

# Bahrain 2023 Human Rights Report

## Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Bahrain during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, and enforcement or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence within the territory of a state and on the right to leave the country; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; and serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials accused

of human rights abuses.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

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

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

### **b. Disappearance**

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

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses**

The constitution prohibited such practices, but domestic and international human rights organizations, as well as detainees and former detainees, maintained that abuse and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by government security officials continued during the year.

Prisoners, including prominent human rights defenders Abdulhadi al-Khawaja and Abduljalil al-Singace, alleged that prison authorities refused to refer them to specialists and denied them access to necessary medicines.

On September 1, Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated authorities repeatedly denied al-Khawaja essential health care, despite his life-threatening cardiac problems. Prisoners and their advocates alleged unreasonable periods of solitary confinement for some prisoners. On September 15, Mary Lawlor, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, released a statement expressing alarm regarding the deteriorating health conditions of detained human rights defenders Abduljalil al-Singace, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, and Naji Fateel. She stated, “Medical negligence and lack of adequate care has left them in a worrying state. Both their detention and the ill-treatment they have suffered in prison violate the rights to free expression, opinion and assembly that must be guaranteed to human rights defenders.” She also noted the three human rights defenders had been subjects of opinions issued by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which found their detention to be arbitrary and pointed to a pattern of ill-treatment of detainees, including lack of access to adequate medical treatment.

On June 20, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention published an opinion calling for the release of six imprisoned students whom the Group maintained were being held arbitrarily after confessing to crimes under torture and undergoing unfair trials. The students – Ahmed Yusuf, Alaa Ansaif, Husain Matar, Husain Abdulla, Mohamed Baddaw and Sayed al-Khabbaz – were arrested separately, in unrelated cases, between 2013 and 2020. At the time of their arrests, three were children.

## Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Human rights activists reported conditions in prisons and detention centers were harsh and, at times, life threatening due to physical abuse, unjust application of solitary confinement as a disciplinary measure, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care.

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** In August, prisoners in Jaw prison began a month-long hunger strike to protest prison conditions. On September 1, HRW reported that in their demands, Jaw prisoners stated they were in some cases forced to spend 23 hours a day in their cells. Inmates demanded an end to prolonged solitary confinement, more than one hour daily outside of their cells in the prison yard, prayer in congregation at the prison mosque, family visits without glass barriers, and improved access to health care. According to international media, on September 12, the prisoners suspended the hunger strike until September 30 to see if promised changes by the government would materialize. These changes included limiting isolation, extending inmates' hours of daylight, and improving health care at the prison. As of the end of the year, the strike was still suspended.

On September 27, the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) reported that the courts sentenced 12 prisoners to an additional three years and one prisoner to one additional year regarding a 2021 prison sit-in protesting medical negligence. BIRD stated that the convictions stemmed from a mass trial of 65 defendants, the rest of whom were acquitted.

According to BIRD, the group of 65 was held incommunicado for more than a month after security forces and prison officers broke up the April 2021 sit-in in Jaw prison. BIRD also shared notes from interviews with prisoners conducted by the public prosecution in which the prisoners said they were beaten with metal objects and tear gas cannisters.

Inmates also claimed authorities delayed scheduling or denied offsite medical treatment, especially for those needing follow-up care for complex or chronic conditions.

**Administration:** The ombudsperson investigated allegations of misconduct by police and other Ministry of Interior personnel and referred cases to the ministry's Special Investigations Unit, which investigated and referred cases of misconduct to appropriate courts, including civilian criminal courts and the ministry's military court. Authorities allowed prisoners to file complaints to judicial authorities without censorship, and officials from the Ombudsperson's Office were available to respond to complaints or meet with prisoners in private at the prison.

On January 31, four police officers were sentenced to one year in prison for mistreating a prisoner. From April to June, the Interior Ministry investigated 15 complaints of mistreatment of prisoners by security forces and interviewed 45 witnesses. As a result, one officer was referred to the ministry's military court and received disciplinary action. Four other police officers were fired due to misconduct, and 19 others were sentenced to

prison on charges unrelated to ill-treatment of prisoners.

Authorities permitted prison access for the ombudsperson and her office staff, as well as for the National Institute for Human Rights and the Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission (PDRC), all of which were parastatal national human rights monitoring organizations. The ombudsperson also served as chair of the PDRC, which maintained an office at Jaw prison to conduct regular investigations and meet privately with inmates and their families. The government permitted the PDRC to conduct unannounced visits to detention centers.

**Independent Monitoring:** In June, the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent visited Jaw prison as part of its recurring engagement with the government.

**Improvements:** In September, under the government's agreement with Jaw prisoners to suspend their hunger strike, the Ministry of Interior agreed to implement most prisoner demands, including more time in the outside prison yard, an expanded visitor list beyond immediate family, the removal of a physical barrier between prisoners and their visitors, increased access to education, a new library, and a reduction in telephone call fees.

The Ombudsperson's Office reported in August that the American Correctional Association accredited the Ministry of Interior's Reformation and Rehabilitation Directorate as meeting international quality standards.

The Open Prison program, which opened in December 2022, allowed 48 prisoners to reunite with their families while serving their sentence in a new facility during the year. The Open Prison program sought to reintegrate select prisoners as productive members of society. Thirteen individuals released under the program's alternate sentencing got full-time private-sector jobs during the year pursuant to an agreement signed on March 29 between the Ministry of Interior and the nonprofit group INJAZ Bahrain, to offer hands-on training and immersive learning on employment, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, sustainability, STEM, and digital literacy to Open Prison program participants.

Civil society organizations such as Taa'fi Drug Recovery Association partnered with the Ministry of Interior and held educational programs for inmates of all prisons. The ministry granted some organizations a supervisory role to promote the effective implementation of alternative sentencing.

