

USDOS – US Department of State

2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Jordan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a constitutional monarchy ruled by King Abdullah II bin Hussein. The constitution grants the king ultimate executive and legislative authority. The multiparty parliament consists of a 130-member popularly elected House of Representatives (Majlis al-Nuwwab) and a Senate (Majlis al-Ayan) appointed by the king. Elections for the House of Representatives occur approximately every four years and last took place in November 2020. Local nongovernmental organizations reported some COVID-19-related disruptions during the election process but assessed voting was generally free and fair.

The Public Security Directorate has responsibility for law enforcement and reports to the Ministry of Interior. The Public Security Directorate and the General Intelligence Directorate share responsibility for maintaining internal security. The General Intelligence Directorate reports directly to the king. The armed forces report administratively to the minister of defense and have a support role for internal security. There is no separate Ministry of Defense; the prime minister also serves as defense minister. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment in government facilities; arbitrary arrest and detention; political prisoners or detainees; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including the existence of criminal libel laws and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceable assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including but not limited to domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and other harmful practices; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association (such as threats against labor activists).

Government impunity for human rights abuses remained, although the government took some limited steps to investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed abuses. Information on the outcomes of these actions was not publicly available for all cases. The government took steps to identify, investigate, prosecute, and punish officials engaged in public corruption. A former cabinet minister and agency head were separately convicted on corruption-related offenses, but limited transparency during investigations and trials contributed to popular perceptions of impunity.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

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

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. There were developments regarding custodial death cases from previous years.

Following the August death in an Irbid hospital of an unnamed individual who had been detained, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) expressed concern there was insufficient information publicly available to rule out arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life by security forces. Also in August, following the reported suicide of an individual held by security services, family members claimed the individual had been killed in custody.

As of October there was no indication authorities had further investigated NGO allegations related to the November 2020 death in custody of a 15-year-old boy identified as Fawwaz in a juvenile detention center in Madaba. An earlier investigation resulted in the suspension of juvenile prisoner transfers between certain detention centers but did not examine the circumstances of Fawwaz's death.

The case of three medical examiners referred to the Zarqa felony magistrate court in 2019 in connection with the 2018 death of Bilal Emoush, allegedly from torture following his arrest by the Public Security Directorate (PSD), remained pending with the Ministry of Justice.

Police officers are tried in police courts when facing either criminal penalties or administrative punishment. The quasi-governmental watchdog National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) and NGOs repeated calls for police officers accused of gross violations of human rights to be tried in independent civil courts instead of police courts, which fall under the Ministry of Interior and are considered less independent, according to many NGOs. NGOs frequently complained they were unable to access information on the results of cases.

b. Disappearance

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

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

The constitution bans torture, including psychological harm, by public officials and provides penalties up to three years' imprisonment for its use, with a penalty of up to 15 years if serious injury occurs. While the law prohibits such practices, international and local NGOs reported incidents of torture and mistreatment in police and security detention centers. Human rights lawyers found the penal code ambiguous and supported amendments to define "torture" more clearly and strengthen sentencing guidelines. According to government officials, all reported allegations of abuse in custody were thoroughly investigated, but human rights NGOs questioned the impartiality and comprehensive nature of these investigations. Authorities on trial for torture and mistreatment were most often convicted on charges of excessive use of force rather than torture.

In contrast with previous years, local and international NGOs did not report that Anti-Narcotics Division personnel routinely subjected detainees to severe physical abuse, but NGOs reported some instances of abuse. There were complaints of mistreatment by the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) during the year. Local NGOs said abuse still occurred, but citizens did not report it due to fear of reprisals. Authorities restricted access to information regarding the results of torture or mistreatment cases.

From October 2020 until September, the PSD Human Rights and Transparency Office received 81 complaints with allegations of harm (a lesser charge than torture that does not require a demonstration of intent) against officers; 64 complaints were referred to the courts. Most alleged abuse occurred in pretrial detention. The Human Rights and Transparency Office reported receiving 12 allegations of torture and mistreatment in prisons and rehabilitation centers between October 2020 and September, a drop of nearly 70 percent from the previous 12-month period. As of October, one case resulted in an internal disciplinary action, another was under investigation, two cases were administrative complaints, and eight did not go to trial for insufficient evidence.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in the country's 18 prisons varied: old facilities had poor conditions while new prisons met international standards. Authorities held foreigners without legal work or residency permits in the same facilities as citizens. (For information on asylum seekers and refugees, see section 2.f.)

Physical Conditions: International NGOs and legal aid organizations identified problems including overcrowding, limited health care, inadequate legal assistance for inmates, and limited social care for inmates and their families. The PSD reopened Qafqafa Prison in 2020, with a capacity of 1,050 inmates, to receive detainees from overcrowded prison facilities. In October an NGO reported this prison was over capacity.

The PSD continued to monitor detention facilities and to promote compliance with detention policies and used electronic records to log every case and detainee in all detention centers.

Officials reported overcrowding at some prisons, especially those in and around Amman. According to the PSD, 63,222 inmates in detention were released between October 2020 and September to ease overcrowding and mitigate the risk of COVID-19 spreading in prisons. NGOs, however, noted that the number of arrests made for violating COVID-19 defense orders (emergency measures the government established in 2020 and that remained in place as of mid-December), combined with governors' orders to rearrest some of those released, reduced the impact of these releases.

According to the PSD, authorities designated some facilities to hold only pretrial detainees. The GID held some persons detained on national security charges in a separate detention facility. During the year the NCHR made one visit to the GID facility. The GID allowed the NCHR to conduct unsupervised meetings with some prisoners in prior years. Detainees complained of solitary confinement, isolation, and prolonged pretrial detentions of up to six months. Local and international NGOs received reports of mistreatment, abuse, and torture in GID detention facilities.

Although basic medical care was available in all correctional facilities, medical staff complained that correctional facilities throughout the country lacked adequate medical facilities, supplies, and staff. Most facilities were unable to conduct blood tests and had limited X-ray capabilities, forcing doctors to rely largely on self-reporting by patients for certain conditions.

Conditions in the women's prison were generally better than conditions in most men's prisons. The capacity of the Juweideh detention center was 450 female detainees; 523 women were detained there as of September 21, according to the PSD.

Some police stations had separate holding areas for juveniles. Authorities held juveniles in special facilities supervised by the Ministry of Social Development.

Administration: The Ministry of Justice exercised oversight regarding the condition of detainees and was authorized to conduct investigations into allegations of human rights abuses. From October 2020 to September, the PSD Human Rights and Transparency Office made a total of 11 visits to detention centers accompanied by observers from both local and international organizations. Karamah (a team of government officials and NGOs) and the NCHR also monitored prison conditions, with the NCHR conducting approximately 30 prison visits. In some cases, both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, authorities severely restricted the access of detainees to visitors.

Authorities sometimes did not inform families regarding the whereabouts of detainees or delayed notification of families between 24 hours and 10 days. Although the PSD had a system of electronic recordkeeping to address this problem, NGOs reported families did not always know the whereabouts of detainees.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted some local and international human rights observers and lawyers to visit prisons and conduct private interviews. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had wide access to visit prisoners and detainees in all prisons, including facilities operated by the GID. Authorities approved some requests by local human rights observers to conduct announced monitoring visits independently of Karamah and the NCHR.

Improvements: The PSD renovated eight prison facilities to improve sanitary facilities, access to water, ventilation, and heating systems and equipped facilities with fire-safety equipment, outdoor lighting systems, and small-scale supermarkets for detainees. Authorities took steps to construct additional wings and floors in existing centers to fix infrastructure and accommodate additional detainees.

The PSD rehabilitated the health units in the Muwaqqar, Tafilah, and Juweideh detention centers. The PSD had a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Health and the ICRC to update the health units in the Swaqa and Juweideh detention centers and to establish a referral system to transfer patients outside prisons if an inmate's condition required treatment not available at the prison clinic.

The PSD and the Ministry of Justice expanded their distanced court hearings program, building additional video conference rooms in detention centers for a total of 18 rooms that served 12 detention centers. As of the end of October, more than 20,000 detainees had attended court hearings via conference calls since the outbreak of the pandemic, representing approximately 47 percent of all hearings during that period. Authorities also took steps to use alternatives to prison sentences for nonviolent offenders. The Ministry of Justice processed 264 criminals into alternative sentencing as of October.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court; however, the government did not always observe these prohibitions.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law provides a person in custody with the right to appear promptly before a judge or other judicial officer for a judicial determination of the legality of the detention. The law allows authorities to detain suspects for up to 24 hours without a warrant in all cases. It requires that police notify authorities within 24 hours of an arrest and that authorities file formal charges within 15 days of an arrest. Authorities can extend the period to file formal charges to as long as six months for a felony and two months for a misdemeanor. According to local NGOs, prosecutors routinely requested extensions, which judges granted. The State Security Court (SSC) can authorize Judicial Police (part of the PSD) to arrest and keep persons in custody for seven days prior to notification of arrest while conducting criminal investigations. This authority includes arrests for alleged misdemeanors. NGOs alleged that authorities transferred suspects to the SSC to extend the legal time from 24 hours to seven days for investigation prior to notification. NGOs also alleged that authorities transferred

suspects from one police station to another to extend the investigation period. During the year the Ministry of Justice operated an electronic notification system for judicial action to help lawyers remain up to date on their cases and reduce the length of pretrial detention.

The penal code allows bail, and authorities used it in some cases. In many instances the accused remained in detention without bail during legal proceedings. The PSD regulations exempt persons from pretrial detention if they have no criminal record and the crime is not a felony. NGOs reported cases of arbitrary administrative detention during the year. Many detainees reported not having timely access to a lawyer, despite the law's guarantee of access to legal counsel upon referral to public prosecutors. Courts appointed lawyers to represent indigent defendants charged with felonies carrying possible life sentences (often interpreted by the judiciary as 20 years) or the death penalty, although for lesser crimes legal aid services remained minimal.

At times authorities held suspects incommunicado for up to one week or placed them under house arrest. Several human rights activists alleged that authorities held arrestees incommunicado to hide evidence of physical abuse by security forces. Courts did not always offer adequate interpreter services for defendants who could not speak Arabic.

According to an NGO, male guardians occasionally requested virginity testing for female relatives detained by authorities for being "absent" from the home. By law medical professionals cannot perform virginity testing on a woman without her consent; however, women and girls reportedly often felt pressured to undergo the test to avoid attracting suspicion from family members. NGOs continued to urge authorities to reject virginity testing requests, arguing these tests violate women's rights and are a form of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

Arbitrary Arrest: The law requires that authorities inform individuals of charges upon arrest. In cases purportedly involving state security, however, security forces at times arrested and detained individuals without informing them of the charges against them and either did not allow defendants to meet with their lawyers or did not permit meetings until shortly before trial.

Security services detained political activists for shouting slogans critical of authorities during protests. Some activists were arbitrarily arrested and held without charge; others were charged with insulting the king, undermining the political regime, or slander. Most detentions lasted for days, but some lasted several months. Approximately a dozen detainees held a hunger strike from January through October to protest their arrest and arbitrary detention. As of October more than 20 individuals remained in detention for reasons connected to freedom of expression, according to media reports and local NGOs. Throughout the year 589 individuals were detained for violating defense orders, a 23 percent increase from 2020, according to the PSD.

Security services arbitrarily arrested, intimidated, and physically assaulted lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals. Authorities shut down at least two events associated with the LGBTQI+ community and arrested guests under public decency and public order laws (see section 6).

The law empowers provincial governors to detain individuals administratively as they deem necessary for investigation purposes or to protect that individual; governors also may set bail amounts. Authorities held some individuals in prison or under house arrest without due process and often despite a finding of not guilty in legal proceedings. According to NGOs some governors abused their detention power to intimidate political activists and individuals, imprison individuals without sufficient evidence, prolong the detentions of prisoners whose sentences had been completed, or set excessive bail.

According to the Ministry of Interior, from January through September more than 25,000 persons were held under administrative detention at least temporarily, a significant increase from 2020.

According to local and international NGOs, authorities routinely engaged in "protective" detention of women (a type of informal detention without trial) to deal with cases ranging from sex outside of marriage to absence from home to being the victim of sexual violence, all of which could put women at risk of so-called honor crimes. NGOs reported that some women were administratively detained at Juweideh Prison for "absence" from home without permission of a male guardian or for having sex outside of marriage. Juweideh Correctional Center held 523 women as of September. From October 2020 to September, 103 women were detained administratively (see section 6). Some detained women told a local NGO that self-defense from domestic violence and economic exploitation led to their detention. Most detained women were kept in prison due to a determination by authorities that a family member must provide a guarantee to protect them from attack prior to their release.

