

# MALDIVES 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Republic of Maldives is a multiparty constitutional democracy. In 2018 voters elected Ibrahim Mohamed Solih president. Observers considered the election mostly free and fair despite a flawed pre-election process, which was overseen by the former administration. Parliamentary elections held in 2019 were well administered and transparent according to local and international observers.

The Maldives Police Service is responsible for internal security and reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Maldives National Defence Force is responsible for external security and disaster relief and reports to the Ministry of Defence. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including intimidation of journalists and online commentators; substantial interference with freedom of peaceful assembly and association; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence; existence and use of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association.

The government took steps to investigate officials who committed human rights abuses. The government and judicial system were slow to investigate and prosecute cases of corruption.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

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

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or

unlawful killings.

## **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities. The government took steps to investigate disappearances reported in previous years.

As of September, the Presidential Commission on Enforced Disappearances and Deaths continues to investigate the 2014 disappearance of reporter Ahmed Rilwan. In 2019 the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) declined the commission's request to charge two individuals, Mohamed Mazeed and Samith Mohamed, for orchestrating Rilwan's abduction, citing a lack of evidence. The commission announced its intention to resubmit these cases to the PGO following further investigation but had yet to do so by year's end.

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

The constitution and the law prohibit such practices, but there were complaints of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. The law permits flogging and other forms of corporal punishment, and security officials employed such practices. According to a Supreme Court guideline, the court must delay the execution of a flogging sentence of minors until they reach age 18. Between January and September, courts sentenced nine convicted individuals but did not enforce the sentences.

The Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM) reported receiving 28 complaints of torture, of which 20 accused the Maldives Police Service (MPS), four accused the Maldives Corrections Service (MCS), two accused the Ministry of Gender and Family of abusing children in state care, and two accused the National Drug Agency. Unlike in 2020 the HRCM reported referring three cases for prosecution as of November. As of November, charges had been filed in one of these cases, and the trial was ongoing. Charges had yet to be filed in the remaining two cases. During the year the MPS charged, or otherwise penalized officers accused of torture. In June the MPS and the PGO revealed that charges of assault

and destruction of property were filed at the Criminal Court against eight police officers accused of beating a Bangladeshi suspect in 2019 during a police raid. The case had yet to be tried by year's end.

In June 2020 the MPS dismissed three police officers and demoted one officer for assaulting a suspect in their custody in 2019.

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

Most prisons were overcrowded, lacked adequate sanitary conditions and medical care, but they generally met most international standards.

**Physical Conditions:** According to the Prisons and Parole Act, pretrial and remand detainees should be held separately from convicted prisoners, but this was not always done. The MCS oversaw the operation of four prison facilities: Asseyri Prison, Hulhumale Detention Center, Maafushi Prison, and Male Prison. The MPS operated Dhoonidhoo pretrial Detention Center and Male Custodial Center. The HRCM and defense lawyers continued to report overcrowding, poor ventilation, and inadequate hygiene and sanitation standards in prisons and pretrial detention facilities. Authorities reported that a requirement to have a ratio of one staff member for every 1.75 prisoners was not met in several facilities. According to the HRCM, after reports that drinking water at Dhoonidhoo Custodial Center was unfit for human consumption, the MPS provided mineral water to detainees. The HRCM expressed concern, however, that authorities had not implemented a permanent solution. Authorities continued to hold undocumented migrant workers awaiting deportation or legalization within the security perimeter of a facility that also held convicts. Although the law requires the Ministry of Home Affairs to designate a separate facility to hold remanded detainees on trial, the MCS continued to hold them in facilities that also hold convicted prisoners. Observers reported that in some facilities remand detainees were kept in the same cells as convicted prisoners. In October the HRCM instructed the MCS to remove all juvenile detainees from the Asseyri Prison and transfer them to a separate location within 30 days, stating domestic and international law require children to be detained separately. Following the HRCM's instruction, the Criminal Court in November ordered two juvenile offenders held at the prison transferred to house arrest, and the MCS reported it had transferred these two juvenile offenders in

Asseyri to house arrest pending the completion of a separate facility to be established specifically to hold juvenile offenders.

There were three reports of deaths during the year. The law requires that the HRCM be informed immediately in the case of any deaths in state custody and be allowed to inspect the body prior to burial. Authorities generally implemented this provision; however, in September, Amnesty International reported a death of a prisoner whose family members stated authorities did not notify them until two hours after the death. In October a pretrial detainee, Ismail Shabeen, died after three years in detention. Local media reported that his repeated requests for treatment of his worsening medical condition were denied.

Authorities and the HRCM reported a lack of access to timely medical care in places of detention overseen by the MCS, with the MCS receiving 660 inmate complaints and the HRCM receiving 85 as of September. The MCS and the HRCM noted most of these complaints related to extended delays in access to specialist physicians. According to the MCS, doctors and nurses were stationed at the five detention facilities it oversees, and pharmacists were stationed at two of the facilities. Local hospitals did not schedule appointments for detainees seeking medical attention, leading to difficulties in obtaining timely specialist appointments for detainees.

The HRCM reported that detainees in most facilities were not allowed to leave their cells for extended periods of time. The HRCM reported authorities no longer practiced solitary confinement but placed some individual inmates in single cells. The detainees could interact with prison guards and inmates in neighboring cells.

**Administration:** Authorities conducted investigations into credible allegations of mistreatment, but nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to report such investigations were lengthy and often did not result in successful convictions or punitive action against responsible officers.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government generally permitted regular and unannounced prison visits by the HRCM, so long as a presidentially appointed commissioner was present during the visit. The HRCM provided recommendations addressing deficiencies to the government. The National

Integrity Commission (NIC) reported that, although it has a legal mandate to enter detention facilities without prior approval, the MCS continued to require a letter signed by a NIC commissioner before allowing access to NIC representatives. The government generally permitted visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and other international assessment teams; however, as of September no international observers had visited any facilities.