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

The constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention, and the law provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government did not always observe these requirements. There were no reports of courts finding individuals to have been unlawfully detained and recommending compensation.

On March 15, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention published an opinion finding that prodemocracy activist Naji Fateel – who was arrested in May 2013 for protest activities and allegedly was tortured severely for days in 2013, during which time he lost consciousness and twice needed hospital treatment – never should have been arrested and called for his immediate release and an investigation of his arbitrary detention and alleged torture.

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

The law stipulated law enforcement officers could arrest individuals without a warrant only if the individuals were caught in the act of committing certain crimes and there was sufficient evidence to press charges. Additionally, before the public prosecutor could summon an individual, an arrest warrant had to have been executed.

The law required the arresting authority to interrogate arrested individuals within seven days following their arrest. A lower criminal court judge could extend detention of a suspect for no more than 30 days or the suspect had to be released. The public prosecutor could extend the suspect's detention for 30 days if the investigation was still pending, in coordination with the higher criminal court. Suspects could be held in pretrial detention for up to three months, after which the case was referred to the attorney general. Pretrial detention should not exceed six months, according to the law. The High Criminal Court had to authorize any extensions beyond that period and any renewals at 30-day intervals. Detained suspects had the right to legal

counsel during questioning. A functioning system of bail provided maximum and minimum bail amounts based on the charges; the law allowed the presiding judge to determine the bail amount within these parameters on a case-by-case basis.

Attorneys reported difficulty in gaining access to their clients in a timely manner through all stages of the legal process. They also complained of difficulty registering as a detainee's legal representative because of bureaucratic hurdles and lack of official government notaries, questioning of credentials by police, lack of notification of clients' location in custody, requirements to seek court orders to meet clients, prohibitions on meeting clients in private, prohibitions on passing legal documents to clients, questioning of clients by the public prosecutor on very short notice, lack of access to clients during police questioning, and lack of access to consult with clients in court. While the state reportedly provided counsel to indigent detainees, there were reports detainees never met with their state-appointed attorney before or during their trial.

According to reports by local and international human rights groups, authorities held some detainees for a week or more with limited access to outside resources.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** Human rights groups reported the Ministry of Interior summoned and questioned individuals for attending protests and demonstrations, expressing their opinion in public or on social media, and

calling for an end to the monarchy (which authorities considered a terrorist act). In publicly reported cases, individuals detained for questioning were released after a few days without charges.

In May, international media reported Shia cleric Sheikh Mohamed Sanqour was arrested after delivering a sermon during Friday prayers in which he raised concerns about the mistreatment of political prisoners and called for their release. He was questioned and then released a few days later after protesters and scholars called for his release.

On December 20, international media and Human Rights First reported Ebrahim Sharif, an opposition figure, was arrested for “supporting a terrorist organization” due to a series of social media posts criticizing the government’s participation in Operation Prosperity Guardian, a multinational maritime security coalition in the Red Sea. Sharif’s posts encouraged support for Houthi actions and the “blockade” on the ports of the “Zionist Entity.” On December 27, local media sources reported Sharif had been released.

## **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

Although the constitution provided for an independent judiciary, human rights groups and political opposition figures asserted executive authorities had near-complete control over the judicial system and the judiciary was subject to political pressure, especially in high-profile or politically sensitive

cases, citing a lack of fair trial guarantees and harsh sentences given to political opposition figures. The king appointed all judges and headed the Supreme Judicial Council, which administered the courts and proposed judicial nominees. The judiciary was divided into civil law courts (for commercial, civil, and criminal cases, and family matters of non-Muslims) and family law courts (for personal status cases for Muslims, with separate courts for Sunni and Shia sharia-based family law proceedings). Family status law varied according to Shia or Sunni interpretations of Islamic law, especially for women.

Some judges were foreign citizens, serving on limited-term contracts and, according to some observers, subject to government approval for contract renewal and residence permits, creating a situation where they were or were perceived to be subject to government pressure to render certain verdicts. Led by the king, the Supreme Judicial Council was responsible for supervising the work of the courts, including judges, and the public prosecutor's office.

## **Trial Procedures**

The constitution provided for the right to a fair and public trial, although there were reports the judiciary did not always enforce this right.

Defendants had the right to consult an attorney of their choice within 48 hours; however, there were reports that defendants and their lawyers had

difficulty getting police, public prosecutors, and courts to recognize or register legal counsel.

While defendants had the right to question witnesses against them, judges could declare questions to be irrelevant and prohibit a line of questioning without providing reasoning. Prosecutors rarely presented evidence orally in court but provided it in written and digital formats to judges in their chambers.

## **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were reports of political prisoners or detainees.

The government claimed to hold no political prisoners. According to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), however, the government held an unverified number of political prisoners. International media reported in August that the government held approximately 1,200 political prisoners, most of them in Jaw prison. Charges against individuals identified by NGOs as political prisoners included terrorism, treason, espionage, and attempting to overthrow the monarchy. Prisoner advocates asserted that the requirement that prisoners not pose a threat to public security was used to limit eligibility for alternative noncustodial sentences of prisoners of conscience or political prisoners.

Former University of Bahrain professor Abduljaleel al-Singace, whom many human rights NGOs called a political prisoner and was charged in 2011 with

“plotting to topple” the government, remained incarcerated in a private medical facility as of year’s end. He continued a limited liquid diet hunger strike begun in 2021 to protest his incarceration. In July, human rights groups stated al-Singace suspended his communications with contacts outside the medical facility until being granted more family visits.

