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2020 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Egypt

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ANNOUNCEMENT: The Department of State will release an addendum to this report in mid 2021 that expands the subsection on Women in Section 6 to include a broader range of issues related to reproductive rights.

According to its constitution, Egypt is a republic governed by an elected president and bicameral legislature, with the upper house or Senate newly established during the year. Presidential elections were held in 2018. Challengers to incumbent President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi withdrew ahead of the election, citing personal decisions, political pressure, legal troubles, and unfair competition; in some cases they were arrested for alleged violations of candidacy rules. Domestic and international organizations expressed concern that government limitations on association, assembly, and expression severely constrained broad participation in the political process. A progovernment coalition won an overwhelming majority of seats in multistage, multiround elections for parliament’s reconstituted Senate and House of Representatives. Domestic and international observers stated that government authorities professionally administered parliamentary elections in accordance with the country’s laws and that their results were credible. Observers noted restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly, political association, and expression significantly inhibited the political climate surrounding the elections.

The Interior Ministry supervises law enforcement and internal security, including the Public Security Sector Police; the Central Security Force; the National Security Sector; and the Passports, Immigration, and Nationality Administration. The Public Security Sector Police are responsible for law enforcement nationwide. The Central Security Force protects infrastructure and is responsible for crowd control. The National Security Sector is responsible for internal security threats and counterterrorism along with other security services. The armed forces report to the minister of defense and are responsible for external defense, but they also have a mandate to assist police in protecting vital infrastructure during a state of emergency. Military personnel were granted full arrest authority in 2011 but normally only use this authority during states of emergency and “periods of significant turmoil.” The country has been under an almost continuous state of emergency since 2017, when there were terrorist attacks on Coptic churches. Defense forces operate in North Sinai as part of a broader national counterterrorism operation with general detention authority. The Border Guard Forces, under the Ministry of Defense, are responsible for border control. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. Members of the security forces committed numerous abuses.

Significant human rights issues included: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings by the government or its agents and terrorist groups; forced disappearance; torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary detention; political prisoners or detainees; politically motivated reprisal against individuals located outside the country; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on free expression, the press, and the internet, including arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, site blocking, and the existence of criminal libel laws, which were not enforced; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, such as overly restrictive laws governing civil society organizations; restrictions on political participation; violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons and use of the law to arrest and prosecute arbitrarily such persons; and forced or compulsory child labor, including its worst forms.

The government inconsistently punished or prosecuted officials who committed abuses, whether in the security services or elsewhere in government. In most cases, the government did not comprehensively investigate allegations of human rights abuses, including most incidents of violence by security forces, contributing to an environment of impunity.

Attacks by terrorist organizations caused arbitrary and unlawful deprivation of life. Terrorist groups conducted deadly attacks on government, civilian, and security targets throughout the country, including places of worship. Authorities investigated terrorist attacks and prosecuted alleged perpetrators. Terrorists and other armed groups abducted civilians in North Sinai, some of whom they beheaded. There were incidents of societal sectarian violence against Coptic Christian Egyptians.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

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

There were numerous reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including incidents that occurred while making arrests or holding persons in custody or during disputes with civilians. Media reported that on September 30, Ewais Abdel Hamid al-Rawy died from a gunshot wound following an altercation with a police officer in Luxor Governorate. Police officers reportedly searched for al-Rawy’s cousin and then sought to arrest al-Rawy’s younger brother, resulting in the altercation; the Prosecutor General’s Office stated al-Rawy had a gun and intended to attack police.

There were also reports of civilians killed during military operations in North Sinai. Impunity was a problem. The Prosecutor General’s Office (for Interior Ministry actions) and the Military Prosecution (for military actions) are responsible for investigating whether security force actions were justifiable and pursuing prosecutions.

There were reported instances of persons tortured to death and other allegations of killings in prisons and detention centers. The government charged, prosecuted, and convicted perpetrators in some cases. A local human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported 359 unlawful killings by the government from January through November, mostly in North Sinai.

According to press reports, one day after President Sisi met with the Italian prime minister in Cairo on January 14, the Egyptian prosecutor general started a new investigation of the 2016 killing in Egypt of Italian graduate student Giulio Regeni, who was found dead with what forensic officials said were marks of torture, following reports indicating he was detained prior to his death. Italian press reported in June that the Italian government requested the personal data and legal residences of five Egyptian security officials suspected in Regeni’s death in order to inform them of their indictment, and that the Egyptian prosecutor general told Italian prosecutors on July 1 he was considering a possible response. On December 10, Italian prosecutors announced their intent to charge four members of Egypt’s National Security Agency with Regeni’s kidnapping and murder. On December 30, the Egyptian prosecutor general announced Egypt would not pursue criminal charges against the four officials due to a lack of evidence.

There were reports of suspects killed in unclear circumstances during or after arrest. On April 6, a human rights organization said it documented 75 deaths due to denial of medical care and nine deaths due to torture in places of detention in 2019. According to the report, one detainee who suffered from hepatitis C, liver cirrhosis, and ascites died in March 2019, having been denied medications and proper health care since his 2018 arrest.

There were several reports of groups of suspected terrorists and other suspected criminals killed during security raids conducted by security forces. In April media outlets reported security forces had arrested a man in North Sinai in 2018 and that his name and photograph had appeared in an official army publication later stating he was killed during an operation against terrorists.

Terrorist groups, including “Islamic State”-Sinai (formerly known as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis) and Harakat al-Suwad Misr, conducted deadly attacks on government, civilian, and security targets throughout the country, including places of worship. There were no published official data on the number of victims of terrorist violence during the year. Terrorist groups claimed responsibility for killing hundreds of civilians throughout the country. As of July in North Sinai alone, militant violence killed at least 12 civilians and 42 security force members, according to publicly available information. During the same period in North Sinai, the government killed at least 178 terrorists in counterterrorism operations, according to public statements. On December 8, a military spokesman announced that the armed forces had killed 40 terrorists during raids from September to December. According to a progovernment newspaper, government security forces killed more than 320 terrorists in North Sinai, and 55 security force members were killed or wounded by December 31.

b. Disappearance

International and local human rights groups reported continuing large numbers of enforced disappearances, alleging authorities increasingly relied on this tactic to intimidate critics. A National Council for Human Rights member stated on June 11 before the House of Representative’s Human Rights Committee that the council inspected all complaints received about alleged forced disappearances and concluded that in most of the cases the individuals were in detention based on a prosecution order, and that in four of the cases the individuals joined ISIS.

Authorities also detained individuals without producing arrest or search warrants. According to a local NGO, authorities detained many of these individuals in unspecified National Security Sector offices and police stations, but they were not included in official registers. Authorities held detainees incommunicado and denied their requests to contact family members and lawyers. On August 29, a local NGO reported 2,723 enforced disappearances in the last five years.

On May 7, local media reported that, after 26 months in pretrial detention, the Supreme State Security Prosecution (State Security Prosecution), a branch of the Public Prosecution specialized in investigating national security threats, ordered the release on bail of Ezzat Ghoneim. Ghoneim was a human rights lawyer who worked on enforced disappearance cases, along with nine other detainees involved in the case who were detained on charges of spreading false news and joining a terrorist group. Ghoneim was not released, and a new case was opened against him based on the same charges. He remained in pretrial detention.

On January 20, the Administrative Court ruled the Interior Ministry must reveal the whereabouts of Mustafa al-Naggar, a former member of parliament who disappeared in 2018 after criticizing the government on Facebook. According to local press, on January 25, the Interior Ministry denied knowledge of al-Naggar’s whereabouts and stated he had fled from a court ruling of imprisonment and a fine on charges of insulting the judiciary. On May 30, the Administrative Court ruled that the Interior Ministry must search for al-Naggar and that solely reporting al-Naggar was not in its custody was not sufficient.

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

The constitution states that no torture, intimidation, coercion, or physical or moral harm shall be inflicted upon a person whose movements are restricted or whom authorities have detained or arrested. The penal code forbids torture to induce a confession from a detained or arrested suspect but does not account for mental or psychological abuse against persons whom authorities have not formally accused, or for abuse occurring for reasons other than securing a confession. The penal code also forbids all public officials or civil servants from “employing cruelty” or “causing bodily harm” under any circumstances.

Local rights organizations reported hundreds of incidents of torture throughout the year, including deaths that resulted from torture (see section 1.a.). According to domestic and international human rights organizations, police and prison guards resorted to torture to extract information from detainees, including minors. Reported techniques included beatings with fists, whips, rifle butts, and other objects; prolonged suspension by the limbs from a ceiling or door; electric shocks; sexual assault; and attacks by dogs. On March 22, Human Rights Watch issued a report documenting alleged abuses, including torture, by security forces against 20 minors as young as 12 while under arrest between 2014 and 2019. Human Rights Watch characterized torture as a systematic practice in the country. According to Human Rights Watch and local NGOs, torture was most common in police stations and other Interior Ministry detention sites. Government officials denied the use of torture was systematic. Authorities stated they did not sanction these abuses and, in some cases, prosecuted individual police officers for violating the law.

On December 8, the Cairo Criminal Court extended Esraa Abdel Fattah’s pretrial detention for 45 days. Local media and international organizations reported Abdel Fattah had been abused while in custody following her October 2019 arrest, including beatings and suspension from a ceiling. As of December 30, there were no reports that the government investigated her allegations of abuse. On December 8 and December 27, respectively, a criminal court renewed the 45-day pretrial detentions of journalist Solafa Magdy and her husband, Hossam El-Sayed. International organizations reported that Magdy was beaten in custody following her November 2019 arrest. On August 30 and 31, respectively, prosecutors added Magdy and Abdel Fattah to a second case and ordered their 15-day pretrial detention in the new case pending investigations on accusations of membership in a banned group and spreading false news.

There were reports that prisoners detained on politically motivated charges were held in prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement. On August 9, local media reported that Strong Egypt party deputy president Mohamed El-Kassas was held in solitary confinement since his initial arrest in 2018. On August 5, a criminal court ordered the release of El-Kassas, after 30 months of pretrial detention. On August 8, the State Security Prosecution ordered his detention pending investigations in a third new case, without prior release and on the same charges. El-Kassas had been arrested originally in 2018 on allegations of joining a banned group and spreading false news and then rearrested without release in December 2019.

According to human rights activists, impunity was a significant problem in the security forces.

On February 8, a criminal court took up the case of a police officer and nine noncommissioned police personnel on charges of torturing to death Magdy Makeen, a donkey-cart driver, in a Cairo police station in 2016. The case was first referred to the court in October 2019 but was on hold since March 10 because of COVID-19 court closures. On December 12, a Cairo Criminal Court sentenced the police officer and eight of the noncommissioned personnel to three years in prison. A police corporal also charged in the case was acquitted. The convicted defendants have the right to appeal.

On February 10, six police officers received a presidential pardon after being sentenced in 2019 to between one and eight years in prison in connection with the 2018 death of Ahmed Zalut due to physical abuse in custody at a police station in Hadeyek al-Qobba District in east Cairo.

On September 24, the Court of Cassation upheld a 10-year prison sentence against a police officer for killing a citizen stopped at a checkpoint in Minya Governorate in 2013 and for forging official documents connected with the case.

According to the *Conduct in UN Field Missions* online portal, there was one allegation submitted in June of sexual exploitation and abuse by Egyptian peacekeepers deployed to a UN peacekeeping mission. The allegation was against one military contingent member deployed to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, allegedly involving attempted transactional sex with an adult in April. As of September, the Egyptian government was investigating the allegation, and the case was pending final action.

A local human rights organization reported on August 18 that Ayman al-Sisi, director of the Technology Development Center, was abused at the National Security headquarters in Abbasiya. According to the organization, the State Security Prosecution’s August 17 investigation report showed that al-Sisi was subjected to physical and

psychological abuse, which led him to suffer memory loss. Al-Sisi was detained in early July on accusations of joining and providing financial aid to a banned group and publishing false news. Al-Sisi appeared before the State Security Prosecution 45 days after the arrest.

Human rights organizations said the Public Prosecution continued to order medical exams in “family values” cases. Local rights groups and international NGOs reported authorities sometimes subjected individuals arrested on charges related to homosexuality to forced anal examinations (see section 6). Media reported in late July that, according to her lawyer, TikTok influencer Mowada Al-Adham refused to undergo a “virginity test” as part of the prosecution against her (see section 2.a.). Local media reported in early September that a male and a female witness were compelled to undergo an anal exam and a virginity test, respectively, as part of investigations in the Fairmont Hotel gang rape case (see section 6).

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in prisons and detention centers were harsh and potentially life threatening due to overcrowding, physical abuse, inadequate medical care, poor infrastructure, and poor ventilation.

Physical Conditions: According to domestic and international NGO observers, prison cells were overcrowded, and prisoners lacked adequate access to medical care, proper sanitation and ventilation, food, and potable water. On July 20, Human Rights Watch said that the release of approximately 13,000 prisoners since February was insufficient to ease the overcrowding. On April 3, the UN high commissioner for human rights estimated the total prison population at more than 114,000. Inmates often relied upon outside visitors for food and other supplies or were forced to purchase those items from the prison canteen at significantly inflated prices, according to local NGOs. Tuberculosis was widespread. Provisions for temperature control and lighting generally were inadequate. Reports that guards abused prisoners, including juveniles in adult facilities, were common. Prison conditions for women were marginally better than those for men. Media reported some prisoners protested conditions by going on hunger strikes.

On January 14, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that more than 300 prisoners in Tora Prison staged a hunger strike to protest abuse and harsh treatment in custody and to demand transparent investigations into the deaths of prisoners who died due to alleged medical negligence. In April local NGOs stated that prominent activist and blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah and lawyer Hamed Sedik started hunger strikes in Tora Prison to protest their prison conditions and inability to attend their pretrial detention renewal hearings after hearings were suspended in March due to COVID-19. On April 19, a lawsuit against the interior minister was filed to enable Abdel Fattah to correspond with his lawyers and family. Abdel Fattah ended his hunger strike on May 18 and transmitted a letter to his family on June 29. On December 21, a criminal court renewed the pretrial detention of Abdel Fattah and his attorney Mohamed Elbahr for 45 days pending investigations.

According to six local human rights organizations, several prisoners in the Istiqbal Tora Prison started a hunger strike on October 11 to demand investigation of mistreatment against detainees, including electric shocks, and better prison conditions, including exercise, medical care, and canteen services.

Authorities did not always separate juveniles from adults and sometimes held pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners. Rights organizations alleged the use of Central Security Force camps as detention facilities, which violates the law regulating prisons.

The large number of arrests and the use of pretrial detention during the year exacerbated harsh conditions and overcrowding, contributing to a significant number of deaths in prisons and detention centers. Human rights groups and the families of some deceased prisoners claimed that prison authorities denied prisoners access to potentially life-saving medical care and in some cases denied requests to transfer the prisoners to the hospital, leading to deaths in prison.

