

# JORDAN 2015 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a constitutional monarchy ruled by King Abdullah II bin Hussein. The constitution concentrates executive and legislative authority in the king. The multiparty parliament consists of the 75-member House of Notables (Majlis al-Ayan) appointed by the king and a 150-member elected lower house, the Chamber of Deputies (Majlis al-Nuwwab). Separate elections for the Chamber of Deputies and municipal offices took place in 2013. International observers deemed both elections credible. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

The most significant human rights problems were restrictions on the freedom of expression, including detention of journalists, which limited the ability of citizens and media to criticize government policies and officials; citizens' inability to change their government peacefully; and mistreatment and allegations of torture by security and government officials.

Other human rights problems included restrictions on freedom of association and assembly, poor prison conditions, arbitrary arrest and denial of due process through administrative detention, prolonged detention, and allegations of nepotism and the influence of special interests on the judiciary. The government continued to infringe on citizens' privacy rights. The government prevented some refugees from coming into the country, deported other asylum seekers, and stripped some Palestinian refugees from Syria of their Jordanian citizenship prior to returning them involuntarily to Syria. Violence against women was widespread, and abuse of children persisted. Legal and societal discrimination and harassment remained a problem for women, religious minorities, religious converts, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons. Trafficking in persons remained a problem. Discrimination against persons with disabilities was a problem. Legal and societal discrimination against persons of Palestinian origin remained widespread. The government restricted labor rights and local and international human rights organizations reported frequent abuse of foreign domestic workers.

Impunity remained widespread, and human rights organizations alleged that the government did not take sufficiently strong steps to investigate, prosecute, or punish officials who committed abuses. The government did take limited steps to investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed abuses, but the

proceedings were not transparent, and information on the outcomes was not publicly available.

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

### **a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life**

There were reports of arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life.

On May 2, 19-year-old Abdullah al-Zo'ubi died in the custody of the Anti-Narcotics Department at a police station in North Irbid. Family members alleged beatings while in police custody led to his death. On May 4, authorities arrested and detained five Anti-Narcotics Department police officers in connection with the death. The police court investigated and prosecuted the case.

### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports during the year of politically motivated disappearances.

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

While the law prohibits such practices, international and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to report incidents of torture and widespread mistreatment in police and security detention centers. The constitution bans torture, including psychological harm, by public officials and provides penalties of as long as three years' imprisonment for its use, with a penalty of up to 15 years if serious injury occurs. Human rights lawyers found the law ambiguous and supported amendments to define "torture" better and strengthen sentencing guidelines.

On October 4, 49-year-old Omar al-Nasir died in the custody of the Criminal Investigation Department at their headquarters in Amman. Initial news reports stated that the detainee had been arrested for suspected drug crimes. The preliminary forensic medical report stated that the detainee passed away due to an enlarged heart muscle, but also noted that there were signs of beating. Later media reports and NGOs shared a forensic medical report stating that the cause of death was internal bleeding from bruises resulting from collision with a blunt object. The detainee's family filed an official complaint with the Prosecutor General alleging that torture during investigations led to his death. The National

Committee on Human Rights and the Public Security Directorate (PSD) formed a joint investigative committee. The final medical report and the results of the investigation were not publicly released at year's end. The government arrested five police officers in connection with the death.

According to a report by the quasi-governmental National Center for Human Rights (NCHR), the PSD received and investigated 140 complaints of torture and mistreatment in police stations in 2014; 60 had no further action because the complainants dropped them, 49 were referred to the chief of a police unit for administrative punishment, six were closed due to lack of evidence, 24 remained pending, and one was referred to the police court. The NCHR received 87 complaints of torture and mistreatment in police stations in 2014.

The NCHR received complaints of torture and inhuman treatment, but did not report specifics of the allegations. Throughout the year a local NGO reported that, in an effort to humiliate detainees, government agents at times abused them during arrest or detention by making them remove their clothing and threatening them with rape. The NCHR reported that in 2014 the numbers showed a decrease in complaints of torture and mistreatment at prisons and rehabilitation centers, while it observed an increase in complaints of torture and mistreatment at police stations, especially by officers from the Anti-Narcotics Department and the Criminal Investigation Department.

The 2014 NCHR report documented no effective steps by either the legislative or the executive powers to address the problem of torture.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Conditions in the country's six older prisons were generally poor, while the eight new prisons met international standards. Migrants without legal work or residency permits, or charged with other crimes, were held in the same facilities as citizens. For information on asylum seekers and refugees, see section 2.d.

Physical Conditions: Significant problems in older prison facilities included inadequate health care, poor sanitation and ventilation, extreme temperatures, and insufficient basic and emergency medical care. Men and women were held separately, as were adults and juveniles. In its 2014 report, the NCHR identified as problems limited health care, judicial supervision, legal assistance for inmates, and social care provided to the inmates and their families. Detainees reported abuse and mistreatment by guards.

According to a report by the NCHR, in 2014 the PSD received 61 cases of allegations of torture and mistreatment in prisons and rehabilitation centers: 31 officers were convicted, and in the other 30 cases no further action was taken for unspecified reasons. In 2014 the NCHR received 11 complaints of torture and mistreatment at prisons and rehabilitation centers.

According to government statistics, there were 11,489 inmates in 14 correctional and rehabilitation center facilities in early December, including approximately 460 women in the Women's Correctional and Rehabilitation Center in the Jweideh detention facility and in the women's section at Umm al-Lulu prison.

Officials and the NCHR reported overcrowding at most of the prisons, especially the prisons in and around Amman. The NCHR repeatedly recommended the closure of Jweideh Prison, citing deteriorating infrastructure and inmates' complaints of poor social and medical care, missing court dates due to lack of timely notification and transportation, unavailability of potable water, small food portions, a shortage of blankets, and no hot water in winter. Prison conditions for women in Jweideh Prison were generally better than those for men, although prison officials reported the women's prison was also overcrowded.

The Ministry of Social Development reported 2,213 juveniles in custody in June, of whom 387 were repeat offenders. Parliament passed a new Juvenile Law in August 2014 stipulating that juveniles be held separately from adult detainees during the pretrial phases as well.

International and domestic NGOs reported that in some instances Islamist prisoners faced harsher prison conditions than other inmates.

Pretrial detainees often were held in the same detention facilities as convicted prisoners. The General Intelligence Directorate (GID) held some persons detained on national security charges in separate detention facilities. In 2014 the NCHR made one announced visit to GID prisons, where the detainees complained of prolonged pretrial detention. The center received the following complaints about the GID: solitary confinement and isolation of prisoners, prolonged detentions of up to one year. According to human rights activists, the GID held detainees in solitary confinement and prevented from meeting unsupervised with visitors, including their lawyers.

Although basic care was available in all correctional facilities, medical staff complained that prisons throughout the country lacked adequate facilities, supplies, and staff. The staff was unable to address deficiencies in care available to inmates. Most facilities were unable to conduct blood tests and had limited X-ray capabilities, forcing doctors to rely largely on patient self-reporting for certain conditions. If an inmate's condition was severe and could not be treated at the clinic, jail doctors recommended transfer to a local hospital.

Administration: During the year no steps were taken to improve recordkeeping or systematically use alternatives to prison sentences for nonviolent offenders. As of August 2014, the new Juvenile Law recommends that judges use alternative sentencing, including community service and vocational training, for juveniles, although this was not yet applied. There were limited post-release programs and poor classification of inmates. Some newer prisons, such as Umm al-Lulu Prison, offered a range of vocational training programs and employment opportunities for adult male prisoners. There were no prison ombudsmen. In some cases, authorities severely restricted the access of prisoners and detainees to visitors. In some cases authorities did not inform the families about the whereabouts of detainees and banned the families from visiting the detainees. Prisoners could observe their religious practices. Authorities permitted prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities and, in some prisons, prison directors without censorship, but authorities rarely investigated allegations of poor conditions. Karamah, a team of government officials and NGOs, and the NCHR, a quasi-governmental organization, monitored prison conditions.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted local and international human rights observers to visit prisons and conduct private interviews. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited prisoners and detainees in all prisons, including those controlled by the GID, according to standard ICRC modalities. The prime minister-appointed National Human Rights Coordinator organized a monitoring visit in September for several local and international NGO representatives to Swagga Prison, the location of the only execution chamber in the country.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, the government did not always observe these prohibitions.

#### **Role of the Police and Security Apparatus**

The PSD controls general police functions. The PSD, the GID, the gendarmerie, the Civil Defense Directorate, and the military share responsibility for maintaining internal security. The PSD, the Civil Defense Directorate, and the gendarmerie report to the minister of interior with direct access to the king when necessary, and the GID reports directly to the king. Civilian authorities maintained control over security forces.

According to local and international NGOs, the government rarely investigated allegations of abuse or corruption, and, when such allegations were investigated, there were few convictions and little to no public information or transparency about the investigation and sentencing. Local and international NGOs and activists alleged widespread impunity. Citizens may file complaints of police abuse or corruption with the PSD's Ombudsman Bureau or one of 16 police prosecutors stationed throughout the country. Complaints of abuse and corruption by the gendarmerie may be filed directly with the PSD's Ombudsman Bureau. A GID liaison officer receives complaints against the GID and refers them to GID personnel for investigation. Complaints against the PSD, gendarmerie, and the GID may also be filed with the NCHR, several human rights NGOs, or the civilian prosecutor general. The PSD's Special Branch Unit is tasked with investigating allegations of police corruption. The PSD and the GID try their personnel internally with their own courts, judges, and prosecutors; reports about the proceedings are rarely published. Trials rarely yielded substantive punishments for human rights violations, and such punishments were not made public. Human rights activists cited fear of official retribution as a reason for the overall lack of official complaints of human rights violations.

Through October the PSD Ombudsman Office had received 67 complaints against officers for all types of offenses including undue administrative delays, including 21 allegations of harm. Of these complaints, 37 were under investigation at year's end, and 30 were dismissed.

During the year there were few reported instances of security forces using excessive force with impunity and failing to protect demonstrators from violence. The police court investigated one case of premeditated murder related to the death of 17-year-old Ibrahim al-Dirbani in November 2014. Witnesses alleged a police officer shot and killed al-Dirbani outside the West Amman Courthouse when al-Dirbani and his brother ran from a police patrol officer who asked to see their identification cards. News sources reported the police prosecutor charged the police officer with premeditated murder. The court case continued. In 2014 the

NCHR received 18 complaints concerning security personnel using excessive force during arrests and searches.

### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

The law allows suspects to be detained for up to 24 hours without a warrant in all cases. It requires that police notify authorities within 24 hours of an arrest and that authorities file formal charges within 15 days of an arrest. The period to file formal charges can be extended to as long as six months for a felony and two months for a misdemeanor. According to local NGOs, prosecutors routinely requested extensions, which judges granted. The State Security Court authorizes judicial police to arrest and keep persons in custody for seven days prior to notification while conducting criminal investigations. This authority includes arrests for alleged misdemeanors. NGOs alleged that authorities transferred suspects to the State Security Court to extend the legal time from 24 hours to seven days for investigation prior to notification, or transferred suspects from police station to police station to extend the period for investigation. The NCHR report criticized the lack of record keeping at police detention facilities, noting that records failed to note the exact time of arrest and the arresting employee. Bail is allowed under the penal code and was used in some cases. Some detainees reported not being allowed timely access to a lawyer or to contact their relatives at the time of arrest, but authorities generally permitted family member visits, albeit sometimes up to a week after the arrest. Authorities appointed lawyers to represent indigent defendants charged with felonies carrying possible life sentences or the death penalty, although legal aid services remained minimal. The law provides the right to appear promptly before a judge or other judicial officer for a judicial determination of the legality of the detention. At times suspects were held incommunicado for up to one week or placed under house arrest. A number of human rights activists alleged that arrestees were held incommunicado to hide evidence of physical abuse by security forces.

Arbitrary Arrest: In cases purportedly involving state security, security forces at times arrested and detained citizens without warrants or judicial review, held them in pretrial detention without informing them of the charges against them, and either did not allow defendants to meet with their lawyers or did not permit meetings until shortly before trial. Activists reported that during the year officials administratively detained migrant laborers for working without authorization, being absent from their authorized workplace, or lacking proper residency permits. They reported some of these detainees were physically abused or mistreated by their employers. In early December the Prisons Administration reported 908

persons were in administrative detention: 728 men and 180 women. In 2014 the NCHR reported 20,216 administrative detainees held throughout the course of the year, some held as long as five years.

In February the Court of Appeals upheld a 2014 decision by the Amman Magistrate Court to award an Egyptian worker, Hamadino al-Najdi, compensation of 2,000 Jordanian dinars (JD, \$2,800) for unlawful detention. Al-Najdi was held in administrative detention for 13 months after authorities arrested him for carrying an invalid work permit. The court ruling noted that the renewal of work permits is the responsibility of the employer and not the worker.

The law allows the country's 12 provincial governors to detain administratively individuals suspected of planning to commit a crime or sheltering thieves, habitually stealing, or constituting a danger to the public. These individuals were held in prison or house arrest without due process and were found not guilty in legal proceedings. The governors may prolong detentions; some migrants were administratively detained for several months without charges. Governors used this provision widely, including to incarcerate women allegedly to protect them from becoming potential victims of honor crimes, although the detainees posed no threat to public safety.

Several international and national NGOs noted governors routinely abused the law, imprisoning individuals when there was not enough evidence to convict them and prolonging the detention of prisoners whose sentences had expired.

Pretrial Detention: The common practice of judges granting extensions to prosecutors prior to filing formal charges unnecessarily lengthened pretrial detention. Lengthy legal procedures, a large number of detainees, judicial inefficiency, and judicial backlog added to the problem of pretrial detention. The length of the detention at times equaled or exceeded the sentence for the alleged crime. On May 6, authorities sentenced Basem al-Rawabdeh to five months imprisonment for lese majeste and released him the same day because he had already served five months in pretrial detention. Authorities had arrested al-Rawabdeh in January and initially charged him with undermining the regime.

The law criminalizes the act of detaining any person without a prosecutor's order for more than 24 hours. According to human rights organizations, impunity was very common for such violations.

### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The law provides for an independent judiciary, but allegations of nepotism and the influence of special interests by legal experts and human rights lawyers raised concerns about the judiciary's independence. Additionally, judicial inefficiency and a large case backlog delayed the provision of justice. Authorities did not always respect court orders.

### **Trial Procedures**

The law presumes that defendants are innocent. According to the law, all civilian court trials, as well as State Security Court trials are open to the public unless the court determines that the trial should be closed to protect the public interest. State Security Court trials are generally open to the journalists and NGOs, but the court can decide to make them closed if it deems it in the public interest. Juries are not used. Defendants are entitled to legal counsel, provided at public expense for the indigent in cases involving the death penalty or life imprisonment, but only at the trial stage. The Justice Center for Legal Aid reported that in 2012, 83 percent of criminal defendants lacked legal representation prior to trial, and 68 percent lacked legal representation at trial. The report noted access to legal counsel was almost nonexistent in police stations. Officials did not respect the right of defendants to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them or to a fair and public trial without undue delay. Foreign residents, especially for foreign workers who often did not speak Arabic, were not uniformly provided with translations and defense. Defendants may present witnesses and evidence and may question witnesses presented against them. Authorities generally granted defendants access to government-held evidence relevant to a case. Defendants can appeal verdicts; appeals are automatic for cases involving the death penalty. Defendants do not have the right to refuse to testify. Although the constitution prohibits the use of confessions extracted by torture, human rights activists noted that courts routinely accepted confessions allegedly extracted under torture or mistreatment.

Defendants before the State Security Court frequently met with their attorneys only one or two days before their trial began. Authorities did not accord defendants adequate time and facilities to prepare their defense. In many cases the accused remained in detention without bail during the proceedings. In the State Security Court, defendants have the right to appeal their sentences to the Court of Cassation, which is authorized to review issues of both fact and law.

Civil, criminal, and commercial courts accord equal weight to the testimony of men and women. On the other hand, in sharia courts, which have jurisdiction over

Muslim marriage, divorce, and inheritance cases, the testimony of a woman has half the weight of a man's.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

During the year the government detained and imprisoned activists for political reasons including criticizing the government, criticizing the government's foreign policy, the publication of criticism of government officials and official bodies, criticizing foreign countries, and chanting slogans against the king. Citizens and NGOs alleged the government continued to detain other individuals for political reasons during the year and that governors continued to use administrative detention for what appeared to be political reasons.

On February 16, the State Security Court sentenced Zaki Bani Irshaid, the deputy head of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, to 18 months imprisonment for harming the country's relationship with a foreign country under the 2014 Counterterrorism Law. Authorities arrested Bani Irshaid in November 2014 after he posted comments critical of the United Arab Emirates on his Facebook account. The court issued a sentence of three years, lessened to 18 months imprisonment for unspecified "extenuating circumstances." The maximum possible penalty was 15 years. In April the Court of Cassation rejected his appeal as well as a request to be released on bail.

On June 17, the Cassation Court upheld an earlier State Security Court ruling sentencing Husam al-Abdallat to one-year's imprisonment for inciting sedition, undermining the regime, and insulting official entities. He was condemned for remarks he made while hosting a satellite television show, including accusing the family of the president of the upper house of parliament of corruption. Authorities released him on September 15 after 10 months in detention.

In June the State Security Court sentenced in absentia 20 activists who participated in protests in 2012 for undermining the political system. All 20 were sentenced to three months' imprisonment, a penalty that could be replaced by a fine. None was in detention at the time of sentencing.

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

Individuals may bring civil lawsuits related to human rights violations.

#### **f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The law prohibits arbitrary interference in private matters, but the government did not respect this prohibition. Citizens widely believed that security officers monitored telephone conversations and internet communication, read private correspondence, and engaged in surveillance without court orders. Citizens widely believed the government employed an informer system within political movements and human rights organizations.

Activists reported that GID officials withheld documents and threatened to bar children of activists' from entering or graduating from university.

Former prisoners alleged authorities banned citizens from getting security clearances needed for employment.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:**

### **a. Freedom of Speech and Press**

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and press, but the government did not respect these rights. Authorities applied articles of the 2014 Counterterrorism Law to arrest local journalists.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: The law permits punishment of up to three years' imprisonment for insulting the king, slandering the government or foreign leaders, offending religious beliefs, or stirring sectarian strife and sedition. During the year the government restricted the ability of individuals to criticize the government by arresting a number of activists for political expression and for criticizing foreign governments. Laws against slander of public officials were used to restrict public discussion.

On July 1, authorities arrested and detained Ali al-Malkawi, an unemployed schoolteacher, for a posting on his Facebook page criticizing Arab and Islamic inaction in protecting Burmese Muslims. The State Security Court charged him with lese majeste and harming relations with a foreign country. At year's end Malkawi remained in detention, and the case was pending.

All public-opinion polls and survey research require authorization from the Bureau of Statistics, although the law was not enforced. NGOs stated that the measure could be enforced, even retroactively, and called for the government to rescind it.

Press and Media Freedoms: Independent print media existed, including several major daily newspapers, although such publications must obtain licenses from the state to operate. The independent print and broadcast media largely operated with limited restriction, and media observers reported government pressure, including the threat of large fines and prison sentences, to refrain from criticizing the royal family, discussing the GID, using language deemed offensive to religion, or slandering government officials. The government influenced news reporting and commentary through political pressure on editors and control over important editorial positions in government-affiliated media. Journalists of government-affiliated and independent media reported that security officials attempted to influence reporting and place articles favorable to the government through bribes, threats, and political pressure.

In April parliament passed amendments to the Audiovisual Law. The amendments grant the head of the Media Commission the authority to close any unlicensed theater, satellite channel, or radio channel. According to the amended law, the Media Commission cannot grant a new broadcasting license to a company unless all shares are Jordanian-owned. Additionally, those with licenses should not broadcast anything that would harm public order, social security, the economy, national security, or Jordan's relations with a foreign country; incite hatred, terrorism, violence sedition; or mislead or deceive the public. The amendments increased the fine for broadcasting without a license but removed the attendant prison sentence. The amendments also require the cabinet to justify the reasons for rejecting a license and allow the applicant to appeal the decision to the judiciary.

On July 8, authorities arrested *al-Rai* journalist Ghazi al-Mrayat for publishing an article on an Iraqi-Norwegian terrorist suspect on trial in Jordan. The State Security Court had issued a gag order on printing information about the continuing case. The court charged al-Mrayat with exposing the country to hostile acts, exposing the country's citizens to revengeful and aggressive acts, and harming relations with a foreign country. Authorities released al-Mrayat on bail after four days of detention pending further investigation; charges remained pending. *Al-Rai* stated that it did not receive notice of the official gag order before publication of the article.

In 2014 the NCHR documented physical and verbal assaults against journalists. Authorities arrested or temporarily detained some journalists, and some received threats from government officials or private individuals. The 2014 NCHR report noted that security agencies and individuals exposed journalists to physical assaults

and confiscation of cameras and that authorities arrested and temporarily detained some journalists.

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

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

By law any book can be published and distributed freely. If, however, the Press and Publications Directorate deems passages religiously offensive or "insulting" to the king, it can request a court order to prohibit the distribution of the book.

Violence and Harassment: The government subjected journalists to harassment and intimidation.

