

# ALGERIA 2019 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Algeria is a multiparty republic whose president, the head of state, is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The president has the constitutional authority to appoint and dismiss cabinet members and the prime minister, who is the head of government. A 2016 constitutional revision requires the president to consult with the parliamentary majority before appointing the prime minister. Presidential elections took place in 2014, and voters re-elected President Abdelaziz Bouteflika for a fourth term. Following Bouteflika's April 2 resignation, the country twice postponed elections during the year. Elections on December 12 resulted in Abdelmadjid Tebboune's election. Presidential term limits, which were eliminated in 2008, were reintroduced in the 2016 revision of the constitution and limit the president to two five-year terms. Elections for the lower chamber of parliament were held in 2017 and did not result in significant changes in the composition of the government. Foreign observers characterized the 2017 legislative elections as largely well organized and conducted without significant problems on election day but noted a lack of transparency in vote-counting procedures.

The 130,000-member National Gendarmerie, which performs police functions outside of urban areas under the auspices of the Ministry of National Defense, and the approximately 200,000-member DGSN or national police, organized under the Ministry of Interior, share responsibility for maintaining law and order. The army is responsible for external security, guarding the country's borders, and has some domestic security responsibilities. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces.

Since February 22, citizens have held weekly nationwide protests, demanding political change. The scale and geographic spread of protests were the largest since the end of the country's civil war in 2002. Despite sporadic clashes with protestors and occasional use of tear gas and rubber bullets, government forces exhibited restraint with only one death reported.

Significant human rights issues included: reports of one unlawful or arbitrary killing; arbitrary detention; political prisoners; lack of judicial independence and impartiality; unlawful interference with privacy; laws prohibiting certain forms of expression, as well as criminal defamation laws; limits on freedom of the press; site blocking; restrictions on the freedom of assembly and association including of religious groups; refoulement of refugees to a country where they would face a

threat to their life or freedom; corruption; trafficking in persons; the criminalization of consensual same sex sexual conduct and security force sexual abuse of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons.

The government took steps to investigate, prosecute, or punish public officials who committed violations, especially corruption. Impunity for police and security officials remained a problem, but the government provided information on actions taken against officials accused of wrongdoing.

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

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

There were no reports that the government or its agents routinely committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. Nonetheless, on April 12, police allegedly beat Ramzi Yettou while he was walking home from an antigovernment protest in Algiers. Yettou died April 19 with the cause of death being reported as “undetermined,” prompting authorities to order an investigation into the circumstances of his death, according to Amnesty International. The investigation was ongoing at year’s end.

On May 28, Kamel Eddine Fekhar died following a nearly 60-day hunger strike while in pretrial detention after having been arrested March 31. Ghardaia authorities arrested Fekhar for “incitement of racial hatred” due to his Facebook post in which he accused local officials in Ghardaia of discriminatory practices towards Ibadis. Authorities also arrested Fekhar’s friend and trade unionist Brahim Aouf the same day for posting cases of corruption in the national educational system on his Facebook. Following their arrest, the two individuals started a hunger strike to protest alleged discriminatory practices by authorities towards the Muslim minority group of Mozabite Ibadis. Authorities underlined that Fekhar died in a hospital and not in prison. Authorities released Aouf on his own recognizance and required him to check in with the Ghardaia court weekly until July.

### **b. Disappearance**

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

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

The law prohibits torture and prescribes prison sentences of between 10 and 20 years for government agents found guilty of torture. Human rights activists said police occasionally used excessive force against suspects, including protestors. The Ministry of Justice did not provide figures about prosecutions of law enforcement officers for abuse during the year. Local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) asserted that police impunity was a problem.

In April, Amnesty International reported that police used unnecessary or excessive force, firing tear gas and rubber bullets at peaceful protesters, and using water cannons and electrical weapons for crowd control. While the majority of protesters were demonstrating peacefully, some had thrown stones at the police.

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

There were no significant reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns.

The penal code prohibits the detention of suspects in any facilities not designated for that purpose and declared to the local prosecutor, who has the right to visit such facilities at any time.

Physical Conditions: Four prisons (out of 49 nationwide) had an inmate population that was between 7 and 10 percent above capacity, according to the Ministry of Justice, which also reported a total prisoner population of 65,000 individuals. Convicted terrorists had the same rights as other inmates but were held in prisons of varying degrees of security, determined by the danger posed by the prisoners. Prison authorities separate vulnerable persons but provide no consideration for sexual orientation. There were no legal protections for LGBTI persons in prison, but authorities stated civil protections extend to all prisoners regardless of gender orientation.

The government used specific facilities for prisoners age 27 and younger. The Ministry of Justice's General Directorate for Prison Administration and Resettlement (DGAPR) maintained different categories of prisons that also separated prisoners according to the lengths of their sentences. The government acknowledged that some detention facilities were overcrowded but said it used

alternatives to incarceration such as releasing prisoners with electronic bracelets, conditional release, and replacing prison terms with mandatory community service to reduce overcrowding. The Ministry of Justice stated cell sizes exceeded international standards set by the United Nations' Nelson Mandela Rules. Some observers, including government-appointed human rights officials, attributed overcrowding in pretrial detention facilities to continued overuse of pretrial detention, despite reforms in 2015 that sought to reduce the practice.

Authorities generally transferred pretrial detainees, after presenting them before the prosecutor, to prisons rather than holding them in separate detention facilities. The government stated pretrial detainees were normally held in cellblocks separate from those that housed the general prison population.

Administration: Authorities conducted investigations into allegations of mistreatment and took administrative actions against officers it deemed to have committed abuses. Religious workers reported they had access to prisoners during the year and authorities allowed detainees access to religious observance.

Independent Monitoring: The government allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and local human rights observers to visit prisons and detention centers. ICRC staff visited prisons, and police and gendarme stations under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, and an administrative detention center operated by the Ministry of Interior. During the year the ICRC hosted training sessions on human rights standards related to arrest, detention, and interrogation procedures for judicial police from the DGSN and National Gendarmerie, as well as for judges.

Improvements: During the year authorities improved prison conditions to meet international standards. The government said that it closed four older facilities and opened five new ones. Authorities also alleviated overcrowding by increasing the use of minimum-security centers that permit prisoners to work and by using electronic monitoring. The DGSN's human rights office, created in 2017, reported that it was leading seminars and workshops with the National Human Rights Council to provide additional human rights training to its officers. The DGAPR increased prisoners' access to medical care by offering specific services for detainees at certain hospitals nationwide, to include tuberculosis and cancer treatments. The DGAPR also increased weekly bank transfer limits from 1,500 (\$12.50) to 2,500 dinars (\$20.83), permitting prisoners more money to purchase staple goods in the prison.

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

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. A detainee has the right to appeal a court's order of pretrial detention, and if released, seek compensation from the government. Nonetheless, overuse of pretrial detention remained a problem. Security forces routinely detained individuals who participated in unauthorized protests. Arrested individuals reported that authorities held them for four to eight hours before releasing them without charges.

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

According to the law, police must obtain a summons from the prosecutor's office to require a suspect to appear in a police station for preliminary questioning. With this summons, police may hold a suspect for no more than 48 hours. Authorities also use summonses to notify and require the accused and the victim to attend a court proceeding or hearing. Police may make arrests without a warrant if they witness the offense. Lawyers reported that authorities usually carried out procedures for warrants and summonses properly.

If authorities need more than 48 hours to gather additional evidence, they may extend a suspect's authorized time in police detention with the prosecutor's authorization in the following cases. If charges pertain to an attack on data processing systems, they may extend the time in detention once; if charges relate to state security, they may do so twice; for charges concerning drug trafficking, organized and transnational crime, money laundering, and other currency-related crimes, they may do so three times; and for charges related to terrorism and other subversive activities, they may do so five times for a maximum of 12 days. The law stipulates that detainees should immediately be able to contact a family member and receive a visit or to contact an attorney.