Since 2018, women at risk of gender-based violence and "honor" crimes have been referred to Ministry of Social Development shelters.

According to the Ministry of Social Development, since October 2020 approximately 103 women had been transferred to its shelter for varying periods of time.

During the year local NGOs said that officials detained some foreign laborers; those whose employers did not secure their release were held for working without authorization, being absent from their authorized workplace, or lacking proper residency permits. PSD representatives continued to meet in a committee to follow up on and find solutions to the detentions of foreign workers. Most foreign workers were exempted from paying fines for overstaying their visas and subsequently were repatriated if they chose to return to their home country. According to the Ministry of Interior, as of October, 291 foreigners were administratively detained.

Pretrial Detention: The law criminalizes detaining any person for more than 24 hours without a prosecutor's authorization. Rights activists said authorities routinely ignored this limit and that impunity was very common. An NGO reported pretrial detentions decreased, while arrests overall increased, largely due to violations of COVID-related government public health measures. Governors continued to issue thousands of administrative detention orders under a law that allows pretrial detention from three days to one year without charge or trial or any means of legal remedy. NGOs reported pretrial detentions could extend further than one year. According to the Ministry of Interior, of the 63,222 persons released from detention, a total of 23,322 individuals under administrative detention by governors were released between January and September to reduce overcrowding in detention centers.

The GID continued to subject individuals to prolonged pretrial detention (in some cases without charges), solitary confinement, and mistreatment, according to the NCHR and other organizations. According to NGOs, pretrial detainees were occasionally placed with convicted individuals.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: The law does not have an explicit provision that entitles victims of arbitrary or unlawful detention to restitution. The law does not provide for routine judicial review of administrative detentions ordered by governors. Detainees can bring civil lawsuits for restitution for arbitrary or unlawful detention or bring criminal lawsuits for illegal incarceration; however, the legal community reported such lawsuits seldom occurred. Detainees must hire a lawyer with at least five years' experience, must pay their own fees, and must present a copy of the order of detention. There were no cases of restitution during the year.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. Criminal prosecutors report to the Judicial Council, while the Ministry of Justice provides courts with administrative support.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally sought to enforce this right. The law presumes that defendants are innocent. Officials sometimes did not respect the right of defendants to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them or to a fair and public trial without undue delay. According to the law, all civilian court trials and SSC trials are open to the public unless the court determines that the trial should be closed to protect the public interest.

Authorities occasionally tried defendants in absentia. The law allows this practice but requires a retrial upon the accused's return to the country. Defendants are entitled to legal counsel, provided at public expense for the indigent in cases involving the death penalty or life imprisonment, but only at the trial stage. The Ministry of Justice established a committee to investigate the eligibility criteria and challenges facing legal aid programs. Access to legal aid remained limited, especially for women in rural areas. Most criminal defendants lacked legal representation prior to and at trial. Frequently, defendants before the SSC met with their attorneys only one or two days before their trial began.

The PSD and the Jordanian Bar Association have a memorandum of understanding allowing lawyers access to all detention centers and prison facilities and permitting private meetings with their clients in dedicated rooms. To respond to complaints that authorities did not uniformly provide foreign residents, especially foreign workers, with free translation and defense, the Ministry of Justice established a directorate to hire additional translators. The Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with the Jordanian Bar Association and a human rights NGO, maintained a designated unit to provide legal aid services to witnesses and defendants, as mandated by law. Through October, 1,184 individuals received legal aid through this program.

Defendants may present witnesses and evidence and may cross-examine witnesses presented against them. Defendants do not have the right to refuse to testify. Although the constitution prohibits the use of confessions extracted by torture, human rights activists noted that courts

routinely accepted confessions allegedly extracted under torture or mistreatment. The SSC occasionally declines to hear testimony from witnesses they consider add no value to cases.

Court verdicts are announced in open hearings. Defendants can appeal verdicts; appeals are automatic for cases involving the death penalty or a sentence of more than 10 years' imprisonment. When defendants at trial recant confessions obtained during the criminal investigation, those confessions are not used against the defendant; the trial then relies solely on the evidence collected and presented at trial.

The SSC is designed to handle sensitive national security, terrorism, narcotics, and counterfeiting cases and consists of military and civilian judges appointed by the prime minister. All SSC court verdicts are automatically appealed to the country's highest court, the civilian Court of Cassation, which has the authority to review matters of both fact and law. NGOs and activists argue the government should stop trying civilians, including activists, before a nonindependent court such as the SSC, contending that such a step would strengthen the independence of the civilian judicial system.

The government usually allowed international observers to visit the SSC and the military and police courts to observe court proceedings.

Civil, criminal, and commercial courts accord equal weight to the testimony of men and women. In sharia courts, which have civil jurisdiction over Muslim marriage, divorce, and inheritance cases, the testimony of one man equals that of two women, with exceptions in certain cases. As a response to local and international human rights recommendations, the Sharia Judicial Institute continued to provide human rights training sessions for all its judges and prosecutors. The Institute resorted to online sessions during the pandemic.

The law places the age of criminal responsibility at 12 years and stipulates that juveniles charged with committing a crime along with an adult be tried in a juvenile court. Juveniles tried at the SSC were held in juvenile detention centers. The law stipulates alternative penalties for juvenile offenders, including vocational training and community service.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were numerous instances of the government detaining and imprisoning activists for political reasons, including criticizing the government, its foreign policy, government officials and official bodies, or foreign countries, and chanting slogans against the king. Citizens and NGOs alleged the government used administrative detention for what appeared to be political reasons.

A court acquitted the Islamic Action Front's election campaign director Badi al-Rafai'aa of "impudent/offensive speech against a sisterly country" in September. Authorities detained Rafai'aa in 2020 after he made statements critical of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion: Some exiled activists and political commentators alleged that security services harassed and intimidated their Jordan-based family members to pressure them to end their activism.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals may bring civil lawsuits related to human rights abuses through domestic courts.

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

The constitution protects the right to privacy but allows for surveillance "by a judicial order in accordance with the provisions of the law." The law permits the prosecutor general to order surveillance upon receiving "reliable information" that "a person or group of persons is connected to any terrorist activity." Although the law prohibits it, individuals widely believed that security officers monitored telephone conversations and internet communication, read private correspondence, and engaged in surveillance including monitoring online comments by cataloging them by date, internet protocol (IP) address, and location without court orders.

According to Freedom House, in April the government instituted a two-day internet shutdown in specific Amman neighborhoods following the purported coup attempt linked to Prince Hamzah. Freedom House also reported virtual private networks (VPN) sometimes were inaccessible.

Some tribes continued to employ the custom of *jalwa*, where the relatives of a person accused of homicide are displaced to a different geographic area pending resolution between the involved families to prevent further bloodshed and revenge killings. Even though *jalwa* and tribal law were abolished from the legal system in 1976, security officials sporadically continued to facilitate banishment and other tribal dispute resolution customs. As of October the Ministry of Interior indicated there were 413 cases of *jalwa*.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

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

The constitution provides, “the State shall guarantee freedom of opinion; and every Jordanian shall freely express his opinion by speech, writing, photography, and the other means of expression, provided that he does not go beyond the limits of the law.” Authorities applied regulations to limit freedom of expression and press, and used the antiterrorism law, cybercrimes law, press and publications law, and penal code to arrest local journalists.

Freedom of Expression: The law permits punishment of up to three years’ imprisonment for insulting the king, slandering the government or foreign leaders, offending religious beliefs, or fomenting sectarian strife and sedition. The government restricted the ability of individuals to criticize the government by arresting several activists for political expression. Authorities used laws against slander of public officials, blackmail, and libel to restrict public discussion, as well as employed official gag orders issued by the public prosecutor.

Convicted lawyer Firas al-Rousan began a hunger strike in Qafqafa prison on February 17 to demand a retrial. A court convicted al-Rousan of “offensive speech against the king and defaming a government body” in 2020. He refused to take his prescribed medication and said he would strike until “either death or release” from prison. Dozens of protesters gathered in front of the prison on March 7 in solidarity after his son reported to human rights organizations that al-Rousan’s health had deteriorated. On March 10, the minister of justice approved al-Rousan’s request to appeal his sentence before the Court of Cassation. The appeal remained pending at year’s end.

In late April the judiciary rejected the appeals of Layla Hadidoun, Mohammad Seriwa, and Bakr al-Qatawneh for alternative sentencing. The three were charged in connection with posts they published on social media in solidarity with the Teachers’ Union (TU), which the government shut down in July 2020.

On August 31, police officers arrested activist Moaz Wahsha after Minister of Agriculture Khaled Hanifat filed charges against him for social media posts criticizing the agriculture ministry’s failure to provide sufficient help to farmers. Wahsha was administratively detained by the governor of Ajloun and was released on September 12.

Authorities arrested Ahmad Tabanja al-Kinani, an activist in the tribal movement known as *hirak*, in August 2020 on several charges, including “incitement,” under the antiterrorism and cybercrimes laws. Al-Kinani’s charges stemmed from comments he made in support of the TU and his documentation of police use of force during TU protests. Al-Kinani spent almost one year in solitary confinement, six months of which were prior to his being officially charged. The NCHR visited al-Kinani in prison multiple times and was unable to ascertain why his treatment had been disproportionately harsh compared with others arrested under the cybercrimes law. Authorities also refused the NCHR’s request to end al-Kinani’s solitary confinement. Al-Kinani was released on bail on July 4 after his attorney told the media that 13 prior bail requests had been denied.

Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: All publications must obtain licenses from the government to operate. There were many daily newspapers. Observers considered several to be independent of the government, including al-Sabeel, regarded as close to the Islamic Action Front (the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood’s legally registered political party).

Observers also judged several daily newspapers to be close to the government.

The independent print and broadcast media largely operated with limited restrictions. Media observers reported government pressure on media, including the threat of large fines and prison sentences, to refrain from criticizing the royal family, discussing the GID, covering ongoing security operations, or slandering government officials. The government influenced news reporting and commentary through political pressure on editors and control over important editorial positions in government-affiliated media. Journalists of government-affiliated and independent media reported that security officials used bribes, threats, and political pressure to force editors to place articles favorable to the government in online and print newspapers. Defense orders mandated to combat the spread of the pandemic required previously independent journalists to register with the Press Syndicate for permits to cover events in person. The Press Syndicate is legally independent from the government; however, some members alleged government interference in its activities.

Local and foreign journalists operating in the country continued to experience increased restrictions on their reporting in the form of gag orders, harassment by security forces, and withholding of permits to report. On January 11, authorities deported Salim Akash, a Bangladeshi freelance journalist residing in Jordan. Akash’s residency permit for a nonjournalism-related job in Jordan

expired in April 2020, the same month he was taken into custody. According to Reporters Without Borders, Akash was arrested following the publication of an article critical of conditions for Bangladeshi workers in Jordan and was informed only that he had “broken an important law.”

The law grants authority to the head of the Media Commission to close any unlicensed theater, satellite channel, or radio channel. The commission continued granting broadcasting licenses to companies owned by citizens and foreigners. Those with licenses may not legally broadcast anything that would harm public order, social security, national security, or the country's relations with a foreign country; incite hatred, terrorism, or violent sedition; or mislead or deceive the public. The commission must justify the reasons for rejecting a license and allow the applicant to appeal the decision to the judiciary. There is a fine for broadcasting without a license.

By law any book can be published and distributed freely. Nonetheless, if the Media Commission deems that passages violate public norms and values, are religiously offensive, or are “insulting” to the king, it can request a court order to prohibit the distribution of the book. The commission banned the distribution of 39 books for religious and moral reasons, including sexual content or promotion of violence and extremism, as of October.

The government has a majority of seats on the board of the leading semiofficial daily newspaper, *al-Rai*, and a share of board seats for the *ad-Dustour* daily newspaper. According to press freedom advocates, the GID's Media Department must approve editors in chief of progovernment newspapers.

Media observers noted that when covering controversial subjects, the government-owned Jordan Television, Jordan News Agency, and Radio Jordan reported only the government's position.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry licenses all public-opinion polls and survey research centers.