In its 2015 semiannual report *Media Freedom in the Arab World*, the Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ) documented 53 incidents of violations against journalists in the country in 2014, the majority of which were physical assaults. The CDFJ report included photographer Khalil al-Hajajrah's claim that in November 2014 seven members of the security forces insulted him, beat him, and prevented him from documenting a campaign to remove unauthorized street vendors from commercial areas.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The government directly and indirectly censored the media. Journalists claimed that the government used informants in newsrooms and exercised influence over reporting and that GID officials censored reporting. Editors reportedly received telephone calls from security officials instructing them how to cover events or to refrain from covering certain topics or events, especially criticism of political reform. Bribery of journalists took place and undermined independent reporting. On occasion, government officials provided texts for journalists to publish under their bylines. Journalists reported self-censorship due to the threat of detention and imprisonment for defamation for a variety of offenses and fines of as much as 20,000 JD (\$28,000). At times, editors in chief censored articles to prevent lawsuits. The government's use of "soft containment" of journalists, including the withholding of financial support,

scholarships for relatives, and special invitations, led to significant control of media content.

On August 18, the Prosecutor General charged Atef Joulani, the editor in chief of daily newspaper *As-Sabeel*, with “defaming an official body.” Authorities held Joulani for several hours and then released him on bail with charges pending. Joulani published an editorial in June questioning why the Department of Standards and Metrology had rejected an imported shipment of gas cylinders for not meeting standards.

The annual report of the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists noted that 95.2 percent of journalists surveyed in 2014 said they practiced self-censorship.

The government continued to enforce bans on the distribution of selected books for religious, moral, and political reasons. The Media Commission banned 14 internationally published books during the year for propagating a terrorist ideology, disrespecting religions, or violating public norms and values, including “ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] and Its Relatives from al-Qa’ida to the Islamic State” by Muhammad Aloush.

Libel/Slander Laws: Government prosecutors relied on privately initiated libel and slander lawsuits to suppress criticism. Dozens of journalists, as well as members of parliament, faced libel and slander accusations filed by private citizens.

In March media outlets reported that a citizen filed a lawsuit against Member of Parliament Tarek Khoury, alleging that several of his tweets insulted Jordanians. In March the king gave a speech calling on citizens to hold their heads up and be proud; Khoury repeated one of the king’s phrases in his tweets criticizing Jordan’s policy vis-a-vis Israel. Some media sources reported that the citizen dropped the lawsuit the same month, while others reported that the same case or a similar case based on the same comments was still pending.

National Security: The government used laws protecting national security to restrict criticism of government policies and officials.

On January 28, authorities arrested Hashim al-Khalidi, editor in chief and owner of the news website Saraya News, and Seif Obaidat, another editor, on charges of propagating terrorist ideology and exposing citizens to the risk of violent reprisal. The arrests were the first arrests of the country’s journalists under the 2014 Counterterrorism Law. Human Rights Watch stated the journalists were arrested

for posting an article concerning negotiations between the government and Da'eshto secure the release of captured pilot Lt. Moaz al-Kasasbeh, who was later immolated by Da'esh. The government blocked the website in the country for more than five weeks.

On April 23, authorities arrested and detained Jamal Ayyoub, a freelance journalist, for publishing an online opinion article critical of the Saudi military campaign in Yemen on the *al-Balad* news site. The State Security Court charged Ayyoub with harming relations with a foreign country. Authorities released Ayyoub on bail after four months of detention. On October 25, the State Security Court sentenced Ayyoub to four months in prison on a reduced charge, contempt of a fraternal state. Ayyoub had already served the time in pretrial detention and was released. In the same session on October 25, the State Security Court also sentenced the chief editor and the owner of *al-Balad* news site each to three-month prison terms for contempt of a fraternal state, a sentence that can be replaced by a fine. Authorities had arrested the chief editor earlier in October.

### **Internet Freedom**

There were government restrictions on access to the internet. The law requires the licensing and registration of online news websites, holds editors responsible for readers' comments on their websites, requires that website owners provide the government with the personal data of its users, and mandates that editors in chief be members of the Jordan Press Association. The law gives authorities explicit power to block and censor websites. According to the Media Commission, there are 168 licensed news websites and 203 licensed specialized websites, and no websites were blocked during the year.

Concurrent with the arrest of Hashim al-Khalidi and Seif Obaidat on charges of propagating terrorist ideology and exposing citizens to the risk of violent reprisal, authorities blocked the Saraya News website from January 28 through March 8.

The registration fee for a news website is 1,400 JD (\$1,960). The owner and editor-in-chief can be fined between 3,000 JD (\$4,200) and 5,000 JD (\$7,000), in addition to criminal penalties, for website content that “includes humiliation, defamation, or disparaging individuals in a manner that violates their personal freedoms or spreads false rumors about them.”

According to journalists, security forces reportedly demanded websites remove some posted articles. The government threatened websites and journalists that

criticized the government, while it actively supported those that reported favorably on the government. The government monitored electronic correspondence and internet chat sites. Individuals believed they were unable to express their views fully or freely via the internet, including by personal e-mail. The Ministry of Interior continued to monitor internet cafes via video cameras. The ministry also required cafe owners to register users' personal data, submit records of websites visited, and prevent access to "targeted" websites determined by the ministry.

According to UNESCO's Media Development Indicators published in September, internet penetration was 76 percent during the year, up from 38 percent in 2010.

### **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

The government placed some limits on academic freedom. Some members of the academic community claimed there was a continuing intelligence presence in academic institutions, including monitoring academic conferences and lectures. The government monitored political meetings, speech on university campuses, and sermons in mosques and churches. Academics reported the GID must clear all university professors before their appointment and that all research papers, forums, reading materials, movies, or seminars must be approved by the university administration, which in turn clears potentially controversial material through the GID. Commercial foreign films are edited for sexual content before screening in commercial theaters.

### **b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

#### **Freedom of Assembly**

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly, but the government limited this right. Security forces generally permitted demonstrations and provided security at announced demonstrations.

#### **Freedom of Association**

The constitution provides for the right of association, but the government limited this freedom. The law authorizes the Ministry of Social Development to reject applications to register an organization or to permit any organization to receive foreign funding for any reason. It prohibits the use of associations for the benefit of any political organization. The law also gives the ministry significant control over the internal management of associations, including the ability to dissolve

associations, appoint new boards of directors, send government representatives to any board meeting, prevent associations from merging their operations, and appoint an auditor to examine an association's finances for any reason. The law requires associations to inform the ministry of board meetings, submit all board decisions for approval, disclose members' names, and obtain security clearances for board members from the interior ministry. The law includes penalties, including fines up to 10,000 JD (\$14,000), for violations of the regulations. During the year the Ministry of Social Development introduced a new application form for the approval process for associations that receive foreign funding. Associations were critical of the new procedure, which incorporates additional ministries into the decision process and removes the deadline for review of funding requests.

During the year NGOs reported that the government sometimes rejected requests for foreign funding, whereas such rejections were previously extremely rare.

The Ministry of Social Development registered 533 NGOs during the year and dissolved 177. According to statistics, 29 NGOs were dissolved at the request of the founding members. Around 148 NGOs were dissolved for various reasons, such as not meeting their goals, not rectifying their status after committing violations, or failing to elect board members.

Through October the government approved approximately 23 million JD (\$32.2 million) in foreign funding to around 200 NGOs registered with the Ministry of Social Development.

Citizens widely suspected that the government infiltrated civil society organizations, political parties, and human rights organizations and their internal meetings.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at [www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/).

### **d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons**

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, although there were some restrictions. The UN reported that the

government generally cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

Foreign Travel: Former prisoners alleged authorities withheld passports and imposed travel bans against citizens.

### **Protection of Refugees**

Access to Asylum: As of the end of the year, the government, in cooperation with UNHCR, reported more than 633,000 registered Syrian refugees, and hundreds of thousands of additional nonrefugee Syrians in the country. In addition UNHCR registered more than 60,000 other refugees or asylum seekers in the country.

The country's laws do not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government lacked a formal system of protecting refugees. Although it is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention related to the status of refugees or its 1967 Protocol, the government respected UNHCR's eligibility determinations regarding asylum seekers, including those who entered the country illegally. A 1998 memorandum of understanding, renewed in 2014, between the government and UNHCR contains the definition of a refugee, confirms adherence to the principle of nonrefoulement, and allows recognized refugees a maximum stay of one year, during which period UNHCR must find a durable solution. The time limit is renewable, and, generally, the government did not force refugees to return to their country of origin. As of August 2014, all Syrians in the country are required to obtain an official residency card from the Ministry of Interior. Among the requirements to obtain the new residency card are that all Syrians over the age of 12 must obtain an individual health certificate, which until October cost 30 JD (\$42) per person, more than many refugees could afford. In October the fee was dropped to five JD (\$7) to encourage more refugees to register with the Ministry of Interior.

The government continued to limit the number of Syrians seeking asylum in the country, as well as the points of entry they may use. Generally, the government restricted entry of Syrians by air despite formal visa-free travel between the countries. Authorities did not allow Syrian asylum seekers, except severe medical cases, to enter along the more populated north-west border of the country. Instead, Syrian refugees seeking entry may only cross at one of the two informal borders

crossings along the northeast desert border. The country severely limited the number of refugees able to cross at these informal points. Human Rights Watch reported that in April, 2,500 Syrian refugees had waited for days just inside Jordan's eastern border to be processed for registration and entrance to the Azraq refugee camp. By December 24, the number of refugees stranded in the border areas near the two informal crossings reached 15,000. Both UNHCR and Human Rights Watch publicly called on the government to grant entry to the refugees, some of whom had been waiting in the border area for at least a month. Many refugees, including the sick, elderly, children, and pregnant women, waited for as long as 120 days without shelter, with limited food and water, and without most medical care to enter the country. An unknown number turned around and returned to Syria. International organizations reported at least 25 refugees died since April from health conditions exacerbated by the harsh conditions at the border. Many Iraqis and Yemenis faced questioning at formal entry points, and many were refused entry.

Refoulement: The government forcibly returned Syrian refugees, including women, children, war-injured, and persons with disabilities to Syria. Human Rights Watch reported that some refugees crossing at informal border crossings in the northeast were brought to the Raba'a Sarhan processing center to be screened, and then forcibly returned to Syria without being registered as refugees or asylum seekers. International organizations also reported that the government carried out a preliminary screening of refugees waiting at the eastern border and prevented some Syrians seeking refuge from entering the country for official processing at Raba'a Sarhan.

The government also returned to Syria some Syrian refugees found working illegally, living in informal tented settlements, or not presenting refugee documentation when moving internally, while forcing others to return to formal refugee camps. Those subjected to refoulement were most often sent to Dara'a Province, where many had no support network or way to return across battle lines to their homes, which were often within regime- or Da'esh-controlled areas.