Prominent human rights defender and political opposition figure Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, a dual Danish-Bahraini citizen, started a water-only hunger strike in August in protest against his life imprisonment and denial of adequate medical treatment, including access to a cardiologist to treat his heart problems. He ended his strike in September after receiving the requested medical treatment.

## **f. Transnational Repression**

Not applicable.

## **g. Property Seizure and Restitution**

Not applicable.

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

The law prohibited such actions, but NGOs reported the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

The law required the government to obtain a court order before monitoring telephone calls, email, and personal correspondence. According to Freedom House, security services were believed to employ networks of informers, and the government monitored the personal communications of activists, critics, and opposition members. Researchers with Toronto-based Citizen Lab detected Pegasus spyware on the devices of at least 12 activists since 2020.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution provided for freedom of speech, including for members of the press and other media, only “provided that the fundamental beliefs of Islamic doctrine are not infringed, the unity of the people is not prejudiced, and discord and sectarianism are not aroused.” The government limited freedom of expression and press freedom through prosecutions of individuals under libel, slander, and national security laws that targeted both professional and citizen journalists.

According to an HRW report, authorities arrested four persons regarding their social media posts in March. One of those arrested, Ebrahim al-Mannai, a lawyer and prominent activist on X, had called for reform of the

country's parliamentary system ahead of an assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a global organization of national parliaments, which was held in Manama. On March 9, the Public Prosecutor's Office posted a statement that the four had been arrested for "abusing social media platforms." All four individuals were released the following week.

**Freedom of Expression:** The law prohibited any speech authorities considered a challenge to public order or accepted morals. While individuals openly expressed critical opinions regarding domestic political and social matters in private settings, those who shared such opinions publicly, including in traditional or social media, could face questioning. The Ministry of Interior acted on complaints from individuals or groups about certain posts and brought "offenders" in for questioning. Depending on the complaint, investigation, and assessed violation of the law, individuals were released without charge or charged and tried. The penal code allowed penalties of no less than one year and no more than seven years of imprisonment, plus a fine, for anyone who "offends the monarch of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the flag, or the national emblem." According to an October Freedom House report, in 2022 at least 41 activists and journalists were arrested, detained, interrogated, or prosecuted for speech-related matters, including their online activity.

On March 15, Ministry of Interior officials arrested an individual for insulting lawyers in a video he circulated online, which drew a formal complaint from

the Bahrain Bar Society. He was held for seven days pending investigation, then released; his case was pending trial as of year's end.

**Violence and Harassment:** According to opposition social media accounts, authorities sometimes summoned citizen journalists active on social media to account for their reporting. Authorities claimed, however, that some individuals who identified themselves as journalists and photographers were associated with violent opposition groups and produced propaganda and recruitment videos for these groups, but this could not be verified. International media representatives also reported difficulty obtaining visas to work as journalists.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media:** Government censorship regularly occurred. Ministry of Information Affairs personnel monitored media reports on matters deemed sensitive, especially those related to religious sects, national security, criticism of the ruling family or the judiciary, and the Saudi royal family. Media reported government officials contacted editors directly and told them to stop publishing articles on certain subjects.

The government did not own any print media, but the ministry and other government entities exercised considerable control over privately owned domestic print media. The private owners of the country's main newspapers had close ties to the government or held positions in the government.

The government owned and operated all domestic radio and television stations. Audiences could access some radio and television broadcasts in Arabic and English from stations based outside the country, including by satellite. The government blocked foreign television stations it considered critical of the country.

The Ministry of Information Affairs reviewed all books and publications prior to issuing printing licenses. The Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Endowments also reviewed books that discussed religion.

The law prohibited anti-Islamic content in media and mandated imprisonment for “exposing the state’s official religion to offense and criticism.” The law stated, “Any publication that prejudices the ruling system of the country and its official religion may be banned from publication by a ministerial order.”

According to Freedom House, in February, two leaders and one member of the Al-Tajdeed Society, a cultural organization with a sizeable social media following, were arrested because of videos posted to their YouTube channel in which they discussed and questioned some tenets of Islam. They were charged with “insulting” religious texts and “violating foundations of Islam.” In May, the three individuals were sentenced to one year in prison each. In December, they received commuted sentences.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** The government enforced libel and blasphemy-related

laws restricting freedom of the press. The penal code prohibited libel, slander, and “divulging secrets,” and stipulated a punishment of imprisonment of no more than two years or a fine.

On March 28, the Court of Cassation sentenced to one month in prison an individual who posted an allegedly defamatory statement about a government official on Instagram. The court rejected the defendant’s appeal.

**National Security:** National security laws provided for substantial fines and prison sentences of at least six months for criticizing the king or inciting actions that undermined state security, as well as fines for 14 related offenses. Punishable activities included publicizing statements issued by a foreign state or organization without prior government approval, publishing reports that adversely affected the value of the dinar (the local currency), saying anything offensive against a head of state that maintained diplomatic relations with the country, and publishing offensive remarks concerning accredited representatives of foreign countries.

According to Freedom House, in May, the public prosecutor ordered the arrest of Sheikh Mohamed Sanquor, a Shia cleric with a large social media following, after he shared a video of a weekly prayer on social media that called on the government to address domestic economic problems and asked viewers to reject normalization of diplomatic relations between the country and Israel. According to the public prosecutor, the speech

contained “false news” that could “disturb civil peace.” The cleric was released one week later.

## **Internet Freedom**

The government restricted access to the internet and censored online content, and there were credible reports it monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. The government blocked access to some websites from inside and outside the country, including political opposition-linked websites.

On March 8, the Interior Ministry’s General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security warned against retweeting, endorsing, or promoting “subversive” comments on social media that harm the country’s security and stability.

According to the government, the public prosecution arrested 10 individuals during the year for posting illegal content on social media; six of them were tried and convicted. The other cases were pending as of year’s end.

