



Assessing Qatar's Alignment with the 1995 Copenhagen Commitments on Social Development

**Évaluation de l'alignement du Qatar avec les
engagements de Copenhague de 1995 sur le
développement social**

**Evaluación del alineamiento de Qatar con los
compromisos de Copenhague de 1995 sobre
desarrollo social**

Qatar Centre for peace and Democracy (QCPD)
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It is with great honor that we introduce this briefing series, Assessing Qatar's Alignment with the 1995 Copenhagen Commitments on Social Development. This groundbreaking work, authored by Mr. Alex Martin Musiime, Lead Researcher at the Qatar Centre for Peace and Democracy (QCPD), and Mr. Matthias K. Boehning, International Director of QCPD, delves into one of the most pressing issues of our time: the realization of the social development goals articulated at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen.

Through meticulous research and insightful analysis, Mr. Musiime and Mr. Boehning have assessed Qatar's progress in fulfilling its commitments to social equity, poverty eradication, and the creation of inclusive societies. Their work offers a comprehensive examination of the nation's policies and practices, highlighting both achievements and areas requiring urgent reform.

The authors bring to this work a wealth of expertise and dedication. Mr. Alex Martin Musiime, as Lead Researcher, has a proven record of conducting in-depth investigations into social development and governance issues, while Mr. Matthias K. Boehning, as International Director of QCPD, has consistently championed human rights and sustainable development across diverse global contexts. Together, their perspectives enrich this book, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of Qatar's alignment with international social development standards.

This publication is not merely an academic exercise but a call to action. It invites policymakers, civil society, and global stakeholders to reflect on the critical intersections of governance, human rights, and social progress in Qatar and beyond.

We hope this book serves as both an inspiration and a guide for advancing the ideals of the Copenhagen Declaration, fostering societies that uphold dignity, equality, and opportunity for all.

Sincerely,

QCPD

This book, "Assessing Qatar's Alignment with the 1995 Copenhagen Commitments on Social Development," has been proudly edited, published, and distributed by Dar Al Thani.



DAR AL THANI



Abstract

This briefing evaluates Qatar's adherence to the 1995 Copenhagen Commitments on Social Development, emphasizing its role as the host of the 2025 World Summit for Social Development (WSSD). The paper contextualizes Qatar's efforts in aligning its policies with the Copenhagen Commitments, addressing issues such as social justice, poverty eradication, and gender equality. It underscores the duality of Qatar's global image as a platform for international dialogue and progress on the one hand and its internal challenges, such as labour rights violations, restricted civil liberties, limited gender equality, and the controlled operation of civil society organizations on the other. The analysis highlights Qatar's achievements in education, healthcare, and infrastructure development while critically examining persistent gaps in political inclusivity, judicial independence, and labour reforms. By analysing Qatar's performance against the ten Copenhagen Commitments from 1995, this paper provides a nuanced assessment of Qatar's progress and offers strategic recommendations in eight fields of action for achieving comprehensive social development, particularly in preparation for the 2025 WSSD.

1. Introduction

In early November 2025, Qatar will host the United Nation's Second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), a global gathering that is aimed at addressing the persistent gaps in social development around the world. As one of several pivotal UN conferences in 2025[1] the second WSSD will reaffirm the commitments from the first World Summit on Social Development which took place from 6 to 12 March 1995 in Copenhagen/Denmark. These commitments were recorded thirty years ago in the Copenhagen Declaration and are therefore called "Copenhagen Commitments".

The WSSD holds substantial significance for the global community, for UN Member States, as well as for civil society from around the world. For the world as a whole, it constitutes a moment of urgently needed global prioritization of social development as the summit aims to reinvigorate international focus on social issues like poverty eradication, inequality reduction, and social inclusion. It also provides a platform to assess progress and identify gaps in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those focused on social well-being, and can thus serve to accelerate the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, in a time of global fragmentation, the summit might provide an opportunity to reinforce the value of collective action to address shared challenges, promoting peace, justice, and inclusive societies.

For the member states of the United Nations the summit will be a key moment as governments around the world have the chance to recommit to the commitments outlined in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and align them with current challenges on the national and international level. Furthermore, the WSSD might be a platform for effective policy development offering a venue to exchange best practices and innovative policies to address social issues effectively. Member states will also have the opportunity to make use of the WSSD to forge partnerships and innovative forms of collaboration as well as access international funding mechanisms to support social development initiatives.

Finally, for Civil society organizations (CSOs) the summit presents an excellent opportunity to gain a prominent stage to voice the concerns of marginalized communities and advocate for inclusive policies. Depending on the extent to which participatory development of the WSSD's program will be allowed and encouraged by the two co-facilitators to lead the intergovernmental preparatory process for the summit[2], CSOs can play a key role in shaping the outcomes of the summit, most importantly ensuring that adopted social development strategies reflect grassroots realities.

Due to its outstanding global importance, the conference will be a unique opportunity for the host country Qatar to present itself globally as a platform for discussions of the highest importance regarding the state and future of the world community, which can represent an enormous reputational gain for the small country in the Middle East. However, it is questionable what the situation is in the host country itself with regard to the 'social development' to be discussed during the summit, where Qatar is presenting a good image as a host country, but conversely still has some way to go with regard to the Copenhagen Commitments. The people of Qatar and civil society in the country deserve not only for the WSSD to send out important messages to the rest of the world

[1] Next to the 2025 UN Ocean Conference (scheduled for June 9–13 in Nice/France focusing on accelerating action to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 14) and the 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 30, scheduled for November in Belém/Brazil, focusing on assessing global progress toward limiting warming to 1.5°C and the updated climate pledges due by February 2025)

[2] H.E. Mr. Philippe Kridelka, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, and H.E. Mr. Omar Hilale, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations.

promoting social development, but also for this social development to be fully realised in their own country and for the people to be able to perceive the results.

This briefing presents an assessment of the state of Qatar's social development progress measured against the commitments made during the first World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995. Doing so, both policies and measures to promote social development at home and abroad as part of international co-operation are considered in accordance with the Copenhagen Commitments.

2. The Copenhagen Commitments

The Copenhagen Commitments were agreed by over 120 heads of state in March 1995 during the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen Denmark, organized by the United Nations, specifically under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly and coordinated by the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). The summit and its adopted commitments were often described as a first step to a fair and more equitable world having given the poor centre stage and having fostered greater commitments from participating nations.[3] Then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in appreciating the summit remarked that the international community had taken a clear stand against social injustice, exclusion, and poverty in the world.[4] Then First Lady of the United States of America, Hillary Rodham Clinton, described the summit as putting people first.[5]

The Copenhagen Commitments were welcomed with optimism and commitment by several states including Qatar, although Qatar initially entered a reservation would any of the texts have contradictions with Islamic principles (Sharia), the nation's moral values or traditions.[6] The parties at the first WSSD in Copenhagen agreed to 10 ambitious commitments that expressed their willingness to foster social development globally. These were informed by persistent global challenges of poverty, social inequality, and economic instability that drove nations to seek unified approaches toward sustainable development. Thus, the commitments were aimed at tackling the most challenging problems at the time that also continue to glare to this present day.

Below is a summarised version of the commitments that parties agreed to, and which were expressed in terms of commitments to

[3] Felice, W. F. (1997). The Copenhagen Summit: A victory for the World Bank? *Social Justice*, 24(1 (67)), 107–119. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29766994>.

[4] Statement made while giving closing remarks. UNECA (1995): Boutros Boutros-Ghali address to the world summit for social development Copenhagen, 6 March 1995.

<https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/39373?show=full>. Accessed 24 November 2024.

[5] The White House (1995): Remarks By First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton To The International NGO Community At A Forum Of The U.N. World Summit on Social Development Copenhagen, Denmark March 7,1995.

https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/WH/EOP/First_Lady/html/generalspeeches/1995/3-7-95.html. Accessed 24 November 2024.

[6] United Nations (1995): Report of the World Summit for Social Development. Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995. Retrieved from

<https://www.un.org/en/conferences/social-development/copenhagen1995>. Accessed 22 November 2024.

1. Creating an economic, political, social, cultural, and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development;
2. Eradicating absolute poverty by a target date to be set by each country;
3. Supporting full employment as a basic policy goal;
4. Promoting social integration based on the enhancement and protection of all human rights;
5. Achieving equality and equity between women and men;
6. Attaining universal and equitable access to education and primary health care;
7. Accelerating the development of Africa and the least developed countries;
8. Ensuring that structural adjustment programmes include social development goals;
9. Increasing resources allocated to social development;
10. Strengthening cooperation for social development through the UN.

3. Qatar and the Copenhagen Commitments

Qatar's socio-economic landscape offers a unique case study in the pursuit of international commitments like the 1995 Copenhagen Commitments. As the global community and civil society prepare for the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha in November 2025, it is interesting to see how well or poorly the host country of this important global summit is performing itself in terms of living up to the social development agenda (measured by the implementation of the commitments made in 1995). At the same time, Qatar has the opportunity to use the remaining preparation time to take decisive steps to address the remaining weaknesses in its own social development and to present itself to the world in November 2025 as a pioneer in promoting social development at home and around the world. Besides that, understanding Qatar's strategies and the challenges it faces provides valuable insights into the broader discourse on global social development.

This chapter explores the comparison between the commitments made during the 1995 Copenhagen Summit on the one hand and Qatar's legal framework, its ambitious Qatar National Vision 2030 as well as general common practices and realities in the country on the other. Doing so, the chapter analyses both alignment and gaps between international expectations and national realities in Qatar. By examining the country's policy frameworks, economic dependencies, and socio-political dynamics, the discussion aims to uncover the reasons behind ongoing shortcomings in social development.

3.1 Copenhagen Commitment 1: Create an economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development

A national document of utmost importance due to its far-reaching scope and fundamental significance for the assessment of the framework conditions for social development in Qatar is the Qatar National Vision 2030. It outlines a comprehensive framework aimed at transforming Qatar into an “advanced society capable of sustaining its own development and providing a high standard of living for all its people for generations to come.”[7][8] This vision emphasizes economic diversification and the enhancement of human capital, aiming to reduce dependence on hydrocarbon revenues and building a knowledge-based economy.

The Qatar National Vision 2030 rests on four pillars:

1. Human development: Development of all Qatar’s people to enable them to sustain a prosperous society.
2. Social development: Development of a just and caring society based on high moral standards, and capable of playing a significant role in the global partnership for development.
3. Economic development: Development of a competitive and diversified economy capable of meeting the needs of, and securing a high standard of living, for all its people both for the present and the future.
4. Environmental development: Management of the environment such that there is harmony between economic growth, social development and environmental protection.

The government’s commitment to these pillars is further detailed in the Third National Development Strategy 2024–2030, which focuses on sustainable economic growth, fiscal sustainability, the creation of a future-ready workforce, the strengthening of a cohesive society, quality of life, environmental sustainability, and government excellence.[9] Having achieved a lot under the first phase of the Vision 2030 (among the successes the establishment of the Qatar Investments Authority and the Qatar Foundation can be mentioned), the Qatari government seeks to register more gains in the seven key strategic national outcomes.

Qatar displays both impressive strengths and striking weaknesses in terms of the goal of creating an enabling environment for positive social development in the economic, political, social, cultural and judicial spheres. In the following, these individual areas will be subjected to a detailed analysis, while more in-depth descriptions and analyses will also be provided in subsequent chapters.

I. Economic Environment

Qatar's substantial wealth, primarily derived from its extensive natural gas and oil reserves, positions it among the world's richest nations. In 2022, the country's GDP per capita was reported at 87,480 USD, reflecting a 30.84% increase from the previous year.[10] Qatar's economy has been resilient to shocks including the Covid-19 pandemic which is proof of its stability. The country maintains a stable real GDP growth of 2.4% in 2024, and a projected 5.5% according to the World Bank.[11] For several years, Qatar has had a surplus budget,[12] While the country has relied on hydrocarbon growth for

[7] Government Communications Office (2024): Qatar National Vision 2030. <https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/aboutqatar/national-vision2030/>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[8] Planning and Statistics Authority (2024): Third Qatar National Development Strategy 2024–2030. Planning and Statistics Authority. https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/nds1/nds3/Documents/QNDS3_EN.pdf. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[9] Government Communications Office (2024): Qatar Launches Third National Development Strategy 2024–2030. <https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/top-news/qatar-launches-third-national-development-strategy-2024-2030/>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[10] Macrotrends (2024): Qatar GDP Per Capita 1970–2024. <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/QAT/qatar/gdp-per-capita>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[11] World Bank (2024): Macro Poverty Outlook Country-by-country Analysis and Projections for the Developing World. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/macro-poverty-outlook>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[12] Trading Economics (2024): Government Budget. <https://tradingeconomics.com/qatar/government-budget>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

decades it is more recently fast-tracking investments in non-hydrocarbons to continue its growth trajectory. Qatar boasts well capitalized banks and has undertaken several reforms to ensure promotion of public private partnerships and a liberalised economy.[13] This economic prosperity enables the Qatari government to make significant investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and social welfare, thereby fostering social development.

Despite its substantial wealth, Qatar has not succeeded in ensuring equitable economic benefits across its population. Migrant workers constitute approximately 95% of the country's labour force, yet they often experience striking disparities in income and working conditions compared to Qatari nationals.[14][15][16] Despite reforms, such as the introduction of a non-discriminatory minimum wage in March 2021, concerns persist regarding the effective implementation and enforcement of labour laws.[17] Furthermore, Qatar's economy remains heavily reliant on hydrocarbon exports, with its natural gas accounting for more than 60% exports and roughly 82% of export earnings.[18] This dependence exposes the nation to vulnerabilities associated with global energy price fluctuations, which can significantly impact its economic stability and growth prospect

II. Political Environment

Qatar is a constitutional monarchy led by the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. The Emir wields significant authority, including the appointment of all major ministers and serving as the final court of appeal with the ultimate say on key judicial decisions. The current Emir hails from the Al Thani ruling family, a dynasty that has governed the peninsula since the mid-19th century, beginning with Sheikh Mohammed bin Thani, who became the first Emir of Qatar in 1868. The Al Thani family is part of the Bani Tamim tribe, one of the most significant Arab tribes in the Gulf region. Members of the ruling family occupy key positions within the state. The present ruler became Emir on June 25, 2013, after his father, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, abdicated the throne. Under Sheikh Tamim's leadership, Qatar has continued its policies of modernization, economic diversification, and regional diplomacy. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani has been recognized for transforming Qatar into the admired economy it is today, characterized by remarkable economic growth and development.