Early in the Syrian crisis, the government allowed some Palestinian refugees from Syria to enter and remain in the country. During the year the government turned Palestinian refugees from Syria away at the border, although some gained entry. Through November 30, UNRWA was aware of 69 cases of refoulement of Palestinian refugees from Syria. Among those returned were four families, comprising 24 Palestinian refugees from Syria, who had entered the country on Jordanian passports but subsequently lost their Jordanian nationality. The

vulnerability of Palestinian refugees from Syria to deportation increased their risk of other abuses. For those who entered the country irregularly (without required documentation, or using Syrian identity documents), refoulement was a constant risk, and access to basic civil services--including renewal of identity documents, the registration of marriages, deaths, and births--was highly complex. UNRWA reported that such activities could result in forced return to Syria, as well as detention and denaturalization.

On December 16, UNHCR and Human Rights Watch reported that the government rounded up more than 800 Sudanese nationals in front of UNHCR offices in Amman. As many as 80 percent of this group may have been refugees and asylum seekers, according to international organizations. The group was held near the airport, during which time a riot broke out. Security forces responded with force and sent 121 Sudanese to the hospital. On December 18, 525 Sudanese, including unaccompanied minors and families children, were sent back to Sudan on four chartered flights.

Employment: Refugees had limited access to the formal labor market, although many worked or ran businesses illegally. A limited number of Iraqi and Syrian refugees received approval for work permits from the Ministry of Labor, but the cost remained prohibitive for most refugees. The government did not uniformly communicate or administer the work permit process.

Few refugees applied for or received work permits due to bureaucratic hurdles and, for Iraqis who entered on visas, a desire to avoid paying significant overstay fines when applying for such permits. The government agreed to waive overstay fines for a small number of Iraqi refugees who qualified for residency. Very few employers of Syrian refugees applied for a work permit due to high cost and bureaucratic hurdles. The government expressed strong resistance to permitting Syrians to work in the country. The Ministry of Labor reported issuing only 6,025 work permits to Syrians in 2014, including Syrians who were not living in the country as refugees.

Because of the difficulties and expenses involved in seeking work authorization, many refugees worked in the unofficial labor market. Government officials estimated that thousands of Syrians worked in the informal economy. The World Food Program reported that 32 percent of 8,000 Syrian households surveyed in July 2014 had one or more employed family members. As of September the Ministry of Labor reported apprehending nearly 18,000 illegal foreign workers, many of them Syrians. There were reports of administrative detentions and

deportations of Syrian refugees for working without authorization, as well as reports of Syrian refugees forcibly moved from their areas of employment into one of the refugee camps for working without authorization.

Longstanding Palestinian refugees with Jordanian identity documents were well integrated into the Jordanian workforce. This was not the case, however, for the approximately 140,000 Palestinian refugees originally from Gaza, who are not eligible for Jordanian citizenship and were unable to work legally or access public services. In addition, according to UNRWA Palestinian refugees from Syria, the majority of whom are without Jordanian documents, were deprived of the opportunity to work, and faced arrest and deportation if they sought regular employment.

Access to Basic Services: Syrian refugees who arrived at informal border crossings and were admitted to the country were generally transported to Raba'a Sarhan reception center. Most were registered with the government; received food, water, and medical attention from UNHCR and the ICRC; and were transported by the International Organization for Migration to a refugee camp. Since June 2014 authorities compelled some Syrian refugees, at times numbering as many as 15,000, to remain at the border inside the country beyond an earthen berm in harsh desert conditions. These refugees had adequate food and water provided by international organizations but health and hygiene conditions were inadequate as was access to medical aid and shelter. The stranded population was not permitted to register as refugees. Authorities permitted some international organizations to visit or assess the situation of these refugees, although not regularly. In late December, the government permitted humanitarian agencies to register the stranded population and provide them ration cards, but the government did not recognize them as refugees until they were admitted and registered at Raba'a Sarhan.

The government excluded Palestinian refugees from Gaza who entered the country following the 1967 war from services otherwise available to Palestinian refugees, such as access to public assistance or public medical services. They were eligible to receive UNRWA services.

As of August 31, 15,868 Palestinian refugees from Syria had recorded their presence in country with UNRWA.

The government provided health and educational services to Syrian refugees and other UNHCR-registered refugees. Since December 2014 Syrian refugees have

been charged for healthcare at the same rates as uninsured Jordanians, who pay a nominal fee for most basic health services. Iraqi refugees must pay the foreigner's rate for health care, an increase from the previous rate equal to uninsured citizens. The government continued to provide free primary and secondary education to Syrian refugee children. Iraqi and other refugees must pay to attend government schools. Public schools, particularly in the north of the country, were overcrowded and operated on a double-shift schedule to accommodate the high number of students. UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated 90,000 school-aged Syrians were out of school due to lack of space, high costs for transportation and school supplies, and pressure for children to work to support their families. Refugees had equal access to justice regardless of their legal status, but there was fear of retaliation from Jordanians. Refugees had equal access to housing, although they tended to be charged higher rents than citizens were.

Temporary Protection: The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. As of December 17, there were 633,466 Syrian refugees, registered by the government and UNHCR. As of December 15, there were 52,643 Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR. The government tolerated the prolonged stay of many Iraqis and other refugees beyond the expiration of the visit permits under which they had entered the country. As of November 30, there were 8,054 Yemenis, Sudanese, Somalis, and other populations registered with UNHCR and resident in Jordan.

### **Stateless Persons**

Citizenship is derived only through the father. Women do not have the legal right to transmit citizenship to their children. Children of female citizens married to noncitizen husbands receive the nationality of the father and lose the right to attend public school or seek other government services if they do not hold legal residency, which must be applied for every year and is not assured. In guidelines announced by the government in November 2014, if children of Jordanian mothers and noncitizen fathers apply and meet certain criteria they may gain access to certain services enjoyed by citizens, including access to free primary and secondary education and subsidized health care; the ability to own property, invest, obtain a Jordanian driver's license, and have employment priority over other foreigners. The minister of interior stated that this ruling affected 88,983 families, including 355,932 children, in which the father lacked Jordanian citizenship. An estimated 55,000 of these fathers were of Palestinian origin. In order to access these services, children must obtain a special identification certificate through the Civil Status Bureau. The Civil Status Bureau began accepting and adjudicating

applications in January. To qualify, applicants must prove the maternal relationship, that the Jordanian mother has been resident in Jordan for five years, and that the children are currently resident in Jordan. As of September 1, the Civil Status Bureau issued 48,970 certificates. By law, the cabinet may approve citizenship for children of Jordanian mothers and foreign fathers, but this mechanism was not widely known and approval rarely occurred.

Women may not petition for citizenship for noncitizen husbands, who may apply for citizenship only after fulfilling a requirement of 15 years' continuous residency. Once a husband has obtained citizenship, he may apply to transmit citizenship to his children. Such an application could take years, and the government could deny the application. Activists did not identify any obstacles standing in the way of naturalization for men who fulfilled this residency requirement.

Syrian refugees were sometimes unable to obtain birth certificates for children born in the country if they could not present an official marriage certificate or other nationality documents, which were sometimes lost or destroyed when they fled or were confiscated by the government when the refugee entered the country. Refugee households headed by women faced difficulty in certifying nationality of offspring in absence of the father, which increased the risk of statelessness among this population. Authorities established civil registry departments and sharia courts in the Za'atri and Azraq camps to help refugees register births. They also declared several amnesty periods for refugees to register marriages and births late without fines.

### **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The law does not provide citizens the ability to change their government. Citizens have the ability to choose the lower house of parliament in generally credible elections based on universal and equal suffrage. Citizens also elect most mayors and members of municipal councils. The king appoints and dismisses the prime minister, cabinet, and the upper house of parliament; dissolves parliament; and directs major public policy initiatives. The cabinet, based on the prime minister's recommendations, appoints the mayors of Amman, Wadi Musa (Petra), and Aqaba, a special economic zone. Elections for mayors and municipal councils took place in 2013.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

Recent Elections: In 2013 the government held parliamentary elections administered by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). The IEC is an autonomous legal entity that is financially and administratively independent. It supervises and administers all phases of parliamentary elections and municipal elections, as well as other elections called for by the Council of Ministers. Local and international monitors noted the elections were generally credible and technically well administered, despite some irregularities in the voter registration and election preparation phases. The IEC instituted several changes to the election process: it used preprinted and standardized ballots, assigned voters to specific stations, created a hotline for problems, and developed mechanisms for complaint.

The election exhibited important technical advances in administration, but allegations of vote buying, proxy registration, and other concerns undermined the electoral process. International and domestic observers of the election process expressed serious reservations about inadequacies in the electoral legal framework and stressed the need to delimit constituency boundaries to ensure equality and proportional representation. The law grants voters two votes, one vote for a candidate for 123 district level seats and a second vote on the national level for 27 seats.

The government held municipal elections in 2013. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs administered the elections, while the IEC, which at the time did not have the authority to run municipal elections, played an advisory and monitoring role. During the municipal elections, civil society election monitors reported several irregularities and incidents of violence. In August 2014 parliament passed a constitutional amendment to broaden the mandate of the IEC to oversee municipal elections.

Islamist and some other opposition parties boycotted both parliamentary and municipal elections in 2013, due to what they saw as inadequacies of the electoral law. While Islamist and some opposition parties called for their supporters to boycott the elections, domestic election observers stated that many Islamist voters ignored the boycott, and some Islamist candidates won seats in parliament as independent candidates and members of the Islamic Centrist Party.

Political Parties and Political Participation: In September the king, ratified a new Political Parties Law that places supervisory authority of political parties in the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, rather than the Ministry of Interior. Political parties must have 150 founding members, all of whom must be citizens habitually resident in the country, and cannot be a member of another non-

Jordanian political organization, a judge, or affiliated with the security services. The new law eliminated the need for a woman's quota in founding a new political party. Parties may not be formed on the basis of religion, sect, race, gender, or origin. The law stipulates citizens may not be prosecuted for their political party affiliation. The Committee on Political Party Affairs oversees the activities of political parties. The Secretary General of the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs chairs the committee, and it includes a representative from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, the NCHR, and civil society. The law grants the Committee the authority to approve or reject applications to establish or dissolve parties. It allows party founders to appeal a rejection to the judiciary within 60 days of the decision. According to the law, approved parties can only be dissolved subject to the party's own bylaws, or by a judicial decision for affiliation with a foreign entity, accepting funding from a foreign entity, violating provisions of the law, or violating provisions of the constitution. The law also continues government funding for political parties, although specifics of the subsidy were not yet determined. Membership in unlicensed political parties is prohibited. There were 34 registered political parties, but they were weak, generally had vague platforms, and were personality-centered. The strongest and most organized political party was the Islamic Action Front, which boycotted the election in 2013.