Violence and Harassment: The government subjected journalists to harassment and intimidation. A high-level press official said media professionals were less likely to cover sensitive topics due to fear of arrest, which significantly reduced the quality of journalism. The Center for Defending the Freedoms of Journalists (CDFJ), a local NGO, documented 111 violations against journalists and reported a decline in media freedom attributed primarily to the application of the defense law and associated defense orders. In May an *al-Ghad* journalist was forcibly expelled from the airport after attempting to livestream the arrival of Jordanian students who had been stranded abroad during the pandemic.

According to the CDFJ, abuses against journalists were generally characterized as minor, with few exceptions. Grave abuses (physical attacks) tended to occur when journalists attempt to cover protests. Some political commentators attributed this phenomenon to the lack of policies regulating law enforcement's interactions with civilians during crises. The CDFJ attributed the decline in specific cases of violations to the government's denial of access to journalists, as well as self-censorship.

Authorities arrested or temporarily detained some journalists, and government officials or private individuals threatened some journalists. In 2020, authorities arrested Roya TV's general manager, Fares Sayegh, and news director Mohammad Alkhalidi following a news report on Roya News' website and social media pages highlighting workers' complaints concerning the economic impact of the COVID-19 curfew. Prosecutors charged Sayegh and Alkhalidi under the anti-terrorism law. Both were released on bail three days later. As of October, one of their three cases remained pending with the SSC.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The government directly and indirectly censored the media and online activists, reducing the variety of information available on the internet. The government's efforts to influence journalists, including withholding financial support, scholarships for relatives, and special invitations, led to significant control of media content.

The CDFJ report and journalists noted widespread self-censorship among journalists. Fearing arrest and prosecution, journalists avoided reporting on certain topics, including political opposition based abroad and the LGBTQI+ community. NCHR representative Nahla al-Momani said in 2020 that the defense orders increased self-censorship by journalists and made it nearly impossible for journalists to cover major events since the start of the pandemic.

Editors reportedly received telephone calls from security officials instructing them how to cover events or to refrain from covering certain topics or events, especially criticism of political reform. At times editors in chief censored articles to prevent lawsuits. Bribery of journalists took place and undermined independent reporting. Journalists cited the weak financial condition of media outlets, the threat of detention and imprisonment for defamation for a variety of offenses, and court-ordered fines of as much as 150,000 Jordanian dinars (JD) (\$210,000) as factors influencing media content.

During the year the Media Commission circulated official gag orders restricting discussion in all media, including social media. Gag orders are often used in politically or socially sensitive cases that have caught public attention. Public prosecutors can issue these orders under the pretext of not “affecting the course of justice” or disclosing investigation information. One gag order covered the closure of the TU and detention of its leadership in July 2020, which continued throughout the year. A second gag order involved the Prince Hamzah-related sedition case in April, and a third was issued in November on news publications regarding the prime minister’s family (see libel/slander section below). For grand felony cases or cases of domestic violence, the public prosecutor may issue a gag order to protect the victims or witnesses involved. The prosecutor handling the case of a 16-year-old boy whose hands were cut off and eyes were gouged out (see section 6) issued a gag order restricting the publication of any news related to the attack and court procedures, although television networks nevertheless interviewed the victim. The Media Commission also bans publication of any reports concerning the armed forces outside of statements made by the armed forces’ spokesperson.

On April 8, the state-owned Jordan Radio and Television Corporation (JRTC) cancelled a Jordan TV comedy series, *Um al-Darahem* (Mother of Dirhams), reportedly due to its inclusion of politically sensitive topics. The show, which had been scheduled for broadcast during Ramadan, portrayed a corrupt village head who manipulated villagers to seize their money and lands. The show’s lead actor and crew criticized JRTC’s decision as censorship. Separately, member of parliament Mohammad al-Fayez filed a criminal complaint against the *Watan Ala Watar* (Homeland on a Tendon) series on privately owned Roya TV, claiming an episode broadcast by the station mocked Bedouin appearance and hospitality customs.

Libel/Slander Laws: The cybercrimes law allows public prosecutors to detain individuals suspected of violating libel and slander laws. Internet users face at least three months in jail and a maximum fine of JD 2,000 (\$2,800) if they are found guilty of defamation on social or online media. Government prosecutors relied on privately initiated libel, slander, and defamation lawsuits to suppress criticism of public figures and policies. Dozens of journalists, as well as members of parliament, faced libel and slander accusations filed by private citizens. The law places the burden of proof for defamation on the complainant. Defamation is also a criminal offense. The law forbids any insult of the royal family, state institutions, national symbols, or foreign states, as well as “any writing or speech that aims at or results in causing sectarian or racial strife.”

In April a court sentenced Athar al-Dabbas to one year in prison for saying her father was better than the king. Dabbas’s sentencing sparked backlash on social media and stimulated public debate on freedom of expression. Authorities withdrew the prison sentence after the king personally called Dabbas to pardon her.

After activist Kamil al-Zoubi posted claims in late October that the wife of Prime Minister Bisher Khasawneh received a large salary from the government, police officers arrested al-Zoubi, and prosecutors charged him with defaming a state entity and spreading false news. Al-Zoubi supporters held demonstrations and vigils to call for his release. In November officials announced a media gag order. Khasawneh dropped the complaint on November 18.

National Security: The government used laws protecting national security in addition to counterterrorism laws to restrict criticism of government policies and officials. Human Rights Watch argued activists were often charged with terrorism-related crimes that had definitions so vague they could be applied to nearly any political speech or behavior the government dislikes.

In December 2020 a State Security Court (SSC) prosecutor ordered *alwakaai* news site editor Jamal Haddad detained for 15 days. Prosecutors charged Haddad with publishing false information and causing public disorder under the terrorism prevention law by suggesting government officials secretly received COVID-19 vaccinations ahead of the public. The Jordan Press Association called for Haddad’s immediate release, objected to the case’s referral to the SSC, and demanded the case be sent to the civilian judiciary under the press and publications law. Haddad was released on bail in December 2020. At year’s end his case was still pending.

Prosecutors dropped in January a 2020 case against political cartoonist Emad Hajjaj, whom authorities detained for publishing in a United Kingdom periodical a caricature critical of United Arab Emirates (UAE) Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed and the Abraham Accords the UAE signed with Israel.

Actions to Expand Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Media: In mid-November the royal court issued a decree approving a special pardon for 155 individuals convicted of lese-majeste between December 2018 and November 2021. The law does not allow special pardons for cases pending a final verdict.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted or disrupted access to the internet and censored online content. There were credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. The law requires the licensing and registration of online news websites, holds editors responsible for readers' comments on their websites, requires that website owners provide the government with the personal data of its users, and mandates that editors in chief be members of the Jordan Press Association. The law gives authorities explicit power to block and censor websites. The press and publications law allows the media commissioner to ban websites without a court order.

The telecommunications law requires that telecommunications providers take appropriate measures to enable the tracking of user communications upon a judicial or administrative order.

The government continued to order internet service providers (ISPs) to block access to messaging apps on days that secondary school students take their national examination (Tawjihi) in order to prevent cheating.

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services were restricted by some ISPs, such as WhatsApp and Viber, while Facebook Messenger, Telegram, and Skype remained accessible.

In September Freedom House noted among other concerns localized interruptions to Facebook broadcasts, VPNs, and internet service during protests and following national crises, such as the March deaths of patients due to an oxygen shortage in a hospital in the city of Salt, and the Prince Hamzah-related sedition case. No prison sentences of more than one year were handed out for online use violations as of May, although arrests continued.

On April 18, the Jordan Open Source Association (JOSA) reported that five local ISPs had blocked users from accessing the Clubhouse audio chat application beginning on March 15. JOSA reported some users circumvented the blockage through VPNs, but some VPN tools were also blocked between mid-March and mid-April. The Clubhouse app remained blocked as of November.

The Committee to Protect Journalists indicated authorities blocked websites they claimed lacked proper registration. Authorities continued to block the website of an online lifestyle magazine with an LGBTQI+ target audience on the grounds that it was an unlicensed publication.

There is a JD 50 (\$70) registration fee for news websites. News websites must employ editors in chief with at least four years' membership in the Jordan Press Association. The owner and editor in chief can be fined, in addition to facing criminal penalties, for website content that "includes humiliation, defamation, or disparagement of individuals in a manner that violates their personal freedoms or spreads false rumors about them." Personal websites and blogs were not required to register or pay a fee.

According to journalists, security forces demanded that websites remove some posted articles. The government threatened websites and journalists that criticized the government, while it actively supported those that reported favorably on the government. The government monitored electronic correspondence and internet chat sites. Many individuals believed they were unable to express their views fully or freely via the internet, including by personal email.

According to local and international NGOs, during the year security forces blocked livestreamed videos of protests posted on Facebook.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government placed some limits on academic freedom. Some members of the academic community claimed there was a continuing government intelligence agency presence in academic institutions, including monitoring academic conferences and lectures. The government monitored political meetings, speech on university campuses, and sermons in mosques and churches. Academics reported the GID must clear all university administrators and professors before their appointment. Academics also reported university administrators must approve all research papers, forums, reading materials, movies, or seminars. Administrators must clear potentially controversial material through the GID. Authorities edited commercial foreign films for objectionable content before screening in commercial theaters.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government limited freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. In addition the defense orders enacted in 2020 to curb the spread of COVID-19 provided the prime minister with temporarily expanded civil powers that were used to curtail the rights of activists and journalists.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly, but the government sometimes limited this right. Security forces provided security at demonstrations granted permits by government or local authorities.

The law requires a 48-hour notification to the local governor for any meeting or event hosted by any local or international group. Several local and international NGOs reported that hotels, allegedly at the request of security officials, required them to present letters of approval from the governor prior to holding training courses, private meetings, or public conferences. There were some reported cases of the governor denying approval requests without explanation, according to local and international human rights NGOs. Without letters of approval from the government, hotels cancelled the events. In some cases NGOs relocated the events to private offices or residences, and the activities were held without interruption. NGOs were able to conduct their activities more freely when using videoconferencing software due to authorities' inability to censor these online platforms.

Protests regarding economic policies; corruption; Israeli actions in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza; and government ineffectiveness occurred across the country throughout the year. Protests by activists were few and quickly shut down by security forces, following the imposition of public health-related government emergency defense orders and restrictions on gatherings of more than 20 persons to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Small-scale, peaceful demonstrations took place on March 24 in Amman, Madaba, Irbid, Ramtha, and Mafraq to mark the 10th anniversary of the Arab Awakening and to protest corruption and the defense law. Although protests ended prior to the 7 p.m. curfew, authorities used tear gas to disperse protesters in some areas. A press freedom advocate noted security personnel turned away journalists attempting to cover some of the protests. Several detained activists announced an open-ended hunger strike to highlight the arrests and the clamping down on freedom of expression. Authorities released some detainees on March 25 and more in small groups through the month's end. On August 18, the Madaba First Instance Court sentenced 16 detained activists to three months each in prison on charges of illegal assembly. Their appeal remained pending as of the end of October.

In May protesters demonstrated in solidarity with Palestinians at the al-Kalouti Mosque for several consecutive days during a period of Israeli-Palestinian clashes. During at least one evening protest, security forces clashed with and arrested protesters, including a *Jordan Today* press official. A PSD spokesperson said security forces responded to protesters bypassing the security cordon and heading towards the Israeli embassy. Activist Hiba Abu Taha was arrested during the demonstrations while filming the arrests (see section 2.a.). A PSD spokesperson stated an investigation was opened into police misconduct during the demonstration. After a Gaza ceasefire was reached on May 21, thousands of Jordanians rallied in the streets in celebration. Despite regulations mandating masks, social distancing, and groups of fewer than 20 persons, protesters were allowed to gather without interference from security services. Activists commented on the perceived double standards employed by the government when implementing the defense orders, allowing individuals to gather and protest when it suited their interests and dispersing demonstrations when it did not.

On June 21, authorities administratively arrested teacher Ramez al-Batran for his activism on behalf of the Irbid TU branch. The deputy governor of Irbid, Qabalan al-Sharif, released al-Batran from Bab al-Hawa prison without charges or bail on June 24. Prior to his release from administrative detention, authorities ordered al-Batran to sign a pledge not to participate in any future TU demonstrations (see section 7.a.).

On August 8, authorities arrested approximately 30 teachers, including former TU head Nasser Nawasrah and other former TU board members, as they were traveling to the town of Karak to participate in a sit-in. Sit-in participants claimed security forces closed roads and pressured teachers to sign pledges not to join the sit-in. All detained teachers were released without charges the same day they were detained. Nawasrah and other council members were arrested and released several times throughout the year.