Several media reports alleged the government worked with other foreign governments and private companies to monitor political opposition leaders and human rights activists’ social media accounts, mobile telephones, and other forms of local and international electronic communications.

Activists reported security forces interrogated them, sometimes repeatedly,

about their social media posts and threatened their physical safety, livelihood, families, and access to social services such as housing. According to social media, some individuals were summoned to police stations and required to sign pledges to cease posting political content. Several activists said they shut down social media accounts or stopped posting to their accounts after being threatened.

The Ministry of Information's Anti-Cybercrime Directorate monitored social media for indecency, blasphemy, incitement to sectarianism, and offenses to the sanctity of religion.

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

The government restricted the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution provided for the right of peaceful assembly, but several laws and actions by authorities restricted the exercise of this right in practice. The antiterrorism law prohibited unlicensed gatherings of more than five persons, and the Ministry of Interior maintained a prohibition on public demonstrations to "maintain public order." In practice, the government allowed many peaceful protests, often in support of Palestinian rights or political prisoners, on an almost nightly basis.

To license a public gathering, the law required an organizing committee consisting of a head and at least two other members who were responsible for supervising the function and preventing any illegal acts during it.

According to the law, the Ministry of Interior was not obligated to justify its approval or denial of permits for demonstrations.

The law outlined locations where public gatherings were prohibited, including areas close to hospitals, airports, commercial locations, security-related facilities, and downtown Manama. According to the law, the Ministry of Interior was not obligated to justify its approval or denial of permits for demonstrations.

The law prohibited mourners from turning funeral processions into political rallies and allowed security officials to be present at any public gathering, including funerals.

Authorities prohibited the use of vehicles in any demonstration, protest, or gathering unless organizers obtained special written permission from the head of public security.

Organizers of unauthorized gatherings (gatherings without a permit) could face prison sentences of three to six months. Participants in an illegal gathering (including gatherings near hospitals, airports, or commercial complexes) could face sentences ranging from one month to two years in prison. According to the government, the Ministry of Interior arrested 63

individuals during the year for participating in illegal gatherings, 20 of whom were convicted. There were reports the Ministry of Interior summoned individuals who participated in illegal gatherings and released them after interrogation.

The law regulated election campaigning and prohibited political activities at worship centers, universities, schools, government buildings, and public institutions. The government did not allow individuals to use mosques, *maatams* (Shia religious halls), or other religious sites for political gatherings.

According to London-based website *Middle East Eye*, on March 5, four individuals – Hajer Mansoor, Najah Yusuf, Ali Muhana, and Muneer Mushaima – were arrested for peacefully protesting against the Formula One Grand Prix race in the country while calling for the release of political prisoners. After the four signed a statement that they would not take part in any further unauthorized protests, they were released from custody.

## **Freedom of Association**

The constitution provided for freedom of association, but the government limited this right. The government required all civil society groups and labor unions to register with the Ministry of Social Development, and political societies to register with the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Endowments. The law allowed the government to dissolve and ban political

societies. The government decided whether a group was social or political in nature, based on the group's proposed bylaws. The law prohibited any activity by an unlicensed society or group, as well as any political activity by a licensed civil society group. Despite this, some unlicensed civil society associations were active in the country (see section 3).

A civil society group applying for registration had to submit its bylaws and the minutes of the founding committee's meetings containing the names, professions, places of residence, and signatures of all founding members. The law granted the Ministry of Social Development the right to reject the registration of any civil society group if it found the group's services unnecessary, already provided by another entity, contrary to state security, or aimed at reviving a previously dissolved civil society association. Associations whose applications were rejected or not acted upon could appeal to the High Civil Court.

NGOs and civil society activists asserted the ministry routinely exploited its oversight role to restrict the activities of such organizations. Local NGOs reported officials actively sought to undermine some groups' activities, including interference in board elections or imposition of burdensome bureaucratic procedures on NGO board members and volunteers.

Under government regulations, the Ministries of Justice and Interior were required to vet proposed organization funding from international sources, and often did not authorize such funding.

### c. Freedom of Religion

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

### d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The constitution provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. In felony or misdemeanor cases, the attorney general and the competent court decided whether defendants should be subject to a travel ban, a decision that could be appealed to the Supreme Criminal Court. Authorities imposed travel bans on 74 individuals during the year but subsequently lifted 39 of them.

**In-country Movement:** According to Freedom House, authorities sometimes restricted movement inside the country to prevent protests by residents of largely Shia villages outside Manama. According to a July HRW report, some state universities required women to show they had the permission of male guardians before they could go on field trips or stay at or leave campus accommodations or grounds.

**Foreign Travel:** The law allowed the government to reject for “reasonable cause” applications to obtain or renew passports, but the applicant had the right to appeal such decisions before the High Civil Court.

The government maintained a website enabling individuals to check their status before travel, although some individuals claimed the website's information was unreliable. Authorities cited "defense of national security" when denying passport applications and could prevent citizens perceived as openly critical of the government from leaving the country. According to Freedom House, the government obstructed foreign travel by numerous opposition figures and activists.

**Exile:** On September 15, according to Amnesty International, Maryam al-Khawaja was denied boarding in London for a flight to Manama to visit her father, prominent human rights defender Abdulhadi al-Khawaja.

**Citizenship:** The government could revoke citizenship of defendants in both criminal and political cases, including for natural-born citizens, regardless of whether individuals might become stateless by these actions. There were no reports of punitive citizenship revocations during the year.

## **e. Protection of Refugees**

The government generally cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

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

providing protection to refugees. The government at times provided protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Such protection was mostly limited to those who were able to obtain and maintain employment. Such individuals generally had access to health care and education services while employed but were at risk of deportation if they became unemployed or their country of origin revoked their passports.