The law provides detainees the right to see an attorney for 30 minutes if the time in detention has been extended beyond the initial 48-hour period. In these cases, authorities permit the arrested person to contact a lawyer after half of the extended time has expired. Prosecutors may apply to a judge to extend the period before arrested individuals can have access to an attorney. The court appearance of suspects in terrorism cases is public. At the end of the period of detention, the detainee has the right to request a medical examination by a physician of choice within the jurisdiction of the court. Otherwise, the judicial police appoint a doctor. Authorities enter the medical certificate into the detainee's file.

In nonfelony cases and in cases of individuals held on charges of terrorism and other subversive activities that exceed a 12-day period plus any authorized extension, the law calls for the release of suspects on provisional liberty, referred to as “judicial control,” or release on own recognizance while awaiting trial. Under provisional liberty status, authorities subjected suspects to requirements such as reporting periodically to the police station in their district, stopping professional activities related to the alleged offense committed, surrendering all travel documents, and, in some terrorism-related cases, residing at an agreed-upon address. The law provides that foreigners may be required to furnish bail as a condition of release on provisional liberty status, while citizens may be released on provisional liberty without posting bail.

Judges rarely refused requests to extend pretrial detention, which by law may be appealed. Should the detention be overturned, the defendant has the right to request compensation. Most detainees had prompt access to a lawyer of their choice as accorded by law, and the government provided legal counsel to indigent detainees. There were reports that authorities held some detainees without access to their lawyers and reportedly abused them physically and mentally.

Arbitrary Arrest: Although the law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, authorities sometimes used vaguely worded provisions, such as “inciting an unarmed gathering” and “insulting a government body,” to arrest and detain individuals considered to be disturbing public order or criticizing the government. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations criticized the law prohibiting unauthorized gatherings and called for its amendment to require only notification as opposed to application for authorization. These observers, among others, pointed to the law as a significant source of arbitrary arrests intended to suppress political activism. Police arrested protesters throughout the year for violating the law against unregistered public gatherings.

On May 9, authorities arrested Louisa Hanoune, the president of Algeria’s Worker’s Party founded in 1990 by workers, trade unionists, peasants, and youth at the initiative of the Socialist Workers Organization, for “conspiracy against the authority of the state.” She was placed in pretrial detention until her trial on September 23. Following the two-day trial, the Blida Military Court sentenced Hanoune to 15 years in prison.

Pretrial Detention: Prolonged pretrial detention remained a problem. Nongovernmental observers believed pretrial detainees comprised a significant portion of the total detainee and prisoner population but did not have specific

statistics. According to the Ministry of Justice, approximately 12 percent of the prison population was in pretrial detention.

The law limits the grounds for pretrial detention and stipulates that before it can be imposed, a judge must assess the gravity of a crime and whether the accused is a threat to society or a flight risk. Judges rarely refused prosecutorial requests to extend pretrial detention. Most detainees had prompt access to a lawyer of their choice as accorded by law, and the government provided legal counsel to indigent detainees. Human rights activists and attorneys, however, asserted that some detainees were held without access to lawyers.

The law prohibits pretrial detention for crimes with maximum punishments of less than three years imprisonment, except for infractions that resulted in deaths or to persons considered a “threat to public order.” In these cases, the law limits pretrial detention to one month. In all other criminal cases, pretrial detention may not exceed four months. Amnesty International alleged that authorities sometimes detained individuals on security-related charges for longer than the 12-day prescribed period.

On June 29, security forces arrested, Lakhdar Bouregaa, an independence war era figure, for publicly criticizing the military’s leadership and charged him with “demoralization and contempt for the armed forces.” He remained in pretrial detention at year’s end.

Detainee’s Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: The Code of Criminal Procedure grants the right to appeal a court’s order of pretrial detention. The appeal must be filed within three days of the order. A person released from custody following a dismissal or acquittal may apply to a civil commission to seek compensation from the government for “particular and particularly severe” harm caused by pretrial detention. The person must submit an application for compensation within six months of the dismissal or acquittal. Judges found to have ordered an unlawful detention could be subject to penalties or prosecution.

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

While the constitution provides for the separation of powers between the executive and judicial branches of government, the executive branch’s broad statutory authorities limited judicial independence. The constitution grants the president authority to appoint all prosecutors and judges. These presidential appointments

are not subject to legislative oversight but are reviewed by the High Judicial Council, which consists of the president, minister of justice, chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court, 10 judges, and six individuals outside the judiciary chosen by the president. The president serves as the president of the High Judicial Council, which is responsible for the appointment, transfer, promotion, and discipline of judges. The judiciary was not impartial and was perceived by some observers to be subject to influence and corruption.

### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, but authorities did not always respect legal provisions that protect defendants' rights. The law presumes defendants are innocent and have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney provided at public expense if necessary. Most trials are public, except when the judge determines the proceedings to be a threat to public order or "morals." The penal code guarantees defendants the right to free interpretation as necessary. Defendants have the right to be present during their trial but may be tried in absentia if they do not respond to a summons ordering their appearance.

Defendants may confront or question witnesses against them and present witnesses and evidence on their behalf. Defendants have the right not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt, and they have the right to appeal. The testimony of men and women has equal weight under the law.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

International and local observers alleged that authorities occasionally used antiterrorism laws and restrictive laws on freedom of expression and public assembly to detain political activists and outspoken critics of the government.

Intelligence services arrested journalist Said Chitour in 2017 and accused him of sharing intelligence with a foreign power. Authorities released Chitour in November 2018 after he received a 12-month suspended sentence.

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

The judiciary was not always independent or impartial in civil matters and lacked independence in some human rights cases. Family connections and status of the parties involved influenced decisions. Individuals may bring lawsuits, and administrative processes related to amnesty may provide damages to the victims or

their families for human rights violations and compensation for alleged wrongs. Individuals may appeal adverse decisions to international human rights bodies, but their decisions would not have the force of law.

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

The constitution provides for the protection of a person's "honor" and private life, including the privacy of home, communication, and correspondence. According to human rights activists, citizens widely believed the government conducted frequent electronic surveillance of a range of citizens, including political opponents, journalists, human rights groups, and suspected terrorists. Security officials reportedly searched homes without a warrant. Security forces conducted unannounced home visits.

In 2016 the government established an anticybercrime agency charged with coordinating anticybercrime efforts and engaging in preventive surveillance of electronic communications in the interests of national security. Falling under the purview of the Ministry of Justice, the agency has exclusive authority for monitoring all electronic surveillance activities, but the decree did not provide details regarding the limits of surveillance authority or corresponding protections for persons subject to surveillance. The Ministry of Justice stated the agency was subject to all existing judicial controls that apply to law enforcement agencies.

In June the government moved the anticybercrime agency from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of National Defense. A new decree allowed authorities to conduct domestic surveillance and required increased cooperation by internet and telephone providers with the Ministry of National Defense.

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

#### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press**

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and press, and independent media outlets regularly criticized and satirized government officials and policies, but the government on some occasions restricted these rights. The government's actions included harassment of some critics; arbitrary enforcement of vaguely worded laws; informal pressure on publishers, editors, advertisers, and journalists; and control of an estimated 77 percent of the country's advertising money in newspapers and magazines and 15 percent of billboard revenue and printing

capabilities. Some media figures alleged the government used its control over most printing houses and large amounts of public sector advertising preferentially, and that the lack of clear regulations over these practices permitted it to exert undue influence on press outlets.

Freedom of Expression: While public debate and criticism of the government were widespread, journalists and activists believed they were limited in their ability to criticize the government publicly on topics crossing unwritten “red lines.” Authorities arrested and detained citizens for expressing views deemed damaging to state officials and institutions, including the use of the Berber flag during protests, and citizens practiced self-restraint in expressing public criticism. The law criminalizing speech about security force conduct during the internal conflict of the 1990s remained in place, although the government said there had never been an arrest or prosecution under the law. A separate law provides for up to three years’ imprisonment for publications that “may harm the national interest” or up to one year for defaming or insulting the president, parliament, army, or state institutions. Government officials monitored political meetings.

