HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

“Everything I Have to Do is Tied to a Man”

Women and Qatar’s Male Guardianship Rules

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Summary

> For girls - you are [constantly] in quarantine. What the whole world experiences now, this is the normal life for girls [in Qatar]. I wanted to study abroad but it was a no from my parents, even though I had a scholarship.
>
> —"Asma," a 40-year-old Qatari woman, June 16, 2020

Women in Qatar have broken barriers and achieved significant progress, including in education where there are now more female than male graduates, and as doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs in one of the world's richest states per capita. Yet they continue to face deep discrimination in almost all aspects of their lives.

Noof Al Maadeed, age 21, decided to leave her home country Qatar after years of domestic abuse and restrictions on her movements: "[I was] only allowed to go to school and back. Anything else [and I] can expect a beating." At one point, she felt her life and physical integrity were at risk. But she could not just leave. Qatari government rules prohibit unmarried Qatari women under age 25 from traveling outside the country without the permission of their male guardian: typically, their father, brother, uncle or grandfather. A married woman can travel abroad without her husband's permission, but her husband can apply to a court to ban her travel.

On November 12, 2019, Noof secretly took her father's phone, tapped the government's Metrash app and processed the exit permit that would allow her to leave the country. She then climbed out her bedroom window to go to the airport. With her exit permit, she flew first to Ukraine and then to the United Kingdom where she sought asylum. While stories of Qatari women seeking international refuge are rare, the discrimination they face is systemic.

It is not just travel that is restricted. Women must obtain permission from their male guardians—who may be fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, and, when married, their husbands—to exercise many of their basic rights, including to marry, obtain a government scholarship to pursue higher education, work in many government jobs, and obtain some reproductive health care. Women also cannot act as guardians to make choices about their

children's lives. At the root of these discriminatory rules are laws, policies, and practices that deem men as heads of households and as legal and social guardians of women.

Women in Qatar are pushing back, becoming more vocal about their rights online, despite the restricted civic space. In August 2019, several Qatari women tweeted from an anonymized account about how Qatar continues to impose male guardianship rules. They were inspired after Saudi Arabia enacted some reforms to its draconian male guardianship system as a result of Saudi women's rights activists' demands and international pressure. But within 24 hours the women shut down their account after cyber security officials summoned one of the women for interrogation.

In late 2019, on separate occasions, two Qatari women fled and sought asylum in the UK: Noof Al Maadeed (discussed above) and Aisha al-Qahtani. They both went public about their escape, sparking further discussions on social media about women's rights in Qatar. In January 2020, the authorities responded by lifting the requirement on women to have guardian permission to obtain driving licenses. However, Qatari airport officials also began to require some women traveling abroad to call their guardians to confirm they were not escaping.

Many women in Qatar do not know what the official male guardianship rules are, or their legal basis, and only know of them because of their experiences or of others. This report helps to fill that gap through analysis of 73 interviews, including in-depth interviews with 50 women affected by male guardianship rules in Qatar, and a detailed review of relevant laws, policies, and practices. The findings show that, in many aspects of their lives, adult women are treated as legal minors in Qatar. Combined with other discriminatory laws and practices, male guardianship limits the ability of women in Qatar to live full, productive, and independent lives and fuels further discrimination and domestic violence.

Qatar's Male Guardianship Rules

Male guardianship in Qatar is not a cohesive or clear legal system. Rather, it is a mix of laws, policies, and practices under which adult women must obtain male guardian permission for specific activities. Such requirements directly contradict both Qatar's Family Law, which provides that guardianship ends when individuals turn 18, and Qatar's Constitution, which provides for equality before the law without discrimination on the

basis of sex. A significant challenge is the lack of clarity or information about the extent of discriminatory laws and administrative requirements. Human Rights Watch examined 27 laws including laws covering employment, renting accommodation, and personal status, and tracked down relevant regulations, policies, and forms where available. Human Rights Watch wrote letters on February 1 and 2, 2021 to the Qatari authorities to confirm these rules. Human Rights Watch received responses from the Qatari authorities in February and March and have incorporated these in relevant sections of the report.

Several women told Human Rights Watch they have supportive families, fathers, and husbands who back their decisions and life choices. But others said that even where they led "privileged" lives, degrading guardianship rules, which effectively treat them as children, restrict their autonomy and can be used against them at any time. "Lolwa," age 44, said her father finally agreed to let her drive at age 33. "When I am working in my job, I am the one signing contracts. I am treated like an adult on one side but on the other side, I am not an adult."

Women reported particular hardship when their male guardian is absent or has died. "Fatima," age 22 and estranged from her father who lives abroad, said: "I don't know who my guardian is now."

Most of the women Human Rights Watch interviewed for this report spoke of the heavy toll such rules have taken on their ability to lead independent lives, including when male guardians denied them permission to drive, travel abroad, study, work, or marry a person of their own choosing. Some also spoke of how this has impacted their mental health, contributing to self-harm, depression, stress, and suicide ideation.

Male guardianship reinforces the power and control that men feel they have over women's lives and choices and may foster or fuel violence. The lack of domestic violence legislation leaves women further exposed to abuse by their families and husbands.

Qatar's laws require women to have male guardian permission to marry, regardless of age or former marital status. Men can marry up to four women at any one time, without needing permission from a guardian or even from their current wife or wives. "Nawal," age 32, said she married her non-Qatari husband in an unofficial religious ceremony in 2016, with her younger brother acting as her male guardian as her father had passed away. However, later

when she applied to the state marriage committee to allow her, a Qatari national, to officially marry a foreign national according to Qatari law, her brother refused to give his permission as her guardian. "I needed his signature and letter and he kind of felt powerful and showed resistance. We had a personal issue, and he was like, 'I'm not going to help you,'" she said.

When a woman is married, guardianship transfers from her father to her husband. The Family Law provides that she can be deemed "disobedient" if she does not obtain her husband's permission before working, traveling, or if she leaves her home or refuses to have sex with him, without a "legitimate" reason. A few women who fled their marriages after years of abuse told Human Rights Watch their husbands filed claims at court that they had been disobedient which can mean they lose their right to financial support from their husband.

Women also spoke of how discrimination in laws relating to marriage, divorce, and decisions concerning children left them trapped in abusive marriages, often waiting years to obtain a divorce, unable to remarry for fear of losing 'custody' of their children, and dependent on their ex-husbands, who still act as the legal guardians of their children. Many divorced women must return to having their fathers as guardians.

While the law gives men the ability to divorce unilaterally and without needing to inform their wife of their intention to divorce, women can only get a divorce by applying to the courts on limited grounds. Most divorced women who spoke to Human Rights Watch did not obtain a divorce based on harm against them or discord in the marriage, even when they were in abusive marriages. Either they negotiated out-of-court settlements in which their husbands agreed to divorce them, or they went to court to reach an agreement on returning their dowry (*mahr*) as compensation to the husband in return for a divorce (a practice known as *khula*). Other women who cannot afford to return their dowry remain trapped in abusive marriages.

"Buthaina," a 38-year-old woman with a 6-year-old son, said she has been trying to get a divorce since 2016 after her husband cheated on her every year of their seven-year marriage and married a second wife: "I tried three times to get divorced, but all the time they are on the husband's side…. It's not fair."

In Qatar, women cannot be guardians of their own children at any time. They are denied the authority to make independent decisions relating to their children's documents, finances, travel, and sometimes schooling and medical treatment, even if they are divorced and a court granted them residency ('custody') of their children, or the father of their child has passed away. If the child has no relative to act as the male guardian, the state takes up this role instead of allowing the mother to do so.

Several women spoke of how men abused their position of power. Um Qahtan, age 44, said that her husband had threatened her that if she left him, he would prevent their four children from traveling with her, and transfer the children from international schools to government schools. She said after she left him, "he has done both things."

While more women than ever are attending university, many women reported that their male guardians had prohibited them from studying abroad or at mixed-gender universities in Qatar, limiting what they could study and their future careers. Women indirectly need male guardian permission to obtain a government scholarship to study abroad or in Qatar as per Qatar's Scholarships Law. It is unsurprising then that there are double the number of Qatari male students than Qatari female students at universities abroad on government scholarships.

Women reported facing restrictions at the state's sex-segregated Qatar University including that they needed guardian permission to enter or leave with a taxi or a car not registered by their family with the university, to reside in student accommodation, and to take field trips as part of their studies. "Maha," a 20-year-old Qatar University student said, "you need to have [an] approval letter to commute with the taxis. If you don't, they call your parents which is ridiculous because those going to university are adults…"

While no law requires women to have guardian permission to work, it also does not prohibit discrimination against women in the recruitment process. Women said they needed male guardian permission to work in many ministries including the ministries of education, defense, interior, municipality and environment, endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic affairs, as well as governmental or quasi-governmental institutions including Qatar University, Qatar Foundation, the State Audit Bureau, and in government schools. Some women said their families or husbands refused to let them work or would not let them work in mixed-gender environments.

Interior Ministry rules, but not law, provide that unmarried Qatari women under age 25 need permission from their male guardian (in person or an exit permit) to travel abroad. Men can also ask courts to impose travel bans against their wives or daughters, at any age or nationality, and authorities do not inform women when travel bans are imposed on them or their children. Women are also not allowed to travel abroad with their own children without the permission of the children's father, a requirement not imposed on men.
Men can use their control over women capriciously and for self-interest. "Fatima," a 22-year-old Qatari woman said in 2015 her younger brother granted her permission to travel abroad with her mother for one journey. She asked him for an extension, but she said he told her, "'I will only do one for you so I can use it when I want something from mom.'"

In 2020, the authorities appear to have restricted women's travel even further by stopping some Qatari women at the airport traveling alone or without a male relative and making them call their male guardian to prove that they were not "escaping". This appears to be in response to the cases of women escaping Qatar, particularly as Noof Al Maadeed did so using the government's app on her father's phone. Officials stopped women under 25 years old who had valid exit permits, as well as women over 25, who should not require such permission under current Qatari rules and gave differing statements to women on the rule changes.

Women are also subject to a range of discriminatory rules and practices that restrict their movements within the country. Until January 2020, Qatari women needed male guardian permission to obtain a driving license. While the rule has been lifted, male guardians may still be able to block women from obtaining a provisional driving license. Migrant women in Qatar are still required to get permission if their father or husband is their visa sponsor.

Despite the January 2020 decision, many women said their families still refused to allow them to drive. Women also said they faced other restrictions on leaving the home, meeting friends, or living independently as unmarried women. "Dalal," a 24-year-old student, said after their university moved teaching online due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the little freedom they had is gone: "Before I at least could go to university, and I could get a meal that I wanted. Now I am stuck inside the house, interrupted, and constantly abused."

Such restrictions imposed on women by their families are reinforced by the state's discriminatory rules. Some hotels prohibit unmarried Qatari women under 30 years old to

rent a hotel room, and Qatari women are prohibited from attending some events and entering spaces that serve alcohol. These appear to be interior ministry rules, but the legal basis of such rules is unclear. Single Qatari women can also face discrimination in practice when attempting to rent an apartment. Qatari women also reported that they needed to prove they are divorced or widowed to register for their entitlement as citizens to free water and electricity with Qatar's state company on water and electricity.

Despite Qatar's strong regional reputation for its healthcare service, women also face discrimination in their access to health care. Qatari law requires that in cases of abortion for fetal abnormalities, a woman needs the consent of the father, limiting a woman's autonomy. Women also reported that they need a husband's consent for some other forms of reproductive health care relating to fertility but the legal basis for these requirements is unclear. Women said they are required to show proof of marriage to access some sexual and reproductive health care.

Some women reported how such rules delayed treatment, even when their disorders did not relate to sexual activity. "Dana," age 20, said she had to lie that she was married by giving her friend's name and number as her husband in order to be treated urgently for endometriosis, a severe disorder of her reproductive tracts.

> One time, an ER doctor referred me to the [state] Women's Hospital for an ultrasound. I was in so much pain he thought my ovary had burst. But they wouldn't give me a vaginal ultrasound without a marriage license. They refused to actually do a physical on me because I wasn't married.

Foreign national women living in Qatar also face many restrictions. Under Qatar's visa-sponsorship system, known as *kafala,* foreign women who are dependent on their husbands or fathers as their visa sponsors to enter and reside in Qatar are under controls comparable to male guardianship. Women need their visa sponsor to give permission for them to get a driving license, work, or obtain a government scholarship to study in Qatar. The authorities send automatic text messages to visa sponsors when their dependents leave the country and allow men to ban their female relatives from traveling abroad. The visa sponsorship rules thus also enable abuse. "Aziza," a British woman said when she lived in Qatar, her British father had a hold over her as he could decide as her visa

sponsor whether she could work or attend university: “He would reiterate that ‘you can’t work if I don’t give you my no objection, I am your father here. If I don’t want you to go to school or university, no one can do anything about it.’”

While women from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries do not legally need a sponsor to live or work in Qatar, they reported that some employers imposed the same rule requiring male guardian permission to work on them as they do with Qatari women.

Even when the authorities enact reforms, such as the January 2020 decision to allow Qatari women to seek driving licenses independently or when they change rules on whether a woman can rent a hotel room, these decisions do not get much publicity. This makes it difficult for women to enjoy such reforms or to challenge discrimination when they face it. Moreover, women have few avenues to report discrimination in practice as Qatar has no anti-discrimination law or equality body to sanction it. A lack of independent women’s rights organizations as well as intimidation and harassment of vocal Qatari women make it difficult to promote grassroots change.

In the past two decades, Qatar’s initiatives on women’s rights have been driven largely by Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, wife of the former Emir. Major initiatives have included the creation of Education City that hosts mixed-gender universities including satellite campuses of international universities, and social protection mechanisms including a safehouse for domestic violence survivors. In 1999 Qatar became the second GCC state to allow women to vote and stand for its 29-member central municipal council elections. In 2003, Qatar appointed its first female minister. In 2017 the Qatari Emir appointed four women to the 45-member Shura council (advisory legislative body). In 2019, Qatar set up an inter-ministerial body to propose amendments to laws in line with its international obligations on women, among others. “Dana,” age 20, said, “I feel like Qatar was the first in the Gulf to acknowledge women’s rights, but now we are falling behind.”

Despite a growing number of highly educated Qatari women, women’s participation in the workforce continues to remain half that of men. Qatar’s National Vision 2030 states as one of its goals that: “Women will assume a significant role in all spheres of life, especially through participating in economic and political decision-making.” Qatar’s National Development Strategy 2018-2022 acknowledges that the goal of increasing private sector participation depends on “taking advantage of highly educated Qatari women.”

Enforcing male guardianship rules and allowing social restrictions on women to continue unabated directly contradict these aspirations and put Qatar in breach of its constitution and its international human rights obligations. Qatar should take immediate steps to eliminate discriminatory male guardianship rules and practices and other discriminatory rules against women.

Key Recommendations

To Qatari Authorities

- Issue a decree to clarify women's full legal capacity at 18.
- Amend all laws, rules, and practices to reflect that women have equal legal capacity to that of men, by ending requirements for male guardian permission for decisions relating to their rights, including to marry, study, travel, work, and access health care, and to treat women and men equally as heads of households.
- Remove discriminatory policies that prevent women from renting an apartment, connecting utilities, renting a hotel room, attending events, concerts and spaces, as well as any other restrictions on women's movements.
- Issue an anti-discrimination law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, ensures effective remedies for those who experience discrimination, and provides a positive obligation on the state to take steps to eliminate gender-based discrimination.
- Amend the Family Law to ensure that women have rights on an equal basis to men in all matters related to marriage and divorce. All decisions relating to children should be primarily on the basis of the best interests of the child in line with international standards and without discriminating against women.
- Amend laws, regulations and policies to ensure that women are treated as guardians of their own children on an equal basis to men including the ability to register births, obtain passports and ID cards, independently open bank accounts for them, take decisions relating to their finances, enroll them in schools, make health decisions, or travel abroad with them.
- With regard to foreign residents in Qatar, amend laws to remove discrimination between men and women as visa sponsors or as dependents of their visa sponsors, including treating women equally as heads of households. Abolish requirements that non-Qatari women need permission from their visa sponsors or male guardians to obtain special work permits to work, obtain driving licenses, obtain a scholarship to study, or access health care, and stop issuing messages informing visa sponsors when their female relatives travel abroad.

Methodology

A Human Rights Watch senior researcher conducted background research and interviews on Qatar's guardianship system and discriminatory laws between December 2019 and February 2021.

Human Rights Watch conducted interviews with 73 people. Due to restrictions on travel and in-person meetings connected to Covid-19, most of the research was carried out remotely. We spoke to 70 people over the phone, 2 in person, and 1 through online messaging. We conducted 50 in-depth interviews with women about their personal experiences with the male guardianship system aged between 20 and 48 years old. Of the 50, Human Rights Watch spoke to 1 Qatari individual who is perceived as a woman and identified as gender non-binary, 35 Qatari women, and 14 non-Qatari women, including those either resident in Qatar or who formerly lived in Qatar, and women who had Qatari mothers and foreign national fathers. An additional woman submitted a written statement to Human Rights Watch. The women that Human Rights Watch interviewed included students, homemakers, healthcare workers, lawyers, academics, business owners, designers, heads of social enterprises, government workers, and private-sector employees. Human Rights Watch makes no statistical claims based on these interviews on prevalence of abuse.

Human Rights Watch also spoke to 23 academics, hotel workers from 16 different hotels, social workers, students, and doctors in Qatar to collect or verify information. These interviewees sometimes gave their own personal accounts relating to the guardianship system, immigration system or other discriminatory laws. Human Rights Watch also examined 27 Qatari laws covering a range of issues, as well as regulations, government and private companies' websites, policies, forms, and relevant mobile phone applications.

All participants were informed of the purpose of the interview, its voluntary nature, and the ways in which the data would be used. Human Rights Watch conducted interviews using encrypted applications, wherever possible, to ensure the security of interviewees based in Qatar. This report uses pseudonyms—indicated in quotation marks—for most interviewees at their request and withholds other identifying information to protect their privacy and

their security. None of the interviewees received monetary or other incentives for speaking with Human Rights Watch. All interviews were conducted in English or Arabic.

Human Rights Watch spoke to Qatar Foundation for Social Work on March 3, 2021 via video conference.

Human Rights Watch sent letters to seven ministries including the ministries of interior; administrative development, labour and social affairs; justice; education and higher education; public health; energy affairs; commerce and industry; as well as letters to Qatar Foundation for Social Work, the Qatar Foundation, Qatar University, and the National Human Rights Committee on February 1 and 2, 2021.

Human Rights Watch received responses from the Ministry of Energy Affairs on February 15, 2021; Qatar Foundation for Social Work on March 3, 2021; a compiled information response to its letters from other ministries as well as Qatar University, on March 1, 2021; as well as information from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education on March 9, 2021. Human Rights Watch incorporated relevant responses into the report.

I. Background

> A hundred percent the male guardianship system hinders my ability to live my life to the fullest. Everything I have to do is tied to a man.
>
> —"Noora," a 20-year-old Qatari woman, June 15, 2020

Male Guardianship in Qatar

A myriad of Qatari laws, policies and practices require women to secure male guardian permission when making several key life decisions, including those related to travel, work, education, marriage, and health. Despite Qatar's Family Law establishing an individual's full legal capacity at age 18 when guardianship over them ends (with some exceptions such as those deemed "insane"), these laws and practices subject adult women to male guardian control.[1]

Men, once 18, have full legal capacity and can also become the guardians of adult female relatives. A woman's male guardian (*wali al-amr*) may be her father and if not present or able, then her brother, uncle, or grandfather. Upon marriage, guardianship passes to a woman's husband. Many women who get divorced must revert to having their fathers, or nearest male relative as guardians.

A significant challenge in Qatar is the lack of clarity or information about the extent of discriminatory laws and requirements. Human Rights Watch examined 27 laws covering a range of issues including employment, renting accommodation, and personal status, and tracked down relevant regulations, policies, and forms where available. Some policies did not appear to have a legal basis. Many women said they did not know all of the rules and often learned by experience when they came up against a barrier or heard of others' experiences. "Fatima," age 22, said: "I don't know what the legal age is [for a woman].

[1] Law no. 22 of 2006 promulgating the Family Law (hereafter Family Law), June 29, 2006, art. 189 provides "A person who has attained the age of majority by attaining eighteen years of age shall have full legal capacity, unless he is placed under guardianship," https://www.almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=2558&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021). See also Law no. 40 of 2004 relating to Guardianship of Minors' Wealth, December 14, 2014, art. 1 which, provides that "minors" include all those under 18 years old, as well as those deemed "insane," https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=2427&LawID=307&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021).

There is a legal age for traveling and driving and booking a hotel room... There is no actual written law of what the legal age is."[2]

Even in areas where Qatar has no law or policy on male guardianship rules, women may still face employers, government officials, or others insisting that they need male guardian permission. Qatar has no anti-discrimination law or equality body to monitor and sanction such discrimination in practice.

The impact of Qatar's laws, policies, and practices vary, and a woman's experience can be entirely dependent on her age, socioeconomic background, community, and family. Some women spoke of having families and male relatives who supported their decisions and facilitated their ability to travel, marry, study, and work of their choosing. However, women Human Rights Watch interviewed also said that even though they led "privileged" lives, guardianship weighed on them and could be used against them at any time.

Many interviewees spoke of the deep and heavy toll of being denied control over their own lives and the severe restrictions over their movements. Some also spoke of mental health impacts, particularly when their guardian is abusive, including feelings of depression, stress, self-harm, and psychological distress. One woman said the restrictions led to suicide ideation, and two women reported that they knew of women who had attempted suicides because of abuse.

Several women said they sought to marry in order to escape abusive or controlling families, but this also left them prey to another male guardian. "Asma," age 40, said, "When I was 17 years old, a cousin of mine asked for my hand and said that he will be living in the [United] States because of his work. For me it was my only chance to travel and live abroad and study. I didn't look at it as a marriage but an opportunity to leave… Nobody forced me. But they made it so tight for me in the house that marriage was the out." Asma described how she then endured 15 years of marriage to a husband who physically abused her and restricted her movements.[3]

[2] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Fatima," Qatari, January 21, 2020.

[3] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Asma," Qatari, June 16, 2020.

Women reported particular hardship when their male guardian is absent, missing, in prison, experienced difficulties due to a medical condition, passed away, or when they do not have an obvious guardian. "Fatima," age 22, said she is estranged from her father who lives outside of Qatar. She said, "I don't know who my guardian is now. I thought maybe my brother, but he is not in a good mental state, so that makes him unqualified. I tried to contact my uncles, but they don't want to be responsible. I don't know what to do."[4]

The male guardianship system is closely related to the seclusion of women from a male-dominated society that has traditionally controlled women's sexuality and strictly limited their autonomy. For example, women reported that their male guardians and other family members refused them permission to travel, work or study where they wished because they were intent on ensuring that they do not end up in a relationship with a man against their family's wishes, acquire a reputation for being viewed as sexually active or breaking social taboos, or to otherwise "protect" them from male society.

Women remarked how the small Qatari citizenry—around 333,000 Qatari citizens in a population of 2.7 million—reinforces social surveillance imposing conservative values more stringently on women than men and, making it difficult for them to make choices free of social restrictions.[5] "Amira," age 23, spoke of the social pressure on male guardians.

> I think it's important to understand that a lot of these men controlling women—they are not really enforcing their own beliefs. It's like 'You shouldn't drive because what will people say if you drive?'…. He would say 'People think I am not a good father on what society deems to be right.' Men are just as much victims of this authority and power that men are expected to have. They feel pressure to do this.[6]

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[4] Human Rights Watch interview with "Fatima," Qatari, January 21, 2020.