## **f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**

Not applicable.

## **g. Stateless Persons**

The country contributed to statelessness, including through arbitrary or discriminatory denationalization and discrimination against women in nationality laws or their administration in practice. Individuals derived citizenship only from the father, but the king could also confer or revoke citizenship. The law did not grant citizenship to children born to citizen mothers and foreign fathers, even if the birth took place within the country. Similarly, the law did not provide a path to citizenship for foreign men

married to citizen women but allowed foreign women married to citizen men to become citizens.

Human rights organizations reported these laws resulted in stateless children, particularly when the foreign father was unable or unwilling to secure citizenship for the child from the father's country of nationality, or when the father was stateless, deceased, or unknown. The number of stateless persons residing in the country was unknown. Stateless persons had limited access to social services, education, and employment.

According to Freedom House, after a mass citizenship revocation in 2019 prompted international outcry, the monarch and courts restored the citizenship of hundreds of individuals, but those left out of the restoration included the most prominent opposition activists, and the government retained the authority to revoke citizenship without meaningful due process.

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

Citizens did not have the ability to choose their political system or their government. The constitution provided for an elected 40-member Council of Representatives, the lower house of parliament. The constitution permitted the king to dissolve the Council of Representatives after

consulting the chairpersons of both houses of parliament and the head of the Constitutional Court. The king could not dissolve the Council of Representatives for the same reasons more than once in a term. The king had the power to amend the constitution and to propose, ratify, and promulgate laws.

## **Elections and Political Participation**

**Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections:** Free participation in the political process was restricted by several measures, including the lack of power of the elected body, banning of the country's principal opposition political groups in 2017 and 2018, laws restricting former members of banned political groups from running for office, the absence of an independent press, and the criminalization of online political criticism. On August 28, the National Institute for Human Rights issued its 2022 elections monitoring report and asked authorities to review the political rights law, which banned former members of dissolved political societies from participating in parliamentary elections, and to lift the ban on political participation. There were no updates to report as of year's end.

**Political Parties and Political Participation:** The government did not allow the formation of political parties, but some existing political societies developed political platforms, held internal elections, and hosted political gatherings. Bans on the two most prominent opposition political societies,

Wa'ad and al-Wifaq, dating to 2017 and 2018, respectively, were in effect.

To apply for registration, a political society had to submit its bylaws signed by all founding members, a list of all members, copies of members' residency cards, and a financial statement identifying the society's sources of funding and bank information. The society's principles, goals, and programs could not run counter to sharia (religious law) or the national interest, as interpreted by the judiciary, nor could the society base itself on sectarian, geographic, or class identity.

The government authorized registered political societies to nominate candidates for office and to participate in other political activities. The law banned practicing clerics from membership in political societies (including in leadership positions) and involvement in political activities, even on a voluntary basis.

### **Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable**

**Groups:** According to observers, Shia and Sunni citizens had equal rights before the law but Sunnis, despite being in the minority demographically, dominated political life through manipulation of electoral districting, voter registration, restrictions on freedom of expression, and drafting of laws.

## **Section 4. Corruption in Government**

The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the

government generally implemented the law effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption.

**Corruption:** According to GDN Online, 11 government officials faced prosecution for corruption during the year. In addition, two border control employees at the King Fahd causeway were convicted of bribery, sentenced to five and seven years in prison, respectively, and fined 7,000 dinars (\$19,000).

The National Audit Office, an arm of the Prime Minister's Office, was responsible for combating government corruption.

The Interior Ministry's General Directorate of Anticorruption and Economic and Electronic Security held workshops for various ministries throughout the year.

Significant areas of government activity, including the security forces and the Bahrain Defense Force, and their off-budget government expenditures, lacked transparency. The privatization of public land for profit remained a concern among political opposition groups. Human rights advocates contended the security forces employed opaque and discriminatory employment practices, including nepotism.

For additional information concerning corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy*

*Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

## **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

The government restricted domestic human rights groups, and some human rights activists were imprisoned, exiled, or coerced into silence, according to international human rights organizations. Local leaders, civil society organizations, and activists reported harassment, including police surveillance and delayed processing of civil documents. The government disqualified candidates for board elections based on their prior membership in a political opposition society. Activists reported forgoing international travel, particularly to human rights-related events, fearing attendance would result in travel bans.

Noncitizens affiliated with international human rights and labor organizations, or who were critical of the government, reported authorities indefinitely delayed or refused their visa applications for travel to the country, or at times refused to admit individuals who possessed a valid visa or qualified for the country's visa-free entry program.

In March, the government revoked the visas of two HRW representatives to attend an International Parliamentary Union international assembly in

Manama, two days after HRW, a permanent observer to the organization, issued a joint statement with 21 other NGOs urging assembly delegates to raise concerns regarding the lack of political freedom in the country.

Authorities also blocked an international NGO official from entering the country to attend the meeting despite having a valid visa and prior assurances that the visa was in order.

**Retribution against Human Rights Defenders:** On February 28, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women published concerns regarding the shrinking civic space for women human rights defenders in the country and reports of intimidation, harassment, threats, physical abuse, sexual violence, travel bans, and arbitrary detention against them. It urged the government to further strengthen and enforce measures to protect women human rights defenders, including journalists and political opposition members, from acts of reprisals.

A Front Line Defenders report released April 5 stated authorities persistently withheld necessary medical treatment from human rights defenders in prison.