During the year authorities charged approximately 200 protesters with either “undermining national unity,” “undermining the army’s morale,” and/or “participating in an unauthorized gathering,” including those who waved Berber flags during demonstrations. The government frequently arrested other protesters only to release them within hours. “Undermining national unity” carries a sentence of one to five years’ imprisonment, although prosecutors have requested up to 10 years’ imprisonment in some cases. In the vast majority of publicized cases, however, courts acquitted detainees or released them with reduced or suspended sentences or time served. Nadir Leftissi, was arrested for waving the Berber flag in Annaba on July 5, for “undermining national unity.” On August 8, after the prosecutor requested 10 years imprisonment and a 200,000-dinar fine (\$1,662), Leftissi was acquitted and released.

NGOs reported during the year that following suppression of public activities in years past, they no longer hold events outside of private locations. They also report that owners of public gathering spaces have been told not to rent their locations to certain NGOs.

Press and Media, Including Online Media: The National Agency for Publishing and Advertising (ANEP) controls public advertising for print media. According to the NGO Reporters without Borders, private advertising existed but frequently came from businesses with close links to the ruling political party. The ANEP

stated in September that it represented 77 percent of the total advertising market. Nongovernmental sources assessed the majority of daily newspapers depended on ANEP-authorized advertising to finance their operations. ANEP added it wished to preserve a pluralistic press and freedom of information and noted that it funded opposition newspapers. The government's lack of transparency over its use of state-funded advertising, however, permitted it to exert undue influence over print media.

Police arrested blogger Merzoug Touati in 2017 on charges stemming from his online publication of an interview with a former Israeli diplomat. In May 2018 a court sentenced him to 10 years in prison. In June 2018 an appeal trial reduced his sentence to seven years. On March 4, the second judgement was annulled, and he was retried in a court in Skikda, resulting in a two-year prison sentence and a three-year suspended sentence, allowing for his release.

Many civil society organizations, government opponents, and political parties had access to independent print and broadcast media and used them to express their views. Opposition parties also disseminated information via the internet and published communiques but stated they did not have access to the national television and radio. Journalists from independent print and broadcast media expressed frustration over the difficulty of receiving information from public officials. With the exception of several daily newspapers, the majority of print media outlets relied on the government for physical printing materials and operations.

Organizations wishing to initiate regular publications must obtain authorization from the government. The law requires the director of the publication to hold Algerian citizenship. The law additionally prohibits local periodicals from receiving direct or indirect material support from foreign sources.

In September the Ministry of Communication stated there were 265 accredited written publications. Of the daily printed publications, the ministry stated six were state-operated.

The ministry's Media Directorate is responsible for issuing and renewing accreditations to foreign media outlets operating in the country. Although this accreditation is required to operate legally, the vast majority of foreign media were not accredited. Regulations require the shareholders and managers of any radio or television channel to be citizens and prohibit them from broadcasting content that offends "values anchored in Algerian society."

The ministry also issues and renews accreditation of foreign correspondents reporting in the country. According to the ministry, there were 13 accredited foreign press agencies reported during the year. In addition, seven private domestic television channels, 13 foreign broadcasting channels, and one foreign radio station--the BBC--operated throughout the year.

The law mandates that online news outlets must inform the government of their activities but does not require them to request authorization to operate.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Some major news outlets faced direct and indirect retaliation for criticism of the government. Press outlets report taking extra caution before publishing articles critical of the government or government officials for fear of losing revenue from ANEP.

On June 12, authorities blocked access to the IP address for *Tout sur l'Algerie* (TSA), a news site, which had also been blocked in 2017. Authorities also blocked news websites *Algerie Part* and *Inter-Lignes* on June 15 and July 31, respectively. The day following the block on *Inter-Lignes*, former minister of communication, Hassan Rabehi, and former president of the National People's Congress, Karim Younes, denounced the blocking of TSA and *Inter-Lignes* websites and the pressure the government had placed on the media.

During a media interview, Omar Belhouchet, the editor of *El Watan*, an independent daily newspaper, said that media companies self-censor regarding certain topics. According to Belhouchet, the government has a monopoly on advertising that it uses to punish those who criticize the government.

Libel/Slander Laws: NGOs and observers criticized the law on defamation as vaguely drafted and said the definitions in the law failed to comport with internationally recognized norms. The law defines defamation as "any allegation or imputation of a fact offending the honor or consideration of a person, or of the body to which the fact is imputed." The law does not require that the fact alleged or imputed be false or that the statement be made with malicious intent to damage another individual's reputation. Defamation is not a crime but carries a fine ranging from 100,000 to 500,000 Algerian dinars (\$850 to \$4,252). The Ministry of Justice did not provide information on the percentage of defamation claims that originated from private citizens, as opposed to government officials. Defamation laws specify that former members of the military who make statements deemed to

have damaged the image of the military or to have “harmed the honor and respect due to state institutions” may face prosecution.

Printed editions of the monthly news magazine *Jeune Afrique* have not been available in the country since April 23. At the end of March, the distributor received a notification from the Ministry of Communication to stop importing *Jeune Afrique* and other titles published by Jeune Afrique Media Group (*The Africa Report* and *La Revue*). The ministry authorized the import of only 350 copies of *Jeune Afrique* for delivery to various institutions. *Jeune Afrique* online remained available.

The law criminalizes statements denigrating Islam or insulting the Prophet Muhammed or “messengers of God.”

### **Internet Freedom**

The government monitored certain email and social media sites.

Internet users regularly exercised their right to free expression and association online, including through online forums, social media, and email. Activists reported that some postings on social media could result in arrest and questioning; observers widely understood that the intelligence services closely monitored the activities of political and human rights activists on social media sites, including Facebook.

There was some disruption of communication prior to planned antigovernment demonstrations during the year, namely internet shutdowns, the blocking of access to certain online news sites and social media platforms, and the restricting or censorship of content. In March parts of the country experienced internet outages during a hirak protest. On September 14, internet access was also restricted in parts of the country during hirak protests.

The law on cybercrime establishes procedures for using electronic data in prosecutions and outlines the responsibilities of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to cooperate with authorities. Under the law, the government may conduct electronic surveillance to prevent terrorist or subversive acts and infractions against state security, pursuant to written authorization from a competent judicial authority.

By law ISPs face criminal penalties for the material and websites they host, especially if subject matters are “incompatible with morality or public opinion.” The Ministries of Justice, Interior, and Post, Information Technology, and Communication have oversight responsibilities. The law provides sentences of six months to five years in prison and fines between DZD 50,000 and DZD 500,000 (\$425 and \$4,252) for users who do not comply with the law, including the obligation to cooperate with law enforcement authorities against cybercrime.

On August 8, YouTube and several Google websites and services were blocked nationwide for several hours. This block immediately followed the online publication of a video in which former minister of defense, Khaled Nezzar, called on the army to “realize the demands of the people.”

For a third year, the government blocked access to social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter, for several days during nationwide high school examinations. The decision was in response to previous leaks of examination materials, which were posted on social media.

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

Academic seminars generally occurred with limited governmental interference. The Ministry of Culture reviewed the content of films before they could be shown, as well as books before importation. The Ministry of Religious Affairs did the same for all religious publications. The law gives the authorities broad power to ban books that run counter to the constitution, “the Muslim religion and other religions, national sovereignty and unity, the national identity and cultural values of society, national security and defense concerns, public order concerns, and the dignity of the human being and individual and collective rights.” It further prohibits books that “make apology for colonialism, terrorism, crime, and racism.”

A January 2017 prime minister’s decree clarified the process for the Ministry of Culture’s review of imported books, both in print and electronic form. According to the decree, importers must submit to the ministry the title, author’s name, editor’s name, edition, year, International Standard Book Number, and number of copies to be imported. Importers of books covering the “national movement and the Algerian Revolution” must submit the entire text of the books for review, including a secondary review by the Ministry of the Moudjahidine (Veterans of the Revolution). The Ministry of Culture can also require a full content review of books on other topics if it chooses. The ministry has 30 days to review the importation application; in the absence of a response after 30 days, the importer

may proceed with distribution of the publication. After making a determination, the ministry notifies the customs service of the decision to allow or ban the importation of the publication. Appeals may be made to the ministry, with no independent or judicial review provided for in the decree.