[5] In August 2020, Qatar had a population of 2,735,707 people see Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority, "Qatar Monthly Statistics: Statistics of August 2020," Issue 80, September 2020, https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/statistics/Statistical%20Releases/General/QMS/QMS_PSA_80_Sep_2020.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021), p. 15. While Qatar does not publish official statistics on the exact number of Qatari nationals, it does produce monthly and yearly population statistics from which the number can be extrapolated. One consultancy based its calculations on official Planning and Statistics Authority (PSA) data sets see Priya Dsouza Communications, "Population of Qatar by nationality - 2019 report," August 15, 2019, https://priyadsouza.com/population-of-qatar-by-nationality-in-2017/ (accessed February 5, 2021).

[6] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Amira," Qatari, March 19, 2020.

The male guardianship system is also indirectly applied to non-Qatari women who are on visas sponsored by their husbands or fathers. The *kafala* (sponsorship) system for foreign workers, which exists to varying degrees in the region, requires migrants to have a sponsor to enter and reside in the country.[7] The sponsor wields significant control over their lives once in Qatar. Foreign women are required to have permission from their male-relative sponsors in order to drive, work, or obtain a government scholarship to study.

Men and women who earn above 10,000 QAR (USD $2,747) a month can sponsor their foreign spouse and children.[8] Foreign women on their husbands' visa sponsorship, however, are treated differently to foreign men dependent on their wives as their visa sponsors. Women whose husbands are their visa sponsors are identified on their Qatar residency identification (ID) with "home maker" as their occupation, even when they work. Men on their wives' sponsorship have Qatar IDs that list their occupation as "without."

Women can get special work permits if their husbands are their visa sponsors, but they must get their husband's permission to obtain such work permits. Men who are on their wives' visa sponsorship are not allowed to work under their wives' sponsorship (see Restrictions on Women's Right to Work).[9] One American woman resident in Qatar said her foreign husband is not allowed to work under her visa. If he finds work, he will need the company to act as his new visa sponsor, and then Qatari authorities may require that he, the husband, becomes the visa sponsor for her.[10] One academic told Human Rights Watch, "As far as the state is concerned—the man's job is to be the breadwinner, they won't accept a different model for the family."[11]

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[7] See Law no. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates and their residence, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=102231 (accessed February 5, 2021).

[8] Law no. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates and their residence, section 12. Interior Minister Decision no. 25 of 2019 issuing the executive regulations for Law no. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates and their residence, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=8021&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021), art. 58.

[9] Law no. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates and their residence, section 17; see also Interior Minister Decision no. 25 of 2019 issuing the executive regulations for Law no. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates and their residence, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=8021&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021), art. 68.

[10] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Laura," American resident in Qatar, March 7, 2020.

[11] Human Rights Watch video interview with "Sayeeda," British resident in Qatar, August 6, 2020.

Qatar allows Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nationals to reside and work in the country as per freedom of movement rules within the GCC.[12] They did so even during the forced isolation imposed on Qatar in 2017-2021 by some GCC neighbors—Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—who expelled Qatari citizens from their countries.[13] According to the GCC rules, women from GCC states who are resident in Qatar do not need a male sponsor, as other foreign women do, to allow them to reside and work in Qatar. However, in practice, GCC women also reported facing some male guardianship rules like Qatari women.

The practice of male guardianship in its many forms impairs and, in some cases, nullifies women's exercise of a host of human rights including equality before the law and women's equal right with men to travel, work, study, access health care, and marry without discrimination, violating Qatar's 2004 constitution, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which Qatar ratified in 2007, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (ICESCR), both of which Qatar acceded to in May 2018.[14]

In 2019, the UN CEDAW Committee, which oversees the implementation of the CEDAW treaty, called on Qatar to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and to "repeal all remaining legal provisions that discriminate against women and girls, especially in the areas of marriage, divorce, custody of children, inheritance and property

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[12] The Unified Economic Agreement Between the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, December 2001, https://wits.worldbank.org/GPTAD/PDF/archive/GCC.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021), art. 8.

[13] Human Rights Watch, *Qatar: Isolation Causing Rights Abuses,* July 12, 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/12/qatar-isolation-causing-rights-abuses.

[14] Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, art. 35 provides that "All persons are equal before the law and there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of sex, race, language, or religion," https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/about-qatar/the-constitution/ (accessed February 5, 2021). Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted December 18, 1979, G.A. res. 34/180, 34 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 46) at 193, U.N. Doc. A/34/46, entered into force September 3, 1981, art.1(2). Qatar acceded to the convention on April 29, 2009. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, arts.2.1, 3, 12, 23, 24, and 26; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force January 3, 1976; arts. 2.2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 12, and 13. Qatar acceded to the ICCPR and ICESCR on May 21, 2018. [15] See UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), "Concluding Observations on the second periodic report of Qatar," CEDAW/C/QAT/CO/2, July 30, 2019, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/QAT/CO/2&Lang=En (accessed February 5, 2021), para. 14.

rights, nationality and the requirement of the authorization of a guardian for single women under the age of 25 years to travel abroad."[15]

Male Guardianship as a Concept

Qatar has made reservations to international human rights treaties in relation to gender equality provisions in marriage and family and equality before the law on grounds that they contravene Sharia, or Islamic law.[16] However, the CEDAW Committee and others have called on Qatar to withdraw such reservations as they "are contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention."[17]

Moreover, CEDAW requires states parties to go further to eliminate discrimination in practice, by modifying "the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women."[18]

While elements of the male guardianship system on women exist across the Middle East, predominantly in the Gulf, such rules vary across states and Islamic schools of thought. Islamic scholars who support male guardianship do so based principally on a Quranic verse which other scholars see as ambiguous. The verse (Quran 4:34) is translated as,

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[15] See UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), "Concluding Observations on the second periodic report of Qatar," CEDAW/C/QAT/CO/2, July 30, 2019, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/QAT/CO/2&Lang=En (accessed February 5, 2021), para. 14.

[16] For Qatar's reservations to CEDAW see "8. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," United Nations Treaty Collection, accessed February 5, 2021 https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en#EndDec; see also "Qatar Joins Core Human Rights Treaties," Human Rights Watch news release, May 25, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/25/qatar-joins-core-human-rights-treaties; Qatar reservations to ICESCR, see "3. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," United Nations Treaty Collection, accessed February 5, 2021, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-3&chapter=4&clang=_en#EndDec; and for Qatar reservations to ICCPR see "4. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," United Nations Treaty Collection, accessed February 5, 2021, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?chapter=4&clang=_en&mtdsg_no=IV-4&src=IND#EndDec. [17] See CEDAW "Concluding Observations on the second periodic report of Qatar," July 30, 2019, para.9.

[17] See CEDAW "Concluding Observations on the second periodic report of Qatar," July 30, 2019, para.9.

[18] CEDAW, art. 5(a).

"Men are *qawammun* [protectors and maintainers] in relation to women, according to what God has favored some over others, and according to what they spend from their wealth."[19]

Other Islamic legal experts have argued that male guardianship, as interpreted by jurists and states that impose it, misinterprets fundamental Quranic precepts and that male scholars have elevated guardianship over Quranic concepts such as equality and respect between the sexes.[20] A former judge in Saudi Arabia told Human Rights Watch: "According to the Sharia [Islamic law], there is no need for any guardian [for women], except when she travels in a risky situation.… All the Sharia schools consider that women after adulthood … should be considered as an independent human being…."[21]

Male guardianship is not unique to Islamic law and history, but exists in a broader history and context across other laws and traditions around the world that give men control over women's lives or deny women legal capacity equal to men.[22] For instance, while women had rights to property including after marriage, and could inherit under Islamic law in 7th century Arabia, married women in some European legal traditions and later in the United States lost part of their legal personhood upon marriage, and their property became their

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[19] See the reflection on the verse and interpretations on the wording in Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger, eds., *Men in Charge: Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, (London: One World Publications, 2015), p.15. See also A. Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary (Maryland: Amana Corp., 1983), p. 190.

[20] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger, eds., Men in Charge, *Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, (London: One World Publications 2015).

[21] Human Rights Watch telephone interview with former Saudi judge, January 4, 2016. See Human Rights Watch report, *Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System,* July 2016, https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/16/boxed/women-and-saudi-arabias-male-guardianship-system. [22] See Uri Yiftach and Michele Faraguna, eds., *Ancient Guardianship: Legal Incapacities in the Ancient World*, Legal Documents in Ancient Societies VI, Jerusalem, 3-5.11.2013, (Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2017); Suzanne McGee and Heide Moore, "Women's rights and their money: a timeline from Cleopatra to Lilly Ledbetter," *The Guardian*, August 11, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/money/us-money-blog/2014/aug/11/women-rights-money-timeline-history (accessed February 5, 2021). [23] See William Blackstone, *"Of husband and wife" Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–1769), (Lonang Institute, 1769); Ursula Vogel, "Under Permanent Guardianship: Women's Condition under Modern Civil Law," in *The Political Interests of Gender, Developing Theory and Research with a Feminist Face*, ed. Kathleen B. Jones and Anna G. Jónasdóttir, (SAGE, 1988); and Tim Stretton and Krista J. Kesselring, *Married Women and the Law: Coverture in England and the Common Law World*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).

[22] See Uri Yiftach and Michele Faraguna, eds., *Ancient Guardianship: Legal Incapacities in the Ancient World*, Legal Documents in Ancient Societies VI, Jerusalem, 3-5.11.2013, (Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2017); Suzanne McGee and Heide Moore, "Women's rights and their money: a timeline from Cleopatra to Lilly Ledbetter," *The Guardian*, August 11, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/money/us-money-blog/2014/aug/11/women-rights-money-timeline-history (accessed February 5, 2021). [23] See William Blackstone, *"Of husband and wife" Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–1769), (Lonang Institute, 1769); Ursula Vogel, "Under Permanent Guardianship: Women's Condition under Modern Civil Law," in *The Political Interests of Gender, Developing Theory and Research with a Feminist Face*, ed. Kathleen B. Jones and Anna G. Jónasdóttir, (SAGE, 1988); and Tim Stretton and Krista J. Kesselring, *Married Women and the Law: Coverture in England and the Common Law World*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).

husband's under a concept known as 'coverture' as their husbands were deemed their protectors.[23]

Restrictions on Civic Space for Qatari Women

Part of the reason why Qatar has made little progress towards eliminating male guardianship policies and discriminatory practices is the limited space women have to push for reforms. Women who speak out on women's rights, including through online speech, face intimidation and harassment from government authorities or from society. Women who spoke to Human Rights Watch are cautious about referring to themselves in public as activists because such identification could target them for attack.

Qatar has no independent women's rights organizations, and its many women-focused initiatives are governmental or quasi-governmental, predominantly led by Sheikha Moza under Qatar Foundation.[24] Qatar's National Human Rights Committee, funded by the government, does receive complaints from women, but it is not solely focused on women's rights issues.[25] A few women have set up social enterprises, many of which focus on empowering women at work. Qatar's law on associations requires that organizations do not engage in 'political matters' and can otherwise be dissolved.[26] "Sanaa," a 31-year-old Qatari woman, said "We need independent institutions. The civil society law needs to be adjusted so women can start these organizations. How are these issues supposed to resolve themselves, as long as there is no space for people to get together to change these issues?"[27] CEDAW requires that states parties should eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life, including their ability to participate in non-governmental organizations.[28]

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[23] See William Blackstone, *"Of husband and wife" Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–1769), (Lonang Institute, 1769); Ursula Vogel, "Under Permanent Guardianship: Women's Condition under Modern Civil Law," in *The Political Interests of Gender, Developing Theory and Research with a Feminist Face*, ed. Kathleen B. Jones and Anna G. Jónasdóttir, (SAGE, 1988); and Tim Stretton and Krista J. Kesselring, *Married Women and the Law: Coverture in England and the Common Law World*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).

[24] See Qatar Foundation, "About Us," undated, https://www.qf.org.qa/about (accessed February 5, 2021).

[25] Qatar National Human Rights Committee, https://nhrc-qa.org/en/ (accessed February 5, 2021).

[26] See Law no. 12 of 2004 on Private Associations and Foundations, May 10, 2004, https://almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=3956&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021), arts. 1 and 35(3).

[27] Human Rights Watch phone follow-up interview with "Sanaa," Qatari, January 20, 2021.

[28] CEDAW, art. 7.

In recent years, women and men in Qatar have become more vocal on social media about issues in Qatar including women's rights, such as on Twitter and Instagram.[29] However, some women have faced online harassment by individuals or intimidation from government authorities for posting about discriminatory restrictions and family abuse. This was exacerbated during the forced isolation of Qatar by neighboring states of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates that took place between 2017 until January 2021, where Twitter troll armies were used to criticize Qatar, but also left Qatari women exposed to pressure from others online and from government officials not to raise issues related to discrimination against women or other criticism in Qatar.[30]

Qatar's laws limit the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression, contrary to Qatar's constitution.[31] Qatar's 2014 Combatting Cyber Crimes Law criminalizes spreading "false news" on the internet (a term that is not defined) and provides for a maximum of three years in prison for anyone convicted of posting online content that "violates social values or principles," or "insults or slanders others."[32] In 2020, Qatar amended its Penal Code to criminalize broadcasting, publishing or republishing "rumors or statements or false or malicious news or sensational propaganda, inside or outside the state, whenever it is intended to harm national interests or incite public opinion or disturb the social or public order of the state" with up to five years in prison and a 100,000 Qatari riyals.[33] Some women told Human Rights Watch they were concerned that speaking about women's rights could be considered inciting public opinion or disturbing the social order.

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[29] See David Harding, "Can Qatar's feminists go where Saudi Arabia's couldn't?," *Ozy*, June 22, 2020, https://www.ozy.com/around-the-world/can-qatars-feminists-go-where-saudi-arabias-couldnt/272076/ (accessed February 5, , 2021); Joseph Varghese, "More Qatari women in social media: survey," *Gulf Times*, September 26, 2018, https://www.gulf-times.com/story/607403/More-Qatari-women-in-social-media-survey (accessed February 5, 2021); and Noora Ahmed Lari et al., "Social media usage and support for women in community leadership: Evidence from Qatar," *Women's Studies International Forum* 81 (2020), accessed December 14, 2020, doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2020.102374.

[30] Human Rights Watch, *Qatar: Isolation Causing Rights Abuses,* July 12, 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/12/qatar-isolation-causing-rights-abuses; BBC News, "Qatar crisis: Saudi Arabia and allies restore diplomatic ties with emirate," *BBC News*, January 5, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55538792 (accessed February 5, 2021); Human Rights Watch follow-up phone interview with "Haya," Qatari, December 17, 2020.

[31] Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, art. 47.

[32] Law no. 14 of 2014 on Combatting Cyber Crimes Law, September 15, 2014, https://almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=6366&language=ar (accessed March 14, 2021), art. 8.

[33] Law no. 11 of 2004, Penal Code, May 10, 2004, art. 136(bis) amended January 19, 2020, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?ID=26 (accessed March 14, 2021). See Human Rights Watch news release, "Qatar: 5-Year Prison Sentence Set for 'Fake News'," January 22, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/22/qatar-5-year-prison-sentence-set-fake-news.

Six women told Human Rights Watch that they faced intimidation by government cyber security for their tweets or other online actions about women's rights or other political issues, including through interrogations, being asked to sign pledges not to speak about these issues, and being asked to give officials access to their Twitter accounts or surrender their electronic devices to them.[34] As a result, some interviewees shut down their accounts or censored their online speech. In some cases, the authorities called women's families, potentially exposing them to family violence.

In addition, a few women said that they experienced problems trying to get a police clearance certificate, which they need in order to work or to study abroad and found out through contacts that these problems related to their online activities despite not being charged.[35] Non-Qatari women resident in Qatar said they had to consider censoring their online activism in case it affected their continued residency or their families' jobs and legal status in Qatar.

Saudi women's rights activists' decades-long fight against the draconian male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia along with increasing international pressure led to Saudi authorities making several key reforms including in August 2019, allowing women over 21 to obtain passports and travel abroad without male guardian permission, among other reforms.[36] These reforms were however, accompanied by the arrest and silencing of prominent Saudi women activists.[37]

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[34] Human Rights Watch interviews during August 2019-September 2020 with "Haya;" "Amal;" "Hend" and her friend; "Sama;" and "Sharifa."

[35] Qatar, Ministry of Interior, Criminal Evidence, and Information Department, "Requirements for different types of Police Clearance Certificate (Good Conduct Certificate)," undated, http://web.archive.org/web/20210322105608/https://portal.moi.gov.qa/wps/portal/MOIInternet/departmentcommittees/evidencesinformation/pcc-+1 (accessed March 22, 2021).

[36] Human Rights Watch, *Perpetual Minors: Human Rights Abuses Stemming from Male Guardianship and Sex Segregation in Saudi Arabia*, April 2008, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/saudiarabia0408_1.pdf; Human Rights Watch, *Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System,* July 2016, https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/16/boxed/women-and-saudi-arabias-male-guardianship-system; "Saudi Arabia: Important Advances for Saudi Women," Human Rights Watch news release, August 2, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/02/saudi-arabia-important-advances-saudi-women; "Saudi Arabia: Travel Restrictions on Saudi Women Lifted," Human Rights Watch news release, August 22, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/22/saudi-arabia-travel-restrictions-saudi-women-lifted.

[37] Rothna Begum (Human Rights Watch), "For Saudi Women, Freedom to Drive Masks New Crackdown," commentary, *USA Today*, June 22, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/22/saudi-women-freedom-drive-masks-new-crackdown; "Saudi Arabia: Abusive Charges Against Women Activists," Human Rights Watch news release, March 21, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/21/saudi-arabia-abusive-charges-against-women-activists.

Qatari women nonetheless were inspired. A few days after the August 2019 reforms, Qatari women using a Twitter account @QatarFem tweeted a series of messages about how Qatar continues to impose male guardianship requirements including that women under 25 need guardian permission to travel abroad and to obtain a driving license. Within 24 hours the women shut down their account after, according to three interviewees, cybersecurity officials summoned one of the women behind the account for interrogation and called her parents.[38] They said she feared abuse and faced severe restrictions at home as a result. One woman said she believes the government does not like organized accounts where individuals behind it can remain anonymous, "but it is okay for women to tweet from their personal accounts."[39]

[38] The Twitter account @QatarFem currently exists but is now locked https://twitter.com/QatarFem (accessed February 1, 2021).

[39] Human Rights Watch follow-up phone interview with "Haya," Qatari, December 17, 2020.

II. Discrimination in Marriage and Divorce

> Why we can't have this simple right of marrying who we want?
>
> — "Latifa," Qatari, in a statement to Human Rights Watch on January 25, 2020

Under Qatar's 2006 Family Law, women cannot marry without male guardian permission while men can marry without such permission and have up to four wives at any one time. Qatari women and men must obtain the state's permission to marry a foreign national. Qatar's Family Law requires women to obey their husbands during marriage and can be deemed disobedient if they work or travel without permission or refuse to have sexual relations without a justification. The law requires women to apply to the courts for a divorce while allowing men the right to unilateral divorce, and grants fathers legal guardianship of their children regardless of whether a court has ordered that the children should live with their mother. Women also face discrimination in inheritance, in which they receive half the shares of their male siblings.[40]

Qatar reinforces male guardianship by deeming men to be heads of households. Women interviewed by Human Rights Watch spoke of discriminatory measures including those that grant men higher social and housing allowances than women as they are assumed to be providing for the family.[41] Even where women are entitled to social welfare as divorced

[40] This report does not detail discrimination in inheritance. See Qatar's Family Law on inheritance provisions.

[41] See Cabinet Resolution no. 32 of 2016 issuing the executive regulations for the Civil Human Resources Law, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=17511&lawId=7135&language=ar (accessed on February 5, 2021), arts. 19-20. The regulations provide that Qatari employees who work in government, state institutions or state-sponsored companies, are entitled to receive additional governmental monetary contributions including a social allowance and housing allowance which increases if they are married or support children and is determined by their grade at work. The regulations provide that of the married couple, the entitlement goes to whoever is in the higher grade as that is at a higher allowance rate. It also provides that divorced women with 'custody' of the children is entitled to the married persons' social allowance. However, women have reported that even if they are on the higher grade at their government job compared to their husband which should make them eligible to receive the married persons' allowance, their husband can argue to keep receiving the married persons' allowance, and thus depriving them of receiving the amount. Moreover, women who are separated and have temporary 'custody' said they cannot benefit from receiving the married persons allowance unless they show proof of their divorce. See also a study which stated that "Although the law does not state explicitly that these additional salary benefits should be given to the male, this is common practice and leads to the perception that men are paid more than women," in Tanya Kane et al., "In majaalis al-hareem: The complex professional and personal choices of Qatari women," *DIFI Family Research and Proceedings* 2015, no. 1 (2015), accessed February 5, 2021, doi: 10.5339/difi.2015.4.

women on low income they must prove that they did not remarry.[42] "Haya," said in 2019 she applied to the family court to certify that her mother did not remarry, but court officials refused, saying her mother must present two male witnesses to prove it.[43]

As in many majority Muslim-countries, Qatar's Family Law is based on Sharia (Islamic law), which treats marriages as contracts concluded by two mutually consenting parties. Qatar's Family Law is based on the Hanbali school of law, and as such the law applies to "all those subject to the Hanbali madhhab (school of law or thought)." It also states that while non-Muslims, and Muslims who abide by other Islamic schools of thoughts, can abide by their own rules, they can request to have the Family Law apply to them.[44]

Qatar's discrimination against women in marriage and family relations violates CEDAW, which stipulates that states parties are required to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations" including to ensure women's equal right with men to freely enter into and to exit marriage and to ensure equal rights with regard to guardianship of children.[45] It also requires states parties to ensure women's equal right with men to family benefits such as state allowances for families.[46]

Right to Marry

Qatar's Family Law requires that a male guardian must contract a woman into marriage with her consent.[47] The law provides that the "matrimonial guardian shall be the father, then the agnate grandfather, then the son, the paternal uncle (full) and then the father's uncle (full) (great uncle), respectively."[48] When there is no male guardian, a judge may act

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[42] See Qatar Hukoomi, government e-portal, "Social Assistance," undated, http://web.archive.org/web/20210322110505/https://hukoomi.gov.qa/en/service/social-assistance (accessed March 22, 2021).

[43] Human Rights Watch follow-up phone interview with "Haya," Qatari, September 18, 2020.

[44] Law no. 22 of 2006, promulgating the Family Law (hereafter Family Law), June 29, 2006, arts. 3 and 4, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=2558&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021).

[45] CEDAW, art. 16(1).

[46] CEDAW, art. 13.

[47] Family Law, art. 28.

[48] See Family Law, art. 26. Furthermore, Family Law, arts. 27 and 29, provide that a judge may allow a distant guardian to act as the woman's guardian if her closest guardian is absent or obstructing the marriage or where several guardians of the same degree disagree among themselves. However, the "father has the right to annul the marriage if he does not approve the marriage contract." In such cases, the judge can decide on whether the husband is "deemed suitable in the circumstances."

as the woman's guardian to conclude the marriage.[49] The law also requires two Muslim male witnesses to the marriage.[50]

"Sara," age 28, said "it's kind of unheard of" for a woman to marry without guardian permission.[51] This rule is so ingrained in society that in a 2017 survey, 83 percent of respondents in Qatar agreed that "the fathers should have the right to prevent their daughters' marriages when they do not approve of the fiancés."[52]

Women pointed to an array of issues that can impact whether their family will agree to a marriage including family name, ancestry, socioeconomic status, religious sect, and nationality. While some women were able to marry men of their choosing, many spoke of how these restrictions prevented them, their friends, or family members from being able to marry freely. "Maha," age 20, said her friend "wanted to marry someone that her parents didn't approve of. She kept trying to look for loopholes to do it without her dad's approval, but she wasn't able to. She had to forget about it and move on. She was Qatari and he was also Qatari. It was essentially an issue of racism because he had Black ancestors."[53]

The 1989 law regulating marriage to foreigners prohibits Qatari men and women who are in specific official government posts or public bodies or while they are studying on a scholarship abroad, from marrying a foreign national except if they are from another GCC country.[54] In all other cases, they must seek approval to marry a foreign national, except if

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[49] Family Law, art. 30.