On December 16, the king ratified a Decentralization Law that law establishes two councils to participate in the budgeting process at the governorate level: the Governorates' Council will be 85 percent elected and 15 percent appointed, and the Executive Council will be fully appointed. The appointed council will be composed of technical experts from the central government. The majority-elected council has a 15 percent quota for women (10 percent elected and 5 percent appointed).

Participation of Women and Minorities: Human rights activists cited cultural bias against women as an impediment to women participating in political life on the same scale as men. There is a 10 percent (15 seats) quota for women in the lower house of parliament and a 25 percent (243 seats) quota for women in municipal councils. In the 2013 parliamentary elections, voters elected 18 women to the lower house, three of whom won by outright competition outside the quota. The king appointed eight female members to the upper house, there were. In December the 28-member cabinet included four female ministers: the ministers of social development; culture; industry, trade and supply; and information and communications technology. In the municipal elections, women were allocated 297 out of 970 municipal council seats (30 percent). The new Municipalities Law,

which went into effect in October, includes a 25-percent women's quota for municipal council seats. The new Decentralization Law includes a 15 percent women's quota on the elected governorate councils.

Citizens of Palestinian origin were underrepresented at all levels of government and the military. The law reserves nine seats in the lower house of parliament for Christians and three seats for the Circassian and Chechen ethnic minorities combined, constituting an overrepresentation of these minorities. In the parliamentary elections, 10 Christians won seats, one of them on the national list that is open to all religions and ethnicities. The law stipulates that Muslims must hold all parliamentary seats not specifically reserved for Christians or on the national list. There were seven Christians in the upper house of parliament. No seats are reserved for the relatively small Druze population, but its members may hold office under their government classification as Muslims. Christians served as cabinet ministers and ambassadors. There were three Christian ministers in the cabinet. Muslims held all senior command positions in the armed forces as of September. In recent years, few Christians remained in the military long enough to reach senior command positions, leaving for more lucrative private sector jobs, according to Christian former military officers.

#### **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, although the government did not implement the law effectively. Officials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. During the year there were some investigations into allegations of corruption but very few convictions. The use of family, business, and other personal connections to advance personal business interests was widespread. There were allegations of lack of transparency in government procurement, government appointments, and dispute settlement.

Corruption: The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is the main body responsible for combating corruption, although the Anti-Money Laundering Unit in the Central Bank is responsible for combating money laundering. Despite increased investigations, some local observers questioned the ACC's effectiveness due to its limited jurisdiction, insufficient staff, legal obstacles, and the small number of investigations involving senior officials or large government projects. There were credible allegations that the ACC failed to investigate cases involving high-level government officials.

In June the ACC referred the Mawarid Company, affiliated with the armed forces, for investigation in response to allegations of misuse of office and squandering of public funds related to the purchase of a private security company in 2007.

The Ombudsman Bureau receives and investigates public complaints about corruption and misconduct by public officials.

There were no high-profile corruption convictions during the year. According to a report released in October, the ACC received 1,155 complaints about corruption in 2014 and opened 151 investigations, which resulted in three convictions. Public Security Directorate (PSD) officials seconded to the ACC investigated an additional 155 cases in 2014. As of November 25, the ACC had received 950 complaints during the year, referred 75 cases to the judiciary, closed 500 complaints for lack of evidence of corruption, and was still investigating 295 cases.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires certain government officials (along with their spouses and dependent children) to declare their assets privately within three months of their assuming a government position. Officials rarely declared their assets. In the event of a complaint, the chief justice may review the disclosures. Under the law failure to disclose assets could result in a prison sentence of one week to three years or a fine of five to 200 JD (\$7 to \$280). As of December no officials were punished for failing to submit a disclosure.

Public Access to Information: The law provides for public access to government information that is a matter of legal record but denies requests for reasons of national security, public interest, and personal freedoms. On September 8, Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour instructed all ministries and public agencies to have publicly available information request forms. The government has 30 days to respond to requests for information. If a government official refuses to respond to a request, the requestor can appeal to the governmental Information Council the decisions of which are nonbinding. The fees were not prohibitive and usually were associated with photocopy costs, if necessary. Journalists criticized the law, claiming that it permitted the government to deny requests without justification, or to refuse to respond, effectively denying the request.

## **Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights**

A number of domestic and international human rights groups operated in the country with some restrictions. The law gives the government the ability to control

NGOs' internal affairs, including acceptance of foreign funding. NGOs generally were able to investigate and report publicly on human rights abuses throughout the year, although government officials were not always cooperative.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The NCHR received both government and international funding. Its board of trustees is appointed by royal decree, and the government appoints its commissioner general. The NCHR produces an annual report on domestic human rights that sometimes criticizes government practices. The NCHR's recommendations are not legally binding, and the government often ignores its recommendations. The governmental committee headed by the National Human Rights Coordinator, appointed by the prime minister, reviewed the NCHR recommendations. Additionally, the coordinator collaborated with and increased communication among government ministries, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, media, and the international community on human rights problems. In January and July, the office of the National Human Rights Coordinator published semiannual reports on government's progress regarding human rights. The report also highlighted verbal and written instructions for GID detention facilities that ban exposing detainees to any coercion or mistreatment.

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

The constitution states that all citizens are equal under the law and prohibits discrimination based on race, language, and religion; the constitution and other laws prohibit discrimination based on political opinion. The government did not effectively enforce these provisions, however. Furthermore, the penal code does not address discrimination, thereby severely limiting judicial remedies.

Discrimination on the basis of gender, disability, national origin or citizenship, social origin, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, age, or HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases is not specifically prohibited and remained a problem. Women faced significant and widespread discrimination across society.

### **Women**

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law stipulates a sentence of at least 10 years of imprisonment with hard labor for the rape of a girl or woman 15 years of age or older. Spousal rape is not illegal. The Family Protection Law prescribes penalties of up to six months in prison for domestic abuse, but NGOs reported that judges rarely prosecuted cases under the Family Protection Law because judges considered its procedures unclear. Instead, they prosecuted domestic abuses cases under the penal code, as injury or sexual assault cases.

In April a judge ruled that parents who had abused their adult daughter must pay 3,500 JD (\$4,900) in compensation to the victim under the Family Protection Law.

The government did not effectively enforce the law against rape, and violence and abuse against women was widespread. Women's rights activists speculated that many incidents went unreported because violence against women remained a taboo subject due to societal and familial pressures. The PSD's Family Protection Department (FPD) reported 1,588 cases of domestic abuse as of September. Human rights activists stated that girls and women with disabilities were particularly at risk of gender-based violence.

Women may file complaints of rape or physical abuse with certain NGOs or directly with judicial authorities. As of September the FPD treated and investigated 319 cases of rape or sexual assault against women. The FPD actively investigated cases, but there were some reports of pressure on families to settle disputes via mediation instead of in the courts. NGOs reported that families often settled domestic abuse cases outside of the courts by requiring the abuser to sign before the governor or the FPD a statement promising not to reoffend. Spousal abuse is technically grounds for divorce, but husbands claimed religious authority to strike their wives. Observers noted that, while judges generally supported a woman's claim of abuse in court, due to societal and familial pressure, as well as fears of violence such as honor killings, few women sought legal remedies.

The FPD continued to operate a domestic violence hotline and received inquiries and complaints via the internet and e-mail. The FPD provided public information and training for government employees, including police, on domestic violence and rape. As of November 24, the government-run shelter Dar al-Wifaq al-Usari assisted around 900 female victims of domestic violence, according to the Ministry of Social Development. The government opened a second shelter for female victims of domestic violence in Irbid in October. It provided reconciliation services to victims and their families and worked with NGOs to provide services, such as legal and medical assistance, as well as some vocational training. Observers noted the lack of a comprehensive approach for victims, such as psychosocial assistance.

The government-run center for at-risk girls, Dar al-Khansa Juvenile Center, worked with NGOs to provide vocational training, education, and psychosocial assistance to minor female victims. As of October 6, Dar al-Khansa sheltered 74 minor female victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse during the year, many

of whom were at risk of additional violence from family members. It provided reconciliation services to victims and their families. Victims could only depart the shelter if a judge deemed reconciliation successful or if they transferred to another shelter at age 18.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: The Ministry of Justice indicated that seven so-called “honor crimes” were referred to the judicial system through October, with one case still under investigation, while NGOs reported 14 potential honor crimes through September. Activists reported that many such crimes went unreported. The Supreme Criminal Court’s panel of judges dedicated to cases involving honor crimes in recent years has routinely imposed prison sentences of up to 15 years to perpetrators of such crimes. The Cassation Court, which reviews the Supreme Criminal Court rulings, generally decreased the sentences by half. The Supreme Criminal Court did not issue any rulings on honor crimes cases during the year. In November 2014 the courts issued one guilty verdict in an honor crime case, initially issuing a death sentence that was reduced to 10 years’ imprisonment when the victim’s family dropped their personal rights, meaning the family chose to no longer legally pursue the case. Generally, when the victim’s family chose not to pursue the case, the government completely dismissed proceedings. In “honor crime” cases, the family of the victim and the family of the alleged perpetrator were often the same, since the perpetrator and victim usually were related. There were no reported instances of forced marriage as an alternative to a potential honor killing during the year, although NGOs note that many cases of forced marriage occur shortly after an accusation of rape due to family and societal pressure before any formal trial begins. Article 308 of the Penal Code waives punishment for a rapist if he legally marries the victim and stays married for five years. Observers noted that if a woman marries her rapist, according to customary belief, her family members do not need to kill her to “preserve the family’s honor.”

On April 15, the prosecutor general charged two men with premeditated murder of their female relative in an apparent honor crime. The men were the husband and brother of the victim. The husband confessed to strangling his wife with the assistance of her brother then burning the body. He told the investigators he had to kill her to cleanse the family honor because she often left her husband’s home without his approval.

On May 5, the Supreme Criminal Court prosecutor general charged a man with premeditated murder of his daughter in an apparent honor crime, as well as carrying an unlicensed weapon. The suspect shot his daughter in front of the Marka district officer’s office on May 4 after she had gone missing for a year and a

half. The individual suspected his daughter had had a romantic relationship outside of marriage, according to government officials and media reports. The district officer had asked the father to come to his office and sign a pledge that he would not harm his daughter so that she could reunite with her family. Both cases were pending at year's end.

Through their administrative detention authority, governors continued to place potential victims of honor crimes in involuntary protective custody in the Women's Correctional and Rehabilitation Center in Jweideh detention facility and Umm al-Lulu detention facility, where some women remained for more than one year. Conditions in the women's prison were generally better than conditions in most of the men's prison, but overcrowding at Jweideh was sometimes a problem. Authorities held minors in the Dar al-Khansa Juvenile Center under unclear legal status. The government reported that 74 minor girls were placed in protective custody at the Dar al-Khansa Center during the year. A woman detained in protective custody can be released only after her family signs a statement assuring her safety, and both the local governor and the woman agree to the release. One NGO continued to work for the release of these women through mediation with their families. The NGO also provided a temporary but unofficial shelter for such women as an alternative to protective custody and provided post-release rehabilitation and job placement assistance. In one case the NGO assisted a young woman who had spent several years at Dar al-Khansa Juvenile Center and a few months at a women's shelter to find a job linked to vocational training she had received at the center, and to obtain government subsidies to rent her own apartment.