A 2017 decree established a commission within the Ministry of Religious Affairs to review imports of the Quran. This decree requires all applications to include a full copy of the text and other detailed information. The ministry has three to six months to review the text, with the absence of a response after that time constituting a rejection of the application. A separate 2017 decree covering religious texts other than the Quran stated, “The content of religious books for import, regardless of format, must not undermine the religious unity of society, the national religious reference, public order, good morals, fundamental rights and liberties, or the law.” The importer must submit the text and other information, and the ministry must respond within 30 days. A nonresponse after this period of time is considered a rejection. Religious texts distributed without authorization may be seized and destroyed.

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

Although the constitution provides for freedom of peaceful assembly and association, the government severely restricted the exercise of these rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly: The constitution provides for the right of peaceful assembly, but the government continued to curtail this right. A ban on demonstrations in Algiers remained in effect. Authorities utilized the ban to prohibit assembly within the city limits. Nationwide, the government required citizens and organizations to obtain permits from the national government-appointed local governor before holding public meetings or demonstrations. The government restricted licenses to political parties, NGOs, and other groups to hold indoor rallies or delayed permission until the eve of the event, thereby impeding publicity and outreach efforts by organizers.

The ongoing hirak protest movement, which began on February 22, consists of mass, peaceful protest marches taking place every Tuesday and Friday in many locations throughout the country. Hundreds of thousands of individuals have marched peacefully demanding political reforms. The marches occurred mostly without incident, although police at times used tear gas and water cannons as methods of crowd control.

Hotels in Algiers and other major cities continued their practice of refusing to sign rental contracts for meeting spaces with political parties, NGOs, and civil associations without a copy of written authorization from the Ministry of Interior for the proposed gathering. NGOs reported instances of not receiving the written authorization in time to hold planned meetings. NGOs reported that the government threatened hotel and restaurant owners with penalties if they rented rooms to NGOs without official authorization. In most cases, the NGOs continued to hold their meetings and police came to the hotels to end the gatherings.

In July, the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH) and 15 representatives from other NGOs gathered at a hotel in Oran to discuss migration. Security services prevented the meeting from taking place “in the absence of an official authorization.” The attendees moved their meetings elsewhere and were followed by police who ordered them to disperse.

Throughout the year police dispersed unauthorized gatherings or prevented marching groups of protesters from demonstrating. Police typically dispersed protesters shortly after a protest began and arrested and detained organizers for a few hours. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and other NGOs criticized the government’s use of the law to restrict peaceful assembly.

In September a group of military veterans organized a protest in Algiers, prompting a crackdown by authorities. Press reported 107 protestors were injured along with 51 police and gendarmes.

Freedom of Association: The constitution provides for the right of association, but the government restricted this right.

The law’s extensive requirements and uneven enforcement served as major impediments to the development of civil society. The law grants the government wide-ranging oversight of and influence in the day-to-day activities of civil society organizations. It requires national-level civil organizations to apply to the Ministry of Interior for permission to operate. Once registered, organizations must inform the government of their activities, funding sources, and personnel, including notification of personnel changes. The law imposes an additional requirement that associations obtain government preapproval before accepting foreign funds. If organizations fail to provide required information to the government or attempt to operate with or accept foreign funds without authorization, they are subject to fines between DZD 2,000 and DZD 5,000 (\$17 and \$43) and up to six months’ imprisonment.

According to the law, associations that apply for accreditation are entitled to receive a response within two months for national organizations, 45 days for interregional-level associations, 40 days for province-level associations, and 30 days for communal organizations. While the Ministry of Interior oversees the accreditation process for most associations, the president of a local assembly approves applications for communal associations.

The Ministry of Interior may deny a license to or dissolve any group regarded as a threat to the government's authority or to public order, and on several occasions failed to grant, in an expeditious fashion, official recognition to NGOs, associations, religious groups, and political parties. According to the ministry, organizations receive a receipt after submitting their application for accreditation, and after the time periods listed above, this slip is legally sufficient for them to begin operating, to open a bank account, and to rent office or event space. The law does not explicitly include this provision. If the application is approved, the ministry issues a final accreditation document.

Many organizations reported that they never received a deposit slip and that even with the receipt; it was difficult to conduct necessary administrative tasks without formal accreditation. Other organizations reported they never received any written response to their application request even after calling the ministry and trying to register at local police stations. The ministry maintained that organizations that were refused accreditation or that did not receive a response within the specified time period could appeal to the State Council, the administrative court responsible for cases involving the government.

The ministry did not renew the accreditations of the NGOs SOS Disparus (SOS Disappeared), Djazairouna, the LADDH, the National Association for the Fight against Corruption, and the Youth Action Movement, all of which submitted their renewal applications in prior years.

The government issued licenses and subsidies to domestic associations, especially youth, medical, and neighborhood associations. According to the Ministry of Interior, there were 109,000 local and 1,532 national associations registered as of September, including 628 registered since January. Unlicensed NGOs remained active, but rarely received government assistance, and citizens at times hesitated to associate with these organizations.

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

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

#### **d. Freedom of Movement**

The constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government restricted the exercise of these rights.

The government generally cooperated with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

In-country Movement: The constitution provides citizens “the right to freely choose their place of residence and to move throughout the national territory.” The government requires that foreign diplomats and private sector personnel have armed security escorts from the government should members of these groups travel outside of Algiers wilaya (province), El-Oued, and Illizi, near hydrocarbon industry installations and the Libyan border, respectively. Citing the threat of terrorism, the government also prevented overland tourist travel between the southern cities of Tamanrasset, Djanet, and Illizi. Newspapers reported that the government restricted foreign tourists from traveling through trails in Tassili and Hoggar, as well as certain areas in and around Tamanrasset, due to security concerns.

Foreign Travel: The constitution states that the right to enter and exit the country is provided to citizens. The law does not permit those under age 18 to travel abroad without a guardian's permission. Married women under 18 may not travel abroad without permission from their husbands, but married women older than 18 may do so. The government did not permit young men eligible for the draft who had not completed their military service to leave the country without special authorization. The government granted such authorization to students and persons with special family circumstances.

#### **e. Internally Displaced Persons**

Not applicable

#### **f. Protection of Refugees**

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: In June the Associated Press (AP) reported that the government had forced an estimated 13,000 migrants over the previous 14 months to walk from Guezzam, Algeria, to Assamakka, Niger, as part of the repatriation process. According to AP reports, some migrants died during the 20-kilometer desert march.

According to UNHCR's March report on Sahrawi refugees in Tindouf, the government protected a significant number of refugees in five large refugee camps in Tindouf and ran two other smaller camps near Tindouf, one surrounding a women's boarding school and another used for administrative purposes. The government also protected a smaller urban refugee population, primarily in Algiers. The report noted the refugee population included predominantly Syrians, (an estimated 85 percent), as well as Yemenis, Congolese, Ivoirians, Palestinians, Malians, Central Africans, and other nationalities. UNHCR, the World Food Program (WFP), UNICEF, the Algerian Red Crescent, the Sahrawi Red Crescent, and other organizations assisted Sahrawi refugees.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported in July that officials were deporting an estimated average of 1,000 migrants to Niger per month. International organizations reported that authorities continued to leave deportees at the Algerian/Niger border near Guezzam, Algeria or Assamakka, Niger, where migrants were forced to walk 250 km (155 miles) to the nearest town of Agadez.

There were reports that during government roundup operations of suspected migrants, some of those detained were raped, suffered sexual harassment, or both and that unaccompanied minors were sometimes rounded up and taken to the border for expulsion. Similarly, a diplomat from Burkina Faso was reported to have been rounded up and sent to the Nigerien border.