In March the Interior Ministry began a program of sanitizing police stations and prisons to inhibit the spread of COVID-19. Local and international NGOs raised concerns beginning in March regarding the situation inside the country’s prisons due to COVID-19 and called for the release of prisoners, especially those vulnerable to COVID-19 complications. One NGO posted weekly reports of prison-related COVID-19 infections and deaths among detainees, police officers, and detention facility employees. On several occasions, the government denied there had been any prison-related COVID-19 infections or deaths.

According to one rights group, authorities appeared to have taken no contact tracing measures and done little to isolate prisoners showing symptoms of COVID-19. It added that guards in at least three prisons refused to allow inmates to obtain or wear masks. In September at least one U.S. citizen detainee contracted COVID-19 during imprisonment.

On August 13, Essam Al-Erian, a former member of parliament and deputy chair of the banned Freedom and Justice Muslim Brotherhood party, died in prison. On August 13, one NGO said Al Erian had contracted hepatitis C and been denied medical care while in custody. On August 14, the public prosecutor stated he had died of natural causes.

A member of the April 6 youth movement, activist Mustafa al-Jabaruni, died in Tora Prison on August 10 when he reportedly touched an electric kettle by accident with wet hands. According to local media, his family did not learn about his death until August 17. State Security Prosecution interrogated al-Jabaruni on May 10, approximately one

month after his arrest, in connection with accusations of joining a banned group, spreading false news, and misusing social media related to COVID-19. Al-Jabaruni was transferred from his detention place in Damanhur to Tora Prison without notification to his lawyer or family, according to local media.

According to media reports and local NGOs, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, former presidential candidate, a former leader in the Muslim Brotherhood, and leader of the opposition party Strong Egypt, suffered two heart attacks in July 2019 while in prison. In February and May, two rights groups called for Fotouh’s release because of his “deteriorating health condition.” On February 2, the Public Prosecution added Fotouh to a new case pending investigations on accusations of assuming leadership in a terrorist group and committing financial crimes. On September 27, Fotouh filed a lawsuit to improve his prison conditions. On December 7, a Criminal Court renewed Aboul Fotouh’s pretrial detention, pending investigations into charges of joining a banned group, spreading false news, and receiving funding for the purpose of terrorism.

There were reports authorities sometimes segregated prisoners accused of crimes related to political or security issues from common criminals and subjected them to verbal or physical abuse and punitive solitary confinement. In January 2019 the retrial of imprisoned activist Ahmed Douma resulted in a 15-year prison sentence. Douma appealed the verdict, and the Court of Cassation on July 4 turned down the appeal. Since his arrest in 2015, Douma had been held in solitary confinement for more than 2,000 days.

The law authorizes prison officials to use force against prisoners who resist orders.

Administration: Prisoners could request investigation of alleged inhuman conditions. NGO observers claimed prisoners were reluctant to do so for fear of retribution from prison officials. The government did not investigate most of these allegations. As required by law, the public prosecutor inspected prisons and detention centers.

The criminal procedure code and the law regulating prisons provide for reasonable access to prisoners. According to NGO observers and relatives, the government sometimes prevented visitors’ access to detainees. On March 10, the prime minister instructed authorities to suspend all prison visits as a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Authorities did not provide for regular alternative means of communications between detainees and their families and lawyers. Limited prison visits with precautionary measures for COVID-19 resumed on August 22. Rights groups also claimed that authorities administered some court hearings and trials inside state security premises not accessible to family or legal counsel and denied detainees access to legal counsel during times of heightened security or due to COVID 19 complications.

Independent Monitoring: The government arranged three visits in February and March for a delegation of foreign media correspondents, representatives of human rights organizations, and the National Council for Women to Tora Prison, El Marag General Prison, and Al-Qanater Women’s Prison. Media published three professionally recorded videos covering the visits, in which all the inmates interviewed gave positive feedback about their prison conditions. On February 19, the Interior Ministry’s prison sector allowed some university students to visit El Marag General Prison and Al-Qanater Women’s Prison. In November the Public Prosecution announced it had conducted an additional inspection of Al-Qanater Prison, where officials reviewed prison administrative and legal procedures and inspected the prison pharmacy. On December 27, members of the National Council for Human Rights toured Al-Qanater Prison, visiting the prison’s nursery and health clinic.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution 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, but reported incidents of arbitrary arrests and detentions remained frequent, according to local and international rights groups.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

For persons other than those apprehended in the process of committing a crime, the law requires that police act on the basis of a judicial warrant issued either under the penal code or the code of military justice, but there were numerous reports of arrests without a warrant.

Ordinary criminal courts and misdemeanor courts hear cases brought by the prosecutor general. Arrests under the penal code occurred openly and with warrants issued by a public prosecutor or judge. There was a functioning bail system, although some defendants claimed judges imposed unreasonably high bail.

Criminal defendants have the right to counsel promptly after arrest, and usually, but not always, authorities allowed access to family members. The court is obliged to provide a lawyer to indigent defendants. Nevertheless, defendants often faced administrative and, in some cases, political or legal obstacles and could not secure regular access to lawyers or family visits. A prosecutor may order four days of preventive detention for individuals suspected of committing misdemeanors or felonies. In regular criminal cases, the period of preventive detention is subject to renewal in increments of 15 days by the investigative judge up to a total of 45 days, for both misdemeanors and felonies. Before the 45th day, the prosecutor must submit the case to a misdemeanor appellate court panel of three judges, who may release the accused person or renew the detention in further increments of 45 days. In cases under the jurisdiction of the State Security Prosecution, prosecutors may renew preventive detention in increments of 15 days up to a total of 150 days, after which the prosecutor must refer the case to a criminal court panel of three judges to renew the detention in increments of 45 days.

Detention may extend from the stage of initial investigation through all stages of criminal judicial proceedings. The combined periods of prosecutor- and court-ordered detentions prior to trial may not exceed six months in cases of misdemeanors, 18 months in cases of felonies, and two years in cases involving the death penalty or life imprisonment. After the pretrial detention reaches its legal limit without a conviction, authorities must release the accused person immediately. Legal experts offered conflicting interpretations of the law in death penalty or life imprisonment cases once the trial has commenced, with some arguing there is no time limit on detention during the trial period, which may last several years.

Charges involving the death penalty or life imprisonment, such as joining a banned group to undermine state institutions, sometimes were added to cases related to expression; as a result authorities might hold some appellants charged with nonviolent crimes indefinitely.

Arbitrary Arrest: The constitution prohibits arrest, search, or detention without a judicial warrant, except for those caught in the act of a crime. These rights are suspended during a state of emergency. There were frequent reports of arbitrary arrest and detention. Local activists and rights groups stated that hundreds of arrests did not comply with due-process laws. For example, authorities did not charge the detainees with crimes or refer them to prosecutors and denied access to their lawyers and families (see section 1.b.).

On September 20, Kamal el-Balshy was arrested in downtown Cairo according to a local news website. On October 1, the state prosecutor’s office charged el-Balshy with illegal assembly, membership of a banned group, spreading false news, and misusing social media, according to local news reports. He remained in pretrial detention as of December 30. A regional rights group characterized the arrest as retaliation for the work of his brother Khaled el-Balshy, editor in chief of *Daarb*, a local independent news website.

In November 2019, Ramy Kamel, a Coptic Christian human rights activist, was arrested in his home in Cairo. On December 7, the Criminal Court renewed for 45 days his pretrial detention on accusations of joining a terror group and spreading false news. Activists called for his release during the COVID-19 pandemic due to his health issues, including asthma. An international organization stated Kamel has been held in solitary confinement since his November 2019 arrest and had not been authorized a visit from his family or lawyers between March and July due to COVID-19 restrictions on prison visits. He remained in custody.

On March 24, the Islamist YouTuber Abdallah Al Sherif claimed security authorities had arrested his brothers in Alexandria in response to his March 19 posting of a leaked video allegedly showing an Egyptian military officer mutilating a corpse in North Sinai.

Local media reported a criminal court ordered the release of human rights lawyer Mohsen Al-Bahnasi on probation on August 24 and that he was physically released on August 31. State Security officers had arrested him on March 27 after he publicly expressed confidence that prosecutors would release detainees due to COVID-19 concerns. On May 20, prosecutors renewed his pretrial detention for 15 days on charges of joining a terrorist group, spreading false news, and misusing social media. A local human rights organization said authorities beat Bahnasi upon arrest, refused to grant his lawyers access to the investigation record and arrest warrant, and presented no evidence of the accusations against him.

Kholoud Said, the head of the translation unit of the publication department at Bibliotheca Alexandria, was arrested on April 21 on charges of joining a terrorist group, spreading false news, and misusing social media. She appeared before the State Security Prosecution on April 28. On December 13, the Cairo Criminal Court ordered Said released pending investigation. Said remained in detention as of December 30. Freelance translator Marwa Arafa was arrested on April 20 and appeared before the State Security Prosecution on May 4. Her 45-day pretrial detention was renewed on December 10 pending investigations on similar charges. Representatives of one women’s rights organization said they could not identify any apparent reason for these arrests.

On June 22, security forces arrested human rights activist Sanaa Seif from outside the public prosecutor’s office in New Cairo. Seif’s brother, activist Alaa Abdel Fatah (see section 1.c.), had been in detention since September 2019. Seif’s trial on charges of disseminating false news, inciting terrorist crimes, misusing social media, and insulting a police officer started on September 12. The next session was set for January 2021.

According to a local human rights organization, in September security forces increased their presence in downtown Cairo and continued to search and arrest citizens around the anniversary of protests in September 2019. On October 3, local media reported a number of arrests in Cairo following demonstrations, and a lawyer reported that nearly 2,000 individuals had been arrested. Between late October and early December, several hundred persons were released.

On January 13, Moustafa Kassem, a dual Egyptian-U.S. citizen who was arbitrarily arrested in Cairo in 2013, died in an Egyptian prison.

Pretrial Detention: The government did not provide figures on the total number of pretrial detainees. Rights groups and the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights alleged excessive use of pretrial detention and preventive detention during trials for nonviolent crimes. Authorities sometimes held pretrial detainees in the same facilities as convicted prisoners. Large backlogs in the criminal courts contributed to protracted periods of pretrial

detention. Estimates of the number of pretrial and preventive detainees were unreliable. According to human rights organizations, the government sometimes rearrested detainees on charges filed in new cases to extend their detention beyond a two-year maximum.

On December 12, local media reported that a criminal court renewed the pretrial detention of Ola Qaradawi for 45 days. Authorities had arrested Qaradawi and her husband, Hosam Khalaf, in 2017 on charges of communicating with and facilitating support for a terrorist group. A court ordered her release in July 2019, but prior to her release, authorities rearrested her on the same charges in a new case. A court ordered her release again on February 20, although the order was overturned on appeal. Qaradawi and her husband remained in pretrial detention pending investigations.

On November 8, a court renewed the 45-day pretrial detention of al-Jazeera journalist Mahmoud Hussein, who had been held for more than 1,400 days in pretrial detention, including long periods in solitary confinement, for allegedly disseminating false news and receiving funds from foreign authorities to defame the state’s reputation. He was arrested in 2016, ordered released, and rearrested on unspecified charges in a new case in May 2019; he remained in pretrial detention awaiting formal charges.

On September 2, Ahmed Abdelnabi Mahmoud died in a prison in Cairo after nearly two years in pretrial detention, according to Human Rights Watch. He was charged with belonging to an unspecified illegal group. Authorities allegedly never provided Mahmoud’s lawyers with a copy of the official charges against him.

On September 4, authorities arrested Islam el-Australy in Giza. On September 7, he died in police custody, allegedly of heart failure. Following the death, dozens of protesters demonstrated outside the local police station until security forces dispersed them and sealed off the area. On September 9, security forces arrested Islam al-Kalhy, a reporter for *Daarb*, while he was covering protests related to el-Australy’s death. He was charged with spreading false news and joining a banned group and ordered to be detained for 15 days pending an investigation.

Detainee’s Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: According to the constitution, detainees have the right to challenge the legality of their detention before a court, which must decide within one week if the detention is lawful or otherwise immediately release the detainee. In practice, authorities deprived some individuals of this right, according to international and local human rights groups. The constitution also defers to the law to regulate the duration of preventive detention.

On April 28, the Cairo Court of Appeals ruled that due to COVID-19, courts could release detainees or renew their pretrial detention without their presence in court. Based on this decision, between May 4 and May 6, judges extended the pretrial detention of 1,200 to 1,600 detainees without their presence, according to Amnesty International and local human rights organizations. Affected detainees included lawyer Mahienour al-Massry, who was arrested in September 2019 while he was representing detained protesters and then charged anew on August 30 on the same charges; and political activist Sameh Saudi, whom authorities arrested in 2018, ordered released in May 2019, and rearrested before his release in a new case in September 2019. Both remained detained pending investigations on charges of joining a terrorist group and spreading false news. On May 3, courts resumed pretrial renewal sessions after suspending them on March 16 due to COVID-19. After the sessions resumed, courts issued retroactive pretrial detention renewal orders for detainees whose detention orders expired while detained between March 16 and May 3.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality. Individual courts sometimes appeared to lack impartiality and to arrive at outcomes that were politically motivated or without individual findings of guilt. The government generally respected court orders. Human rights organizations claimed the State Security Prosecution bypassed court orders to release detainees by arresting them again in a new case and in some instances on the same charges. After authorities ordered their release on May 7, and prior to their actual release, the State Security Prosecution on May 9 and 10 ordered the continued pretrial detention of journalists Moatez Wadnan and Mostafa Al Aaser for 15 days pending investigations in a new case on charges of joining a banned group and spreading false news. Security forces arrested them both in 2018. Wadnan was arrested after a press interview with the former head of the Central Audit Organization, Hisham Genena. A misdemeanor appellate court on August 27 upheld a 2016 conviction against Genena for spreading false information against the state and suspended the one-year sentence, pending no further convictions for three years. Genena was arrested in 2018 and was serving a five-year sentence based on a separate military court conviction for making offensive statements against the state. On June 17, human rights defender Ahmed Amasha was arrested from his home and taken to an unknown location. On July 12, he was seen at the office of the State Security Prosecution. The State Security Prosecution ordered his detention for 15 days pending investigations on charges of joining and funding a terror group.

Some trials involving hundreds of defendants continued, particularly in cases involving demonstrators sympathetic to former president Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 and 2014. On July 9, the Court of Cassation upheld the life sentences of Muslim Brotherhood supreme guide Mohamed Badie, Badie’s deputy Khairat El-Shater, and four others on charges stemming from violence that occurred in 2013.

