

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES 2018 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 FNC consists of 40 representatives allocated proportionally to each emirate based on population; half are elected members while the remainder are appointed by the leaders of their emirates. There are no political parties. The last election was in 2015, 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.

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 brought to conviction cases of official corruption.

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. Further, 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 severe abuse or mistreatment. Human rights groups alleged mistreatment 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.

Sharia 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 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 prisoners complained that most detainees had to share beds or sleep on the concrete floor due to lack of mattresses. There were reports that cellblocks built to hold 148 inmates held 220 and had only two functioning toilets.

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 Dubai several procedural and judicial reforms were recently implemented 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 temperatures.

In drug units there were reports of insects in food, poor food handling, and inadequate general hygiene.

Medical care was generally adequate in regular prisons, although some prisoners reported delays of up to six weeks in receiving medical treatment and difficulty obtaining necessary medication, including insulin for diabetics. Media reports and nongovernmental organizations stated some detainees in State Security Department custody did not receive adequate access to medical care.

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 nongovernmental organizations (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.

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.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

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 for external security.

There were no public reports of impunity involving security forces, but there was also no publicly available information on whether authorities investigated complaints of police abuses including prison conditions and mistreatment (see section 1.c., Administration).

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 nonstate security detentions of more than two years without charges.

Authorities may temporarily release detainees who deposit money, a passport, or an unsecured personal promissory statement signed by a third party. In April Dubai Public Prosecution announced that it would no longer keep passports of residents or tourists charged with certain misdemeanors in exchange for bail, instead issuing an electronic travel ban. Law enforcement officials often held detainees' passports. 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.

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 committed 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 at 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. There was no estimate available of the percentage of the prison population in pretrial status. On December 31, the State Security Court at the Federal Supreme Court upheld a 10-year prison sentence and fine of one million dirhams (\$272,000) issued in May 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 for insulting the "status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols" and 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 pretrial.

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.

Osama al-Najjar, convicted in 2014 of making unlawful postings on social media and having links to al-Islah, an organization with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and designated by the government as a terrorist organization, 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; he remained imprisoned throughout the year.

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.

A diplomatic observer reported that in Abu Dhabi a doctor, without receiving notification of a trial, was charged and convicted in his absence of criminal medical malpractice before police attempted arrest. The doctor was sentenced to one year in prison, ordered to pay 200,000 AED (\$54,447) in diya or compensation to the victim's family, and 300,000 AED (\$81,670) in fines.

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 June the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department began issuing court summons in Arabic, English, 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; cases under local jurisdiction are appealed to the Court of Cassation and federal cases to the Federal Supreme Court. Dubai has its own Court of Cassation. With the additional exception of Ras al-Khaimah, appeals in all other emirates are heard before 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 payment, 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 May Dubai Courts announced a judicial reform aimed at reducing overall trial duration and curbing jail overcrowding. Under the C3 Court initiative, Dubai's

courts of first instance, appeal, and cassation will all be integrated into one court with three departments, each with a judge.

State security cases are heard at the Federal Court of Appeal and may be appealed to the higher Federal Supreme Court.

On November 25, president Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan issued a pardon for British academic Matthew Hedges, who was released the following day and returned to the United Kingdom. Authorities arrested Hedges on May 5 at the Dubai airport on suspicion of spying for the UK government, and a court sentenced him to life in prison on November 21. Hedges said he was in the country doing academic research on the UAE security sector. Advocates for Hedges said he was not allowed access to a lawyer and was mistreated in detention. The government denied the allegations and stated he was treated in accordance with the law.

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 permitted to defend themselves while on bail.

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 issued or updated 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.

In March security officers reportedly pulled over Loujain al-Hathloul, a Saudi women's rights activist, while she was driving in Abu Dhabi. She was subsequently extradited to Saudi Arabia.

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. A 2016 study by the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab reported that since 2012 local journalists, activists, and dissidents were targeted by sophisticated spyware attacks, which the researchers found may be linked to the government (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 also includes the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Senegal, 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, and against al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State in southern Yemen.