[50] Ibid., art.36.

[51] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Sara," Qatari, February 12, 2020.

[52] Dr Kaltham Al-Ghanim, "Transitional society and participation of women in the public sphere: A survey of Qatar society," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research* 3, no. 2, 51–63, (Feb. 2017): 55 and 56, accessed February 5, 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314090616_Transitional_society_and_participation_of_women_in_the_public_sphere_A_survey_of_Qatar_society_International_Journal_of_Humanities_and_Social_Science_Research32_51-63_ISSN_2455-2070.

[53] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Maha," Palestinian, February 7, 2020.

[54] Law Decree no. 21 of 1989 regarding the Regulation of Marriage to Foreigners, December 25, 1989, https://almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=8702&LawID=2555&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021), art. 1, provides that they include "Ministers and Deputy Ministers, heads of boards of institutions, public bodies and their deputies," "diplomatic staff and consular corps," "officers, non-commissioned officers and members of the Armed Forces, police and other security agencies" unless they have the approval of the ministers of defense and interior or the competent head of security, and "Students on scholarship who are studying abroad whether supported by the State or studying at their own expense." This article also provides that the council of ministers can add more public offices or functions to the list, and the Emir can grant exemption to anyone listed in the article.

[55] Ibid., arts. 2.1, 3 and 4.

they are from the GCC, from a committee of officials with the Minister of Interior making the final decision.[55] Qatari women must also show they have male guardian permission to marry.[56] While the law provides that applicants can expect a response within three months, and have a month to appeal, women said that it took years for them, their friends and family members to receive a response.[57] In practice, women and men marry in religious-only marriages without registering the marriage, and then seek the state marriage committee's approval following which they have an official state-registered marriage.[58]

"Nawal," age 32, said she married her non-Qatari husband in a religious ceremony in 2016, unofficially, with her younger brother acting as her male guardian to provide the approval as her father had passed away. However, when she applied to the marriage committee to approve her marriage to a foreign national, her brother changed his mind and refused to give his permission as her guardian. She said, "I had problems with my brother, and I needed his signature and letter and he kind of felt powerful and showed resistance. We had a personal issue, and he was like 'I'm not going to help you.'" She said this delayed her application, but the committee approved it after three years. However, she still needed her brother to act as her guardian to approve her official marriage in 2019.

> When I was about to get married, I had the papers, and I picked a date and my mum had to collect my brothers as they needed to be there. They played the powerful people: 'we're not going.' I went to *mahkama al-usra* [family court] and said, 'my brothers don't want to come,' and they said, 'okay the *qadi* [judge] will do it'. The court official was about to call my brothers when my mum called to say my younger brother agreed he would come but only as a favor to my mum.[59]

Women who cannot get guardian permission to marry a foreign national may try to leave the country. One woman "Munira" said: "I know one friend who couldn't marry because

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[55] Ibid., arts. 2.1, 3 and 4.

[56] Ibid., art. 4.

[57] Ibid., arts.9-10.

[58] As found in Human Rights Watch interviews. See also a study which found that religious-only (i.e., non-state-registered) marriages are occurring in part because of lengthy administrative processes required for official approval to marry a foreign national. Rajnaara C. Akthar, "Contemporary Issues in Marriage Law and Practice in Qatar," *Journal of Women in the Middle East and the Islamic World* 20 (2020): 124-158, accessed February 5, 2021, doi: 10.1163/15692086-12341389.

[59] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Nawal," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

her father didn't consent. So, she left the country and married where he is from."[60] But those who do so can face punishment. "Zainab" explained: "They have rules that if you do it [marry] abroad, then they might not give you land, and kids won't get passports. They can use the [government-provided citizen] benefits against the Qataris."[61] Some families who are against a woman's choice of husband may cut off their relationship with them, and in extreme cases, may trick or kidnap them back to Qatar or become violent.[62]

Qatari women also complained that they cannot pass nationality to their children like men.[63] "Najwa," age 37, talked about how the Qatari government often holds women up as the provider of education and the caregiver in the family, but asked: "Why is it okay to give [nationality] to a Qatari man's kids but not mine?"[64] While Qatar passed a permanent residency law in 2018, allowing children of Qatari women to receive the same benefits as children of Qatari men, the law allows only up to 100 people to apply for a year, and some families that applied are still awaiting a response.[65] Since Qatari women's children face problems in obtaining citizenship and related benefits, this can further encourage a male

[60] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Munira," Qatari, February 14, 2020.

[61] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Zainab," daughter of a Qatari woman, June 12, 2020; see also Law Decree no. 21 of 1989 regarding the Regulation of Marriage to Foreigners, art. 6(4) which provides that the state's decision to endorse any marriage to a foreign national shall entail that their children are granted residence, travel documents and treated like Qataris in relation to education, healthcare and employment; and that adult children shall have priority in the acquisition of Qatari nationality. Art. 7 sets out sanctions including that marriages that are not endorsed by the committee are considered null and void, as well as termination of employment or cancellation of a scholarship for those prohibited from marrying a foreign national.

[62] The most high-profile case related to Hamda Fahad Jassem Al Thani, a woman from the ruling family, who married her husband abroad without her family's approval in 2002. Amnesty International reported how she was kidnapped and returned to Qatar where she was then held under house arrest until she escaped. In 2006, government officials helped secure travel documents so that she could return to her husband in Egypt. See Amnesty International, "Urgent Action: Fear for Safety Hamda Fahad Jassem Al Thani," March 15, 2005, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE22/001/2005/en/ (accessed February 5, 2021), and Amnesty International, "Further Information on: Fear for Safety Hamda Fahad Jassem Al Thani," October 19, 2006, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/003/2006/en/ (accessed February 5, 2021).

[63] Law no. 38 of 2005 on the acquisition of Qatari nationality, October 30, 2005, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=2591&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021); see also Rothna Begum (Human Rights Watch), "Gulf Crisis Shows How Discrimination in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, and Qatar Tears Families Apart," commentary, *Newsweek*, July 21, 2017 https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/21/gulf-crisis-shows-how-discrimination-saudi-arabia-bahrain-uae-and-qatar-tears.

[64] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Najwa," Qatari, June 22, 2020.

[65] Law no. 10 of 2018 on Permanent Residency, September 4, 2018, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=7737&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021); Rothna Begum, "Qatar's Permanent Residency Law a Step Forward but Discrimination Remains: New Nationality Law Fails to Recognize Equal Treatment for Women, Their Children and Spouses," commentary, September 11, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/11/qatars-permanent-residency-law-step-forward-discrimination-remains.

guardian to prohibit a female relative from marrying a foreign national.[66] "Zainab" said her Qatari female cousin married a foreign national in 2020 but does not want children because she cannot pass her nationality to them.[67]

Several divorced women with children also said they have not remarried because they fear losing 'custody' of their children (see section on Residence and Guardianship of Children).[68] "Ghada," age 48, asked, "why can't I marry again and still have custody? I couldn't marry twice, because I would lose my daughter if I get married."[69]

Obedience Provisions within Marriage

Qatar's Family Law requires a wife to be obedient to her husband, maintain the house and its belongings, and breastfeed infant children unless there is an impediment.[70] Under the law, a wife can lose her right to financial maintenance from her husband if, for example, she refuses to have sexual relations with him, refuses to move to the marital home, leaves her marital home, prevents her husband from entering into the marital home, or refuses to travel with her husband when moving to another dwelling, "without a legitimate reason," as well as if she travels or works outside the home without her husband's permission, unless her husband is being abusive in preventing her from working.[71]

The law requires a husband to provide "maintenance" for his wife during marriage.[72] He must also "allow his wife to complete her compulsory education and facilitate continuation of her university education within the State" as long as it does "not conflict with her family duties."[73] Some women, with their families, negotiate to include provisions into their marriage contract preserving their rights to drive or to work.[74]

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[66] See for instance Mobin Pandit, "A Passionate Plea for Justice," *The Peninsula*, June 4, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20110703144448/http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/qatar/154609-a-passionate-plea-for-justice.html (accessed February 5, 2021).

[67] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Zainab," daughter of a Qatari woman, June 12, 2020.

[68] Family Law, art. 168 (1).

[69] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Ghada," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

[70] Family Law, art. 58.

[71] Ibid., art. 69.

[72] Ibid., art. 57.

[73] Ibid., art. 68.

[74] See Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar et al., "Education, Marriage, and Professionalization: The Modern Qatari Woman's Dilemma," *GENDER* 1 (2017), 82-98, accessed February 5, 2021, doi: 10.3224/gender.v9i1.06.

While the Family Law provides that women have the right not to be physically or morally harmed by their husbands, and the penal code criminalizes assault in general, there is no law criminalizing domestic violence or explicitly criminalizing marital rape.[75] The obedience provisions in the Family Law instead reinforce the notion that men are allowed to control women's movements and behavior.[76]

Some women spoke of how their husbands limited their movements, including to complete their education, work, or even visit their family or friends. "Mariam," age 30, said that she got married at 18, and one of the conditions to which her husband verbally agreed with her father was that she would be allowed to complete her university education. But she said he was "very controlling" and "he would take my car away so I couldn't get to school…. He took away my housekeys so I couldn't leave the house."[77]

A few women said their husbands threatened to file or did file *beit al-ta'a,* or "house of obedience" cases against them at a family court to force them to return to the marital home—usually after they left following years of abuse. "Zainab" described the case of her cousin:

> She put up with it [violence] because of kids but it got so bad she couldn't take it…. She went to her family [parents'] home when it was too much. Her husband said that she is disobedient, as she left the home. He put *beit al-ta'a* and everyone found it crazy because he was beating her. She went back to him for a while. Then separated and went back to her parents. Her father and his uncles went and spoke to him that it has to stop, and they divorced.[78]

Notably, the resolution of this situation hinged on the intervention of male relatives.

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[75] Family Law, art. 57 provides that the wife has a right to have her husband "Refraining from hurting her physically or morally."

[76] International standards on domestic violence includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, which are identified by "coercive control" i.e., how such violence links to a pattern of domination through intimidation, isolation, degradation, and deprivation, as well as physical assault. See UN Women, Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls "Definition of Domestic Violence," last modified December 11, 2010, http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/398-definition-of-domestic-violence.html (accessed February 5, 2011).

[77] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Mariam," Qatari, July 1, 2020.

[78] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Zainab," daughter of a Qatari woman, June 12, 2020.

Obstacles to Obtaining a Divorce

Under Qatari law, men can divorce (*talaq*) by a simple pronouncement or in writing, or even an understandable gesture where they are unable to write or pronounce the divorce, and without needing to appeal to a court.[79] They do not have to inform their wife that they wish to divorce but should inform their wife that they have divorced them, if they pronounced the divorce outside a courtroom.[80] The law also allows men three months in which they can reconcile with their wife and nullify the divorce.[81] "Dana," age 20, said her dad divorced her mother 10 years ago unilaterally: "He came back to the house with the divorce paper already signed and said, 'I divorced you this afternoon' and threw the paper at her and left." Two months later he reconciled with her mother so they could co-parent her.[82]

On the other hand, the law requires women to apply to the courts for divorce, and only on limited grounds, such as impotency, abandonment, or lack of financial support.[83] A woman cannot argue for a divorce even if her husband married another woman against her wishes. Qatar allows men to have up to four wives at any one time and does not require the consent of their current wife or wives before they can do so.[84] "Asma" said it took a year for her sister to obtain a divorce. "Her husband got married to another wife while he was married to her. They didn't see that as a reason for divorce. They [counselors reporting to court] didn't see him cheating on her as wrong and thought it was the man's right. They thought if a man is cheating then it's for her to fix the relationship."[85]

Divorce is still largely taboo. Women spoke of facing pressure from family members to stay married, while some described how support from key family members, particularly fathers and uncles, helped them secure divorces. Many spoke of difficulties navigating the laws and the legal system; while some hired lawyers, others could not afford to do so.

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[79] Family Law, arts. 101, and 106-117.

[80] Ibid., art. 113.

[81] Ibid., arts. 116 and 161.

[82] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dana," Qatari, October 1, 2020.

[83] Family Law, arts. 101, and 123-155 relating to separation by judicial decree.

[84] Ibid., art. 25 provides the reference to restricting polygamy. It provides that men are prohibited from "Marrying more than four wives, even if one of them is in Iddat [waiting period]."

[85] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Asma," Qatari, June 16, 2020.

The law allows a woman to apply for a divorce in cases of harm (*dharar*) or discord (*shiqaq*) which make marital life impossible. However, in such cases a judge must attempt to reconcile the spouses before the divorce can take place.[86] The judge can appoint arbitrators to reconcile the couple, but there is no limit to how long the arbitration lasts which is for the judge to decide.[87] Where a judge agrees to divorce the couple, the judge can require the woman to provide an amount of money to the husband if the judge believes that she is largely to "blame." But the judge does not have to assign a sum of money from one to the other if the husband is deemed to be at fault.[88]

Most divorced women who spoke to Human Rights Watch did not obtain a divorce based on dharar or shiqaq, even when they were in abusive marriages, but negotiated out-of-court settlements in which their husbands agreed to divorce them, or resorted to *khula* in which a woman pays compensation or return of the dowry (*mahr*) for her husband to divorce her in return.[89] "Amna," age 34, said she was able to obtain a khula divorce in 2009 by returning half her mahr, and successfully negotiated to keep her son even if she remarries: "We went to a lawyer and I paid an amount of money—40,000 QAR [around USD10,000], so that I can keep my son."[90]

Some women cannot afford khula, particularly when they have children, and some men may use this to extort them. "Amna," said her 23-year-old sister who has two children has been separated from her husband for five years but is unable to get a divorce: "He won't give her a divorce. He wants khula. He doesn't want to pay for anything."[91]

If the husband refuses to divorce her, the law requires that the court should attempt reconciliation with two arbitrators for up to six months, and if they still cannot reconcile and the wife still seeks dissolution on the basis of khula, then the court can order separation.[92] However, women said it can take years to obtain a divorce, particularly when they had children in the marriage.

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[86] Family Law, art. 129.
[87] Ibid., arts, 129-133.
[88] Ibid., art. 134.
[89] Ibid., arts. 118-121.
[90] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Amna," Qatari, June 2, 2020.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Family Law, art. 122.

"Buthaina," a 38-year-old woman with a 6-year-old son, said she has been trying to get a divorce since 2016 when she found out that her husband had married another woman, and that he had cheated on her every year of their seven-year marriage. "I tried three times to get divorced, but all the time they are on the husband's side." She said the counseling sessions can take weeks and they won't say how long it will take to finish it.[93]

Um Qahtan, age 44, described how she filed for a khula divorce against her abusive husband in January 2019 but "he played every game" to delay the divorce including not showing up for sessions, not providing the court information, asking for a different mediator etc. and which were impacted further by the courts postponing sessions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The judge granted the divorce in July 2020, but her husband appealed the decision. "We had 19 hearings to get khula with the corona[virus]. It was almost two years. We are still not finished, he is appealing the decision… he immediately appealed it, which means I can't get a divorce certificate."[94] Um Qahtan needs the divorce certificate to receive state allowances as a divorced woman supporting her children, which otherwise continue to go to her husband who is deemed head of the household.

Residence and Guardianship of Children

Women face discrimination regarding the status of their children. The law states that following divorce, the default is that for a Muslim mother, her child should live with her ('custody') up to age 13 for boys and age 15 for girls, unless the court rules otherwise, but the law, implicitly, assigns guardianship—all decision-making authority—to the father even when he does not live with the child.[95] A non-Muslim mother may only retain 'custody' of the child until the age of seven.[96] Children are required to live in the same country as their guardian and they can be removed from living with their mothers if their mothers re-marry.[97] The law provides that in 'custody' cases the judge can make the final decision in the "best interests" of the child but appears to be only in cases of conflict

[93] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Buthaina," Qatari, June 23, 2020.[94] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, September 29, 2020.

[94] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, September 29, 2020.

[95] Family Law, arts. 171 and 173.

[96] Ibid., art. 175.

[97] Ibid., arts. 168(1) and 180.

whereas international human rights standards require that the best interests of the child are given "primary consideration" in all decisions relating to them.[98]

"Asma," age 40, said that in 2015 she left her abusive husband, with whom she had two sons, then aged 15 and 6, and remarried in 2017.

> At first, when he heard I was remarried, he went crazy and insisted that his son live with my mother. He was living abroad and giving his conditions. Why is there a law that once a woman gets married again the son goes to the bad father? The default law that we have is a disaster. This is the reason why my sister didn't get married again, because her ex-husband is saying that if she remarries then he will take her kids from her.[99]

Women are not allowed to act as guardians of their children, regardless of whether they are married to their child's father, divorced, or widowed. Women cannot register the births of their children. The father of the child must register the birth, or in his absence other adult male relatives present at the birth can register it.[100] As guardians, men continue to have sole or ultimate control over decisions regarding their children, regardless of whether the child lives with them, including by holding identity documents of their child, being responsible for obtaining and renewing ID cards and passports, making decisions on children's schooling, opening and accessing their child's bank account, handling their financial affairs, and issuing exit permits so their child can travel abroad. Women are required to allow male guardians to perform these duties.[101]

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[98] Ibid., art. 169; Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), entered into force September 2, 1990, art. 3. Qatar ratified the convention in 1995.

[99] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Asma," Qatari, June 16, 2020.

[100] See Law no. 5 of 1982 on Foundation of Births and Death Records, March 9, 1982, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=3983&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021), art. 3 provides "The following persons shall be authorized to report births: The father of the newborn, if present. Adult relatives who have attended the birth: male first, then female, who are the closest relative to the newborn. Persons residing with the mother in the same house: male first, then female. The physician or other licensed persons who attended to the delivery. Directors of hospitals, maternity homes, jails, or other locations where the birth takes place. The aforesaid persons shall not be responsible for reporting where the sequential order required for persons making the report cannot be established. No unauthorized persons may report a birth."

[101] Family Law, art. 171.

For instance, rules listed on the Interior Ministry website require children under 18 to obtain a guardian's consent to apply for their ID cards, even though the laws governing IDs do not impose such requirements.[102] The passports law explicitly require "minors" obtain a guardian's consent to get a passport.[103] The government, in its written response to Human Rights Watch, stated that children under the age of 18 can be granted individual passports with the approval of a guardian "which can be either a man or a woman" and that "a woman may apply for the personal identification of her children without any additional approval required."[104] Human Rights Watch's research, however, appears to contradict this claim. This chapter details cases in which women reported that they cannot obtain passports or ID cards for their children, including one case where a woman had to get a court order in 2020 to get a valid ID card for her 13-year-old son (see below) and another case where a woman obtained a court order in 2019 to issue her children new passports (see section on Travel Bans).[105]

Moreover, the Family Law states that the male guardian may hold their child's passport except for when they travel, and that the 'female custodian' may hold their child's birth certificate and ID card.[106] But some women said their child's father had kept both the passport and ID card.

In cases that Human Rights Watch documented, discrimination against Qatari women's ability to act as a child's guardian also harmed or increased the risk of harm to the child. While the Family Law provides a number of situations in which women can lose 'custody' of their children, it does not state if or when male guardians can be stripped of their guardianship over their children.[107] Only in cases where male guardians present a danger

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[102] See Decree-Law no. 5 of 1965 regarding Identity Cards, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=13267&LawID=4001&language=ar (accessed March 9, 2021); Decision of the Minister of Interior no. 17 of 2015 on data for identity card and necessary procedures to obtain it https://almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=6588&language=ar (accessed March 9, 2021). Neither of these laws require guardian consent to obtain IDs. However, the Ministry of Interior's website states that Qatari citizens above 18 can apply for an ID card and among the required documents asks for 'Consent of Guardian' see "Issuing an ID card for (Qataris), Ministry of Interior website (Arabic), undated, https://bit.ly/3fcmdXR (accessed February 5, 2021).

[103] Decree-Law no. 14 of 1993 regarding Passports (hereafter Passports Law), as amended by law no. 5 of 2007, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawArticleID=54059&LawId=3991&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021), art.15.

[104] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[105] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dalal," Qatari, November 9, 2020, and Human Rights Watch phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, September 29, 2020.

[106] Family Law, art. 176.

[107] Ibid., art. 182.

to their child's wealth due to misconduct, absence or imprisonment can they be stripped of their role as guardians over their child's finances.[108] Even then, guardianship over a child's finances transfers to another male guardian or to the state but not their mother.

Men also continue to wield male guardianship authority over their children even when they have been abusive. Um Qahtan said her ex-husband, who had been abusive towards her children during their marriage, maintained guardianship over her children even after leaving him. She said he threatened to kill her children in October 2020:

> He was sending death threats to the children that he is the *wali* [male guardian] and he can do anything he wants, and there will be no repercussion for him. Yesterday, he sent messages to the girls that if they disrespect him, if they don't obey him, then he will kill them, and that he won't be accountable, that he will pay the *diya* [blood money] and walk out of the police station. He sent me a message with the same thing saying, 'if they disrespect me, I will kill them.'[109]

Men also wield more control over their daughters' lives than their sons', as they serve as male guardians of their daughters, even after they turn 18, and daughters must seek their approval to travel abroad, marry, obtain a government scholarship, or work in some places. Some men abuse this position of power against their ex-wives who are dependent on them to make decisions that impact their children and their own lives.

"Ghada," age 48, who was granted her divorce in 2003, said her ex-husband had to authorize issuance of her daughter's passport and kept it as her child's guardian. "I am her mother, and had custody and we [her ex-husband and her] don't get along, do we have to fight to get things done? …. I needed permission for everything." She said her daughter, now 19, who lives with her still needs her father's permission for many issues.[110]

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[108] Law no. 40 of 2004 relating to Guardianship of Minors' Wealth, December 14, 2004, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=2427&LawID=307&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021). art. 14.

[109] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, September 29, 2020.

[110] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Ghada," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

The 2004 Law on Guardianship of Minors' Wealth provides that fathers have guardianship over a child's wealth, and then the paternal grandfather, if the father has not chosen an executor.[111] "Amna" said, "I cannot open a bank account for my son, for savings for him. They said that his father needs to open the account for him, and he can take all the money from it if he wants."[112] Um Qahtan said three years ago she tried to open bank accounts for her sons after her then-husband refused to do so: "I went to a bank to enquire and they said, 'you can't open a bank account, you are a woman.' For any local banks it was just 'no, it has to be the wali [guardian] for the children.'"[113]

Women cannot be the guardians of their own children, even when the child has no male guardian available such as following the death of their father and with no paternal grandfather present. In such instances, women must depend on other male relatives to act as their child's guardian, and as a last resort the state takes up the role rather than allow women to obtain control over their child's financial decisions.

The General Authority for Minors' Affairs can hold guardianship authority over specific persons including "minors" or fetuses with no guardian or chosen agnate (heir from the male line).[114] Guardianship by this authority involves "supervising their social, pedagogical, health and educational affairs;" managing, investing and preserving their funds; opening bank accounts and keeping books for them; and acting on their behalf before the competent authorities both inside and outside the State.[115]

"Nawal," age 32, said her father passed away more than ten years ago. With no other male relatives in Qatar, she said her mother must go to the General Authority on Minors Affairs to approve every financial decision regarding her youngest brother, age 17.

