

Jordan

The authorities escalated their crackdown on freedom of expression and association for political activists, journalists, workers, political party members, LGBTI people and others through the use of abusive and vaguely defined laws. Debt imprisonment continued, in breach of international law. Civilians continued to be tried in military courts. A new law granted Jordanian women married to non-Jordanian men the right to retain their nationality, but they remained unable to pass their nationality to their spouse and children. LGBTI people faced harassment and abuse fostered by “immorality” provisions in the Penal Code and an anti-LGBTI campaign led by some parliamentarians.

Background

In May, King Abdullah II ended the state of emergency declared in March 2020 at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in Jordan, which granted the authorities powers to curtail human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

According to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, Jordan hosted 655,283 Syrian, 66,686 Iraqi, 12,882 Yemeni and 7,578 Sudanese and Somali refugees in 2023. It also hosted 2 million Palestinian refugees registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In March, UNHCR and the World Bank reported that the poverty rate among Syrian refugees had reached 66%. In July, the World Food Programme and UNHCR announced aid cuts due to funding shortages.

Arbitrary detention

Local governors continued to use the Crime Prevention Law of 1954 to administratively detain anyone “deemed to be a danger to society”, without charge and without access to due process guarantees. In February and March, for example, the governor of Madaba city arbitrarily detained at least two activists under this law simply for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, respectively. In June, the minister of interior ordered local authorities to release 503 people in administrative detention held under the Crime Prevention Law. However, according to lawyers, they were not released.

On 7 May, acting on a request from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), airport security officials in the capital, Amman, detained Turkish-Emirati citizen Khalaf al-Rumaithi. He was released on bail and allowed to enter Jordan but was re-arrested on 8 May before being extradited to the UAE in secrecy and in violation of a Jordanian court order.¹ Khalaf al-Rumaithi had been living in exile in Türkiye for a decade after being sentenced in the UAE in his absence to 15 years’ imprisonment following a grossly unfair trial of 94 dissidents.

Debt imprisonment

Growing unemployment and an increase in the cost of living significantly affected people’s access to essential goods and services, including food, fuel and water. Given the lack of an adequate social protection scheme, hundreds of thousands of people were in debt to make ends meet. At least 158,000 people faced debt imprisonment under the Execution Law, which provides for a prison sentence of six months for unpaid debt of more than JOD 5,000 (USD 7,049). Such debt imprisonment breaches international law.

A 24-year-old woman told Amnesty International that she had sponsored her 60-year-old father to obtain a loan to cover living expenses. Her father was unable to pay back the loan, which left them both at risk of imprisonment as the debt exceeded JOD 5,000.

Freedom of expression

The authorities investigated or prosecuted at least 43 individuals for online expression, including eight political activists and one journalist, using abusive and vague laws such as the Cybercrime Law, Anti-Terrorism Law and Penal Code. Nine were tried at the State Security Court (SSC), a military court, on trumped-up or vague charges, including “undermining the regime”, spreading fake news that “undermines the state’s prestige” and “inciting religious or sectarian strife”.

In January, the SSC charged Sofian al-Tal, Abed Tawahia and Omar Abu Rassa’ with “undermining the regime”, which carries a sentence of up to 20 years in prison. The political activists were arrested in December 2022 for planning to publicly criticize the king’s annual speech.

On 9 August, the Amman First Instance Court, an appeal court, increased the prison sentence of journalist Ahmad al-Zobi from three months to one year. He had been convicted of “inciting sectarian and racial strife, as well as conflict between the components of the nation” for a Facebook post in which he criticized an official during a transport drivers’ strike against rising fuel prices. On 21 August, the minister of justice rejected Ahmad al-Zobi’s request to appeal against the verdict before the Court of Cassation.

On 12 August, the king approved a new cybercrime law, further repressing individuals’ right to freely express their opinions online. The law introduced harsher prison terms of a minimum of three months and fines of up to JOD 32,000 (USD 45,115).² Two independent news platforms told Amnesty International that they had removed their comments section because Article 33 of the law allows “the prosecutor or court [to] order any website, social media platform, or person responsible for a public account to remove or block content deemed to have violated the law, to temporarily ban the user or publisher, and to hand over relevant information, including users’ personal data.”

In November, security forces arrested at least three individuals under the new cybercrime law for their online opinion about the conflict in Gaza, Palestine, including defending Palestinian rights. The public prosecutor charged them with “inciting sedition, strife, and hatred”, “sending, re-sending, or publishing libel or slander information”, “defaming of an official body” and “publishing pictures, information, or news of law enforcement officials”.

Freedom of association

In May, the authorities intimidated scores of Partnership and Salvation Party members into resigning from their party positions so that the number of founding members fell below 1,000, the minimum required for registration under the Political Parties Law of 2022. A lawyer and party member told Amnesty International that the party had fulfilled all conditions for registration, including the minimum number of members who have never been convicted of crimes that violate “honour, morals and security”. However, a week after the party held its first annual meeting, the independent elector committee dissolved it, claiming that 130 members had been convicted of crimes that violated the Political Parties Law. The party brought a case before the Administrative Court after the accused members submitted proof of innocence to the electoral committee.

The authorities failed to call for the election of a new board for the teachers’ syndicate after a court order dissolved the previous one in 2020. A lawyer told Amnesty International that the authorities forced several members of the former board into early retirement in an effort to prevent them from participating in elections.

Women's rights

In January, parliament approved a law granting Jordanian women married to non-Jordanian men the right to retain their nationality. Formerly, women had to renounce their nationality when marrying a non-Jordanian man, only regaining it if they were widowed or divorced. Women remained unable to pass their nationality to their spouse and children.

In March, parliament approved amendments to the Labour Law, which included imposing fines of JOD 2,000-5,000 (USD 2,820-7,049) on individuals found responsible for sexual harassment in the workplace.

LGBTI people's rights

The authorities continued to use vaguely defined Penal Code “immorality” provisions to target LGBTI individuals, even though same-sex sexual relations are not criminalized by law.

In July, some parliamentarians spearheaded an anti-LGBTI campaign on social media, calling for same-sex sexual relations to be criminalized, which triggered a wave of hate speech and threats by members of the public against LGBTI individuals and supporters. Two activists told Amnesty International that security services intimidated and harassed the organizers of a screening of an LGBTI-related film into cancelling the event.

Right to a healthy environment

Jordan continued to be one of the most water-stressed countries in the world. It reported that it is using more water resources than are being renewed and that climate change will significantly decrease the amount of water resources available.

In September, Jordan announced a cut on water subsidies for households that consume more than 6m³ of water per month.

The government did not announce a new Nationally Determined Contribution; in 2021, it had raised its macroeconomic greenhouse gas emission reduction target from 14% to 31% by 2030. The authorities said they would not be able to meet this target nor implement needed adaptation measures without significant financial support.