Qatar's political stability and effective governance have enabled the implementation of large-scale infrastructure and social projects like (1) the Hamad International Airport (opened in 2014 as a state-of-the-art facility designed to handle over 50 million passengers annually that positions Qatar as a key global aviation hub), (2) Education City (a sprawling campus that hosts branches of leading international universities, including Georgetown University, Carnegie Mellon University, and Weill Cornell Medicine) or (3) Lusail City (a 45 billion USD smart city development, which is one of Qatar's most ambitious urban planning projects designed to accommodate over 450,000 residents). The nation's leadership has been proactive in aligning policies with international development standards, as evidenced by the launch of the Third National Development Strategy (NDS3) 2024–2030 as

[13] International Monetary Fund (2024): Country Report No. 24/43, Qatar. <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2024/English/IQATEA2024001.ashx>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[14] Human Rights Watch (2020): Qatar – Events of 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/qatar>. And: Human Development (2020): Country Profiles: Qatar. Migrants & Refugees Section. <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/qatar/>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[15] Human Rights Watch (2024): Qatar – Events of 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/qatar>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[16] See chapter 3.3 (Copenhagen Commitment 3: Support full employment as a basic policy goal) for a more in-depth analysis.

[17] ILO (2023): What has changed for migrant workers in Qatar?. <https://webapps.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Country-Focus/world-cup-qatar>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[18] IMF (2024). Ibid.

mentioned above. Additionally, Qatar's commitment to international cooperation is reflected in its active participation in global initiatives and adherence to international agreements.[19]

Nevertheless, Qatar faces big challenges in fostering inclusive societal development due to limited political participation and restrictions on fundamental freedoms. The government does not permit the organization of political parties, and there were no attempts to form them in recent years. Voting is open only to citizens at least 18 years old who can prove that their family resided in the country before 1930 or that their grandfather was born in Qatar.[20] Additionally, the authorities continued to curtail the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including by arbitrarily detaining individuals for exercising their human rights.[21] These constraints hinder full engagement of all of Qatar's population in societal development and limit the diversity of perspectives in public discourse.

III. Social Environment

Qatar boasts a high standard of living, underpinned by substantial government investments in healthcare, education, and public welfare. In 2020, the government allocated 22.6 billion QR (6.2 billion USD) to health, representing 11% of the total budget, and 22.1 billion QR (6.1 billion USD) to education, accounting for 10.5% of the total budget.[22] These investments have led to the development of a world-class healthcare system, with five hospitals ranked among the world's top 250 academic medical centres in 2023.[23] Additionally, Qatar has made significant strides in the sports sector, hosting major international events and establishing itself as a regional hub for sports and entertainment.[24] These efforts align with the Qatar National Vision 2030, which aims to diversify the economy and enhance human capital development. Nevertheless, Qatar faces notable challenges in addressing social inequalities, particularly between Qatari nationals and expatriates.

Civil society in Qatar exists within a tightly controlled framework shaped by the state's political and legal environment. Officially, Qatar recognizes the importance of civil society as part of its Qatar National Vision 2030, which emphasizes sustainable development, education, and societal advancement. However, the reality of civil society in Qatar reveals significant restrictions on the formation, independence, and operations of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The establishment and operation of civil society organizations (CSOs) are governed by Law No. 12 of 2004

[19] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar (2024): International Cooperation – An Overview. <https://mofa.gov.qa/en/foreign-policy/international-cooperation/international-cooperation>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[20] U.S. Department of State (2022): 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Qatar. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/qatar/>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[21] Amnesty International (2023): Qatar 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/qatar/report-qatar/>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[22] Oxford Business Group (2020): Growing public investment in Qatar's health care and education. <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/qatar/2020-report/economy/budgeting-for-progress-the-authorities-work-to-keep-the-fiscal-balance-in-surplus-while-also-investing-in-health-and-education>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[23] The Peninsula (2024): Qatar's healthcare system ranked among top 20 globally. <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/30/01/2024/qatars-healthcare-system-ranked-among-top-20-globally>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[24] Oxford Business Group (2019): Qatar's position as international sports centre supported by investment, partnerships. <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/qatar/2019-report/economy/full-pelt-infrastructure-investment-and-business-partnerships-are-supporting-the-countrys-rise-to-become-a-major-international-centre-for-sports-events>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

on Private Associations and Foundations, which imposes stringent requirements.[25] Organizations must receive government approval to register and operate, a process that includes close scrutiny of their mandates and activities. The state has the authority to dissolve organizations at its discretion, particularly if their objectives or actions are deemed inconsistent with national interests. This legal framework discourages dissent and stifles any potential for independent or critical voices.

The majority of recognized CSOs in Qatar are closely linked to the state, often focusing on non-controversial areas such as education, health, and charity. [26] Prominent organizations, like the Qatar Foundation and the Qatar Red Crescent, operate under significant state influence, serving as extensions of Qatar's development and foreign policy objectives rather than independent entities. Grassroots activism and organizations advocating for political or labour rights are effectively non-existent, further highlighting the limited scope of civil society activity. Advocacy groups focusing on migrant workers, such as Migrant-Rights.org, often operate from outside Qatar due to these constraints. Unlike in liberal democracies, Qatari law prohibits CSOs from engaging in political activities, which effectively curtails their ability to function as watchdogs or advocates for systemic change. Public demonstrations or protests are not permitted, and efforts to mobilize grassroots movements are met with resistance. For example, international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have repeatedly criticized Qatar for its lack of tolerance toward dissent and its refusal to allow independent scrutiny of human rights abuses. Registering a civic organisation, particularly one critical to the government, is nearly impossible due to crackdowns on groups that express divergent views from that of the government.

Qatar has taken steps to present itself as supportive of civil society on the international stage. The establishment of the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) and the Doha International Family Institute are examples of organizations that operate within state-sanctioned boundaries. However, critics argue that these entities primarily serve to enhance Qatar's global reputation rather than to foster genuine civic engagement or address pressing domestic issues. To foster a truly vibrant civil society, Qatar would need to reform its legal framework to allow for independent registration, operation, and funding of organizations, and to protect the rights of individuals to organize, advocate, and express dissent without fear of reprisal.


IV. Cultural Environment

Qatar positions itself as a "bridge between cultures" by leveraging its unique geopolitical location, financial resources, and diplomatic influence to foster understanding and cooperation between different regions and civilizations. The country actively promotes intercultural dialogue through initiatives such as the Doha Forum, a global platform for policy discussions on pressing international issues. Qatar also supports educational and cultural exchange programs, including partnerships with Western universities hosted at Education City, and sponsors global cultural initiatives like the Year of Culture program, which pairs Qatar with a partner nation annually to celebrate shared heritage. Qatar has adeptly balanced cultural preservation with modernity through institutions like the Qatar Foundation and the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA). The MIA, designed by architect I. M. Pei, houses an extensive collection of Islamic art spanning over 1,400 years and three continents, highlighting Qatar's dedication to cultural heritage.[27]

[25] Al Meezan (2024): Law No. 12 of 2004 on Private Associations and Foundations. <https://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=3956&language=en>. Accessed 27 November 2024.

[26] U.S. Department of State (2022): 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Qatar. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/qatar>. Accessed 27 November 2024.

[27] Museum of Islamic Art (2024): Frontpage. <https://mia.org.qa/en/>. Accessed 20 November 2024.



Qatar's self-declared role as a cultural and diplomatic bridge extends to its hosting of major international events, such as the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which it framed as an opportunity to showcase Middle Eastern culture to a global audience. By hosting the World Cup, Qatar further solidified its global image as an intercultural centre. The country was praised by FIFA for having actively promoted international cultural exchanges by hosting the global event. In FIFA's view, the World Cup 2022 not only showcased the nation's hospitality to the world but also facilitated cultural understanding among diverse populations.[28] While initiatives like hosting the FIFA Soccer World Cup underscore Qatar's commitment to fostering a rich cultural environment that bridges its historical legacy with contemporary global engagement there is also a downside. Despite the general success of hosting the tournament, numerous rights violations were reported. Qatar's showcasing of cultural exchange has been overshadowed by human rights controversies, including labour abuses and censorship. To date, the government has not fulfilled the compensation to victims of abuses as recommended by rights groups.[29]

The country's investment in media, particularly through Al Jazeera, allows it to present narratives from the Global South and amplify diverse voices on the world stage. Moreover, Qatar's foreign policy emphasizes dialogue and non-alignment, maintaining ties with adversarial powers such as the U.S., Iran, and Hamas. This approach allows Qatar to position itself as an interpreter between conflicting interests and ideologies, offering solutions that others might find challenging to broker. The country has repeatedly portrayed itself as a mediator in international conflicts, using its relationships with diverse global players to facilitate negotiations, as seen in its role in mediating disputes such as the U.S.-Taliban talks in 2020 and the Darfur peace process as well as in facilitating negotiations in the context of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

However, Qatar's role as a "bridge between cultures" and a mediator in global conflicts warrants critical scrutiny. While the country has achieved some notable diplomatic successes, such as facilitating the U.S.-Taliban agreement, critics argue that its interventions are often self-serving, aimed at enhancing its soft power rather than achieving genuine reconciliation. Qatar's support for controversial groups, including ties to Hamas and accusations of enabling extremist movements, undermines its claims of impartiality and peacebuilding. These factors suggest that while Qatar's role as a cultural and diplomatic bridge has merit, it is at times overstated, and its actions do not always align with its rhetoric.

Furthermore, Qatar faces challenges in aligning traditional cultural norms with international human rights standards, particularly regarding labour and women's rights. Despite recent labour reforms, such as the official abolition of the Kafala system and the introduction of a non-discriminatory minimum wage, concerns persist about the effective implementation and enforcement of these laws.[30] For instance, migrant workers, who constitute approximately 95% of the labour force, continue to encounter issues related to wages, living conditions, and legal protection.[31][32] In terms of women's

[28] FIFA (2022): Social Pillar – Cultural Understanding.

<https://publications.fifa.com/en/final-sustainability-report/social-pillar/cultural-understanding/cultural-understanding-overview>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[29] Human Rights Watch (2023): Qatar: Six months post-World Cup, migrant workers suffer. Human Rights Watch.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/16/qatar-six-months-post-world-cup-migrant-workers-suffer>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

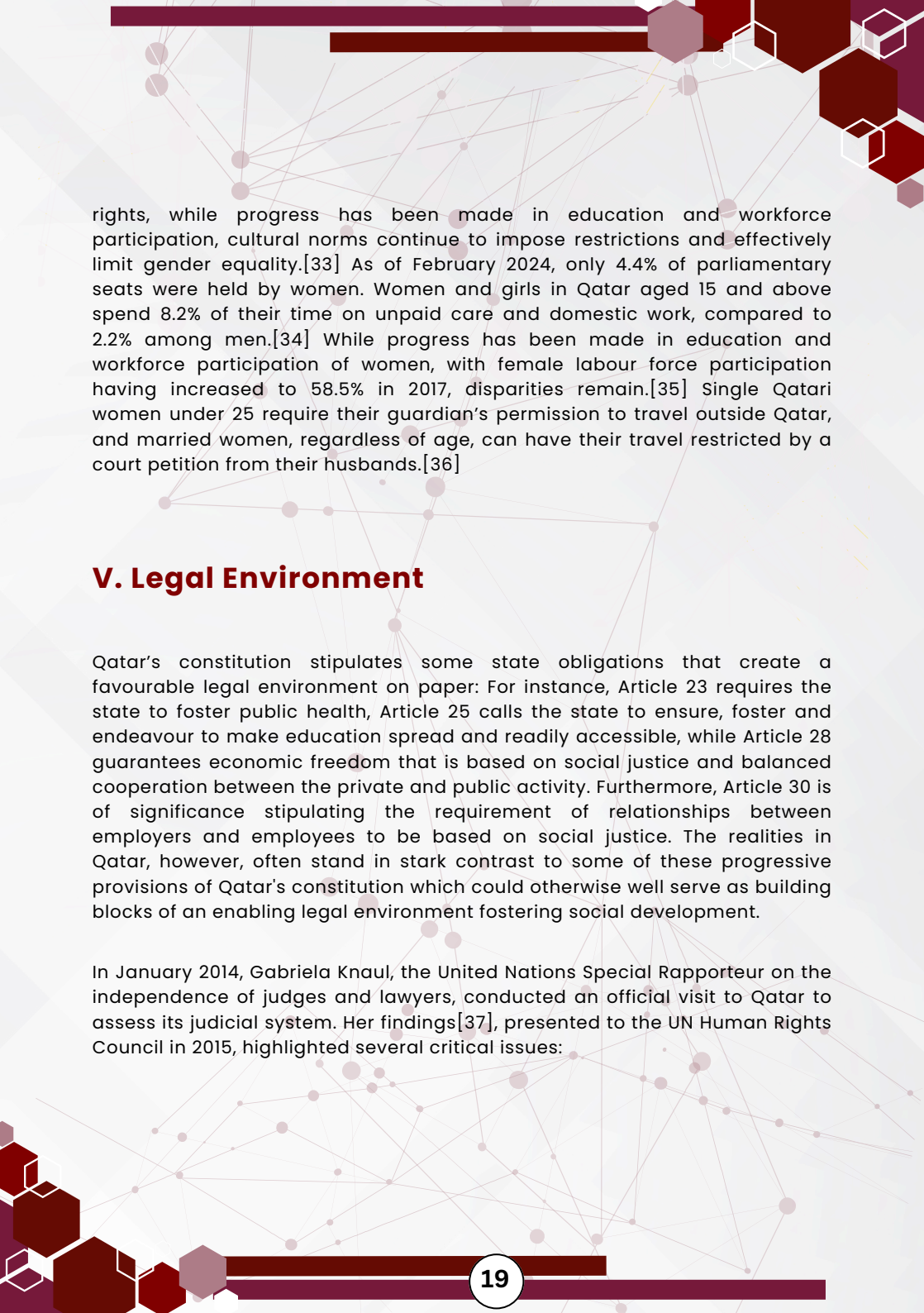
[30] ILO (2022): Labour reforms in the State of Qatar – Coming together around a shared vision.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40arabstates/%40ro-beirut/%40ilo-qatar/documents/publication/wcms_859843.pdf. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[31] Normlex (2024): Qatar. https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11110:0::NO::P11110_COUNTRY_ID:103429.

