

World Report 2024



Jordan

Events of 2023

People protest near the Israeli Embassy in Amman on October 18, 2023, as they demonstrate against the killing of hundreds of Palestinians following a strike on a hospital in the Gaza Strip.

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Jordanian authorities continued to limit civic space in 2023, quashing dissent by arresting and harassing peaceful dissidents and journalists and using vague and abusive laws to limit free speech and peaceful activism in violation of international legal protections.

In August, Jordanian authorities promulgated a new repressive [cybercrime law](#) that further undermines free speech online, threatens internet users' right to anonymity, and introduces a new authority to control social media that could pave the way for a surge in online censorship.

In May, authorities finally rescinded a [state of emergency](#) declared in March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic that had granted the prime minister sweeping powers to rule by decree.

Freedom of Expression

Jordanian law criminalizes speech deemed critical of the king, foreign countries, government officials and institutions, Islam, and Christianity and defamatory speech.

In August, Jordan's parliament hastily overhauled the country's [cybercrime law](#), circumventing public discourse and input. The law uses imprecise, vague, and undefined terminology like "fake news," "inciting immorality," and "online assassination of character." Such language falls short of meeting international legal standards for clear and precise legislation, making it difficult for individuals to understand and adhere to the law.

Notably, authorities dramatically increased penalties for online defamation or "character assassination" to a minimum three-month jail sentence or a fine of up to 20,000 Jordanian dinars (about US\$28,000). In 2021, the [number of cases](#) relating to online defamation under the 2015 cybercrime law reached 4,030, nearly double the number from the previous year, according to the annual reports from the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR).

In May, the trial of political activist Sufyan al-Tal and two other men, Abed Tawahiya and Omar Abu Rasaa, on charges related to free expression began. While al-Tal was released on bail soon after his arrest, Abu Rasaa and Tawahiya remain detained. In August, authorities briefly detained journalist Heba Abu Taha after she was sentenced to three months in prison for criticizing normalization with Israel in a Facebook post. She was released pending appeal. Also in August, a court sentenced commentator Ahmed Hassan al-Zoubi to one year in prison for a 2022 Facebook post criticizing the government's response to fuel price protests. Following a lengthy hunger strike to protest his own detention, the health of activist Hamad al-Kharsha had deteriorated by September. Authorities had arrested him in January 2022, and he is facing charges based on a coerced confession, according to his lawyer.

Freedoms of Assembly and Association

Under the Public Gatherings Law amended in March 2011, Jordan did not require government permission to hold public meetings or demonstrations, but authorities continued to require organizations and venues to obtain permission from the Interior Ministry or General Intelligence Department to host events.

Several Jordanian laws restrict freedom of association, including the Labor Law of 1996, which limits the [ability](#) to freely form trade unions, and the Associations Law of 2008, which regulates the formation and operation of nongovernmental groups (NGOs). Jordanian authorities impose onerous pre-approval restrictions on the receipt of foreign funding by NGOs.

In late 2019, Jordanian authorities [created a centralized committee](#) under the Prime Minister's Office to study and decide on foreign funding approval requests. However, representatives of donor states and local NGOs told Human Rights Watch in 2023 that the committee has done little if anything to ease restrictions.

Refugees and Migrants

By late 2023, [over 655,000](#) people from Syria had sought refuge in Jordan, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Over 85 percent of Syrians lived outside refugee camps in rented accommodations.

According to UNHCR, Jordan also hosted asylum seekers and refugees from other countries in 2023, [including](#) 61,081 Iraqis, 12,772 Yemenis, 5,163 Sudanese, 593 Somalis, and 1,195 people from other countries. Authorities continued to enforce a January 2019 decision banning UNHCR from registering as asylum seekers non-Syrians who officially entered the country for the purposes of medical treatment, study, tourism, or work, effectively barring their recognition as refugees and leaving many without UNHCR documentation or access to services.

Authorities continued to implement the Jordan Compact, the 2016 agreement between the Jordanian government and donor countries, which aimed to improve the livelihoods of Syrian

refugees by granting new legal work opportunities and improving the education sector. By July 2023, labor authorities stated that they had issued or renewed at least [373,000 work permits](#) for Syrians since 2016, although [many of these were renewals](#). Most professions remained closed to non-Jordanians, and many Syrians continued to work in the informal sector without labor protections.