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

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

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

The constitution states an arrest may not be made unless the arresting officer observes the offense, has reasonable evidence, or has a court-issued arrest warrant. The Criminal Procedure Act allows police to arrest a person if a police officer has reason to believe a person has committed, is committing, or is about to commit an offense or may attempt to destroy evidence of a major crime. The MPS generally complied with arrest procedures when making arrests. The Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) allows police to arrest terrorism suspects without an arrest warrant where there are probable and reasonable grounds to believe that a terrorism offense is imminent unless immediate action is taken. Civil society sources and defense lawyers reported the need to define properly “probable and reasonable grounds” within the law to avoid misuse of this provision. The law provides for an arrestee to be verbally informed immediately of the reason for the arrest and to have the reason confirmed in writing within 12 hours of arrest.

Prisoners have the right to a ruling on bail within 36 hours, but lawyers reported the courts rarely considered bail. The law also requires that an arrestee be informed of the right to remain silent and that arrestees’ statements may be used as evidence in a court of law. The law further provides that arrestees have access to a lawyer at the time of arrest. A lawyer may be appointed by the court in serious criminal cases if the accused cannot afford one. The law allows police to question a detainee in the absence of counsel if the detainee’s lawyer does not appear within

12 hours without adequate reasons for the delay. Police normally informed the arrestee's family of the arrest within 24 hours. The law does not require that police inform the family of the grounds for the arrest unless the arrestee is younger than age 18, in which case a parent or guardian must be informed within four hours. The ATA allows police to restrict private meetings with lawyers for suspects of terrorism offenses for a period of seven days from the time of arrest in situations where there is reasonable ground to believe private meetings may result in evidence tampering, committing a terrorist offense, physical harm to another or hindering the recovery of property obtained by committing a terrorism offense.

The law provides for investigative detention. A person detained for investigation is allowed one telephone call prior to police questioning. Once a person is detained, the arresting officer must present evidence to a court within 24 hours to justify continued detention. Based on the evidence presented, the prosecutor general has the authority to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed with an investigation. If law enforcement authorities are unable to present sufficient evidence within 24 hours, the prisoner is eligible for release. Judges have the authority to extend detention upon receiving an arresting officer's petition but must cite factors such as the detainee's previous criminal record, status of the investigation, type of offense in question, and whether the detainee poses a threat if released. Defense lawyers reported that judges often accepted investigative authorities' claims that detainees posed a threat if released to issue detention orders, without clarifying the nature of the exact threat. Judges also reportedly often relied on confidential intelligence reports submitted by the MPS to justify extended detentions. These intelligence reports were not shared with the defense.

**Pretrial Detention:** The MCS reported 307 pretrial or remand detainees were held in its facilities as of August, with some held for several years without a conviction. As of September, the PGO reported a total number of 373 pretrial and remand detainees. The MCS and HRCM reported some of the pretrial or remand detainees were held without charge for extended periods of time. Defense lawyers reported problems with a criminal procedure policy to address the large percentage of pretrial or remand detainees. The policy requires an internal committee established within the PGO to review pretrial detention decisions by judges every 30 days and for the PGO to request the court to dismiss pretrial detention orders if

the prosecutor general finds an insufficient need for detention. The PGO reported the committee rarely recommended such dismissals. The committee's decisions were not made public or shared with the suspect or courts.

In May the Supreme Court overturned a High Court ruling that defendants must be held in custody for the duration of their trials if there is sufficient evidence the defendant committed the crime and if there is a presumption the defendant may either destroy evidence or influence a witness; abscond; or poses a threat to public security. The PGO appealed the High Court ruling on the grounds that it could result in a defendant accused of even minor crimes having to be remanded for lengthy trial periods.

**Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court:** The constitution and the Criminal Procedure Act stipulate conditions under which a person may be arrested or detained, provides everyone the right to appeal and the right to compensation for unlawful arrest or detention. The High Court routinely hears appeals of arrest warrants or pretrial detention orders, but defense lawyers continued to claim that High Court judges sought justification for upholding such orders rather than questioning the grounds and merits of detention and delayed verdicts until the authorized pretrial detention orders expire. Trial judges have discretionary authority that may not be appealed to authorize detention of suspects for the duration of pending trials. Individuals claiming unlawful or arbitrary arrest or detention may submit cases to the Civil Court to seek compensation, but they did not commonly exercise this right. In February the HRCM announced intentions to file a civil case seeking compensation on behalf of a detainee who had been kept in detention for 34 days following a court-ordered release in 2019; however, it had yet to do so by year's end.

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

The law provides for an independent judiciary, but the judiciary was not completely independent or impartial and was subject to influence. Lawyers reported continuing allegations of judicial impropriety and abuse of power, with judicial officials, prosecutors, and attorneys reportedly intimidated or bribed. Government officials, members of parliament, and representatives of domestic and

international civil society organizations accused the judiciary of bias.

According to NGOs and defense lawyers, some magistrate judges could not interpret common law or sharia because they lacked adequate English or Arabic language skills. Many judges in all courts, appointed for life, held only a certificate in sharia, not a law degree. An estimated one-quarter of the country's judges had criminal records.

NGOs reported the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) continued to make positive strides in investigating allegations of judicial misconduct but noted investigations against some judges were lengthy. Some of these judges were allowed to remain on the bench and hear cases while under investigation by the JSC, raising concerns they could be intimidated to issue certain rulings to avoid punitive action from the JSC.

### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial, although the judiciary did not always enforce this right. The law provides that an accused person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Most trials were public and conducted by judges and magistrates, some of whom were trained in Islamic, civil, or criminal law. The constitution states defendants have a right to be informed of the charge without delay in a language understood by the defendant. The law states a defendant must be provided with a copy of the case documents within five days of charges being submitted to court. The law provides that accused persons have a right to be present at trial, communicate with an attorney of their choice (or have one provided at public expense if unable to pay, in the case of major crimes or if the defendant is a juvenile), and have adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense. The law provides the right to free assistance of an interpreter. The constitution states the accused has the right not to be compelled to testify. Defendants have the right to full access to all evidence relating to their case, confront prosecution or plaintiff witnesses, and present their own witnesses and evidence. Defendants may not be compelled to testify or confess guilt.

Convicted defendants have the right to appeal.

The testimony of women is generally equal to that of men in court, although some



laws allow for differences in cases of rape (where the testimony of two male witnesses or four female witnesses is required). Islamic law, as interpreted by the government, is applied in situations not covered by civil law.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees during the year.

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

Individuals or organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights violations through domestic courts, but lawyers and the HRCM reported victims rarely chose to do so due to a belief the court would rule in favor of the government. The Civil Court addressed noncriminal cases.

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

The law prohibits security officials from opening or reading radio messages, letters, or telegrams, or monitoring telephone conversations, except as expressly provided by law. Security forces may open the mail of private citizens and monitor telephone conversations if authorized to do so by a court during a criminal investigation. There were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions during the year.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

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

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, except on religious matters, and the government generally respected this right. Civil society sources continued to report, however, that the government failed to act against online death threats and attacks against those perceived to be critical of Islam, leading to journalists and NGOs practicing self-censorship on matters

related to Islam.

## Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media

Independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views. Criticism of the government and debates on societal problems were commonplace, but media did not question Islamic values or the government's policies on religion. The Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Community Empowerment regulations prohibit publishing literary material without first seeking authorization from the National Bureau of Classification. The regulations define publication of literary material as "any writing, photograph, or drawing that has been made publicly accessible electronically or by way of printing, including publicizing or circulating on the internet."

The constitution prohibits utterances contrary to tenets of Islam or the government's religious policies.

**Violence and Harassment:** In August the Maldives Journalist Association (MJA) published a threat perception survey of journalists in which 54 percent of journalists reported receiving multiple death threats or threats of violence. The MJA reported receiving multiple complaints of police brutality against journalists covering a May protest regarding workplace harassment, including obstruction, use of obscene language, and beatings. The MPS launched an internal investigation into the matter and suspended officers who were actively involved in the operation. It had yet to announce findings or any further action against the officers as of September.

The MJA reported an increase in anonymous social media accounts believed to be linked to government officials or extremist groups that harassed journalists. Due to their suspicions of direct or indirect official involvement and fear of retribution by perpetrators, journalists rarely filed complaints of online harassment with authorities.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions:** The Parliament Privileges Act allows authorities to force journalists to reveal their sources, but authorities did not routinely utilize this provision. NGO and journalist sources stated media practiced

self-censorship on matters related to Islam due to fears of harassment from being labeled “anti-Islamic.” In May the MJA expressed concern regarding the implications of a decision by the parliament’s National Security Committee to investigate online anonymous sources of information.

There were no known restrictions on domestic publications, nor were there prohibitions on the import of foreign publications or materials, except for those containing pornography or material otherwise deemed objectionable to Islamic values, such as Bibles and idols for worship. The restriction applies only to items for public distribution; tourists destined for resort islands were not prohibited from carrying Bibles and other religious items for their personal use.

### **Internet Freedom**

The government generally did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority.

The Communications Authority of Maldives (CAM) is the regulatory body mandated to enforce internet content restrictions on sites hosted within the country and to block domestic access to any websites. CAM maintained an unpublished blacklist of all offending websites. Although CAM did not proactively monitor internet content, it accepted requests from ministries and other government agencies to block websites that allegedly violated domestic laws on anti-Islamism, pornography, child abuse, sexual and domestic violence, and other prohibitions.

NGOs reported the government’s failure to act against online death threats and attacks against those perceived to be critical of Islam continued.

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

The law prohibits public statements contrary to the government’s policy on religion or the government’s interpretation of Islam. In response to the law, there were credible reports that academics practiced self-censorship. The government censored course content and curricula. Sunni Islam was the only religion taught in

schools.

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

The constitution provides for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association; however, the government limited these rights.

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution provides for “freedom of peaceful assembly without prior permission of the State.” The law on peaceful assembly restricts protests outside designated areas in the capital city. Protesters must obtain prior written permission from the MPS and from the Ministry of Home Affairs to hold protests. Local civil society organizations continued to condemn the restrictions as unconstitutional. These provisions were seldom enforced by the government during the past three years.

Between April and September, the MPS cited legal provisions on peaceful assembly and COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures that limited gatherings to no more than 10 persons, to disperse several protests organized by the political opposition.

### **Freedom of Association**

The constitution provides for freedom of association, but the government imposed some limits on this freedom. The government allowed only clubs and other private associations that did not contravene Islamic or civil law to register.

NGOs continued to report that, although sporadically enforced, a regulation that requires human rights and other NGOs to seek government approval before applying for domestic assistance above 25,000 rufiyaa (\$1,630) or for any foreign assistance threatened their freedom of operation. The regulation also requires organizations to submit their membership registries to the government and authorizes the registrar of associations to enter organizations to obtain documents without a search warrant and to dissolve organizations.

The Political Parties Act restricts registration of political parties and eligibility for state funds to parties with 10,000 or more members. The act requires all political

parties to submit fingerprints with each membership application. Civil society organizations continued to express concerns that the law and subsequent amendments restricted the constitutional right to form and participate in political parties.