Security services and protesters generally refrained from violence during demonstrations. Occasional scuffles occurred when protesters attempted to break through security cordons intended to limit demonstrations to specific locations. In such situations police occasionally used tear gas.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for the right of association, but the government limited this freedom. The law authorizes the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, and Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Supply to approve or reject applications to register organizations and to prohibit organizations from receiving foreign funding for any reason. It prohibits the use of associations for the benefit of any political organization. The law also gives these ministries significant control over the internal management of associations, including the ability to dissolve associations, approve boards of directors, send government representatives to any board

meeting, prevent associations from merging their operations, and appoint an auditor to examine an association's finances for any reason. The law requires associations to inform the Ministry of Social Development of board meetings, submit all board decisions for approval, disclose members' names, and obtain security clearances from the Interior Ministry for board members. The law includes penalties, including fines, for violation of the regulations. The Ministry of Social Development is legally empowered to intervene in NGO activities and issue warnings for violation of the law. NGOs that receive a warning are given a two-month probationary period to address violations.

Although the Ministry of Social Development instituted an automated system in 2020 for reviewing foreign fund transfers to local NGOs, it continued to accept paper applications. Some local NGOs reported applications were processed in under 30 days as required by law, while other NGOs continued to claim officials reviewing the foreign fund transfers applied arbitrary criteria to delay or reject their fund transfer applications, effectively shutting down several NGOs. Some NGOs reported that unexplained, monthslong delays in the decision process continued and that there was no formal process to appeal nontransparent decisions. On February 21, the local office of Journalists for Human Rights closed. Country Director Mohammad Shamma said restrictions on foreign funding led to the local office's inability to remain operational. Another NGO reported being forced to lay off staff due to continued government intervention and foreign funding application rejections and monthslong delays. NGOs reported the drawn-out approval process for even uncontentious projects and foreign funding was stifling civil society.

In April a local NGO released the results of a survey of local NGOs' experiences with official registration and foreign funding procedures. Despite the rollout of a new foreign funding mechanism in early 2020, more than two-thirds of NGOs receiving foreign funding reported the government had rejected their applications for receipt of foreign funds, and only one-fifth reported being informed of the reasons for rejection. Nearly all surveyed NGOs called for further reform to the foreign funding regulations.

To avoid the registration and foreign funding processes, civil society organizations sought alternative solutions, including registering as for-profit companies or international NGOs.

Citizens widely suspected that the government infiltrated civil society organizations, political parties, and human rights organizations, and that security services monitored political and civil society conferences and meetings.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

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

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, although there were some restrictions. Restrictions on freedom of movement due to public health measures designed to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic included temporary restrictions on travel between governorates.

In-country Movement: The government placed some restrictions on the free internal movement of registered Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. Residents of refugee camps were required to apply for permission to relocate from or temporarily depart the camp for family visits or work, limiting their freedom of movement. The pandemic significantly reduced the likelihood of obtaining such permission.

There were continued reports of forced refugee relocations to Azraq refugee camp, including many to Azraq's restricted Village 5, as an alternative to deportation for offenses by Syrian refugees. Such offenses included "irregular status" (expired registration documents or working without a work permit), criminal activities, and potential security risks, which were not clearly defined.

As of September Azraq camp hosted 43,493 individuals, including 9,711 adults and children in the fenced-off Village 5 area. NGOs estimated that the government forcibly relocated 790 refugees to Azraq camp during the year, including 469 to Village 5 for security reasons. The refugees who were forcibly relocated to Village 5 were not officially informed of the reasons for their relocation or given the opportunity to access legal remedies or assistance prior to their relocation. Residents of Village 5 had access to basic humanitarian assistance, to a clinic providing comprehensive health services inside the Village, and to the hospital within Azraq camp if escorted by police. To access the broader camp facilities, Village 5 residents were required to submit a request to security officials.

Although some refugees were permitted to leave Village 5 each month, the process for Village 5 residents to relocate to the larger camp remained irregular and slow, with the pandemic slowing the process even further. NGOs reported only 93 individuals left Village 5 during the year, compared with 1,185 in 2019, leading to a growing resident population lacking freedom of movement within

and outside the camp. NGOs reported nearly half of Village 5 residents had been there for more than three years. Residents of Village 5 were subject to additional nontransparent criteria that restricted approval of requests to depart the camp.

Civil documents of Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) and other refugees were held by authorities during their stay in the camp, and residents were required to apply for leave in order to go outside the camp, severely limiting their freedom of movement.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees in most cases.

In 2019 the government effectively halted UNHCR's registrations of any person arriving in Jordan on a medical, tourism, study, or work visa. As of September the halt in registrations affected more than 5,500 individuals, primarily from Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen. According to UNHCR, there was no backlog of registration for Syrian refugees, and it was possible for Syrians to register with UNHCR. With the COVID-19 pandemic and temporary closures of the centers, the government decided it would accept expired documentation in support of refugee and asylum seeker requests for access to services, including health care, until the end of the year.

Hundreds of PRS and other refugees resided in King Abdullah Park, an unused fenced public space in Irbid Governorate repurposed since 2016 to house PRS, mixed Syrian-PRS families, and some individuals of other nationalities who arrived from Syria. Refugees in the park were exposed to a wide range of vulnerabilities, including but not limited to overcrowding and lack of space. The camp did not meet international standards, lacked several essential facilities, and had only one small shop to obtain daily necessities. PRS residing there were not able to pay residency fees to the Ministry of Interior to obtain legal status, without which they lacked access to formal livelihood opportunities.

PRS illegally residing outside of camps usually limited their movements to avoid coming into contact with authorities. In addition some PRS with legal documentation reported delays of up to four years for renewal of their documentation.

For PRS with Jordanian citizenship, potential revocation of that citizenship remained a concern. The UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) was aware of at least 50 cases of citizenship revocation since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011. In most cases authorities did not provide information concerning the reasons for the revocation.

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government lacked a formal system of protecting refugees. A 1998 memorandum of understanding between the government and UNHCR, renewed in 2014, contains the definition of a refugee, confirms adherence to the principle of nonrefoulement, and allows recognized refugees a maximum stay of one year, during which period UNHCR must find them a durable solution. The time limit is renewable, and the government generally did not force refugees to return to their country of origin. Authorities require all Syrians in the country to register with the Ministry of Interior and obtain a ministry-issued identification card.

The country's border crossings with Syria remained closed to new refugee arrivals. Syrians may not enter Jordan without prior approval from the Ministry of Interior or a valid residency permit in a third country. Syrians staying in Jordan as refugees may visit Syria for a short period without losing their status in Jordan if they obtain permission in advance from the Ministry of Interior to reenter Jordan.

The Rukban border crossing between Jordan and Syria remained closed, and the government continued to restrict humanitarian access to the area, which it considers a "closed military zone." The Jaber-Nassib border crossing with Syria was periodically closed and reopened throughout the year as a preventive measure related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In October it reopened for passenger movements; commercial traffic was sporadic.

Employment: Since 2016 the government issued more than 239,000 work permits to UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees, with 94.5 percent of these work permits issued to men. Most of these work permits, which grant access to sectors "open" to foreign labor, were no longer valid. Work permit issuance continued to fall during the year, in part due to COVID-19 mitigation measures that shut key areas of the economy for prolonged periods and kept camp employment offices closed.

Formal work for UNHCR-registered non-Syrian refugees was not permitted. Non-Syrian refugees seeking work permits were required to renounce their registration with UNHCR. Although this renunciation resulted in a number of deportation orders, with some individuals, primarily Yemenis,

placed in detention, there were no known reports of deportation for labor-law infractions.

The Ministries of Interior and Labor, in coordination with the United Nations, permitted Syrian refugees living in the camps to apply for work permits. The agreement allows camp-based refugees to use their work permits as a 30-day leave pass to work outside the camp. Camp-based refugees receiving work permits must report to the camp at least one day per month. The pandemic-related suspension of work permits in both Azraq and Zaatari refugee camps for the first six months of the year resulted in job losses among camp residents previously employed outside the camp but unable to return to work despite businesses reopening across the country. Problems with leave permit validity reportedly limited the ability of some refugees to accept potential opportunities once work permit issuance resumed. UNHCR and local NGOs reported unemployment for women and youth remained at concerning levels.

Some Jordan residents of Palestinian descent, such as those referred to as “ex-Gazans” for short, do not hold Jordanian citizenship. To accommodate this population of 174,000 individuals, authorities issued registration cards, which provided permanent residency and served as personal identity documents, and temporary Jordanian passports without national identity numbers. Without a national identity number, however, Palestinian refugees from Gaza were unable to access national support programs and were excluded from key aspects of health and social service support, although they were able to access UNRWA services.

Access to Basic Services: The government continued to provide access to free primary and secondary education to Syrian refugee children. As of the end of the 2020-21 academic year, however, an estimated 50,650 Syrians and 21,540 non-Syrians remained out of school due to financial challenges, transportation costs, child labor, early marriage, bullying by fellow students and teachers, and administrative challenges. Non-Syrian refugees must pay to attend government schools, and some nationalities faced documentary requirements as barriers to entry.

Access to basic civil services, including renewal of identity documents and the registration of marriages, deaths, and births, remained highly complex for PRS. These vulnerabilities put undocumented refugees at additional risk of abuse by third parties such as employers and landlords.

Temporary Protection: The government provided temporary protection to individuals without official refugee status and tolerated the prolonged stay of many Iraqis and other refugees beyond the expiration of the visit permits under which they had entered the country. Iraqi and other non-Syrian refugees accrue fines for overstaying their visit permits and must pay or settle the fines and penalties prior to receiving an exit visa. They then face a five-year ban from reentry into Jordan.

g. Stateless Persons

Only fathers can transmit citizenship. Women do not have the legal right to transmit citizenship to their children, which can lead to statelessness. Children of female citizens married to noncitizens receive the nationality of the father. Women may not petition for citizenship for noncitizen husbands, who may apply for citizenship only after maintaining continuous Jordanian residency for 15 years. Once a husband has obtained citizenship, he may apply to transmit citizenship to his children. Approval of such an application could take years, and the government can deny the application.

Many Syrian marriages reportedly took place in Jordan without registration due to refugees’ lack of identity documents, which were sometimes lost or destroyed when the bearers fled Syria or were confiscated by government authorities when they entered the country. Refugees were sometimes unable to obtain birth certificates for children born in the country if they could not present an official marriage certificate or other nationality documents. The government has a legal process for such cases to adjust and obtain registration documents. Refugee households headed by women faced difficulty in certifying nationality of offspring in absence of the father, which increased the risk of statelessness among this population. Civil registry departments and sharia courts in the Zaatari and Azraq camps helped Syrian refugees register births.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law does not provide citizens the ability to choose their executive branch of government. The king appoints and dismisses the prime minister, cabinet, and upper house of parliament; can dissolve parliament; and directs major public policy initiatives. Citizens have the ability to choose the lower house of parliament in generally credible periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage and conducted by secret ballot. Citizens also elect 97 of the 100 mayors, some members of governorate councils, and all members of municipal councils. While voting processes were well run, official obstacles to political party activity and campaigning limited participation.

The Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System released a draft elections law, draft political parties law, and recommendations to amend the constitution and other laws on October 4, spurring national debate. If enacted, these proposals would use a party-based proportional representation electoral system to select 30 percent of the next lower house of parliament, while preserving geographic electoral districts for other members of parliament. The proposals would expand the party-based proportional representation electoral system to 50 percent and then 65 percent of the seats in the lower house in subsequent elections. Additionally, the committee proposed legal changes that would transfer responsibility for regulating political parties from the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs to the Independent Election Commission and incentivize participation of women and youth in political parties.

Parliament approved a new Municipalities and Decentralization Law on September 14. The law restores the direct election of mayors and municipal council members, with the exception of Amman, Wadi Musa (Petra), and Aqaba. The law allows the cabinet to appoint 40 percent of the governorate councils' members (from 15 percent in the 2015 law).

