than 70 percent of national higher education students.

The government excluded women from certain social and economic benefits, including land grants for building houses, because tribal family law often designates men as the heads of families.

The government has a Gender Balance Council to promote a greater role for female citizens, but not noncitizens, working outside the home.

Children

Birth Registration: Children generally derive citizenship from their parents. As noted above the children of UAE citizen mothers married to foreigners did not receive citizenship automatically. The government registered noncitizen births, including of Bidoon. The criminalization of sexual relations outside of marriage

prevented the registration of children born out of wedlock and, as a result, access to travel documents.

Education: Education is compulsory through the ninth grade; however, the law was not enforced, and some children did not attend school, especially children of noncitizens. The government provided free primary education only to citizens. Noncitizen children could enroll in public schools only if they scored more than 90 percent on entrance examinations, which authorities administered only in Arabic. In September 2018 the Ministry of Education made all public schools coeducational from the first to fifth grades, starting with that year's first grade class.

Child Abuse: The law prohibits child abuse, and the government has taken steps to increase awareness of the issue, including the Child Safety Campaign, which reinforced the role of media in protecting the rights of children. The government provided shelter and help for child victims of abuse or sexual exploitation. In March, the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children opened a new shelter for children up to 12 years of age who have been victims of violence and exploitation and have no parents or dependents. The shelter has capacity to accommodate 25 children and provides social and medical services.

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal age of marriage for both men and women is 18, unless a judge gives approval for an earlier marriage. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women previously reported on the persistence of unregistered child marriages.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law criminalizes the sexual exploitation of children, with a minimum penalty for conviction of 10 years in prison. Consensual sex is illegal outside of marriage, carrying a minimum penalty of one year in prison. The penalty for conviction of sex with children younger than 14 is life imprisonment. Distribution and consumption of child pornography is illegal.

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 <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

There is no indigenous Jewish community. There were no synagogues and no formal recognition of the very small foreign Jewish population (which constituted less than 1 percent of the population); the foreign Jewish community could conduct regular prayer services in rented space. In May the Anti-Defamation League announced the appointment of the first chief rabbi of the Jewish community in the UAE at an event cohosted with the UAE Embassy in Washington. Occasionally, social media contained anti-Semitic remarks and local Arabic print media featured anti-Semitic caricatures in political cartoons. There was anti-Semitic material available at some book fairs, including a few that operated with government oversight.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, or the provision of other state services.

Public and private facilities provided education, health services, sports, and vocational rehabilitation for persons with disabilities. Many of the facilities were reserved for citizens.

The Ministry of Community Development (formerly Social Affairs) is the central body responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and raising awareness at the federal and local level. In accordance with the law, most public buildings provided some form of access for persons with disabilities.

Government entities, including the Ministry of Community Development, the Services for Educational Development Foundation for Inclusion, and the Sports Organizations for Persons with Disabilities, sponsored conferences and workshops emphasizing the inclusion and integration of persons with disabilities into schools and workplaces. The government continued to raise public awareness of societal inclusivity through its National Strategy for Empowering People with Special Needs. The policy includes investment in research and development for health and rehabilitation, an integrative education system, vocational rehabilitation and employment, creation of unified criteria for building requirements, social

protection, and societal integration through cultural, sports, and social activities. In July Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai Mohammad Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum directed service-related organizations to designate a person in charge of facilitating services for persons with disabilities.

Various departments within the Ministries of Human Resources and Emiratization (formerly Labor), Education, and Community Development are responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, and the government enforced these rights in employment, housing, and entitlement programs (see also section 7).

The government sponsored several initiatives to host international conferences for persons with disabilities emphasizing rights, opportunities, and the importance of social inclusion. The government also improved accessibility of public facilities. In March Abu Dhabi hosted the Special Olympics World Games in 2019 and in November Dubai hosted the world's first Accessible Tourism International Summit.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Approximately 90 percent of the country's residents were noncitizens, more than half of whom originated from South Asia. Societal discrimination against noncitizens was prevalent and occurred in most areas of daily life, including employment, education, housing, social interaction, and health care.

The law allows for criminalizing commercial disputes and bankruptcy, which led to discrimination against foreigners. Authorities enforced these laws selectively and allowed citizens to threaten noncitizen businesspersons and foreign workers with harsh prison sentences to assure a favorable outcome in commercial disputes.