The law imposes penalties on individuals designated by a court as terrorists, even without criminal convictions. The effects of a designation include a travel ban, asset freeze, loss of political rights, and passport cancellation. The court designation may be appealed directly to the country’s highest appeals court, but human rights organizations reported that designated individuals were not allowed to appeal the designation, and authorities had not informed most individuals of their impending designation before the court ruled.

The constitution states: “Civilians may not stand trial before military courts except for crimes that represent an assault against military facilities, military barracks, facilities protected by the military, designated military or border zones; military equipment, vehicles, weapons, ammunition, documents, military secrets, public funds or military factories; crimes related to conscription; or crimes that represent an assault against its officers or personnel because of the performance of their duties.”

Authorities used military courts to try civilians accused of threatening national security. Public access to information concerning military trials was limited. Military trials were difficult to monitor because media were usually subjected to restraint orders. Rights groups and lawyers said defense attorneys in military trials had difficulty gaining access to their clients and to documentation related to the cases. A local NGO reported that from January through March, there were five military trials conducted involving 1,332 civilian defendants.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but the judiciary often failed to uphold this right.

The law presumes defendants are innocent, and authorities usually inform them promptly and in detail of charges against them. Defendants have the right to be present at their trials. Attendance is mandatory for individuals charged with felonies and optional for those charged with misdemeanors. Civilian criminal and misdemeanor trials usually are public. Defendants have the right to consult an attorney, and the government is responsible for providing counsel if the defendant cannot afford a lawyer. Defendants have the right to free interpretation from the moment charged through all appeals. The court assigns an interpreter. The law allows defendants to question witnesses against them and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants have adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense. The constitution provides for the right of an accused person to remain silent in his own trial. Defendants have the right of appeal up to the Court of Cassation. Judicial and executive review is available to individuals sentenced to the death penalty. Judges must seek the nonbinding review of the grand mufti on all death sentences, and the president must confirm all such sentences.

A local NGO reported in February that authorities executed eight men convicted of deadly attacks on three churches in 2017. On March 4, authorities executed former special forces officer and militant Hisham Ashmawy. On June 27, authorities executed Libyan citizen Abdel-Raheem al-Mesmary. Both were convicted of terrorism crimes for attacks that resulted in the deaths of armed forces personnel and police officers and the destruction of public facilities and equipment. In July authorities executed seven men convicted of killing a police officer in 2013. Human rights organizations said the trials lacked due process. In December a human rights organization reported that authorities executed 57 additional individuals between October and November.

The law permits individual members of the public to file charges with the prosecutor general, who is charged with deciding whether the evidence justifies referring the charges for a trial. Observers reported, however, that due to unclear evidentiary standards, the Prosecutor General’s Office investigates and refers for trial most such cases, regardless of the strength of the evidence.

On September 7, an economic misdemeanor appellate court reduced the sentence of dancer Sama El-Masry from three years to two years in prison and a fine for inciting debauchery and immorality. On October 18, in a separate case, the economic misdemeanor appellate court reduced El-Masry’s prison sentence handed down in August from two years to six months and cancelled her fine for verbally offending television host Reham Saeed. El-Masry was arrested on April 24 based on lawsuits filed against her by Saeed and her attorney. Saeed accused El-Masry of “libel and slander for uploading photos and videos onto social media without any regard for public decency or morals.”

After a prime ministerial decree in 2017, authorities began referring certain economic and security crimes, including violations of protest laws, to state security courts instead of the public prosecutor. State security courts may have two military judges appointed to sit alongside three civilian judges. Verdicts of state security courts may be appealed only on points of law rather than the facts of the case as in a civilian court.

Military courts are not open to the public. Defendants in military courts nominally enjoyed the same fair trial assurances, but the military judiciary has wide discretion to curtail these rights in the name of public security. Military courts often tried defendants in a matter of hours, frequently in groups, and sometimes without access to an attorney, leading lawyers and NGOs to assert they did not meet basic standards of due process. Consequently, the quick rulings by military courts sometimes prevented defendants from exercising their rights. Defendants in military courts have the right to consult an attorney, but sometimes authorities denied them timely access to counsel. According to rights groups, authorities permitted defendants in military trials visits from their attorneys only once every six months, in contrast with the civilian court system, where authorities allowed defendants in detention attorney visits every 15 days.

On March 9, a military court acquitted four minors facing death sentences in a mass trial on charges of associating with a terrorist group. The acquittal followed an opinion by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which stated the minors’ confessions were obtained through torture. The Military Judiciary Law governing the military court system grants defendants in the military court system the right to appeal up to the Supreme Military Court of Appeals. The president must certify sentences by military courts.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were reports of political prisoners and detainees, although verifiable estimates of their total number were not available. The government claimed there were no political prisoners and that all persons in detention had been or were in the process of being charged with a crime. Human rights groups and international observers maintained the government detained or imprisoned as few as 20,000 and as many as 60,000 persons solely or chiefly because of their political beliefs.

Amnesty: The government periodically issued pardons of prisoners, sometimes including individuals whose cases human rights organizations considered to be politically motivated. Local press reported that the Interior Ministry Prisons Authority ordered the release of thousands of inmates based on presidential decrees in May on the eve of Eid al-Fitr holiday. Reportedly, no activists, journalists, or political prisoners were included. On January 21, the chairman of the Human Rights Committee in the House of Representatives stated that 22,399 inmates had received pardons since 2014. On November 21, the assistant minister of the interior for the prisons sector told the press that 21,457 prisoners received pardons in 2020.

Politically Motivated Reprisal against Individuals Located Outside the Country

Five cousins of a U.S. citizen were arrested and detained in June, and his already incarcerated father was moved to an unknown prison location in apparent retaliation for the filing of a U.S.-based lawsuit alleging that Egyptian officials authorized the torture of the U.S. citizen. Government authorities reportedly did not provide the cousins access to counsel or family members. The cousins were released in early November; however, the location of the father of the U.S. citizen, a former senior official in the Morsi government, remained unknown.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals had access to civil courts for lawsuits relating to human rights violations and filed such lawsuits during the year. Nonetheless, courts often dismissed cases or acquitted defendants for lack of evidence or conflicting witness testimonies. Individuals and organizations may appeal adverse domestic decisions to the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

Property Restitution

Following the launching of Operation Sinai 2018, the government intensified its efforts to establish a buffer zone in North Sinai Governorate to interdict weapons smuggling and incursions to and from the Gaza Strip. The government also created a buffer zone around the Arish Airport, south of al-Arish.

In 2018, based on interviews and analysis of satellite imagery, human rights organizations reported the government destroyed approximately 3,600 homes and commercial buildings and hundreds of acres of farmland in North Sinai. In contrast, according to statements to media, the government stated it demolished 3,272 residential, commercial, administrative, and community buildings between mid-2013 and 2016. Human rights organizations continued to report that security forces punitively demolished the homes of suspected terrorists, dissidents, and their families. On July 30, following an IS-Sinai attack on a village in Bir al-Abd, the Ministry of Social Solidarity announced it had allocated two million Egyptian pounds (EGP) (\$125,000) as urgent aid to compensate the families that were negatively affected by the attack and subsequent military operations, with each affected family receiving EGP 500 (\$31). On June 27, local media reported that the North Sinai governor issued a report to the prime minister stating that between October 2015 and May 2020 the government spent approximately EGP 385 million (\$24 million) in humanitarian assistance and EGP 2.7 billion (\$169 million) in compensation for agricultural land and rebuilding for North Sinai residents.

On December 27, a criminal court sentenced 35 residents of Warraq Island to prison terms ranging from five years to life for unauthorized protests or refusal to leave their residences, which the government was preparing to demolish as part of a redevelopment plan. The government stated the residents had illegally built homes on the properties. In a separate action, the Administrative Court scheduled a November 7 hearing in the case filed by Warraq Island residents seeking to suspend the prime minister’s decision to transfer ownership of the island to the New Communities Authority.

Beginning on July 18, security forces arrested dozens of residents of Al-Sayadin village for demonstrating against the government’s decision to relocate them from their coastal homes, according to a local human rights organization. The relocation was part of a nationwide initiative to redevelop poor areas, and residents were reportedly protesting ownership and compensation claims. According to the organization, the Alexandria military prosecution released all but one defendant by the beginning of November on bail pending investigations of gathering, demonstrating, and attacking army and police forces and causing injuries due to clashes that ensued. According to the organization, security forces beat some protesters, and a four-year-old girl died from tear gas used by security forces during the protests.

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

The constitution prohibits such actions and provides for the privacy of the home, correspondence, telephone calls, and other means of communication. Nevertheless, there were reports that security agencies sometimes placed political activists, journalists, foreigners, and writers under surveillance; monitored their private communications; screened their correspondence, including email and social media accounts; examined their bank records; searched their persons and homes without judicial authorization; and confiscated personal property in an extrajudicial manner. Ahead of planned protests or demonstrations, there were reports of police stopping young persons in public places and searching their telephones for evidence of involvement in political activities deemed antigovernment in nature.

The constitution protects the right to privacy, including on the internet. The constitution provides for the confidentiality and “inviolability” of postal, telegraphic, and electronic correspondence; telephone calls; and other means of communication. They may not be confiscated, revealed, or monitored except with a judicial order, only for a definite period, and only in cases defined by law. The law allows the president to issue written or oral directives to monitor and intercept all forms of communication and correspondence, impose censorship prior to publication, and confiscate publications.

Surveillance was a significant concern for internet users. The constitution states that private communications “may only be confiscated, examined, or monitored by causal judicial order, for a limited period of time, and in cases specified by the law.” Judicial warrants are required for authorities to enter, search, or monitor private property such as homes. In practice the government’s surveillance operations lacked transparency, potentially violating the constitution’s privacy protections. There were credible reports the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority, including cyberattacks to gain access to devices and accounts belonging to critics of the government.

On May 22, the Interior Ministry posted pretrial videos showing defendants making confessions. Human Rights attorneys claimed this violated the law and constitution and the secrecy of investigations. On June 14, journalist Mohamed Mounir posted on Facebook a surveillance video allegedly showing security forces breaking into his apartment. Security forces arrested him on June 15, after which the State Security Prosecution held him in pretrial detention on accusations of joining a banned group, spreading false news, and misusing social media. Al-Jazeera showed an interview with him on June 13 and published an article he wrote on June 14 that criticized the government’s handling of COVID-19. On July 13, Mounir died from COVID-19 in a hospital, 11 days after his release from detention for medical reasons.

g. Abuses in Internal Conflict

The conflict in North Sinai involving government security forces, terrorist organizations, and other armed groups (including militias and criminal gangs) continued. According to media reports, at least 36 troops were killed in attacks on government positions or in counterterrorist operations between January and July. Rights groups and international media reported that the armed forces used indiscriminate violence during military operations resulting in killings of civilians and destruction of property. The government continued to impose restrictions on North Sinai residents’ travel to mainland Egypt and movement within North Sinai Governorate. During the year the armed forces initiated some development projects, such as building houses and a desalination plant.

The government severely restricted media access to North Sinai. On May 22, the State Information Service reported that the Interior Ministry arrested 12 persons for allegedly fabricating reports to media on conditions in North Sinai. There were continuing reports of periodic shortages of food, fuel, and other supplies as a result of the conflict in North Sinai. Armed groups disrupted water and electricity services in al-Arish and Sheikh Zuweid.

Killings: The government acknowledged no civilian deaths due to security force actions. Human rights organizations stated some persons killed by security forces were civilians. A local NGO reported 12 civilian deaths, 42 security force deaths, and 178 terrorist deaths in the conflict in Sinai through July.

Human rights groups and media reported civilian casualties following army artillery fire or stray bullets from unidentified sources in civilian residential areas. An estimated 621 civilians were killed and 1,247 were injured between July 2013 and mid-2017 by stray bullets and shelling from unknown sources, according to statistics from the North Sinai Social Solidarity Directorate cited in a May 2019 press report.

Terrorist and other armed groups continued to target the armed forces and civilians, using gunfire, improvised explosive devices, and other tactics. On July 21, militants attacked a military camp in the village of Rabea in North Sinai. The spokesperson for the armed forces stated that two soldiers, one civilian, and 18 militants were killed in the attack. On July 24, local media quoted a source who said that militants checking identification at a checkpoint in Qatiya village discovered a noncommissioned military officer and killed him on the spot. The militants claimed they killed 40 security force members. Local media reported on August 13 that ISIS-Sinai executed four Egyptian citizens after the attack for their alleged cooperation with the army.

Abductions: Terrorist groups and other armed groups abducted civilians in North Sinai. According to human rights groups, terrorist groups and other armed groups sometimes released abductees; other abductees were often shot or beheaded. According to human rights groups, terrorist groups and other armed groups abducted civilians suspected of cooperating with security forces. Local Sinai media reported that militants released one abductee on May 15 and another on August 1. On August 17, local media reported that ISIS-Sinai kidnapped a citizen in Bir al-Abd for ransom.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: In March, Human Rights Watch reported that military forces in North Sinai arrested a 12-year-old boy in 2017, detained him without notice to his family or attorneys for six months, waterboarded and tortured him with electricity, suspended him by one handcuffed hand, and placed him in solitary confinement for approximately 100 days after his older brother allegedly joined ISIS-Sinai.

In the same report, Human Rights Watch and a local human rights organization documented the cases of 20 children who had been detained and abused by security forces across the country. According to the children and their families, all were subjected to arbitrary arrest. Authorities ordered their pretrial detention for extended periods; one boy was in pretrial detention for 30 months despite a two-year maximum in law. In at least nine cases, children were detained with adults. At least 13 of the children were allegedly physically tortured during interrogation, another was verbally threatened to confess to crimes, and at least one more child was severely beaten by prison officials.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: After the July 21 attack on Rabea, local media reported that many residents in nearby villages on the outskirts of Bir al-Abd fled their homes amid a rapidly deteriorating security situation. Armed militants with ISIS-Sinai occupied the villages of Qatiya, Iqtiya, Ganayen, and Merih, forcing mass displacement from the area, according to local media. On October 10, residents from the four villages started returning to their homes after the armed forces began clearing the area of terrorist elements. Explosions caused by hidden explosive devices killed several villagers upon their return. An international organization reported on July 29 that combatants in North Sinai regularly placed explosive devices at the entrance of villages and along the road.

On June 27, the government reported it paid nearly EGP 3.5 billion (\$219 million) to residents as compensation to those affected by the security confrontations in North Sinai and that residents benefited from humanitarian aid valued at more than EGP 397 million (\$25 million) and medical services of EGP 204 million (\$13 million) through the end of May. The report stated the state also paid EGP 2.7 billion (\$169 million) to owners of demolished houses and those affected by the 2017 Sinai mosque attack in the village of Al Rawda in North Sinai.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, but includes a clause stating, “It may be subject to limited censorship in times of war or public mobilization.” The government frequently did not respect this right. Government failure to investigate or prosecute attacks on human rights defenders and peaceful protesters led to de facto restrictions on freedom of assembly and association. On June 10, a local human rights organization said authorities did not investigate police reports it filed after several attacks against its director between October and December 2019 that resulted in bodily injury to the director and theft of his car. On June 27, eight human rights organizations condemned a media attack against the director after he published a report on conditions in Gamassa Prison.