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

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

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

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. NGOs reported approximately 180 undocumented migrant workers being processed for regularization or repatriation at the Hulhumale Detention Center between July 2020 and November, were only allowed to leave or enter the center at certain times. NGOs also reported concerns regarding a September 2020 High Court ruling prohibiting arrested migrant workers from release on bail unless a local national was willing to take responsibility for monitoring them until the conclusion of their cases.

### **e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons**

Not applicable.

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

**Access to Asylum:** The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a system for providing protection to refugees.

## **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.

## **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** The parliamentary elections held in April 2020 were well administered and transparent according to Transparency Maldives and international election observers. Despite an assessment the overall election was well administered, Transparency Maldives highlighted some matters of concern including unverified reports of vote buying, lack of transparency in political financing, abuse of state resources, and barriers for women's equal participation in the electoral process.

**Political Parties and Political Participation:** In March the Elections Commission expressed concern regarding restrictive measures introduced in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, including restrictions on interisland travel and prohibition of public gatherings, unfairly impacted political parties in campaigning ahead of local council elections. Following negotiations with the commission, the Health Protection Agency published special campaigning guidelines lifting some of these restrictions in the weeks leading up to the elections.

The political opposition maintains that the 2019 conviction of money laundering and sentencing to five years' imprisonment of opposition leader and former president Abdulla Yameen was politically motivated. Civil society and international observers, however, viewed the convictions as credible and appropriate.

**Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups:** No law limits participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Women's rights activists and female politicians continued to highlight a lack of government and political party effort to encourage political participation of women. In January the High Court confirmed the constitutionality of a 2019 amendment to the Decentralization Act that provides for a 33 percent quota for female membership in all local councils. In April the quota was applied for the first time in the election of representatives to island, atoll, and city-level

local councils.

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

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption during the year. Officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity and the government and judicial system was slow to investigate and prosecute cases of corruption. Suspected cases of corruption in the judicial system also stymied the ability to provide additional oversight.

**Corruption:** The MJA reported increased intimidation and pressure on journalists by government officials and political appointees for reporting on government corruption.

In 2018 President Solih established a Presidential Commission on Corruption and Asset Recovery to investigate corruption cases originating between 2012 and 2018. As of September, the commission had not issued a public report of its findings.

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

Several domestic human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials often were cooperative and responsive to their views.

NGOs reported that obstacles to registering members limited their operations (see section 2.c.).

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The HRCM is a constitutionally recognized independent institution with a mandate to promote and protect human rights under the constitution, Maldivian Islamic law, and regional and international human rights conventions ratified by the country. NIC is a constitutionally recognized independent institution with a mandate to investigate allegations of human rights

abuses by law enforcement agencies and employees, and it has the authority to forward any cases with criminal elements to police for further investigation. Human Rights activists reported the HRCM and NIC appeared to be working more independently during the year. The HRCM reported government authorities were generally cooperative in investigations but noted they were reluctant or slow to act on their recommendations. NIC reported as challenges a lack of public awareness of its mandate, budgetary constraints, and a lack of trained technical staff. Both NIC and the HRCM reported having to rely on the MPS for training, technical analysis, including forensic analysis. The Child Rights Ombudsman is tasked with monitoring implementation of the Child Rights Protection Act. The ombudsman had not issued any reports as of October.

In December 2020 the president appointed a chief ombudsperson and two additional ombudspersons to oversee the Office of Transitional Justice (OOTJ), with a two-year mandate to investigate human rights violations by the state between 1953 and 2018. Civil society observers expressed concern that the OOTJ lacked adequate expertise to investigate cases covering a time span of 60 years. They also noted the two-year mandate provided insufficient time to adequately investigate the number of expected complaints.

## **Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses**

### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalizes rape against both men and women including spousal rape. The law also criminalizes domestic violence, including physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, and financial abuse. The law also extends protection to wives against being forcibly impregnated by their husbands and includes an extensive list of other abuses for which protection is provided. The law allows courts to issue restraining orders in domestic violence cases and criminalizes any actions violating these orders. A man may be convicted of rape in the absence of a confession only if there are two male witnesses or four female witnesses willing to testify. In the case of a child, the burden of proof is lower. Penalties if convicted range from four months' to 10 years' imprisonment,



depending on factors such as the age of the survivor.

NGOs and other authorities continued to report MPS officers were reluctant to make arrests in cases of violence against women within the family. Reportedly, this made survivors reluctant to file criminal cases against abusers. While the MPS received 954 reports of domestic violence as of September, it investigated only 346 cases and recommended charges in only 28 cases. Of these 28 cases, charges were brought in just six cases as of September. The MPS received 86 reports of rape and sexual assault as of September, investigated 55 complaints, and recommended charges in seven cases. Of these seven cases, charges were filed in just three as of September. Human rights activists conducted social media campaigns throughout the year and in May staged protest in Male to express concern regarding inadequate investigations of rape and child sexual abuse cases and the impunity of offenders.

Human rights activists alleged in February government officials intervened to lift a travel ban against former tourism minister Ali Waheed, indicted for sexual harassment and attempted rape. Waheed left the country and as of October had not returned.

The Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services received reports of rape, sexual offenses, and domestic violence and conducted social inquiry assessments of cases it submitted to the MPS. It also provided psychological support to survivors during MPS investigations. To streamline the process of reporting abuses against women and children, the ministry operated family and children's service centers on every atoll. During the year the ministry operated residential facilities at eight of the centers and opened five domestic violence shelters to provide emergency shelter to domestic violence and other survivors. Authorities and NGOs reported the service remained understaffed and under resourced. Staff employed at the centers lacked technical capacity and were forced to divide their time between administrative duties and casework.

**Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C):** No cases of FGM/C were reported to government authorities during the year. Since 2014 some religious leaders have intermittently called to revive the practice, and in November 2020, a popular individual associated with a religious NGO reportedly called for a

resumption of female circumcision. In July the Maldives National University dismissed Assistant Professor Mohamed Iyaz Latheef because of his social media posts allegedly promoting female circumcision. NGOs and women's rights activists continued to express concern the government has failed to publicly denounce or counter calls for revival of female circumcision.

**Other Harmful Traditional Practices:** By law only Maldivian Islamic law penalties may be imposed for conviction of *hadd* (robbery, fornication, homosexual acts, alcohol consumption, apostasy) and *qisas* (retaliation in kind) offenses. Although this was not enforced, penalties may include hand amputation for theft and stoning to death for adultery.

**Sexual Harassment:** The law bans sexual harassment in the workplace, detention facilities, and any centers that provide public services. NGOs reported that while the law requires all government offices to set up sexual harassment review committees, a significant number of government offices had failed to establish these committees or, in cases where the committees had been set up, employees were unaware of their existence.

The MPS reported referring three out of a total of 54 received cases of sexual harassment for prosecution. In November 2020 former tourism minister Ali Waheed was indicted for sexual harassment and attempted rape. In February he left the country and as of October had not returned.

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

Extramarital sex is criminalized and childbirth out of wedlock is stigmatized.

Limited public information on reproductive health services was available for unmarried individuals. NGOs and activists expressed concern that adolescents' access to information on reproductive health rights and services was extremely limited. They also noted in smaller island communities, contraceptives were only available at a single health center or pharmacy on each island, leaving unmarried couples reluctant to access them due to social stigma.

Health-care facilities generally provided reproductive health services only to

married couples. A centralized system of health-care provision is a significant barrier to access for health-care services on islands outside the capital region. Reportedly, men often influenced or controlled the reproductive health decisions of women. Youth access to reproductive health information and services was especially limited, and cultural attitudes prevented youth from accessing what limited services were available from health facilities.

NGOs reported that the government provided access to emergency contraceptives for sexual violence survivors. NGOs reported public health services provided psychosocial support and medical attention for a limited period immediately following instances of sexual violence. Access to these services through private health-care providers was costly or unavailable, especially outside Male.

**Discrimination:** The law provides for same legal status and rights for women and for men in religious, personal status and nationality laws and laws related to labor, property, access to credit and owning or managing business and property and prohibits gender discrimination including in workplaces, educational institutions, and service providers, such as hospitals, but discrimination against women remained a problem. Islamic shariah governs inheritance of private property which behests male heirs twice the share of female heirs. Women's rights activists reported that women who initiated divorce proceedings faced undue delays in court as compared with men who initiated divorce proceedings. According to women's rights activists, there were no policies in place to provide equal opportunities for women's employment, despite provisions in the constitution and the law.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on race or national origin. No law specifically protects members of racial, ethnic, or national minorities or groups from violence and discrimination.

NGOs reported some societal discrimination against members of racial, ethnic, or national minorities. There were no government programs to mitigate societal,

racial, or ethnic biases.

## **Children**

**Birth Registration:** Citizenship is derived by birth from one's parents. Under the law a child born of a citizen father or mother, regardless of the child's place of birth, may derive citizenship. During the year the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services received one report of parents failing to register the birth of their child. NGOs reported no known cases of the Family Court refusing to register children born to couples whose marriage ceremony was held outside of the country.

**Education:** Education is free, compulsory, and universal through secondary school. The Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services handled 26 cases of children being deprived of education as of September. NGOs stated this included parental refusal to send children to school, in some cases based on religious reasons. NGOs and activists stated the effect of religious extremism on child rights was a problem but lacked a baseline study determining its prevalence. NGOs reported receiving reports that some families wanting to keep children out of the formal education system for religious reasons used COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures to deprive children of school attendance for periods of time. According to a 2018 Ministry of Education report, more girls were enrolled in primary schools than boys, but there were more boys enrolled in secondary schools than girls. The report attributed this discrepancy to the possibility that some girls are home schooled from lower secondary school age on, but NGOs noted no formal studies have been made to identify the real cause.

**Child Abuse:** The law stipulates sentences of up to 25 years' imprisonment for conviction of sexual offenses against children. The courts have the power to detain perpetrators, although most were released pending sentencing and allowed to return to the communities of their victims. The MPS investigates and the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services oversees providing care and support to victims of child abuse, including cases of sexual abuse. The ministry reported a lack of individuals trained in case work, psychosocial support, and other technical skills. More than 70 percent of the total cases received by the ministry as of September were cases of child abuse, the majority involving sexual abuse. Of the

child abuse cases received by the MPS, 31 percent were also sexual abuse cases, with the MPS forwarding only 18 percent of these cases for prosecution as of September. During the year the PGO had proceeded with charges in only 1 percent of these cases. Human rights activists conducted social media campaigns throughout the year. In May activists staged a protest in Male regarding inadequate investigation of rape and child sexual abuse cases and impunity of offenders. Human rights activists reported the lack of effective coordination among authorities handling child abuse cases, delays in attending to reports of abuse, and a lack of standard operating procedures to handle child abuse cases remained a problem.