Killings: The UN, NGOs such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (AI), 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, 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. The UN Panel of Experts released a report in January stating that the UAE detained individuals in Yemen at possibly three centers in Yemen, which were “administered and supervised exclusively by the United Arab Emirates.” It also reported that UAE forces were responsible for torture, denial of timely medical treatment, denial of due process rights, and enforced disappearances of detainees. Detainees informed the panel that at the Bureiqa detention site, there was “[t]orture, including beatings, electrocution, constrained suspension, imprisonment in a metal cell (‘the cage’) in the sun and sexual violence. UAE soldiers and officials reportedly inflicted these abuses to obtain information or to punish individuals.”

In June the Associated Press (AP) published articles alleging that the UAE controlled secret prisons in Yemen, with Yemeni guards working under the direction of Emirati officers and prisoners being held without charge or trial. The AP alleged that those prisoners were subjected to sexual violence, electric shocks, and beatings. The AP alleged that at least five prisons used sexual torture against inmates, including electric shocks on prisoners' genitals, hanging rocks from their testicles, and rape. The UAE government denied that it maintained any secret prisons in Yemen or that it tortured prisoners.

In August a UN Human Rights Council-mandated Group of Experts looking into the human rights situation in Yemen reported that it had reasonable grounds to believe that the Emirati, Saudi, and Yemeni governments were responsible for human rights violations in Yemen, including “unlawful deprivation of the right to life, arbitrary detention, rape, torture, ill-treatment, enforced disappearance and child recruitment, and serious violations of freedom of expression and economic, social and cultural rights.”

Other Conflict-related Abuse: In September international humanitarian organizations said Saudi and Emirati policy decisions in Yemen continued to hamper their ability to respond to the crisis, impede the import of necessary food and fuel, and slow the delivery of aid. The organizations cited examples, stating the coalition refused to grant multi-entry visas to international-NGO staff; interfered with staff access to project sites; continued insistence on extra inspections for shipments to Hudaydah port; and maintained the closure of the Sana'a airport.

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.

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 the Supreme Court ruled that both online verbal and written insults are a prosecutable offense. In January the Federal Supreme Court upheld a 10-year jail sentence and 500,000 AED (\$136,000) fine for a citizen who was found guilty of insulting and mocking one of the country's leaders.

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.

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. During the year there were no confirmed arrests under the declaration.

Press and Media Freedom: 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. All media conformed to unpublished government reporting guidelines. 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 March 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. In April an Ajman Radio anchor was fired under orders from the crown prince of Ajman after being accused of insulting a caller on his morning talk show; the anchor stated that he was defending the country's reputation.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: By law the NMC, whose members the president appoints, licenses and censors all publications, including private association publications. The law authorizes censorship of domestic and foreign publications to remove criticism of the government, ruling families, or friendly governments. Statements that "threaten social stability," and materials considered pornographic, excessively violent, derogatory to Islam, or supportive of certain

Israeli government positions are criminalized. In April the Dubai Appeals Court upheld a three-month prison sentence and 5,000 AED (\$1,360) fine for an Indian man who was convicted of defaming Islam. 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. In 2017 the government issued new regulations that require government and private institutions to obtain a license before publishing or broadcasting media or advertising content, or face penalties. The order applied 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.

After severing diplomatic ties with Qatar, the government blocked Qatari-funded *al-Jazeera's* website and most Qatari broadcasting channels.

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. In June an Arab man was fined 250,000 AED (\$68,100) by the Abu Dhabi Criminal Court of First Instance on charges of defamation and violating cybercrime laws when he tweeted comments that were deemed insulting to a woman.

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, particularly in statements at the United Nations Human Rights Council in January in response to the country's Universal Periodic Review, for excessively restricting freedom of speech.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted access to some websites and monitored social media, instant messaging services, and blogs. 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. 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 late December 2017, the government blocked Skype and in January reportedly blocked an online petition protesting that move. Calling applications 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. In April a man was

sentenced to three months in prison and fined 5,000 AED (\$1,360) for insulting key figures in Islam on Facebook.

