

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Arab Emirates is a federation of seven semiautonomous emirates with a resident population of approximately 9.8 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, a consultative body that examines, reviews, and recommends changes to legislation and may discuss topics for legislation. The last election was in 2019, when appointed voters elected 20 Federal National Council members. Citizens may express their concerns directly to their leaders through traditional consultative mechanisms such as the open *majlis* (forum), but they do not have the right to choose their government in free and fair elections.

Each emirate maintains a local police force called a general directorate, which is officially a branch of the federal Ministry of Interior. All emirate-level general directorates of police enforce their respective emirate's laws autonomously. They also enforce federal laws within their emirate in coordination with one another under the federal ministry. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture in detention; arbitrary arrest and detention, including incommunicado detention, by government

agreeing with the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization on additional contract protections to provide domestic workers access to a personal mobile phone, private sleeping quarters, and a bank account in the worker's name for salary deposits. Liability for exploitation was extended to cover recruiters, and any contract extensions or transfers to other employers would need to be approved by the Philippine Embassy.

Although domestic worker salaries were not required to be paid via the WPS, the government continued a 2020 pilot program to incorporate domestic workers into the WPS through an agreement between the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization and First Abu Dhabi Bank. The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking reported that the pilot program integrated 423 individuals during the year, a figure representing less than 1 percent of the estimated number of domestic workers nationally.

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. To mitigate against potential labor abuse under the employer-based sponsorship system known as *kafala*, domestic workers have the right to terminate their employment if an employer fails to meet contractual obligations or if the employee is subject to sexual harassment or physical or verbal abuse by the employer. Despite legal measures allowing workers to change sponsors or terminate their employment, regulatory enforcement remained a problem.