**The United Nations or Other International Bodies:** On August 30, the government invited the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit the country following the hunger strike in Jaw prison earlier that month; the government postponed the visit without giving a reason and had not rescheduled it as of year's end.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The foreign minister chaired the National Human Rights Committee, which coordinated human rights policy with 18 ministries and public entities. The Ombudsperson's Office, the National Institute for Human Rights (NIHR), the Ministry of Interior's Special Investigation Unit and Child Protection Unit, the General Directorate of Verdict Enforcement and Alternative Sentences, the PDRC, the Ministry of Social Development's Child Protection Center, and the Expatriate Workers' Shelter worked with one another throughout the year. The Ombudsperson's Office maintained a hotline for citizens to report police abuse via telephone, email, WhatsApp, or in person. The National Intelligence Agency's inspector general also worked with the Ombudsperson's Office.

The PDRC monitored prisons, detention centers, and other places where persons could be detained, such as hospital and psychiatric facilities. It was empowered to, and did, conduct inspections of facilities, interview inmates or detainees, and refer cases to the Ombudsperson's Office or the Ministry of Interior's Special Investigations Unit. The NIHR conducted human rights workshops, seminars, and training sessions, as well as prison visits, issued public reports, and referred complaints to the public prosecutor. It also operated a hotline for citizens and residents to file human rights-related complaints, as well as a walk-in option.

Human rights groups questioned the independence and credibility of

investigations by government-sponsored organizations and asserted investigations into police abuse were slow and ineffective.

## Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

### Women

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** Rape, including of men, was illegal. The law did not address spousal rape. Penalties for rape included life imprisonment or execution when the survivor was younger than age 16, the rapist was the survivor's custodian or guardian, or the rape caused death. The government enforced this law.

On June 26, the king signed legislation to repeal a penal code provision that had allowed rapists to evade criminal prosecution if they agreed to marry their victims. Regional media reported the change was welcomed by women's rights activists, who had fought for years to eliminate the provision.

The law criminalized gender-based violence. Nevertheless, domestic violence against women was common, according to several women's rights organizations. Government leaders and women's organizations participated in awareness-raising activities during the year. The government maintained a shelter for women and children who were survivors of domestic violence. The law provided that local police officials should be contacted in cases of

domestic violence and that the public prosecutor could investigate if police passed information to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

**Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment:** The law prohibited sexual harassment, including insulting or committing an indecent act towards a woman in public or in the workplace, with penalties of imprisonment and fines. Although the government sometimes enforced the law, sexual harassment remained a widespread problem for women, especially foreign women domestic workers.

**Discrimination:** The constitution guaranteed gender equality in "political, social and economic spheres, without breaching the provisions of Islamic law." Laws were derived from sharia (Islamic jurisprudence).

Women had the right to initiate divorce proceedings in family courts, but unlike for men, both Shia and Sunni religious courts could refuse a woman's request for divorce. In divorce cases, Shia women retained custody of daughters until age nine and sons until age seven, after which time Shia fathers typically gained custody. In contrast, Sunni women could retain custody of daughters until age 17 and sons until age 15. Regardless of custody decisions, the father retained guardianship, or the right to make all legal decisions for the child, until the child reached age 21. A noncitizen woman automatically lost custody of her children if she divorced their citizen father "without just cause." Citizen women could file for divorce for reasons stated in their marriage contract, as well as for physical harm, lack

of financial support, abandonment, or imprisonment. Any divorced woman who remarried lost custody of her children from a prior marriage. Lawyers expressed concern regarding the long waiting periods for final judgments in Shia courts, particularly in divorce cases.

The basis for family law was sharia, as interpreted and enforced by separate bodies of Sunni and Shia religious experts. In instances of mixed Sunni-Shia marriages, families could choose which court heard the matter.

Women could own and inherit property and represent themselves in all public and legal matters. In the absence of a direct male heir, Shia women could inherit all their husband's property, while Sunni women inherited only a portion, with the brothers or other male relatives of the deceased also receiving a share. The government, however, respected wills directing the division of assets according to the wishes of the deceased.

Women encountered employment discrimination, including wage discrimination. The government did not effectively enforce antidiscrimination laws in the workplace.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

There were no known legal barriers or penalties for accessing contraception. Health centers did not require women to obtain spousal consent for provision of most family planning services but did require such consent for

women seeking sterilization procedures.

Contraceptives were available without prescription throughout the country regardless of nationality, gender, age, or marital status. The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence, although emergency contraception was not available.

Postexposure prophylaxis for HIV and syphilis was available locally.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The law did not specifically provide for the protection of members of racial or ethnic minority groups against violence and discrimination. It granted citizenship to ethnic Arab applicants who had resided in the country for 15 years and non-Arab applicants with 25 years' residency. There were numerous reports that authorities did not apply the citizenship law uniformly.

## **Children**

**Birth Registration:** Individuals derived citizenship only from their father or by decree from the king. Women could not transmit their nationality to their children, rendering stateless the children of citizen mothers and noncitizen fathers if the children could or would not claim citizenship through the father's nationality.

Authorities did not register births immediately. Children not registered

before reaching their first birthday had to obtain a registration by court order. The government did not provide public services to a child without a birth certificate. Mothers giving birth out of wedlock in public or government-run hospitals often faced difficulties in obtaining birth certificates for their children.

**Education:** Schooling was compulsory for children until age 15 and was provided free of charge to citizens and legal residents through grade 12. Authorities segregated government-run schools by gender, although girls and boys used the same curricula and textbooks. Islamic studies based solely on Sunni doctrine were mandatory for all Muslim students and optional for non-Muslim students.