Accessed 20 November 2024.

[32] See chapter 3.3 (Copenhagen Commitment 3: Support full employment as a basic policy goal) for a more in-depth analysis.



rights, while progress has been made in education and workforce participation, cultural norms continue to impose restrictions and effectively limit gender equality.[33] As of February 2024, only 4.4% of parliamentary seats were held by women. Women and girls in Qatar aged 15 and above spend 8.2% of their time on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 2.2% among men.[34] While progress has been made in education and workforce participation of women, with female labour force participation having increased to 58.5% in 2017, disparities remain.[35] Single Qatari women under 25 require their guardian's permission to travel outside Qatar, and married women, regardless of age, can have their travel restricted by a court petition from their husbands.[36]

V. Legal Environment

Qatar's constitution stipulates some state obligations that create a favourable legal environment on paper: For instance, Article 23 requires the state to foster public health, Article 25 calls the state to ensure, foster and endeavour to make education spread and readily accessible, while Article 28 guarantees economic freedom that is based on social justice and balanced cooperation between the private and public activity. Furthermore, Article 30 is of significance stipulating the requirement of relationships between employers and employees to be based on social justice. The realities in Qatar, however, often stand in stark contrast to some of these progressive provisions of Qatar's constitution which could otherwise well serve as building blocks of an enabling legal environment fostering social development.

In January 2014, Gabriela Knaul, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, conducted an official visit to Qatar to assess its judicial system. Her findings[37], presented to the UN Human Rights Council in 2015, highlighted several critical issues:

1. **Executive Interference:** Knaul expressed concern over the executive branch's influence on the judiciary, particularly in cases involving high-profile individuals or businesses. This interference, the Special Rapporteur wrote, undermined judicial independence and impartiality.
2. **Due Process Violations:** The report identified significant breaches of due process and fair trial standards. Instances included defendants, especially non-Arabic speakers, being compelled to sign documents in Arabic without understanding their content, and the absence of interpretation services during court proceedings.
3. **Discrimination Against Non-Qataris:** Knaul noted discriminatory practices within the justice system against non-Qatari individuals, particularly migrant workers. These groups often face additional obstacles in accessing justice and are more susceptible to rights violations.
4. **Transparency and Access to Information:** The report highlighted a lack of transparency in judicial proceedings, including restricted access to information during investigations and closed court sessions without justification. Such practices, the Special Rapporteur wrote, impede the fairness and openness of the legal process.

[33] See chapter 3.5 (Copenhagen Commitment 5: Achieve equality and equity between women and men) for a more in-depth analysis.

[34] UN WOMEN (2024): Qatar. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/qatar>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[35] Parvez, Z. (2021). Women Workforce Participation in Qatar: Oil, Culture and Demographic Trends. In: Zweiri, M., Al Qawasmi, F. (eds) Contemporary Qatar. Gulf Studies, vol 4. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-1391-3_14.

[36] Human Rights Watch (2024): Qatar – Events of 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/qatar>. Accessed 20 November 2024.


[37] UN OHCHR (2014): UN rights expert urges Qatar to seize opportunity to reform its justice system. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2014/01/un-rights-expert-urges-qatar-seize-opportunity-reform-its-justice-system>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

5. Independence of Non-Qatari Judges: Concerns were raised about the independence of non-Qatari judges, who often serve on temporary contracts. This employment structure may compromise their impartiality and susceptibility to external pressures.

Knaut's 2014 report had called for comprehensive reforms to address these issues, emphasizing the need for judicial independence, adherence to due process, and equal access to justice for all individuals in Qatar. This briefing draws on the findings of Gabriela Knaut's official visit, even though it took place ten years ago, since there have been no further official visits to Qatar by a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers since January 2014. The current Special Rapporteur, Margaret Satterthwaite, appointed in October 2022, has not conducted an official mission to Qatar.[38] The absence of subsequent visits suggests that the UN has not undertaken further in-depth assessments of Qatar's judicial independence since the 2014 evaluation.

Qatar has undertaken several reforms aimed at enhancing its judicial system since 2014. In the most recent move in April 2024, Qatar enacted Judicial Enforcement Law No. 4 of 2024 to streamline the enforcement of judicial decisions. Key features included the establishment of a dedicated Enforcement Court and the introduction of digital solutions to expedite legal processes. The same law also features digital transformation initiatives which shows that Qatar has made efforts to digitize judicial procedures, improving transparency and accessibility within the legal system.[39]

However, while these reforms indicate progress, especially with regards to digitization, the judicial system does not appear to have been fundamentally changed. This is characterized by two main persisting problems[40]: The first is the ongoing executive influence. The Emir continues to hold the authority to appoint judges, a practice that has raised concerns regarding judicial independence. Also, the Supreme Judiciary Council, responsible for overseeing the judiciary, is chaired by the Minister of Justice, who is a member of the executive branch. This structure has been criticized for potentially compromising the impartiality of the judicial system. For instance, the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024 report notes that judges are appointed by the Emir upon the recommendation of the Supreme Judiciary Council for three-year, indefinitely renewable terms, which impedes their independence.[41]



The second problem is the ongoing practice of using non-Qatari Judges in Qatar's judicial system. It raises concerns about independence, impartiality, and the potential for judicial insecurity. Non-Qatari judges, who constitute a significant portion of the judiciary, are typically expatriates employed on short-term renewable contracts, making them vulnerable to government influence, as their reappointment often depends on state discretion.[42] This arrangement can compromise judicial independence, as judges may feel pressured to align with government interests to secure their positions. Critics also highlight that the practice undermines the development of a fully autonomous and stable Qatari legal system, as reliance on expatriate judges creates a lack of continuity and institutional memory. While Qatar argues that employing foreign judges is necessary to fill expertise

[38] UN OHCHR (2014): Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-independence-of-judges-and-lawyers>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[39] Eversheds Sutherland (2024): Qatar's Judicial Enforcement Law No. 4 of 2024: A New Chapter in Legal Reform. <https://www.eversheds-sutherland.com/en/qatar/insights/qatars-judicial-enforcement-law>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[40] Marhaba (2022): The Court System in Qatar. <https://marhaba.qa/the-court-system-in-qatar/>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[41] Bertelsmann Stiftung (2024): BTI Transformation Index – Qatar Country Report 2024. <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/QAT>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[42] UN OHCHR (2014). Ibid.

gaps, the practice continues to invite scrutiny regarding transparency and accountability in the administration of justice.

Regarding association and assembly rights, the state continues to clamp down dissent. In May 2022, three Qatari activists, including Hazza al-Marri and Rashed al-Marri were sentenced to life imprisonment for opposing an electoral law. In the same year, a group of activists of the umbrella organization “National Campaign for Travel-Banned Citizens” that advocated for the lifting of arbitrary travel bans was arrested and spent several months in prison.[43] In 2020, Qatar amended its penal code to make the offence of publication of false news punishable with up to five years in prison or a fine of 27,500 USD.[44] Law No. (5) of 2003 gives the state security apparatus arbitrary policing, prosecution, and juridical powers including powers to detain persons for 30 days without producing them to a competent court. There have been reports that this law is being used to silence Human Rights Defenders.[45]

3.2 Copenhagen Commitment 2: Eradicate absolute poverty by a target date to be set by each country

With numerous sources including the World Bank and IMF putting Qatar’s GDP per capita at a level exceeding 80,000 USD and limited data suggesting the presence of poverty in Qatar, the country seems to have eradicated poverty. [46] Qatar is also engaged in various poverty eradication programs around the world with various partners including the IMF, the World Bank, the Gulf Cooperation Council, different UN agencies , Civil Society, and partner countries.[47]

However, ongoing reports highlight indicators of poverty on Qatar's interior including low wages for migrant workers, deplorable living conditions, and restricted access to healthcare, painting a different picture than the official statistics indicate. In this context, it is important to note that the state of Qatar has not been forthcoming in releasing data related to low income or poverty indicators, despite numerous reports of low income, particularly among migrant workers compared to Qatari nationals.[48] Migrant workers continue to live in labour camps that are distant from most social amenities, such as hospitals. The housing conditions in labour camps starkly contrast with the skyscrapers that dazzle Doha's skyline.[49] After the World Cup tournament, several accounts of workers' wages being cut or skipped have emerged and been documented. This has further left many workers in the country

[43] Freedom House (2024): Qatar: Freedom in the World 2024 Country Report. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/qatar/freedom-world/2024>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[44] Freedom House (2023): Qatar: Freedom in the World 2023 Country Report. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/qatar/freedom-world/2023>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[45] Gulf Centre for Human Rights, Access Now, ARTICLE19, & CIVICUS (2024): Joint Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review 47th Session of the UPR Working Group. <https://www.civicus.org/documents/upr-submissions/UPR47-JointSubmission-Qatar.pdf>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[46] Ibid.

[47] See chapter 3.7 (Copenhagen Commitment 7: Accelerate the development of Africa and the least developed countries) for a more in-depth analysis.

[48] Pattisson (2022): Low-wage workers have paid dearly for Qatar's glittering World Cup. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/01/low-wage-workers-have-paid-dearly-for-qatar-world-cup>.

[49] Kunti (2023): Migrant workers endure Qatar's dark World Cup legacy. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/samindrakunti/2023/12/18/migrant-workers-endure-qatars-dark-world-cup-legacy/>.

unable to sustain the cost of living in Qatar. Whereas the Kafala system was officially abolished by the government, many employers continue to exploit workers with poor payment and deplorable working conditions while at the same time holding them at ransom. Should workers dare to leave the workplace, the employer requires the workers to compensate them.[50] Due to the still prevalent practice of sponsorship, many individuals find it impossible to switch jobs, leaving them vulnerable to exploitative employers. [51]

State social security systems are an important instrument for combating and preventing poverty. In 2002, Qatar implemented Law No. 24, which established a public retirement security system managed by the General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority (GRSIA). This system provides retirement, survivor, and disability benefits specifically for Qatari citizens and residents employed in the public sector.[52] By 2022, there were 79,441 contributors to the scheme.[53] The number of contributors is expected to increase following the enactment of Social Insurance Law No. 1 of 2022, which expanded social security coverage to include Qatari citizens, residents, and GCC nationals working in the private sector, effective since January 2023.[54] However, it is important to note that the system does not cover migrant workers, who make up a significant portion of Qatar's labour force. Qatar should therefore consider reforms to include this crucial segment of the Qatari labour force.

3.3 Copenhagen Commitment 3: Support full employment as a basic policy goal

Qatar is among the countries in the world with the lowest unemployment rates. Unemployment stands at 0.4% according to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, while the World Bank is even putting the unemployment rate at 0.1% of the labour force.[55] While this seems to be an almost ideal situation for the Qatari labour force and while the goal of the 3rd Copenhagen Commitment seems to be formally achieved in Qatar, the problems relating to labour and employment in Qatar run deeper: The country's employment record has been characterized for many years by the notorious violation of the rights of workers, particularly migrant workers.



At the heart of the problem is the so-called Kafala system, which for many years made Qatar sadly famous worldwide for the injustices it perpetrated. Essentially a labour sponsorship framework, the Kafala system has been a defining feature of Qatar's labour market for decades, particularly affecting the country's vast migrant worker population. The Kafala system has its roots in the traditional Bedouin practice of sponsorship, adapted into a formal labour system in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries during the mid-20th century to manage the influx of migrant workers. In Qatar, the

[50] Ibid.


[51] More shortfalls are discussed in more detail in the ensuing parts of this briefing. See chapter 3.3 (Copenhagen Commitment 3: Support full employment as a basic policy goal)

[52] General Retirement and Social Insurance Authority (2022): Annual report 2022. <https://www.grsia.gov.qa/ar/studies-and-researches/Lists/AnnualReports/Attachments/53//2022.pdf>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Qatar OFW (n.d.): Qatar retirement pension plan and social insurance law. <https://qatarofw.com/retirement-pension-social-insurance-law/>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[55] World Bank Group (2024): Unemployment, total – Qatar. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=QA>. Accessed 26 November.



system became formalized as the country's economy grew rapidly after the discovery of natural gas and oil, requiring large numbers of foreign labourers for infrastructure and development projects.

Among the key characteristics of Qatar's Kafala system were (1) the principle of employer sponsorship (under Kafala, a migrant worker's legal residency was tied to their employer, referred to as the "kafeel" and that workers were not able to leave the country without their employer's permission, giving employers significant control over workers' lives), (2) passport retention (employers frequently confiscated workers' passports, limiting their freedom of movement and exacerbating dependency on employers), (3) restrictive labour market mobility (workers were not able to switch jobs without obtaining a No-Objection Certificate (NOC) from their current employer, making it difficult to leave abusive or exploitative work environments without risking arrest, deportation, or loss of income essentially creating forced labour conditions), (4) exploitation and abuse (reports of unpaid wages, unsafe working conditions, and long working hours without adequate compensation were common and domestic workers, in particular, faced significant vulnerabilities under the system).

Qatar's Kafala system has increasingly faced widespread and escalating criticism over the years for enabling exploitative practices and human rights abuses. In the early 2000s, human rights organizations began highlighting the oppressive nature of the Kafala system. Reports from Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International documented cases of forced labour, passport confiscation, and restrictions on workers' freedom of movement. These publications brought initial international attention to the plight of migrant workers in Qatar. Qatar's successful bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup in 2010 intensified global scrutiny. The massive infrastructure projects required for the event led to an influx of migrant workers, bringing the Kafala system under the spotlight of global attention. In 2013, The Guardian published an investigative report titled "Revealed: Qatar's World Cup 'slaves'," exposing the harsh conditions faced by workers.[56] This report was pivotal in raising awareness and prompting calls for reform.