Sexual Harassment: The law strictly prohibits sexual harassment and does not distinguish between sexual assault and sexual harassment. Both carry a minimum prison sentence of four years at hard labor. The government did not enforce this law. Women's groups stated that harassment was common, but many victims hesitated to file a complaint and rarely did so because they feared blame for inciting the harassment or consequences such as losing their job, or because they faced social and cultural pressure to keep silent. NGOs reported that refugees from Syria and foreign migrant workers, including garment workers and domestic workers, were especially vulnerable to gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and sexual assault, in the workplace.

Reproductive Rights: Couples have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children, and individuals were able to make such decisions free from discrimination and coercion. Contraceptives were

generally accessible to all men and women, both married and single, and provided free of charge in public clinics. Comprehensive essential obstetric, prenatal, and postnatal care was provided throughout the country in the public and private sectors. The Sisterhood Is Global Institute estimated that 65 hysterectomies were performed on women and girls with intellectual disabilities as recently as 2013. In April 2014 the General Fatwa Department issued a fatwa banning the practice, and the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (HCAPD) stated they heard no reports of hysterectomies performed on women with intellectual disabilities during the year.

Discrimination: The law does not provide for the same legal status and rights for women as for men. Women experienced discrimination in a number of areas, including inheritance, divorce, child custody, citizenship, pension and social security benefits, the workplace, and, in certain circumstances, the value of their testimony in a sharia court. Nearly 10 percent of women were illiterate. In 2013 women owned only 20 percent of land and 25 percent of property, according to the Jordanian Department of Statistics.

No specialized government office or designated official handles discrimination claims. The Jordanian National Commission for Women, a government-supported NGO, operated a hotline to receive discrimination complaints.

Under sharia law as applied in the country, female heirs receive half the amount that male heirs receive. A sole female heir receives only half of her parents' estate, with the balance going to designated male relatives, whereas a sole male heir inherits all of his parents' property. Women may seek divorce without the consent of their husbands in limited circumstances such as abandonment, spousal abuse, or in return for waiving financial rights. The law allows retention of financial rights under specific circumstances, such as spousal abuse. Special courts for each Christian denomination adjudicate marriage and divorce.

The law allows fathers to prevent their children from leaving the country through a court order that is not available to mothers. Authorities did not stop fathers from exiting the country with their children when the mother objected.

The government provided men with more generous social security benefits than women. The government continued pension payments of deceased male civil servants to their heirs, but it discontinued payments to heirs of deceased female civil servants unless they were the sole income earner in the family. Laws and regulations governing health insurance for civil servants under the Civil Service

Bureau do not permit married women to extend their health insurance coverage to dependents or spouses unless they are the sole income earner in the family. Divorced and widowed women may extend coverage to their children. (See section 2.d. on statelessness and section 7.d. on worker's rights.)

## **Children**

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived only through the father. The government did not issue birth certificates to all children born in the country during the year. The government deemed some children--including children of unmarried women, orphans, or of certain interfaith marriages involving a Muslim woman and converts from Islam to another religion--illegitimate and denied them proper registration, making it difficult or impossible for them to attend school, access health services, or receive other documentation. Illegitimate and abandoned children already holding national identity numbers have identity cards that clearly marked them as different; such numbers impeded these children as adults from obtaining employment, housing, and government benefits.

Education: Education is compulsory from ages six through 16 and free until age 18. No legislation exists to enforce the law or to punish guardians for violating it. Children without legal residency do not have the right to attend public school. The Ministry of Education allows Syrians to enroll at local public schools, with the exception of students who have been out of school for three or more years who were not permitted to register. In some cases refugee children were not permitted to register in school due to lack of residency documentation. UNICEF helped cover the cost and provided a supplement to Jordanian teachers who worked in Za'atri and Azraq camps and in the host communities. According to UNICEF, of approximately 222,000 school-aged Syrian refugees, only around 140,000 were registered in public schools for the 2015-2016 school year. An additional 30,000 children attended informal education, while approximately 60,000 Syrian refugee children did not participate in any form of organized learning. UNICEF and Save the Children reported many who were registered did not attend due to the distance to schools, child labor, harassment, and the lack of space and resources in schools. Additionally, UNRWA operated 174 primary schools for approximately 120,000 Palestinian refugee children and opened enrollment to Palestinian refugee children from Syria. Some children of female citizens and noncitizen fathers must apply for residency permits every year, and permission was not assured. (See Section 2.d on statelessness.) Children with disabilities experienced extreme difficulty in accessing constitutionally protected early and primary education.

Child Abuse: The law specifies punishment for abuse of children. For example, conviction for rape of a child younger than age 15 potentially carries the death penalty. Local organizations working with abused children pointed to gaps in the legal system that regularly resulted in lenient sentencing, particularly for family members. For example, the penal code allows judges to reduce a sentence when the victim's family does not press charges. In child abuse cases, judges routinely showed leniency in accordance with the wishes of the family. As of September authorities investigated 132 cases of child sexual abuse.

The Juvenile Law places the age of criminal responsibility at 12 years. The law stipulates that juveniles charged with committing a crime along with an adult are to be tried in a juvenile court, except for crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of the State Security Court, such as terrorism charges, drug charges, or other charges relating to national security. As of August, eight juvenile cases were under review at the State Security Court; the cases were referred before the passage of the Juvenile Law in 2014. The new law stipulates alternative penalties for juvenile offenders, including vocational training and community service. Police stations have no designated holding areas for juveniles.

The government continued to fund a child protection center that provided temporary shelter and medical care for abused children between the ages of six and 12. Through August the shelter housed 19 abused children at a time.

Early and Forced Marriage: The minimum age for marriage is 18. With the consent of both a judge and a guardian, a child as young as 15 years old, in most cases a girl, may be married. The sharia court reported that early marriages comprised 13 percent of all marriages registered in 2014, with the early marriage rate among registered Syrian refugee's marriages at 31.4 percent in the first quarter of 2014. There was no data available on the number of unregistered marriages, but, due to the differences between the Jordanian and Syrian legal and social framework, it was likely that many Syrian refugee marriages were not registered.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law stipulates a penalty for the commercial exploitation of children of six months' to three years' imprisonment. The law also penalizes individuals who subject persons to trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation with a maximum of 10 years of hard labor and a fine of 2,000 to 50,000 JD (\$2,800 to \$70,000). The law prohibits the distribution of pornography involving persons under the age of 18 and provides for a fine of 300 to 5,000 JD (\$420 to \$7,000) or at least three months' imprisonment. The law does not prohibit the possession of child pornography. The law penalizes those who use the

internet to post or distribute child pornography with a fine of 500 to 5,000 JD (\$700 to \$7,000) or at least six months' imprisonment. The minimum age of consensual sex is 18, although sexual relations between minors whose marriages are approved by the courts are legal.

Institutionalized Children: A 2013 government report found no physical or sexual abuse in government institutions, but NGOs reported such abuses occurred. According to the NCHR, some juveniles in detention alleged mistreatment. Cases involving violence against persons with disabilities or institutionalized persons are automatically referred to the FPD. During the year the Ministry of Social Development closed two day-care centers for violations. The community monitoring committee highlighted the pervasive use of physical discipline, physical and verbal abuse, unacceptable living conditions, and a lack of educational, rehabilitative, or psychosocial services for wards and inmates. NGOs noted that the ministry was responsive and followed up on reports from the community monitoring committee. Activists for orphans' rights alleged that adult orphans and former wards of the state were especially vulnerable to forced and early marriage, labor trafficking, and sexual exploitation.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information see the Department of State's report on compliance at [travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html) and country-specific information at [travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/english/country/jordan.html](http://travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/english/country/jordan.html).

## **Anti-Semitism**

Aside from foreigners, there was no resident Jewish community in the country. Anti-Semitism was present in the media. Editorial cartoons, articles, and opinion pieces sometimes negatively depicted Jews without government response. The national school curriculum, including materials on tolerance education, did not include mention of the Holocaust.

On November 17, *Ro'ya*, a private television station hosted a journalist drawing an editorial cartoon showing an anti-Semitic stereotype and stating that Jews were the "mother of terrorism."

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

### **Persons with Disabilities**

The law generally provides equal rights to persons with disabilities, but such legal protections were not upheld. Activists noted the law on the rights of persons with disabilities lacked implementing regulations. The HCAPD, a government body, worked with ministries, the private sector, and NGOs to formulate and implement strategies to assist persons with disabilities. Citizens and NGOs universally reported that persons with disabilities faced problems in obtaining employment and accessing education, health care, transportation, and other services, particularly in rural areas.

Human rights activists reported that institutions and rehabilitation centers subjected some persons with disabilities to negligence and cruel and inhuman treatment. There were no reported allegations against government-run care centers during the year.

In April 2014 the Ministry of Social Development launched an investigation into allegations that staff at the government-run Karak Rehabilitation Center physically and sexually assaulted a resident. After news sources published photographs of the abuse, the Ministry of Social Development suspended six employees, who faced charges of negligence and failure to report a crime. The ministry stated the resident's injuries resulted from a fight with another resident rather than from abuse by center staff. The Karak Criminal Magistrate Court acquitted the defendants on January 8, citing insufficient evidence against the defendants and agreeing with the ministry that the injuries resulted from a fight with another resident.

The electoral law directs the government to verify that voting facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities and allows such persons to bring a personal assistant to the polling station; the Independent Electoral Commission has responsibility for implementing this law. Following the January 2013 parliamentary elections, the NCHR noted that accessibility for persons with disabilities needed improvement. Following the August 2013 municipal elections, the NCHR reported that most of the polling centers were not accessible to persons with disabilities.

Banks commonly refused to allow persons with vision disabilities to open a bank account independently and required blind applicants to bring two male witnesses to certify each transaction. Banks commonly refused to issue customers with vision disabilities automated teller machine cards.

According to the HCAPD, only 3 percent of children with disabilities were enrolled in schools. The 2013 NCHR report noted that school classrooms were not fully accessible and that there were no qualified teachers for children with disabilities, problems that remained throughout the year. The HCAPD reported that educational accommodations were more readily available at the university level than in elementary and secondary schools. At all levels of education, children with certain types of disabilities were excluded from studying certain subjects and often could not access critical educational support services, such as sign-language interpretation. Authorities did not train general education teachers to work with students with various disabilities. Families of children with disabilities reported that teachers and principals often refused to include children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The education ministry provided accessible transportation to specialized centers for children with disabilities, but not to mainstream schools. There remained insufficient capacity in specialized centers for all students who required accommodations. Students with significant intellectual disabilities fell under the authority of the Ministry of Social Development rather than the Ministry of Education.