Refoulement: The government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Since the outbreak of violence in northern Mali in 2012, international observers reported an influx of individuals into the country across the Malian border inconsistent with traditional migratory movements. During the year the government deported migrants to Mali. Unlike in previous years, the government expelled some Syrians who the government claimed had been combatants in Syria's civil war and were involved in networks assisting other

Syrians to relocate to Algeria. These Syrians, as well as Yemeni and other nationals, were deported to Niger according to press reports.

According to the IOM, the government repatriated 5,348 migrants to Niger and deported 6,090 migrants to Niger, for a total of 11,438 from January to July, pursuant to a bilateral agreement at the request of the Nigerien government. Various international humanitarian organizations and observers criticized the operations, citing unacceptable conditions of transport, primarily on the Niger side of the border, and what they described as a lack of coordination among the Algerian Red Crescent, the government of Niger, and the Red Cross of Niger. The National Human Rights Committee (CNDH) stated the government had dedicated \$12 million to ensure the human rights of migrants during repatriation operations (to include accommodation, food, clothing, health care, medicines, and transportation). The repatriations were conducted in coordination with consular officials from the countries of origin of the migrants, but the migrants were not permitted to challenge their removal. The government stated that it maintained a policy of not removing migrants registered with UNHCR, and that in a few cases it worked with UNHCR to return registered refugees who were mistakenly removed. Air Algerie signed an agreement with the IOM agreeing to provide charter flights for humanitarian supplies and migrants returning voluntarily.

The Ministry of Interior reported in March to a Senate session that approximately 500 illegal migrants try to enter the country daily along the country's southern borders.

Access to Asylum: While the law provides generally for asylum or refugee status, the government has not established a formal system through which refugees can request asylum. There were no reports that the government granted refugee status and asylum to new refugee applicants during the year. According to UNHCR, the government did not accept UNHCR-determined refugee status for individuals. UNHCR offices in Algiers reported an estimated 200 to 300 asylum requests per month, mostly from Syrian, Palestinian, and sub-Saharan African individuals coming from Mali, Guinea, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Those determined by UNHCR to have valid refugee claims were primarily from the DRC, Cote d'Ivoire, Iraq, and the Central African Republic. There was no evidence of any pattern of discrimination toward asylum applicants, but the lack of a formal asylum system made this difficult to assess.

UNHCR registered more than 10,000 Syrians, but fewer than 7,000 remained registered with UNHCR as of September. The Algerian Red Crescent, which is subordinate to the Ministry of Solidarity, maintained “welcome facilities” that provided food and shelter for those Syrians without means to support themselves. The facilities were located in Sidi Fredj. The government did not grant UNHCR access to these reception centers but reported that by 2016 most Syrians no longer used the centers.

Employment: The government does not formally allow refugee employment; however, many worked in the informal market and were at risk of labor exploitation due to their lack of legal status in the country. Other migrants, asylum seekers, and Malians and Syrians who had a “special status” with the government, relied largely on remittances from family, the support of local family and acquaintances, and assistance from the Algerian Red Crescent and international aid organizations.

Access to Basic Services: UNHCR provided registered refugees with modest food assistance and lodging support. Sahrawi refugees lived predominantly in five camps near the city of Tindouf, administered by the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario). The Polisario (through the Sahrawi Red Crescent Society), UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, and partner NGOs provided basic services including food aid, primary health care, and primary and secondary education, while the government invested heavily in developing the camps’ infrastructure and also provided free secondary and university educations, as well as advanced hospital care, to Sahrawi refugees. The remote location of the camps and lack of government presence resulted in a lack of access by police and courts. Other refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants had access to free public hospitals, but independent NGOs reported instances of migrants turned away.

School administrators must allow migrant and refugee children to enroll in primary school through high school and require only that they present their passport and documentation showing their level of schooling from their home country. International organizations reported some children had trouble in their attempts to integrate into the educational system but that migrants’ access to education was improving, particularly in the north of the country. These organizations reported that migrant parents were often reluctant to enroll their children in Algerian schools due to language barriers or cultural differences. NGOs also indicated that some migrants were denied treatment at healthcare facilities.

Durable Solutions: The government did not accept refugees from foreign countries for resettlement. The Sahrawi refugees had not sought local integration or naturalization during their 40-year stay in the refugee camps near Tindouf, and the Polisario Front continued to call for a referendum on independence in Western Sahara. The IOM leads an “Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration” program to help migrants return to their homes willingly with economic and social support, including personalized professional training and other socioeconomic assistance. Although the government is not a financial donor to the initiative, they do cooperate.

Temporary Protection: The law does not address formal temporary protection, but authorities provided informal, temporary protection to groups such as Syrians, 7,000 registered as of September, and Malians.

### **g. Stateless Persons**

Not applicable.

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

The constitution provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. Restrictions on freedom of assembly and association as well as restrictions on political party activities inhibited the activity of opposition groups.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

The law states that members of local, provincial, and national assemblies are elected for five-year terms and that presidential elections occur within 30 days prior to the expiration of the presidential term. Presidential term limits, which were eliminated in 2008, were reintroduced in a 2016 revision of the constitution and limit the president to two five-year terms. The Ministry of Interior is responsible for organizing the election and voting processes. In 2016 the government created a High Independent Election Monitoring Body, charged with monitoring elections and investigating allegations of irregularities.

Recent Elections: The country’s held presidential elections on December 12, after two previous failed attempts. Former prime minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune was elected with 58 percent of the vote, meeting the majority needed to avoid holding a second round. The National Independent Authority for Elections reported that 40

percent of approximately 24 million voting-eligible citizens participated. Tebboune was sworn in as president on December 19. There were no international observers.

The 2017 elections for the lower chamber of parliament did not result in significant changes in the composition of the government. The government allowed international observation of the elections but did not permit local civil society organizations to do the same. Most major opposition parties lost seats in the elections, and several parties claimed the results were significantly altered by fraud. Foreign observers from the African Union, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Arab League characterized the elections as largely well organized and conducted without significant problems on election day. Local media outlets reported that a team of European Union elections experts provided the government a report noting a lack of transparency in vote counting procedures, but the report was not made public. In 2017 Algerian National Front party leader Moussa Touati stated that his party paid bribes in order to secure its single seat in parliament. Several opposition political parties claimed voter turnout figures were inflated and that the results were fraudulent.

The law does not place significant restrictions on voter registration, but observers claimed that implementation of voter registration and identification laws proved inconsistent and confusing during past elections.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The Ministry of Interior must approve political parties before they may operate legally.

The government maintained undue media influence and opposition political parties claimed they did not have access to public television and radio. Sometimes security forces dispersed political opposition rallies and interfered with the right to organize. During popular protests against the government, security forces sometimes dispersed demonstrations when protesters came near to government buildings.

Pursuant to the constitution, all parties must have a “national base.” The electoral law adopted by parliament in 2016 requires parties to have received 4 percent of the vote in the preceding election or to collect 250 signatures in the electoral district in order to appear on the ballot. Opposition parties from across the political spectrum criticized the new law for creating a more complex process for qualifying for the ballot, as well as for establishing an electoral monitoring body whose

members would be appointed by the president and parliament, which is controlled by a coalition headed by the president's party.

The law prohibits parties based on religion, ethnicity, gender, language, or region, but there were various political parties commonly known to be Islamist, notably members of the Green Alliance. According to the Ministry of Interior, in September there were 70 registered political parties, unchanged from 2018. The ministry reported 14 parties applied for registration during the year, and the ministry approved four requests. Parties must hold a party congress to elect a party leader and confirm membership before the Ministry of Interior will count them as a registered party. The ministry explained that though it approved new parties, these organizations did not hold their congresses yet.

The law does not place significant restrictions on voter registration.

Membership in the Islamic Salvation Front, a political party banned since 1992, remained illegal. The law also bans political party ties to nonpolitical associations and regulates party financing and reporting requirements. According to the law, political parties may not receive direct or indirect financial or material support from any foreign parties. The law also stipulates the collection of resources from domestic contributions by the party's members, donations, and revenue from its activities, in addition to possible state funding, must be reported to the Ministry of Interior.