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

Both civil law and sharia criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity. Under sharia individuals who engage in consensual same-sex sexual conduct could be subject to the death penalty. Dubai's penal code allows for up to a 10-year prison sentence for conviction of such activity, while Abu Dhabi's penal code allows for up to a 14-year prison sentence. There were no reports of arrests or prosecutions for consensual same-sex activity.

The law does not extend antidiscrimination protections to LGBTI individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination.

By law wearing clothing deemed inappropriate for one's sex is a punishable offense. The government deported foreign residents and referred the cases of individuals who wore clothing deemed inappropriate to the public prosecutor.

The law permits doctors to conduct sex reassignment surgery when there are "psychological" and "physiological" signs of gender and sex disparity. The penalty for performing an unwarranted "sex correction" surgery is three to 10 years in prison. In 2018 the Abu Dhabi Federal Court of First Instance denied a January request for legal gender recognition by three local transgender persons who sought legally to change their names and update their gender on official documents. The Federal Appeals Court upheld the lower court's ruling in March 2018. The Abu Dhabi Court of Cassation rejected their final appeal in December 2018.

Due to social conventions and potential repression, LGBTI organizations did not operate openly, nor were gay pride marches or gay rights advocacy events held.

There were reports of LGBTI persons being questioned in national airports on the basis of appearance and behavior.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Noncitizens and, to a lesser extent, citizens with HIV/AIDS and other diseases faced discrimination. Legal protections against employment and education discrimination for individuals with HIV/AIDS, as well as free access to HIV treatment and care programs, existed for citizens; however, noncitizens did not have these rights. The government does not grant residency or work visas to persons with certain communicable diseases including HIV/AIDS. Noncitizens who test positive for these diseases may be detained and deported. Doctors are required to inform authorities of HIV/AIDS cases, reportedly discouraging individuals from seeking testing or treatment.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law does not protect the right to organize, strike, or bargain collectively. The law does not permit workers to form or join unions. The labor law forbids strikes by public sector employees, security guards, and migrant workers. The law does not entirely prohibit strikes in the private sector but allows an employer to suspend an employee for striking. In the private sector, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization, formerly the Labor Ministry, must approve and register individual employment contracts. The labor law does not apply to agricultural workers or to most workers in export processing zones. Domestic workers fall under a separate labor law but are regulated by the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization. Persons with a claim to refugee status but who lacked legal residency status, including those with either short-term visitor visas or expired visas, were generally not eligible for employment.

Private sector employees may file collective employment dispute complaints with the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization, which by law acts as mediator between the parties. Employees may then file unresolved disputes within the labor court system, which forwards disputes to a conciliation council. Public sector employees may file an administrative grievance or a case in a civil court to address a labor-related dispute or complaint. Administrative remedies are available for labor complaints, and authorities commonly applied them to resolve issues such as delayed wage payments, unpaid overtime, or substandard housing.

All foreign workers have the right to file labor-related grievances with the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization. The ministry sometimes intervened in foreign workers' disputes with employers and helped negotiate private settlements. The law allows employers to request the government to cancel the work permit of, and deport for up to one year, any foreign worker for unexcused absences of more than seven days or for participating in a strike.

The government generally enforced labor laws. In 2018 the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization issued its second Workers Welfare Report, which outlined and provided statistics on the ministry's enforcement and dispute settlement activities regarding recruitment, contract integrity, payment of wages and overtime, housing accommodation, and health and safety. It also discussed domestic legislative and regulatory reforms affecting domestic workers.

Professional associations were not independent, and authorities had broad powers to interfere in their activities. For example, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization had to license and approve professional associations, which were required to receive government approval for international affiliations and travel by

members. The government granted some professional associations with majority citizen membership a limited ability to raise work-related issues, petition the government for redress, and file grievances with the government.

In Dubai the CDA regulates and provides licensing services to nonprofit civil society organizations and associations that organize ongoing social, cultural, artistic, or entertainment activities. In Dubai, all voluntary organizations and individual volunteers are required to register with the CDA within six months. In addition, all voluntary activities require a CDA permit, but there are no prescribed penalties for noncompliance.