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The government held parliamentary elections in November 2020. Local monitors reported the election was technically well administered.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The law prohibits parties formed on the basis of religion, sect, race, gender, or origin, as well as membership in unlicensed parties. The law also prohibits members of non-Jordanian political organizations, judges, and security service personnel from joining parties. There were 49 registered political parties, but most had few members and only two ran party-based lists in the 2020 election. International organizations continued to have concerns regarding the gerrymandering of electoral districts. Many politicians believed the GID would harass them if they attempted to form or join a political party with a policy platform, despite political parties being legal since 1992. Local civil society organizations were able to monitor and comment on the election process in 2020.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process. The electoral law limits parliamentary representation of certain ethnic or religious minorities to designated quota seats. Human rights activists cited cultural bias against women as an impediment to women participating in political life on the same scale as men. Women elected competitively or appointed through quota systems held a small minority of positions in national and local legislative bodies and executive-branch leadership roles.

The 29-member cabinet included two female ministers as of November: the minister of culture and the minister of state for legal affairs. Sixteen women served as members of parliament, 15 selected by quota and one through open competition. The new Municipalities and Decentralization Law raises the quota for women on governorate councils from 10 percent to 25 percent of elected members and provides for a 20 percent female quota on municipal councils. No women won mayorships in the 2017 election.

Citizens of Palestinian origin were underrepresented at all levels of government and the military. The law reserves nine seats in the lower house of parliament for Christians and three seats for the Circassian and Chechen ethnic minorities combined, constituting an overrepresentation of these minorities. The law stipulates that Muslims must hold all parliamentary seats not specifically reserved for Christians. There are no reserved seats for the relatively small Druze population, but its members may hold office under their government classification as Muslims. Christians served as cabinet ministers, senators, and ambassadors. There was one Druze cabinet member.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, although the government did not implement the law effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption during the year. Authorities began showing an increased willingness to open public corruption investigations in recent years. Courts convicted a former minister of public works and housing, customs director general, and several local elected officials in separate trials during the year. The use of family, business, and other personal connections to advance personal economic interests was widespread.

In February the king sent an open letter to the GID director stating that because civilian oversight institutions and the judicial system had “stepped up to their constitutional and legal responsibilities,” the GID should focus solely on national security.

Activists and journalists found it difficult to access government reporting and statistics. They attributed the lack of access to ineffective record keeping and the government's withholding information from the public. In September the NCHR stated freedom to access information was

pivotal to promoting human rights and called for penalties for individuals who impede the public from obtaining information or who intentionally destroy it.

Corruption: On September 29, the SSC issued verdicts in a case related to the illegal production and smuggling of tobacco. A three-judge panel convicted 23 defendants and sentenced the chief suspect to 20 years' imprisonment. The judges also acquitted four defendants and dismissed charges on two defendants who died during the trial. The verdict was subject to appeal at the Court of Cassation. The SSC also imposed fines of JD 179 million (\$252 million) on multiple defendants in the case, requiring additional hearings.

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

A number of domestic and international human rights groups operated in the country with some restrictions. The law gives the government the ability to control NGOs' internal affairs, including acceptance of foreign funding. NGOs generally were able to investigate and report publicly on human rights abuses, although government officials were not always cooperative or responsive. A legal aid organization reported that lawyers continued to be harassed for following up on cases and were threatened with disbarment by the Jordanian Bar Association.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The NCHR, a quasi-independent institution established by law, received both government and international funding. The prime minister nominates its board of trustees, and the king ratifies their appointment by royal decree. The board of trustees in turn appoints NCHR's commissioner general. The NCHR's annual report assessing compliance with human rights sometimes criticizes government practices. The NCHR submits the report to the upper and lower houses of parliament and to the cabinet. NCHR recommendations are not legally binding, but the government coordinator for human rights (GCHR) in the Prime Minister's Office is required to respond to the report's recommendations and to measure progress towards international human rights standards.

Ministries' working groups continued to meet and implement their responsibilities under the national human rights action plan, a 10-year comprehensive program launched in 2016 to reform laws in accordance with international standards and best practices, including improving accessibility for persons with disabilities. Developments on the action plan were regularly published on the ministries' websites. Through September, 20 percent of the plan's activities were completed, 42 percent remained ongoing, and 38 percent remained pending. In September the GCHR, in collaboration with local NGOs, launched a new national human rights abuse complaint mechanism and trained liaison officers to identify and respond to human rights abuses. Ministries affirmed commitment to the plan and expanded resources available to implement it in coordination with donors and NGOs.

The GCHR head and the Prime Minister's Office human rights unit coordinate government-wide implementation of the national plan, including drafting and responding to human rights reports. The GCHR office conducted 38 activities during the year under the national human rights plan, including discussions of the Universal Periodic Review recommendations, inclusion of persons with disabilities in the public and private sectors, gender, trafficking in persons, and general human rights awareness workshops.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law stipulates a sentence of at least 10 years' imprisonment with hard labor for the rape of any individual age 15 or older. Spousal rape is not illegal. The law makes prosecution mandatory for felony offenses, including rape. Nonfelony offenses, such as certain cases of domestic violence, are first subjected to mediation by the Family Protection Department (FPD) of the PSD. The law provides options for alternative sentencing in domestic violence cases, with consent of the victim. The government did not effectively enforce the law against rape.

Violence against women was prevalent. While the reported number of "honor" crimes decreased, local NGOs reported an increase in domestic violence. As of September a human rights NGO reported that 13 women died from domestic violence.

In January two men were charged with the attempted murder of their sister. The victim, identified only as Ayah, remained hospitalized in a coma for a month. Police reported Ayah had previously been hospitalized in December 2020 after an earlier assault by one of the brothers, who was then referred to the governor but released without charges.

In August the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA), a civil society organization chaired by the queen, launched guidelines for responding to domestic violence against women and children. Women may file complaints of rape or physical abuse with certain NGOs or directly with judicial authorities. Due to social taboos and degrading treatment at police stations, however, gender-based crimes often went unreported. NGOs also highlighted that there were no official figures on the prevalence of violence against unmarried girls and women age 50 years and over.

In January the Grand Criminal Court sentenced a man to seven and one-half years' imprisonment with hard labor for sexually assaulting his 16-year-old daughter more than 300 times. Social media activists and women's rights advocates condemned the sentence as too lenient relative to the scope of the crime and called for legal reform to eliminate the use of mitigating factors by judges when imposing sentences for such crimes.

The FPD investigated more than 4,000 cases during the year, referring 90 cases to government shelters and more than 100 to a nongovernmental shelter. Some NGOs and lawyers reported pressure against taking physical abuse cases to court and asserted that courts routinely dropped two-thirds of assault cases that resulted in little or no physical injury. Spousal abuse is technically grounds for divorce, but husbands sometimes claimed cultural authority to strike their wives. Observers noted while judges generally supported a woman's claim of abuse in court, due to societal and familial pressure and fear of violence such as "honor" killings, few women sought legal remedies.

In March the PSD announced the merger of the Juvenile Police Department with the FPD to unify efforts aimed at protecting children and families. The PSD, the judiciary, and the Ministries of Justice, Health, and Social Development jointly developed a formal mediation process, including a manual with guidelines. A specialized "settlement" judge must oversee the resolution of each case and confirm consent of both parties, receiving recommendations from mental health providers and social workers, and may order community service, quash criminal charges, and issue protection orders.

NGO representatives reported fewer women at risk of becoming victims of "honor" crimes but more women at risk of domestic violence. According to international human rights organizations operating in the country, gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emotional and physical abuse, often perpetrated by an intimate partner or member of the family, were the most common forms of abuse.

Governors used the crime prevention law to detain women administratively for their protection. The Ministry of Social Development operated a shelter for women at risk of violence and "honor" crimes. As of October the Amman-based shelter for women at risk of "honor" crimes had served 268 women, including administrative detainees from the Juweideh women's correctional and rehabilitation center, women referred to the shelter by the FPD, and women directly referred to the shelter by governors. The Ministry of Social Development amended the shelter's bylaws to allow children younger than age 10 to accompany their mothers, including mothers who had previously been detained under protective custody.

The FPD operated a domestic violence hotline and received inquiries and complaints via email and in person. The Ministry of Social Development maintained a second shelter for female victims of domestic violence in Irbid. NGO reports indicated, prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, that all government-run shelters were operating well below capacity.

The NCFA published a three-year national plan to respond to gender-based violence, domestic violence, and child protection. NGOs reported that health-care providers and teachers were still hesitant to report abuse due to the absence of witness protection guarantees. Specialized judges continued expediting domestic violence cases; misdemeanor cases took approximately three days to resolve, according to the FPD. The NCFA assisted the government in developing mediation guidelines.

NGOs reported improvements to domestic violence-related procedures and policies in law enforcement and the judiciary, since revisions recommended by an NCFA committee established in the wake of protests concerning the handling of a 2020 case in which a man allegedly bludgeoned his adult daughter to death with a brick. In March the Grand Felonies Court convicted a man who had gouged out his wife's eyes in 2019, a case known as the Jerash crime, of premeditated murder and sentenced him to 30 years' imprisonment with hard labor.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: Civil society organizations stated that many "honor" crimes went unreported, especially in nonurban areas.

In June a man beat his 21-year-old daughter, identified as Rania, to death with an electric cable. NGOs suspected it was an "honor" killing case. The grand felonies prosecutor charged the father with torturing and murdering his daughter. The father remained in detention, and the case was still in

process as of mid-November. The killing provoked popular anger and calls on social media for justice for Rania and other women killed by their families.

There were no reported instances of forced marriage as an alternative to a potential “honor” killing during the year. NGOs noted that a few cases of forced marriage occurred shortly after an accusation of rape, due to family and societal pressure before any formal trial began. Observers noted that, according to customary belief, if a woman marries her rapist, her family members do not need to kill her to “preserve the family’s honor,” despite a law ending the practice of absolving rapists who married their victims. Nevertheless, NGOs noted that this law helped reduce such instances and encouraged more women to report rape, especially since the establishment of the shelter.

Governors referred potential victims of “honor” crimes to the Ministry of Social Development shelter instead of involuntary protective custody in a detention facility. During the year governors directly referred 10 women to the shelter. Most cases were referred by the FPD and NGOs.

The law authorizes DNA tests and other scientific means to identify paternity of a newborn associated with “rape, deception, and deceit.”

Sexual Harassment: The law strictly prohibits sexual harassment and does not distinguish between sexual assault and sexual harassment. Both carry a minimum prison sentence of four years’ hard labor. The law also sets penalties for indecent touching and verbal harassment but does not define protections against sexual harassment. The government did not effectively enforce the law; sexual harassment of women and girls in public was widely reported. NGOs reported refugees from Syria and foreign workers, particularly garment workers and domestic workers, were especially vulnerable to gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and sexual assault, in the workplace.

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

The law permits couples the basic right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children. Contraceptives were widely accessible and provided free of charge in public clinics. Hormonal and emergency contraceptives and medical abortion drugs were not included on the government’s over-the-counter list, according to UK-based scientific journal *Bio Med Central* (BMC). According to estimates in the UN Population Fund’s *State of World Population 2020*, 21 percent of women ages 15-49 years used a modern method of contraception. BMC reported that sexual and reproductive services were underutilized by youth.

Advocates raised concerns regarding barriers to services for unmarried women and access problems for women and girls with disabilities, including consent for hysterectomies. Human rights groups raised concerns regarding the treatment of single women who give birth at hospitals, including hospital staff’s reporting them to authorities.

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. There were no governmental policies limiting family size.

The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services, including rape kits and forensic examinations, for survivors of sexual violence, but emergency contraception was generally not available, limiting clinical management of rape. According to an NGO, health professionals did not consistently use trauma-informed practices when interacting with victims, and the quality of care varied throughout the country.

Another NGO reported unmarried victims of rape who became pregnant faced difficulties gaining access to safe delivery and establishing legal status for their children.

Adolescent girls and unmarried women who became pregnant were routinely transferred to government-funded shelters where they could receive educational services, although the quality varied. Social norms prevented underaged girls who became pregnant from attending school.

Discrimination: The constitution affords equal rights to men and women. Nonetheless, observers continued to emphasize the relevant passage’s ambiguity, and the women’s subcommittee of the Royal Committee for the Modernization of the Political System recommended clarifying definitions of equality in the constitution in a report published in October.

In February the PSD launched its first gender-mainstreaming strategy for the years 2021 to 2024. Prior to the launch, female officers mainly served in traffic police and family protection capacities. This strategy opened all PSD positions to female officers, including positions in the Criminal Investigative and Anti-Narcotics Departments, and aimed to recruit young women and retain officers after marriage by instituting family friendly policies. The PSD established a gender office in February to implement the strategy and train PSD leaders on its tenets. The Jordan Armed Forces also launched its own strategy in September to increase women’s participation, including recruitment,

retention, and advancement in leadership positions. Observing this strategy, the armed forces began to accept more female pilots into the air academy and deployed more women in UN peacekeeping missions.