On February 16, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation issued executive regulations for the media law ratified in 2018. Among the regulations, newspapers are required to print their issues in Egypt at licensed printing houses registered with the council; news websites must host their servers in Egypt; newspapers must submit 20 copies of each printed issue to the council; and news websites and television outlets must keep copies all of published or broadcast material online for one year and submit a copy of their published or broadcast material to the council every month. The regulations also prohibit any recording, filming, or interviews in public places with the intention of broadcasting them on a media outlet without a permit issued by the council.

Freedom of Speech: Citizens expressed their views on a wide range of political and social topics. Nonetheless, the government investigated and prosecuted critics for alleged incitement of violence, insults to religion, insults to public figures and institutions such as the judiciary and the military, or violation of public morals.

Between March and July, authorities arrested at least seven doctors and charged them with membership in a banned group, spreading false news, and misuse of social media after they criticized the government’s response to COVID-19. Between October and December, three doctors were released pending investigation. The Doctors’ Syndicate protested the arrests and called for release of all the doctors. On October 1, the State Security Prosecution ordered the 15-day pretrial detention of prominent lawyer Tarek Jamil Saeed pending investigations of disturbing the peace, spreading rumors, and misusing social media after he criticized candidates for parliament. Saeed was released on bail on October 11.

On December 27, a criminal court ordered the release of housing-rights researcher Ibrahim Ezzedine with probationary measures. Ezzedine remained in detention until the end of the year. According to a local human rights organization, he was held without notice beginning in June 2019 after criticizing the government’s urban slums policies and appeared in November 2019 before the State Security Prosecution accused of joining a banned group and spreading false news.

A criminal court on September 13 renewed the 45-day pretrial detention of Mohamed Ramadan, who was arrested in 2018 for “inciting social unrest” after he posted a photograph of himself wearing a yellow vest akin to those worn by political protesters in France. After a court ordered Ramadan’s release on bail on December 2, the State Security Prosecution ordered him remanded into custody on December 8 on additional charges of joining a banned group based upon letters he sent while in detention.

The law provides a broad definition of terrorism, to include “any act harming national unity or social peace.” Human rights observers expressed concern that authorities used the ambiguous definition to stifle nonviolent speech and nonviolent opposition activity.

Between January and September, a local organization that tracks freedom of association and speech recorded 96 violations of the freedoms of media and artistic and digital expression. In June 2019 several political figures were arrested, including El-Aleimy and journalist Hossam Moanes, after they met to form the political Alliance of Hope to run in parliamentary elections. They remained in pretrial detention. On March 11, a misdemeanor court sentenced El-Aleimy to one year in prison for spreading false news and disturbing public peace as a result of a BBC interview in 2017. On April 18, a terrorism court added 13 defendants from the “Hope” case to the terrorism list, including former member of parliament and Social Democratic Party leader Ziyad El-Aleimy and activist Ramy Shaath, for alleged collaboration with the banned Muslim Brotherhood. On June 16, the Cairo Criminal Court turned down a challenge filed by Moanes against an August 2019 ruling to seize his money. On August 4, the Cairo Criminal Court upheld a freeze on the assets of 83 defendants in the case (No. 930/2019). On October 10, a criminal court ordered the release of four Alliance of Hope defendants, including activist Ahmed Tammam. On November 14, an administrative court heard the lawsuit filed by El-Aleimy to allow him to receive telephone calls and correspondence. Amnesty International reported he was being denied adequate health care by Tora Prison authorities even though his underlying medical conditions put him at particular risk if exposed to COVID-19.

On March 19, the State Security Prosecution ordered the release of 15 political figures in pretrial detention, including political science professor Hassan Nafaa and former president Sisi campaigner Hazem Abdel Azim. Nafaa was arrested in September 2019 with Hazem Hosni, spokesperson for Sami Anan’s 2018 presidential campaign, and journalist Khaled Dawoud. On December 27, a criminal court renewed Hosni’s and Dawoud’s pretrial detention for 45 days pending investigations of joining a banned group and spreading false news and ordered Hosni’s release. The State Security Prosecution ordered Hosni’s continued detention in a new case on November 4. On July 5, a criminal court overturned the public prosecutor’s 2019 decision to freeze Nafaa’s fixed assets and stayed the public prosecutor’s decision to seize his assets until the Supreme Constitutional Court rules on the constitutionality of Article 47 of the Antiterrorism Law.

On August 5, the writer and prominent leftist Sinai activist, Ashraf Ayoub, and his son Sherif, were detained in Arish city, North Sinai, and taken to an unknown location. According to a labor leader, Ayoub advocated for detainees. After 20 days, Ayoub appeared before the State Security Prosecution, which ordered his pretrial detention on charges of joining a terrorism group and spreading false news. According to local media, Ayoub’s son was released without charges in mid-August.

In May security forces arrested sports critic Awany Nafae while he was under government-imposed COVID-19 quarantine after returning from Saudi Arabia, according to local media. The arrest came after Nafae criticized the Ministry of Emigration for its handling of thousands of Egyptian nationals stranded abroad amid the COVID-19 pandemic. He was held in pretrial detention on charges of spreading false news, misusing social media, and participating in a terrorist group, but he was released in October.

Freedom of Press and Media, Including Online Media: Independent media expressed a variety of views but with significant restrictions. The constitution, penal code, and the media and publications law govern media issues. The government regulated the licensing of newspapers and controlled the printing and distribution of a majority of newspapers, including private newspapers. The law does not impose restrictions on newspaper ownership.

More than 20 state-owned media outlets broadly supported official state policy. The National Press Authority holds the power to appoint and dismiss editorial leadership of state-owned print outlets. The governmental Egyptian Radio and Television Union appointed the heads of state-owned radio and television channels. Both state-owned and private media (including television and online journalism) occasionally broadcast and published mild criticism of government policies, but dominant media narratives supported the president and his policy initiatives.

The law considers websites and social media accounts with at least 5,000 subscribers as media outlets, requires them to pay a licensing fee of EGP 50,000 (\$3,030), and grants the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (Supreme Council) broad discretion to block their content.

According to media reports, on April 21, the Supreme Council fined the newspaper *Al Masry Al Youm* for an op-ed written by its founder Salah Diab under a pseudonym. The article suggested that Sinai should have one governor with expanded powers to better govern the entire peninsula. The Supreme Council ordered the newspaper to remove the op-ed, issue an apology, and suspend Diab’s opinion pieces for one month. On May 12, the Supreme Council ordered media not to publish or broadcast any material under pseudonyms without the approval of the Supreme Council.

On April 12, authorities arrested Mustafa Saqr, owner of the Business News company, and the State Security Prosecution detained him for 15 days pending investigations on charges of colluding with a terrorist, spreading false news, and misusing social media. His arrest came after he published an article that discussed the impact of COVID-19 on the economy.

As of December the Committee to Protect Journalists reported 27 journalists were imprisoned in the country.

During the year the government raided several newspapers, arrested employees, and released them shortly thereafter. On June 24, the security services arrested Noura Younis, editor in chief of the independent news website *Al-Manassa* and a former *Washington Post* correspondent. On June 26, authorities released Younis on bail pending trial on charges of creating a network account with the intent to commit a crime, possessing software without a license from the National Telecom Regulatory Authority, copyright infringement, and wrongfully profiting through the internet or telecommunication services.

On May 11, authorities arrested *Al-Masry Al-Youm* journalist Haitham Mahgoub, days after he published an article relating to the country’s response to COVID-19, according to media. Media reported that Mahgoub and his attorneys were not allowed to attend the June 7 hearing where the State Security Prosecution ordered his 15-day pretrial detention pending investigations of joining a banned group, financing a banned group, and spreading false news. Mahgoub was released on November 19 pending further investigation. On May 22, television stations broadcast confessions of four of 11 journalists and media workers whom the Interior Ministry claimed were part of a Muslim Brotherhood plot to produce false reports for al-Jazeera. Human rights lawyers challenged the confessions and their pretrial publication as illegal.

Violence and Harassment: According to media reports and local and international human rights groups, state actors arrested and imprisoned, harassed, and intimidated journalists. Foreign correspondents reported cases where the government denied them entry, deported them, and delayed or denied issuance of media credentials; some claimed these actions were part of a government campaign to intimidate foreign media.

On March 17, the State Information Service revoked the accreditation of a correspondent for the London-based *Guardian* newspaper, after it published a report addressing the spread of the COVID-19 in the country. On March 26, the *Guardian* reported that authorities forced the correspondent to leave the country.

On March 30, authorities ordered the detention of Mohamad Al-Eter, the *Ultra Sawt* website correspondent, for 15 days pending investigations. He was accused of joining a terrorist group, publishing false news, and misusing the online social networks. A court granted Al-Eter bail in May, and he was released on June 1 pending investigation.

According to Freedom House, multiple prominent digital activists and online journalists remained in prison. In many cases the individuals faced charges unrelated to their online activities, although their supporters argued they were arrested to prevent them from expressing their views. Spreading false news, affiliation with a terrorist or banned group, insulting the state, and inciting demonstrations were the prevailing allegations used to justify the arrest of human rights activists.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Official censorship occurred. The state of emergency empowered the president to monitor newspapers, publications, editorials, drawings, and all means of expression and to order the seizure, confiscation, and closure of publications and print houses. The emergency law allows the president to censor information during a state of emergency.

In June the Supreme Council for Media Regulation stated that all media in any form had to use official sources to publish or broadcast any information about Libya, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the war against terrorism in Sinai, or COVID-19.

In June a media rights organization said that the government blocked thousands of websites, including 127 media websites.

The rising number of arrests for social media posts had a chilling effect on online speech. Some activists and many journalists reported privately they self-censored criticism of the government or comments that could be perceived as sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood, due to the overall anti-Muslim Brotherhood and progovernment media environment. Publishers were also wary of publishing books that criticized religious institutions, such as al-Azhar, or challenged Islamic doctrine. On August 15, the National Translation Center published its translation guidelines, including conditions that books it translates do not “oppose religion, social values, morals and customs.” According to media, professional writers and translators denounced the rules as a form of censorship. Online journalists were also reluctant to discuss sensitive topics such as sectarian tensions, sexuality, political detainees, military operations in the Sinai, and the military’s outsized role in the national economy.

Libel/Slander Laws: Local and international rights groups reported cases of authorities charging and convicting individuals with denigrating religion under the so-called blasphemy law, targeting primarily Christians but also Muslims. On June 21, the Alexandria Economic Misdemeanor Appeals Court upheld the February 27 three-year sentence against activist and blogger Anas Hassan for “insulting religion and misusing social media.” According to a local human rights organization, security forces arrested Hassan in August 2019 for his Facebook page “The Egyptian Atheists” that a police report stated contained atheistic ideas and criticism of the “divinely revealed religions.”

National Security: The law allows government censors to block the publication of information related to intelligence and national security.

The law imposes a fine on any person who “intentionally publishes...or spreads false news.” The fine is many times the average annual salary of most local journalists. In 2018 authorities established hotlines for members of the public to call or leave text messages reporting fake news in either traditional or social media that endangers state security.

On March 10, the prime minister instructed relevant authorities to take all necessary, legal measures against anyone who broadcasts false news, statements, or rumors regarding COVID-19. On March 28, the Public Prosecution affirmed in a statement that it would address such “fake news” stories according to the law.

On March 18, security forces arrested Atef Hasballah, editor in chief of Alkarar Press website, at his home in Aswan following a critical post on his Facebook page questioning official statistics on the spread of COVID-19 cases in the country. He appeared before the State Security Prosecution on April 14, which ordered his 15-day pretrial detention pending investigation.

A local independent human rights organization reported that journalist Basma Mostafa was detained for nine hours while covering a crowd of citizens waiting for a COVID-19 test at the Ministry of Health’s Central Laboratories in downtown Cairo. Media reported Mostafa was arrested on October 3 while covering the death of Luxor Governorate citizen Ewais al-Rawy (see section 1.a.) and ensuing protests; Mostafa was released on October 6.

On February 12, local media reported that the Supreme Council for Media Regulations sent a warning letter to 16 news websites and social network accounts concerning posting “false news” regarding a reported COVID-19 infection case in Tanta City. It also included a directive to ban publishing any information other than the Ministry of Health’s official data.

Judges may issue restraining orders to prevent media from covering court cases considered sensitive on national security grounds. Rights groups stated authorities sometimes misused the orders to shield government, police, or military officials from public scrutiny. Citing safety and security, the government and military restricted media access to many parts of North Sinai.

On March 11, authorities released, with probationary measures, blogger Islam al-Refai, known as Khorm, who ran a satirical Twitter account with 75,000 followers. He had been held in pretrial detention since 2017, according to his attorney. NGOs continued to claim that authorities used counterterrorism and state-of-emergency laws and courts unjustly to prosecute journalists, activists, lawyers, political party members, university professors, and critics for their peaceful criticism.

Internet Freedom

The constitution prohibits the government from “arbitrarily” interrupting, disconnecting, or depriving citizens seeking to use all forms of internet communications.

Telecommunications services and internet service providers are regulated by the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority under the 2003 Telecommunication Regulation Law. The law does not guarantee the independence of the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority. The government centralized the internet infrastructure and fiber-optic cables, allowing considerable state control over internet access, including restricting and disrupting user access and censoring online content. Law enforcement agencies restricted or disrupted individuals’ access to the internet, and the government monitored social media accounts and internet usage, relying on a law that only allows targeted interception of communications under judicial oversight for a limited period and does not permit indiscriminate mass surveillance. The public prosecutor prosecuted individuals accused of posting “insulting” material.

On August 25, a criminal court in a terrorism circuit sentenced in absentia the director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Bahey Eldin Hassan, to 15 years in prison for publishing false news and insulting the judiciary. In March Hassan, who lived abroad, learned that a criminal court in a separate case sentenced him in September 2019 in absentia to three years in prison on charges of spreading false news and tweeting phrases that undermined and discredited the judiciary. Hassan criticized the Public Prosecution on Twitter in 2018.