Foreign workers may belong to local professional associations; however, they do not have voting rights and may not serve on association boards. Apart from these professional associations, in a few instances, some foreign workers came together to negotiate with their employers on issues such as housing conditions, nonpayment of wages, and working conditions.

The threat of deportation discouraged noncitizens from voicing work-related grievances. Nonetheless, occasional protests and strikes took place. The government did not always punish workers for nonviolent protests or strikes, but it dispersed such protests, and sometimes deported noncitizen participants. According to media reports, 900 men living in company accommodations in Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah appealed to the Ministry of Labor for assistance after their employer failed to pay wages for 10 months.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but the government did not effectively enforce the law, particularly in the domestic worker sector.

The government took steps to prevent forced labor through continued implementation of the Wages Protection System (WPS) (see section 7.e.). The government enforced fines for employers who entered incorrect information into the WPS, did not pay workers for more than 60 days, or made workers sign documents falsely attesting to receipt of benefits. According to local media reporting, some firms withheld ATM cards from employees, withdrawing the money and paying the employee anywhere between 35 to 40 percent less than the mandated salary.

In July the government announced it had launched 132 educational lectures to inform 6,640 workers in Dubai about UAE labor laws and regulations as well as occupational health and safety standards in the workplace.

The domestic worker law that regulates domestic workers' contracts, rights and privileges, prohibitions, and recruitment agencies was implemented throughout the year.

It was relatively common for employers to subject migrant domestic workers, and to a lesser degree, construction and other manual labor workers, to conditions equivalent to forced labor. Workers experienced nonpayment of wages; unpaid overtime; failure to grant legally required time off, withholding of passports, threats; and, in some cases, psychological, physical, or sexual abuse. Contract substitution remained a problem. In a few cases physical abuses led to death. Local newspapers reported on court cases involving violence committed against maids and other domestic workers. In August local media reported that the Philippine Overseas Labor Office in Dubai had sheltered a total of 1,737 women between January and June, 86 percent of whom left their employers due to alleged maltreatment, including long work hours, verbal and physical abuse, and lack of food.

In violation of the law, employers routinely held employees' passports, thus restricting their freedom of movement and ability to leave the country or change jobs. In labor camps it was common practice for passports to be kept in a central secure location, accessible with 24 or 48 hours' notice. In most cases individuals reported they were able to obtain documents without difficulty when needed, but this was not always the case. There were media reports that employees were coerced to surrender their passports for "safekeeping" and sign documentation that the surrender was voluntary. With domestic employees, passport withholding frequently occurred, and enforcement against this practice was weak.

Some employers forced foreign workers in the domestic and agricultural sectors to compensate them for hiring expenses such as visa fees, health exams, and insurance, which the law requires employers to pay, by withholding wages or having these costs deducted from their contracted salary. Some employers did not pay their employees contracted wages even after they satisfied these "debts." There were other reports from community leaders that employers would refuse to apply for a residency visa for their domestic workers, rendering them undocumented and thus vulnerable to exploitation.

Although charging workers recruitment fees was illegal, workers in both the corporate and domestic sectors often borrowed money to pay recruiting fees in their home countries, and as a result spent most of their salaries trying to repay home-country labor recruiters or lenders. These debts limited workers' options to leave a job, and sometimes trapped them in exploitive work conditions. The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization oversees recruitment of domestic workers. In 2018 the ministry established Tadbeer recruitment centers, one-stop shops for recruitment agencies to register their services, workers to undergo interviews and receive training, and visas and identification documents to be distributed. However, locals reported that Tadbeer has been slow to bring these recruitment centers up to full functionality, noting ongoing difficulties with processing basic services.

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits employment of persons younger than 15 and includes special provisions regarding children ages 15 to 18. The law, however, excludes agricultural work, leaving underage workers in these sectors unprotected. Under the law governing domestic workers, 18 is the minimum age for legal work. The law allows issuance of work permits for 12- to 18-year-old persons, specifically for gaining work experience and under specific rules. The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization is responsible for enforcing the regulations and generally did so effectively.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The Antidiscrimination Law prohibits all forms of discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, or race, although without specific reference to employment. Penalties are adequate and include fines and jail terms of six months to 10 years. To date the law has only been applied in cases of religious discrimination, including one incident that occurred in a work environment.