The Special Buildings Code Department is tasked with enforcing accessibility provisions and oversees retrofitting of existing buildings to comply with building codes. The vast majority of private and public office buildings continued to have limited or no access for persons with disabilities. Municipal infrastructure such as public transport, streets, sidewalks, and intersections was not accessible. A 2014 report by the HCAPD, the Department of Statistics, and the Washington Group found that 76 percent of persons with disabilities over the age of 15 years were economically inactive.

The law mandates that public and private sector establishments with between 25 and 50 workers employ at least one person with disabilities and that establishments with more than 50 workers must reserve 4 percent of their positions for persons with disabilities. The law lacked implementing regulations, and authorities rarely enforced it. Additionally, employers who state the nature of the work is not suitable for persons with disabilities are exempt from the quota. Employers, including the government's Civil Service Bureau, frequently required potential employees with disabilities to present a medical letter certifying the bearer was

competent to perform the job in question. Human rights activists considered the letter a significant barrier to participation in public life because some medical professionals were not aware of the full range of accommodations available and thus certified individuals as not able to perform certain tasks. Girls and women with disabilities were particularly at risk for gender-based violence.

Human rights activists and the media reported that children and adults with disabilities were vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse while in institutions, rehabilitation centers, or other care settings, including their family homes. The government operated some of these institutions, and some of the abusers were government employees. Media reported several instances of abuse of persons with disabilities by family members during the year; the government launched investigations into many of these cases and referred the victims for assistance.

The government endorsed instructions giving tariff exemptions for the vehicles of persons with disabilities and reduced the costs of hiring domestic help for persons with disabilities. Approximately 10,000 persons with disabilities (some 17 percent of the total estimated population with disabilities) benefited from these measures.

### **National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities**

Four groups of Palestinians resided in the country, many of whom faced some discrimination. Those who migrated to the country and the Jordan-controlled West Bank after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war received full citizenship, as did those who migrated to the country after the 1967 war and held no residency entitlement in the West Bank. Those still holding residency in the West Bank after 1967 were no longer eligible to claim full citizenship but could obtain temporary travel documents without national identification numbers, provided they did not also carry a Palestinian Authority travel document. These individuals had access to some government services but paid noncitizen rates at hospitals, educational institutions, and training centers. Refugees who fled Gaza after 1967 were not entitled to citizenship and were issued temporary travel documents without national numbers. These persons had no access to government services and were almost completely dependent on UNRWA services. Finally, Palestinian refugees from Syria who were able to enter the country, despite many being turned away at the border, had access to UNRWA services and some government services.

Palestinians were underrepresented in parliament and senior positions in the government and the military, as well as in admissions to public universities. They had limited access to university scholarships.

## **Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

While consensual same-sex sexual conduct is not illegal, societal discrimination against LGBTI persons was prevalent, and LGBTI persons were targets of abuse. Activists reported discrimination in housing, employment, education, and access to public services. Some LGBTI individuals reported reluctance to engage the legal system due to fear their sexual orientation or gender identity would either provoke hostile reactions from police or disadvantage them in court. Activists reported that most LGBTI individuals were closeted and fearful of their sexual identity being disclosed.

Over a few days in August, tourist police arrested nine gay men and transgender women in Amman based on their appearance; none was charged, and most were released within a day or two. One individual was released after a week of detention. During the year there were reports of individuals who left the country due to fear that their families would punish them because of their sexual orientation.

### **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

HIV/AIDS was a largely taboo subject. Lack of public awareness remained a problem, because many citizens believed the disease exclusively affected foreigners and members of the LGBTI community. Society stigmatized HIV/AIDS-positive individuals, and they largely hid their medical status. The government continued its efforts to inform the public about the disease and eliminate negative attitudes about persons with HIV/AIDS, but it also continued to test all foreigners annually for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B, syphilis, malaria, and tuberculosis. The government deported individuals who tested HIV positive.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law, including related regulations and statutes, provides for the right to form and join independent unions and conduct legal strikes, but with significant restrictions. There is no right to collective bargaining, although the labor code provides for collective agreements. The law identifies specific groups of public- and private-sector workers who may organize and defines 17 industries and

professions in which trade unions may be established. The establishment of new unions requires approval from the Ministry of Labor. The law requires that these 17 trade unions belong to the government-subsidized General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions, the country's sole trade union federation. The law authorizes additional professions on a case-by-case basis to form professional associations. The constitution prohibits antiunion discrimination, and the law protects workers from employer retaliation due to union affiliation or activities. The law does not explicitly provide a worker fired due to antiunion views with the right to reinstatement.

Conflicts during negotiations are referred first to a mediator appointed by the Ministry of Labor. If the case is unresolved, it moves to the minister of labor and then to a mediation council composed of an employee representative, a labor representative, and a chair appointed by the minister of labor. The minister refers conflicts not settled by the council to a labor court. There are limits on the right to strike, including a requirement to provide a minimum of 14 days' notice to the employer. Strikes are prohibited if a labor dispute is under mediation or arbitration.

Foreign workers are allowed to join unions, but they are not permitted to create unions, head a union, or hold union office. It remained unclear whether domestic and agricultural workers are permitted to create or join unions or whether they are granted other protections in the labor code. Labor court judges were divided over whether the entire labor code applied to domestic workers or whether only a specific regulation for domestic workers, cooks, gardeners, and similar workers applied. The government did not fully enforce applicable laws with effective remedies and penalties.

In September the first official migrant domestic worker network was formed to advocate for full rights for domestic workers.

The government did not fully respect freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Many worker organizations were not independent of the government, and government influence on union policies and activities continued.

On April 2, representatives from the Ministry of Labor; the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment, and Clothing Industries; and the Jordan Garments, Accessories, and Textile Exporters' Association signed a unified contract for all migrant workers in the garment sector. The unified contract clarifies the rights and duties of foreign workers recruited to the garment sector, to be executed in Arabic

and the language of the foreign worker. The unified contract should help address the problem of contract switching. The government worked to ensure the unified contract was used by all garment factories.

The government subsidized and audited salaries and activities of the General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions and monitored union elections. The government denied recognition to independent unions organized outside the structure of the government-approved federation. The General Federation of Jordanian Trade Unions also reported trouble getting government recognition for trade unions in new sectors beyond the 17 established in law.

The Ministry of Labor reported 17 strikes and labor protests as of September. There were no reports of threats of violence against union heads, although labor activists alleged that the security services pressured union leaders to refrain from activism that challenged government interests. Strikes generally occurred without advance notice or registration.

Jordanian Labor Watch, a labor rights NGO, reported that authorities forcibly dispersed a port workers' sit-in on October 25. Port workers had started a sit-in on October 21 in front of the port container company headquarters. Newspapers reported that 12 workers were arrested during dispersal of the protest; Jordanian Labor Watch reported that more than 20 workers were arrested and that authorities used tear gas to disperse the protest.

Foreign workers in the garment, construction, services, and agricultural sectors, whose residency permits are tied to work contracts, were vulnerable to retaliation by employers for participating in strikes and sit-ins. Participation in a legally unrecognized strike counted as an unexcused absence for the purpose of this law. The law allows employers to consider employment contracts void if a worker is absent more than 10 consecutive days, as long as the employer provides written notice. The Ministry of Labor sometimes prevented management from arbitrarily dismissing foreign workers engaged in labor or other activism, but its enforcement was inconsistent. Observers reported management's common practice of refusing to renew foreign workers' contracts on the basis of "troublemaking" or attempting to organize in the workplace. Labor organizations reported that management representatives used threats to intimidate striking workers. Labor organizations and industry representatives reported that workers also sometimes used threats and physical violence to retaliate against management officials or to coerce colleagues into participating in labor actions.

The Ministry of Labor received 48 labor complaints, 40 of which were settled through direct negotiations, five through a mediator, and one through a mediation panel. It referred two of the cases to a labor court.

While the Ministry of Labor received no complaints of antiunion discrimination during the year, observers noted that nonunionized workers were not explicitly protected in the labor code from retaliation. This was particularly the case for foreign workers in all sectors as well as citizens working in the public sector on short-term contracts (day laborers).

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

### **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor except in a state of emergency, such as war or natural disaster. The government made some efforts to enforce the law through inspections and other means. Labor activists noted that law enforcement and judicial officials did not consistently identify victims or open criminal investigations.

Police investigated nine cases of forced labor involving 16 potential victims and 16 perpetrators in 2014. Police referred potential victims of forced labor to shelter services. In 2014 the Joint Trafficking Unit of the Public Security Directorate investigated 67 cases of nonpayment of wages, 38 cases of passports being withheld, and 4 cases of employers' restricting the worker's freedom.

In the garment sector the government actively inspected factories and investigated allegations of forced labor. According to NGOs, reports of withholding of passports continued to decline during the year, particularly those of workers in the garment sector. Forced labor or conditions indicative of forced labor occurred, particularly among migrant workers in the domestic work and agricultural sectors. Activists highlighted the vulnerability of agricultural workers due to minimal government oversight. Activists also identified domestic workers as particularly vulnerable to exploitation due to inadequate government oversight, social norms that excused forced labor, and workers' isolation within individual homes. Labor inspectors did not regularly investigate reports of labor or other abuses of domestic workers in private homes and were not permitted to enter a private residence without the owner's permission except with a court order. NGOs and foreign

embassy representatives reported the joint antitrafficking unit preferred to settle potential cases of domestic servitude through mediation, rather than referring them for criminal prosecution.

In February the government announced a two-month amnesty for foreign workers, temporarily lifting fines and other legal barriers that had prevented migrant domestic workers sheltering at their embassies and in detention centers from returning to their countries of origin. The government announced another amnesty period from August through October. Authorities repatriated 776 out-of-status domestic workers as of mid-October, and renewed 81,544 work permits for out-of-status foreign workers. The government continued its cooperation with foreign embassies to waive overstay fees for migrant domestic workers who wish to repatriate after a two-year stay in the country.

In February the government issued new bylaws regulating recruitment agencies for migrant domestic workers. On October 6, the government issued related implementing instructions. The bylaws require recruitment agencies to provide health insurance, workplace accident insurance, and insurance that reimburses the recruitment fees to employers when a worker leaves before fulfilling her contract. If the employer fails to pay the worker's salary or return the worker's passport, then the employer would not be entitled to the insurance payment. The new bylaws give the Ministry of Labor the authority publicly to classify recruitment agencies based on compliance, and to close and withdraw the license of poorly ranked agencies. Under the new bylaws, the ministry closed 21 recruitment agencies during the year, most of which had been the subject of repeated complaints.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/).