During the mid-2010s, international pressure on Qatar increased and calls for reform of the Kafala system became louder. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and other bodies increased pressure on Qatar to reform its labour practices. In 2016, Amnesty International released a report titled "The Ugly Side of the Beautiful Game," detailing abuses in World Cup construction projects. [57] These publications highlighted systemic issues and urged FIFA and Qatar to take responsibility. Facing mounting pressure, Qatar initiated labour reforms, including the abolition of the exit permit requirement and the introduction of a minimum wage. However, organizations like HRW and Amnesty International continued to report on the inadequate implementation of these reforms. In 2020, HRW published "How Can We Work Without Wages?" highlighting ongoing wage abuses despite new laws.[58]

In her 2020 report, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, Tendayi Achiume, noted several incidences of labour exploitation that she had documented during her visit to Qatar between 24 November to 1 December

[56] The Guardian (2013): Revealed: Qatar's World Cup 'slaves'.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/25/revealed-qatars-world-cup-slaves>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[57] Amnesty International (2016): THE UGLY SIDE OF THE BEAUTIFUL GAME.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MDE2235482016ENGLISH.pdf>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[58] Human Rights Watch (2020): "How Can We Work Without Wages?".
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/08/24/how-can-we-work-without-wages/salary-abuses-facing-migrant-workers-ahead-qatars>. Accessed 26 November 2024.



2019.[59] These injustices included the inability for migrant workers to change places of work due to the “no objection” certificates that are required from the former employer, whereby an employee who leaves their workplace without such a certificate loses their right of work and consequently their right to stay in the country.

Regarding domestic workers (majority of whom are women), the reports of exploitation have been even more dire. The Special Rapporteur received “reports that it is not uncommon for domestic workers to be confined by their employers – Qatari and non-Qatari alike – to the private homes in which these women work. Many are subjected to harsh working conditions: excessively long workdays with no rest and no days off; passport and mobile phone confiscation; physical and social isolation; and, in some cases, physical, verbal or sexual assault by employers and their teenage or adult children.” The Special Rapporteur heard testimonies from domestic workers who reported being denied food for prolonged periods, being regularly forced to subsist on leftovers or insufficiently nutritious food, and, in some cases, starvation. Two sub-Saharan domestic workers testified regarding their experiences of chilling and horrifying sexual abuse – one reported being regularly raped by her male employer for over a year, before she was able to escape from his home.”[60]

Although after the Rapporteur’s report, Law No.18 was enacted (officially to end the Kafala system and to remedy the issue of exploitation and guarantee more protection of workers), reports of gross abuse of the rights of workers continued.[61] Many workers were still subjected to restrictive contracts that did not give them the liberty to change work. Furthermore, they were barred from organising themselves in labour unions where they would collectively bargain for better and fairer working conditions.

After the 2022 FIFA World Cup, evaluations of Qatar's labour practices persisted. In August 2023, Migrant-Rights.org published an article titled "Three years since sweeping reforms, workers in Qatar face evermore innovative obstacles", discussing how employers circumvent new regulations.[62] Throughout these stages, major publications and reports have played a crucial role in documenting abuses and advocating for the rights of migrant workers in Qatar. While some reforms have been implemented by Qatar, the ongoing criticism underscores the need for effective enforcement and genuine systemic change.

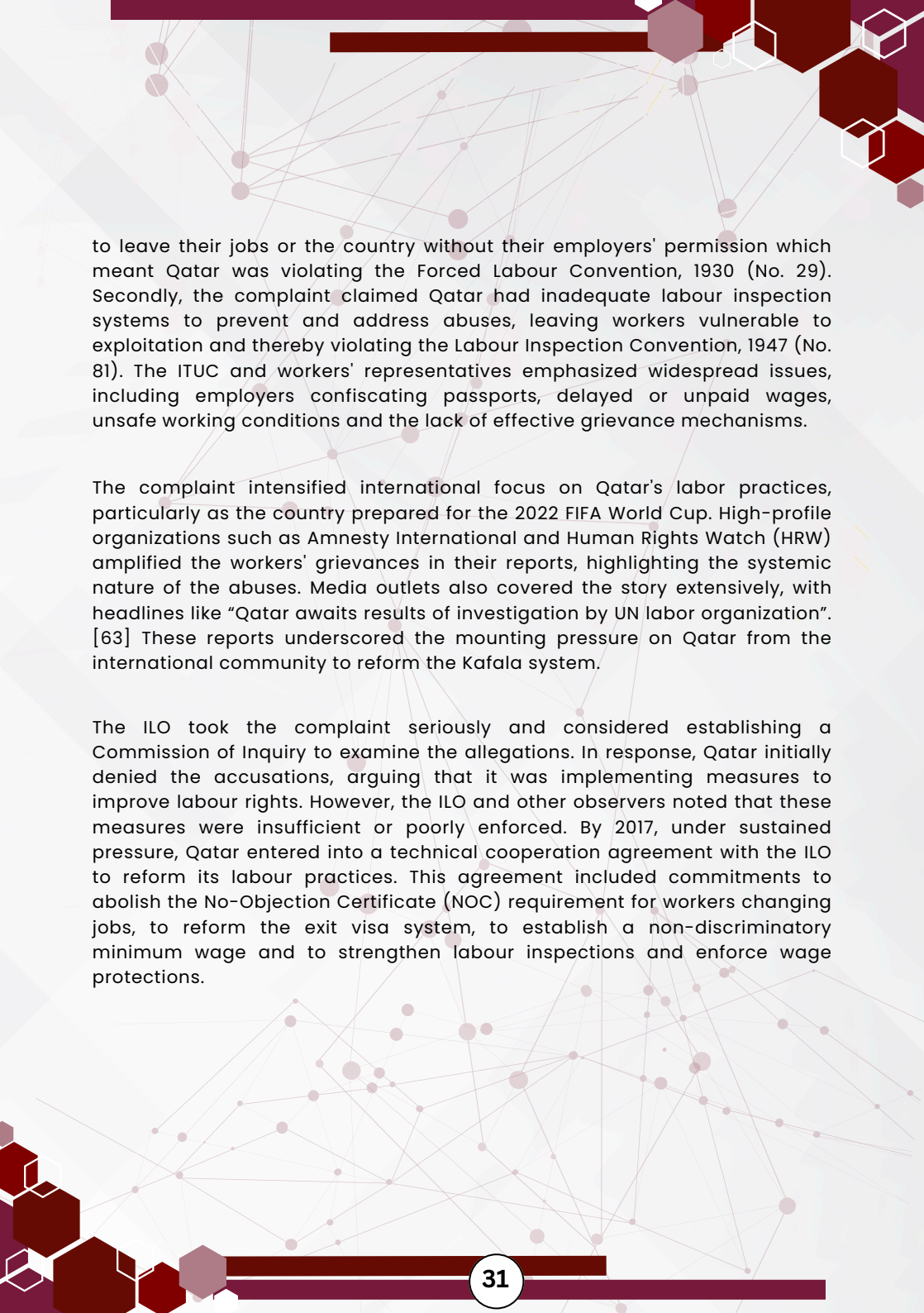
A 2014 complaint against Qatar at the International Labour Organization (ILO) marked a significant episode in the global criticism of Qatar's Kafala system. It was a turning point that brought international legal scrutiny to the system's exploitative practices and Qatar's alleged violations of international labour standards. In March 2014, a group of workers, supported by global trade unions including the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), lodged a formal complaint against Qatar at the ILO. The complaint alleged that Qatar was violating two key ILO conventions. Firstly, workers argued that the Kafala system created conditions tantamount to forced labour, as they were unable

[59] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020): Visit to Qatar – Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (A/HRC/44/57/Add.1). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc4457add1-visit-qatar-report-special-rapporteur-contemporary-forms>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[60] Ibid.

[61] GJIA interview with Ryszard Cholewinski, titled, "Understanding the Kafala Migrant Labor System in Qatar and the Middle East at Large, with ILO Senior Migration Specialist Ryszard Cholewinski," Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, February 1, 2023, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/02/01/the-Kafala-system-a-conversation-with-ryszard-cholewinski/>.

[62] Migrant-Rights.org (2023): Three years since sweeping reforms, workers in Qatar face evermore innovative obstacles. <https://www.migrant-rights.org/2023/08/three-years-since-sweeping-reforms-workers-in-qatar-face-evermore-innovative-obstacles/>. Accessed 26 November 2024.



to leave their jobs or the country without their employers' permission which meant Qatar was violating the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29). Secondly, the complaint claimed Qatar had inadequate labour inspection systems to prevent and address abuses, leaving workers vulnerable to exploitation and thereby violating the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81). The ITUC and workers' representatives emphasized widespread issues, including employers confiscating passports, delayed or unpaid wages, unsafe working conditions and the lack of effective grievance mechanisms.

The complaint intensified international focus on Qatar's labor practices, particularly as the country prepared for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. High-profile organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) amplified the workers' grievances in their reports, highlighting the systemic nature of the abuses. Media outlets also covered the story extensively, with headlines like "Qatar awaits results of investigation by UN labor organization". [63] These reports underscored the mounting pressure on Qatar from the international community to reform the Kafala system.

The ILO took the complaint seriously and considered establishing a Commission of Inquiry to examine the allegations. In response, Qatar initially denied the accusations, arguing that it was implementing measures to improve labour rights. However, the ILO and other observers noted that these measures were insufficient or poorly enforced. By 2017, under sustained pressure, Qatar entered into a technical cooperation agreement with the ILO to reform its labour practices. This agreement included commitments to abolish the No-Objection Certificate (NOC) requirement for workers changing jobs, to reform the exit visa system, to establish a non-discriminatory minimum wage and to strengthen labour inspections and enforce wage protections.

This episode was pivotal in catalysing international advocacy for labour reform in Qatar. For some analysts, it highlighted the role of international mechanisms like the ILO in holding states accountable for labour rights violations. They argue that the 2014 complaint was a landmark case, demonstrating how collective action and international pressure can drive change in global labour practices, even in politically and economically influential nations like Qatar. Other observers are much more critical of the episode and see it rather as an example of how skilfully Qatar has managed to avoid any real indepth scrutiny and fundamental reforms of its labour practices. They emphasise the fact that, in November 2017, the ILO decided not to proceed with its initial plan to establish a Commission of Inquiry, its highest-level investigative procedure. Instead, the aforementioned three-year “technical cooperation programme” with Qatar was started. SWI swissinfo.ch, a branch of Swiss Broadcasting Corporation SRG SSR, notes in this context that “as part of this agreement, Qatar paid a 25 million USD contribution which financed the ILO’s office in Doha – an unusually large amount which was not publicly announced at the time of the deal” and explains further “this left critics to question the ILO’s independence, but the organisation says that there is nothing unusual about the agreement”. [64]

The program ran from 29 January 2018 – 29 January 2021 under the reference number “QAT/17/01/QAT” and was described by ILO in the following way

“This Technical Cooperation Project in Qatar reflects the common commitment of both the Government of Qatar and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to cooperate on ensuring compliance with ratified international labour Conventions, as well as achieving basic principles and rights related to work in the State of Qatar in a gradual manner during the period 2018–2020. The project seeks to achieve this through five areas of action. More specifically this will be done through

[63] Doha News (2016): Qatar awaits results of investigation by UN labor organization. <https://dohanews.co/qatar-awaits-results-investigation-un-labor-organization>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[64] SWI swissinfo.ch (2023): Qatar heads UN labour conference despite poor rights record. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/how-a-controversial-qatari-minister-is-heading-a-un-labour-conference/48571016>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

the following five immediate objectives: (1) Improvement in payment of wages, (2) Improvement of labour inspection and Occupational Safety and Health systems, (3) Implementation of a contractual system to replace KAFALA and to improve employment conditions and labour recruitment procedures, (4) Increased prevention, protection and prosecution against forced labour, (5) Provision of Workers with a voice. The ILO and Government of Qatar will partner to ensure implementation and alignment of national laws and activities with international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work, as set out in those conventions already ratified by the State of Qatar and the related comments by the ILO Supervisory Bodies.”[65]

Whether fundamental changes have actually been made to Qatar’s labour system, as expressed in these fine words and lofty goals of the ILO programme in Qatar, is highly controversial. Qatar itself confirms that recent reforms have sought to address some of the longstanding issues in its labour market – especially its Kafala system. The Government Communications Office argues that Qatar has implemented significant legal reforms to enhance worker protections and confirms that Qatar has abolished the Kafala system, by allowing migrant workers to change jobs without employer permission and by introducing a non-discriminatory minimum wage of QAR 1,000 per month supplemented by allowances for accommodation and food. [66] Independent analysts are more critical. “Qatar remains a deeply authoritarian state whose labour system continues to facilitate the types of abuses that the ILO was set up to eradicate,” the leaders of FairSquare, a UK-based NGO, wrote in an email to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) on June 2, 2023.[67] And the NGO Migrant-Rights.Org wrote in its statement for the pre-session of the Universal Periodic Review on Qatar in August 2024: “While Qatar has dismantled some aspects of the Kafala system over the last six years its most problematic components still remain, like work and residence visas being tied to the sponsor/employer.” The organization goes on to specify that Qatar indeed “accepted the recommendation from Liechtenstein [the last review] to establish a fair minimum wage” [68] but states that “the minimum wage is extremely low and does not take into consideration the high cost of living in the state” as well as that “low wages ensure that workers are dependent on their employers for survival and discourage them from speaking up when exploited”.[69]

The full realisation of the abolition of the Kafala system, which would be urgently needed for Qatar to align the country's commitment to international labour standards, is therefore still a long way off. That Qatar generally demonstrates dedication to improving labour conditions and adhering to global labour norms, is evidenced by its ratification of six International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, including five fundamental ones.[70] As of November 2024, Qatar has ratified (1) the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) (ratified on March 12, 1998), (2) the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105) (ratified on February 2, 2007), (3) the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) (ratified on August 18, 1976), (4) the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) (ratified on January 3, 2006, specifying a minimum age of 16 years for employment), (5) the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) (ratified on May 30, 2000) and (6) the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81) (ratified on August 18, 1976). SWI

[65] International Labour Organisation (n.d.): Development Cooperation Dashboard.