**Child Abuse:** Laws against child abuse existed and the government enforced them effectively. In May, the Ministry of Interior established a cyberspace protection unit for children younger than 15 and a hotline to report online blackmailing incidents against children. On July 11, the NIHR established a child rights commissioner tasked with promoting the rights of children, investigating crimes against children or allegations of systemic abuse against them and reinforcing existing protections, among other duties.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** According to the law, the minimum age of marriage was 16 for girls and 18 for boys, but special circumstances allowed marriages at younger ages with approval from a family court. The government enforced the law effectively.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law prohibited exploitation of a child for various crimes, including in commercial sex and child pornography; authorities enforced the law. The law imposed penalties, including a mandatory minimum two-year prison sentence for child pornography, on adults who sexually exploited children or incited or coerced children to commit crimes.

The age of consent was age 21 and there was no close-in-age exemption.

## **Antisemitism**

The Jewish community was estimated at approximately three dozen persons. Antisemitic media statements and protests by local citizens occurred regularly. No incidents of antisemitic violence were reported.

In May, religious leaders publicly criticized the Ministry of Education's curriculum reforms aimed at eliminating antisemitic language and misinformation about the State of Israel in K-12 curricula, forcing the government to halt its planned revision of the curriculum.

The region's oldest synagogue, the House of Ten Commandments, openly observed Jewish traditions and held prayers in the downtown area of the capital. In October, Ministry of Interior officers assigned to protect the synagogue halted attempts to deface its door and walls. No arrests or prosecutions were reported.

## Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

**Criminalization:** The law did not criminalize same-sex sexual conduct between consenting adults. It prescribed fines, imprisonment, deportation, or a combination thereof for persons engaging in “debauchery” or “public indecency.” The government used this provision against individuals suspected of being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) or of “cross-dressing.”

**Violence and Harassment:** There was a societal pattern of harassment against LGBTQI+ persons, although no official cases of violence were available for citation.

**Discrimination:** The law did not extend antidiscrimination protections because of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. The law did not recognize LGBTQI+ couples and their families, nor grant them rights equal to rights of other persons.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity occurred,

including in employment and obtaining legal identity documents.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** Courts permitted individuals to change their gender identity markers on legal and identifying national documents to bring them into alignment with their gender identity (as male or female). Individuals had to provide medical documentation of a “sex change operation” or medical necessity. Nonbinary, intersex, or gender nonconforming options were not available.

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices:** The law did not ban so-called conversion therapy or involuntary psychological treatment for suspected LGBTQI+ individuals. There were no known reports of such practices being employed during the year, or of medically unnecessary surgeries performed on children or nonconsenting adult intersex persons.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:** There were no official or licensed organizations that advocated for the LGBTQI+ community. Societal norms restricted the ability of LGBTQI+ organizations to form and to openly convene events publicly supportive of the LGBTQI+ community.

In June, international media reported authorities abruptly and without explanation removed the movie *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* from cinema screenings. The government’s motivation for removal of the movie was believed to be over the inclusion of a transgender flag printed with the

words “Protect Trans Kids” in the background of one frame.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The law prohibited discrimination against persons with disabilities, including in employment, and provided for fines in cases of job-related discrimination. The government did not enforce these provisions effectively, and did not prosecute any cases of offenses against persons with disabilities during the year. The government did not provide information and communications in accessible formats. Persons with disabilities encountered employment discrimination, including wage discrimination. The government did not effectively enforce antidiscrimination laws in the workplace.

The constitution provided for social security, social insurance, and health care for persons with disabilities. Children with disabilities attended public and private schools through the secondary levels, although physical and curriculum accessibility remained a challenge for some. Schools appointed teacher assistants and helpers to assist them.

Building codes required accessible facilities in all new government and public buildings in the city of Manama. The law did not mandate access to private, nonresidential buildings for persons with disabilities.

## **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

Human rights organizations reported that Shia citizens faced systemic

discrimination and faced barriers to equal participation in society and government, especially certain government and security-sector jobs. Human rights advocates contended the security forces employed discriminatory employment practices, including rarely hiring Shia citizens.

In July, HRW reported authorities blocked Shia worshippers from attending Friday prayers at the country's largest Shia mosque on two Fridays in June, following local protests against Saudi Arabia's execution of two Shia Bahrainis. The Ministry of Interior imposed traffic control and access restrictions, and interviewees told HRW that authorities set up checkpoints at every entry point to al-Diraz neighborhood starting on June 2, with riot and traffic police present at the checkpoints. According to those who spoke with HRW, authorities checked the identity documents of those seeking to pass through the checkpoints and police continued to allow non-Bahrainis and residents of al-Diraz and nearby neighborhoods to enter the area.

HRW reported in July that authorities arrested a prominent Shia cleric, Sheikh Mohammad Sanqoor, on May 22. He often gave sermons at the country's largest Shia mosque. A few days before his arrest, Sanqoor called on authorities to share information with the families of persons detained at Jaw prison, saying the families had recently heard detainees at the prison had been abused. After protests, authorities released Sanqoor on May 25.

There were no known cases involving societal violence or discrimination against persons based on HIV or AIDS status, but medical experts

acknowledged that discrimination existed in the form of social stigmas that delayed or prevented patients from seeking medical care for fear of public disclosure of their medical condition. The government screened newly arrived migrant workers for infectious diseases, including HIV and AIDS. The government provided medical care to individuals with HIV and AIDS with no reports of discriminatory practices.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The constitution and labor code recognized the right to form and join independent trade unions, as well as the right to strike, but with significant restrictions. The law did not provide for the right to collective bargaining. The government did not effectively enforce all applicable laws, including prohibitions on antiunion discrimination. Penalties for violations of law protecting freedom of association and the right to strike were less than those under other laws involving denials of civil rights and were sometimes applied against violators.

The law prohibited trade unions in the public sector. The law also prohibited members of the military from joining unions. Public sector workers could join private sector trade unions and professional associations,

although these entities could not bargain on their behalf. There were two licensed, multisectoral trade union federations, the General Federation for Bahrain Trade Unions and the Bahrain Free Labor Unions Federations.