The law does not necessarily provide for the same legal status, rights, and inheritance provisions for women as for men. Women experienced discrimination in several areas, including divorce, child custody, citizenship, the workplace, and, in certain circumstances, the value of their testimony in a sharia court handling civil law matters. The Jordanian National Commission for Women, a quasi-governmental organization, operated a hotline to receive discrimination complaints.

NGOs reported a disproportionate number of individuals charged with nonrepayment of debt were women unable to repay loans they had taken out on behalf of their male family members. In March a defense order suspended prison sentences penalizing the nonrepayment of debt through December 31, and an estimated 8,000 to 12,000 individuals were released from debt imprisonment. This order echoed a Judicial Council decision in April 2020 postponing the jailing of debtors with unpaid debts less than JD 100,000 (\$141,000).

The Ministry of Labor designated an office for handling discrimination claims in the workplace for both men and women. Local NGOs advocated for better representation of women in leadership positions in both the public and private sectors. In March the International Labor Organization (ILO) reported Jordanian women held 62 percent of leadership positions in the education sector but just 2.7 percent of leadership positions in the overall economy. Additionally, World Bank research found the pay gap between Jordanian men and women was 40 percent in the private sector and 28 percent in the public sector. Some NGOs criticized the absence of provisions on maternity leave, childcare, and access to equal health insurance for female workers.

Under the Personal Status Law that applies sharia rulings, daughters inherit half the amount that sons receive, with some exceptions. A sole female heir receives only half of her parents' estate, with the balance going to uncles, whereas a sole male heir inherits all of his parents' property. Women may seek divorce without the consent of their husbands in limited circumstances, such as abandonment, spousal abuse, or in return for waiving financial rights. The law allows retention of financial rights under specific circumstances, such as spousal abuse. Special religious courts for recognized Christian denominations under the Council of Churches adjudicate marriage and divorce for Christians, but for inheritance, sharia applies to all persons, irrespective of religion.

Since the start of the pandemic, by order of the sharia court, alimony for women was paid electronically or through the Jordan Post Office. Due to suspension of work and salaries in some cases, the court resorted to the Alimony Credit Fund to pay women and children's alimony.

The government provided men with more generous social security benefits than women. Family members who inherited the pension payments of deceased civil servants received differing amounts according to the heir's gender. Laws and regulations governing health insurance for civil servants permit women to extend their health insurance coverage to dependents or spouses.

The law allows a non-Muslim mother to retain custody of her Muslim children beyond the age of seven (the previous limit).

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

Four distinct groups of Palestinians resided in the country, not including the PRS covered in section 2.f. Many of these individuals reportedly faced some discrimination. Palestinians and their children who migrated to the country and the Jordan-controlled West Bank after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war received full citizenship. The same applied to Palestinians who migrated to the country after the 1967 war and held no residency entitlement in the West Bank. Palestinians and their children still holding residency in the West Bank after the 1967 war were not entitled to citizenship, but they could obtain temporary travel documents without national identification numbers, provided they did not also carry a Palestinian Authority travel document. These individuals had access to some government services; they paid 80 percent of the rate of uninsured foreigners at hospitals and noncitizen rates at educational institutions and training centers. Refugees and their children who fled Gaza after the 1967 war were not entitled to citizenship, and authorities issued them temporary travel documents without national numbers. These refugees had no access to government services and were almost completely dependent on UNRWA.

Jordanians of Palestinian heritage were underrepresented in parliament and senior positions in the government and the military, as well as in admissions to public universities. They had limited access to university scholarships but were well represented in the private sector.

Other minority populations in Jordan include Circassians, Chechens, Armenians, Assyrians, Bani Murra (Jordanian/Syrian "Roma" regionally known as "Dom"), in addition to the Syrian, Iraqi, Yemeni, and Sudanese refugee populations (see section 2.f.). Minority Rights Group International reported

the Bani Murra faced widespread prejudice and hostility across the region, suffered from high rates of poverty, and had limited access to education, employment, and government services.

Children

Birth Registration: Only fathers can transmit citizenship. The government did not issue birth certificates to all children born in the country. The government deemed some children, including children of unmarried women or interfaith marriages involving a Muslim woman and converts from Islam to another religion, illegitimate and denied them standard registration. Instead, the government issued these children, as well as orphans, special national identification numbers that differed from the standard national identification numbers given to most citizens. This made it difficult for these children to attend school, access health services, or receive other documentation. National identification numbers do not change during a person's lifetime and are used in all forms of identification. If children of Jordanian mothers and noncitizen fathers apply and resided in the country for at least five years, they may gain access to certain services enjoyed by citizens, including basic education; subsidized health care; the ability to own property, invest, and obtain a driver's license; and receive employment priority over other foreigners. To access these services, children must obtain a special identification card through the Civil Status Bureau.

By law children of Jordanian mothers and noncitizen fathers who apply for social services must reside in the country and prove the maternal relationship. The cabinet may then approve citizenship for these children under certain conditions, but this mechanism was not widely known, and approval rarely occurred. NGOs continued to lobby the government to make access to social services less onerous.

Authorities separated children born out of wedlock from their mothers and placed them in orphanages, regardless of the mother's desire for custody.

Education: Education is compulsory from ages six through 16 and free until age 18. No legislation exists to enforce the law or to punish guardians for violating it. Children without legal residency faced obstacles enrolling in public school. Some children of female citizens and noncitizen fathers must apply for residency permits every year, and authorities did not assure permission (see section 2.g., Stateless Persons). See section 2.f. for information on access to education for refugees.

Child Abuse: No specific law provides protection for children, but other laws specify punishment for child abuse. For example, conviction for rape of a child younger than age 15 potentially carries the death penalty. There were no convictions for rape of a child younger than 15 during the year. Local organizations working with abused children pointed to gaps in the legal system that regularly resulted in lenient sentencing, particularly for family members. In child abuse cases, judges routinely showed leniency in accordance with the wishes of the family. In some cases authorities failed to intervene when confronted with reports of abuse, resulting in escalating violence and death.

In March the SSC reached a decision in the case of gang members accused of torturing a 16-year-old boy (identified as Saleh), cutting off his hands and gouging out his eyes, allegedly to avenge the death of a gang member killed by the boy's father during an extortion attempt in 2020. The court convicted the defendants of terrorizing society, forming a gang, indecent assault, criminal kidnapping, causing permanent disability, possession of an unlicensed firearm, resisting arrest, and attempted murder. Six of the perpetrators were sentenced to death, one in absentia, despite calls by human rights organizations not to bring back the death penalty, while the court acquitted seven others. The court also sentenced one defendant to 10 years in prison, another to 15 years, and two others to one year.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The minimum age for marriage is 18. With the consent of both a judge and a guardian, a child as young as age 16 may be married. Judges have the authority to decide if marriage of girls between age 16 and 18 would be "in their best interest" and to adjudicate the marriage contract. A local NGO reported higher rates of child marriages during the year. Early and forced marriage among refugee populations remained high. During the year a large number of marriages of Syrians in the country involved an underage bride, according to many sources. According to local and international organizations, some Syrian refugee families initiated early marriages for their daughters to help mitigate the stresses of poverty.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law stipulates a penalty of six months' to three years' imprisonment for the commercial exploitation of children. The law prohibits the distribution of pornography involving persons younger than age 18. The law does not specifically prohibit the possession of child pornography without an intention to sell or distribute. The law penalizes those who use the internet to post or distribute child pornography. The minimum age of consensual sex is 18, although sexual relations between minors whose marriages the courts approved are legal.

Displaced Children: Within the large refugee population, there were significant numbers of displaced children (see section 2.f.).

Institutionalized Children: Authorities automatically referred cases involving violence against persons with disabilities or institutionalized persons to the FPD. The Ministry of Social Development monitoring committee highlighted the pervasive use of physical discipline; physical and verbal abuse; unacceptable living conditions; and a lack of educational, rehabilitative, or psychosocial services for wards and inmates.

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

Anti-Semitism

Aside from foreigners, there was no resident Jewish community in the country. Anti-Semitism was present in media. Editorial cartoons, articles, and opinion pieces sometimes negatively depicted Jews, without government response. In December 2020 a government university professor publicly denied the Holocaust. The national school curriculum, including materials on tolerance education, did not mention the Holocaust and used anti-Semitic tropes. Some private-school curriculums included information on the Holocaust. Increased anti-Semitic hate speech on social media appeared to coincide with escalated tensions in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Organ Harvesting

Organ harvesting is considered a cross-border trafficking-in-persons crime and was the third-most committed trafficking offense after forced labor and sexual exploitation, according to the PSD. The PSD's Counter Trafficking Unit started tracking social media activity to locate potential perpetrators. There were reports of six organ harvesting cases as of October.

Persons with Disabilities

The law generally provides equal rights to persons with disabilities, but authorities did not uphold such legal protections. Disabilities covered under the law include physical, sensory, psychological, and mental disabilities. The Higher Council for Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (HCD), a government body, worked with ministries, the private sector, and NGOs to implement strategies to assist persons with disabilities. Citizens and NGOs reported that persons with disabilities faced problems obtaining employment and accessing education, health care, information, communications, buildings, transportation, the judicial system, and other services, particularly in rural areas.

UN Development Program surveys conducted in April and November 2020 detailed more than 85 percent of the most vulnerable households, including those with persons with disabilities, reported facing significant challenges in meeting their basic needs. According to the report, persons with disabilities were more likely to be impoverished, less likely to have access to education, and more likely to face long-term health consequences.

The law tasks the Ministry of Public Works' Special Buildings Code Department with enforcing accessibility provisions and oversees retrofitting existing buildings to comply with building codes. Most private and public office buildings continued to have limited or no access for persons with disabilities. Municipal infrastructure, such as public transport, streets, sidewalks, and intersections, was largely not accessible. The HCD continued implementing the 10-year Strategy on Accessibility, a plan to make existing buildings and public facilities accessible.

The PSD's national 911 emergency call center provided emergency services for citizens with hearing and speech disabilities by using sign language over a video call with specially trained officers on duty. These PSD interpreters were also available for citizens to use when interacting with government offices without a representative who could communicate via sign language.

Children with disabilities experienced extreme difficulty in accessing constitutionally protected early and primary education. The NCHR noted school classrooms were not fully accessible and that there was a limited number of qualified teachers for children with disabilities. The NCHR reported that the appointment of qualified teachers was restricted since the activation of the defense law in 2020, imposing a temporary moratorium (still in effect as of year's end) on new appointments and the secondment of personnel in ministries, government departments, and public official institutions and bodies. Families of children with disabilities reported further obstacles from COVID-19 prevention measures.

Human rights activists and media reported cases of physical and sexual abuse of children and adults with disabilities in institutions, rehabilitation centers, and other care settings. The government operated some of these institutions. As of October, three government-run centers were permanently shut down, and three were suspended for at least two months, mostly due to incidences of staff-member violence against beneficiaries. The Ministry of Social Development conducted intensive inspections and visits to ensure remedies were in place. On March 7, the ministry formed a joint investigative committee with the Higher Council for the Rights of People with Disabilities following the death of a 45-year-old man at a ministry-run shelter for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The shelter was shut down for three months and beneficiaries were transferred to another facility; an investigation remained underway at year's end. News websites shared a video reportedly from security cameras at the shelter showing staff apparently mistreating and assaulting shelter residents. The prosecutor charged an employee with negligence, and the ministry suspended another employee until the investigation's conclusion.

The HCD's Complaints Division received 10 complaints of abuse. Four of those were domestic violence and were referred to the Family Protection Department for investigation. The remaining cases were complaints against staff in public and private organizations.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

HIV and AIDS were largely taboo subjects. Lack of public awareness remained a problem because many citizens believed the disease exclusively affected foreigners and members of the LGBTQI+ community. Society stigmatized individuals with HIV, and those individuals largely concealed their medical status. Individuals with HIV are not eligible for disability pensions. The government continued its efforts to inform the public about the disease and eliminate negative attitudes toward persons with HIV or AIDS, but it also continued to test all foreigners annually for HIV, as well as for hepatitis B, syphilis, malaria, and tuberculosis. According to NGOs, detention centers placed detainees with HIV in solitary confinement to prevent them from mixing with other detainees. The government deported migrant workers and refugees who were diagnosed with HIV. The Ministry of Health enforced a policy to deny access to antiretroviral drugs for those awaiting deportation. Palestinian refugees with HIV were treated as Jordanian citizens and permitted to remain in the country. Refugees of other nationalities, including Syrian and Iraqi refugees, were deported to either their home countries or other countries.