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[111] Law no. 40 of 2004 relating to Guardianship of Minors' Wealth, art. 4.

[112] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Amna," Qatari, June 2, 2020.

[113] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, September 29, 2020.

[114] The General Authority for Minors' Affairs, reorganized following Emiri Decree no. 41 of 2014 organizing the General Authority for Minors Affairs, https://bit.ly/3nwloot (accessed February 5, 2021), art.4.

[115] Emiri Decree no. 41 of 2014 organizing the General Authority for Minors' Affairs, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=6187&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021), arts. 4 and 15. See also General Authority for Minors Affairs, "About Us," undated, https://gama.gov.qa/en/Pages/About-US.aspx (accessed February 5, 2021).

> Every decision that my mom takes about my brother, who is a minor, she has to go to a committee, and they have to approve it… Selling a house, selling a car that is in my brother's name. Everything that is related to money. Opening a bank account and every decision for his bank account [with the money] that he has inherited from my father has to go through that committee.[116]

"Amina," a 39-year-old woman, said she is unable to act as a guardian for her three young children despite being the main provider after her 60-year-old Qatari husband had a stroke.

> I am worried about my children. If something happens to my husband, the guardian will not be me…it will be one of his brothers or my husband's eldest sons [from a different marriage]. Both of them will not take care of my children and will not do anything for them.[117]

Violations of Children's Rights to Education and Health Care

States are obliged to base all decisions about children on the best interests of the child "as a primary consideration," but Qatari authorities have enforced male guardians' arbitrary demands to block children's mothers from ensuring their rights, including education and even life-saving medical treatment.[118]

Guardians are responsible for obtaining and renewing their children's Qatari Identity Document (QID) cards, which expire every five years for those under 16, as well as their passports (see above). Interpretation and practice mean that male guardians have this role, and this can impact whether children can travel or obtain other services like their health card, a Qatar National Library card, register at universities, and to register on the Ehteraz mobile app (track and test app), launched in 2020 which is mandatory for people

[116] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Nawal," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

[117] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Amina," married to a Qatari national, September 18, 2020.

[118] UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General Comment No. 14 on the right of the child to have his or her best interest taken as a primary consideration," May 29, 2013, CRC/C/GC/14, https://www2.ohchr.org/English/bodies/crc/docs/GC/CRC_C_GC_14_ENG.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021)

who leave their homes during the Covid-19 pandemic.[119] In its written response to Human Rights Watch, the Education Ministry denied that the Ehteraz app is required to attend in-person schooling.[120] However, "Dalal," said their mother had to get a court order in 2020 to get a valid QID card for Dalal's 13-year-old brother because he could not go to school without the Ehteraz app when the academic year began. "He needs the app to go to school. But to register for the app [he] needed an ID" issued by his guardian.[121] Other schools appeared to have similarly imposed such requirements.[122]

The Education Ministry wrote to Human Rights Watch that "registration in any higher education institution does not require approval from a guardian for either men or women."[123] However, children can face difficulties because they need their QIDs during the admissions or registration processes at universities or further education institutions, and children and women also indirectly need guardian consent for government scholarships in addition to their QIDs (see section on Restrictions on Women's Right to Education). One scholarship application form requires a signed consent letter from the guardian, but it acknowledges the possibility that the male guardian may be causing problems; in such cases it requests a "[c]opy of court documentation IN CASE father/guardian is involved in a case or in custody preventing the family to renew QIDs or causing financial barriers."[124]

The Education Ministry wrote that "[c]hildren are registered in educational institutions (admissions and transfers) at the request of one of the parents (father or mother) or

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[119] Qatar National Library, "Children and Young Adults registration," undated, https://registration.qnl.qa/registration/child-patron#no-back (accessed February 5, 2021); Qatar's Hukoomi, e-government portal, "Issue Health Card," undated, http://web.archive.org/web/20210322112312/https://hukoomi.gov.qa/en/service/issue-health-card (accessed March 22, 2021); Al Jazeera, "Qatar makes COVID-19 app mandatory, experts question efficiency," *Al Jazeera*, May 26, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/26/qatar-makes-covid-19-app-mandatory-experts-question-efficiency (accessed February 5, 2021), I Love Qatar.net, "Are children required to have EHTERAZ app?," https://www.iloveqatar.net/coronavirus/guideTips/children-install-ehteraz-covid-19-app-qatar (accessed March 14, 2021).

[120] The Ministry of Education and Higher Education response to questions in a written communication provided by a government official to Human Rights Watch, on March 9, 2021,

[121] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dalal," Qatari, November 9, 2020.

[122] See for example one school which required "All parents and students over the age of 12 must show Ehteraz before entering the school premises," International School of London Qatar, "ISL Qatar's Safety Guidelines," undated, http://web.archive.org/web/20210322115906/https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1597748534/islqatarorg/x3dj7mps3lvxbrx7bsht/Safety_Measures_ISLQatar.pdf (accessed March 22, 2021).

[123] The Ministry of Education and Higher Education response to questions in a written communication provided by a government official to Human Rights Watch, on March 9, 2021.

[124] Education Above All - Dynamic Futures Scholarship Program, "Dynamic Futures Qatar Scholarship checklist," undated, https://bit.ly/2OZpyAK (accessed February 5, 2021).

whoever acts on their behalf if neither parent is the legal guardian."[125] Indeed, most divorced or separated women said in practice they were able to enroll their children in school without needing their child's father's permission. However, some schools expect women to have the child's father's documents in order to enroll them. In addition, schools may require the child's passport or QID card for enrollment, which the father may hold.

"Amna" explained that her ex-husband continues to hold her child's passport and QID that she needs to enroll her son in school. In 2013, she said she obtained a court order requiring him to give her the passport and other documents, but he would not comply.

> He kept ignoring my calls. The court … gave a *hukm* [ruling] that says he should give the documents. The court said: 'we give you this paper and you can ask him to give you the documents.' I went to the police station. … They said we called him and asked him but can't do anything else. I communicated to the principal of school – I showed her the ruling and all the papers. She said, 'okay we'll keep him with us but if the Ministry of Education asks for anything, we can't do anything, and he might not be able to study.'[126]

The father, moreover, can decide to transfer children to other schools at any time. Um Qahtan, age 44, said her husband withdrew three of her children from international schools and registered them into poorly performing government schools as retaliation for her starting divorce proceedings. She said she asked the education ministry if she could transfer her 12-year-old son to a different school, and they said yes as she had 'custody,' but the government school he was registered in told her "we can't do that, as his father came and threatened us not to transfer him, so you have to go to the ministry." But when she went back to the ministry, they told her that her ex-husband "already came and said he will throw a tantrum. So, you have to go to court and get permission to transfer him."

In September 2020, she said the judge denied her petition to transfer her son to a different school: "I have asked for permission to be in charge of my son's education. To show it was

[125] The Ministry of Education and Higher Education response to questions in a written communication provided by a government official to Human Rights Watch, on March 9, 2021.

[126] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Amna," Qatari, June 2, 2020.

in my child's best interest. It was just rejected. He [the judge] just called the father and talked to him."[127] She objected to the denial of her petition leading to a full court hearing. However, in February 2021 the judge denied the transfer on the basis that he could not interfere with the father's "God-given right to decide where his child goes to school."[128]

The government wrote to Human Rights Watch that all individuals under 18 "require a parent (whether mother or father) or authorized legal guardian to accompany them to hospital appointments and consent to any medical treatment provided."[129] Most women also said they are able to get health treatment for their children, but "Amna" said around two years ago she took her then 9-year-old son to hospital but needed his QID card to admit him, but her ex-husband held the card. She said her ex-husband refused to answer her calls, so she had to ask the receptionist to call him. "He said [to receptionist] 'I will send [a photo of the boy's QID] via WhatsApp but please don't show this to her.'"[130]

Even in cases where women can give permission for their child's medical treatment, the father can stop it. Um Qahtan said her ex-husband tried to prevent her daughter, age 17, from having a heart operation in April 2019 shortly after she filed for divorce, even though she was granted temporary "custody." She said her daughter had kept her father informed of developments, but he turned up at the hospital and threatened the doctor. They said, "well you are the father." I [as the mother] did agree [to the operation] but they said "'he is the father, he is the wali [guardian]'… So, they canceled everything." She said the nurses told her that as she has "custody" any disagreement with the other parent would go to a legal committee at the hospital and then a court would decide. In the end, his brother convinced him to agree to the operation but with a different doctor so he "felt in control."[131]

[127] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, September 29, 2020.

[128] Human Rights Watch follow-up phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, February 4, 2021.

[129] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[130] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Amna," Qatari, June 2, 2020.

[131] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, September 29, 2020.

III. Restrictions on Women's Right to Education

> To get a scholarship to study abroad you need guardian permission… Even at Qatar University, as a TA [teaching assistant], you need your legal guardian's permission stating that they don't mind you going and continuing your studies abroad.
>
> —"Sanaa," a 31-year-old Qatari woman. July 8, 2020

Qatar has made significant advances on women's access to higher education. In the 1970s there were a few hundred female graduates in Qatar, but by 2018 there were more than 38,000 Qatari female graduates, exceeding the number of Qatari men with bachelors and postgraduate degrees.[132] Part of that success is due to the former Emir's wife, Sheikha Moza, who set up Education City in 1997 under Qatar Foundation to encourage foreign universities to set up satellite campuses in Doha, enabling Qatari women to access more universities and a broader range of academic courses, including from internationally high-ranking institutions and in mixed gender (co-educational) environments.

However, male guardians can directly or indirectly control women's choices about education. Qatar's Family Law requires that the husband "allow his wife to complete her compulsory education and facilitate continuation of her university education within the State, provided that this shall not conflict with her family duties," making a woman's right to study contingent on her husband and prioritizing her domestic responsibilities.[133]

The Education Ministry wrote to Human Rights Watch that a "student (male or female) is not required to obtain permission from a guardian to accept a scholarship."[134] However, Qatar's Scholarships Law requires students to have their guardian or sponsor to act as a

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[132] See table of data from Louay Bahry and Phebe Marr, "Qatari Women: A New Generation Of Leaders?," *Middle East Policy Council* 12, (2005), accessed February 5, 2021, doi: 10.1111/j.1061-1924.2005.00205.x. In 2018, there were 38,301 Qatari women who were educated at university or above level compared to 30,804 Qatari men who were educated at university or above level see Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority, "Labour Force Sample Survey, 2018," July 2019, https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/statistics/Statistical%20Releases/Social/LaborForce/2018/Annual_Bulletin_Labour_force_2018_AE.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021), pp.65-66.

[133] Family Law, art. 68.

[134] The Ministry of Education and Higher Education response to questions in a written communication provided by a government official to Human Rights Watch, on March 9, 2021.

guarantor—essentially requiring their permission—to obtain a government scholarship to study abroad or in Qatar, such as at the private universities in Education City. This impacts children under 18 and women, as in practice guardianship does not end for them at 18, and non-Qataris who are sponsored by a family member or employer. Moreover, an unmarried Qatari woman under 25 is required to have a male guardian issue her an exit permit to travel abroad. Married women government employees also cannot obtain a post-graduate scholarship to study abroad unless their husbands are also required to be abroad.

While Qatar's Education City and other private universities have mixed gender campuses, Qatar's main state higher education institutions—Qatar University and Community College of Qatar—continue to have gender-segregated campuses. Qatar University, which provides free undergraduate degrees to citizens, imposes specific restrictions over women's movements, including requiring a woman to obtain male guardian permission in order to take student field trips, to stay at the student accommodation, or to leave the university in a taxi or an Uber, ride-sharing taxi app, or with an unrelated man.

Many women said their family would not allow them to either study abroad or study at mixed gender environments within Qatar. Male guardians' power to dictate both what and where women are allowed to study can impact their career aspirations.

Qatar's obligations under CEDAW and the ICESCR include taking all appropriate measures to ensure women have equal rights with men to education.[135] The ICESCR requires states parties recognize, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right, that "Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education."[136]

Study Abroad

For government scholarships to study abroad, the Scholarships Law requires students to have their guardians commit to paying back the government scholarship funding if they fail to abide by the conditions of their scholarship, essentially requiring guardian permission

[135] CEDAW, art. 10, and ICESCR, arts. 3 and 13.

[136] ICESCR, art. 13(2)(c).

to obtain the scholarship.[137] The Education Ministry wrote to Human Rights Watch that "Qatari women awarded scholarships to study abroad can proceed without being accompanied by their husband or parent."[138] While, the law does not require women to be accompanied by a guardian, it provides that married women who are employees of a ministry or government agency can only seek a government scholarship to study abroad for post graduate studies if their husbands are also required to "be abroad on study leave, a training course, an official mission, a secondment or a job," and that the duration of the husband's mission must be not less than three years.[139] Such a requirement is not imposed on married men seeking to study abroad. In addition, unmarried Qatari women under 25 also face restrictions studying abroad as they need a male guardian to issue their exit permits to travel abroad (see section on Restrictions on Traveling Abroad).

Some women said their guardians prevented them from pursuing studies abroad. "Noora," age 20, said she wished to study geography, which was not offered as a university course in Qatar. "My dad is quite open minded but is tied to what society will say about his daughter traveling abroad. Like what will my friend say about my daughter living abroad? It's tied with sexuality in the sense that people will ask 'what is she doing there? There is no one to look over her all the time.'" She spoke of "double standards" however, as her brothers went to boarding school abroad when they were 14.[140]

Such barriers contribute to greater numbers of Qatari men studying abroad than women. According to Qatar's 2019 education statistics report, Qatari male students at universities abroad on government scholarships are double the number of Qatari female students.[141]

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[137] Law no. 19 of 1976 Organizing Scholarships (hereafter Scholarships Law), November 22, 1976, https://almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=2662&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021), as amended by Law no. 10 of 1985, art. 14(1) provides that "The Ministry shall secure the commitment of the guardians or sponsors of scholarship grantees to refund all expenses and salaries paid to such grantees as set forth in Articles 17 and 20 of this Law in case of a breach of the terms and conditions prescribed in Articles 9, 11, 19 and 21 of this Law."

[138] The Ministry of Education and Higher Education response to questions in a written communication provided by a government official to Human Rights Watch, on March 9, 2021.

[139] Scholarships Law, as amended by Law no. 10 of 1992, art. 30.

[140] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Noora," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

[141] During the academic year 2017-2018 of those on scholarships studying abroad, 67 per cent were male and 33 per cent were female. See Ministry of Development, Planning and Statistics, "Education in Qatar Statistical Profile 2019," (in Arabic), June 2017, https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/statistics/Statistical%20Releases/General/StatisticalAbstract/2019/Education_Statistical_Pro%EF%AC%81le_2019_Ar.pdf#search=education (accessed February 5, 2021), p.47.

Studying in Qatar

For women who study in Qatar, they have a choice between segregated state universities—Qatar University and Community College of Qatar—or Qatar Foundation's Education City, which has allowed "large numbers of Qatari women to receive international degrees by sidestepping the taboo of traveling abroad."[142] Education City currently has nine mixed-gender universities (six American, one French, one British, and one Qatari).[143] While women can attend other public or private technical colleges or higher education institutions, some of which are mixed gender environments, they may be limited in the courses they can take.[144]

However, many women reported that their families required them to go to Qatar University's segregated campus for women.[145] "Fatima," a 22-year-old Qatar University student, said, "I was told 'if you go abroad, you will be exposed to harm by bad people. You are going to university and you can't be around men.'"[146]

Male guardians can impact women's careers by insisting that they must study at Qatar University. Aisha al-Qahtani, age 22, told Human Rights Watch: "I wanted to be a doctor, but they [her family] said 'you can't touch a man, and it's shift work and you can only go to

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[142] Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar et al., "Education, Marriage, and Professionalization: The Modern Qatari Woman's Dilemma," GENDER, vol. 9, no. 1 (2017).

[143] Qatar has 14 public higher education institutions, eight international universities supported by Qatar Foundation, and a further nine private higher education institutions. For a full list see Qatar Ministry of Education and Higher Education, "Higher Education in Qatar," undated, https://www.edu.gov.qa/en/Pages/higheredudefault.aspx?ItemID=96 (accessed February 5, 2021).

[144] Other technical colleges and higher education institutions include Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (mixed gender), undated, accessed February 5, 2021 https://www.dohainstitute.edu.qa/EN/Pages/Default.aspx; Ahmed bin Mohammed Military College (segregated but now allowing Qatari women who wish to join the armed forces voluntarily) see "Ahmed Bin Mohammed Military College," undated, accessed February 5, 2021, http://www.abmmc.edu.qa/wp/?lang=en; Jane Dalton, "Qatar allows women to do military service for first time" *the Independent*, April 6, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/qatar-women-military-service-allow-gender-saudi-arabia-a8291451.html (accessed February 5, 2021); The Police College, "Police Training Institute", undated, accessed February 5, 2021, https://portal.moi.gov.qa/wps/portal/MOIInternet/departmentcommittees/policetraining; Qatar Aeronautical College and College of North Atlantic Qatar (mixed gender) see "Higher Education in Qatar," undated, accessed February 5, 2021, https://www.edu.gov.qa/en/Pages/higheredudefault.aspx?ItemID=58. For instance, the North Atlantic College of Qatar, (mixed gender) its two-year industrial trade technician certification courses are limited to only male students (Electrical Technician; Instrumentation Technician; Mechanical Technician; Process Operations Technician). See College of the North Atlantic Qatar, "CNA-Q Academic Calendar 2020 – 2021," https://www.cna-qatar.com/Documents/Academic%20Calendar.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021), pp.123-134.

[145] See also Hind Al-Ansari, "Women Are Key to Developing a Knowledge-based Economy in Qatar," *Gulf Affairs*, Spring 2018, https://www.oxgaps.org/files/analysis_-_al-ansari.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021).

[146] Human Rights Watch interview with "Fatima," Qatari, January 21, 2020.

Qatar University.' At the time Qatar University didn't [offer a] Medicine course, so I did English Literature instead."[147]

Qatari foundation-level and undergraduate students are entitled to exemption of tuition fees at Qatar University.[148] Qatari students attending other universities, particularly some private universities which have significantly high tuition fees, must either pay the fees, or find alternatives sources, such as applying for scholarships that are either private or from the government, applying for financial aid, or taking out student loans.[149]

As is the case for a government scholarship to study abroad, students who obtain a government scholarship to study in Qatar also need their guardian (i.e. children and women) or sponsor (non-Qataris who have a visa sponsor) to act as their guarantor.[150] Students can apply directly for a government scholarship or apply to a ministry or government agency for sponsorship, which pays the student's fees, and in return the student is expected to work for the ministry or agency for a certain number of years. The government scholarships website requires students applying for scholarships to provide, among other documents, a copy of their male guardian or guarantor's ID card.[151] The manual for applying for scholarship online also says it requires the guarantor's data.[152] "Noora," age 20, explained that for governmental scholarships or ministry sponsorships, "indirectly the dad has to know. As on the website you need to give your guardian's name and you need to give their bank details to prove your guardian's source of income."[153]

"Amina," a 39-year-old non-Qatari woman married to a Qatari national, said in 2020 she obtained a sponsorship from her government employer to pay for her part-time master's degree tuition fees but she needed her husband as her visa sponsor to essentially give her

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[147] Human Rights Watch interview with Aisha al-Qahtani, Qatari, in person interview in UK, January 15, 2020.

[148] Other students such as children of Qatari women may also be exempt of tuition fees. See Qatar University, "Tuition Fees," undated, accessed February 5, 2021, http://www.qu.edu.qa/students/admission/undergraduate/tuition-fees.

[149] Eman Kamel and Shereena Qazi, "Qatar's Universities Are Too Expensive for Many Expats," *Al Fanar Media*, March 8, 2015, https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2015/03/qatars-universities-expensive-many-expats/ (accessed February 5, 2021).

[150] Scholarships Law, art. 14(1).

[151] Ministry of Education and Higher Education, "Documents required to apply for a scholarship," undated, https://bit.ly/3f3UFWM (accessed March 22, 2021).

[152] Ministry of Education and Higher Education, "User manual Portal of the scholarship student," undated, https://bit.ly/3lEmJB7 (accessed February 5, 2021).

[153] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Noora," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

permission: “even for that they have to get my husband to say that he is the one to pay if I do not [complete].”[154]

Other quasi-government scholarship providers also require guardians to act as guarantors. Sheikha Moza’s Education Above All (EAA) Foundation’s scholarship program offered to non-Qatari students living in Qatar who wish to study at the College of North Atlantic – Qatar, a public higher education institution, requires a “signed consent letter and undertaking by family guardian (allowing EAA to access and confirm private information of the family).”[155] Qatar Foundation’s financial aid program also requires that the parent sign as guarantor.[156] The government wrote to Human Rights Watch that Qatar University does not require the consent of a guardian when awarding academic scholarships to male and female students of different nationalities.[157]

Restrictions at Qatar University

Qatar University segregates men and women on its campus and in its courses. The government wrote to Human Rights Watch that Qatar University’s “campus is divided into two adjacent sections for male and female students,” noting that “it is informally practiced that women can enter the male section, but not vice versa,” and that “the University policies and guidelines were written to safeguard this privacy for both sexes.”[158] While, most degrees are available to women, not all are available to both genders. Human Rights Watch found two degrees online in 2020 that were only available to men but not women: civil engineering and mechanical engineering.[159] Men could not study a range of degrees that were available only to women, including primary education and pharmacy.[160] Within degrees, not all courses are available to both men and women. “Khadija,” age 26, said she wanted to study marine science, but it was only available for male students:

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[154] Human Rights Watch phone interview with “Amina,” married to a Qatari national, September 18, 2020.

[155] Education Above All Dynamic Futures Scholarship Program, “Dynamic Futures Qatar Scholarship checklist,” undated, accessed March 22, 2021, https://bit.ly/2OZpyAK; and Education Above All, “Dynamic Futures Scholarship Program, the Letter of Undertaking” (to be signed by guardian), last modified July 22, 2018, https://bit.ly/2PgQXoQ (accessed March 22, 2021).

[156] Qatar Foundation, “Parent Student Declaration and Obligation Form,” undated, https://bit.ly/359ObJn, (accessed February 5, 2021).

[157] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Qatar University, “College Requirements,” as checked on 6 February 2020, http://www.qu.edu.qa/students/admission/undergraduate/program-requirements (accessed October 21, 2020).

[160] For instance: Arabic Language, English Literature, biology, sociology, primary education, and pharmacy. Ibid.

> For marine science, you need to go on the boats and stay overnight to get samples from coral. That's why they don't offer it, as they don't want girls to go on trips or think their parents won't want them to. I wanted to do marine science, but I could only do biotechnology.[161]

Women reported restrictions imposed by Qatar University that are not applied by private universities. For instance, Qatar University requires students to obtain male guardian permission before they could take class trips. "Sanaa" said in 2014-2015, female engineering students at Qatar University told her they needed their father's permission to go on class trips to the oil fields.[162] Likewise, "Dalal," an engineering student at Qatar University, said in 2020:

> We were supposed to go to a factory at Qatar Steel Manufacturing Company. They asked for field trip letters—we are all over 18, but they still asked for permission for parents to agree. If we had not gone, our grades would be deducted based on the fact that our parents didn't agree. It says 'father' on the [permission] slip.[163]

"Khadija," a 2017 Qatar University science graduate, complained that women students needed guardian permission for their few class trips, and had to go with the class by the university bus even when they lived closer to the site than the campus.[164] "Noor," an instructor at Qatar University, said "female and male science students must have their guardians sign a permission form to leave the university premises for field work."[165] Qatar University requires female passengers of the Janan research vessel to bring "appropriate approval" prior to boarding and requires all students for "signed authorization by a responsible parent, husband, or guardian."[166] Even where male students as well as female students are required to have guardian signed permission for field trips, such rules

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[161] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Khadija," (nationality withheld at her request), February 9, 2021.