NGOs reported authorities failed consistently to use the online child rights' case management system through which various authorities can monitor progress and actions taken by other authorities on child abuse cases.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The Child Protection Act prohibits any marriage of a child younger than age 18. While NGOs lauded the prohibition, they stated the prohibition could lead to an increase of child marriages outside the legal system and reported anecdotal evidence of some child marriages conducted outside of the legal system. Girls reportedly often quit school following such marriages. In 2019 police arrested and the PGO charged a man who entered marriage with a child outside the legal system on Raa Maduvvari Island with child sexual abuse. The man was arrested during police raids on a group of religious fundamentalists active on the island. The government reported several individuals in the group had entered unregistered, unlawful marriages with girls.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation, sale, grooming, offering, or procuring children for sexual purposes, and practices related to child pornography. The Child Rights Protection Act prohibits using, procuring, and offering children for pornographic performances. Conviction of the crime is punishable by five to 25 years' imprisonment. The act stipulates that a child between ages 13 and 18 involved in a sexual act is deemed not to have given consent "unless otherwise proven." The law also treats the sexual exploitation of children by a third party as a form of human trafficking with exploitation under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, subject to a 15-year maximum sentence if convicted. The penal code allows the PGO to file multiple

charges against a perpetrator for a single offense. Regarding sex trafficking, the office may file charges for human trafficking under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act and for prostitution under the Child Rights Protection Act and aggregate the penalties so convicted perpetrators serve longer sentences for a single offense. As of September, the MPS investigated two cases of child pornography but had not forwarded any for prosecution. NGOs reported that, although there have been no confirmed reports of child sex tourism, government authorities lacked the capacity to monitor the guesthouse-tourism sector in remote islands.

**Institutionalized Children:** The NGO Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC) reported children routinely spent many months in government-run “safe homes” intended to be temporary stopovers for children being taken into state care. The safe homes were inadequately furnished and equipped, lacked essentials, and were often understaffed, resulting in inadequate care, protection, and education for institutionalized children. During the year the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services closed one of two government-run children’s homes and moved the children sheltered in the facility to 14 facilities in outer atolls. As of July, two of these facilities sheltered more children than their prescribed capacity. NGOs reported an inadequate number of trained staff at these facilities. The country lacked a juvenile detention center, so youth offenders were sometimes held with juvenile victims of abuse or at special units in minimum security prisons.

**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 public practice of religion other than Islam is prohibited by law, and the government did not provide estimates on the number of Jewish residents in the

country. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

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

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The constitution and law provide for the rights and freedom from most types of discrimination for persons with disabilities; however, persons with disabilities did not have access to education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. Although the constitution provides for freedom from discrimination in access to employment for persons with disabilities, the Disabilities Act does not do so. The Disabilities Act provides for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities as well as financial assistance. The act mandates the state to provide a monthly financial benefit of not less than 2,000 rufiyaa (\$130) to each registered individual. NGOs reported the National Social Protection Agency (NSPA), which handles the National Registry, has strict conditions and a cumbersome screening process that prevent most persons with disabilities from being registered. The NSPA requires an assessment from a medical center in Male City, which may cost up to 40,000 rufiyaa (\$2,600) for some families living in the islands who must travel and stay in Male City for lengthy periods while the assessment is completed. A limited number of medical centers outside Male City are authorized to conduct the assessments, which reduced the cost in some limited cases. The NSPA covered 5,000 rufiyaa (\$324) of assessment-related costs. NGOs noted inclusion on the registry is a precondition to access several other benefits provided for persons with disabilities, including priority in accessing social housing schemes and special accommodations during voting.

Although no official studies have been concluded, NGOs that operate throughout the country estimated as much as 10 percent of the total population of persons with disabilities had been subjected to various forms of abuse and that 40 to 60 percent of girls or women with disabilities, especially those who are visually impaired, were subject to sexual abuse. The families of these victims often did not report

these cases to authorities, because the police investigation and judicial process was inaccessible to persons with disabilities.

Government services for persons with disabilities included special educational programs for those with sensory disabilities. Inadequate facilities and logistical challenges related to transporting persons with disabilities among islands and atolls made it difficult for persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce or consistently attend school. Most public streets and buildings were not accessible for wheelchair users.

Students with disabilities are integrated into mainstream educational programs at primary and secondary level. Most large government schools also held special units catering to persons with disabilities who were not be accommodated in the mainstream classes. Nonetheless, children with disabilities had virtually no access to support for transition to higher secondary education.

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

The law prohibits same-sex sexual conduct. Under the penal code, the punishment for conviction includes up to eight years' imprisonment and, under Islamic law, 100 lashes. None of the legal provisions prohibiting discrimination covers discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. No organizations focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) problems in the country. There were no reports of officials complicit in abuses against LGBTQI+ persons, although societal stigma likely discouraged individuals from reporting such problems. Local citizens who expressed support for LGBTQI+ rights on social media were reportedly targeted for online harassment as "apostates" or irreligious.

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

NGOs reported online death threats and attacks against citizens perceived to be critical of Islam continued, and NGOs reported the government failed to act in



these cases.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

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

The constitution provides for workers' freedom of association; however, there is no specific law protecting the right to freedom of association, which is required to allow unions to register and operate without interference and discrimination. As a result, the court system refused to officially recognize trade unions. Worker organizations were usually treated as civil society organizations or associations without the right to engage in collective bargaining. Police and armed forces do not have the right to form unions. The Freedom of Peaceful Assembly Act effectively prohibits strikes by workers in the resort sector, the country's largest money earner. Employees in the following services are also prohibited from striking hospitals and health centers, electricity companies, water providers, telecommunications providers, prison guards, and air traffic controllers. The Home Ministry enforces the act by arresting workers who go on strike, but there were no such arrests during the year.