No specific law prohibits or regulates discrimination regarding sex, political opinion, national origin or citizenship, social origin, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, age, language, or communicable disease status in employment or occupation. Various departments within the Ministries of Human Resources and Emiratization, Education, and Community Development are responsible for

protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, and the government enforced these rights in employment, housing, and entitlement programs. Enforcement was effective for jobs in the public sector and the government made efforts to encourage private sector hiring of persons with disabilities. In September the Government Accelerators program organized a recruitment drive for persons with disabilities seeking private sector jobs. Some emirates and the federal government included statements in their human resources regulations emphasizing priority for hiring citizens with disabilities in the public sector and actively encouraged the hiring of all persons with disabilities. Public sector employers provided reasonable accommodations, defined broadly, for employees with disabilities. The employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector remained a challenge due to a lack of training and opportunities, and societal discrimination. Women who worked in the private sector, and especially nonnationals, regularly did not receive equal benefits and reportedly faced discrimination in promotions and equality of wages. Labor law prohibits women from working in hazardous, strenuous, or physically or morally harmful jobs. The domestic worker law also prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, religion, political opinion, national, or social origin. Nevertheless, job advertisements requesting applications only from certain nationalities were common and not regulated. In free zones individualized laws govern employment requirements. For example, in the Dubai International Financial Center, employers may not discriminate against any person based on sex, marital status, race, national identity, religion, or disability.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no national minimum wage. There was very limited information on average domestic, agricultural, or construction worker salaries or on public sector salaries. In some sectors minimum wages were determined by workers' nationality and years of experience.

The law prescribes a 48-hour workweek and paid annual holidays. The law states daily working hours must not exceed eight hours in day or night shifts, and provides for overtime pay to employees working more than eight hours in a 24-hour period, with the exception of those employed in trade, hotels, cafeterias, security, domestic work, and other jobs as decided by the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization.

Government occupational health and safety standards require that employers provide employees with a safe work and living environment, including minimum

rest periods and limits on the number of hours worked, depending on the nature of the work. For example, the law mandates a two-and-one-half-hour midday work break, from 12:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., between June 15 and September 15, for laborers who work in exposed open areas, such as construction sites. Companies are required to make water, vitamins, supplements, and shelter available to all outdoor workers during the summer months to meet health and safety requirements. Employers who do not comply are subject to fines and suspension of operations. The government may exempt companies from the midday work break if the company cannot postpone the project for emergency or technical reasons. Such projects include laying asphalt or concrete and repairing damaged water pipes, gas lines, or electrical lines.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization was responsible for enforcing laws governing acceptable conditions of work for workers in professional and semiskilled job categories, but did not do so in all sectors, including the informal sector. To monitor the private sector, the ministry had active departments for inspection, occupational safety, combating human trafficking, and wage protection.

Workers in agriculture and other categories overseen by the Ministry of Interior come under a different regulatory regime. These workers are not covered by private and public sector labor law, but have some legal protections regarding working hours, overtime, timeliness of wage payments, paid leave, health care, and the provision of adequate housing; however, enforcement of these rules was often weak. As a result, these workers were more vulnerable to unacceptable work conditions.

There was no information available on the informal economy, legal enforcement within this sector, or an estimate of its size; however, anecdotal reports indicate it was common for individuals to enter the country on a nonwork visa and join the informal job sector, subjecting them to exploitative conditions. The government encouraged undocumented residents to legalize their status or leave the country voluntarily during a five-month amnesty period from August to December 2018.

Sailors faced particular difficulty remedying grievances against employers. In 2018 the Federal Authority for Land and Maritime Transport announced that ship owners operating in the country's ports were required to carry insurance contracts for all sailors on board and mandated that sailors must be deported to their home countries in case of abandonment by the ship owner. In August the UAE coast guard allowed sailors from the abandoned MV Tamim Aldar ship to seek refuge on shore after spending three years stranded 46 km (31 miles) off the coast of Ras al-

Khaimah waiting for their salaries to be paid. Complaints included unpaid salaries, harsh living conditions, lack of fuel, food, fresh water, and access to medical treatment. According to media reports, during the year the Indian diplomatic mission in Dubai has helped repatriate more than 100 sailors caught in similar circumstances.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization conducted inspections of labor camps and workplaces such as construction sites. The government also routinely fined employers for violating the midday break rule and published compliance statistics. The Abu Dhabi Judicial Department and Dubai Courts employed buses as mobile courts, which traveled to labor camps to allow workers to register legal complaints. Abu Dhabi's mobile courtroom was used for cases involving large groups or those who encountered difficulties attending court.