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

While consensual same-sex sexual conduct among adults is not criminalized, societal discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons was prevalent. According to a security official, these relationships were largely seen as "unacceptable by Jordan's conservative society." LGBTQI+ persons were frequently targets of violence and abuse, including rape, with little legal recourse against perpetrators. Transgender individuals were especially vulnerable to acts of violence and sexual assault, and authorities provided them with no legal protection. Local activists reported a significant increase in the number of cases of LGBTQI+ individuals seeking support or reporting domestic violence during COVID-related lockdowns.

The law does not prohibit discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals. LGBTQI+ community leaders reported that most LGBTQI+ individuals kept their sexual orientation or gender identity secret due to fear of societal or government discrimination. LGBTQI+ individuals reported their reluctance to engage the legal system due to fear their sexual orientation or gender identity would provoke hostile reactions from police, disadvantage them in court, or be used to shame them or their families publicly. Some LGBTQI+ individuals reported that authorities responded appropriately to reports of crime in some cases.

Authorities arrested LGBTQI+ individuals on the pretext of violating public order or public decency ordinances. LGBTQI+ citizens faced regular administrative or arbitrary detentions, harassment including informal interrogation, and monitoring from state actors. During the year authorities shut down at least two events associated with the LGBTQI+ community and arrested participants under public decency laws. Activists planned a virtual event in mid-June to discuss the rights of LGBTQI+ persons. A member of parliament declared the event contradictory to the country's values and traditions, referred to LGBTQI+ persons using denigrating terminology, and alerted the Ministry of Interior, which subsequently shut down the virtual event. Authorities also arrested 14 individuals in July during an LGBTQI+ gathering at a private residence after monitoring their social media pages.

Members of the LGBTQI+ community confirmed they generally lacked safe spaces and reported being targeted by the police upon leaving any of the few associated with the community. In July an NGO reported police detained 30 visitors at the NGO's center on suspicion of "Satan worship," a justification sometimes used to harass LGBTQI+ persons, according to NGO representatives. Authorities later claimed the NGO conducted "public LGBTQI+ activities." Police released 12 individuals within 24 hours of the incident and released the remaining 18 within days. None of the individuals were officially charged.

LGBTQI+ persons reported discrimination in housing, employment, education, and access to public services. Individuals have reported being fired from jobs or denied professional opportunities because of their LGBTQI+ identity. Some experienced extortion and threats of being fired, disinherited, disowned, arrested, or prosecuted. Several LGBTQI+ individuals found it impossible to live in the country due to their LGBTQI+ identity and therefore left the country or were in the process of doing so. Many feared for their lives or abuse at the hands of family members or authorities. Parents were customarily allowed to request informal “warrants” from security services for children, including adult-age children, to suspend their movement inside the country, prevent travel abroad, or require authorities to forcibly return them to family custody, even if family members had previously threatened that person’s life. In cosmopolitan circles, a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy loosely allowed LGBTQI+ individuals to socialize discreetly. LGBTQI+ members of the growing working classes and refugee communities were more vulnerable to police harassment and assault with impunity than individuals who belonged to politically connected families or to tribes the authorities were hesitant to harass.

Relatively few shelters accepted LGBTQI+ cases, and the facilities and NGOs that served the community lacked sufficient funding and services.

Open discussion of LGBTQI+ individuals and topics was controversial due to a generally traditional culture among all citizens, regardless of faith. The Media Commission banned books and blocked websites containing LGBTQI+ content. Government regulations on NGO registration and foreign funding largely prevented civil society groups from working on activities with perceived links to the LGBTQI+ community.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join trade unions and conduct legal strikes, but with significant restrictions. There is no right to collective bargaining, although the law provides for collective agreements. The law identifies specific groups of public and private-sector workers who may organize. It also defines 17 industries and professions in which trade unions may be established. The law requires that these 17 trade unions belong to the government-linked General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions (GFJTU), the country’s sole trade union federation. The establishment of new unions requires at least 50 founding members and approval from the Ministry of Labor. The law authorizes additional professions to form professional associations on a case-by-case basis.

The government did not fully enforce applicable laws, which were commensurate with those for other laws involving denial of civil rights, such as discrimination. The government did not respect freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Many worker organizations were not independent of the government, and the government influenced union policies and activities. The Ministry of Labor may dissolve any union perceived as violating the labor law.

There were no known reports of threats of violence against union heads, although security services arrested labor activists and reportedly pressured union leaders to refrain from activism that challenged government interests. Strikes generally occurred without advance notice or registration.

In December 2020 the Amman Magistrate’s Court issued a decision to dissolve the TU and imprison council members for one year; all were released shortly thereafter on bail. All public-school teachers belonged to the union, which had approximately 140,000 members.

After its closure the union accused the government of continued legal and administrative pressure against activists. The government forcibly retired more than 120 union-affiliated teachers following a July 2019 crackdown, imposed salary and benefit cuts without written justification, and reassigned dozens of teachers to distant school districts, reportedly in retaliation for union activities. Education International, the American Federation of Teachers, the NCHR, and other organizations condemned authorities’ treatment of union activists. In February the UN high commissioner for human rights expressed concern regarding gag orders imposed on news coverage of the union and encouraged the government to engage in dialogue and promote civic freedoms.

Although union members continued to be entangled in multiple pending court battles, the union and some members won some legal victories during the year. On July 11, the Amman First Instance Court found the union’s former acting head not guilty of spreading false news and incendiary remarks on social media; an appeals court upheld the decision in September. On October 31, an Amman appeals court dismissed a lower court’s March ruling that contributed to the government’s case dissolving the TU. This ruling did not immediately restore the union’s legal status because it was awaiting two other pending cases, as of November.

When conflicts arise during labor negotiations, the law requires that union representatives and employers first attempt to resolve the matter through informal mediation. If a matter remains unresolved, the union is required to request Ministry of Labor-appointed mediation. Ministry-appointed mediators are assigned to cases for up to 21 days. If initial mediation fails, the case is referred to a higher mediation council composed of an employer representative, a labor representative, and a chair appointed by the minister of labor. If the council's adjudication is unsuccessful, the dispute goes to a labor court with a panel of ministry-appointed judges for 21 days.

The law allows foreign workers to join unions but does not permit them to form unions or hold union office. Authorities did not permit civil servants to form or join trade unions or engage in collective bargaining. No new trade union had been established since 1976. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and protects workers from employer retaliation for union affiliation or activities. The law does not explicitly provide the right to reinstatement for workers fired due to antiunion views.

There are limits on the right to strike, including a requirement to provide a minimum of 14 days' notice to the employer. The law prohibits strikes if a labor dispute is under mediation or arbitration. The law prohibits management from arbitrarily dismissing workers engaged in labor activism or arbitration, but enforcement was inconsistent. Labor organizations reported that some management representatives used threats to intimidate striking workers. As of October, 12 workers' strikes had occurred during the year.

The government subsidized and audited salaries and activities of the GFJTU and monitored union elections. The government denied recognition to independent unions organized outside the structure of the government-approved federation. The government did not meet with these unions, and the lack of legal recognition hampered their ability to collect dues, obtain meeting space, and otherwise address members' workplace concerns. Labor organizations also reported difficulty getting government recognition for trade unions in new sectors beyond the 17 sectors established in law, in part because new unions would require approval by a tripartite committee in which the existing 17 union heads are represented.

Some foreign workers whose residency permits are tied to work contracts were vulnerable to retaliation by employers for participating in strikes and sit-ins. Participation in a legally unrecognized strike is counted as an unexcused absence under the law. The law allows employers to consider employment contracts void if a worker is absent more than 10 consecutive days, as long as the employer provides written notice. Labor rights organizations reported instances of refusing to renew foreign workers' contracts due to attempts to organize in the workplace.

Observers noted that the labor code did not explicitly protect unionized and nonunionized workers from retaliation. This was particularly the case for foreign workers in all sectors as well as citizens working as day laborers in the public sector on short-term contracts.

Labor NGOs working to promote the rights of workers generally focused on promoting the rights of migrant workers. Labor NGOs did not face government restrictions in addition to or apart from those discussed in section 2.b.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law generally prohibits forced labor, but there are exceptions in cases related to national emergency and with just remuneration. The law allows for forced prison labor as a punishment. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Penalties were not commensurate with those for other analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping.

Labor activists noted that law enforcement and judicial officials did not consistently identify victims or open criminal investigations of forced labor (see section 6). The government inspected garment factories, a major employer of foreign labor, and investigated allegations of forced labor. Forced labor or conditions indicative of forced labor also occurred among migrant workers in the domestic work and agricultural sectors. Activists highlighted the vulnerability of agricultural workers due to minimal government oversight. Activists also identified the 48,000 domestic workers in the country (as of October), most of whom were foreign workers, as particularly vulnerable to exploitation due to inadequate government oversight, social norms that excused forced labor, and workers' isolation within individual homes. Activists further noted cases where domestic workers who used an employer's telephone to complain to a Ministry of Labor hotline experienced retaliation when the hotline returned the call to their employers. *Kafala*, the system in which employers sponsor domestic workers' visas, continued to apply. Under *kafala*, domestic workers cannot change employers or leave the country without permission from their employer, leaving them vulnerable to forced labor conditions.

In October the government issued regulations requiring recruitment agencies to provide migrant domestic workers with insurance covering medical care and workplace accidents. The law authorizes the Ministry of Labor to rate recruitment agencies publicly based on compliance with the labor law and to close and withdraw the license of poorly ranked agencies. As of August the ministry referred 22 recruitment agencies and transferred 11 domestic-helper complaints to the Counter Trafficking Unit (CTU) of the PSD. The minister of labor has the authority to close recruitment agencies with multiple labor violations, based on the recommendation of ministry inspectors.

As of October the Ministry of Labor issued 2,210 verbal and written warnings requiring remedial action in workplaces.

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

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits all of the worst forms of child labor. The law forbids employment of children younger than age 16, except as apprentices in light work. The law bans those between the ages of 16 and 18 from working in hazardous occupations, limits working hours for such children to six hours per day, mandates one-hour breaks for every four consecutive working hours, and prohibits work after 8 p.m., on national or religious holidays, and on weekends.

The government did not effectively enforce the law. Penalties were not commensurate with those for other analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping.

According to a local NGO, Jordanian child laborers work in the car mechanic, cleaning, metalwork, carpentry, and sewing sectors, while Syrian refugee children predominantly work in agriculture, services, and industry. Children also sold goods in the streets and begged in urban areas. The government had limited capacity to monitor children working in the informal sector, such as family businesses and the agricultural sector. NGOs estimated that child laborers younger than 16 numbered approximately 70,000. The government continued a series of campaigns begun in 2020 continuing to combat forced child begging. Throughout the year the PSD detained 12,484 individuals, 45 percent of whom were juveniles. Children were often sent to a shelter for one to three months and subsequently returned to their homes.

The Ministry of Labor's Child Labor Unit was responsible for coordinating government action regarding child labor in collaboration with the National Committee on Child Labor. Authorities referred criminal violations to the magistrate's penalty court, which handles labor cases. The law provides that employers who hire a child younger than age 16 pay a fine. In addition the government provided shelter, education, and financial services to children engaged in child labor. Children continue to be engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including street work and dangerous tasks in agriculture.

Labor inspectors reportedly monitored cases of legally working children between ages 16 and 18 to issue advice and guidance, provide safe work conditions, and cooperate with employers to permit working children to attend school concurrently. The Labor Ministry had a zero-tolerance policy for labor of children younger than age 16 and hazardous work for children younger than 18.

Although the Ministries of Labor, Education, and Social Development collaborated with NGOs seeking to withdraw children from the worst forms of child labor, activists saw a noticeable increase in child labor due to economic hardships caused by the government's COVID-19 measures and school closures. Refugee children worked in the informal sector, sold goods in the streets, worked in the agricultural sector, and begged in urban areas.

Also see the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion; however, labor law does not explicitly prohibit it. The law also does not prohibit discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, based on race, national origin, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV or AIDS status, or refugee and stateless status. It is unclear whether penalties are imposed for discrimination based on sex or disability, or if such penalties are commensurate with other laws on civil rights, such as election interference.