<https://webapps.ilo.org/DevelopmentCooperationDashboard/#btiyhxsx>.

Accessed 26 November 2024.

[66] Government Communications Office (2024): Labour Reform.

<https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/focus/labour-reform>. Accessed 20 November

2024.

[67] SWI swissinfo.ch (2023). Ibid.

[68] A non-discriminatory minimum wage was introduced by Law No.17 in 2020.

[69] UPR-Info.org (2024): Civil Society Materials – Pre-session Statement.

<https://upr-info.org/en/review/qatar>. Accessed 27 November 2024.

[70] ILO (2024): Country Portal Qatar. <https://www.ilo.org/regions-and-countries/ilo-arab-states/countries-covered/qatar>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

swissinfo.ch points out, however: “Over the past five years, Qatar has not ratified a single ILO convention. In comparison, neighbouring Saudi Arabia has ratified three.”[71]

Notably, Qatar has not ratified other fundamental ILO conventions, including (1) the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), (2) the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), (3) the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), (4) the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), and (5) the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187). Additionally, Qatar has not ratified the ILO's governance conventions, such as the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122), the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129), the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144), the ILO Convention No. 189 on domestic workers), and the ILO Convention No.190 on Violence and Harassment.[72]

Thus, while Qatar has ratified some of the key ILO conventions, there remain significant areas where further commitments could enhance labour standards and protections within the country. Qatar continues to face significant challenges in consistently enforcing labour and human rights laws, particularly concerning the treatment of migrant workers. Despite the aforementioned recent legal reforms, enforcement remains inconsistent, leading to ongoing exploitation and abuse.[73] The legal system often favours Qatari nationals in disputes, creating barriers for foreign workers seeking justice. Migrant workers frequently encounter difficulties in accessing legal recourse, with reports indicating that employers can still exploit loopholes to maintain control over their employees.[74]

In Qatar, trade union activities are highly restricted. The Labour Law No. 14 of 2004 permits the establishment of only one trade union: the General Union of Workers of Qatar. This law explicitly prohibits non-citizens, government employees, and household workers from forming or joining trade unions. Consequently, the vast majority of the workforce, comprising expatriate workers, is excluded from union membership and the associated rights to collective bargaining and striking. This exclusion has been a point of contention among international labour rights organizations.[75] Migrant-Rights.Org states that Qatar has initiated a non-mandatory workers joint committee at company level in lieu of workers unions.[76]

Qatar has also faced criticism for not effectively addressing the gaps that exist in the area of recruitment of migrant workers from their home countries, all of which are least developed. The US Department of State has reported existing flaws in the recruitment process of migrant workers

[71] SWI swissinfo.ch (2023). Ibid.

[72] International Labour Organisation (n.d.): Ratifications of C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190). Normlex.
https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/fp=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:PI1300_INSTRUMENT_ID:3999810. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[73] Global Detention Project (2024): Qatar: Persistent Concerns Regarding the Treatment of Migrant Workers Despite Reforms.
<https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/qatar-persistent-concerns-regarding-the-treatment-of-migrant-workers-despite-reforms>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[74] Migrant Rights (2023): Qatar's performance reports on labour law reforms raises concern of regressing on commitments. <https://www.migrant-rights.org/2023/12/qatars-performance-reports-on-labour-law-reforms-raises-concern-of-regressing-on-commitments>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[75] Freedom House (2024): Qatar.
<https://freedomhouse.org/country/qatar/freedom-world/2024>. Accessed 27 November 2024.

[76] UPR-Info.org (2024). Ibid.

including exorbitant fees by recruitment agencies, and unreasonable medical examination practices, among others that leave the workers from LDCs vulnerable to trafficking.[77]

According to the Coalition on Labour Justice for Migrants in the Gulf, migrant workers in Qatar were subjected to various combinations of all 11 of the ILO indicators of forced labour during the reporting period before the Universal Periodic Review 2024.[78] And to many workers, the more recent legal reforms are not known. Their exploitative employers are just continuing with business as usual. With such regressive practices still prevalent in the Qatari labour market, the state has an uphill task to demonstrate that it lives up to the 2nd Copenhagen Commitment.

The systemic issues described in this chapter underscore the need for more robust enforcement mechanisms and legal reforms to ensure equitable treatment and protection for all workers in Qatar. Labor issues are, however, also intricately linked to the broader social development challenges in Qatar. The country's reliance on hydrocarbons has not only affected wealth distribution but also influenced labour dynamics, with much of the workforce comprising migrant labourers who face the systemic challenges mentioned above. In addressing these issues, Qatar must consider implementing policies that promote social justice and economic diversification. This, of course, includes enforcing labour rights more stringently but also extends to fast-tracking the transition towards a more inclusive economic model that reduces dependency on hydrocarbons.

3.4 Copenhagen Commitment 4: Promote social integration based on the enhancement and protection of all human rights


Article 35 of the constitution of Qatar guarantees the right to equality for all people and prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex, race, language, or religion. Similarly, among other provisions of the constitution that protect rights is Article 36 that promises freedom from torture, Article 37 that protects privacy, Article 47 that guarantees freedom of expression, and Article 48 that protects press freedom.

It is however challenging to discuss social integration, the protection of human rights, nondiscrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality, and equal opportunity without addressing the contradictions in the constitution of Qatar. The constitution establishes a two-tier system regarding fundamental rights, differentiating between Qatari citizens and non-citizens. Qatari citizens are afforded more rights compared to non-citizens. As mentioned earlier, certain provisions, such as Article 49, which mandates the state to provide education to all citizens, Article 19, which guarantees equal opportunities for all citizens, and Articles 44 and 45, which protect the rights of citizens to freedom of assembly and association, are exclusive to citizens. Also, Article 34 confers equality in public rights and duties to citizens only. The rights to assembly, association, and education are in the same ambit only guaranteed to citizens.[79] These provisions are couched in discriminatory language and are due for reform.

[77] US Government (2024): Trafficking in Persons Report: Qatar, US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/qatar/>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[78] Coalition on Labor Justice for Migrants in the Gulf (2024): Migrant Worker Rights Violations in Qatar Briefing for the Universal Periodic Review Pre-Session 47. https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Qatar-UPR-Advocacy-Brief_Coalition-on-Labor-Justice-for-Migrants-in-the-Gulf.pdf. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[79] Articles, 44, 45, 49 of the constitution of Qatar.



The provisions have been implemented in general practice and government actions where, for instance, non-citizens cannot form labour unions or protest the poor working conditions in the country. Similarly, the disproportionate pay of migrant workers, women, non-white, and non-Qataris,[80] is emblematic of a state that is still falling short on the 4th Copenhagen Commitment.

These practices and provisions go counter to the principles of equality that are espoused in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, that Qatar is party to. Qatar acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on May 21, 2018, under Decree No. 40 of 2018. The ICCPR came into force for Qatar on August 21, 2018.[81] Regarding the optional protocols to the ICCPR, Qatar has not ratified the first optional protocol, which establishes an individual complaint mechanism allowing individuals to submit complaints to the Human Rights Committee. Qatar has also not ratified the second optional protocol, which aims at the abolition of the death penalty.[82] While this represents a significant restriction on human rights protection within Qatar, it is fair to point out that the ratification of both additional protocols is far from being the global standard. As of November 2024, the first optional protocol had 116 state parties while the second had only 91.

Considerably longer time ago than the ratification of the ICCPR, Qatar acceded to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which defines racial discrimination in Article 1 as:

"Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."

The country ratified the convention on July 22, 1976, which subsequently entered into force for Qatar on August 21, 1976.[83] It should be observed, however, that Qatar has never fully adopted the definition of racial discrimination mentioned above that fully implements Article 1 of the ICCPR. Upon ratification, Qatar entered reservations to certain provisions of the convention, particularly those it considered incompatible with Islamic Sharia law. These reservations continue to affect the full implementation of the convention's provisions within Qatar.[84]

Furthermore, while Qatar has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on April 29, 2009, the country has not ratified the optional protocol to CEDAW that establishes mechanisms for individuals or groups to submit complaints about violations

[80] Ibid.

[81] National Human Rights Institution (2020): International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. <https://nhriuae.com/en/law-details/international-covenant-on-civil-and-political-rights-17>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[82] OHCHR (2024): UN Treaty Body Database. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=140. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[83] Qatar acceded to this convention on July 22, 1976, UN OHCHR (2024): UN Treaty Body Database. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=140. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[84] International Court of Justice (2019): Written statement of Qatar. <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/105940>. Access 26 November 2024.

of rights protected under the convention and allows the CEDAW Committee to initiate inquiries into grave or systematic violations.[85]

Regarding freedom of worship, non-Muslims are not allowed to worship in public despite a growing number of Christians, according to the Freedom House report of 2022. Many of the non-Muslim worshippers are relegated to the Mesaymeer Religious Complex in Doha, which serves as the designated worship area for the country's non-Muslim communities, primarily expatriates. Reports indicate that this facility is experiencing significant overcrowding. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church within the complex conducts 33 masses every Saturday, and the Anglican Centre hosts 150 worship services each weekend for 85 Evangelical, Pentecostal, and interdenominational churches. This high volume of services underscores the limited capacity relative to the demand for worship space.[86] Despite the construction of places of worship for the expanding Christian community in Qatar in more recent times, there have been concerning reports of individuals facing discrimination based on their religion, faith, and beliefs. This issue raises questions about the country's commitment to religious freedom and equality, highlighting the need for further scrutiny and action to ensure that all residents can practice their faith without fear of prejudice or retribution. [87]

Another group that has been reported to face discrimination in Qatar due to their belief is the Baha'i Faith community. In October 2023, the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) reported with concern Qatar's refusal to recognize and register the Baha'i community, many of whom are citizens.[88] This refusal increases the risk of deportation and blacklisting, which, according to the Committee, often leads to family separations and loss of employment. Additionally, the CESCR noted that the Baha'is are not only denied registration but also certificates of good conduct, which are essential documents for job changes and employment. In summary, these limitations on religious freedom underscore the challenges that religious minorities encounter in the country, raising concerns about the inclusivity and integration of diverse believers within Qatari society.

For a country whose largest population is people who are noncitizens, yet which still maintains laws and practices that exclude or penalise people based on their nationality, religion, gender, and level of education (the majority of the excluded people being non-Qataris), there is still a lot of work to do to align the country with the commitments of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration. It is imperative for Qatar to recognize and respect cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, and take measures to facilitate their full participation in all aspects of the political, economic, social, religious and cultural life of their societies and in the economic progress and social development of their countries.

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Qatar face significant challenges, including restrictions on freedom of expression, arbitrary detention, and legal obstacles that hinder their advocacy efforts. The Gulf Centre for Human Rights recently pointed to the fact that “Law No. (5) of 2003 gives the State Security apparatus, who report directly to the Emir, powers to detain any citizen without judicial oversight” and continues to emphasize that “this law has been used to silence and punish HRDs for their peaceful

[85] OHCHR (1999): Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-elimination-all-forms>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[86] Church in Chains (2022): QATAR: What is life like for Christians?

<https://www.churchinchains.ie/news-by-country/middle-east/qatar-what-is-life-like-for-christians/>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[87] Ibid.

[88] U.S. Department of Defense (2023): Report on International Religious Freedom: Qatar. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/qatar/>.

work”.[89] The case of Malcolm Bidali, a Kenyan labour rights activist, exemplifies these challenges. In May 2021, Bidali was detained by Qatari authorities for his online writings that highlighted the plight of migrant workers in the country. He was held in solitary confinement for nearly a month without formal charges before being released and fined. His detention drew international condemnation and underscored the precarious situation of those advocating for labour rights in Qatar.[90][91]

Another pertinent example is the case of Mansour bin Rashid al-Matroushi, a Qatari activist and blogger. In 2013, al-Matroushi was arrested and detained for delivering a letter to the French embassy in Doha, criticizing France's military intervention in Mali. He was held in solitary confinement without formal charges, highlighting the risks faced by activists who express dissenting views. Although he was released after several weeks, his case illustrates the broader pattern of suppression faced by HRDs in Qatar.[92][93]

3.5 Copenhagen Commitment 5: Achieve equality and equity between women and men

Qatar's constitution[94] enshrines the principles of equality and non-discrimination, which extend to all citizens, including women. Article 34 states that "the citizens of Qatar shall be equal in public rights and duties" while Article 35 stipulates that "all persons are equal before the law and there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of sex, race, language, or religion.”[95] These provisions affirm the state's official commitment to gender equality and the protection of women's rights within its legal framework.

Despite Qatar being a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)[96], the gender gap between men and women in Qatar is not only reflective in the fact that women are a numerical minority in the country but also visible in the Qatar's laws, job sector, and politics. Women constitute a much smaller proportion of Qatar's total population due to the special demographics of the country as Qatar's population is predominantly composed of male expatriate workers, who are recruited primarily for labour-intensive industries such as construction. This skews the gender ratio significantly. As of recent estimates (2024), men account for

[89] UPR-Info.org (2024): Civil Society Materials – Pre-session Statement. <https://upr-info.org/en/review/qatar>. Accessed 27 November 2024.

[90] Amnesty International (2021): Katar: Kenianischer Arbeitsrechtsaktivist Malcolm Bidali darf nach Zahlung einer Geldstrafe ausreisen. <https://www.amnesty.de/informieren/aktuell/katar-arbeitsrechtsaktivist-malcolm-bidali-darf-ausreisen>. Accessed 27 November 2024.

[91] Human Rights Watch (2021): Qatar: Kenyan Labor Rights Activist in Solitary Confinement. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/28/qatar-kenyan-labor-rights-activist-solitary-confinement>. Accessed 27 November 2024.


[92] Amnesty International (2013): Besuch von Familien gestattet. <https://www.amnesty.de/urgent-action/ua-071-2013-1/besuch-von-familien-gestattet>. Accessed 27 November 2024.

[93] Doha News (2013): Qatari activists held for a week over 'threatening' letter to French embassy. <https://dohanews.co/qatari-activists-held-for-a-week-over-threatening/>. Accessed 27 November 2024.

[94] In force since 2004 under the title "Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar".