The roughly 230,000 school-age Syrian refugees in Jordan face multiple obstacles to education that are most acute for children ages 12 and older. Only one-quarter of secondary-school-age Syrian refugee children in Jordan were [enrolled in school](#).

Jordan hosted an estimated [49,000 documented migrant domestic workers](#) in 2023, according to Labor Ministry statistics, mostly from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. NGOs repeatedly referred domestic workers who had suffered multiple abuses to Labor Ministry investigators. Abuses included wage theft, unsafe working conditions, long working hours without rest, passport and document confiscation, and physical, verbal, and sexual abuse.

Women's and Girls' Rights

Despite amendments in 2019, Jordan's personal status code remains discriminatory. Women and girls over 15 need the [permission](#) of a male guardian to marry for the first time, and marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men are not recognized. Women cannot travel abroad with their children without male guardian or judicial consent.

Article 98 of Jordan's penal code, amended in 2017, states that the "fit of fury" defense does not allow mitigated sentences for perpetrators of crimes "against women," but judges continued to impose mitigated sentences under article 99 if family members of victims did not support prosecutions of their male family members. Article 340 of the penal code also allows a man to receive a reduced sentence if he kills or attacks his wife or any of his female relatives in the act of committing adultery or in an "unlawful bed."

Such discriminatory laws leave women exposed to violence. Similarly, the penal code and Juveniles Act do not prohibit corporal punishment and allow parents to punish children in accordance with "general norms."

Article 9 of Jordan's Nationality Law does not allow Jordanian women married to non-Jordanians to pass on nationality. And while non-citizen children of Jordanian women no longer need work permits, many professions remain closed to them.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Jordan has no laws that explicitly criminalize same-sex relations. The penal code includes vague "immorality" provisions that are used to target sexual and gender minorities. Jordanian law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activists in Jordan reported facing [increased harassment](#) by authorities in 2023, which included the detention of two activists and freezing of their bank accounts, the closure of two LGBT rights organizations, and threats by security forces to expose LGBT people to their family members.

In a [2023 report](#), Human Rights Watch documented the far-reaching offline consequences of online targeting against LGBT people in Jordan, including entrapment, online extortion, online harassment, and reliance on illegitimately obtained digital information based on arbitrary phone searches in prosecutions. As a result of digital targeting, LGBT people said they felt unable to safely express their sexual orientation or gender identity online and that LGBT rights activism has subsequently suffered.

Social Protection and Economic Rights

Jordan continues to grapple with high unemployment, particularly for youth and women, coupled with a sharp rise in poverty following the Covid-19 pandemic and an increase in the cost of living that makes it difficult for many people to afford necessities. A decade of International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan programs has both failed to bring down Jordan's high debt levels and introduced economic reforms that further increased prices, including for fuel and electricity. Human Rights Watch [reported](#) in June that Jordan's automated cash transfer program for workers on low incomes, developed with significant financing from the World Bank, is undermined by errors, discriminatory policies, and stereotypes about poverty. The program is part of a social protection system that is failing to provide support to many people even as they go hungry, fall behind on rent, and take on crippling debt.

Jordan remains one of the few countries in the world that still allows imprisoning people for debt, which is prohibited under international law. In 2023, authorities lifted the pandemic-related state of emergency, ending a moratorium on debt-related imprisonment for sums exceeding 5,000 Jordanian dinars (about US\$7,000). Human Rights Watch [documented](#) how, in the absence of an adequate social security net, tens of thousands of Jordanians took out loans to cover basic necessities, only to end up in prison or wanted for failure to repay.

Criminal Justice System

Local governors continued to use provisions of the Crime Prevention Law of 1954 to place individuals in administrative detention for up to one year, in circumvention of the Criminal Procedure Law. Jordan's NCHR [reported](#) in 2023 that only 2,258 people were administratively detained in 2021, marking a dramatic decrease from the 21,322 administrative detentions in 2020.