### **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The law forbids employment of children younger than 16 years of age, except as apprentices in nonhazardous positions. The law bans those between the ages of 16 and 18 from working in potentially hazardous jobs, limits working hours for such children to six hours per day, mandates one-hour breaks for every four consecutive working hours, and prohibits work after 8:00 p.m. on national or religious holidays and on weekends.

There were instances of child labor, and many local and international organizations reported it was on the rise, particularly among the Syrian refugee community. Children worked in mechanical repair, agriculture, construction, quarrying, tour-guiding, and the hotel and restaurant industry. They also worked as street vendors, carpenters, blacksmiths, domestic workers, and painters, as well as in small family businesses. The MOL reported that children faced occupational-specific hazards in employment that involved mechanical work and welding, where they often lacked the training and protective equipment to perform their work safely. The government lacked recent statistics on the problem. A 2008 Department of Statistics study estimated that more than 32,000 children between the ages of five and 17 were working in the country. Activists estimated the number to be significantly higher, because many businesses and families tended to hide the practice.

The government's capacity to implement and enforce child labor laws was not sufficient to deter the practice. Staffing in the Ministry of Labor's Inspection Department was insufficient to address child labor effectively. The ministry's three-person Child Labor Unit was responsible for coordinating government action regarding child labor; with the department's labor inspectors were responsible for enforcing all aspects of the labor code, including child labor. In 2014 the Child Labor Unit reported that labor inspectors found 1,060 child laborers, and issued 633 warnings and 235 violations--a 47-percent overall increase from 2013. Authorities referred violators to an administrative labor court; the Ministry of Justice had no information on any child labor cases referred to criminal courts. The law provides that employers who hire a child younger than age 16 pay a fine of as much as 500 JD (\$700), which is doubled for repeat offenses. Observers did not believe the penalties sufficed to deter child labor.

Children working in the informal sector did not benefit from the minimum age requirements that protect children working in the formal sector. The government lacked capacity to monitor child working in the informal work sector such as children working in family businesses and the agricultural sector.

Labor inspectors reportedly attempted alternative approaches before issuing official warnings and violations, such as issuing advice and guidance, ensuring safe work conditions, and cooperating with employers to permit working children to attend school concurrently.

The Ministries of Labor, Education, and Social Development collaborated with NGOs aiming to withdraw children from the worst forms of labor. In June these

ministries in cooperation with the International Labor Organization launched a child labor monitoring system with an Arabic and English language website to receive reports of child labor from the public and coordinate information sharing among concerned ministries.

An increasing number of Syrian refugee children worked in the informal sector without legal work permits. Some Syrian refugee children in the country served as the sole breadwinners of their family. Syrian refugee children sold goods in the streets near Za'atri refugee camp, and increasing numbers of Syrian refugee children begged in urban areas.

Also, see the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at [www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/](http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/).

#### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

Labor laws do not prohibit discrimination with respect to employment and occupation on the basis of race, sex, gender, disability, language, political opinion, national origin or citizenship, age, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases, or social status.

Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to sex, gender, disability, and sexual orientation (see section 6).

Union officials reported that sectors employing predominantly women, such as secretarial work, offered wages below the official minimum wage of 190 JD (\$266) per month. Many women said traditional social pressures discouraged them from pursuing professional careers, especially after marriage. According to the Jordanian National Commission for Women, half of the country's university graduates were women, but women comprised only 13 percent of the labor force.

Discrimination against migrant workers occurred (see section 7.e.).

#### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

In 2012 the government raised the national minimum wage to 190 JD (\$266) per month, and the poverty level was set at 366 JD (\$512) per month for a family of five. The minimum wage increase excluded noncitizens and all workers in the garment industry. Citizen workers in the garment industry received a minimum wage of 190 JD (\$266) per month; noncitizen workers in the garment industry

received a minimum wage of 110 JD (\$154) per month, although many had base wages slightly above the minimum wage. This exemption was granted in part because employers often provided room and board for noncitizen workers in this sector. Some garment factories continued to deduct room and board from workers' already lower salaries.

The law sets a standard workweek of 48 hours and requires overtime pay for hours worked in excess of that standard. The law provides for 14 days of paid annual leave per year, which increases to 21 days after five years of service. Workers were also provided additional national and religious holidays designated by the government. Employees are entitled to one day off per week. The law permits compulsory overtime under certain circumstances such as conducting an annual inventory, closing accounts, preparing to sell goods at discounted prices, avoiding loss to goods that would otherwise be exposed to damage, and receiving special deliveries. In such cases actual working hours may not exceed 10 hours per day, the employee must be paid overtime, and the period may not last more than 30 days. There is no cap on the amount of consensual overtime.

The government set occupational health and safety standards. Employers are required to abide by all such standards set by the Ministry of Labor. The law requires employers to protect workers from hazards caused by the nature of the job or its tools, provide any necessary protective equipment, train workers on hazards and prevention measures, provide first aid as necessitated by the job, and protect employees from explosions or fires by storing flammable materials appropriately.

The Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcement of labor laws and acceptable conditions of work. Ministry inspectors enforced the labor code but were unable to ensure full compliance; there were 230 inspectors for the entire country, an increase of more than 50 from 2014 but still an insufficient number to enforce the labor code effectively. Employees may lodge complaints regarding violations of the labor code directly with the Ministry of Labor or through organizations such as their union or the NCHR. The ministry opened an investigation for each complaint.

Labor standards apply to the informal sector, but the Ministry of Labor lacked the capacity to detect and monitor informal work. Authorities did not consistently apply all the protections of the labor code to domestic and agricultural workers, because their applicability was not clear. Labor contacts stated that agricultural and domestic workers, cooks, and gardeners were not entitled to social benefits from the Social Security Corporation.

The government took action to prevent violations and improve working conditions. As of September labor inspectors conducted 53,161 inspections and issued 10,969 warnings and 9,071 violations nationwide. The Ministry of Labor placed a special focus on enforcing compliance in the Qualifying Industrial Zones, which were populated largely by migrant garment workers. The ratio of labor inspectors to workers or places of employment was significantly higher in these zones than for the general population. The government required export garment manufacturers to participate in Better Work Jordan to improve labor standards. As of September all 75 factories required by the government to join Better Work Jordan were active members of the program.

Wage, overtime, safety, and other standards often were not upheld in several sectors, including construction, mechanic shops, day labor, and the garment industry. Foreign workers faced hazardous and exploitative working conditions in a variety of sectors. Authorities did not effectively protect employees who attempted to remove themselves from situations that endangered their health and safety. Union leaders and the media reported that female citizen workers were more likely to encounter labor violations; including wages below the minimum wage and harassment in the workplace. The National Committee on Pay Equity noted that the gender gap in wages in the private education sector was 41.6 percent, and 27 percent of women in the private education sector earned less than minimum wage. In September a teacher won a case against her private school employer for underpayment of wages and nonpayment of social security benefits; the court awarded the teacher 1,242 JD (\$1,739) and ordered the school to pay the legal fees.

Because there was no limit on consensual overtime, the Ministry of Labor permitted employees in some industries, such as the garment sector, to work excessive workweeks, reportedly as much as 80 to 100 hours per week. As of September 1, the Ministry of Labor closed 1,526 workplaces for recruiting foreign workers without work permits.

In the garment sector, foreign workers were more susceptible than their citizen counterparts to dangerous or unfair conditions, including mandatory overtime, delayed payment of wages, deductions for room and board, and unacceptable dormitory conditions. Forced labor or conditions indicative of forced labor occurred in the garment industry, although Better Work Jordan reported finding no noncompliant factories concerning bonded labor. Better Work Jordan also found

that compliance regarding coercion improved. Indebtedness of migrant garment workers to third parties and involuntary or excessive overtime persisted.

Some workers in the agricultural sector, the vast majority of whom were Egyptians, were subjected to exploitative conditions. According to a domestic NGO, agricultural workers usually were paid less than the minimum wage, worked excessive hours without adequate compensation, and lived in substandard housing. Some employers in the agricultural sector also reportedly confiscated passports. Egyptian migrant workers were also vulnerable to exploitation in the construction industry; they usually were paid less than the minimum wage and lacked basic training and equipment necessary to uphold occupational health and safety standards.

Domestic workers, overwhelmingly migrants, often faced unacceptable working conditions. Many domestic workers reported to local NGOs and their embassies that they received insufficient food, no private accommodations, no health care, no days off, and long delays in or nonpayment of wages. While domestic workers could file complaints in person with the Ministry of Labor Domestic Workers Directorate or the PSD, many domestic workers complained there was no follow-up on their cases either from the ministry or from the PSD. Users of a domestic-worker hotline of the Ministry of Labor reported that live operators were available only during government business hours, or seven hours a day during the workweek. After-hours calls required the user to leave a message and a callback number, which posed particular difficulties for domestic workers who had access only to their employers' telephones. Advocates for migrant workers reported that hotline instructions in Arabic were difficult for non-citizens to understand and that some key languages were still missing from the hotline translation service.

On August 16, the prosecutor general charged a citizen woman in Irbid with premeditated murder after she allegedly beat an Indonesian domestic worker in her employ to death. The victim died on October 13 and the forensic report showed that the worker died due to brain hemorrhage. The case was pending at year's end.

Advocates for migrant domestic workers reported that domestic workers who sought government assistance or made allegations against their employers frequently faced counterclaims of criminal behavior from their employers. Employers could file criminal complaints or flight notifications against domestic workers with police stations. Even when domestic workers benefited from initiatives such as the general amnesty that waived immigration overstay fines,

they could be prevented from leaving the country due to such alerts on file with police.

During the year dozens of domestic workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka sought shelter at their countries' embassies in Amman. Most of the domestic workers reportedly fled conditions indicative of forced labor or abuse, including unpaid wages and, to a lesser extent, sexual or physical abuse. By law employers are responsible for renewing foreign employees' residency permits but often failed to do so for domestic employees. As a result authorities considered most of the domestic workers sheltered by embassies illegal residents, and many were stranded because they were unable to pay the daily overstay fees of 1.50 JD (\$2.10) to depart the country. The government continued its cooperation with foreign embassies to waive overstay fees for migrant domestic workers who wish to repatriate after a two-year stay in the country, a policy that has been in place since 2013 and greatly reduced the number of domestic workers stranded at their embassies' shelters.

As a result of poor working conditions experienced by some of its citizens, Indonesia prohibited its citizens from traveling to Jordan as domestic workers. Some human rights organizations argued that these bans heightened the vulnerability of foreign domestic workers who turned to unscrupulous recruitment agencies to migrate illegally to the country.

The Social Security Corporation reported that 15,348 work injuries occurred during the year, of which only 1,242 were injuries to women.