[95] UN WOMEN (2024): Global Gender Equality Constitutional Database – Qatar. <https://constitutions.unwomen.org/en/countries/asia/qatar>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[96] As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Qatar acceded to this convention on April 29, 2009. Ibid.



approximately 75% of the population, while women represent about 25%. This imbalance is due to the large influx of male expatriates in the workforce.[97]

Women in Qatar, while not subject to formal discrimination, encounter challenges due to the country's patriarchal societal structure. Still, according to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 2021 Gender Inequality Index, Qatar is ranked 54th out of 191 nations globally, positioning it as the third highest among Arab countries, following the UAE and Bahrain. Despite this notable placement, Qatar continues to lag behind nations within the OECD. The country's relatively high ranking is largely attributed to its high standard of living and strong performance in female education indicators. [98]

Qatar was the first country in the Gulf to grant women the right to vote, when both men and women were allowed to vote and stand as candidates for the Central Municipal Council in 1999 during Qatar's first municipal elections.[99] The country has also made remarkable progress in female education, achieving impressive indicators that reflect its focus on gender equality in this sector. The literacy rate among young women aged 15-24 is exceptionally high, at 99.7% as of 2021[100]. Additionally, women surpass men in tertiary education enrolment, with a gross enrolment ratio of 68.5% for women compared to 41.5% for men in 2020[101]. Female students also excel in graduation rates, completing tertiary education at higher rates than their male counterparts[102]. Furthermore, Qatari women are increasingly entering fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), contributing to greater gender diversity in traditionally male-dominated disciplines. These achievements align with Qatar's national development goals and its commitment to international standards of gender equality.

Despite this significant progress in female education and workforce participation, Qatar faces substantial challenges in achieving comprehensive gender equality. Legal constraints under the country's male guardianship system limit women's autonomy in several aspects of life. For example, Qatari women require a male guardian's permission to marry, study abroad on government scholarships, work in certain government jobs, travel abroad under specific conditions, and access some forms of reproductive healthcare. Even in cases of divorce, women face restrictions on acting as their children's primary guardians, reflecting the pervasive impact of these laws on women's independence.[103] In Qatar, laws and practices are embedded in the system that preclude women below 25 years from making decisions of their own without the obtaining permission of their male guardians. They must obtain permission before making key decisions relating to their education,

[97] National Planning Council of the State of Qatar (2024): Statistics of July 2024. <https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/Pages/default.aspx>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[98] Bertelsmann Stiftung (2024): BTI Transformation Index – Qatar Country Report 2024. <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/QAT>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[99] UN Secretary-General (2019): Deputy Secretary-General's remarks at dinner discussion with leading women of Qatar on women's empowerment and gender equality [as prepared for delivery].

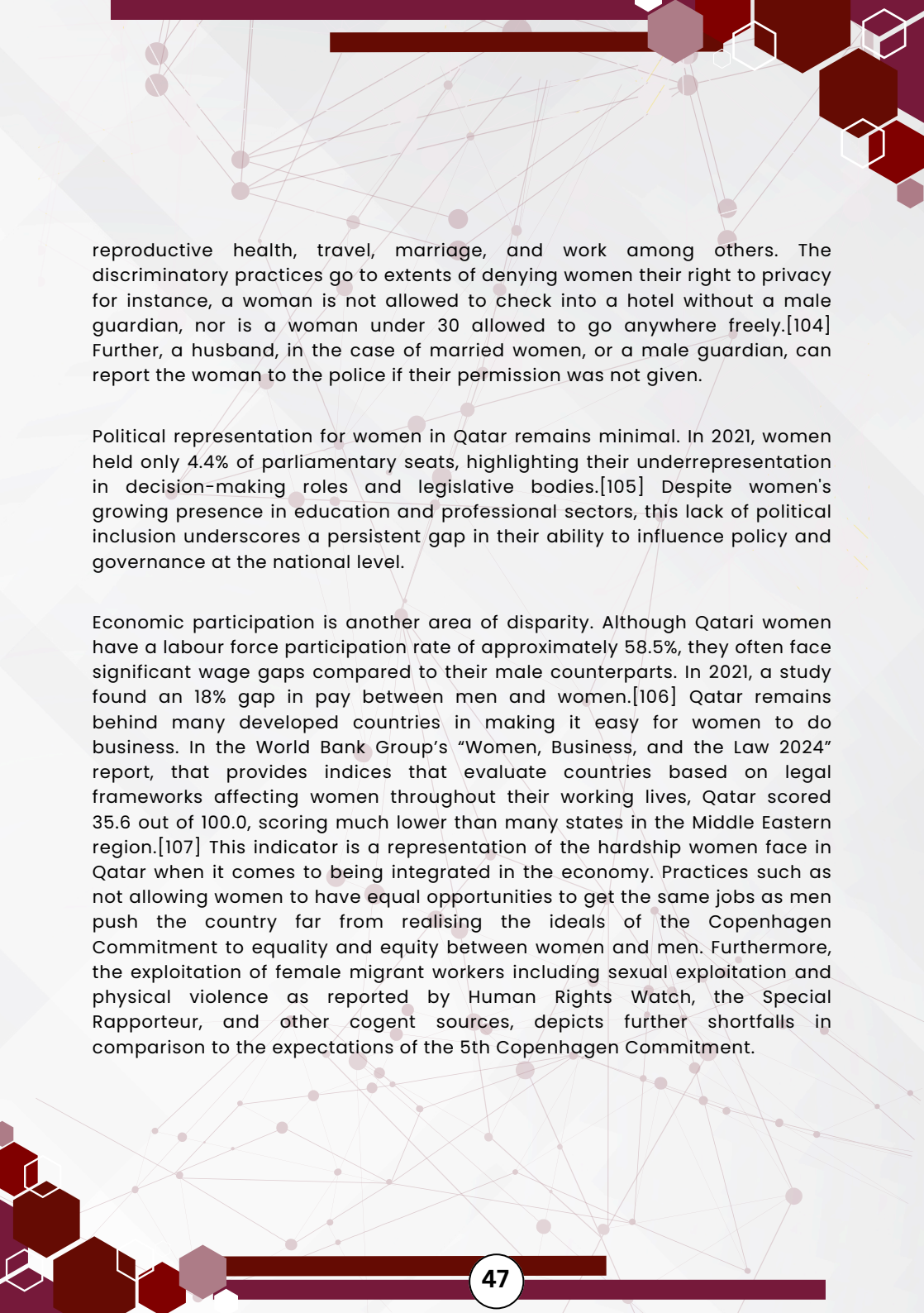
<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/deputy-secretary-general/statement/2019-12-07/deputy-secretary-general%E2%80%99s-remarks-dinner-discussion-leading-women-of-qatar-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-and-gender-equality-prepared-for-delivery>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[100] World Bank Group (2024): Literacy rate, youth female (% of females ages 15–24) – Qatar. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.FE.ZS?locations=QA>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[101] World Bank Group (2024): School enrollment, tertiary (% gross) – Qatar. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR?locations=QA>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[102] OECD (2023): Country reports for Qatar. <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryReports?primaryCountry=QAT>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[103] Human Rights Watch (2021): “Everything I Have to Do is Tied to a Man”. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/03/29/everything-i-have-do-tied-man/women-and-qatars-male-guardianship-rules>. Accessed 20 November 2024.



reproductive health, travel, marriage, and work among others. The discriminatory practices go to extents of denying women their right to privacy for instance, a woman is not allowed to check into a hotel without a male guardian, nor is a woman under 30 allowed to go anywhere freely.[104] Further, a husband, in the case of married women, or a male guardian, can report the woman to the police if their permission was not given.

Political representation for women in Qatar remains minimal. In 2021, women held only 4.4% of parliamentary seats, highlighting their underrepresentation in decision-making roles and legislative bodies.[105] Despite women's growing presence in education and professional sectors, this lack of political inclusion underscores a persistent gap in their ability to influence policy and governance at the national level.

Economic participation is another area of disparity. Although Qatari women have a labour force participation rate of approximately 58.5%, they often face significant wage gaps compared to their male counterparts. In 2021, a study found an 18% gap in pay between men and women.[106] Qatar remains behind many developed countries in making it easy for women to do business. In the World Bank Group's "Women, Business, and the Law 2024" report, that provides indices that evaluate countries based on legal frameworks affecting women throughout their working lives, Qatar scored 35.6 out of 100.0, scoring much lower than many states in the Middle Eastern region.[107] This indicator is a representation of the hardship women face in Qatar when it comes to being integrated in the economy. Practices such as not allowing women to have equal opportunities to get the same jobs as men push the country far from realising the ideals of the Copenhagen Commitment to equality and equity between women and men. Furthermore, the exploitation of female migrant workers including sexual exploitation and physical violence as reported by Human Rights Watch, the Special Rapporteur, and other cogent sources, depicts further shortfalls in comparison to the expectations of the 5th Copenhagen Commitment.

Cultural and social norms in Qatar further restrict women's freedoms and roles in society. Traditional expectations, such as adhering to specific dress codes like the abaya and shayla, shape public perceptions of women. Furthermore, the separation of the sexes in many aspects of life, including education and social events, limits women's integration into broader professional and social networks. Most educational institutions in Qatar, including schools and some universities, maintain gendersegregated classrooms and facilities, ensuring separate environments for male and female students. Many social venues, such as parks, gyms, and sports clubs, often have designated times or areas exclusively for men or women to ensure gender separation in recreational activities. And in some more conservative sectors, offices may enforce gender segregation at the workplace, with separate seating arrangements or workspaces for men and women, particularly in public and government settings.

Access to justice and legal protection for women also remain areas of concern. Women in Qatar often face barriers when seeking recourse in cases of domestic violence, sexual harassment, or workplace discrimination. Women often need permission or accompaniment from a male guardian to file complaints or pursue legal action in cases of domestic violence, limiting their autonomy in seeking

[104] Ibid, Human Rights Watch, World Report (2024).

[105] United Nations (2019): Applauding Qatar's Gender Parity, Deputy Secretary-General Says Only with Women Voices, Leadership 'Will We Reach the World We Want and Need'.

<https://press.un.org/en/2019/dsgsm1377.doc.htm>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[106] Alselaiei (2021): The Gender Pay Gap in Qatar: Challenges and Future Prospects.

<https://www.proquest.com/openview/d3a88f3ef4db0a00e1ff9da9ddd853a3/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2026366&diss=y>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[107] World Bank Group (2024): Women, Business and the Law 2024.

<https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/reports>. Accessed 27 November 2024.



justice. Reporting issues like sexual harassment or domestic violence can expose women to social ostracism or accusations of dishonouring the family, discouraging many from coming forward to avoid social stigma and retaliation. Furthermore, Qatar's legal framework places a heavy burden of proof on women in cases of sexual harassment or workplace discrimination, often requiring corroborative evidence or witnesses, which can be difficult to obtain. Qatar has also not enacted a law on domestic violence to protect women from spousal abuse. The absence of comprehensive legislation to address these issues leaves women vulnerable and without adequate legal protection, despite Qatar's broader commitments to international human rights agreements.[108]

Regarding conferring nationality, Qatari women are prohibited from conferring nationality upon their foreign spouses and children. Children of Qatari women married to foreign spouses do not enjoy the same rights as children of Qatari men married to foreign spouses. Children and spouses of Qatari women can only receive permanent residence or apply for citizen by naturalisation which is only conferred by a decree by the Emir himself. And these decrees are extremely rare.

Addressing these issues is critical for Qatar to achieve meaningful gender equality. By implementing systemic reforms that ensure legal, political, economic, and social inclusion for women, Qatar can align its practices with international human rights standards and foster a more equitable society. Achieving full gender equality would demonstrate Qatar's commitment to the core principles of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, which emphasizes the empowerment and inclusion of women as key to sustainable development. As the host of the 2025 World Summit for Social Development, such progress would bolster Qatar's credibility on the global stage, showcasing its dedication to aligning domestic policies with international standards for social justice and equality.

3.6 Copenhagen Commitment 6: Attain universal and equitable access to education and primary health care

Under the 6th Copenhagen Commitment countries pledged to promote and attain the goals of universal and equitable access to quality education, the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the access of all to primary health care. This commitment is in line with other provisions of international law: For instance, the right to free education is enshrined in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and in Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I. Health

Whereas the health standard in Qatar has tremendously improved in recent decades, there remain barriers in access particularly for migrant workers in the country. Many employers still refuse to give the Hamad health card to their employees to access health facilities. In the same ambit, they do not allow them to take sick leave. There are reports of long queues in specific health facilities that are designated for foreigners – particularly the migrant workers. The workers end up not taking the risk of losing their jobs should they be absent from their workplace for too long. Some of these grievances coupled with the dire working conditions and the exposure to extreme heat have been reported to have been the cause of the death of many migrant workers between 2009 and 2017.[109]

[108] Ibid, UN Secretary-General (2019).

[109] Ibid.

Qatar remains one of the few states in the world that still has mandatory disclosures of one's HIV status for work, study, or residency. According to the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Qatar denies residency permits (for stays longer than 90 days) on the basis of HIV status and deports non-nationals living with HIV.[110] According to the European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights, Qatar discriminates against persons living with HIV complicating their recruitment, their continued employment or the pursuit of equal opportunities.[111]

II. Education

Over the years, Qatar has seen tremendous changes in its education sector from increasing the number of public schools to making education more accessible to launching several initiatives to expand education in Qatar and across the world, particularly to developing countries.[112] Qatar has also positioned itself as a regional and global education hub owing to its ambitious Vision 2030, which aims to create a knowledge-based economy.

Despite all progress made, significant challenges have been reported by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education as well as by civil society organizations. Key among these challenges is the low quality of education provided in community schools, the inaccessibility of education for children of migrant workers who are not employed in public services, and the lack of adequate vocational training opportunities. Furthermore, there is still a problem of high fees for better schools. Many migrant workers who earn low wages are unable to afford these fees, therefore limiting access to quality education for their children.

There have been reports of children dropping out of school or being unable to attend school due to their parents being undocumented immigrants or losing their residence rights after being laid off from work.[113] Schools often require students to have a residence permit to enrol. Additionally, girls who become pregnant frequently drop out of school because of the stigma and discrimination they face. This situation is exacerbated by the already disparaging treatment of women and harmful religious beliefs that further marginalize women, including pregnant girls.