The government took action to address wage payment issues. Its implementation of the WPS and fines for noncompliance discouraged employers from withholding salaries to foreign workers under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization. The WPS, an electronic salary transfer system, requires private institutions employing more than 100 employees to pay workers via approved banks, exchange bureaus, and other financial institutions, to assure timely and full payment of agreed wages, within 10 days of payment due date. Under the law after 16 days of nonpayment, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization will freeze issuance of new work permits to the employer. If the nonpayment lingers past 29 days, the ministry refers the case to the labor courts; after 60 days, a fine of 5,000 AED (\$1,360) per unpaid worker is imposed, up to a maximum of 50,000 AED (\$13,600). For companies employing less than 100 employees, the freezes, fines, and court referrals only apply after 60 days of nonpayment. The ministry monitored these payments electronically. The WPS, however, did not apply to foreign workers under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, such agricultural workers or to domestic laborers.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization conducted site visits to monitor the payment of overtime. Violations resulted in fines and in many cases a suspension of permits to hire new workers.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization continued efforts to provide for adequate health standards and safe food and facilities in labor camps. A ministerial decree requires that employers with 50 or more employees must provide low salaried workers (those earning less than 2,000 AED, or \$550 per month) with accommodations. It conducted regular inspections of health and

living conditions at labor camps, stated that it issued written documentation on problems needing correction, and reviewed them in subsequent inspections. Nevertheless, some low-wage foreign workers faced substandard living conditions, including overcrowded apartments or unsafe and unhygienic lodging in labor camps. In some cases, the ministry cancelled hiring permits for companies that failed to provide adequate housing. During some inspections of labor camps, the ministry employed interpreters to assist foreign workers in understanding employment guidelines. The ministry operated a toll-free hotline in several languages spoken by foreign residents through which workers were able to report delayed wage payments or other violations. The ministry's mobile van units also visited some labor camps to inform workers of their rights.

The government instituted a revised standard contract for domestic workers aimed to protect domestic workers through a binding agreement between employers and domestic workers. The contract provides for transparency and legal protections concerning issues such as working hours, time-off, overtime, health care, and housing. Officials from some originating countries criticized the process, saying it prevented foreign embassies from reviewing and approving the labor contracts of their citizens. As a result, some countries attempted to halt their citizens' travel to the UAE to assume domestic labor positions. Many still entered on visit visas, however, and then adjusted status, making them vulnerable to exploitation by illegal recruiters.

The government allowed foreign workers to switch jobs without a letter of permission from their employer. Labor regulations provide foreign employees the option to work without an employment contract or, in cases in which a contract was in force, to change employer sponsors after two years, as well as within the first two years within the terms of the contract. The government designed this regulation to improve job mobility and reduce the vulnerability of foreign workers to abuse. The regulation, however, did not apply to agricultural or domestic workers.

The government-supported NGO EHRA promoted worker rights. It conducted unannounced visits to labor camps and work sites to monitor conditions and reported violations to the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization.

There were cases in which workers were injured or killed on job sites; however, authorities typically did not disclose details of workplace injuries and deaths, including the adequacy of safety measures. The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization routinely conducted health and safety site visits. The ministry

mandated that companies with more than 15 employees submit labor injuries reports. A ministerial resolution requires that private companies that employ more than 500 workers must hire at least one local as an occupational health and safety officer; companies with more than 1,000 employees must hire two health and safety officers. In addition, Dubai emirate required construction companies and industrial firms to appoint safety officers accredited by authorized entities to promote greater site safety.

Reports of migrant worker suicides or attempted suicides continued. In some cases, observers linked the suicides to poor working and living conditions, low wages, and financial strain caused by heavy debts owed to originating-country labor recruitment agencies. Dubai police and the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children, a quasi-governmental organization, conducted vocational training programs with some elements aimed at decreasing suicidal behavior.