The counterterrorism law criminalizes the use of the internet to “promote ideas or beliefs that call for terrorist acts” or to “broadcast what is intended to mislead security authorities or influence the course of justice in relation to any terrorist crime.” The law also authorizes the public prosecutor and investigators to monitor and record online communications among suspects in terrorism cases for a period of 30 days, renewable in 30-day increments. The law does not specify a maximum period. On October 8, several UN human rights special rapporteurs in the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated the country was using “terrorism charges” and “terrorism circuit courts” “to target legitimate human rights activities,” silence dissent, and detain activists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The cybercrime law states, “The relevant investigating authority may, when the evidence indicates that a website is broadcasting phrases, numbers, pictures, videos, or any promotional material, that constitutes one of the crimes enshrined in this law, and poses a threat to national security or endangers the security or economy of the country, order the blocking of the website.” The government issued implementing regulations for the law on August 27. On May 20, several local human rights organizations accused the government of restricting access to information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Media reported that authorities arrested a group of women in June and July who posted videos on the TikTok social media app. On July 27, a Cairo Economic Court sentenced TikTok influencers Haneen Hossam and Mawada Eladhm and three others to two years in prison and fined each for “violating family values” based on the cybercrime law. An appeal was scheduled for January 10, 2021. On August 18, a criminal court upheld an administrative decision to freeze the assets of Hossam and Eladhm.

On August 6, authorities released TikTok influencer Manar Samy on bail pending an appeal. On September 19, a Tanta Economic Court upheld her sentence of three years in prison with hard labor for “inciting debauchery and violating family values” for content she posted on social media. Authorities also arrested members of Samy’s family for resisting authorities. On September 30, a Cairo Economic Court sentenced TikTok influencers Sherifa Rifaat, known as “Sherry Hanim,” and her daughter, Zumoroda, to six years in prison and fined each for assaulting family values and inciting prostitution. A court was scheduled to examine the appeal in January 2021.

There were reports the government temporarily blocked access to internet messaging applications.

The government attempted to disrupt the communications of terrorist groups operating in Sinai by cutting mobile services, internet, and sometimes landlines.

The law obliges internet service providers and mobile operators to allow government access to customer databases, allowing security forces to obtain information regarding activities of specific customers, which observers noted could lead to lack of online anonymity.

There were reports authorities monitored social media and internet dating sites to identify and arrest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity).

On June 25, a local media rights organization reported that since May 2017 the state had blocked at least 547 websites, including at least 127 news websites. The blocked sites included international NGOs, local human rights NGOs, and numerous virtual private network services. Some blockages appeared intended to respond to critical coverage of the government or to disrupt antigovernment political activity or demonstrations. On April 9, authorities blocked the newly established *Daarb* website run by human rights defender Khaled al Balshy, one month after its launch.

In 2017 the news website *Mada Masr* sued the government seeking information on why it was blocked. In 2018 the Court of Administrative Justice referred the case for technical review by the Justice Ministry’s Authority of Experts. This review was pending at year’s end.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were reports of government restrictions on academic freedom and cultural events. The removal of references to the country’s 2011 and 2013 revolutions from high school history class curricula continued after a 2017 decree from the Ministry of Education and Technical Education. According to media and local rights groups, a degree of self-censorship, like that reported by nonacademic commentators, existed when academics publicly commented on sensitive political and socioeconomic issues. University faculty members and Ministry of Education employees (including teachers) needed security agency approval to travel abroad for academic or professional purposes. Faculty and officials at public universities and research centers also must obtain Ministry of Foreign Affairs permission to travel abroad for any reason. Some public universities restricted campus visits of foreign speakers or delegations or required a faculty chaperone for delegations of university students traveling to the United States.

On May 8, authorities at the Cairo International Airport confiscated the passport of Walid Salem, a University of Washington doctoral student, preventing him from traveling. Authorities arrested Salem in May 2018 while he was conducting political science dissertation research on the Egyptian judiciary and released him in December 2018 with a travel ban and probationary measures pending trial. On February 22, the State Security Prosecution canceled the probationary measures and released him under guarantee of his place of residence.

There was censorship of cultural events. A prime ministerial decree issued in 2018 declares it unlawful to hold a special event or festival without “prior license from the Ministry of Culture and liaising with relevant state entities.” This requirement added to existing regulations, under which organizations must obtain a permit from the Ministry of Culture’s Censorship Board, as well as permits from the Interior Ministry and the relevant artists’ union for concerts, performances, and other cultural events. The Ministry of Culture must approve all scripts and final productions of plays and films. The ministry censored foreign films to be shown in theaters but did not censor the same films sold as DVDs.

On February 16, the Musicians Syndicate banned Mahraganat music, a popular street-music genre, in public and prohibited any dealings with Mahraganat singers without the syndicate’s permission. This decision came two days after a Cairo concert where Mahraganat singers used what the syndicate considered inappropriate words. A few hours after the decision, the Tourism Police prevented Omar Kamal from holding a concert in a Cairo hotel. The syndicate and the Department of Censorship of Artistic Works filed police reports against a number of Mahraganat singers.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly “according to notification regulated by law.” The demonstrations law includes an expansive list of prohibited activities, giving a judge the authority to prohibit or curtail planned demonstrations after submitting an official memorandum. Domestic and international human rights organizations asserted the law did not meet international standards regarding freedom of assembly. On January 18, an administrative court dismissed a lawsuit filed by a local human rights organization in 2017 challenging the law. A government-imposed exclusion zone prohibits protests within 2,600 feet (790 meters) of vital governmental institutions.

On March 22, President Sisi ratified amendments to the Prison Regulation Law, preventing the conditional release of those convicted of assembly crimes, among other crimes.

There were protests throughout the year, mostly small, and some occurred without government interference. In most cases the government rigorously enforced the law restricting demonstrations, in some instances using force, including in cases of small groups of protesters demonstrating peacefully.

On February 7, authorities detained Patrick George Zaki, a student at the University of Bologna, at the Cairo International Airport. Media reported he was beaten and subjected to electric shocks. On February 8, Zaki appeared before the prosecutor, who ordered his pretrial detention on charges of inciting individuals to protest in September 2019, spreading false news, promoting terrorism, and harming national security. A criminal court renewed his pretrial detention for 45 days on December 6.

On April 22, a local NGO reported that authorities released 3,633 of the 3,717 protesters detained after street demonstrations in September 2019. According to the report, approximately 1,680 defendants were released in 2019, approximately 1,983 were released in the first quarter of 2020, and an estimated 54 remained in detention. On February 5, the Al-Mokattam Emergency Misdemeanor Court ordered the acquittal of 102 individuals of charges of attacking the Mokattam police station in protest against the death in custody of Mohamed Abdel Hakim. Government investigators reported that Hakim had died from beatings by two police employees following his arrest in 2018.

On July 1, the Cassation Court reduced the prison sentence of a Central Security Forces officer, Yaseen Hatem, from 10 years to seven years for the death of activist Shaimaa el-Sabbagh. Hatem was convicted of wounding that led to the death and deliberately wounding other protesters during a 2015 protest marking the fourth anniversary of the January 25 revolution.

According to a local human rights organization, thousands of persons whom authorities arrested during 2013 and 2014 due to their participation in demonstrations (some of which were peaceful) remained imprisoned; however, authorities released others who had completed their sentences. Authorities reportedly held such individuals under charges of attending an unauthorized protest, incitement to violence, or “blocking roads.” Human rights groups claimed authorities inflated or used these charges solely to target individuals suspected of being members of groups in opposition to the government or those who sought to exercise the rights to free assembly or association.

On April 12, the State Security Prosecution ordered the release of 35 detainees on bail whom authorities had accused of spreading false news about COVID-19, some of whom had participated in a street march in Alexandria on March 23 after curfew, despite government restrictions on gatherings during the pandemic. On April 25, authorities released 20 detainees on bail who had participated in an April 23 street march after curfew in Alexandria to celebrate Ramadan and protest COVID-19.

On June 17, a local human rights organization filed an official complaint with the prosecutor general to release activist Mohamed Adel as he reached the two-year legal limit for pretrial detention since his June 2018 arrest on charges of violating the protest law. On December 21, State Security Prosecution ordered Adel’s detention for 15 days pending investigation in a new case on charges of joining and funding a terrorist group, meeting terrorist leaders in prison, and spreading false news. Reports indicated that in September more than 2,000 persons, including at least 70 younger than 18, were arrested in response to small demonstrations marking the first anniversary of the anticorruption protests of September 2019. On September 27, the Public Prosecution ordered the release of 68 of the 70 minors who had been arrested. In early November more than 400 persons arrested during the demonstrations were released from prison, and in early December approximately 67 additional individuals were also released.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provides for freedom of association. The law governing associations, however, significantly restricts this right.

A 2019 law governing NGOs eliminated prison sentences as penalties and removed formal oversight roles for security and intelligence authorities. It also required the government to issue executive regulations to clarify that NGOs will have exclusive access to and control of NGO funds as well as procedural protections, such as impartial administrative and judicial appeal mechanisms. On November 25, the cabinet approved the executive regulations. As of December 31, however, they had not been published in the official gazette.

The penal code criminalizes the request for or acceptance of foreign funds, materiel, weapons, ammunition, or “other things” from states or NGOs “with the intent to harm the national interest.” Those convicted may be sentenced to life in prison (or the death penalty in the case of public officials) for crimes committed during times of war or with “terrorist purpose.”

As of year’s end, lawyer Amr Emam remained in detention pending investigations on charges of colluding with a terrorist organization, publishing false news, and misusing social media to spread false information. Emam was arrested in October 2019 after he began a hunger strike and sit-in to protest the arrests, alleged abuse, and continued detention of journalist Esraa Abdel Fattah, activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, and lawyer Mohamed Elbakr. In late August Emam, along with Esraa Abdel Fattah and Mohamed Elbakr, was added to a new case on similar charges.

On September 6, after a criminal court ordered his release on August 26, the State Security Prosecution ordered the 15-day pretrial detention of Ibrahim Metwally Hegazy on new charges. This was the third case against Hegazy, a human rights lawyer and founder of the Association of the Families of the Disappeared, since his 2017 arrest at the Cairo International Airport while traveling to Geneva to participate in the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

The Muslim Brotherhood, the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party, and its NGO remained illegal, and the Muslim Brotherhood was listed as a designated terrorist organization.

Authorities continued investigations of local NGOs that received foreign funding under a case originally brought in 2011. On July 18, the Cairo Criminal Court denied a motion to lift the travel bans imposed on 14 defendants in the case, including Nazra for Feminist Studies founder Mozn Hassan and others, accused of receiving foreign funding to harm national security in connection with her NGO. On December 5, an investigative judge dismissed criminal charges, including receiving foreign funding to harm the national interests, and lifted the travel bans and asset freezes against 20 domestic NGOs involved in the 2011 case.

A court case brought by el-Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence (also registered under the name el-Nadeem for Psychological Rehabilitation) challenging a 2016 closure order remained pending an expert report ordered by the court. The organization asserted the closure was politically motivated, targeting el-Nadeem because of its work investigating torture, deaths in detention, and impunity for these crimes. The organization continued to operate in a limited capacity.

In November Mohamed Basheer, Karim Ennarah, and executive director Gasser Abdel Razek of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights were arrested on charges of “joining a terror group” and “spreading false news.” On December 3, authorities released the three pending investigation. On December 6, the Third Terrorism Circuit Court ordered a temporary freeze on the personal assets of the three employees.

c. Freedom of Religion

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

d. Freedom of Movement

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, albeit with some exceptions, including the handling of potential refugees and asylum seekers.

In-country Movement: Citizens and foreigners may not travel freely in areas of the country designated as military zones. The government sought to prevent private individuals, journalists, civil society figures, and international organizations from entering North Sinai on safety grounds.

Foreign Travel: The constitution states, “No citizen may be prevented from leaving the State territory.” Nonetheless, men who have not completed compulsory military service and have not obtained an exemption may not travel abroad or emigrate. National identification cards indicated completion of military service.

Authorities required citizens between ages 18 and 40 to obtain permission from the Interior Ministry to travel to 16 countries: Georgia, Guinea, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Qatar, South Africa, South Korea, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, and Yemen. Enforcement of these regulations was sporadic. The government stated it intended these regulations to make it more difficult for citizens to join terrorist groups and to stop flight of criminals. These regulations also affected the ability of other individuals to travel outside the country. Authorities maintained a “no-fly” list that prevented some defendants in court cases from fleeing the country.

The government-imposed travel bans on human rights defenders and political activists under investigation or formally charged. Local human rights groups maintained that authorities used travel bans to intimidate and silence human rights defenders. A 2018 court ruling stated a travel ban “does not require the investigation of certain facts and their certainty,” but there must be “serious evidence that there are reasons for it and that the decision to prevent travel is due to security reasons and the interests of the state.”

Democracy activist Esraa Abdel Fattah remained unable to depart the country because of a travel ban (see section 1.c. regarding her arrest).

Exile: There was no government-imposed exile, and the constitution prohibits the government from expelling citizens or banning citizens from returning to the country. Some Mubarak- and Morsi-era politicians lived outside the country by choice and stated they faced government threats of prosecution.

On June 6, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not have to renew the passport of Ayman Nour, the president of the opposition New Ghad Party who was living abroad. Nour filed the lawsuit when the ministry refused to renew his passport at the Egyptian consulates in Turkey and Lebanon.

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, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: Media, NGOs, and UNHCR staff reported multiple cases of attacks against refugees, particularly women and children. According to UNHCR, refugees sometimes reported harassment, sexual harassment, and discrimination. Refugee women and girls, particularly sub-Saharan Africans, faced the greatest risk of societal, sexual, and gender-based violence.

According to UNHCR and press reports, police security sweeps increased in neighborhoods known to house Syrian, Sudanese, and other African refugees, as well as migrants, resulting in increased detentions. Detainees reported authorities subjected them to verbal abuse and poor detention conditions.

Refoulement: Although the government often contacted UNHCR upon detaining unregistered migrants and asylum seekers, authorities reportedly sometimes encouraged unregistered detainees to choose to return to their countries of origin or a neighboring country to avoid continued detention, even in cases where the individuals expressed a fear of return. The number of these cases was unknown.

On January 8, the Supreme Administrative Court made a final ruling that the government could not extradite to Libya six former Libyan officials who were part of the government of former president Muammar Gaddafi. The court stated that according to domestic and international law, they were entitled to protection in Egypt.

UNHCR protested the government's November 2019 deportation of a Yemeni asylee to Yemen. According to UNHCR, the asylee was arrested in August 2019 in Egypt for his alleged conversion from Islam to Christianity and subsequent proselytizing activities.

Access to Asylum: The constitution provides for the protection of political refugees, but the law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a comprehensive legal regime for providing protection to refugees. The government granted UNHCR authority to make refugee status determinations. UNHCR does not register Libyan citizens; neither does it register or assist Palestinian refugees in the country.

According to UNHCR as of March, asylum seekers in the country came mainly from Syria, as well as from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen.