The 2012 cybercrimes decree and the 2015 Antidiscrimination Law provide for more severe penalties for violations and include jail terms that reach life sentences and fines depending on severity and seriousness of the crime. In August 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 Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) warned residents that posting or spreading “fake news” on social media was punishable by imprisonment or fines up to one million AED (\$272,000).

Abu Dhabi police reported in January that they had investigated 774 cybercrime cases in 2017, 206 of which were categorized as blackmail.

In March the National Media Council (NMC) began requiring 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.

The International Telecommunication Union estimated in 2017 that 94 percent of households had access to the internet.

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 and the government imposed restrictions.

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 some restrictions.

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 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.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at 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. Additionally, 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 704 prisoners ahead of Eid al-Adha and pledged to settle financial obligations of released prisoners. Rulers across the emirates pardoned nearly 2,000 prisoners ahead of national day. In April a Dubai-based businessperson cleared the debts of 560 prisoners held across the country.

Travel bans were placed on citizens. 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 June 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. Qatar filed a case in the International Court of Justice against the UAE for having violated the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination when it ordered all Qatari citizens to leave the country. In July the International Court of Justice ruled that the government should take three provisional measures: ensure that all families that included a Qatari were reunited; give Qatari students who were studying in the UAE at the time of the expulsion the opportunity to complete their education in the UAE, or obtain their educational records if they chose to study elsewhere; and allow Qataris access to the UAE's judicial system. In response the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation issued a statement that the government had already taken those measures.

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.

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 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 for a permit to legally remain in the UAE for a year. These applicants were to be exempted from immigration fines and their permits extendable, although the duration of the extension was unknown.

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 September 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.

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.

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. Additionally, authorities sometimes held a women-only majlis or a majlis focused specifically on women's issues.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: There were no democratic general elections. In 2015 an appointed electorate of more than 224,000 members, representing approximately one-fifth of the total citizen population, elected 20 members of the Federal National Council (FNC), a 40-member consultative body with some legislative authority. Each emirate receives seats in the FNC based on population. Each emirate's ruler appoints that emirate's portion of the other 20 FNC members. The electorate appointment process lacked transparency. Approximately 35 percent of eligible voters participated, electing one woman among the 20 FNC members, with another eight women appointed by their respective rulers. The current speaker of the FNC is the first woman to lead the FNC. In December the president decreed that women's representation in the FNC will 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 nine women in the FNC (one elected, who was appointed speaker).

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 February a local public prosecution employee and four Indian paralegals were sentenced by the Dubai Court of First Instance to 10 years in prison and fines of 50,000 AED (\$13,600) each, on top of an additional payment of 154,000 AED (\$42,000) to the public prosecution office, for accepting bribes to alter 103 criminal rulings issued in absentia. The Indian defendants were also sentenced to deportation following their prison time.

Authorities also prosecuted cases of police corruption. In July a Dubai police officer was sentenced for two years in prison and a 2,000 AED (\$540) fine for accepting bribes in return for inappropriately running police checks into the criminal status of 17 individuals.

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 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 2015 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 be based in the country but, on a limited basis, allowed representatives to visit. 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 Centre 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 January the EHRA accused HRW and AI of obtaining incorrect and misleading information to spread rumors 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/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 July local media reported a case of domestic abuse of a woman in Ajman. Her husband reportedly beat her, starved her, and forced her to work for his business without pay. 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 January, a man was sentenced to 10 years in prison for repeatedly raping his maid. 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.

Additionally, female victims of rape or other sexual crimes faced the possibility of prosecution for consensual sex outside marriage instead of receiving assistance from authorities. For example, the Dubai Court of Cassation reduced a one-year prison sentence to a six-month prison sentence against a Gulf woman accused of consensual sex after accusing a Gulf man of raping her.

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 is 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, involuntary sterilization, or other coercive population control methods.

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.

Additionally, 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. In January the Dubai Court of Misdemeanors sentenced an unwed mother and father to a suspended one-month jail term and deportation for having sexual relations outside of marriage. The government may imprison and deport noncitizen women if they bear children out of wedlock.

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 February Sharjah Civil Defense hired 15 female firefighters, joining the country's first "Women's Firefighting Unit."