[162] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Sanaa," Qatari, July 8, 2020.

[163] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dalal," Qatari, November 9, 2020.

[164] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Khadija," (nationality withheld at her request), February 9, 2021.

[165] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Noor," Qatari, February 6, 2021.

[166] Qatar University, "Terms and Conditions for Use of RV Janan, 2019," https://bit.ly/317EaRk (accessed March 22, 2021). See also Qatar University, Environmental Science Center, "Consent Form" and in Arabic "Request for Guardian Approval," https://bit.ly/3tGwul6 (accessed March 22, 2021).

disproportionately impact women whose families are more likely to restrict their movements over their male relatives. The government however, stated in writing to Human Rights Watch that guardian approval is not required for educational field trips that are part of academic programs.[167]

Qatar University also allows families or guardians to be informed of details about a woman's conduct or studies at the university and does not require the student's consent.[168] Students records are not kept confidential from parents or guardians.[169] While the communications form does not state whether it is only for female students, such requirements disproportionately impact female students who are more likely than male students to face monitoring by their families and husbands. Several women told Human Rights Watch that Qatar University can and does report students to their guardians.[170] One Qatari woman described how "some guardians can go to the university and have full authorization on what their daughter or wife are doing, and what studies they are taking."[171]

Male and female students can apply for car permits to enter the main gates of Qatar University.[172] However, women told Human Rights Watch that they are not allowed to come in or out of the university by taxi or an Uber, or with a male friend, without a permission slip from their male guardian, and the female campus entrance is guarded by both police and university security staff.[173] "Sara," age 28, said since the late 2000s women can travel in their female friends' cars which was not allowed before.[174]

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[167] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[168] The Qatar University website notes that it has a Parents Program and a "Parent Communication Form" that relatives or guardians—a parent, spouse, sibling or other—can fill in to receive communication about the student and requests the "guardian signature" and for the form to include "1- A copy of the guardian's Qatari ID. 2- A copy of the student's Qatari ID card. 3- Marriage Contract (If the Guardian is the Spouse)." See Qatar University, "Parent Communication Form," undated, https://bit.ly/3cUKocG (accessed March 22, 2021).

[169] Qatar University, "Confidentiality of Student Records," undated, accessed February 8, 2021 http://www.qu.edu.qa/students/registration/student-records/confidentiality.

[170] See also Qatar University, "Student Code of Conduct," undated, accessed February 8, 2021 http://www.qu.edu.qa/students/code-of-conduct, art. 14 provides that the guardian of the student can be contacted and informed of the violation of the code and the sanction.

[171] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Hend," Qatari, January 15, 2020.

[172] See Qatar University, "Manual for how to register in MARAHEB service," undated, accessed February 5, 2021, https://bit.ly/3rdRX3c.

[173] Women described that they must have their car or family car registered with the university, following which they receive a permit sticker to place on the car window so they can enter and leave the female campus in the car.

[174] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Sara," Qatari, February 12, 2020.

Women described how when they or their friends were caught using a taxi or an Uber without permission, the university either sent them warnings or called their parents. "Leyla," age 20, explained how during her first year at Qatar University she left the campus to have lunch with her female friends, but she was stopped by the police upon her return to the campus with an Uber driver:

> I was 17 at the time. I called mom and told her what happened as they took my ID and she said, 'if they tell your dad don't involve me.' For a whole week I was crying I didn't know if they told my dad or not. I don't use Uber and if my family found out that would lead to physical abuse immediately.[175]

Aisha al-Qahtani, age 22, said:

> I was not allowed to take Uber unless I had guardian permission. There is security at the gate. They check who you are leaving with. Your student ID shows if you have permission. They have both police outside the gates and security inside and sometimes both. They can call the police if you are unrelated to the man [in the car].[176]

"Leyla," age 20, said that a few of her friends were expelled or forced to drop out of university after being caught with a male friend.[177] The men involved can face arrest. One Qatari woman said in 2019 she was with her partner in his car when the police at the university stopped them and asked to see his ID which he showed. He then drove the car further away "and dropped me off and then went around to them. He refused to say who I was. They arrested him for two weeks." In 2019, a cousin of "Dalal," similarly faced trouble when she was found with her fiancé: "they didn't believe it, so they called the cops, and he was arrested. Her father had to confirm that he knows about him and he proposed to her."[178]

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[175] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Leyla," Qatari, February 12, 2020.

[176] Human Rights Watch in person interview with Aisha al-Qahtani, Qatari, in UK on January 15, 2020.

[177] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Leyla," Qatari, February 12, 2020.

[178] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dalal," Qatari, November 9, 2020.

Female Qatari students who wish to stay at Qatar University's student accommodation must have their "guardian's approval (in writing) to enrol the female student in student housing with the phone number."[179] "Fatima," age 22, said she sought to stay at the student accommodation for two years because her family's restrictions on her affected her mental health and academic performance but the staff member told her "that's what parents are supposed to do, they are supposed to watch their daughters go, how and when."[180]

Qatar University also allows guardians a range of options referred to as an 'exit permit' on whether a woman staying at the female student accommodation can use the dorm buses to leave the campus grounds, use other forms of transportation to leave the campus, or sleep outside of the accommodation. Guardians are also offered the choice of a 'restricted exit permit' in which the guardian lists who the student can leave the hostel with.[181] Women are also required to show guardian approval if they seek to leave the accommodation to travel abroad and have a curfew of 10pm at night.

"Khadija," age 26, who stayed at the female campus dorms in 2015-2017, described how some women's guardians only allowed them to leave on the dorm buses, which are pre-arranged weekly trips to Souq Waqif, the Museum of Islamic Art or to a mall. She also described how she and her friends were issued a warning letter when they broke curfew and returned at 11:30pm. She said that they could be kicked out of the dorms if they were issued three warning letters, while "the guys have no rules at all. They had security but no slips and no curfew. They can go in and out [of their dorm campus] at any time."[182]

[179] Qatar University, "Student Housing," undated, accessed February 5, 2021, http://www.qu.edu.qa/ar/students/services/student-housing.

[180] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Fatima," Qatari, January 21, 2020.

[181] Qatar University, "Exit Permits (Female)," undated, https://bit.ly/2PbHIz8 (accessed March 22, 2021).

[182] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Khadija," (nationality withheld at her request), February 9, 2021.

IV. Restrictions on Women's Right to Work

> Some government departments need permission from the husband or father [for a woman to work there]. I know it from multiple people… Some ministries require it, and some don't. No one knows the rules as the government doesn't want us to know.
>
> —Noof Al Maadeed, a 21-year-old Qatari woman. December 4, 2019

Despite a large number of highly educated Qatari women—there are more Qatari women university graduates than men graduates—Qatari women's employment hovers at 37 percent compared to Qatari men's employment at 68 percent.[183] While Qatari men's participation in the labor force is increasing, Qatari women's participation has remained steady and even shown "a significant and continuous decline among the more educated women."[184] Qatar's Vision 2030 aims for a diversified workforce including "increased opportunities and vocational support for Qatari women."[185] Yet, women face severe discrimination in their right to work.

Qatari women who spoke to Human Rights Watch said that they need male guardian permission in order to work in most government ministries and some governmental or quasi-governmental institutions. No law requires employers to ask women to obtain such permission but there is also no law prohibiting public or private institutions from requiring such permission. One woman reported that her employer in the private sector requested male guardian permission while another said she needed permission to visit a factory.

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[183] 38,428 employed out of 103, 796 Qatari women, and 67,610 employed out of 99, 421 Qatari men. See Planning and Statistics Authority, "Labour Force Sample Survey," 2018, https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/statistics/Statistical%20Releases/Social/LaborForce/2018/Annual_Bulletin_Labour_force_2018_AE.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021), p.60; see also Ministry of Development, Planning and Statistics, "Education in Qatar Statistical Profile 2016," June 2017, https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/statistics/Statistical%20Releases/Social/Education/2016/Education_Statistical_Pro%EF%AC%81le_2016_En.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021), pp.47-48. See also Lesley Walker, "Female university students in Qatar outnumber men 2:1," *Doha News*, June 12, 2014, https://www.dohanews.co/female-university-students-outnumber-males-nearly/ (accessed February 5, 2021).

[184] Ministry of Development, Planning and Statistics, "Qatar Second National Development Strategy, 2018-2022," September 2018, https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/knowledge/Documents/NDS2Final.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021), p.201.

[185] Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority, "Qatar National Vision 2030," undated, accessed February 5, 2021, https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/qnv1/Pages/default.aspx.

Even where employers do not request such permission, women have reported their families or husbands either prohibited them from working or insisted that they work wearing an abaya or face covering or in sex-segregated workplaces. They also noted guardianship-related restrictions—like not being allowed to drive or travel abroad—that hindered their ability to work. Women also reported other forms of discrimination at work, such as sexual harassment and unequal pay that are beyond the scope of this report.[186]

Requiring male guardian permission for women to work is in violation of Qatar's obligations under CEDAW, which stipulates that states shall take all appropriate measures to ensure women enjoy equal rights to men, including "the right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service."[187] It is also in breach of Qatar's obligations under ICESCR, which provides that states parties must ensure the equal right of men and women to enjoy "the right to work."[188]

Male Guardian Permission to Work

There is no legal basis for requiring male guardian permission for women's employment in certain ministries and other government institutions. The 2016 Civil Human Resources Law, which governs labor rights of government employees, does not stipulate that women need male guardian permission for employment.[189] Neither does the Labour Law apart from the provision banning women from certain types of work.[190] The Labour Law does require guardian permission to work for anyone aged 16 to 18 including apprentices, but this applies to both boys and girls.[191] The Qatari government confirmed to Human Rights Watch that "Qatari legislation does not require women to obtain permission from a guardian (or

[186] Women reported sexual harassment, unequal pay, discrimination during employment including in promotion and unfair dismissal and limited provision for maternity leave and paid family leave. This chapter focuses however on male guardian permission to work.

[187] CEDAW, art. 11.

[188] ICESCR, arts. 3 and 6.

[189] Law no. 15 of 2016 promulgating the Civil Human Resources Law (hereafter Civil Human Resources Law), November 6, 2016, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=7102&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021).

[190] Law no. 14 of 2004 promulgating the Labour Law (hereafter Labour Law), May 19, 2004, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=3961&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021), arts. 94-95.

[191] Ibid., arts. 13, 16 and 87.

anyone else) as a precondition for working in the public or private sectors. The same policy applies to Qatari women or women from the GCC countries."[192]

However, the Family Law provides that a woman can be deemed disobedient if she works outside the home without her husband's permission, unless her husband is being abusive in preventing her from working.[193] Moreover, Qatar's Labour Law does not prevent discrimination against women during job recruitment, job offer, or hire.[194] Employers can discriminate against women by requiring them to show that they have male guardian permission to work before they hire them. Male guardian permission to work is often referred to as a no-objection certificate (NOC), and this usually takes the form of a letter from the male guardian to the employer stating they have no objection to their female relative working there. The government in its written communication to Human Rights Watch said: "A No Objection Certificate (NOC) is not required for recruitment of men or women in schools, governmental, semi-governmental or private institutions."[195]

Human Rights Watch is not aware of any written ministry policies requiring such permission but confirmed individual cases of women who were only able to obtain their ministry jobs after demonstrating male guardian permission. These included women working at government ministries such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Municipality and Environment, Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs and governmental or quasi-governmental institutions including State Audit Bureau, Qatar University, the Qatar Foundation, and in government schools.[196]

But women also said that other government institutions did not require guardian permission for them to work. Two women reported that their female relatives who worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed to them that they did not need male guardian permission to work there. Women Human Rights Watch interviewed who worked at governmental institutions including Qatar Museums, National Tourism Council, Planning and Statistics Authority, and Qatar News Agency said they did not require male guardian

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[192] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[193] Family Law, art. 69.

[194] The Labour Law only prohibits discrimination in termination based on a woman's marriage or taking maternity leave see Labour Law, art. 98.

[195] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[196] This is the list of ministries and government institutions that women confirmed that they or their female relatives needed guardian permission to work there. Other ministries not listed here may also require such guardian permission.

permission for the jobs they obtained. Women who worked at some institutions within or affiliated to Qatar Foundation said they were not required to obtain male guardian permission to work. The Ministry of Energy Affairs wrote to Human Rights Watch that it "does not require guardian permission from its Qatari women employees to work at the ministry in the form of a no-objection certificate or otherwise. The same answer applies to the entirety of the energy sector including oil and gas companies."[197]

"Lolwa," age 44, said five years ago when she began working for a ministry, she needed a letter from her father granting permission: "I was in my late 30s. I had to get my father's permission, it had to be written in his handwriting and his signature. You can't just sign a form. It was a letter stating: "I don't mind that my daughter works in [redacted]."[198]

"Reem," age 26, said when she began working for the Ministry of Environment in 2018, she needed her father's permission. "When [you] finished the interview, they give you the agreement letter and you need to get your father's signature so the paperwork would go up with it. There is a specific point where you need his signature."[199]

Several women said they needed permission to work at Qatar University, a state university. Human Rights Watch has seen an email from the university's Human Resources department to a Qatari woman requesting a "No Objection Letter."[200] The government denies this. It said that Qatar University's "recruitment of Qatari women does not require the approval of a male guardian."[201]

Whether a workplace is mixed or segregated by sex does not seem to influence the permission requirement. The number of Qatari female teachers for instance far outstrip the number of male teachers in both private and public schools, and public schools are segregated by sex, yet several women said they or their family members needed male guardian permission to work as teachers in public schools.[202] The Ministry of Education

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[197] Letter from the Ministry of Energy Affairs responding to Human Rights Watch requests for information, February 15, 2021.

[198] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Lolwa," Qatari, June 23, 2020.

[199] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Reem," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

[200] Email from a Qatar University staff member to Qatari women requesting documents for the Human Resources department including a "No Objection Letter," date withheld to protect her anonymity. On file with Human Rights Watch.

[201] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[202] Ministry of Education and Higher Education, "Annual Statistics of Education in the State of Qatar 2017-2018," https://bit.ly/34l7OnS (accessed February 5, 2021).

imposed the requirement for male guardian permission around 10 years ago. In its written response to Human Rights Watch, however, the ministry denied this, saying that "a guardian's approval is not required to work in the Ministry [of Education], public schools, or private schools."[203]

According to a shadow submission by Qatari citizens to the UN CEDAW Committee in 2013, "Qatari female teachers working at local independent schools [schools created by the then government-based Supreme Education Council] are required to provide a letter of approval from their male guardians in order to start working." They noted that "when this condition was rolled out it was also required of existing teachers." They referred to one Qatari teacher who had been teaching for a little over twenty years who "had to pay off her abusive blackmailing husband […] to get him to write the letter of approval/consent."[204]

"Nayla," a 24-year-old teacher, described how in 2019 to work as a teacher: "I had to get my father's ID and letter of consent that he doesn't mind me taking this job and working with this place…. It's for the Ministry of Education."[205]

Almost all interviewees, with the exception of two women, said that employers in the private sector did not require male guardian permission. In one such case, "Reem" age 26, said in 2018, she got a job offer from a private aluminum factory and asked to visit the site before deciding to take the job.

> The first thing they said is: "you need to have your father's permission otherwise you can't do the field trip." It's just a field trip to see the place. They had to do cards, my name and my father's name goes to the Ministry of Interior to go to that factory. We had to wait for their reply. It was a long process for a one-hour field trip or even less…. I was completely not allowed to do it without his permission.[206]

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[203] The Ministry of Education and Higher Education response to questions in a written communication provided by a government official to Human Rights Watch, on March 9, 2021.

[204] Independent Group of Concerned Citizens, "Qatar shadow report" CEDAW, 2013, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fNGO%2fQAT%2f16177&Lang=en (accessed February 5, 2021).

[205] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Nayla," Qatari, March 10, 2020.

[206] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Reem," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

Women also face barriers at work that can only be resolved with guardian permission. "Noor" who works at Qatar University said in 2019 she was told she could not join a research project because a senior male colleague deemed it "inappropriate for a woman to work in close physical proximity to that number of men on the site." She said she sent a letter from her father that as her male guardian he did not object to her working on the site but received no response, "I was then advised by a male colleague to personally bring my father." The university only allowed her to proceed after she had her father come to the university in person and signed the permission form which she said was meant for students: "I had to scratch out the word 'student' to 'working professional.'"[207]

Even where guardian permission is not required by the employer, some workplaces enforce sex-segregation. "Noor," age 25, said Qatar University assigned her to teach female-only classes because of her age: "I was told by my department that it was inappropriate for me to teach male students until I received my PhD and then I have to wait for a few more years before I could teach [male students]."[208] Some women complained to Human Rights Watch that their families still dictated where they should work often because they preferred that they work in gender-segregated offices.[209] Noof Al Maadeed, age 21, said she wanted to intern at McKinsey & Company, a management consultancy, "but I couldn't because my father said no. It was a mixed [gender] environment."[210]

According to a 2017 study by Dr. Kaltham Al-Ghanim, 70 percent of men respondents "strongly agreed" to the statement that Qatari women should work only if they obtained their husband's permission and neither age nor educational attainment mattered regarding men's attitudes in this regard. 50 percent of men in the same survey also said they did not believe women should work in gender-mixed workplaces.[211]

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[207] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Noor," Qatari, February 6, 2021.

[208] Ibid.

[209] See also Christina Paschyn, "Educated and ambitious, Qatari women nudge their way into the office," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 1, 2014, https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2014/0501/Educated-and-ambitious-Qatari-women-nudge-their-way-into-the-office (accessed February 5, 2021).

[210] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Noof Al Maadeed, Qatari, December 4, 2019.

[211] Dr Kaltham Al-Ghanim, "Transitional society and participation of women in the public sphere: A survey of Qatar society," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research,"* vol 3, no. 2, 51–63, (2017), pp.56- 57.

Guardian Permission for Foreign Women to Work

Foreign national women (whether spouses or daughters) resident in Qatar on family visas have specific access to the Qatari labor market on a special work permit from the labor ministry, as long as they are able to obtain their family sponsor's permission.[212] However, there are limitations to such access because of the "no-objection" requirement from their family sponsor.[213] "Nadine," a 33-year-old British woman in Qatar, described how she needed a letter signed from her husband to apply for the work permit in order to work at a university: "a paper that says 'I, as the husband, give permission for my wife to work at …'" She added: "My ID card has 'housewife' on it even though I'm a professional. I'm not allowed to work without my husband's permission."[214]

When foreign national women on family-dependent visas work for companies, they are denied many work-related benefits they would receive if on a company-sponsored work permit, such as housing.[215]

This rule also endows men a level of control that is open to abuse, as they can prohibit women from working. "Aziza" is a 31-year-old British woman who lived in Doha from 2003 to 2017 and spoke of how her British father had a hold over her because he could decide as her visa sponsor whether she could work.

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[212] A woman resident on a dependent family visa who wishes to work can obtain a special work permit without needing to apply for a work permit with their employer as their sponsor by showing that they have approval from their husband. See Hukoomi, Qatar e-government portal, "Residence and Work Permits," undated, accessed February 5, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20201129123913/https://portal.www.gov.qa/wps/portal/topics/visas+and+official+documents/residenceandworkpermits. In 2019, this was extended to foreign national sons who can now obtain this work permit while under the dependent visa sponsorship, provided they have the same 'no-objection' letter from their head of household. The Peninsula, "Qatar announces new measures on work and residence permits: Full details," *The Peninsula*, October 9, 2019, https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/09/10/2019/Qatar-announces-new-measures-on-work-and-residence-permits-Full-details (accessed February 5, 2021). Qatari women cannot pass nationality to their spouse or children, and while they can sponsor their spouse and children's residency they can only work in her company or in a government job under her sponsorship. If they wish to work elsewhere, they will need their employer to sponsor them. See Interior Minister Decision no. 25 of 2019 issuing the executive regulations for Law no. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates and their residence, art.69, and see also Law no. 15 of 2016 promulgating the Civil Human Resources Law, art.13(1), which provides that for a person appointed to a position in the government "He must be a Qatari national. If not, then priority is given to the children of a Qatari woman married to a non-Qatari, then the non-Qatari husband married to a Qatari."

[213] See also Nabil Khattab et al., "Gender and mobility: Qatar's highly skilled female migrants in context," *Migration and Development*, accessed February 5, 2021, doi: 10.1080/21632324.2020.1723216.

[214] Human Rights Watch interview with "Nadine," in person, British resident in Qatar, December 12, 2019.

[215] Nabil Khattab et al., "Gender and mobility: Qatar's highly skilled female migrants in context," pp. 369-389.

> I felt a lot of the time that he would reiterate that "you can't work if I don't give you my no objection, I am your father here…" In Qatar, as my sponsor, at any time he could cancel my sponsorship, at any time he can object to my working…[216]

Foreign women working in Qatar can sponsor their spouses for residency, but not for work. If their spouses wish to work, they must find an employer to be their visa sponsor.[217]

Women from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states fall into a different category. As GCC citizens, they can work in Qatar without needing a sponsor.[218] Even so, women reported that, in practice, they were treated as Qatari women who need male guardian permission. "Nada," a GCC resident in Qatar, said she was asked for a letter from her husband to work for two different government institutions, first when she received an offer to work in 2007 for ictQatar, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, and again in 2016, to work for Qatar Foundation:

> [Qatar Foundation] requested a letter from my husband that he has no objection to me working. He is not my sponsor. He is my husband. It's not in the bylaws. There is no law that says she has to have the permission. It's still on a cultural basis… When they offer you the job, they [human resources] ask you to bring all required documents.[219]

She said, similarly, all the Qatari women she knew needed guardian permission as part of the paperwork to work for Qatar Foundation. The government wrote to Human Rights Watch that "[t]here is no policy that requires GCC women to obtain consent from a legal guardian before being appointed to jobs in Qatar."[220] The Education Ministry also denied that GCC women need to obtain guardian consent to work in the education sector.[221]

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[216] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Aziza," British, January 8, 2020.

[217] Interior Minister Decision no. 25 of 2019 issuing the executive regulations for Law no. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates and their residence, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=8021&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021), arts. 58 and 68.

[218] The Unified Economic Agreement Between the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, signed in December 2001, https://wits.worldbank.org/GPTAD/PDF/archive/GCC.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021), art.8.

[219] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Nada," from a GCC state (country name withheld for security), July 14, 2020.

[220] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[221] The Ministry of Education and Higher Education response to questions in a written communication provided by a government official to Human Rights Watch, on March 9, 2021.

V. Restrictions on Traveling Abroad

> You can travel [independently] from [age] 16 when you are married but not when you are 22 and single.
>
> —Aisha al-Qahtani, a 22-year-old Qatari woman, January 15, 2020

Some women in Qatar require male guardian permission to leave their country and travel abroad. Unmarried Qatari women under 25 cannot travel abroad without a male guardian's approval, unlike men who do not need guardian permission after age 18. In 2020, after two women under 25 fled Qatar in late 2019 and went public about their escape, some women, including women over 25, told Human Rights Watch that airport passport control officials required them to call their male guardians to confirm they had approval to travel.

Although married women do not need to obtain permission each time to go abroad, their husbands can block their travel, regardless of age, by applying for court-ordered travel bans.[222] A wife can be deemed disobedient, and thus lose her husband's financial support, if she leaves the marital home without a legitimate reason or travels despite his objection.[223] Women, including non-Qatari women, can also face travel bans through court orders obtained by other male guardians like their fathers. Authorities do not inform women when they have travel bans imposed on them or their children.