The government did not always enforce applicable laws. Resources, inspections, and remediation remained inadequate, and penalties were not commensurate with other laws involving the denial of civil rights. The Labor Relations Authority (LRA) is mandated to oversee compliance of the Employment Act and its related regulations. The Employment Tribunal examines and adjudicates legal matters arising between employers and employees and other employment problems, but its processes remained cumbersome and complicated. In addition, because the LRA does not regularly screen labor violations such as nonpayment of wages for elements of trafficking, the Employment Tribunal adjudicates some potential trafficking cases. The LRA requested the Ministry of Economic Development to blacklist violators who refused to correct violations or pay fines, but as of September the ministry had only blacklisted one-half of the violators requested by the LRA. Employment Tribunal cases are heard in the Dhivehi language, which few foreign workers understood. Foreign workers may not file a case with the tribunal unless they appoint a representative to communicate for them in the local language. If an employer fails to comply with a decision of the tribunal, the case

must be submitted to the Civil Court, which often delays decisions. The Tourism Employees Association of Maldives (TEAM) reported the judicial system continued to delay final decisions on numerous such cases, some older than six years. The Employment Tribunal only hears cases submitted within three months for cases involving unfair dismissals and within six months of the alleged offense for all other violations of the Employment Act. The law states that dismissed or withdrawn appeals may only be resubmitted once, after paying a monetary fine. Under the law some workers' organizations were established as civil society organizations, including in the tourism, fisheries, education, health, and shipping (seafarers') sectors, although these functioned more as cooperative associations and had very limited roles in labor advocacy. The Teachers Association of the Maldives (TAM), TEAM, and the Maldives Trade Union Congress, an umbrella organization formed by TEAM, Maldivian Ports Workers, and Maldives Health Professionals Union were among the more active workers' organizations.

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

All forms of forced or compulsory labor are prohibited, but the government did not effectively enforce applicable laws.

Resources, inspections, and remediation remained generally inadequate, and penalties were not commensurate with those for other serious crimes. The foreign worker population, especially migrant workers from Bangladesh, were particularly vulnerable to forced labor or labor trafficking in the construction industry, as were Sri Lankan and Indian women engaged in domestic work. Authorities expanded programs allowing undocumented workers to become regularized or return to their home countries without penalty. In previous years undocumented workers were detained at Hulhumale Detention Center, an immigration-processing center near Male, until deportation or repatriation. The Ministry of Economic Development announced that more than 25,000 undocumented workers had been repatriated from April 2020 to September. There were continued reports of bureaucratic delays in receiving passports from foreign missions for foreign workers seeking to return to their home countries. Maldives Immigration did not have in place any mechanisms to screen workers for victims of labor trafficking prior to repatriation, and there were reports that some of the repatriated undocumented workers should

have been identified as human trafficking victims.

Under the penal code, conviction of forced labor carries a penalty of up to eight years' imprisonment. Under section 29 of the Maldives Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, confiscation, alteration, or withholding of identity and travel documents is a crime, and convicted perpetrators are subject to up to five years' imprisonment. In 2015 parliament approved the *National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons for 2015-19*. The penalty for conviction of human trafficking is a maximum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment. As of September, the MPS and Maldives Immigration reported they were continuing to investigate more than 35 labor recruiters or agencies allegedly engaged in fraudulent practices. In August human trafficking charges were raised against a sitting member of parliament, who was also managing director of a construction company investigated during the previous year. The investigation focused on suspicion the company "carried out forced labor and acts of exploitation against foreigners, acted in a manner that has led to human trafficking, failed to make payment of fees required to be paid to the government on behalf of these workers and violated the rights of these workers." Preliminary hearings continued as of October. Employee associations continued to report concerns the alleged traffickers were deported with no further action or attempts to identify local traffickers who worked with them to traffic victims.

Penalties were not sufficient to deter violations by large companies and were not commensurate with other analogous serious crimes for which conviction carried sentences of imprisonment.

As of August, Maldives Immigration reported the number of documented foreign workers at approximately 112,085. It estimated an additional 63,000 undocumented foreign workers in the country, predominantly men from Bangladesh and other South Asian countries. Some of the foreign workers in the country were subject to forced labor in the construction and tourism sectors. Both the LRA and NGOs noted a continuing trend of resorts hiring third-party subcontractors to work in departments such as maintenance, landscaping, and laundry services. These subcontractors reportedly hired undocumented migrant workers who received a lower salary, worked longer hours, and often experienced delays in payment of salaries and work without a legal employment contract. Most

victims of forced labor continued to suffer the following practices: debt bondage, holding of passports by employers, fraudulent offers of employment, not being paid the promised salary, or not being paid at all. Domestic workers, especially migrant female domestic workers, were sometimes trapped in forced servitude, in which employers used threats, intimidation, and in some cases sexual violence to prevent them from leaving.

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 the worst forms of child labor and sets the minimum age for employment at 16, with an exception for children who voluntarily participate in family businesses. The law prohibits employment of children younger than age 18 in “any work that may have a detrimental effect on health, education, safety, or conduct,” but there was no list of such activities. The law prescribes a monetary fine for infractions.

The Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services, the Ministry of Economic Development, and the Family and Child Protection Unit of the MPS are tasked with receiving, investigating, and acting on complaints of child labor. According to the LRA, the MPS, and the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services, none of the complaints received related to child labor or employment of minors. In September the Ministry of Health reported that recent assessments found children were regularly engaged in the transport of drugs for criminal gangs. NGOs reported children were also engaged in forced labor in domestic work. The LRA found no cases of child labor during its regular labor inspections during the year. Resources, inspections, and remediation remained inadequate because no additional resources were dedicated specifically to uncover additional child labor cases. The government did not effectively enforce child labor laws. The penalties for conviction of commercial sexual exploitation of children were commensurate with those for other serious crimes, and the Child Rights Protection Act criminalizes the child exploitation, including the use of children to sell drugs with

penalties for conviction of imprisonment.