While foreign men working in the country and earning a salary above a certain level could obtain residency permits for their families for three years, a foreign woman could 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 60 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, who were working outside the home.

Children

Birth Registration: Children generally derive citizenship from their parents. As noted above the children of local 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 the Ministry of Education made all public schools coeducational from the first to fifth grades, starting with this 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 February the Community Development Authority began creation of a database of child abuse reports as part of its child protection system. In April Dubai Police inaugurated an interrogation center specifically designated for child abuse victims.

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 noted a reported 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 age 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.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 December *Bloomberg* published an article featuring Dubai's Jewish community, entitled "As the Gulf Warms to Israel, a Synagogue Grows in Dubai." 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 <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/>.

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 December Dubai police launched a smart application to teach people how to communicate through Emirati sign language.

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. While enforcement was effective for jobs in the public sector, the government did not sufficiently encourage hiring in the private sector. 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 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. A survey of 75 human resources managers from the government and private sectors released in July showed that local employers do not hire persons with disabilities because they were perceived as “too expensive” and unable to perform well.

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 MENA Games and will host the Special Olympics World Games in 2019.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Approximately 90 percent of the country's residents were noncitizens, more than half of whom originated from the Indian subcontinent. 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. 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. The Abu Dhabi Court of Cassation rejected their final appeal on December 31.

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.

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.

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 law. In May 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 Community Development Authority (CDA) regulates and provides licensing services to nonprofit civil society organizations and associations that organize ongoing social, cultural, artistic, or entertainment activities. In April Dubai issued a law requiring all voluntary organizations and individual volunteers to register with the CDA within six months. Additionally, 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. In November hundreds of workers in Abu Dhabi protested over their privately owned company's failure to pay wages on time. Workers complained that they had not been paid for up to five months.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor; however, 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 withhold ATM cards from employees, withdrawing the money and paying the employee anywhere between 35 to 40 percent less than the mandated salary.

In February the government published a guidebook in English, Arabic, and Urdu to inform workers about personal safety, the importance of protective equipment, and their rights, such as working hours, overtime, salary, medical benefits, days off, end-of-service benefits, and accommodation allowances; it also warned laborers about arrestable offenses. Guidebooks were distributed in Dubai medical centers.

The September 2017 domestic worker law that regulates domestic workers' contracts, rights and privileges, prohibitions, and recruitment agencies was implemented throughout the year. In March the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department issued a resolution establishing a public prosecutor and specialized judicial departments for crimes against domestic workers, whom the government estimated to number approximately 750,000.

It was relatively common for employers to subject migrant domestic workers, and to a lesser degree, construction and other manual labor workers, to conditions indicative of 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 February a foreign-born mother and daughter were sentenced by a Sharjah court to one and a half years in jail, followed by deportation, while the husband was fined 3,000 AED (\$800) for torturing a domestic worker to death.

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. 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.

Also see the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits employment of persons younger than age 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 olds, 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 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. Women who worked in the private sector, however, regularly did not receive equal benefits and reportedly faced discrimination in promotions and equality of wages. The domestic worker law also prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, religion, political opinion, national, or social origin. 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. Nevertheless, job advertisements requesting applications only from certain nationalities were common and not regulated.

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.

Sailors faced particular difficulty remedying grievances against employers. In February 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. According to the Volunteers from the Mission to Seafarers, the organization assisted almost 700 crew in 2017 who had not received their salaries.

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 busses 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 General Directorate of Residency and Foreign Affairs Dubai Office conducted the third iteration of the Taqdeer Award program, which rewards companies based on labor practices and grants them priority for government contracts.

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.

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.

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.

In May the New York University Coalition for Fair Labor, a faculty-student advocacy group, accused New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) of failing to reimburse recruitment fees for workers on its campus. NYUAD disagreed with the report's findings, and presented a counter-report that it said pointed to "a good level of compliance among contractors."

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. According to local press reports, there were 48 registered cases of workplace injuries in 2017. The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization routinely conducted health and safety site visits. In 2017 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. Additionally, 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/or 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.