In 2013 the government began applying a system of visa and security clearance requirements for Syrian nationals and Palestinian refugees from Syria, thus assuring no direct entries from Syria, since Egypt lacked consular services there. Following the UNHCR's visit in 2017, the country relaxed its visa requirements for Syrians seeking family reunification.

Reports of irregular movements of individuals, including asylum seekers, and detention of foreign nationals attempting to depart the country irregularly via the Mediterranean, remained low during the year, according to UNHCR, following enactment and enforcement of a law dramatically increasing patrols on the country's Mediterranean coast in 2016.

UNHCR and its partners usually had regular access, by request, to detained registered refugees and asylum seekers along the north coast. Local rights groups faced continued resistance from the government when trying to interview detainees at Qanater men's and women's prisons outside Cairo, which housed most detained refugees and asylum seekers. Authorities generally granted UNHCR access to asylum seekers at all prison and detention facilities. Authorities generally released asylum seekers registered with UNHCR, although frequently not detained migrants, many of whom were Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali, and Sudanese (who may have had a basis for asylum claims). Authorities often held detained migrants as unregistered asylum seekers in police stations until UNHCR or other aid agencies assisted them, although sometimes authorities sent some to regular prisons alongside convicted criminals or deported them.

The government has never recognized UNHCR's mandate to offer services to Palestinians outside of the fields of operations of the UN Relief and Works Agency, reportedly due to a belief that allowing UNHCR registration would negate Palestinian refugees' alleged right of return. Approximately 2,900 Palestinian refugees from Syria were also

present in the country, the majority reportedly in Cairo. The Palestinian Authority mission in the country provided limited assistance to this population. The Swiss Red Cross also provided some humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees from Syria.

Employment: No law grants or prohibits refugees the right to work. Those seeking unauthorized employment were challenged by lack of jobs and societal discrimination, particularly against sub-Saharan Africans. Refugees who found work took low-paying jobs in the informal market, such as domestic servants, and were vulnerable to financial and sexual exploitation by employers.

Access to Basic Services: Refugees, in particular non-Arabic-speaking refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, received limited access to some services, including health care and public education. The Interior Ministry restricted access for some international organizations seeking to assist migrants and refugees in Sinai. UNHCR was unaware of any migrants detained in Sinai since 2016. UNHCR provided some refugees with modest support for education and health care, as well as small monthly financial assistance grants for particularly vulnerable refugees. The International Organization for Migration provided additional assistance to particularly vulnerable migrants and individual asylum cases that were either rejected or being processed by UNHCR.

Refugee children not enrolled in public schools mainly attended refugee-run schools or private schools, or they were home schooled. The law requires government hospitals to provide free emergency medical care to refugees, but many hospitals did not have adequate resources to do so. In some cases hospitals insisted that refugees provide payment in advance of receiving services or refused to provide services to refugees. One local refugee agency reported some refugees died due to the lack of medical care.

g. Stateless Persons

Of the eight stateless persons known to UNHCR, most were Armenians displaced for more than 50 years. According to a local civil society organization, the number of stateless persons in the country was likely higher than the number recorded by UNHCR. The government and UNHCR lacked a mechanism for identifying stateless persons, including those of disputed Sudanese/South Sudanese nationality and those of disputed Ethiopian/Eritrean nationality. A majority of the approximately 70,000 Palestinian refugees were stateless.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Constraints on freedom of expression, association, and assembly, however, limited citizens’ ability to do so.

On July 29, President Sisi ratified legal amendments that ban active or retired military personnel from running in presidential, parliamentary, or local council elections without prior approval from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. Decisions are appealable within 30 days before the Supreme Judicial Committee for Officers and Personnel of the Armed Forces. Amnesty International said on July 30 that the amendments would allow President Sisi and the government to restrict electoral opposition.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Domestic and international organizations expressed concern that government limitations on freedoms of speech, association, and assembly severely constrained broad participation in the political process. Local media reported that video blogger and satirist Shady Abu Zeid was released from detention on October 17 with probationary measures based on an October 10 release order. Authorities arrested him in 2018 after the March presidential election on charges of spreading false news and joining a banned group; following a February 4 release order, he was charged in a new case on February 11 on the same charges. On November 21, a Cairo appeals court sentenced Abu Zeid to six months in prison following his conviction for insulting a government official in a Facebook post. On March 19, former Constitution Party leader Shady El Ghazali Harb was released after spending 22 months in detention. According to local media, authorities arrested Harb in 2018 after he made statements about the presidential elections. On July 27, authorities released the chief editor of the blocked *Masr al-Arabiya* news site, Adel Sabri, after he spent more than two years in detention. According to Front Line Defenders, authorities arrested Sabri in 2018 after *Masr al-Arabiya* published a translation of a *New York Times* article that claimed authorities gave bribes to citizens to vote during the presidential elections.

There were two rounds of elections during the year for the re-established 300-seat upper house, or “Senate,” and for the House of Representatives’ 568 elected seats. A progovernment coalition won an overwhelming majority of the Senate’s 200 elected seats; the president appointed the remaining 100 seats. Election observers documented visible judicial supervision, a tight security presence, available ambulances and wheelchairs, and COVID-19 precautions in place. Local media noted higher than expected participation by women and youth voters. One political coalition alleged instances of vote rigging and bribery that advantaged an opponent political party during the House of Representatives’ elections. Some opposition parties questioned the youth turnout, especially in poorer areas, and claimed they were “bussed in” to vote. Irregularities observed included campaign stickers at the entrance of some polling stations, distribution of campaign flyers to voters at one polling station, and some instances of voters not wearing masks or social distancing. No significant acts of violence or disturbances to the election processes were observed.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The constitution grants citizens the ability to form, register, and operate political parties. The law requires new parties to have a minimum of 5,000 members from each of at least 10 governorates. The constitution also states: “No political activity may be practiced and no political parties may be formed on the basis of religion or discrimination based on gender, origin, or sectarian basis or geographic location. No activity that is hostile to democratic principles, secretive, or of military or quasi-military nature may be practiced. Political parties may not be dissolved except by virtue of a court judgment.”

The Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, remained banned. According to local media, on May 30, the Supreme Administrative Court dissolved the Islamist Building and Development Party, based on the allegation of the Political Parties Affairs that the party was affiliated with an Islamic group in violation of the law. Authorities did not ban other Islamist parties, including the Strong Egypt party.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: On July 2, President Sisi ratified laws governing legislative elections, as required by the April 2019 constitutional amendments. The new Senate law requires that women receive at least 10 percent of Senate seats. Women received 40 seats in the 300-seat Senate. Amendments to the House of Representatives law require that women receive at least 25 percent of House seats. Women received 148 of the 568 elected seats in the House of Representatives.

No laws limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Social and cultural barriers, however, limited women’s political participation and leadership in most political parties and some government institutions. The April 2019 constitutional amendments introduced a requirement to better represent workers, farmers, youth, Christians, Egyptians abroad, and individuals with disabilities.

Eight women led cabinet ministries. There were two Christians among the appointed governors of the 27 governorates. In 2018 authorities appointed Manal Awad Michael, a Coptic woman, governor of Damietta, making her the country’s second female governor. On December 20, a female academic was appointed as deputy to the president of the Supreme Constitutional Court. In September the General Assembly of the Cairo Economic Court appointed for the first time a female judge as the head of civil division circuit of an appellate court. In 2018 the Supreme Judiciary Council promoted 16 female judges to higher courts, including the Qena Appeals Court. Legal experts stated there were approximately 66 female judges serving in family, criminal, economic, appeals, and misdemeanor courts; that total was less than 1 percent of judges. Several senior judges were Christian.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not consistently implement the law effectively, and officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

Corruption: The Central Agency for Auditing and Accounting is the government’s internal anticorruption body and submitted reports to the president and prime minister that were not available to the public. The auditing and accounting agency stationed monitors at state-owned companies to report corrupt practices. The Administrative Control Authority (ACA), another state institution with technical, financial, and administrative independence, has jurisdiction over state administrative bodies, state-owned enterprises, public associations and institutions, private companies undertaking public work, and organizations to which the state contributes in any form. The ACA is a civilian agency led by personnel seconded from the military and intelligence services with authority to investigate any crimes related to public corruption. The ACA has no oversight role for allegations of corruption involving the military. In addition to anticorruption, it also has jurisdiction for criminal violations to include human trafficking and financial crimes.

On March 9, the ACA arrested Gamal Al-Showeikh, a member of parliament, for accepting a bribe to influence a real estate project in the Cairo. At year’s end, the case remained under investigation.

On February 23, the Cassation Court upheld a verdict issued in April 2019 by the Port Said Felonies court sentencing Gamal Abdel Azim, the former head of the Customs Authority, to 10 years in prison and a fine on charges of corruption and bribery.

On September 5, the Cairo Court of Appeals started hearing the retrial of a corruption case against Ahmed Shafiq, former prime minister and 2012 presidential candidate, and two former leaders in the Ministry of Civil Aviation on charges of wasting public funds and facilitating embezzlement. A Cairo criminal court acquitted Shafiq in absentia in 2013, and the Court of Cassation accepted the public prosecutor’s appeal and ordered the retrial on August 29. The court was scheduled to reconvene on January 4, 2021, to examine the case.

Financial Disclosure: There are no financial disclosure laws for public officials. The law forbids government officials from maintaining any pecuniary interest in matters over which they exercise authority.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

International and local human rights organizations stated the government continued to be uncooperative. The Supreme Standing Committee for Human Rights, established by the cabinet and chaired by the minister of foreign affairs as an intragovernmental body, was launched during the year to devise a national human rights strategy, lead national efforts on human rights education and training, and work with regional and international human rights institutions. Domestic civil society organizations criticized the government’s consultations with civil society as insufficient.

Extended delays in gaining government approvals and an unclear legal environment continued to limit the ability of domestic and international NGOs to operate. State-owned and independent media frequently depicted NGOs, particularly international NGOs and domestic NGOs that received funding from international sources, as undertaking subversive activities. Some NGOs reported receiving visits or calls to staff, both at work and at home, from security service officers and tax officials monitoring their activities, as well as societal harassment.

Human rights defenders and political activists were also subjected to governmental and societal harassment and intimidation, including through travel bans (see section 2.d.).

Well-established, independent domestic human rights NGOs struggled to operate amid increasing pressure from security forces throughout the country. Online censorship (see section 2.a.) diminished the roles of internet activists and bloggers in publicizing information concerning human rights abuses. Authorities sometimes allowed civil society organizations not registered as NGOs to operate, but such organizations often reported harassment, along with threats of government interference, investigation, asset freezes, or closure.

The government continued investigations into the receipt of foreign funding by several human rights organizations (see section 2.b.). Major international human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, had not had offices in the country since 2014.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: In 2018 the UN special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing visited the country, the first rapporteur to visit since 2010. Nine other UN special rapporteurs had pending visit requests. Authorities did not allow the International Committee of the Red Cross access to prisoners and detainees. The Interior Ministry provided international and local organizations informal access to some asylum seeker, refugee, and migrant detention centers (see section 2.d.).

Government Human Rights Bodies: The quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights monitored government abuses of human rights submitted in the form of citizen complaints to the government. The council continued to function with its existing membership, even though under the law the terms of council members ended in 2016. Several well-known human rights activists served on the organization’s board, although some observers alleged the board’s effectiveness was limited because it lacked sufficient resources and the government rarely acted on its findings. The council at times challenged and criticized government policies and practices, calling for steps to improve its human rights record.

On March 7, the council issued a report covering May 2018 to July 2019. According to media, the council reported a significant decline in freedoms and stated there should be a statement of intent to make room for freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. Media reported that the council received complaints about detention deaths due to torture and identified possible changes to reduce impunity for torture.

On May 7, the council renewed its call to release detainees held in pretrial detention for longer than the two-year maximum. It highlighted the case of Shadi Habash, a filmmaker arrested in 2018 for directing a music video that mocked President Sisi, who was held in pretrial detention beyond the two years and died in Tora Prison on May 1 after ingesting sanitizing alcohol used to prevent COVID-19. The council called on the prosecutor general to examine the medical procedures taken in Habash’s case.

In early June the council renewed its call to the Interior Ministry to allow communication between prisoners and their families after the suspension of prison visits due to COVID-19. The Interior Ministry allowed prison visits to resume on August 22. Visitors were required to wear face masks and were allowed one 20-minute visit per month for each prisoner.

Other government human rights bodies include the Supreme Standing Committee for Human Rights; Justice Ministry General Department of Human Rights; Prosecutor General Human Rights Office; State Information Service Human Rights Unit; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Human Rights and International, Social, and Humanitarian Department; and human rights units in each of the country’s governorates.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape, prescribing penalties of 15 to 25 years’ imprisonment, or life imprisonment for cases of rape involving armed abduction. Spousal rape is not illegal. The government improved its enforcement of the law. Civil society organizations reported instances of police pressuring victims not to pursue charges.

On July 4, authorities arrested Ahmed Bassam Zaki after more than 50 women accused him online of rape, sexual assault, and harassment dating back to 2016. On July 8, the prosecution ordered his pretrial detention for 15 days pending investigations on charges that included attempted rape and sexual assault. Zaki faced charges of statutory rape, sexual harassment, and blackmail in an October 10 trial session; the court was scheduled to reconvene in January 2021. On December 29, the Cairo Economic Court convicted Zaki of misuse of social media and using social media for sexual assault and sentenced him to three years’ imprisonment with labor. These allegations gave rise to what media referred to as Egypt’s #MeToo movement.

On July 21, a Qena criminal court sentenced three defendants to death after convicting them of kidnapping and raping a young woman from Farshout in Qena Governorate in 2018. A local NGO said on July 22 that the victim received threats from the families of the defendants hours after the verdict was issued and after she discussed the rape on television two weeks prior to the ruling.

On July 31, media reported that the administrator of the Instagram and Twitter accounts “Assault Police,” which had almost 200,000 followers, deactivated the accounts after it received death threats following postings about various alleged gang rapes. Local media reported the account also referred allegations against Ahmed Bassam Zaki to authorities and the National Council for Women.

On August 4, the National Council for Women forwarded a complaint to the public prosecutor from a woman who alleged she was sexually assaulted by multiple men at the Fairmont Nile City hotel in 2014. The complaint included testimony about the incident in which a group of men allegedly drugged, raped, and filmed the victim after a social event. According to social media, the men signed their initials on her body and used the film as a “trophy” and blackmail. On August 24, the public prosecutor ordered the arrests of nine men allegedly involved in the case, most of them sons of prominent businesspeople. According to media, as of September 2, authorities arrested five suspects in Egypt and three in Lebanon, who were extradited to Egypt. Media reported that in late August state security arrested a man and three women who were witnesses to the alleged rape and two of the witnesses’ acquaintances. The prosecutor general charged all six in a separate case with violating laws on drug use, “morality,” and “debauchery;” the prosecutor general ordered the release on bail of three of the six on August 31 and was pressing charges.