Qatar previously required married women to have their husband's permission in order to obtain an independent passport, but this requirement in the 1993 Passports Law was repealed in 2007.[224] While many women said they were able to renew their passports themselves as adults, a few interviewees said officials initially still asked them to show guardian permission.

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[222] See Ministry of Interior website, Airport Security Department, "Exit Permit to the Qataris," undated, accessed March 22, 2021, https://bit.ly/3tH75bo.

[223] Family Law no. 22 of 2006, art. 69.

[224] See Decree-Law no. 14 of 1993 regarding Passports, as amended by law no. 5 of 2007, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawArticleID=54059&LawId=3991&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021), art.15.

International human rights law provides for freedom of movement including to leave and enter their own country. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."[225] Any restrictions can only be individual, for a legitimate reason, and proportionate—as, for instance, during a criminal investigation. By imposing such discriminatory restrictions, Qatar is in breach of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and CEDAW.[226] In 2019, the CEDAW Committee called on Qatar to "repeal … the requirement of the authorization of a guardian for single women under the age of 25 years to travel abroad."[227]

Qatar's constitution provides that "All persons are equal before the law and there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of sex, race, language, or religion" and that "Personal freedom shall be guaranteed and … neither may his freedom of residence and mobility be restricted save under the provisions of the law."[228]

Exit Permits

Interior Ministry rules require unmarried Qatari women under 25 years old to obtain an exit permit from their male guardian to travel abroad.[229] Human Rights Watch was unable to verify the legal basis for these rules. The Qatari authorities did not respond to Human Rights Watch's questions relating to the requirement to obtain guardian permission to travel abroad. All Qatari women Human Rights Watch spoke to said that when they traveled abroad while under 25 and unmarried, they either had to be traveling with their male guardian, have their guardian provide permission at the airport, or have an exit permit authorized by their guardian. Even women under 25 who have diplomatic passports as they are relatives of Qatari officials require such permission.[230]

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[225] Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted December 10, 1948, G.A. Res. 217A(III), U.N. Doc. A/810 at 71 (1948), art. 13(2).

[226] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 12 and CEDAW, art.15(4).

[227] See CEDAW Concluding Observations on Qatar, 2019, para.14.

[228] See Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, https://www.gco.gov.qa/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/GCO-Constitution-English.pdf (accessed February 5, 2021), arts. 35 and 36.

[229] See Ministry of Interior website, Airport Security Department, "Exit Permit to the Qataris."

[230] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Nayla," Qatari, March 10, 2020.

Male guardians can wield their power over women to get other things they want. "Fatima," age 22, is estranged from her father who lives abroad. She said in 2015, "My [younger] brother gave permission for one journey only. I said, 'I want an extension please.' But he said, 'I will only do one for you so I can use it when I want something from mom.'"[231]

Fifteen women Human Rights Watch interviewed said that their male guardians denied them permission to travel abroad, thereby preventing them from studying, working, or accessing health care abroad. "Dana," age 20, explained how at 18 her father refused to allow her to travel for surgery abroad that she could not access in Qatar.[232]

In 2017, Qatar introduced online applications on the website *Hukoomi* and mobile application *Metrash2* to allow male guardians and employer-sponsors to issue exit permits for their dependents—including children, unmarried women under 25, and migrant employees.[233] This online portal and mobile app provides other government services such as document services and driving licenses.[234]

Qatar's online portal and mobile app allows guardians two options: to approve an exit permit or to cancel an exit permit (see screen shots of the system in appendix I). Permits are valid for up to one year and then subject to renewal. It does not provide further options such as approval for multiple trips.

While the introduction of the apps may have been designed to make providing such permission easier, it also means guardians can just as easily cancel such permission. Moreover, twelve Qatari women told Human Rights Watch that they experienced delays at immigration because the online system sometimes did not register the exit permit approval on the app or because the permit expires after a year. Women themselves cannot check if they have an approved or expired exit permit, as this information is only available to their guardians.

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[231] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Fatima," Qatari, January 21, 2020.

[232] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dana," Qatari, October 1, 2020.

[233] See Mohammed Osman, "Exit permit for expats now free," *The Peninsula*, January 30, 2017, https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/30/01/2017/Exit-permit-for-expats-now-free (accessed February 5, 2021); Mohamed Faisal, "Qatar MoI to issue exit permits free of charge; no more printouts," *NRI Café*, January 31, 2017, https://nricafe.com/qatar-exit-permits-free-of-charge-no-more-printouts/ (accessed February 5, 2021).

[234] Hukoomi is described as "an advanced e-portal to be used as a single access point to all government information and services in Qatar with the aim of being accessible to all users." See Hukoomi Qatar e-Government portal, "Vision and Mission," undated, accessed February 5, 2021, https://portal.www.gov.qa/wps/portal/about-hukoomi/VissionAndMission/.

"Sara," age 28, said when she was 23 years old, she was stopped at the airport border control and told that the system did not show that her father had given permission and "therefore I didn't have the right to leave." She had to call her father who was in Italy to give the permission on the app: "I was trying to call him several times and I was almost in tears… This is not a position that anyone should be in."[235]

Some male guardians may not have the mobile app and are required then to go to the interior ministry's airport passport department or passport office to approve the exit permit. "Dalal," age 24, whose father is estranged and does not live in Qatar, said "only fathers can have you under the Metrash [app]." Dalal's brother, just 11 months older, had to process Dalal's exit permit at the interior ministry's office.[236]

Several Qatari women have sought asylum abroad after fleeing the country. Human Rights Watch interviewed two women who fled Qatar in late 2019 and sought asylum in the UK. Noof Al Maadeed, age 21, described how she fled years of domestic violence from her family on November 12, 2019 and sought asylum in the UK.

> My dad was asleep. I crept up on him, took his phone, and went on Metrash app. There is a list of people that you own, it was all [ID] numbers, I had to figure out which one is my ID number for a year-long exit permit and then I blocked Metrash's SMS number so that they can't send government notifications. That was 2 a.m. on November 12. I then put the phone back next to him. I ran to my room and started packing my stuff. I locked my bedroom door and exited through the window. I was worried my dad would log into Metrash and know something was wrong… I took a flight at 7 a.m.[237]

Aisha al-Qahtani, age 22, said she escaped a life of domestic violence including restrictions on her movement. She fled while on holiday with her family in Kuwait on 18 December. "As I can't travel from Qatar, I took this opportunity to leave from Kuwait. I

[235] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Sara", Qatari, February 12, 2020.
[236] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dalal," Qatari, November 9, 2020.
[237] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Noof Al Maadeed, Qatari, December 4, 2019.

traveled to Kuwait with my brother and his wife. I had my own room… I thought: this is it."[238]

Both Noof Al Maadeed and Aisha al-Qahtani have publicly tweeted about their escapes to the UK and life under male guardianship and domestic violence, sparking public conversations within Qatar. Many women referred to their cases when speaking to Human Rights Watch. A few said they considered similar moves to escape restrictions at home. However, two women described how the stories of escape prompted their families to become more restrictive, believing they might do the same. "Kholoud," age 26, told Human Rights Watch that, following Noof Al Maadeed's discussion of her escape online, on 6 January, her brother confiscated her phone, car keys and room keys and told her "'to unfollow the account of the girl that ran away.' He fears I will up and leave."[239]

The authorities' response to these escapes appears to be to restrict women's travel even more. Since January 2020, several women described instances in which officials asked their female friends or female relatives under 25, despite their possession of exit permits, and over 25 traveling alone or without a male relative to call their male guardians to check they were not escaping. Between January and November 2020, several women also tweeted about officials requiring that they call their male guardian, including women under 25 who said they had valid exit permits and women 30 years old and over.

On August 1, 2020, Qatar lifted travel restrictions imposed as measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and women like men began to travel outside of Qatar.[240] However, in August and September 2020, four women over 25 and two women under 25, traveling alone, told Human Rights Watch they were stopped by the authorities and asked to call or have their male guardian present to confirm they approved their travel.[241] Airport officials gave inconsistent statements to the women as to current requirements.

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[238] Human Rights Watch interview, in person, with Aisha al-Qahtani, Qatari, in UK, January 15, 2020.

[239] Human Rights Watch online interviews with "Kholoud," Qatari, January 6-7, 2020.

[240] Al Jazeera, "Tests, home quarantine as Qatar reopens borders on August 1," *Al Jazeera,* July 22, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/22/tests-home-quarantine-as-qatar-reopens-borders-on-august-1 (accessed February 5, 2021).

[241] Human Rights Watch phone interviews with "Muna," aged 32, Qatari, September 1, 2020; "Sara," age 28, Qatari, September 3, 2020; "Hanan," age 30, Qatari, September 10, 2020; "Dana," age 20, Qatari, October 1, 2020; "Dalal," age 24, Qatari, November 12, 2020; "Noor," age 25, Qatari, February 6, 2021.

"Sara," age 28, said officials at border control in the airport told her that instructions had changed so that women under 30 have to call their guardians. She said, "I could have argued but I wanted to make my flight, so I called my dad…."[242] "Muna," age 32, said she was also stopped at the airport and told "there are new internal state regulations." She said she refused to give her father's number initially and argued: "what you are doing is illegal, the law says I can travel above 25."

> They said it's in the best interest of the internal state security of Qatar and best interests of families of Qatar… Then I gave him the number and I hoped my dad is awake, it was midnight, and he is 67…. We are citizens and have the right to know what law we are being stopped for.[243]

"Dalal," age 24, said in September that passport control officials stopped Dalal's two female cousins and uncle's wife, who had valid exit permits, and asked them all for their fathers' contact numbers to check their permissions. Dalal's uncle had dropped off his wife, who is 30 and has five children, at passport control. "She told them he [her husband] was there, and he dropped her off, but they wouldn't accept that. They said 'no, we have to call your father.'… To treat her like a minor, like a child… she is not property." Dalal, who was traveling the next day to join them and had a valid exit permit, said passport control officials still sought to confirm permission directly with Dalal's brother. Dalal asked the official, "'When I travel again in December, when I turn 25, do I need to bring him?' He said 'No, we can call him again. I said, 'Is this a new law?' He said 'No, this is a new regulation on top of the law.'"[244]

Women also face difficulty traveling with their children. Qatar's Family Law provides that a male guardian can keep their child's passport.[245] A mother can travel with her child and can appeal to a judge if the guardian prevents her from traveling with her child.[246] But in

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[242] Human Rights Watch interview with "Sara," Qatari, September 12, 2020.

[243] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Muna," Qatari, September 1, 2020.

[244] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dalal," Qatari, November 9, 2020.

[245] Family Law, art. 176 provides "the guardian of the child may retain the passport of the child save for when traveling when it shall be delivered to the female custodian of the child. The judge may order that the female custodian shall keep the passport of the child if he considers that the guardian may not hand over the passport timely when needed. The female custodian may keep the original birth certificate of the child and any other evidential documents of the child, or certified copies thereof in addition to his identity card."

[246] Family Law, art. 185 provides that the mother can travel with her child, and a judge can intervene if the guardian is preventing such travel.

practice, exit permit requirements mean women cannot travel abroad with their own child since the child's male guardian must either accompany them or grant an exit permit for the child.[247] Men however can travel with their children without requiring the mother's permission.[248] "Amna," age 34, said she has not been able to travel abroad at all with her son, now 11, since she divorced his father. Despite a settlement that allowed her son to live with her, her ex-husband continues to hold her child's documents including his passport and QID card.[249]

"Leyla," age 20, told Human Rights Watch that she could not cross the border by car with her maternal uncle and mother, as the border official still needed her father or paternal uncle's permission.[250] "Nawal," age 32, described her mother's humiliation when officials did not allow her out of the country with her children after their father had passed away.

> When we were going out, they [officials] told my mum "you need permission from the father to take the kids.'" We said, "he passed away." They said: "[if not the father] then the grandfather." She said "we don't have any family here. The only guy is my 17-year-old son." They said, "No problem, bring him." My brother had to come to give permission to take us out of the country. My mum was crying, and she was saying "these are *my* children."[251]

In addition, while the exit permit rules on Qatari women do not apply to non-Qatari women, foreign women said that their visa sponsor such as their husband or father are informed when they leave Qatar. As residents pass immigration control to leave the country, their visa sponsor receives a text notification that they have left the country.[252] Visa sponsors

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[247] In practice male guardians provide the exit permit for their child, and where they do not, a woman must appeal to a court to have the court issue an exit permit.

[248] Family Law, art. 185 provides "Fathers and grandfathers of male children may travel with male children who are seven years of age for a reasonable period of time. Should there be a dispute regarding the period of travel the child may undertake with their fathers and grandfather, the judge shall intervene and determine an appropriate period. Only fathers, grandfathers and the agnate relatives may travel with the child in custody." However, in practice men can and do travel with their children without needing permission.

[249] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Amna," Qatari, June 2, 2020.

[250] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Leyla," Qatari, February 12, 2020.

[251] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Nawal," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

[252] See also Tory Scott, "Internet furor over 'tracking' of Saudi women leads to questions about Qatar's kafala system," *Doha News*, November 25, 2012, https://dohanews.tumblr.com/post/36493957633/internet-furor-over-tracking-of-saudi-women (accessed February 5, 2021).

can also request from the interior ministry for a log of all travel in and out of Qatar of anyone they sponsor.[253]

Travel Bans

Men can apply to a court to impose travel bans on women, and the authorities do not need to inform women of the ban. The legal basis or criteria for these travel bans on women is unclear. It is up to the women themselves to find out if they have a travel ban imposed on them.[254] Women explained how their male relatives obtained such travel bans from the family court. "Aziza," a 31-year-old British woman who lived in Qatar with her family until 2017, described how her British father of Egyptian origin placed a travel ban on her in 2011, when she was around age 23.

> The reason was because I threatened to run away. He told me "I put a travel ban on you" … Then end of 2014, when he finally agreed to let me travel by myself, I had to go to a court hearing with my dad. Me and my dad stood in front of the judge. A Sharia judge, a religious judge. All he said was "I want to lift the travel ban on my daughter." That was it. It was done. He gave consent. At the end of the hearing, the judge turned to me and said: "Why are you not wearing the hijab?" Back at that time I wasn't wearing a hijab. I wanted to be polite and said: "I don't think it's compulsory," he said, "There is no such thing as what you think is compulsory, you don't get to decide."[255]

Qatar's Family Law provides that fathers can apply to the courts to intervene and stop the travel of foreign national women who have 'custody' of their child if they suspect they will not return.[256] However, in practice, Qatari women have reported that their ex-husbands have requested travel bans on their children as a form of harassment.

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[253] Hukoomi, Qatar e-government portal, "Inquire about Travel Transactions of the Sponsored," undated, accessed March 22, 2021, https://bit.ly/315hAIX.

[254] See Hukoomi, Qatar e-government portal, "Inquire about Travel Ban," undated, accessed February 5, 2021, https://bit.ly/2Pe6XRl.

[255] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Aziza," British, January 8, 2020.

[256] Family Law, art. 185 allows the child's guardian to apply to the court to stop the travel of the child if they "suspect that the foreign custodian woman may not return with the child," which the court can do if it believes this to be unlikely.

"Mariam," age 30, described how in 2013, four years after getting divorced, she found out that a court had placed a travel ban on her son, on the request of her ex-husband, to prevent her from leaving Qatar with her son: "We found out there was a *mana' safar* (travel ban) he put it on my son." She said she had to obtain three different court orders to travel with her son: a court order for a one-year exit permit for her son; a court order to require her ex-husband to give her their son's passport for when she travels; and a court order to lift the travel ban imposed on her son. It took several weeks to get all the various orders.[257]

Um Qahtan, age 44, said she attempted and failed to travel in 2019 for the summer holidays with her four children, over whom she had temporary 'custody,' because her ex-husband would not hand over their passports and then imposed a travel ban. She said in June and July, she first obtained a single exit permit from the court, with specified dates. However, her children's father still had their passports and refused to give them back despite the court order she obtained that he should return their passports for traveling. She said when the police called him to give their passports, he shouted at them: "I am the wali [guardian] and I am not giving them to you." She said despite the court order the police did nothing when her husband refused to hand over the passports. "I went back to the judge with a petition saying there are two police reports that he refused twice. The court then gave a paper that I had permission to issue new passports at immigration."

However, after she got the new passports and a couple of days later got to the airport, she found they could not travel. "We got to immigration and we were told you have a travel ban and you can't leave." She said at some point "he had gone to court to get the travel ban." They were unable to travel that day and "a month later, we had another hearing about the travel ban and he didn't show up, so the judge said 'Okay, enough, no travel ban.'" But she said the judge was supposed to issue a certificate to show that the travel ban was lifted, but court officials said they could not find it, and told her to go back to the judge. She said: "I gave up and that was it, we couldn't travel during the school period."[258]

[257] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Mariam," Qatari, July 1, 2020.

[258] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, September 29, 2020.

VI. Restrictions on Movement within Qatar

> I thought about it [seeking asylum]. Every oppressed girl [has] thought about it… I'm dreaming about having lunch in a restaurant without covering up. But I don't want it [asylum abroad] anymore. I want to live my life in my country freely.
>
> —"Leyla," a 20-year-old Qatari student. February 12, 2020

Men control many aspects of women's movements in Qatar. Restrictions connected to male guardianship compromise women's full freedom to obtain driving licenses and move freely within the country. Other discriminatory rules also restrict women's movements including whether Qatari women can rent an apartment, stay in a hotel, or register for utilities so she can live on her own. The authorities also prohibit Qatari women from attending events, concerts, or bars that serve alcohol.[259] Such restrictions are in breach of international human rights law on nondiscrimination, the right to freedom of movement and to choose one's own residence, and Qatar's own constitution.[260]

Qatar's laws reinforce restrictive social norms granting men power over women, including through the threat of financial consequences. Qatar's Family Law provides that a woman can be deemed disobedient and lose her right to financial maintenance if she leaves her marital home or refuses to travel with her husband when moving to another dwelling without a legitimate reason, or if she travels without his permission.[261] This is especially significant in a context where women are already dependent on their guardian's approval to study, work, and travel abroad.

While some women said that their families were "liberal" and they could choose where to study, work and live, many other women spoke of facing a myriad of restrictions by their families on where they can go, how they dress, and what they can do within Qatar. Some

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[259] Women reported how such restrictions has impacted their ability to enjoy events in their own country equal to men.[260] UDHR, art. 13(1); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 12; CEDAW, art.15(4); and Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, arts. 35 and 36.

[260] UDHR, art. 13(1); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 12; CEDAW, art.15(4); and Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, arts. 35 and 36.

[261] Family Law, art. 69.

women said their families not only prohibited them from driving but also did not allow them to take a taxi or an Uber. "Noora," age 20, said her family forbids her to use Uber, "I once had to get one and I got into trouble."[262] Several women spoke of not being allowed to go anywhere other than their university and home, and not being allowed to meet female friends outside of university. In 2020, this was further exacerbated by Covid-19 restrictions as universities moved to online teaching.

Most women who spoke of such restrictions imposed by their families, which can amount to emotional abuse, said they did not go to the authorities because the authorities do not support their independence. "Amira," age 23, said: "the things I wanted to do would not be supported by government or police. I want to go out. The common ideology is that women should stay at home and listen to your dad…"[263]

Driving

The government wrote to Human Rights Watch that they allowed women to drive for the first time in 1970.[264] However, reports indicate that the government began permitting Qatari women to drive but only with male guardian permission from the late 1990s.[265] At one point, women not only needed guardian permission to drive but to also show that they needed to drive due to school, work, or financial inability to hire male drivers.[266] It is unclear whether there was a written policy for this rule on male guardian permission or whether it was implemented as an unwritten rule. Human Rights Watch reviewed traffic laws and regulations as well as the application form to obtain a driving license but found no provisions that required such permission.[267]

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[262] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Noora," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

[263] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Amira," Qatari, March 19, 2020.

[264] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[265] Roula Khalaf, "Interview transcript: Qatar's Sheikh Hamad," *Financial Times*, October 24, 2010, https://www.ft.com/content/9163abca-df97-11df-bed9-00144feabdc0 (accessed February 5, 2021); Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar, Rumsha Shahzad, and Tanya Kane, "Measuring Qatari Women's Progress Through Reactions to Online Behavior," *IAFOR Journal of Cultural Studies*2, no. 1 (2017), accessed February 5, 2021, doi: 10.22492/ijcs.2.1.02.

[266] Tofol Jassim Al-Nasr, "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) women and misyar marriage: Evolution and progress in the Arabian Gulf," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 12, no. 3 (2011): 43–57, accessed February 5, 2021, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/48828368.pdf.

[267] Traffic laws only refer to an age limit of 18 to obtain a driving license for light motor vehicles and 21 for heavy vehicles see Decree-Law no. 19 of 2007 promulgating the Traffic Law, issued June 8, 2007, https://almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=2691&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021); Interior Minister Decision no. 6 of 2010 Executive Regulations for the Decree-Law no. 19 of 2007 promulgating the Traffic Law, issued July 17, 2010,

On January 1, 2020 the General Department on Traffic issued a decision in a letter to the assistant director of the Department of Licensing Affairs to end requiring guardian permission for women to obtain driving licenses (see Appendix III). The news of this decision circulated on social media and has only been referred to in one article in a local newspaper.[268] It is not an official decree or a law, and it was not announced more broadly otherwise. In its written response to Human Rights Watch, the government stated only that "[n]o approval from a guardian is required to obtain a driving license."[269]

Almost all Qatari women Human Rights Watch spoke to said that before January 2020 they needed guardian permission in order to obtain a provisional driving license, enroll in a driving school, or convert a GCC or other international license to a Qatari license which requires completing a short course. "Nawal," age 32, said, "I went to change my driving license from Emirati to Qatari and they said, 'You need your father's signature.' I said 'Why? I am 29.'"[270]

In addition, male guardian permission is still required for those under 18 to obtain a provisional license, meaning women do not have the same ability to support their children to get a license as men.[271] Moreover, male guardians can still block a woman from obtaining her provisional license after age 18. Um Qahtan, who is separated from her husband, said in July 2020 she went with her 17-year-old daughter "to try and get her learner's permit at the traffic department and the traffic captain said, 'We can't until your father gives you permission.' I said, 'What about in March [2021] when she turns 18?' He said, 'Unless he hasn't blocked it.'"[272]

Women explained that the process had involved their male guardian accompanying them to register at the driving school where the staff member would take the guardian's

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https://almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=3856&language=ar (accessed February 5, 2021); see also Ministry of Interior, Traffic Department, "Application for New Driving license," https://portal.moi.gov.qa/wps/wcm/connect/bd86496a-91fa-45a9-8a87-bce4a7c82adb/10_18169.pdf?MOD=AJPERES (accessed February 5, 2021).

[268] "Cancellation of Condition of Male Guardian Permission to Grant Driving Licenses," *al-Raya*, January 2, 2020, https://bit.ly/35EYfRV (accessed February 5, 2021).

[269] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[270] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Nawal," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

[271] See for instance "Primary Guidelines," Gulf Driving School, undated, accessed March 22, 2021, http://web.archive.org/web/20210122032338/https://www.gdsqatar.com.qa/.