Opposition party leaders complained that the government did not provide timely authorizations to hold rallies or party congresses.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws limit the participation of women and members of minorities in the political process, and women and minorities did participate. The law requires parties to ensure that at least 30 percent of the candidates on their electoral lists are women.

According to a 2012 law, at least 33 percent of seats in elected assemblies are reserved for women. Due to this law, after the legislative elections of 2012, the proportion of women in the National People's Assembly (APN) increased from 8 percent to 32 percent of seats (146 out of 462). The 2017 legislative elections, however, resulted in women holding only 26 percent of seats in the APN, despite the quota.

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

The law provides for criminal penalties of two to 10 years in prison for official corruption, but the government did not fully implement the law. Corruption remained a problem, and officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

Corruption: The criminal code stipulates that only the board of directors of the institution concerned may initiate charges related to theft, embezzlement, or loss of public and private funds against senior, public sector “economic managers.” Critics of the law asserted that by permitting only senior officials of state businesses to initiate investigations, the law protects high-level government corruption and promotes impunity.

Corruption throughout the government stemmed largely from a lack of transparent oversight. The National Association for the Fight against Corruption noted the existence of an effective anticorruption law but stated that the government lacked the “political will” to apply the law.

Between April and June, authorities arrested at least 34 former government officials and wealthy businessmen on charges of corruption. In April authorities arrested then president Bouteflika’s brother, Said Bouteflika for “undermining authority and conspiring against the state.” In June authorities arrested former prime ministers Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal, the highest-level officials to be arrested since Bouteflika’s resignation. Ouyahia faced charges of “abuse of official position and illegal authorizations of public funds.” Sellal was charged with “abuse of public funds,” “abuse of power,” and “illegal favoritism.” In August authorities arrested former minister of justice, Tayeb Louh, for various tactics used to protect high-level officials and powerful businessmen, often in the president’s circle, from corruption charges. Corruption cases in the private sector began with the arrest of Ali Haddad, chief executive officer (CEO) of the ETRHB Group, who was detained in March while attempting to cross the Tunisian border with undeclared currency and two passports. In June a court in Algiers sentenced Haddad to six months in prison and a fine of 50,000 dinars (\$418). In April the CEO of the Cevital Group, Issad Rebrab, as well as Kouninef brothers Reda, Abdelkader Karim, Noah, and Tarek faced charges such as using “insider influence to obtain undue advantages and misappropriation of real estate” and receiving unwarranted tax and custom breaks.

Financial Disclosure: The law stipulates that all elected government officials and those appointed by presidential decree must declare their assets the month they

commence their jobs, if there is substantial change in their wealth while they are in office, and at the end of their term. Few government officials made their personal wealth public, and there was no known enforcement of the law.

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

A variety of domestic human rights groups operated with varying degrees of government restriction and cooperation. The law requires all civil associations to apply for operating permission, and at year's end several major civil associations remained unrecognized but tolerated.

Amnesty International maintained an office and actively reported on human rights issues, but it did not receive official authorization to operate from the Ministry of Interior. Amnesty International has received authorization to open a bank account, although the organization awaits final documentation from the government to open the account.

Although the government did not renew the accreditation of LADDH, the organization had members countrywide, received independent funding, and was one of the most active independent human rights groups. The Algerian League for Human Rights, a separate but licensed organization based in Constantine, had members throughout the country monitoring individual cases.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: The government extended an invitation to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in 2014 and again in 2015, but no visit occurred. The country joined the Human Rights Council in 2014 but continued to deny requests for visits from the UN special rapporteurs on extrajudicial executions (pending since 1998) and counterterrorism and human rights (pending since 2006), the UN Working Group on arbitrary detention (pending since 2009), and the UN Security Council Mali Panel of Experts on Sanctions (since 2016).

Government Human Rights Bodies: In 2016 the government replaced the National Consultative Commission for Promotion and Protection of Human Rights with the National Human Rights Council (CNDH). The CNDH has budget autonomy and the constitutional responsibility to investigate alleged human rights abuses, officially comment on laws proposed by the government, and publish an annual report. The CNDH completed its first annual report in November and presented it to then Interim President Abdelkader Bensalah but has not published the report to

the public yet. The previous entity had presented its first draft report to President Bouteflika, but the report had not been made public by year's end. During the year, the CNDH organized seminars and workshops on topics such as penitentiary reform and trafficking in persons. The CNDH reports receiving 687 complaints of human rights abuses during the year, of which it has investigated 638 as of September. A CNDH representative said the organization viewed the most serious human rights concerns as limits on socioeconomic rights, as well as limits on free speech.

The government also maintained cooperation with the Algerian Red Crescent Society, a local humanitarian volunteer organization officially recognized by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The local group collaborates with the Ministry of Health, providing medical assistance and analyses to vulnerable groups, including refugees and migrants. The Algerian Red Crescent also promotes tolerance via cultural events supporting migrants, such as Christmas-related events, work to protect vulnerable children, and distribution of food and supplies for education and sanitation.

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

### **Women**

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape but does not specifically address spousal rape. Prison sentences for rape range from five to 10 years, and, although sex crimes are rarely reported owing to cultural norms, authorities generally enforced the law. A provision of the penal code allows an adult accused of "corruption of a minor" to avoid prosecution if the accused subsequently marries his or her victim and if the crime did not involve violence, threats, or fraud.

Domestic violence remains a society-wide problem. The law states that a person claiming domestic abuse must visit a "forensic physician" for an examination to document injuries and that the physician must determine that the injuries suffered "incapacitated" the victim for 15 days. The law prescribes up to a 20-year imprisonment for the accused, depending on the severity of injuries. If domestic violence results in death, a judge may impose a life sentence.

For the first quarter of the year, the Ministry for National Solidarity, Family, and Women reported that there were 1,734 logged cases of violence against women. According to statistics from women's advocacy groups published in the local

press, between 100 and 200 women died each year from domestic violence. The government maintained two regional women's shelters and plans to open two additional shelters in Annaba by the end of the year. These shelters assisted with approximately 300 cases of violence against women during the year. The Information and Documentation Center on the Rights of Children and Women, a network of local organizations that promoted the rights of women, managed call centers in 15 provinces.

On August 8, a man killed his wife at the home of her parents following a marital dispute. The victim, a teacher and mother of three, was found by her family and transported to the local hospital, where she died from severe blood loss. The husband was arrested and placed in pretrial detention pending his appearance in court.

During the year a women's advocacy group, the Wassila Network, received 200 cases of domestic violence. The Wassila Network noted this number is a fraction of actual cases since victims of domestic violence rarely report the abuse to authorities and because of a forgiveness clause provided in the legal code. The clause stipulates that, if the victim forgives his or her aggressor, legal action ceases. The Wassila Network described situations in which a victim goes to police to report a domestic violence incident and family members convince the victim to forgive the aggressor, resulting in no charges.

The law provides for sentences of one to 20 years' imprisonment for domestic violence and six months to two years' incarceration for men who withhold property or financial resources from their spouses.

In February 2018 the Ministry for National Solidarity, Family, and Women and UN Women launched an administrative database, named AMANE, to collect information on violence against women. They were working to translate the database into Arabic. UN Women is using the information collected to assist the government in developing targeted programs to support and protect women in vulnerable situations, including violence, as part of one of its programs funded by the Belgian Government.

Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C): This was not generally practiced in the country but was widely present among immigrant communities in southern sectors, particularly among Sub-Saharan African migrant groups. While this abuse is considered a criminal offense punishable by up to 25 years in prison, there were

no reports of any related convictions, nor any official pronouncements by religious or secular leaders proscribing the practice.