Domestic violence was a significant problem. The law does not prohibit domestic violence or spousal abuse, but authorities may apply provisions relating to assault with accompanying penalties. The law requires that an assault victim produce multiple eyewitnesses, a difficult condition for domestic abuse victims. Police often treated domestic violence as a family issue rather than a criminal matter.

The Interior Ministry includes a unit responsible for combating sexual and gender-based violence. The National Council for Women (NCW) was responsible for coordinating government and civil society efforts to empower women. In 2015 the NCW launched a five-year *National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women* with four strategic objectives: prevention, protection, intervention, and prosecution. An NCW study found that approximately 1.5 million women reported domestic violence each year. A 2015 Egypt Economic Cost of Gender-based Violence Survey reported that 5.6 million women experience violence at the hands of their husbands or fiancés each year. After the start of the country’s #MeToo movement, the NCW coordinated with women’s rights organizations and the Prosecutor General’s Office to help women who disclosed they were victims of sexual harassment.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): FGM/C is illegal, but it remained a serious problem. According to international and local observers, the government did not effectively enforce the FGM/C law. In May 2019 the government formed a national task force to end FGM/C, led by the NCW and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM). On June 13, the NCCM stated that 82 percent of FGM crimes were carried out by doctors.

On January 20, a Sohag criminal court sentenced a doctor who conducted FGM/C surgery on a girl in Sohag Governorate in 2018 and the father of the girl to one year in prison; it ruled to suspend implementation of the sentence unless the doctor committed the crime again within the next three years. On August 6, the Administrative Prosecution referred the doctor, who directed a government clinic in Sohag Governorate, to administrative trial for committing FGM/C. One local human rights organization welcomed this disciplinary proceeding and criticized the legal discretion given to the judiciary in sentencing FGM/C cases. The circumcision resulted in severe bleeding and caused the girl permanent disability that forced her to stay in a Sohag hospital for more than a year.

In late January Nada Hassan, a 12-year-old girl, died from FGM/C in Assiut. Authorities arrested the doctor who performed the FGM/C, the parents, and an aunt. On February 6, a court in Assiut released the parents and aunt on guarantee of their residence pending trial and released the doctor on bail pending trial. The public prosecutor summoned the doctor and redetained him on February 20 and referred the case to trial on February 22. The Assiut Criminal Court scheduled a review of the case on October 28, but further developments were not made public. On June 3, the Public Prosecution stated that after a forensic analysis confirmed FGM/C occurred on three minor girls in Sohag Province, it charged a doctor with performing the procedure and the father of the girls for assisting in the crime. The statement also said the father had told the girls that the doctor was going to vaccinate them for COVID-19. According to media reports, the children’s mother reported the crime on May 31 to police. On July 12, a Sohag court sentenced the doctor to three years in prison and the father to one year in prison.

A 2016 amendment to the law designated FGM/C a felony, as opposed to a misdemeanor as it was previously, and assigned penalties for conviction of five to seven years’ imprisonment for practitioners who perform the procedure, or 15 years if the practice led to death or “permanent deformity.” The law granted exceptions in cases of “medical necessity,” which rights groups and subject matter experts identified as a problematic loophole that allowed the practice to continue. After Hassan’s death and the case of the three Sohag girls, the Ministry of Health and Population, National Council for Population, NCCM, National Council for Women, Prosecutor General’s Office, and local NGOs worked together successfully to eliminate the loophole and raise awareness of the crime.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: The law does not specifically address “honor” crimes, which authorities treated as any other crime. There were no reliable statistics regarding the incidence of killings and assaults motivated by “honor,” but local observers stated such killings occurred, particularly in rural areas. Local media, especially in Upper Egypt, occasionally reported on incidents where fathers or brothers killed their daughters and sisters in alleged “honor killings” after they discovered they had premarital or extramarital relationships.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment remained a serious problem. The government claimed it prioritized efforts to address sexual harassment. The penal code defines sexual harassment as a crime, with penalties including fines and sentences of six months’ to five years’ imprisonment if convicted. Media and NGOs reported sexual harassment by police was also a problem, and the potential for further harassment further discouraged women from filing complaints. In September the president ratified a penal code amendment to strengthen protection of the identities of victims of harassment, rape, and assault during court cases.

On January 29, a Giza court ordered a daily newspaper to pay financial compensation to journalist May al-Shamy for dismissing her wrongfully in 2018 after she complained of sexual harassment in the workplace.

On February 9, the Supreme Administrative Court issued a final ruling dismissing a teacher after he was convicted of sexual harassment of 120 elementary school students in Alexandria Governorate in 2013. The teacher had been dismissed in 2013 by the school where he was working.

According to local press, a Qena criminal court on July 11 sentenced a man to 15 years in prison for sexually assaulting a woman in February. The verdict remained subject to appeal.

On July 18, the Coptic Orthodox Church announced that Pope Tawadros II decided to defrock priest Rewiess Aziz Khalil of the Diocese of Minya and Abu Qurqas, following allegations of sexual abuse and pedophilia leveled by Coptic Christians in North America where the priest had lived on a foreign assignment.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Discrimination: The constitution provides for equal rights for male and female citizens. Women did not enjoy the same legal rights and opportunities as men, and discrimination was widespread. Aspects of the law and traditional societal practices disadvantaged women in family, social, and economic life.

Women faced widespread societal discrimination, threats to their physical security, and workplace bias in favor of men that hindered their social and economic advancement.

Laws affecting marriage and personal status generally corresponded to an individual’s religious group. A female Muslim citizen cannot legally marry a non-Muslim man. If she were to do so, authorities could charge her with adultery and consider her children illegitimate. Under the government’s interpretation of Islamic law, any children from such a marriage could be placed in the custody of a male Muslim guardian. *Khula* divorce allows a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband’s consent, provided she forgoes all her financial rights, including alimony, dowry, and other benefits. The Coptic Orthodox Church permits divorce only in rare circumstances, such as adultery or conversion of one spouse to another religion. Other Christian churches permitted divorce on a case-by-case basis.

On February 4, President Sisi approved harsher penalties in the penal code for divorced men who avoid paying spousal and child support.

The law follows sharia in matters of inheritance; therefore, a Muslim female heir generally receives one-half the amount of a male heir’s inheritance, and Christian widows of Muslims have no inheritance rights. A sole Muslim female heir receives one-half her parents’ estate, and the balance goes to the siblings of the parents or the children of the siblings if the siblings are deceased. A sole male heir inherits his parents’ entire estate.

In marriage and divorce cases, a woman’s testimony must be judged credible to be admissible. Usually the woman accomplishes credibility by conveying her testimony through an adult male relative or representative. The law assumes a man’s testimony is credible unless proven otherwise.

Labor laws provide for equal rates of pay for equal work for men and women in the public but not the private sector. Educated women had employment opportunities, but social pressure against women pursuing a career was strong. Large sectors of the economy controlled by the military excluded women from high-level positions.

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive citizenship through their parents. The mother or the father transmits citizenship and nationality. The government attempted to register all births soon after birth, but some citizens in remote and tribal areas such as the Sinai Peninsula registered births late or could not document their citizenship. In some cases, failure to register resulted in denial of public services, particularly in urban areas where most services required presentation of a national identification card.

Education: Education is compulsory, free, and universal until the ninth grade. The law provides this benefit to stateless persons and refugees. Public schools enrolled Syrian refugees, but they largely excluded refugees of other nationalities.

Child Abuse: The constitution stipulates the government shall protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, mistreatment, and commercial and sexual exploitation. According to a local rights group, authorities recorded hundreds of cases of alleged child abuse each month. The NCCM worked on child abuse issues, and several civil society organizations assisted runaway and abandoned children.

Rights organizations reported children faced mistreatment in detention, including torture, sharing cells with adults, denial of their right to counsel, and authorities’ failure to notify their families. In March Human Rights Watch reported that security forces arrested a 14-year-old boy for protesting in 2016, used electric shocks on sensitive parts of his body, suspended him from his arms until it dislocated his shoulders and left him without medical care for three days, and sentenced him to 10 years in prison for participating in an antigovernment protest.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal age of marriage is 18. On January 30, the NCCM announced it had stopped 659 cases of child marriage in 2019. A government study published on March 17 reported that 2.5 percent of the population in Upper Egypt governorates were married between the ages of 15 and 17, and the percentage of females in that age group who had previously been married exceeded that of males. On February 23, the deputy minister of health and population affairs stated there were 230,000 newborns as a result of early marriage in various governorates across the country. Informal marriages could lead to contested paternity and leave minor females without alimony and other claims available to women with registered marriages. Families reportedly sometimes forced adolescent girls to marry wealthy foreign men in what were known locally as “tourism” or “summer” marriages for the purpose of sexual exploitation, prostitution, or forced labor. According to the law, a foreign man who wants to marry an Egyptian woman more than 25 years younger than he is must pay her EGP 50,000 (\$3,030). Women’s rights organizations argued that allowing foreign men to pay a fine to marry much younger women represented a form of trafficking and encouragement of child marriage. They called on the government to eliminate the system altogether. The NCCM’s antitrafficking unit is responsible for raising awareness of the problem.

On January 4, the Supreme Administrative Court upheld a lower court ruling to dismiss an imam and preacher in the village of Mit Habib in Samanoud, Gharbeya, for administering the marriage of a minor girl and a minor boy in violation of the law. He had administered several *urfi* (unregistered) marriages of underage girls under the pretext that the practice is “lawful” in Islamic law. The court ruled that *urfi* marriages of minors is a violation of children’s rights and an attack on children and young girls, calling the practice of child marriage inconsistent with efforts to protect and promote women’s rights. On February 14, security forces arrested a criminal network engaged in the sale of minors in Giza Governorate. According to local media, the gang sold girls for marriage to wealthy Arabs for a large fee, exploiting their families’ financial need. On December 10, the Public Prosecution referred the case to the Criminal Court.

On March 10, the NCCM’s Child Protection Committee at the Akhmeem Center in Sohag announced it stopped an early marriage of a minor in the village of Al-Sawamah Sharq after receiving a report that a person was preparing to marry off his 16-year-old sister.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law provides for sentences of not less than five years’ imprisonment and fines for conviction of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. The government did not adequately enforce the law. The minimum age for consensual sex is age 18.

On May 26, security forces detained Menna Abd El-Aziz, a minor, after she said in a social media video that an acquaintance and others had sexually assaulted her. On May 31, the prosecution ordered Abd El-Aziz’s detention pending investigations on charges of inciting debauchery and forging an online account. On June 9, the prosecutor general confirmed Abd El-Aziz had been assaulted, beaten, and injured and ordered her pretrial detention in one of the Ministry of Social Solidarity’s shelters for women. On July 26, the prosecutor general referred Abd El-Aziz and six other defendants to criminal court. According to her lawyers, Abd El-Aziz was released on September 17. The individuals she accused were charged in a separate case with sexual abuse and violating the sanctity of a minor’s private life.

On August 29, the public prosecutor ordered the detention of a cook whom authorities had arrested the same day on charges of sexually assaulting underage girls at the orphanage where he worked. On September 26, the Public Prosecution ordered the detention of a teacher pending investigations on charges of sexually assaulting two children in the Khalifa district.

Displaced Children: The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics and the NCCM estimated there were 1,600 street children, while civil society organizations estimated the number to be in the millions. The ministry offered shelters to street children, but many chose not to use them because staff reportedly treated the children as if they were criminals, according to local rights groups. According to rights groups, the incidence of violence,

prostitution, and drug dealing in these shelters was high. Religious institutions and NGOs provided services for street children, including meals, clothing, and literacy classes. The Ministry of Health and Population provided mobile health clinics staffed by nurses and social workers. The Ministry of Social Solidarity also provided 17 mobile units in 10 governorates, offering emergency services, including food and health care, to street children.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State’s *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases>.

Anti-Semitism

The country’s Jewish community reportedly numbered fewer than 10 individuals. In January the government publicly celebrated the history of Jews in Egypt with the reopening of a historic synagogue in Alexandria following completion of its restoration.

On February 25, the Anti-Defamation League called on the government to remove anti-Semitic books from the Cairo International Book Fair.

In April, Israel condemned an Egyptian television series called *The End*, which depicted the future destruction of Israel in a science fiction film.

Trafficking in Persons

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

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution states persons with disabilities are equal without discrimination before the law. The law prohibits discrimination in education, employment, health, political activity, rehabilitation, training, and legal protection.

The law provides for persons with disabilities to gain access to vocational training and employment. Government policy sets a quota for employing persons with disabilities of 5 percent of workers with disabilities for companies with more than 50 employees. Authorities did not enforce the quota requirement, and companies often had persons with disabilities on their payroll to meet the quota without employing them. Government-operated treatment centers for persons with disabilities, especially children, were of poor quality.

A 2019 law establishes the National Council for People with Disabilities (NCPD), an independent body that aims to promote, develop, and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and their constitutional dignity. The council signed a cooperation protocol with the Justice Ministry to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities and to train employees in the government on how to help those with hearing impairments.

Persons with disabilities rode government-owned mass transit buses without charge, but the buses were not wheelchair accessible. Persons with disabilities received subsidies to purchase household products, wheelchairs, and prosthetic devices. Some children with disabilities attended schools with their nondisabled peers while others attended segregated schools. Some of the segregated institutions were informal schools run by NGOs. Some parents of children with disabilities complained on social media of the lack of experience of teacher assistants assigned to help their children.

On January 11, President Sisi directed the government to increase its support to persons with special needs. On April 28, the NCPD general secretary complained to the Human Rights Department of the Prosecutor General’s Office about a reality television broadcast where one participant presented himself as having intellectual disabilities in order to elicit reactions from other participants.

On June 29, the prosecutor general ordered reconsideration of the acquittal of a minor who had allegedly raped an autistic child in late January.

During the Senate and House of Representatives elections, polling stations provided wheelchairs for persons with walking disabilities.

Members of National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups

The law prohibits discrimination on any grounds. Nevertheless, dark-skinned Egyptians and sub-Saharan Africans faced discrimination and harassment, as did Nubians from Upper Egypt.

On July 3, the prosecutor general ordered the detention of two suspects pending investigations on charges of insulting a Sudanese child, violating his personal life, violating Egyptian social values, theft, physical abuse, and discrimination based on national origin. The Prosecutor General’s Office stated the two suspects had beaten the child, stolen his property, and filmed him to post the video on social media. On July 25, the Imbaba misdemeanor court sentenced two defendants in a bullying case to two years in prison with labor and a fine. On September 5, President Sisi ratified amendments to the penal code to criminalize bullying. The new law criminalizes disparaging someone else’s race, gender, religion, physical attributes, social status, health, or mental condition with up to six months in prison a fine, or both.