[272] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, September 29, 2020.

permission including their QID number as well as the applicant's.[273] In recent years, women reported that male guardians could give the necessary permission via the Metrash2 app known as a no-objection certificate (NOC). The Metrash2 app includes amongst its Traffic services, the "NOC to obtain driving license" (see also appendix II).[274]

Human Rights Watch reviewed the documents required to register for four driving schools which either did not mention guardian permission or only mentioned visa sponsor permission in relation to foreign national residents.[275] However, until mid-2020 Al Khebra driving school continued to require on its website that Qatari women needed to present a NOC from their guardian using the Metrash2 application, while men did not.[276]

Women told Human Rights Watch that the inability to drive and the limited availability of public transportation makes them reliant on their family members or drivers to ferry them around.[277] Some women may even have resorted to driving without a license. "Fatima," age 22, said in 2019 she bought a car and drove for almost a year without a license and without her family's knowledge. She was unable to obtain a driving license since age 18 as her estranged father lived abroad and her younger brother only agreed to give her the permission in late 2019.[278]

In addition, some women have said that regardless of the January 2020 change, the reality remains that women's ability to drive is still dependent on their male guardian's approval. "Leyla," age 20, said her father does not allow her or her sister, age 24, to drive. "My dad

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[273] Some of the driving schools have a traffic department office at their premises which can process driving tests, license verification, and issuance of provisional and full driving licenses. See for instance "Dalla Driving Academy Company Profile", Dalla Driving Academy, p.8 reference to "Traffic Department office," https://www.dalladrivingacademy.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/dalla-profile-2017.pdf (accessed March 22, 2021).

[274] Ibid. See also "Qatar: Traffic Services are Easier with METRASH 2," Q Motor, July 23, 2018, https://qmotor.com/en/car-news/711/qatar-traffic-services-are-easier-with-metrash-2 (accessed February 5, 2021).

[275] See Gulf Driving School, http://gdsqatar.com.qa/ (accessed February 5, 2021); United Driving School, http://udqatar.com/registration-2/ (accessed February 5, 2021); Doha Driving Academy, (accessed February 5, 2021); Dallah Driving Academy, https://web.archive.org/web/20200217124109/https://www.dalladrivingacademy.com/registration-documents/ (accessed February 5, 2021).

[276] "VIP Full Course Manual," provides that "For the Qatari male: No Objection is not required. For the Qatari female: No Objection is to be given by the guardians using Metrash 2 application," https://alkhebradriving.com/course/vip-full-course-manual/?lang=en (accessed May 21, 2020).

[277] Doha Metro opened in December 2019. Railway Technology, "RKH Qitarat opens all Doha Metro lines for public use," December 12, 2019, https://www.railway-technology.com/news/rkh-qitarat-opens-doha-metro/ (accessed February 5, 2021).

[278] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Fatima," Qatari, January 21, 2020.

said if you want to drive just get married. I said 'I don't want to get married to get my freedom…'"[279]

"Nayla," age 24, said after she graduated her father took away her car keys for eight months between October 2018 to June 2019.

> I wasn't allowed to drive because he thought I wasn't behaving. It was very humiliating that he can just do that… He just wants to show you who is the boss. He repeatedly refused to give them back until I started summer training.[280]

Moreover, foreign national residents and migrant workers in Qatar are still required to show their visa sponsor's permission in order to obtain a license. The sponsor can be either the company or an individual or family member such as a father or husband.[281] While this rule applies to both men and women residents, it can allow men who act as sponsors for their wives or daughters to decide whether they can obtain a driving license. Visa sponsors can provide such permission on the Metrash2 mobile app. Several non-Qatari women residents told Human Rights Watch they needed their father or their husband's permission to enroll in a driving school.

Booking a Hotel Room

In its written response to Human Rights Watch, the government said that "[t]here are no restrictions for either men or women to stay in hotels in Qatar."[282] However, many women told Human Rights Watch that hotels told them they cannot check in to hotel rooms if they are unmarried Qatari women under 30 years old. They reported that married women under 30 had to present a marriage certificate upon checking into hotel rooms and that all couples, regardless of age or citizenship, must show they are married to check into hotels.

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[279] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Leyla," Qatari, February 12, 2020.

[280] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Nayla," Qatari, March 10, 2020.

[281] See Ministry of Interior, on instructions on granting driving licenses provides that for non-Qataris, a letter of approval from the sponsor and if it is a personal sponsor then to also include a copy of their ID card https://bit.ly/3vJSi1f (accessed March 22, 2021).

[282] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

Human Rights Watch spoke to staff at 16 hotels in Qatar.[283] Staff at 6 of the 16 hotels said that the hotel applied a rule that unmarried or unaccompanied Qatari women under 30 years old cannot check into and stay at the hotel. Staff at 1 hotel applied the rule to Qatari women under age 32, and another hotel for Qatari women under age 35. All 8 of these hotels allowed Qatari men to check in at a lower age with 7 stating a minimum of age 21 for Qatari men and one at age 18. The eight hotels also require Qatari couples to present a marriage certificate. Many of the hotels stated that such rules were in line with government policy.

Another 6 hotels said they previously prohibited unaccompanied or unmarried Qatari women under age 30 from checking into a hotel room but had recently lowered the age. Four out of these 6 now require the same age minimum of either 21 or 18 for both Qatari men and women, and 2 require a slightly higher age minimum for women than for Qatari men.[284] One worker at a 5-star hotel told Human Rights Watch:

> For nationals and non-nationals, it is 18 years and above [to check in]. It was 21 for men and it was 30 for Qatari unaccompanied females without male guardian, like without a husband, father, or brother. It changed a few weeks ago. End of last year [2020] it [the rule] came but it became official hotel policy this year [2021]. It came from the National Tourism Council.[285]

Staff at seven hotels also said the government no longer requires them to ask for marriage certificates from Qatari nationals or from foreign national couples. Staff at two of these hotels said the government had changed this rule so that it no longer applied to four and five-star hotels. The rules still vary between hotels—staff at four five-star hotels said that they still require a marriage certificate for Qatari couples.

While it is not clear where such official rules exist, it appears to be based on the 2012 Tourism Law which requires that hotels or tourist establishments "shall be prohibited from allowing any acts to be committed in the hotel or at the tourist establishment that are

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[283] Human Rights Watch phone interviews with staff at one hotel on May 29, 2020, five hotels on January 13, 2021, and with ten hotels on January 22, 2021.

[284] Of the two five-star hotels, one said it applied a minimum of age 21 for Qatari women and age 18 for men, while another said they applied an age minimum of 22 for Qatari women and 18 for men.

[285] Human Rights Watch phone interview with staff member (unnamed) at a five-star hotel in Qatar, January 22, 2020.

inconsistent with legislation, public order or public morals, or that affect the safety of the community or the security and stability of the country."[286] A hotel worker when asked about these rules said, "These restrictions are from local authority: Ministry of Interior and Qatar Tourism Authority. A memo comes from those authorities to general managers of hotels who send it around."[287]

"Nayla," a 24-year-old single Qatari woman, said in 2019 when she attempted to book a hotel room for a dinner with some female friends, the hotel staff member asked how old she was and then whether she had a marriage certificate, when she said no, he told her "You have to be over 30 or have someone book it for you."[288]

Interviewees told Human Rights Watch that they and their friends have to depend on their parents, non-Qatari friends, or older or married family members to book hotel rooms for them. These rules can impact women who may be fleeing domestic violence at home and need a safe place to go. "Haya," age 31, said she fled her house one time after her brother threatened to hurt her in 2013. She had to stay at a friend's place but could not stay for more than a week.

> I tried to go to a hotel. I had my own salary… Women here are not allowed to book a room if they are under 30. It was a huge issue for me as it was embarrassing to stay in someone's house for a week… My friend's mother told me 'Until when do you want to stay here? Call your parents or something.' So, I had to leave there.[289]

Renting an Apartment and Connecting Utilities

While some Qatari women said they were able to rent an apartment, other women said they knew women who faced difficulties as unmarried Qatari women trying to rent an apartment without male guardian permission. The law on leasing does not require male

[286] Law no. 6 of 2012 on the Regulation of Tourism, August 7, 2012, art. 13, https://almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=14754&LawID=4785&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021).
[287] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Fahad," on May 29, 2020.
[288] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Nayla," Qatari, March 10, 2020.
[289] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Haya," Qatari, September 18, 2020.

guardian permission, as such.[290] It is unclear whether there is a policy or if some landlords refuse to rent to unmarried Qatari women. As there is no equality or anti-discrimination law or an equality monitoring body, women do not have clear recourse for such discrimination.

"Nawal," age 32, said a few years ago she tried to rent an apartment: "When I called and said I am Qatari, they asked for a marriage certificate. They said they can't rent it to me while I am alone."[291] "Muna," age 32, said in 2018 she had to lease an apartment under her mother's name because the rental agency refused to lease to her telling her that she needed to be married and show a marriage certificate: "They said this is not allowed in Qatar. I remember they didn't refer to any law, they said verbally 'You know how it is in Qatar. We cannot accept a single woman living in the building.'"[292]

Even if a Qatari woman is able to rent an apartment or house, she may need a certificate proving her marriage, divorce, or the death of her husband to register for electricity and water, if it is not already registered, with Kahramaa, the state General Electricity and Water Corporation. Qatari citizens are entitled to free water and electricity.[293] The Ministry of Energy Affairs wrote to Human Rights Watch that "All Qatari citizens, regardless of their gender or marital status are exempt from electricity and water fees at their primary residence. ln order to ensure that a citizen, man or woman, is only availing of the exemption at their primary residence, certain documentary evidence may be requested by Kahramaa including marriage, divorce or death certificates."[294] However, it appears that in practice Qatari women can only receive such an entitlement if they are deemed heads of their household upon divorce or being widowed.

The online Kahramaa form providing exemption from electricity and water fees lists a number of reasons for exemption including additional buildings in the same land as well

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[290] Law no. 4 of 2008 regarding Property Leasing, February 14, 2008, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=3982&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021).

[291] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Nawal," Qatari, June 15, 2020.

[292] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Muna," Qatari, September 1, 2020.

[293] Hussam Hussein and Laurent A. Lambert, "A Rentier State under Blockade: Qatar's Water-Energy-Food Predicament from Energy Abundance and Food Insecurity to a Silent Water Crisis," *Water 2020* 12, no. 4 (2020), accessed October 20, 2020 doi: 10.3390/w12041051; Law no. 7 of 1963 Concerning the Determination and Organization of the Collection of Electricity and Water Tariffs, May 27, 1963, https://almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=406&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021).

[294] Letter from the Ministry of Energy Affairs responding to Human Rights Watch requests for information, February 15, 2021.

as for homes of the second, third or fourth wife. [295] This suggests that the allocation of how each household is exempt from fees is determined in relation to marriage to a Qatari man.

According to Kahramaa's 2013 guidance, only Qatari citizens are required to show a marriage certificate when applying for supply of electricity.[296] The 2020 service application form also lists among required documents for single women the husband's death certificate or divorce certificate.[297] Some women said the buildings they lived in were already set up with utilities so this did not impact them, however for others this effectively means that they cannot live alone as single women unless they can prove they are divorced or widowed.

"Amna," a 34-year-old divorced Qatari woman, said she was able to rent an apartment in 2018 however, in order to register with electricity and water with Kahramaa, she had to prove she was divorced.

> They told me I have to have a husband or bring a paper from court saying that I am divorced living with my son, and two witnesses from family… They said, 'We need [a divorce] certificate so we can register it under your name.'[298]

A Qatari man, "Ahmed" told Human Rights Watch that he knew of a divorced Qatari woman who had her electricity cut off in 2020. "Kahramaa cut off her power a month ago because they wanted proof from her dad that she was divorced. They do not want single women living alone."[299]

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[295] "QTR Exemption," Kahramaa, undated, accessed February 5, 2021, https://bit.ly/3vNA7rb.

[296] Kahramaa, "Supply Connection for Existing Rented Buildings," September 9, 2013, https://bit.ly/3vRCj1c (accessed February 5, 2021).

[297] Kahramaa, "Service Application Form," September 27, 2018, https://km.qa/CustomerService/FormsApplications/Service%20Application%20Form.pdf (accessed March 22, 2021), p.3. The state established Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) in July 2000, see Law no. 10 of 2000 on Establishing Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation, July 12, 2000 https://almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=7977&lawId=2467&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021).

[298] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Amna," Qatari, June 2, 2020.

[299] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Ahmed," Qatari, May 2, 2020.

VII. Restrictions on Women's Access to Health Care

> At the hospital when you go for prenatal tests, they say please make sure you bring your Qatar ID and marriage certificate."
>
> —"Laura," a woman resident in Doha, who had a baby in 2019, March 7, 2020

Qatar has a strong regional reputation for its healthcare service, which provides free or subsidized health care to its citizens and residents.[300] However, women face discrimination in their access to health care. Women reported that in some cases hospitals required that they show a marriage certificate as a prerequisite for admission, or to receive certain forms of care such as for pregnant women to obtain prenatal and obstetric care. Human Rights Watch interviewed healthcare workers who said hospital staff are required to report women to the police if they are pregnant outside of marriage, as sex outside of marriage is a crime. In its written communication to Human Rights Watch, the government refuted this claim (see below).

Women also reported that they need male guardian permission in order to access specific forms of sexual and reproductive health care. According to Qatari law, abortions are prohibited except in specific circumstances such as to save a mother's life or in cases of fetal abnormality but, in case of the latter, both parents are required to consent. Women also need their husband's consent in relation to some matters of fertility, but it is unclear what the legal basis for such a requirement is, such as if they are seeking sterilization. Women and girls who are unmarried but experiencing reproductive health issues for which they need examinations or birth control may also need to get guardian permission or show a marriage certificate to access such care.

Qatar's two state health institutions set out patient rights. The government's main healthcare provider, Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), has a patient charter which provides that all patients have the right to "Access healthcare services regardless of race, religion, national origin, beliefs, values, language, age or disability," but it does not

[300] Annekathryn Goodman, "The Development of the Qatar Healthcare System: A Review of the Literature," *International Journal of Clinical Medicine* 6, no. 3 (2015), accessed February 5, 2021, doi: 10.4236/ijcm.2015.63023.

mention sex or gender.[301] While patients have a right to access all information in their medical record, this can be specifically restricted for medical reasons or as prohibited by law by the attending physician and in consultation "with family representative, legal or surrogate guardian." The Primary HealthCare Corporation, a state institution which overseas healthcare clinics, has a similar bill of rights and responsibilities.[302]

The government wrote to clarify to Human Rights Watch that only those under 18 years old "require a parent (whether mother or father) or authorized legal guardian to accompany them to hospital appointments and consent to any medical treatment provided" and that a legal guardian may be involved in providing consent for those diagnosed with "a mental illness or learning disability which renders them incapable of making informed decisions."[303]

Qatar's failure to ensure that women can access sexual and reproductive health care independently is in breach of their obligations under CEDAW.[304] The World Health Organization has recommended that sexual and reproductive health services should be provided, "including contraceptive information and services, for adolescents without mandatory parental and guardian authorization or notification, in order to meet the educational and service needs of adolescents."[305] The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has called on states parties to provide all adolescents "access to free, confidential, adolescent-responsive and non-discriminatory sexual and reproductive health services,

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[301] "Patient and Family Bill of Rights and Responsibilities," Hamad Medical Corporation, undated, accessed February 5, 2021 https://www.hamad.qa/EN/Patient-Information/Documents/Patient%20and%20Family%20Rights%20Poster%20English_2015.pdf.

[302] "Bill of Rights and Responsibilities," Primary Healthcare Corporation, undated, accessed February 5, 2021 https://www.phcc.gov.qa/Patients-And-Clients/Bill-Of-Rights-And-Reponsibilities.

[303] The government clarified that the "HMC's Informed Consent Policy/Procedure (CL 7226) defines a 'competent adult' as a patient with a decision-making capacity who is: 18 years of age or older; conscious and mentally capable; able to understand and retain information about the nature and severity of the illness involved; able to understand the possible consequences of, and alternatives to, the proposed treatment; able to make informed and deliberate choices concerning the course of treatment and communicate them to the caregivers." Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[304] The CEDAW Committee in its General Recommendation on the Right to Health says that states "should not restrict women's access to health services… on the ground that women do not have the authorization of husbands, partners, parents or health authorities, because they are unmarried or because they are women." UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 24, The Right to Health, UN Doc. A/54/38/Rev.1 (1999), para. 14.

[305] World Health Organization, "WHO recommendations on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights," 2018, https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/275374/9789241514606-eng.pdf?ua=1 (accessed February 5, 2021).

information and education," with "no barriers ... such as requirements for third-party consent or authorization."[306]

Prenatal, Obstetric, Postnatal and Fertility Health Care

In order to access prenatal, obstetric and postnatal health care, interviewees told Human Rights Watch that women are required to show proof of marriage and their husband's QID. "Dr. Rodha," a physician, told Human Rights Watch, "For hospitals, if [a] lady is pregnant, or she comes for abortion or something pregnancy-related we usually need a confirmation that she is married, and to have a certificate that she is married or divorced."[307] If it relates to emergency care such as when an unmarried woman is in labor, hospitals do provide such care but may have requirements to report them to the police. The government wrote to Human Rights Watch there are no reporting requirements to the police for unmarried pregnant women, except for their protection (see below).

Eight women in Qatar told Human Rights Watch that they had to show their marriage certificate, the first time they registered for appointments relating to their pregnancy, in both private and government hospitals. Likewise, "Dr. Rodha" confirmed that women do not need the presence of husband or family member for obstetric, gynecological, and prenatal care once their marriage was confirmed.[308]

According to "Nadine," the state Hamad Medical Corporation's (HMC) Women's Hospital had displayed a poster that instructed women that if they are unmarried and need to see a gynecologist "you need your father's permission. If you are married, you have to show a marriage certificate and your husband's ID card."[309] The Women's Wellness and Research Centre is now the main state hospital for women and replaced the HMC's Women's Hospital after transitioning all its services including a range of reproductive clinical

[306] UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, "General Comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence," December 6, 2016, CRC/C/GC/20, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fGC%2f20&Lang=en (accessed March 18, 2021), para. 60.

[307] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dr. Rodha," Qatari, September 18, 2020.

[308] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dr. Rodha," Qatari, September 18, 2020.

[309] Human Rights Watch interview with "Nadine," British, in person, December 12, 2019.

services.[310] Its website provides information for women registering at the Emergency Department: "If you have not visited Women's Wellness and Research Center before, we will also require your marriage certificate and husband's identification (QID, passport)."[311] "Ruth," a 20-year-old medical student, described how the private hospitals she worked in, women needed their husband's signature or presence for some treatments relating to reproductive health care:

> They [the staff] usually ask for guardian to be present or for their signature. They usually won't admit [the married woman without it]. They give an external referral or … if the husband is not around, they ask for a male relative of the husband to be there.[312]

Having a policy that requires women to show proof of marriage in order to be admitted is discriminatory and can delay their access to treatment. Aisha al-Qahtani said, "One of my friends went to hospital bleeding, and they refused to treat her unless her guardian comes. [It was] not enough to give it on the phone. He has to be there."[313] "Nadine" described how men were not allowed into the state Women's Hospital and required to drop off women in front of the emergency room. She said in 2015: "I was in the emergency department [at the Women's Hospital] and a Filipino woman in front of me, her water broke, they told her 'You can't come through, tell your husband to come here with documents.' She was like: 'I don't have my phone with me.' I remember they sent her back and she was looking for her husband outside."[314]

Women who are unmarried and pregnant can face punishment for accessing reproductive health care. Qatar prohibits extramarital sexual relations and if caught, individuals can be

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[310] The Women's Wellness and Research Center first opened in 2017 and in 2018, transitioned all the services from the state Women's Hospital to the Center see "Women's Wellness and Research Center Celebrates One-Year Anniversary," Women's Wellness and Research Center, June 20, 2019, accessed February 5, 2021 https://www.hamad.qa/EN/Hospitals-and-services/WWRC/News/Pages/Women%E2%80%99s-Wellness-and-Research-Center-Celebrates-One-Year-Anniversary.aspx.

[311] The Women's Wellness and Research Centre has taken over most of the Women's Hospital's functions with clinical services that range from "preconception to childbirth, post-natal care and beyond the reproductive phase of life." Regarding registration see "Registration," Women's Wellness and Research Centre, undated, accessed February 5, 2021 https://www.hamad.qa/EN/Hospitals-and-services/WWRC/Emergency%20Department/Pages/Registration.aspx.

[312] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Ruth," (nationality withheld), February 6, 2020.

[313] Human Rights Watch interview with Aisha al-Qahtani, Qatari, in UK, January 15, 2020.

[314] Human Rights Watch interview with "Nadine," British, in person, December 12, 2019.

arrested and prosecuted.[315] Healthcare workers and other women recounted that hospitals and medical professionals report any cases which may indicate sexual relations outside of marriage, such as pregnancy, miscarriage or sexually transmitted infections. Qatar's 2018 state report to CEDAW acknowledges that the government hospital Hamad Medical Corporation "require medical professionals to report suspected cases of violence, including … illegitimate pregnancy…"[316]

The information provided in the government's written response to Human Rights Watch conflicts with the information in its state report to CEDAW. The response stated that the HMC "has established policies to guide healthcare professionals in cases of suspected unmarried pregnancy, with the clear mandate of protecting all parties concerned." That includes providing a complete physical examination to confirm the pregnancy. If confirmed, the treating physician consults the social worker who they work with "closely to ensure patient's care, safety and privacy." The response goes on to state that "[i]n case the patient's safety is threatened after discharge, Social Service shall inform the police in order to protect the patient. To be clear, the patient will not face any legal action."[317] Information in this chapter suggests that this is either a new policy or it has not been applied in the past.

"Ruth," a medical student, said "every doctor has a nurse or social worker put there to ensure that anything going on that violates social rules are obligated to report it."[318] Likewise, "Dr. Rodha," a physician, said that in cases of unmarried pregnant women "the hospital involves police, social workers and psychologists."[319] "Dr. Helen," a British woman formerly residing in Qatar said someone contacted her about an unmarried pregnant woman.

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[315] See Qatar Penal Code, arts. 281-282 that provides a maximum of seven years imprisonment for sexual relations outside of marriage between male and female persons, or up to 15 years imprisonment if they know it is prohibited. For more information on how such offences are penalized and how they impact women disproportionality see Human Rights Watch, "Submission to the CEDAW Committee of Qatar's Periodic Report for the 73rd Session," July 1, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/01/human-rights-watch-submission-cedaw-committee-qatars-periodic-report-73rd-session#,_ftn12.

[316] UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, "Second periodic report submitted by Qatar under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2018," February 16, 2018, CEDAW/C/QAT/2, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fQAT%2f2&Lang=en (accessed February 5, 2021), para. 66.

[317] Compiled written response provided by the Qatari government to Human Rights Watch on March 1, 2021.

[318] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Ruth," (nationality withheld), February 6, 2020.

[319] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dr. Rodha," Qatari, September 18, 2020.

> What ultimately happened is she passed out at work. She was taken to hospital. She was aware she shouldn't go but it was too late as the ambulance was called. They found out she was pregnant and then the police were called. In the end, I think they allowed her to go as the miscarriage was complete…[320]

Even if they were not pregnant but medical staff believed them to be, they can still report them. According to one media report from 2017, a Filipino domestic worker said she had been reported to the police by the hospital after she sought treatment for heavy bleeding and the hospital staff believed she had miscarried. She had spent a year in prison but had not yet been sentenced for the charge of extramarital sex at the time of the media report.[321]

Women also need guardian permission for fertility-related treatments. "Ruth," a medical student, explained that if married women required fertility treatments or post-natal care, they needed their husband's presence. "Legally they [health care providers] are not allowed to ask for anyone's guardian, but with Qatari women… socially a rule from higher ups is enforced. A rule across all hospitals."[322] But, "Dr. Rodha," a physician, told Human Rights Watch that in relation to caesarean sections, hospital staff take permission from the woman herself.[323]

As noted above, abortion is criminalized in most cases.[324] Where abortion is allowed for "serious and incurable physical malformations or mental deficiency" of the fetus then "both parents must consent to the abortion." [325] This required consent of the father limits a woman's autonomy in such circumstances. The abortion must be performed in a

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[320] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dr. Helen," former resident in Qatar, June 11, 2020.