Sexual Harassment: The punishment for sexual harassment is one to two years' imprisonment and a fine of dinars 50,000 to 100,000 (\$425 to \$850); the punishment doubles for a second offense. Women's groups reported that the majority of reported cases of harassment occurred in the workplace.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: Although the constitution provides for gender equality, aspects of the law and traditional social practices discriminated against women. In addition, some religious elements advocated restrictions on women's behavior, including freedom of movement. The law prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims, although authorities did not always enforce this provision.

Women may seek divorce for irreconcilable differences and violation of a prenuptial agreement. In a divorce, the law provides for the wife to retain the family's home until the children reach age 18. Authorities normally awarded custody of children to the mother, but she may not make decisions about education or take the children out of the country without the father's authorization. The government provided a subsidy for divorced women whose former husbands failed to make child support payments.

The law affirms the religiously based practice of allowing a man to marry as many as four wives. The law permits polygamy only upon the agreement of the previous and future wife, and the determination of a judge as to the husband's financial ability to support an additional wife. It was unclear whether authorities followed the law in all cases since local authorities had significant discretion and the government did not maintain nationwide statistics.

Women suffered from discrimination in inheritance claims and were entitled to a smaller portion of an estate than male children or a deceased husband's brothers. Women did not often have exclusive control over assets that they brought to a marriage or that they earned.

Women may own businesses, enter into contracts, and pursue careers similar to those of men. Women enjoyed rights equal to those of men concerning property ownership, and property titles listed female landowners' names.

## Children

Birth registration: The mother or father may transmit citizenship and nationality. By law, children born to a Muslim father are Muslim, regardless of the mother's religion. The law does not differentiate between girls and boys in registration of birth.

Child Abuse: Child abuse was illegal but was a serious continued problem. The government devoted increasing resources and attention to it. A national committee is responsible for monitoring and publishing an annual report on the rights of children. The government supported the Qatari NGO Network for the Defense of Children's Rights.

Laws prohibiting parental abduction do not penalize mothers and fathers differently, and the punishment for convicted kidnappers includes the death penalty.

Early and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age of marriage is 19 for both men and women, but minors may marry with parental consent, regardless of gender. The law forbids legal guardians from forcing minors under their care to marry against the minor's will. The Ministry of Religious Affairs required that couples present a government-issued marriage certificate before permitting imams to conduct religious marriage ceremonies.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits solicitation for prostitution and stipulates prison sentences of between 10 and 20 years when the offense is committed against a minor under age 18. By law the age for consensual sex is 16. The law stipulates a prison sentence of between 10 and 20 years for rape when the victim is a minor.

The law established a national council to address children's issues, gives judges authority to remove children from an abusive home, and allows sexually abused children to provide testimony on video rather than in court.

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

## **Anti-Semitism**

The country's Jewish population numbered fewer than 200 persons.

Religious and civil society leaders reported that the Jewish community faced unofficial, religion-based obstacles to government employment and administrative difficulties when working with government bureaucracy.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

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

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities, although the government did not always effectively enforce these provisions (see also section 7, Worker Rights).

The Ministry of National Solidarity, Family, and the Status of Women provided some financial support to health-care-oriented NGOs, but for many NGOs, such financial support represented a small fraction of their budgets. The government provided disability benefits to persons with disabilities who registered.

The Ministry of National Solidarity, Family, and Women reported that it ran 238 centers throughout the country that provided support for persons with intellectual, auditory, vision, and physical disabilities--down from 242 the previous year.

The ministry stated that it worked with the Ministry of Education to integrate children with disabilities into public schools to promote inclusion. The majority of the ministry's programs for children with disabilities remained in social centers for children with disabilities rather than in formal educational institutions. Advocacy groups reported that children with disabilities rarely attended school past the secondary level. Many schools lacked teachers trained to work with children with disabilities, threatening the viability of efforts to mainstream children with disabilities into public schools.

Many persons with disabilities faced challenges in voting due to voting centers that lacked accessible features.

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

The law criminalizes public indecency and consensual same-sex sexual relations between adult men or women, with penalties that include imprisonment of six months to three years and a fine of dinars 1,000 to dinars 10,000 (\$8.50 to \$85). The law also stipulates penalties that include imprisonment of two months to two years and fines of dinars 500 to dinars 2,000 (\$4.25 to \$17) for anyone convicted of having committed a “homosexual act.” If a minor is involved, the adult may face up to three years’ imprisonment and a fine of dinars 10,000 (\$85). LGBTI activists reported that the vague wording of laws criminalizing “homosexual acts” and “acts against nature” permitted sweeping accusations that resulted in multiple arrests for consensual same-sex sexual relations, but no known prosecutions during the year.

LGBTI status is not, in itself, criminalized; however, LGBTI persons may face criminal prosecution under legal provisions concerning prostitution, public indecency, and associating with bad characters. NGOs reported that judges gave harsher sentences to LGBTI persons for the above crimes compared to non-LGBTI persons. An NGO reported that LGBTI men were targeted more often than women.

The law does not extend antidiscrimination protections to LGBTI persons based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. Officials assert that the law covers LGBTI individuals through general civil and human rights legislation. Government officials did not take measures specifically to prevent discrimination against LGBTI persons. LGBTI persons faced discrimination in accessing health services such as longer wait times, refusal of treatment, and shaming. Some organizations maintained a list of “LGBTI-friendly” hospitals, and several NGOs operated mobile clinics specifically for vulnerable communities. NGOs reported that employers refused jobs to LGBTI persons, particularly men perceived as effeminate. Community members said that obtaining legal assistance was also a challenge due to similar discrimination.

On February 10, a medical student who had previously shared his LGBTI status on Facebook was killed in his university residence. Alouen, an LGBTI activist group, called the attack a “homophobic hate crime,” because the two assailants, reportedly peers of the victim, wrote “He is gay” on the crime scene wall in the victims’ blood. The incident sparked a protest of several hundred students as well as

criticism from the media and civil society groups regarding both homophobia and security on university campuses.

Members of the LGBTI community reported that forced marriage was a problem, particularly for lesbian women.

During the year authorities blocked LGBTI NGOs from organizing meetings. The NGOs reported harassment and threats of imprisonment by government authorities.

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

Strong social stigma towards the vulnerable groups in which HIV/AIDS was most concentrated--commercial sex workers, men who have sexual relations with men, and drug users--deterred testing of these groups. The government said it did not take measures to specifically prevent and treat HIV/AIDS in the LGBTI community.

The government's National AIDS Committee met twice during the year. The committee brought together various government and civil society actors to discuss implementation of the national strategy to combat HIV/AIDS.

### **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

Academics and activists said that sub-Saharan African migrants sometimes faced discrimination and that there were tensions in some communities between the native and migrant populations.

On February 5, a 22-year-old Zimbabwean student was stabbed and killed, sparking a protest by dozens of sub-Saharan students demanding justice. The students told reporters that foreign students regularly face aggression and assault from local citizens.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

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

The constitution provides workers with the right to join and form unions of their choice, provided they are citizens. The country has ratified the International Labor Organization's (ILO) conventions on freedom of association and collective

bargaining but failed to enact legislation needed to implement these conventions fully.

The law requires that workers obtain government approval to form a union, and the Ministry of Labor must approve or disapprove a union application within 30 days. To found a union, an applicant must be Algerian by birth or have held Algerian nationality for 10 years. The law also provides for the creation of independent unions, although the union's membership must account for at least 20 percent of an enterprise's workforce. Unions have the right to form and join federations or confederations, and the government recognized four confederations. Unions may recruit members at the workplace. The law prohibits discrimination by employers against union members and organizers and provides mechanisms for resolving trade union complaints of antiunion practices by employers.

The law permits unions to affiliate with international labor bodies and develop relations with foreign labor groups. For example, the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA), which represented a majority of public-sector workers, is an affiliate of the International Trade Union Confederation. Nevertheless, the law prohibits unions from associating with political parties and receiving funds from foreign sources. The courts are empowered to dissolve unions that engage in illegal activities. The government may invalidate a union's legal status if authorities perceive its objectives to be contrary to the established institutional system, public order, good morals, law, or regulations in force.