There was a right to strike but according to the law, only trade union organizations could organize and announce strikes. According to the law, strikes were prohibited in vital facilities such as hospitals, airports, and commercial outlets, and in front of locations with a security nature.

The law prohibited strikes in 12 “vital” sectors, the scope of which exceeded International Labor Organization standards, including the oil, gas, education, telecommunications, transportation, and health sectors, as well as pharmacies and bakeries. The law made no distinction between “vital” and “nonvital” employees within these sectors. Workers were required to approve a strike with a simple majority and provide 15 days’ notification to the employer before conducting a strike.

The law allowed trade unions and federations of unions. In practice the existing union federations represented unions from different sectors, although the legal text stipulated that union federations should include only “similar,” not multisector, unions. An individual convicted of criminal acts that led to the dissolution of a trade union was prohibited from holding any union leadership position. The law gave the labor minister, rather than the unions, the right to select the federation to represent workers in national-level bargaining and international forums. The law did not require

reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The law prohibited unions from engaging in political activities.

On June 16, the country's first trade union for domestic workers was established during a conference to commemorate International Domestic Workers' Day.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

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 prohibited the worst forms of child labor. There were no confirmed reports during the year of the worst forms of child labor.

## **d. Discrimination (see section 6)**

## **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** There was no national private sector minimum wage law. A standardized government pay scale covered public sector workers, with a set minimum monthly wage. While the minimum wage for citizens was generally considered a living wage, there was no minimum wage for

foreign workers in the public sector; however, government-issued guidelines advised employers in the public and private sectors to pay a minimum monthly wage. There was no official poverty level.

Subject to the provisions of the private-sector law, employers could not employ a worker for more than 48 hours per week without including contract provisions for overtime pay. Employers could not employ Muslim workers during the month of Ramadan for more than six hours per day or 36 hours per week.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** The Ministry of Labor set occupational safety and health (OSH) standards that were appropriate for the main industries in the country. The law outlined protections that applied to citizens and noncitizens alike, except for domestic workers. The law stipulated that companies in violation of occupational safety standards could be subject to fines. The Ministry of Labor employed general inspectors and occupational safety inspectors. Their roles were to inspect workplaces, occupational health and safety conditions, and the employer/employee work relationship. The ministry used a team of six engineers from multiple specialties to investigate risks and inspect standards at construction and outdoor sites, where most violations of OSH standards took place. Workers reported fear of retaliation and risked jeopardizing their employment for reporting situations that endangered their health or safety, refusing to work in hazardous conditions, or taking legal action

against employers who retaliated against them for exercising their right to remove themselves from such conditions.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The government did not regularly or proactively identify unsafe conditions but did respond to workers' OSH complaints. The government did not effectively enforce OSH laws or the minimum wage and overtime laws. Violations of OSH laws were rarely reported. Penalties were regularly applied against OSH violators but never applied against minimum wage violators. Penalties for wage and hour violations were not commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud. Labor inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and could initiate sanctions. Law 51, issued in June, granted inspectors of the Labor Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) the status of judicial police officers during labor inspections, with enhanced authority to inspect workplaces and implement labor law.

In February, the LMRA partnered with Amazon Web Services to implement the final phase of the Wage Protection System, allowing the government to monitor payments from employers to private-sector workers.

The LMRA threatened employers who confiscated passports with administrative violations and prohibited at-fault employers from hiring new workers. Recruitment agencies complicit in illegal practices could be subject to license revocation, legal action, shutdown of business operations, or a forfeit of license deposits. During the year the government shut down

recruitment agencies and revoked licenses of others for infringing on workers' rights.

The LMRA's inspectors were sworn officers of the court, with the authority to conduct official investigations. Inspector reports could result in fines, court cases, loss of work permits, and termination of businesses. These inspectors focused on the legal and administrative provisions under which individuals fell, including work permits, employer records, and licenses.

Inspectors had the authority to levy fines and close worksites if employers did not improve conditions by specified deadlines. A judge determined fines per violation, per worker affected, or both. A judge could also sentence violators to prison. For repeat violators, the court could double the penalties. NGOs expressed concern that resources for enforcement of the laws were inadequate for the number of worksites and workers, that worksites would not be inspected, and that violations would continue. The number of labor inspectors was not sufficient to enforce compliance.

A ministerial decree prohibited outdoor work between noon and 4 p.m. during July and August because of heat conditions. Authorities enforced the ban with regard to large firms, but according to local observers, violations by smaller businesses were common and without consequences. Employers who violated the ban were subject to up to three months' imprisonment, fines, or both, but enforcement was inconsistent. From July 1 to August 31, the Ministry of Labor documented 16 companies and 31 workers who

violated the summer heat ban.

In April, the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments and the LMRA signed a joint initiative to provide administrative assistance in filing labor lawsuits, following up with labor cases, connecting workers with lawyers, offering experts' advice, and providing translators for workers who were registered with the migrant workers registration centers. The government published pamphlets on foreign workers' rights in several languages and provided manuals on these rights to local diplomatic missions. Workers could file complaints with the government via email, in person, or through government hotlines. Most cases involving abused domestic workers, however, did not reach the ministry or the public prosecutor.

Violations of wage, overtime, and OSH standards were common in sectors employing informal foreign workers, such as construction, automotive repair, and domestic service. According to NGOs, workplace safety inspection and compliance were substandard. Because the law did not fully protect domestic workers, this group was particularly vulnerable to exploitation due to the difficulties of oversight and access to private residences.

The Ministries of Labor and Interior acknowledged severe underreporting of abuse and labor exploitation in the informal sector. The informal sector was estimated to make up approximately one-third of the labor force.