[321] Ana P. Santos, "The Boyfriend System: Migrant Life in Qatar," *Pulitzer Center*, September 4, 2017, https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/boyfriend-system-migrant-life-qatar (accessed February 5, 2021).

[322] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Ruth," (nationality withheld), February 6, 2020.

[323] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dr. Rodha," Qatari, September 18, 2020.

[324] Women can face up to three years imprisonment for abortions without official approval, and anyone who administers abortions can face up to seven years imprisonment, or even up to 10 years imprisonment if they are a medical professional. See Qatar Penal Code, arts. 316-317.

[325] Law no. 2 of 1983 with respect to the Practice of the Profession of Medicine and Dental Medicine and Surgery, February 22, 1983, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=253&language=en (accessed February 5, 2021), art. 17 provides that these include "certain and serious harm to the mother's health" or "serious and incurable physical malformations or mental deficiency and both parents must consent to the abortion" of the fetus.

government hospital on the recommendation of a medical commission composed of three medical specialists, including a specialist in gynecology and obstetrics.[326]

While there does not appear to be any other law requiring a man's consent, women also need their husband's consent if they are seeking other forms of reproductive health care such as sterilization.[327] Um Qahtan, age 44, recounted her experience eight years ago at the state HMC Women's Hospital: "To get my [fallopian] tubes tied he [my husband] had to sign. At one of the pre-op appointments. It was a form that [stated] 'As the husband of …, I give my permission for this procedure.'"[328] While some reports suggest that freezing unfertilized eggs is an option for unmarried women in Qatar and can be used after marriage, married women may not be able to make independent choices to freeze their own eggs.[329] "Dalal," said a doctor told their Filipino domestic worker undergoing chemotherapy for cancer in 2020 that, "if her husband was in the country, they could provide the service to allow her to take her eggs and freeze them but since her husband was not in the country they couldn't and so it wasn't an option for her."[330]

Other Sexual and Reproductive Health Care

Human Rights Watch spoke to seven women who said as unmarried women they were able to receive reproductive health care that related to routine gynecological care unrelated to sexual activity such as urinary tract infections without needing permission from a guardian or a marriage certificate. "Ruth," a medical student, and "Dr. Rodha" confirmed this explaining that women can receive more routine gynecological care relating to menstrual care, menopause, or hormonal skin changes without needing to show they are married or have permission.[331] "Dr. Rodha" explained that only girls under 16 "require an adult's presence."[332]

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[326] Ibid.

[327] This may be in addition to other restricting criteria. "Nadine," age 33, reported that both the HMC Women's Hospital and Sidhra Hospital refused to tie her fallopian tubes at her request following what she described as traumatic labor because she was under 40 years old. Human Rights Watch follow-up phone interview with "Nadine," British, January 20, 2021.

[328] Human Rights Watch phone interview with Um Qahtan, Qatari, September 29, 2020.

[329] Maha El Akoum, "Is egg freezing permissible in Islam?" *Doha News*, November 28, 2020, https://www.dohanews.co/is-egg-freezing-permissible-in-islam/ (accessed February 5, 2021).

[330] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dalal," Qatari, November 9, 2020.

[331] Human Rights Watch phone interviews with "Ruth," (nationality withheld), February 6, 2020, and "Dr. Rodha," September 18, 2020.

[332] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dr. Rodha," September 18, 2020.

Unmarried women reported that they cannot get sexual health checks. "Sama," a 21-year-old Palestinian woman, said she could go for normal gynecological check-ups that did not relate to sexual activity, but when she went to a private clinic for other checks, "they said you either come with a guardian or with a marriage certificate or your husband here."[333] "Ruth," said that "if someone goes in and has said they contracted an STI [sexually transmitted infection] and [is] single, the doctor will prescribe antibiotics, but the person will get in trouble with the law or their employer. I know someone whose employment was terminated."[334]

A few women also complained about limited access to screening tests (pap smear tests) for cervical cancer, stating they had to show they had been married for three years particularly at state facilities.[335] One Qatari woman said she was able to get such a test at a private clinic but only after being forced to pretend she was married at the point of admission.[336]

Moreover, some women reported that for some gynecological care which did not relate to sexual activity or sexual health, they still needed to show proof of marriage or guardian permission, and experienced delays even where they needed urgent treatment at the state hospital.

"Dana," age 20, said when she was 18, she had to lie to get urgently checked at the state Women's Hospital as she was in severe pain, as unbeknownst to her at the time, she had endometriosis, a severe disorder of her reproductive tracts.

> One time, an ER [emergency room] doctor referred me to the Women's Hospital for an ultrasound. I was in so much pain he thought my ovary had

[333] Human Rights Watch interview with "Sama," Palestinian, February 5, 2020.

[334] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Ruth," (nationality withheld), February 6, 2020.

[335] However, such criteria are not mentioned on official websites. The Primary Health Care Corporation states that "All women aged between 21 and 69 with no related symptoms" are eligible for screening see,
"Cervical Cancer Screening," Primary Health Care Corporation, undated, accessed February 5, 2021 https://www.phcc.gov.qa/en/Clinics-And-Services/Screening-And-Detection/Cervical-Cancer-Screening. Sidhra Medicine for instance provides that "Women should be screened for cervical cancer every three years from ages 21 to 49, and every five years from ages 50 to 64. Patients married for more than three years and not yet aged 21 are also eligible." See "Sidra Medicine Introduces Cervical Screening to its Women' Services Program," Sidra Medicine, February 25, 2020 https://www.sidra.org/media/newsroom/2020/february/sidra-medicine-introduces-cervical-screening-to- (accessed February 5, 2021).

[336] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Sanaa," Qatari, July 8, 2020.

> burst. But they wouldn't give me a vaginal ultrasound without a marriage license. They refused to actually do a physical on me because I wasn't married … I told them, 'No, I am married.' They asked me to bring out [my] marriage certificate. I didn't have it. They asked me for my husband's number. I gave them my schoolmate's number. Then they gave me the physical. They told me next time I should bring my marriage certificate.[337]

"Nadine," age 33, explained how she suffered from endometriosis since the age of 13 but could not get it diagnosed in Qatar until a few years after getting married, as healthcare workers would not allow her to undergo certain examinations including a transvaginal ultrasound, a pap smear test, or a womb biopsy without a marriage certificate.

> You suffer in silence. I had horrible pain. I used to have massive blood clots. I realized it was like being in labor. I was having these contractions and blood clots come out the size of your palm. But because of all the obstacles you go through you kind of give up.[338]

"Noor," age 25, said a private clinic doctor, when considering a transvaginal ultrasound for the diagnosis of her polycystic ovaries, "asked if I was married and I said no, and she said, 'okay I will use a blood test and not a vaginal ultrasound.'" The doctor did not offer her a choice.[339] "Nadine," said she believed that healthcare workers refused to conduct transvaginal ultrasounds, which are internal examinations, on unmarried women as "they are worried about breaking the hymen."[340]

"Dalal," age 24, said a gynecologist at HMC's Women's Hospital prescribed birth control pills eight years earlier for polycystic ovaries to control menstrual periods, but the hospital reception demanded to see a marriage certificate:

> God forbid that one has birth control not to have sex! They made a big deal that I am not married, and how come I am taking birth control. They wanted

[337] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dana," Qatari, October 1, 2020.
[338] Human Rights Watch follow-up phone interview with "Nadine," British, January 20, 2021.
[339] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Noor," Qatari, February 6, 2021.
[340] Human Rights Watch follow-up phone interview with "Nadine," British, January 20, 2021.

> proof that I was married that I needed birth control. Even though I had a diagnosis that I needed it. So, then my mom had specifically told them that she was the guardian [as the father was estranged] … and they let her give permission for me.[341]

Foreign national women, unlike Qatari women, reported that they were able to get birth control pills from pharmacies or private gynecologists without needing to show they were married. One married foreign woman resident in Qatar said she got birth control pills from a gynecologist at a private hospital without being asked for a marriage certificate. Moreover, she and another foreign national woman said they can get birth control pills at pharmacies: "An expat woman could get birth control without prescription from a doctor, but it is probably different for Qatari women."[342]

[341] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Dalal," Qatari, November 9, 2020.

[342] Human Rights Watch phone interview with "Laura," March 7, 2020.

VIII. Recommendations

To the Prime Minister

- Issue a decree to all governmental institutions to protect women's equality and legal autonomy including by ending requirements for male guardian permission for decisions relating to their rights, including to marry, study, travel, work, access health care, and to treat women and men equally as heads of households.
- Issue a decision clarifying women's full legal capacity at 18 and ordering that all government rules must reflect women's equal legal capacity with men.

To the Council of Ministers and the Shura Council

- Issue an anti-discrimination law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, ensures effective remedies for those who experience discrimination, adequate penalties and sanctions for breaches, and provides a positive obligation on the state to take steps to eliminate gender-based discrimination.
- Establish an equality body with the mandate to propose repealing discriminatory laws, receive complaints of discrimination, monitor and investigate discrimination in practice, and make binding recommendations for government institutions and private actors.
- Amend the Family Law to:
    - ensure that women can enter marriage on an equal basis to men, including by removing the requirement for male guardian permission for a woman to marry;
    - remove language relating to obedience of women to men;
    - ensure that women have the equal right to divorce along with men;
    - articulate the concept of marital property and allow for its division on an equal basis between spouses at the time of dissolution of marriage for all communities, recognizing financial and non-financial contributions made by women;
    - ensure that women are treated as guardians of their own children on an equal basis to men including the ability to independently open bank

accounts for them, enroll them in schools, make health decisions, or travel with them; and
    - provide for decisions concerning children after the dissolution of marriages to be primarily on the basis of the best interests of the child in line with international standards, and without discriminating against women, including with respect to where the child should live ("custody"), and ability to open bank accounts for the child, enroll them in school, make health decisions for them or travel with them.
- Repeal Law Decree no. 21 of 1989 regarding the Regulation of Marriage to Foreigners and allow Qatari men and women to marry foreign nationals without requiring the state's permission.
- Amend Law no. 5 of 1982 on Foundation of Births and Death Records, to allow women to register their children's births.
- Amend the 2004 Law on Guardianship of Minors' Wealth so women can be guardians of their children's wealth on an equal basis to men.
- Amend Law no. 38 of 2005 on the acquisition of Qatari nationality to allow Qatari women the right, on an equal basis to men, to pass nationality to their children.
- Amend Law no. 10 of 2018 on Permanent Residency to lift the cap on the number of children of Qatari women who can apply each year for permanent residency.
- Introduce domestic violence legislation, in line with international human rights standards and in consultation with women in Qatar.
- Amend Law no. 12 of 2004 on Private Associations and Foundations to remove reference to organizations working on "political matters" to allow establishment of independent women's rights organizations.
- Repeal provisions that criminalize peaceful exercise of freedom expression in laws including in the Penal Code and the 2014 Combatting Cyber Crimes Law.
- Repeal provisions in the Penal Code that criminalize consensual sexual relations.
- Remove all reservations to CEDAW.

To the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs

- Prohibit employers, including government ministries and institutions, from demanding that women obtain the permission of a male guardian in order to work or conduct any work-related activities, and impose penalties on employers that do so.

- Amend the 2004 Labour Law to prohibit gender-based discrimination during recruitment, job offers, or hire and repeal discriminatory provisions against women including articles 94-95 that ban women from certain types of work.
- Lift the requirement that non-Qataris who are on family visas must show they have their family visa sponsors permission to work in order for them to obtain special work permits.
- Amend Law no. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates and their residence and its 2019 executive regulations, to remove discrimination between men and women as visa sponsors or as dependents of their visa sponsors, including treating women equally as heads of households.
- Amend the 2016 executive regulations for the Civil Human Resources Law and other policies relating to social assistance, housing, land, and other benefits to:
    - ensure that women can receive the same or equal benefits as men, by splitting the benefits equally between a married couple rather than having one individual receive it;
    - remove the requirement that divorced or widowed women must prove their marital status to obtain the same benefits as married men; and
    - ensure that in practice, men are not treated as the default heads of households.

To the Ministry of Interior

- Disseminate to all traffic departments the 2020 decision to lift guardianship requirements for obtaining a driving license and clarify that male guardians cannot block women from obtaining their provisional or permanent driving licenses.
- Prohibit driving schools and traffic departments from requiring women to obtain guardian permission to obtain a driving license, including sanctions for those that still continue to do so.
- Remove requirements that visa sponsors must provide permission for a foreign national to register with a driving school or obtain a driving license in Qatar.
- Abolish the requirement for unmarried Qatari women under 25, or women at any age above 18, to obtain male guardian permission to travel abroad.
- Send clear guidance to all passport control and border officials prohibiting them from asking women, of any age, to show that they have male guardian permission to leave the country.

- Repeal the requirement that only men can authorize an exit permit for their children to travel abroad and ensure that both men and women can make decisions relating to their children's travel abroad.
- Remove notification messages sent to visa sponsors informing them when a foreign national they have sponsored leaves or enters Qatar.
- Issue a memo reminding officials that women are allowed to obtain and renew their own passports and that they cannot require women to show male guardian permission to obtain or renew their passports.
- Issue regulations that provide for the right of all women, like men, to enter and leave their own country, and prohibit imposition of travel bans by male guardians. Ensure that any restrictions on travel can only be individual, for a legitimate reason, and proportionate—as, for instance, during a criminal investigation—that individuals are informed of the travel ban and that they can appeal it.
- Allow women to register births, to obtain QID cards and passports for their own children, and to register deaths of relatives on an equal basis with men.
- Issue a decision lifting the prohibition on Qatari women and women who wear traditional dress or Qatari men who wear the traditional dress from entering bars, restaurants, or attending events that serve alcohol; and coordinate with the National Tourism Council to ensure all venues, hotels and others are informed of the change.
- Issue a decision to lift the discriminatory requirements on people booking hotel rooms including bans on unmarried or unaccompanied Qatari women under a certain age from checking into a hotel room and any requirements of a marriage certificate in order to check in. Coordinate with the National Tourism Council to ensure all hotels are informed of the change and sanction any hotels that continue to discriminate who can check into a hotel room on the basis of sex, gender, national origin, or marital status.
- Issue a decree to lift any requirements that women need male guardian permission to visit factories or worksites.
- Issue a moratorium on cybersecurity officials to stop harassing or interrogating women who speak out online about women's rights, including male guardianship, or other political issues, and issue guidance to ensure that officials do not obstruct women from receiving their certificates of good conduct because of their online speech.
- Publicize all decisions relating to changes to policies widely.

To the Ministry of Education and Higher Education

- Amend the Law no. 19 of 1976 Organizing Scholarships to:
    - Lift requirements for government scholarships to study abroad or in Qatar that students must have their guardians or sponsors commit to paying back the scholarship funding if they fail to abide by the conditions of their scholarship, which essentially requires guardian permission to obtain the scholarship.
    - Remove the requirement that married women who are employees of a ministry or government agency who are seeking a graduate scholarship to study abroad, can only do so where her husband is also required to "be abroad."
    - Remove the provision that guardians can request consular attachés to supervise students abroad who are not on the scholarship program.
    - Find alternative ways to recoup costs from a student, without discriminating on the basis of gender or nationality of the student, if they fail to abide by their scholarship requirements aside from their guardians or sponsors.
- Issue a decision to lift all discriminatory requirements on female students at universities including measures taken at Qatar University that allow for monitoring and restricting women's movements such as requirements of guardian permission to take class trips, enter or leave the university campus by a taxi, Uber, or in any other car, stay at student accommodation, and for those staying in student accommodation to come and go freely.
- Where universities or higher education institutions have sex-segregated classes or campuses, ensure that women have equal access with men to all educational degrees, courses, and resources.
- Issue instructions that ministerial and primary and secondary school staff shall ensure children's right to education, and not refuse to enroll children in school on the discriminatory grounds of the gender of the person seeking their enrollment.

To the Ministry of Public Health

- Issue directives to all hospitals and clinics prohibiting staff from requiring guardian permission or a marriage certificate to provide health care to an adult woman, and establish accessible complaints mechanisms for patients, and penalties for violations.

- Enforce the Hamad Medical Corporation's stated policy of protecting privacy and confidentiality and providing care to unmarried pregnant women; and issue clear directives to all healthcare workers and other staff at hospitals and healthcare providers, private and public, to prohibit them from reporting women seeking healthcare to the police on the basis that they might have had sex outside of marriage, including through private health information obtained while treating sexually transmitted infections, pregnancies or miscarriages.
- Ensure women can receive all forms of sexual and reproductive health care without discrimination based on sex, marital status, migration status, or nationality.
- Ensure adolescents can receive contraceptive information and services, including other forms of sexual and reproductive health care, without mandatory parental and guardian authorization or notification, in order to meet the educational and service needs of adolescents, in line with international standards.
- Amend the 1983 Law on the Practice of the Profession of Medicine and Dental Medicine and Surgery law to lift requirement that both parents need to consent to an abortion.

To the Ministry of Energy Affairs

- Repeal the requirement that women need to show proof of marriage, divorce, or being widowed in order to access electricity and water and treat women as equals to men as heads of households.

Acknowledgments

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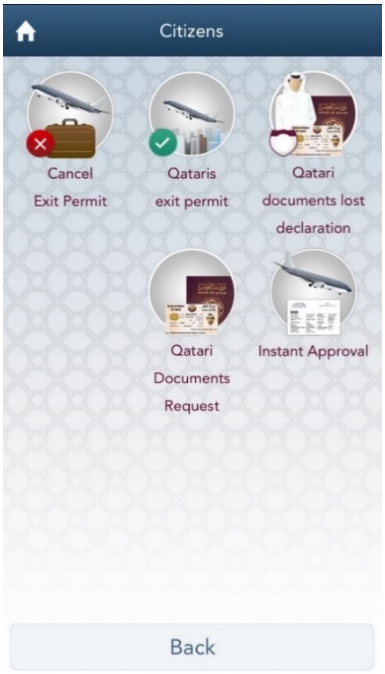
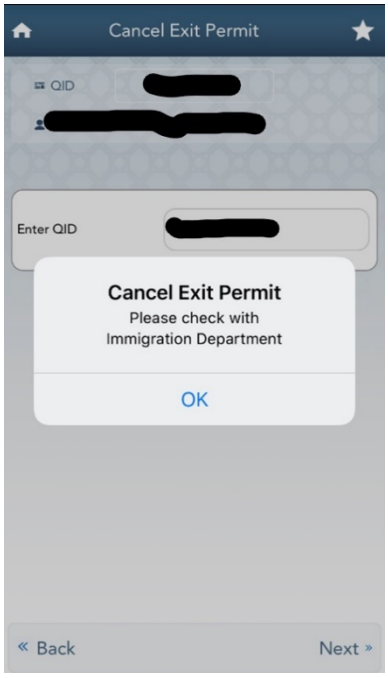
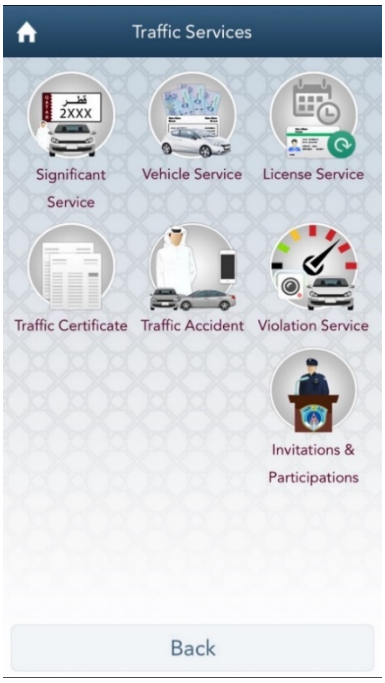
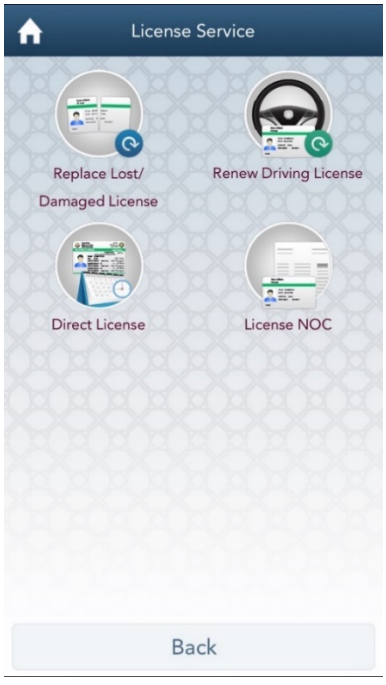
Appendix I: Exit Permit for Qataris on Metrash2 App

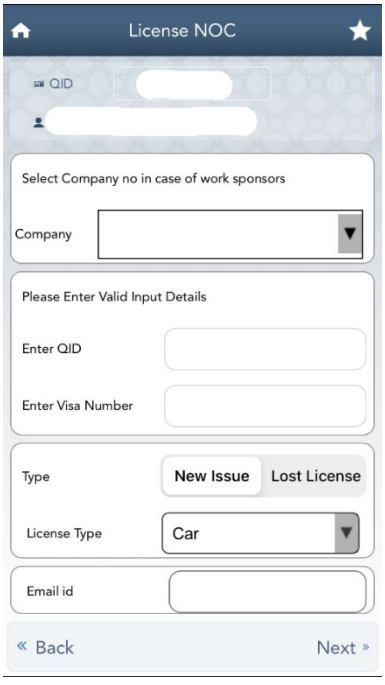




Appendix II: No-Objection Certificate (NOC) for Driving License on Metrash2 app







Appendix III: Decision to Lift Male Guardian Permission Requirements for Driving Licenses

General Traffic Department
General Director Office

وزارة الداخلية
الإدارة العامة للمرور
مكتب المدير العام

التاريخ: 05/05/1441 هـ
الموافق: 01/01/2020 م

الرقم: و د/ا ع م/6

المحترم

السيد/ مساعد مدير إدارة شؤون التراخيص

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،،،

الموضوع: إلغاء شرط موافقة ولي الأمر

تتخذ الإجراءات اللازمة بإلغاء شرط موافقة ولي الأمر في منح رخص القيادة مع إستيفاء الإجراءات القانونية الأخرى.

لإجراءاتكم والعمل بموجبه

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام،،،

اللواء:

محمد سعد الخرجي

مدير عام الإدارة العامة للمرور

نسخة الى:
- السيد/ مساعد مدير عام المرور

“Everything I Have to Do is Tied to a Man”

Women and Qatar’s Male Guardianship Rules

Women in Qatar have broken barriers and achieved significant progress, including in education, and as doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs. Yet they continue to face discrimination in almost all aspects of their lives.

“Everything I Have to Do is Tied to a Man”: Women and Qatar’s Male Guardianship Rules is the first report to detail official male guardianship rules and practices, through analysis of 73 interviews including 50 in-depth interviews with women, and a detailed review of relevant laws, policies, and practices. The report finds that women must obtain permission from their male guardians—who may be their father, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, and, when married, their husband—to exercise many of their basic rights, including to travel abroad until certain ages, marry, obtain a government scholarship to pursue higher education, work in many government jobs, and obtain some reproductive health care. Women also cannot act as primary guardians to make choices about their children’s lives. Foreign national women in Qatar who are dependent on their husbands or fathers as their visa sponsors are also under controls comparable to male guardianship. Women need their visa sponsor’s permission to get a driving license, work, or obtain a government scholarship to study in Qatar.

The findings show that, combined with other discriminatory laws and practices, male guardianship limits the ability of women in Qatar to live full, productive, and independent lives.

Human Rights Watch calls on Qatar to eliminate discriminatory rules and practices against women including all male guardianship rules.

A girl and a woman fly a kite along the promenade by the Doha corniche in the Qatari capital on March 16, 2020.

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