Civil society groups continued to report concerns that some Bangladesh migrant workers in the construction and service sectors were younger than 18 but possessed passports stating they were older.

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

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

The law and regulations prohibit discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, color, sex, political opinion, religion, social origin, marital status, family obligations, age or disability. The law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination for national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identify, HIV or AIDS status or refugee status. The government generally enforced those laws and regulations, with some exceptions that included unequal pay for women and discrimination in working and living conditions of foreign migrant workers, especially from Bangladesh. Penalties for violations were commensurate with laws related to civil rights.

According to NGOs, no policies were in place to provide equal opportunities for women's employment, despite provisions in the constitution and the law. The law and constitution prohibit discrimination against women for employment or for equal pay or equal income, but women tended to earn less than men for the same work and also tended to work in lower-paying industries. The absence of child-care facilities made it difficult for women with children to remain employed after they had children.

The Employment Act establishes the Employment Tribunal to examine and protect the rights of employers and employees in legal matters and other employment problems.

Discrimination against migrant workers was pervasive (see section 7.b.).

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

**Wage and Hour:** The country does not have a national policy on minimum wage.

Wages in the private sector were commonly set by contract between employers and employees and were based on rates for similar work in the public sector.

The law establishes maximum hours of work, overtime, annual and sick leave, maternity leave, and guidelines for workplace safety. Civil servants are allowed six months of maternity leave and one month's paternity leave. The law provides for a 48-hour per week limit on work with a compulsory 24-hour break if employees work six days consecutively. Certain provisions in the law, such as overtime and public-holiday pay, do not apply to emergency workers, air and sea crews, executive staff of any company, and workers who are on call. Employee associations reported some government schools and hospitals placed a cap on overtime pay.

The LRA and Employment Tribunal are charged with implementing employment law, and the LRA conducted workplace investigations and provided dispute resolution mechanisms to address complaints from workers. The most common findings continued to be related to missing or problematic provisions included in employment contracts and job descriptions, overtime and other pay, and problems related to leave. Inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. The LRA typically gave employers one to three months to correct problems but lacked sufficient labor inspectors and travel funding to enforce compliance. The government effectively enforced overtime laws. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** The country does not have a general occupational health and safety law, but certain industries, including construction, health, aviation, and tourism, have compiled their own standards and regulations, which they enforce themselves. There were no reports the government took any action under health and safety regulations during the year. The law mandates implementation of a safe workplace, procurement of secure tools and machinery, verification of equipment safety, use of protective equipment to mitigate health hazards, employee training in the use of protective gear, and appropriate medical care, but there were no national standards for safety measures, and as a result such measures were at the discretion of employers. There were multiple reports of workers at the central port in Male sustaining injuries at work, including two deaths of port employees who were struck by a carpet roll and a glass pallet while

unloading cargo. In March parliament's State-Owned Enterprises Committee launched an inquiry into health and safety standards at the port but had not published its findings by year's end. The LRA continued to report difficulties in assessing safety standards during inspections due to the lack of national standards. Safety regulations for the construction industry require employers to provide employees with safety equipment such as helmets, belts, and masks, but NGOs reported the government failed to monitor implementation of these standards. All employers are required to provide health insurance for foreign workers.

The government did not effectively enforce occupational safety and health laws, and penalties for violations were not commensurate with laws for other similar crimes.

**Informal Sector:** According to the government, 19 percent of the total working population is engaged in informal employment, with 62 percent self-employed and not subject to wage, hour, and occupational safety and health laws and inspections. The proportion of workers in the informal sector is higher in the islands outside Male, with 31 percent of the total working population outside Male engaged in the informal sector compared with 9 percent in Male. Informal employment is higher among women, with 25 percent of women compared to 16 percent of men. Manufacturing is the leading industry of informal employment with most women engaged in home-based work producing thatches and rope weaves, followed by the services (including domestic workers), agriculture and fisheries sectors. The LRA is authorized to inspect any workspace with employees but reported they did not routinely inspect workspaces of domestic workers. They did investigate complaints filed by domestic workers.

Migrant workers were particularly vulnerable to exploitation, worked in unacceptable conditions, and were frequently forced to accept low wages to repay their debts with employment agencies, especially within the construction sector. The LRA reported more than 40 percent of the complaints it received were submitted by foreign migrant workers.

Migrant workers were treated harshly, and the COVID-19 pandemic compounded this. Migrants experienced abuses from employers, including deceptive recruitment practices, wage theft, passport confiscation, unsafe living and working

conditions, and excessive work demands, which indicate forced labor and violate domestic and international standards. The spread of COVID-19 and the lockdown to contain it exacerbated these conditions, as workers faced job loss, unpaid leave, reduced salaries, and forced work without pay.

NGOs expressed concern that senior government officials made statements characterizing the high number of undocumented workers present in the country as “a threat to national security,” indicating a lack of political will to address the exploitation of foreign migrant workers. Female migrant workers, especially in the domestic-service sector were especially vulnerable to exploitation. Employers in the construction and tourism industry often housed foreign workers at their worksites or in cramped labor quarters.

In 2020 the Maldivian Red Crescent reported their inspection of labor quarters in Male found each quarter housed approximately 200 workers, with six to seven individuals sharing rooms of 100 square feet. In some locations workers were forced to sleep in bathrooms or on balconies due to a lack of space. Most buildings also lacked adequate space for cooking and posed safety risks due to being structurally unsound. NGOs reported the government did not act to enforce regulations, which came into force in October 2020 setting standards for employer-provided accommodations for foreign migrant workers. Inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. Some migrant workers were exposed to dangerous working conditions, especially in the construction industry, and worked in hazardous environments without proper ventilation. The Employment Act protects workers who remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to their employment.