3.7 Copenhagen Commitment 7: Accelerate the development of Africa and the least developed countries

Over many years, Qatar has demonstrated its commitment to economic, social and human development in a number of developing countries – particularly on the African continent – through various programmes, projects and initiatives. From March 5-9, 2023, Qatar hosted the second part of the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries under the theme: ‘From Potential to Prosperity’ in the context of which the host country drew on its own success story of development from a least developed country to the wealthy country it is today. The conference, with Qatar as the

[110] UNAIDS (2024): Global AIDS Update 2024.

<https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2024/global-aids-update-2024>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[111] European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (2024): A new Qatar that respects the rights of migrant workers or yet another facade to hide human rights violations?. <https://www.ecdhr.org/a-new-qatar-that-respects-the-rights-of-migrant-workers-or-yet-another-facade-to-hide-human-rights-violations/>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[112] See chapter 3.7 on Copenhagen Commitment 7 for further elaboration of Qatar’s role in promoting education globally.

[113] Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education on her visit to Qatar, 2020.

chair, was pivotal in further discussing the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (DPoA) for the Decade 2022–2031 which was adopted on March 17, 2022, during the first part of the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) held in New York at the UN Headquarters.

The DPoA focuses on six key priority areas to accelerate sustainable development and address structural challenges faced by Least Developed Countries (LDCs):[114]

1. Investing in People in Least Developed Countries: Improving health, education, social protection, and gender equality to enhance human capital development.
2. Leveraging the Power of Science, Technology, and Innovation: Bridging the digital divide, fostering innovation, and strengthening technological capabilities in LDCs to drive sustainable economic growth.
3. Supporting Structural Transformation as a Driver of Prosperity: Promoting economic diversification, industrialization, and sustainable agriculture to build resilient economies and reduce dependence on a narrow range of exports.
4. Enhancing International Trade and Regional Integration: Improving LDCs' integration into the global trading system, ensuring preferential market access and building trade-related infrastructure.
5. Addressing Climate Change, Environmental Degradation, and Building Resilience: Strengthening climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and access to climate financing to mitigate the disproportionate impacts of environmental challenges on LDCs.
6. Mobilizing International Solidarity, Reinvigorating Global Partnerships, and Strengthening Innovative Financing: Fostering enhanced development assistance, South-South cooperation, and innovative financial mechanisms to support LDCs' development efforts.

Qatar has not only been effective in hosting such global events aimed at fast tracking the economic, social and human development of least Developed countries, it has also made significant investments to LDCs itself, particularly in Africa. According to the World Economic Forum, Qatar has invested 7.2 billion USD on the African continent over the last decade.[115] This underscores Qatar's growing interest in and commitment to Africa's growth.

Furthermore, Qatar has extended assistance in the form of humanitarian aid, education related aid, health assistance, and infrastructural development support. According to the Center for International Policy Research, a Doha-based think tank, Qatar donated over 1.3 billion USD to 40 Least Developed Countries between 2012 and 2023, with Sudan, and Yemen being among the biggest beneficiaries. [116] On average, Qatar's official development assistance (ODA) over the past five years was 600 million USD with remarkably more resources allocated to ODA in the years 2022 and 2023. In 2022 Qatar's ODA was over 800 million USD and in 2023 704.7 million USD representing 0.3% of its Gross National Income, according to data from the OECD.[117] Although this represents a significant sum, Qatar has so

[114] United Nations (2023): 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5). <https://www.un.org/ldc5/doha-programme-of-action>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[115] World Economic Forum (2024): Africa and the Gulf states: A new economic partnership. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/04/africa-gcc-gulf-economy-partnership-emerging/>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[116] Center for International Policy Research (2024): CIPR Policy Brief No. 4. https://cipresearch.org/assets/document/CIPR_PolicyBrief_No.4_v1.pdf. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[117] OECD (2024): Development Co-operation Profiles – Qatar. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/32d62def-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5e331623en&csp=b14d4f60505d057b456dd1730d8fcea3&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=chapter>. Accessed 21 November 2024.



far not achieved the 0.7% target for Official Development Assistance (ODA) set by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In fact, against the background of Qatar's wealth, its ODA contributions are relatively modest compared to major international donors like the United States (approximately 55.3 billion USD in 2022), Germany (35 billion USD) or Japan 17.5 billion USD. Therefore, despite its substantial efforts, Qatar cannot be considered a major donor in comparison to the leading contributors of international development aid.

Qatar's assistance is mainly implemented through the Qatar Fund for Development^[118], the country's development cooperation entity. The country emphasizes its active role in global humanitarian and developmental initiatives by extending much of the assistance to the ends of 'promoting human development and poverty alleviation by strengthening health services and educational systems, supporting economic development, mobilising humanitarian aid, and enhancing communities' resilience towards climate change.^[119]

A large part of the resources provided by Qatar is allocated to major UN agencies that offer aid and financial assistance to those who need it the most in developing countries. Such agencies include the World Food Program (WFP), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UNHCR, UNRWA, UNICEF, among others. Qatar has equally supported IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT) and the Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST) that aims at supporting initiatives in Least Developed Countries. Qatar has also collaborated in strategic partnerships with various countries and organizations to support least developed and developing nations. For instance, in 2024, Qatar and the United Kingdom launched a joint co-funding initiative for international development cooperation and humanitarian response.^[120]

Furthermore, Qatar has been central to offering financial assistance aimed at tackling climate change in Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States. For instance, during the annual ministerial meeting of Foreign Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries in 2020 and at the UN General Assembly in the same year, Qatar's minister of state for Foreign Affairs pledged Qatar's contribution of 100 million US dollars towards addressing the challenges of climate change.[121]

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Qatar extended support worth over 50 million USD to combat the pandemic, with 20 million USD going to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization and 10 million USD going to the World Health Organisation.[122] The state additionally partnered with private sector to extend aid aimed at ending the Covid-19 pandemic. Undeniably, doing so Qatar showed

[118] established in 2012.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Qatar News Agency (2024): Joint Statement Launching the Joint Co-Funding Initiative for International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Response between Qatar and UK.

<https://www.qna.org.qa/en/News-Area/News/2024-02/18/0059-joint-statement-launching-the-joint-co-funding-initiative-for-international-development-cooperation-and-humanitarian-response-between-qatar-and-uk-%28completed-repeat%29>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[121] Al-Ansari, Majed & Aras, Bulent & Muğurtay, Nihat (2022): Qatar's Development Cooperation and Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Alternatives: Global, Local, Political. 47. 030437542210828.

10.1177/03043754221082899. Solution to Gulf crisis has to begin with lifting of Qatar's blockade.. (n.d.) >The Free Library. (2014). Retrieved Nov 20 2024 from <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Solution+to+Gulf+crisis+has+to+begin+with+lifting+of+Qatar%27s+blockade.-a0636189749>

[122] State of Qatar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2020): The State of Qatar's Aid to friendly countries to confront the emerging corona virus "Covid-19".

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Events/GoodPractices/Coronavirus/qatar-submission-covid19.pdf>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

resolve to accelerating social development globally by providing the necessary support (including health assistance, food, and education) needed for human survival and development.

A major field where Qatar has continued to exhibit its commitment to social development globally as enunciated in the 7th Copenhagen Commitment is in the field of education. Through its state-owned entities such as the Qatar Charity, Education Above All, and Qatar Foundation, it has put education assistance at the core of its international development agenda. Founded in 2012 by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, consort to the former Emir and mother to the current Emir, Education Above All has been instrumental in providing education support to millions of children from different countries around the world particularly in the least developed countries. Until now, the initiative has provided over 1.4 billion USD under its flagship program Educate A Child (EAC), benefiting 11.6 million out-of-school children in 57 countries over the last decade.[123] The majority of the countries that have benefitted from EAA's program are African countries. EAA has also promoted education through various programs such as "Al Fakhoora", "Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict" (PEIC), "Reach Out To Asia" (ROTA), "Innovation Development" (ID). Together all programs aim at addressing educational challenges among marginalised groups majority of whom are from least developed countries,[124] underscoring the state's commitment to human development through education.

Despite Qatar's commitment to these fields of human development, the country's development assistance to developing and least developed countries has been subject to several criticisms, particularly concerning Qatar's pursuit of geostrategic interests and its limited emphasis on promoting democratic institutions and human rights. Qatar's foreign aid is often strategically directed to enhance its political influence rather than solely addressing humanitarian needs. For instance, Qatar's significant investments in the Horn of Africa have been viewed as efforts to expand its geopolitical reach and counterbalance regional rivals.[125] This approach raises concerns about the genuine altruism of its aid programs as it reveals geopolitical motivations behind the allocation of development aid.

Qatar has also been accused of providing aid to controversial organizations and groups with contentious human rights records. Notably, its support for Hamas in Gaza has drawn criticism, as Hamas has been designated a terrorist organization by several countries.[126] Against this background, it is at least questionable to what extent Qatar allows its development aid to inadvertently bolster entities that do not uphold democratic values or human rights.

Qatar's development assistance is also characterized by limited promotion of democratic governance. While the country provides substantial financial assistance, there is a perceived lack of emphasis on fostering democratic institutions in recipient countries. Analysts note that Qatar's aid often focuses on infrastructure and economic projects without corresponding efforts to support political reforms or civil society development, potentially perpetuating authoritarian regimes.[127] Consequently, Qatar is rightly facing criticism over failure to further promote the development of democratic institutions and

[123] Education Above All (2023): Fostering Innovation: Education Above All Foundation. <https://www.educationaboveall.org/library/fostering-innovation-education-above-all-foundation>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[124] Ibid.


[125] Global Policy Journal (2023): Qatar's foreign aid and political strategies in the Horn of Africa: The case of Somalia.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1758-5899.13294?campaign=wolearlyview>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[126] SWP (2023): Qatar's Foreign Policy. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2023RP04/>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[127] European Institute of the Mediterranean (2024): Qatar's Role in the Geopolitical Scenarios of the Middle East and North Africa.

<https://www.iemed.org/publication/qatars-role-in-the-geopolitical-scenarios-of-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>. Accessed 26 November 2024.



human rights in the countries of its assistance and operations. For instance, Qatar has been accused of supporting the government of Al-Bashir in Sudan that was severely implicated in human rights violations against the civilian population.[128]

The way in which Qatar implements its development aid is also, at least in part, questionable. Reports have highlighted that some of Qatar's aid initiatives, particularly those involving labour-intensive projects, have been marred by human rights abuses. For example, infrastructure projects funded by Qatari aid in various countries have faced allegations of poor labour conditions, reflecting negatively on Qatar's commitment to human rights in its development assistance.[129] Beyond aid practices, observers have also raised concerns about the transparency of Qatar's aid disbursements. The lack of publicly available data and detailed reporting on aid allocations makes it challenging to assess the effectiveness and true intent behind Qatar's development assistance, leading to scepticism about its motivations. [130]

These critiques underscore the complexities and controversies surrounding Qatar's role as a development aid donor, highlighting the need for greater transparency and alignment with international human rights and democratic standards. While Qatar has for many years been making extensive efforts to achieve the 7th Copenhagen Commitment, it could set an even better example for other countries around the world, also in view of the upcoming World Summit for Social Development in Doha in November 2025, if the country addressed some of the areas for improvement mentioned in this briefing in a committed and consistent manner and presented itself in a more transparent, consistent and coherent way in the future.

3.8 Copenhagen Commitment 8: Ensure that structural adjustment programmes include social development goals

To understand the 8th Copenhagen Commitment correctly from today's perspective, the context of the time in the year 1995 must be taken into account. At the time of the first World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, the world was grappling with the aftershocks of the debt crisis of the 1980s and early 1990s. Many developing countries had been subjected to Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank as conditions for receiving financial aid or debt relief. These SAPs often focused on fiscal austerity, privatization, and deregulation to stabilize economies and encourage growth. However, the SAPs frequently led to cuts in social spending (as governments reduced investments in health, education, and social protection), increased poverty and inequality (since vulnerable populations in developing countries bore the brunt of economic reforms) and subsequent public backlashes with protests and political instability emerging in countries affected by the measures under the SAPs.