The law requires private companies to hire workers with disabilities, forbids employers from firing employees solely because of a disability, and directs employers to make their workplaces accessible to persons with disabilities. Citizens and NGOs, however, reported that persons with disabilities faced problems obtaining employment. In July the employment bylaw went into effect, which provided some employment protection for persons with disabilities.

Some persons with disabilities continued to face discrimination in employment and access to the workplace despite the law's requirement that any workplace with more than 50 employees have 4 percent or more of its workforce be persons with disabilities. According to the Ministry of Labor, agreements were signed with private-sector companies in June to ensure implementation of the 4-percent requirement and to allow the ministry to conduct inspections. As of October, 120 persons with disabilities had registered on the Ministry of Labor Department for Persons with Disabilities Employment platform during the year to be notified of job opportunities. The ministry, however, lacked the capacity to keep the platform up to date.

A three-year Ministry of Labor program entitled *Economic Empowerment and Social Participation of Persons with Disabilities*, slated to end in 2020, was extended until the end of the year due to the pandemic. Through the program, 13 instructors were certified to train civil society organizations, private-sector companies, and the public sector. The ministry continued to implement a sign-language program and offer simultaneous interpretation devices across the ministry's departments. The ministry also allocated funding for its Employment of Persons with Disabilities department.

Discrimination in employment and occupation also occurred with respect to gender, national origin, and sexual orientation (see section 6).

Working women were largely concentrated in the "socially acceptable" health and education sectors and made up approximately 14 percent of the workforce as of March, according to the Department of Statistics. By law the minister of labor specifies the industries and economic activities that are prohibited for women, as well as the hours during which they are allowed to work. Women are prohibited from working in quarries, construction sites, and other hazardous environments, and are not allowed to work between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. except in hotels, theaters, restaurants, airports, tourism offices, hospitals, clinics, and some transportation industries. Women are generally barred from working between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

The minister of labor used regulatory authority in 2019 to suspend profession- and sector-based restrictions for female workers, which continued throughout the year. Evening work for women is limited to 30 days per year and a maximum of 10 hours per day. These restrictions limit job competition in favor of men. The Civil Service Ordinance allocates benefits such as the family allowance and cost of living allowance at a higher level for men than for women.

The law prohibits discrimination in wages based solely on gender and includes protections for flexible and part-time work contracts.

Union officials reported that sectors predominantly employing women, such as secretarial work, offered wages below the official minimum wage. Many women reported traditional social pressures discouraged them from pursuing professional careers, especially after marriage. According to the Department of Statistics, as of the second quarter of the year, unemployment among women holding a bachelor's degree was 83.4 percent, compared with 31.2 percent for men. The female unemployment rate was 33.1 percent, compared with a male unemployment rate of 22.7 percent and the overall unemployment rate of 24.8 percent.

In 2019 the Ministry of Labor increased the number of professions closed to foreign workers from 11 to 28, with the stated purpose of creating job opportunities in the private sector for Jordanian youth. Professions reserved for citizens include office workers, sales professionals, electricians, security guards, hair stylists, and car mechanics. The decision to close these professions to foreign workers included denying new workers permits and not renewing previously granted foreign worker permits in all closed professions.

According to the employment ministry, Egyptians were the majority of foreign workers in the country and were subject to a sponsorship system, including needing employer clearance to leave the country. Jordan exported highly skilled and educated workers while hosting unskilled migrants to perform lower-level jobs its citizens avoid. NGOs reported foreign workers, including garment workers, agricultural workers, and domestic workers, were especially vulnerable to gender-based violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and verbal and physical assault in the workplace. Lawyers criticized the law on harassment in the workplace, saying it did nothing to hold perpetrators accountable and assisted victims only by allowing them to resign. Domestic workers and Syrians were unable to participate in social security programs.

On June 9, the Ministry of Interior announced that its approval was no longer required for previously deported migrant workers to seek new visas to enter the country. Migrant workers wishing to return after being deported for residency infractions could apply for a visa following a three-year waiting period.

Some migrant workers faced discrimination in wages, housing, and working conditions (see section 7.e.). The informal labor market continued to be the primary sector of employment for refugees. Non-Syrian refugees did not have access to the formal labor market. Syrian refugees were mostly

employed in the informal sector due to the limited number of “fee-free” work permits available, the high annual cost of work permits in areas not covered by the fee-free program, and the limited sectors in which refugees were permitted to work.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law provides for a national minimum wage, per month, which is above the individual poverty line. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud. A January increase in the minimum wage excluded migrant workers.

The law sets a workweek of 48 hours and requires overtime pay for hours worked in excess of that level. Because there was no limit on mutually agreed overtime, the Ministry of Labor reportedly permitted employees in some industries, such as the garment sector, to work as many as 70 to 75 hours per week, and observers reported many foreign workers requested overtime work. NGOs reported some instances of forced overtime. As part of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic response, the government announced policies for remote work, reduced wages, and suspension of operations for private-sector companies. The policies included permission for employers to reduce workers’ salaries up to 50 percent in cases where employees could not report to work. As of August the Ministry of Labor received 13,651 employee complaints regarding policies designed to ease the impact of government public health measures on employers.

Employees are entitled to one day off per week. The law provides for 14 days of paid sick leave and 14 days of paid annual leave per year, increasing to 21 days of paid annual leave after five years of service with the same firm. Workers also received additional national and religious holidays designated by the government. The law permits compulsory overtime under certain circumstances, such as conducting an annual inventory, closing accounts, preparing to sell goods at discounted prices, avoiding loss of goods that would otherwise be exposed to damage, and receiving special deliveries. In such cases actual working hours may not exceed 10 hours per day, the employee must be paid overtime, and the period may not last more than 30 days.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, and employers were required to abide by all occupational health and safety standards set by the government. However, enforcement was inconsistent. The law requires employers to protect workers from hazards caused by the nature of the job or its tools, provide any necessary protective equipment, train workers on hazards and prevention measures, provide first aid as needed, and protect employees from explosions or fires by storing flammable materials appropriately. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remains with the Ministry of Labor’s occupational safety and health experts and not the worker. The law provides workers the right to remove themselves from a hazardous workplace without jeopardizing their employment.

The Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcement of labor laws and acceptable conditions of work. The government did not effectively enforce occupational safety and health laws. Penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for crimes like negligence. Labor inspectors did not regularly investigate reports of labor abuses or other abuses of domestic workers in private homes, and inspectors cannot enter a private residence without the owner’s permission except with a court order. Employees may lodge complaints regarding violations of the law directly with the Ministry of Labor or through organizations such as their union or the NCHR. The NCHR reported receiving 12 complaints related to labor disputes through November. The ministry opened an investigation for each complaint.

Wage, overtime, safety, and other standards often were not upheld. Some foreign workers faced hazardous and exploitative working conditions in a variety of sectors. Authorities did not effectively protect all employees who attempted to remove themselves from situations that endangered their health and safety. Labor organizations reported that female citizen workers were more likely than men to encounter labor abuses, including wages below the minimum wage and harassment in the workplace.

The government requires garment-exporting manufacturers to participate in the Better Work Jordan (BWJ) program, a global initiative by the ILO and the International Finance Corporation to improve labor standards. All factories required by the government to join BWJ were active members of the program. BWJ expanded its program during the year to include export factories in the plastics, chemicals, and industrial engineering sectors.

In the garment sector, foreign workers were more susceptible than citizens to dangerous or unfair conditions. BWJ stated that reports of coercion decreased during the year. Indebtedness of foreign garment workers to third parties and involuntary or excessive overtime persisted. While the law sets the minimum wage, a substantial portion of the standard monthly minimum wage for foreign workers in the garment industry was used to pay employment placement agencies for food, accommodation, and travel for workers from their home countries, according to an international

NGO. In January BWJ launched a two-year initiative to improve the mental health of factory workers in the garment sector, a matter NGOs had raised during 2019 collective bargaining agreement discussions, by training medical providers and Ministry of Health staff who treat factory workers.

Informal Sector: The Ministry of Labor did not consistently inspect and monitor all workplaces or apply all the protections of the labor code for vulnerable workers such as domestic and agricultural workers. Authorities were hampered by barriers to the inspection of homes where domestic workers lived. Labor organizations stated that many freelancing agricultural workers, domestic workers, cooks, and gardeners, most of whom were foreign workers, were not enrolled for social benefits from the Social Security Corporation because only salaried employees were automatically enrolled, and optional enrollment was limited to citizens. Domestic workers face discrimination by nationality in their wages. Although the law was amended in 2008 to extend certain rights to domestic and agricultural workers, the law required that each group be covered by its own legislation.

In June 2020 the Ministry of Labor shut down two textile factories in the town of Karak following complaints of poor working conditions and maltreatment of employees; as of September the two factories remained closed pending court rulings. The 1,500 Jordanian employees of these factories were being paid via a social security program to ease the impact of COVID-19 on the private sector, while 230 Burmese workers were waiting to be deported or relocated to other factories.

On March 14, the government approved a new law to regulate the agricultural sector, preserve workers' rights, protect against discrimination, and provide workers with coverage under the Social Security Law. For the first time, the law also gives agricultural workers the right to file lawsuits and submit complaints to labor inspectors, have access to the courts, and be exempt from work- or residency-permit fees. Local NGOs said the bylaw fell short of expectations, particularly because it did not address work permits for migrant workers, who make up most of the sector's workforce. Other NGOs criticized the absence of provisions on maternity leave, childcare, and equal health insurance for female workers in the informal sector. The law does not require farms with three or fewer workers to enroll employees in social security.

Employers reportedly subjected some workers in the agricultural sector, the majority of whom are Egyptians, to exploitative conditions. According to a domestic NGO, agricultural workers usually received less than the minimum wage. Some employers in the agricultural sector confiscated passports. Egyptian migrant workers were also vulnerable to exploitation in the construction industry, where employers usually paid migrant workers less than the minimum wage and failed to uphold occupational health and safety standards.

Domestic workers often faced unacceptable working conditions, working long hours without holidays or days off during the week and not being paid on time. NGOs report employers regularly confiscate passports and other documents. While domestic workers could file complaints in person with the Ministry of Labor's Domestic Workers Directorate or the PSD, many domestic workers complained there was no follow-up on their cases. The CTU operates a 24-hour hotline, with limited translation capabilities. From January through August, the Ministry of Labor referred 29 cases to the CTU; 104 workers were placed in shelters.

Advocates reported that migrant domestic workers who sought government assistance or made allegations against their employers frequently faced counterclaims of criminal behavior from the employers. Employers could file criminal complaints or flight notifications with police stations against domestic workers. Authorities waived immigration overstay fines for workers deported for criminal allegations or expired work permits. Most fleeing domestic workers reportedly sought to escape conditions indicative of forced labor or abuse, including unpaid wages and, to a lesser extent, sexual or physical abuse. By law employers are responsible for renewing foreign employees' residency and work permits but often failed to do so for domestic employees. NGOs reported authorities administratively detained domestic workers and other migrant workers and did not inform them of their rights or the reasons for their detention. Legal processes for migrant workers take years and translation services are minimal.

Migrant workers were disproportionately affected by the government's COVID-19 response. Factory workers contracted the virus at higher rates due to poor health and safety standards and overcrowding, particularly those working in factories in Dalil and Aqaba. Migrant workers are excluded from government programs to offset the effects of the pandemic. Migrant workers are also vulnerable to hate speech and negative stereotypes in print, broadcast, and social media. As of September, the Hemaya online platform the government launched in 2020 to assist foreign workers with their pandemic-related difficulties had received 85,000 complaints on delayed wages and job terminations. Medium and small factories were especially affected by the pandemic; some could not meet commitments to staff, and some cancelled contracts and closed worker dormitories. The government continued its cooperation with foreign embassies to waive overstay fees for migrant domestic workers who wished to repatriate after a two-year stay in the country, a policy that greatly reduced the number of domestic workers stranded at their embassies' shelters.

In May the Ministry of Labor began to address dormitory conditions of migrant workers in response to complaints. Officials conducted inspections, reported unlicensed dormitories to the Ministry of Justice, and coordinated with BWJ to renovate dormitories.

The informal labor market continues to be the primary sector of employment for refugees. Syrian refugees are mostly employed in the informal sector due to the limited number of “fee-free” work permits available, high annual cost of work permits for work in areas not covered in the fee-free scheme, and limited sectors in which refugees are permitted to work.

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