The law provides for collective bargaining by all unions, and the government permitted the exercise of this right for authorized unions. Nevertheless, the UGTA remained the only union authorized to negotiate collective bargaining agreements.

The law provides for the right to strike, and workers exercised this right, subject to conditions. Striking requires a secret ballot of the whole workforce. The decision to strike must be approved by majority vote of workers at a general meeting. The government may restrict strikes on a number of grounds, including economic crisis, obstruction of public services, or the possibility of subversive actions. Furthermore, all public demonstrations, including protests and strikes, must receive prior government authorization. By law workers may strike only after 14 days of mandatory conciliation or mediation. The government occasionally offered to mediate disputes. The law states that decisions reached in mediation are binding on both parties. If mediation does not lead to an agreement, workers may strike legally after they vote by secret ballot to do so. The law requires that a minimum level of essential public services must be maintained during public-sector service

strikes, and the government has broad legal authority to requisition public employees. The list of essential services included banking, radio, and television. Penalties for unlawful work stoppages range from eight days to two months' imprisonment. The law protects union members from discrimination or dismissal based on their union activities. Penalties for violations of the rights of union members are not sufficient to deter violations. The law says any firing or other employment action based on discrimination against union members is invalid. The government did not effectively enforce these laws.

The government affirmed there were 81 registered trade unions and employers' organizations, down from 101 in 2018. The government registered 21 new trade unions between January and September, for a net loss of 20 trade unions, likely due to mergers and smaller unions losing members. The government did not approve an application from the Confederation of Autonomous Unions, a group of 13 autonomous unions, to operate as one union. The National Council of Algerian Journalists received accreditation from the Ministry of Labor in July. Many trade unions remained unrecognized by the government; they identified delayed processing and administrative hurdles imposed by the government as the primary obstacles to establishing legal status. In May the government hosted a visit from an ILO High-Level Mission to explore adherence to Convention 87, the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize. The ILO mission met with the Ministry of Labor and some unions. In 2017 the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations reiterated that the lengthy registration process seriously impedes the establishment of new unions.

Attempts by new unions to form federations or confederations suffered similar challenges. Representatives of the National Autonomous Union for Public Administration Personnel (SNAPAP) stated that the union continued to function without official status.

The government continued to deny recognition to the General Autonomous Confederation of Workers in Algeria (CGATA), an independent trade union confederation that includes public and economic sector unions and committees. CGATA membership included workers from unions representing government administrators, diplomatic personnel, state electricity and gas employees, university professors, public transport and postal workers, and lawyers. The confederation also included migrants working in the country.

SNAPAP and other independent unions faced government interference throughout the year, including official obstruction of general assembly meetings and police

harassment during sit-in protests. Furthermore, the government restricted union activities and the formation of independent unions in certain critical public services sectors, such as oil and gas and telecommunications. The International Trade Union Confederation reported that judicial persecution of trade union leaders had intensified.

The Committee on the Application of Standards at the International Labor Conference again reviewed the country's adherence to Convention 87 in June. The committee issued a number of recommendations to encourage the country to continue to promote freedom of association and organizing rights. In June the committee requested the government to reinstate employees that the committee determined were fired based on antiunion discrimination and to process expeditiously pending trade union registration applications.

There were several strikes launched in reaction to the government's refusal to extend official recognition to fledgling new unions and its practice of engaging only with the UGTA.

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

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. NGOs reported that irregular migrants sometimes worked in forced labor and that their lack of work permits made them more vulnerable to exploitation. For example, female migrants were subjected to debt bondage as they worked to repay smuggling debts through domestic servitude, forced begging, and forced prostitution. Designated penalties under this statute were sufficiently stringent to deter violations. Construction workers and domestic workers were reportedly vulnerable. The government did not effectively enforce the law.

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

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

The law prohibits employment by minors in dangerous, unhealthy, or harmful work or in work considered inappropriate because of social and religious considerations, yet the country has not determined by national law or regulation the types of work that are hazardous for children. The country does not bar all of the worst forms of child labor. Under the law there is no legislative provision prohibiting the use, procuring, or offering of a child under 18 years of age for the

production and trafficking of drugs. The minimum legal age for employment is 16, but younger children may work as apprentices with permission from their parents or legal guardian. The law prohibits workers under age 19 from working at night. The ILO noted, however, that the country's standard of "night" for children is only eight hours, less than the 11 hours recommended by the ILO.

Although specific data was unavailable, children reportedly worked mostly in the informal sales market, often in family businesses. There were isolated reports that children were subjected to commercial sexual exploitation. From January 1 to July 13, the national Body for the Protection and Promotion of Childhood received 760 reports of violations of the rights of children, which focused on economic exploitation and begging, along with abuse, violence, and abandonment.

The Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcing child labor laws and refers violators to the Ministry of Justice for prosecution. There is no single office charged with this task, but all labor inspectors are responsible for enforcing laws regarding child labor. The Ministry of Labor conducted inspections and, in some cases, investigated companies suspected of hiring underage workers. From March 18 until April 8, the ministry's Labor Inspector Service conducted inspections into child labor of 9,748 business--down from 11,575 businesses the previous year. It reported the discovery of four minors--down from 12 the year before. The law for the protection of the child criminalizes anyone who economically exploits a child with; the penalties are neither sufficiently stringent nor commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes. Monitoring and enforcement practices for child labor were ineffective and hampered by an insufficient number of inspectors to examine the formal and informal economy.

The Ministry of National Solidarity, Family, and Women leads a national committee composed of 12 ministries and NGOs that meets yearly to discuss child labor issues. The committee was empowered to propose measures and laws to address child labor as well as conduct awareness campaigns.

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

The law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment, salary, and work environment based on age, gender, social and marital status, family links, political conviction, disability, national origin, and affiliation with a union.

Women reported facing employment discrimination with job offers being extended to less qualified male applicants. Leaders of women's organizations reported that

discrimination was common, and women were less likely to receive equal pay for equal work or promotions.

Few businesses abided by the law requiring that they reserve 1 percent of jobs for persons with disabilities. NGOs reported that the government did not enforce payment of fines for failing to abide by the law. As of September the Ministry of Labor audited 160,218 organizations and found that 2,389 companies did not respect the 1-percent quota. The government gave 89 organizations formal notices to abide by the law. The ministry has not confirmed receipt of fine payment.

The law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination with respect to employment based on sexual orientation, HIV-positive status, or religion. The government did not adequately enforce the law, since discrimination reportedly existed, specifically against migrant workers in the informal economy who lacked a legal means to address unfair working conditions.

Men held a large percentage of positions of authority in government and the private sector. NGOs reported instances in which unaccompanied migrant female youth were exploited as domestic workers and were known to be loaned out to families for extended periods to work in homes or exploited as prostitutes.

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

A tripartite social pact among business, government, and the official union established a national, monthly minimum wage which is above the poverty income level.

The standard workweek was 40 hours, including one hour for lunch per day. Half of the lunch hour is considered compensated working time. Employees who worked longer than the standard workweek received premium pay on a sliding scale from time-and-a-half to double time, depending on whether the overtime occurred on a normal workday, a weekend, or a holiday.

The law contains occupational health and safety standards that were not fully enforced. There were no known reports of workers dismissed for removing themselves from hazardous working conditions. If workers face such conditions, they may renegotiate their contract or, failing that, resort to the courts. While this legal mechanism exists, the high demand for employment in the country gave an advantage to employers seeking to exploit employees. Labor standards do not formally allow refugee employment or adequately cover migrant laborers;

therefore, many economic migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere who worked in the informal sector, primarily in construction and as domestic workers, were at risk of labor exploitation due to their lack of legal status.

The government requires employers to declare their employees to the Ministry of Labor and to pay social security benefits. Penalties for noncompliance are insufficient to deter violations. The government allowed undeclared workers to gain credit for social security and retirement benefits for time spent in the informal economy if they repay any taxes owed after registering. The government did not effectively enforce the law.

The Labor Ministry did not employ sufficient inspectors to deter violations.