According to the constitution, the state should make efforts to return Nubians to their original territories and develop such territories within 10 years of the constitution’s 2014 ratification.

On January 20, the prime minister presided over a ceremony granting compensation to Nubians in Aswan Governorate who were displaced by the construction of the two Aswan dams decades ago. The ministers of social solidarity and of culture and of housing attended the event. In his speech, the prime minister noted recent major development projects in Upper Egypt, including improvements to roads, electricity, housing, drinking water, sanitation, education, and health.

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

While the law does not explicitly criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity, it allows police to arrest LGBTI persons on charges such as “debauchery,” “prostitution,” and “violating the teachings of religion” and it provides for prison sentences of up to 10 years. According to a local rights group, there were more than 250 reports of such arrests since 2013. Authorities did not use antidiscrimination laws to protect LGBTI individuals. Legal discrimination and social stigma impeded LGBTI persons from organizing or advocating publicly in defense of their rights. Information was not available on official or private discrimination in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or access to education or health care based on sexual orientation and gender identity. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination. There were reports of arrests and harassment of LGBTI individuals. Intimidation and the risk of arrest greatly restricted open reporting and contributed to self-censorship. Rights groups and activists reported harassment by police, including physical assault and forced payment of bribes to provide information concerning other LGBTI individuals or to avoid arrest. The government has the authority to deport or bar entry to the country of LGBTI foreigners.

There were reports that authorities used social media, dating websites, and cell phone apps to entrap persons they suspected of being gay or transgender, a method LGBTI advocates described as especially effective as LGBTI-friendly public spaces had largely closed in recent years.

On June 1, the Administrative Court rejected a lawsuit filed by transgender Malak El-Kashef, whom authorities released from detention in July 2019, to compel the interior minister to establish separate facilities for transgender individuals inside prisons and police stations. A court ordered transgender male Hossam Ahmed, whom authorities subjected to invasive physical exams, released from pretrial detention in a women’s prison in September.

In a televised statement in early May, prominent actor Hisham Selim spoke openly about his son’s gender change and inability to change his identity card from female to male. On June 23, two lawyers filed lawsuits against Selim and his transgender son for an Instagram post that paid tribute to Egyptian LGBT activist Sara Hegazy, who died by suicide in 2020. Hegazy was reportedly subjected to electric shocks, verbally and sexually assaulted, and held in solitary confinement during her imprisonment for debauchery in 2017, reportedly because she flew a rainbow flag at a concert.

Rights groups reported that authorities, including the Forensic Medical Authority, conducted forced anal examinations. The law allows for conducting forced anal exams in cases of debauchery.

According to a LGBTI rights organization 2019 annual report issued in January, authorities arrested 92 LGBTI individuals in 2019 and conducted forced anal exams on seven persons.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

HIV-positive individuals faced significant social stigma and discrimination in society and the workplace. The health-care system provided anonymous counseling and testing for HIV, free adult and pediatric antiretroviral therapy, and support groups.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and strike, with significant restrictions. The constitution provides for freedom of association. The law prescribes union elections every four years and imposes a strict hierarchy for union formation consisting of a company-level trade union committee, a profession, or industry-level general union, and a national-level union.

While the law provides for collective bargaining, it imposes significant restrictions. For example, the government sets wages and benefits for all public-sector employees. The law does not provide for enterprise-level collective bargaining in the private sector and requires centralized tripartite negotiations that include workers, represented by a union affiliated with the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), business owners, and the Ministry of Manpower overseeing and monitoring negotiations and agreements. In January, 115 workers in the Mega Glass Company in Al Fayyum conducted a strike demanding better wages. The Local Ministry of Manpower officials negotiated a raise in workers’ pay with company management, resolving the strike.

The constitution provides for the right to “peaceful” strikes. The Unified Labor Law permits peaceful strikes as well, but it imposes significant restrictions, including prior approval by a general trade union affiliated with ETUF.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and provides for the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Labor laws do not cover some categories of workers, including agricultural and domestic workers, and other sectors of the informal economy.

The Ministry of Manpower and affiliated directorates did not allow trade unions to adopt any bylaws other than those provided in the law. This position, according to local workers’ rights organizations, was contrary to the law, which states that unions can use the statutory bylaws as guidance to develop their own.

Government enforcement of applicable laws was inconsistent, and penalties for engaging in illegal strikes are more stringent than other laws involving denial of civil rights, such as discrimination. The government also occasionally arrested workers who stage strikes or criticize the government, and it rarely reversed arbitrary dismissals. Since February authorities arrested at least 10 doctors from the Egyptian Medical Syndicate for social media posts critical of the government’s handling of the COVID-19 crisis and charged the doctors with spreading false news, misuse of social media, and membership in a banned group, according to human rights groups. In March government prosecutors extended the detention of labor union activist Khalil Rizk on charges of spreading false news, misuse of social media, and membership in a banned group. Authorities first arrested Rizk in 2019 while he was advocating for workers in a pharmaceutical factory engaged in a dispute with management over wages. In April, Aswan University, a public university, laid off 1,500 workers when the university closed due to COVID-19. In June the National Steel Fabrication Company in Suez Governorate fired six workers, including trade union leadership, and suspended another 270 workers following a dispute over compensation.

The government seldom followed the requirement for tripartite negotiations in collective disputes, leaving workers to negotiate directly with employers, typically after resorting to a strike. In March workers from Al Masryia Company for Weaving and Textile struck for alleged unpaid raises and bonuses. Management and worker representatives reached an agreement on compensation and back pay.

Independent unions continued to face pressure to dissolve. In some cases the Ministry of Manpower delayed responding to unions’ applications for legal status, leaving many in legal limbo. In other instances the Ministry of Manpower refused to legalize proposed unions if an ETUF-affiliated counterpart existed. In January, Bibliotheca Alexandria workers resubmitted documents to form a trade union committee. Their application had been pending since 2018, and they filed multiple legal and administrative complaints to local police and the Ministry of Manpower to have it reviewed. A decision on accepting its registration remained pending.

Workers sometimes staged sit-ins on government and private property, often without obtaining the necessary permits. Rights groups claimed authorities sometimes arrested those seeking to obtain protest permits. In March police in Nasr City detained 70 street cleaner workers protesting an employer who reportedly withheld their salaries for three months. Police originally accused the workers of staging an illegal assembly, but subsequently released them without charges.

A new law provides that for a period of 12 months beginning July 1, a monthly 1 percent deduction will be made from the net income of all public-sector employees, and 0.5 percent of the net income of pensioners, to fund efforts to address the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The constitution states no work may be compulsory except by virtue of a law. The government did not effectively enforce the prohibition but conducted awareness raising activities such as distributing antitrafficking informational booklets to migrant laborers, and the NCW conducted a media campaign regarding the treatment of domestic workers, a population vulnerable to trafficking, and worked with NGOs to provide some assistance to victims of human trafficking, including forced labor. Penalties for forced labor and trafficking were less severe than for other analogous crimes, such as kidnapping.

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 does not prohibit all of the worst forms of child labor. The law sets the minimum age for regular employment at age 15 and at age 13 for seasonal employment. The constitution defines a child as anyone younger than 18. A Ministry of Manpower decree bars children younger than 18 from 44 specific hazardous occupations, while the law prohibits employment of children younger than 18 from work that “puts the health, safety, or morals of the child into danger.” Provincial governors, with the approval of the minister of education, may authorize seasonal work (often agricultural) for children age 13 and older, provided duties are not hazardous and do not interfere with schooling. The labor code and law limit children’s work hours and mandate breaks.

Overall, authorities did not consistently enforce child labor laws. The maximum penalties for violating laws against child labor were fines, while those for other analogous serious crimes such as kidnapping ranged from imprisonment to the death penalty. The Ministry of Manpower, in coordination with the NCCM and the Interior Ministry, enforced child labor laws in state-owned enterprises and private-sector establishments through inspections and supervision of factory management. Labor inspectors generally operated without adequate training on child labor issues, although the Ministry of Manpower offered some child labor-specific training. The government did not inspect

noncommercial farms for child labor, and there were very limited monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for children in domestic service. When authorities imposed penalties for violations, fines were insufficient to deter violations.

Although the government often did not effectively enforce relevant laws, authorities implemented a number of social, educational, and poverty reduction programs to reduce children’s vulnerability to exploitive labor. The NCCM, working with the Ministries of Education and Technical Education and of Social Solidarity, sought to provide working children with social security safeguards and to reduce school dropout rates by providing families with alternative sources of income.

Child labor occurred, although estimates on the number of child laborers varied. According to the 2012 joint International Labor Organization and Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics child labor survey, of the 1.8 million children working, 1.6 million were engaged in hazardous or unlawful forms of labor, primarily in the agricultural sector in rural areas but also in domestic work and factories in urban areas, often under hazardous conditions. Children also worked in light industry, the aluminum industry, construction sites, brick production, and service businesses such as auto repair. According to government, NGO, and media reports, the number of street children in Cairo continued to increase in the face of deteriorating economic conditions. Such children were at greater risk of sexual exploitation or forced begging. In some cases employers abused or overworked children. Children also worked in the production of limestone. On April 9, a total of 43 persons, mostly children, were injured when a truck carrying day-laborer children overturned near a security check point in the district of Abu Tesht, Qena. After an investigation, the government announced that the children worked in agriculture. Authorities charged the hiring contractor and the owner of the farm for violating laws against children engaging in the worst forms of child labor.

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 states all citizens “are equal in rights, freedoms, and general duties without discrimination based on religion, belief, gender, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation, or any other reason.” While discrimination is a civil violation, penalties for other analogous violations of civil rights, such as those related to election interference, were punishable by imprisonment. The country has legal restrictions against women in employment to include limiting working hours at night, occupations such as mining, construction, factories, agriculture, energy, and jobs deemed hazardous, arduous, or morally inappropriate. It does not specify age, citizenship, sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases. In April 2019 the Justice Ministry started its first training course for 22 employees working at the state’s real estate departments in Giza and Cairo to use sign language to help persons with disabilities fill out documents. The training came as part of a cooperation protocol signed in January 2019 between the Justice Ministry and the newly established NCPD. While the law provides for persons with disabilities to gain access to vocational training and employment, the government did not effectively enforce prohibitions against such discrimination. Discrimination also occurred against women and migrant workers (see sections 2.d. and 6), as well as workers based on their political views.

An employee facing discrimination can file a report with the local government labor office. If the employee and the employer are unable to reach an amicable settlement, they can file their claim in administrative court, which may order the employer to redress the complaint or to pay damages or legal fees. According to local rights groups, implementation of the law was inadequate. Additionally, the lengthy and expensive litigation process could deter employees from filing claims. In January the Ministry of Culture rescinded the appointment of artist Mona Al Qammah, who wore a niqab, from a managerial position in Behira Governorate. Al Qammah told the BBC the decision to cancel her appointment came after several online posts claimed she was an ISIS sympathizer and criticized her for wearing the niqab.

Local rights groups reported several cases of employers dismissing workers or depriving them from work for expressing antigovernment opinions.

In August the Ministry of Religious Endowments revoked the preaching license of an Al Azhar preacher after accusing him of membership in the banned Muslim Brotherhood and calling for violence.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Challenges to improving working conditions in both the private sector and informal sector include uneven application or lack of regulations and restrictions on engaging in peaceful protests as a means of negotiating resolutions to workplace disparities. For example, there is no national minimum wage in the private sector, but the government sets a monthly minimum wage for government employees and public-sector workers, which is above the poverty line. According to labor rights organizations, the government implemented the minimum wage for public-sector workers but applied it only to direct government employees and included benefits and bonuses in calculating total salaries. For government employees and public business-sector workers, the government also set a maximum wage limit per month. The law does not require equal pay for equal work. Penalties for violating laws on acceptable conditions of work were not commensurate with crimes such as fraud, which are punishable by imprisonment. In April the International Labor Organization Cairo Office commended the country’s efforts to combat COVID-19. The Egyptian Medical Syndicate, however, criticized a lack of personal protective equipment in hospitals and blamed a lack of COVID-19 testing for the spread of the virus among doctors. In April an international human rights

organization accused private-sector garment factory owners of forcing workers to work without providing sufficient protections from contracting COVID-19 and urged the government to ensure that private-sector companies provide personal protective equipment at no cost to workers. In May a trade union NGO criticized the Ministry of Health for not providing sufficient polymerase chain reaction tests for health-care personnel and placing doctors, nurses, and their families at risk of contracting the virus.

The law stipulates a maximum 48-hour workweek for the public and private sectors and provides for premium pay for overtime and work on rest days and national holidays. The law prohibits excessive compulsory overtime. The government sets worker health and safety standards, for example, by prohibiting employers from maintaining hazardous working conditions. The law excludes agricultural, fisheries, and domestic workers from regulations concerning wages, hours, and working conditions.

The Ministry of Manpower is responsible for enforcing labor laws and standards for working conditions. The government did not effectively enforce the law. The ministry did not attempt to apply labor standards to the informal sector. Penalties include imprisonment and fine but were not sufficient to deter violations, as they were often unenforced. Labor inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions and did not face a moratorium on inspections during the year. The number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance with the law.

By law workers may remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to employment, although authorities did not reliably enforce this right. In March employees at the Port Said Investment Zone warned of the spread of COVID-19 and criticized restrictions against working from home. Following the circulation of a video depicting hundreds of factory workers working in close proximity, the governor ordered the closure of five factories for 15 days. Workers continued to protest the decision not to close all factories in the investment zone.

According to media reports, laborers in some remote areas worked in extremely dangerous environments. In North Sinai, workers' movements were restricted by local government-established curfews and checkpoints run by both the military and nonstate armed groups.

The government provided services, such as free health care, to all citizens, but the quality of services was often poor. Other benefits, such as social insurance, were available only to employees in the formal sector. According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, approximately 11.9 million of the 25.7 million Egyptians in the labor force did not have formal contracts with employers and were categorized as “informal” workers. In March the Ministry of Manpower announced that workers in the informal sector who registered with the ministry were eligible to receive three monthly payments because of wages lost due to the economic slowdown caused by COVID-19. The minister of manpower stated that 400,000 informal workers had registered with the ministry.

Many persons throughout the country faced poor working conditions, especially in the informal economy, which employed up to 40 percent of workers, according to some estimates. Domestic workers, agricultural workers, workers in rock quarries, and other parts of the informal sector were most likely to face hazardous or exploitive conditions. There were reports of employer abuse of citizen and undocumented foreign workers, especially domestic workers. Little information was available on workplace fatalities and accidents.

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Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum
Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
[T \(Telefon\)](tel:+43158900583) +43 1 589 00 583
[F \(Fax\)](tel:+43158900589) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
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