The 8th Copenhagen Commitment emerged as a response to these issues, reflecting a consensus that economic policies should not undermine social development. The aim was to integrate social goals

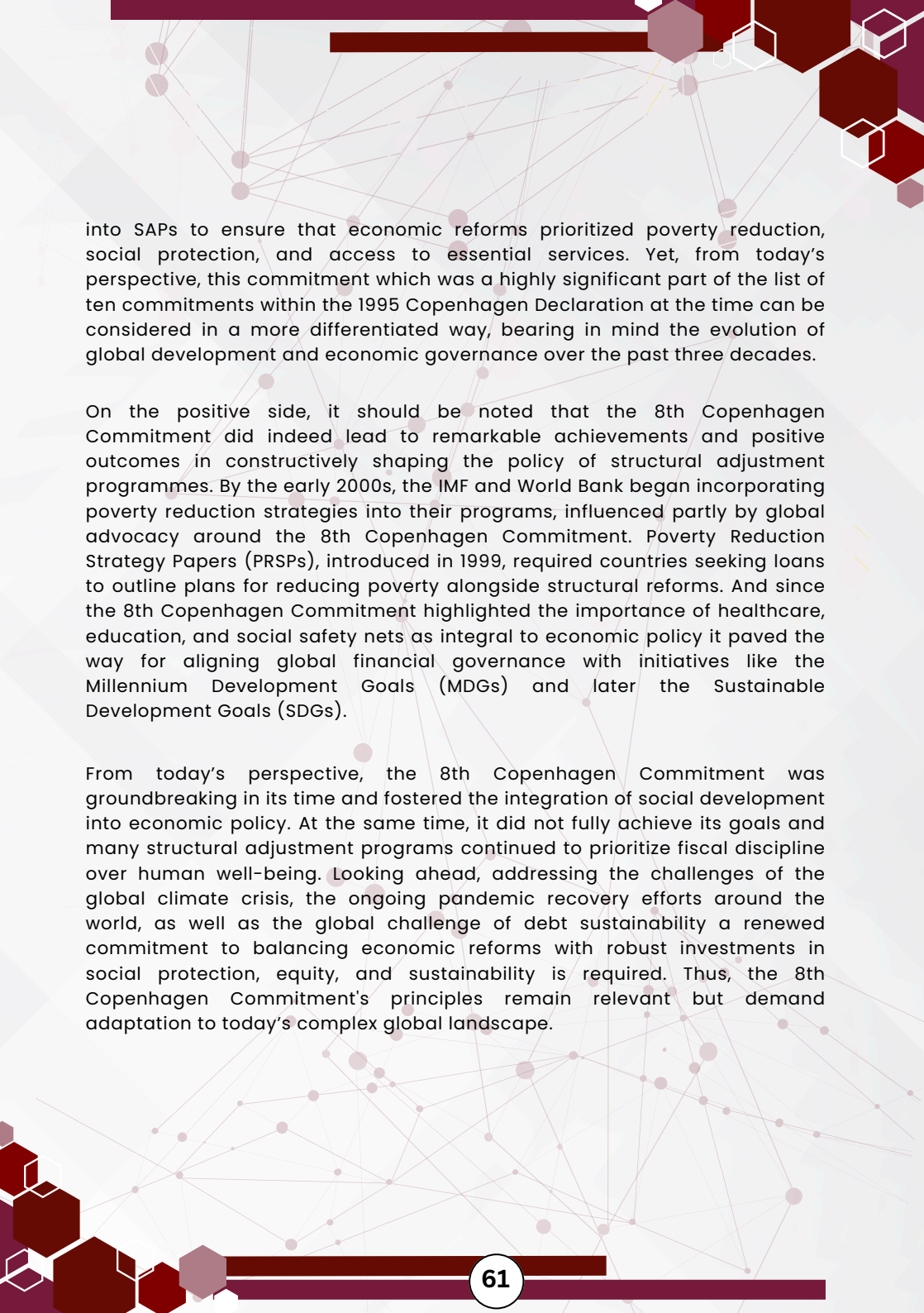
[128] The Guardian (2019): Fall of Bashir risks leaving Sudan prey to rival regional powers: Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt compete with Iran, Turkey and Qatar to exploit political turmoil after deposal of president.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/27/sudan-revolution-regional-powers-fight-control>. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[129] Human Rights Watch (2024): Qatar – Events of 2023.

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/qatar>. Accessed 20 November 2024.

[130] Aras, Fazlioglu, Al Ansari (2024): Interest, Need, or Reputation? Determinants of Qatar's Foreign Aid. Foreign Policy Analysis, Volume 20, Issue 4, October 2024.



into SAPs to ensure that economic reforms prioritized poverty reduction, social protection, and access to essential services. Yet, from today's perspective, this commitment which was a highly significant part of the list of ten commitments within the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration at the time can be considered in a more differentiated way, bearing in mind the evolution of global development and economic governance over the past three decades.

On the positive side, it should be noted that the 8th Copenhagen Commitment did indeed lead to remarkable achievements and positive outcomes in constructively shaping the policy of structural adjustment programmes. By the early 2000s, the IMF and World Bank began incorporating poverty reduction strategies into their programs, influenced partly by global advocacy around the 8th Copenhagen Commitment. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), introduced in 1999, required countries seeking loans to outline plans for reducing poverty alongside structural reforms. And since the 8th Copenhagen Commitment highlighted the importance of healthcare, education, and social safety nets as integral to economic policy it paved the way for aligning global financial governance with initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

From today's perspective, the 8th Copenhagen Commitment was groundbreaking in its time and fostered the integration of social development into economic policy. At the same time, it did not fully achieve its goals and many structural adjustment programs continued to prioritize fiscal discipline over human well-being. Looking ahead, addressing the challenges of the global climate crisis, the ongoing pandemic recovery efforts around the world, as well as the global challenge of debt sustainability a renewed commitment to balancing economic reforms with robust investments in social protection, equity, and sustainability is required. Thus, the 8th Copenhagen Commitment's principles remain relevant but demand adaptation to today's complex global landscape.

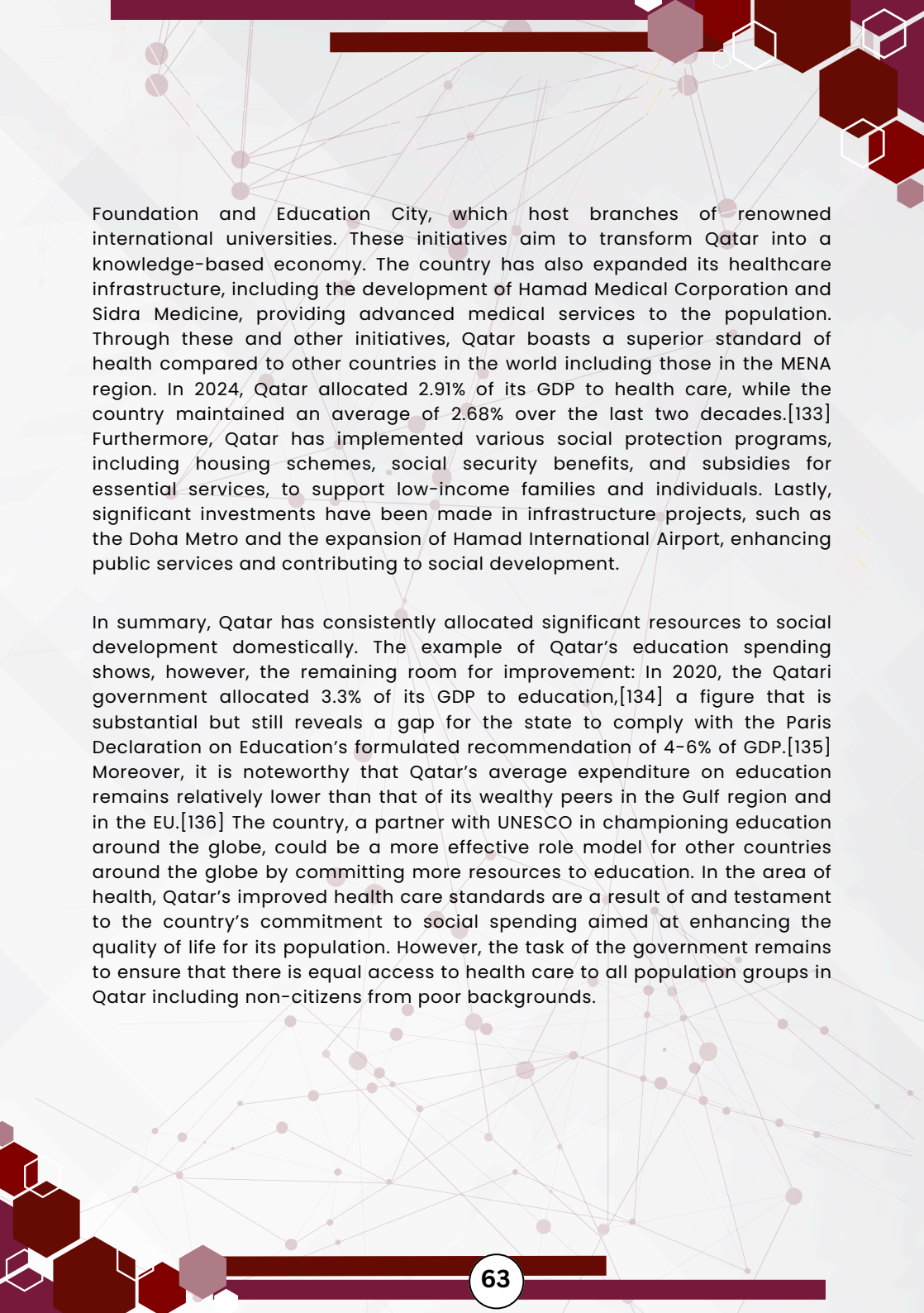
Due to its wealth from substantial oil and gas revenues, Qatar has not been a recipient of SAPs as set by the IMF, also owing to the country's low inflation rate of 2.4% on average between 1980 and 2000,[131] its low fiscal deficits as well as its large oil and gas exports.[132] Consequently, Qatar has had limited direct involvement in the formulation of SAPs or in advocacy efforts targeting SAPs. The country has not played a significant role in influencing the integration of social development goals into Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) at the level of institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As a high-income nation with a relatively small population, Qatar's economic policies and international engagements have primarily focused on its own development and regional diplomacy rather than on global economic reform initiatives.

3.9 Copenhagen Commitment 9: Increase resources allocated to social development

Since 1995, Qatar's domestic social spending has experienced significant growth, reflecting the nation's commitment to enhancing the well-being of its citizens and residents. This increase is evident in several key areas. Qatar has invested heavily in education, establishing institutions like the Qatar

[131] Al-Bassam (2017): The sources of inflation in Qatar: An empirical study (1980–2010). JKAU: Econ. & Adm., 30(1), 215–229.
https://www.kau.edu.sa/Files/320/Researches/72729_45882.pdf. Accessed 21 November 2024.

[132] World Bank (n.d.): GDP growth (annual %) – Qatar.
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=QA>. Accessed 21 November 2024.



Foundation and Education City, which host branches of renowned international universities. These initiatives aim to transform Qatar into a knowledge-based economy. The country has also expanded its healthcare infrastructure, including the development of Hamad Medical Corporation and Sidra Medicine, providing advanced medical services to the population. Through these and other initiatives, Qatar boasts a superior standard of health compared to other countries in the world including those in the MENA region. In 2024, Qatar allocated 2.91% of its GDP to health care, while the country maintained an average of 2.68% over the last two decades.[133] Furthermore, Qatar has implemented various social protection programs, including housing schemes, social security benefits, and subsidies for essential services, to support low-income families and individuals. Lastly, significant investments have been made in infrastructure projects, such as the Doha Metro and the expansion of Hamad International Airport, enhancing public services and contributing to social development.

In summary, Qatar has consistently allocated significant resources to social development domestically. The example of Qatar's education spending shows, however, the remaining room for improvement: In 2020, the Qatari government allocated 3.3% of its GDP to education,[134] a figure that is substantial but still reveals a gap for the state to comply with the Paris Declaration on Education's formulated recommendation of 4-6% of GDP.[135] Moreover, it is noteworthy that Qatar's average expenditure on education remains relatively lower than that of its wealthy peers in the Gulf region and in the EU.[136] The country, a partner with UNESCO in championing education around the globe, could be a more effective role model for other countries around the globe by committing more resources to education. In the area of health, Qatar's improved health care standards are a result of and testament to the country's commitment to social spending aimed at enhancing the quality of life for its population. However, the task of the government remains to ensure that there is equal access to health care to all population groups in Qatar including non-citizens from poor backgrounds.

Qatar actively engages in both regional and global cooperation on social development through various platforms and initiatives. In February 2024, Qatar hosted the Arab Multidimensional Social Development Forum in Doha. This high-level event brought together Arab ministers and officials to discuss significant topics related to social development in the region. The forum aimed at sharing Qatar's successful experiences in development and social fields, along with its pioneering initiatives.[137] More recently, Qatar participated in the fifth edition of the Arab Sustainable Development Week held at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo in November 2024. The event focused on advancing sustainable development goals within the Arab region. [138]

In recent years, Qatar has strengthened international partnerships in humanitarian and development cooperation worldwide. In November 2024, Qatar signed several agreements, including a Memorandum of Understanding with Canada to enhance development cooperation. According to Qatar News Agency (QNA), the official state-run news agency of Qatar, this partnership focuses on

[133] Ibid.

[134] World Bank (2024): Government expenditure on education, total (% of government expenditure) – Qatar.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GB.ZS>. Accessed 15 November 2024.

[135] UNESCO (2021): UNESCO Member States unite to increase investment in education. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-member-states-unite-increase-investment-education>. Accessed 15 November 2024.

[136] European Union (2024): Educational expenditure statistics. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_expenditure_statistics. Accessed 15 November 2024.

[137] The Peninsula (2024): Doha to host Arab Multidimensional Social Development Forum. <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/05/02/2024/doha-to-host-arab-multidimensional-social-development-forum>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[138] Gulf Times (2024): Qatar participates in Arab Sustainable Development week in Cairo. <https://www.gulf-times.com/article/695277/qatar/qatar-participates-in-arab-sustainable-development-week-in-cairo>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

strengthening joint foreign aid policies, empowering youth, promoting women's economic and social roles, and reducing poverty to achieve sustainable development goals.[139]


3.10 Copenhagen Commitment 10: Strengthen cooperation for social development through the UN

The state parties to the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and its accompanying Programme of Action agreed to a three-pronged approach involving national, regional, and international actions to fulfil the ten commitments. This comprehensive framework was designed to ensure that efforts to advance social development were effective, collaborative, and inclusive. On the international level, governments committed (1) to acknowledge the interconnected nature of global challenges, (2) to provide financial resources, technical assistance, and debt relief to support social development in developing countries, (3) to promote fairer global trade and economic systems and (4) to collaborate through multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, to address transnational social development issues.

Qatar has demonstrated a strong commitment to fulfilling its international obligations toward social development, aligning with global frameworks such as the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. One key way Qatar fulfils this commitment is through its substantial contributions to international aid and development. The Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), established in 2012, serves as the primary mechanism for channelling Qatar's foreign aid. Through QFFD, Qatar supports projects in education, health, and economic empowerment in developing countries, exemplifying its dedication to addressing pressing global challenges. For instance, Qatar has provided significant funding for initiatives such as the Educate A Child program, which aims to enrol millions of out-of-school children globally.

Moreover, Qatar has played an active role in fostering multilateral cooperation. Qatar has participated in the IMF consultative process and the World Bank mechanisms and is also part of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review mechanism. The country also hosts numerous international conferences and initiatives to address global social and economic challenges. For example, the Doha International Conference on Social Development regularly brings together world leaders, policymakers, experts, and stakeholders to exchange ideas and solutions and to discuss and formulate strategies aimed at enhancing social welfare and achieving sustainable development goals. The conference does not adhere to a fixed schedule. Instead, it is convened as deemed necessary to address pressing social development issues. The most recent iteration of the conference was the Doha International Conference on Disability and Development, held on December 7–8, 2019. This event concentrated on the intersection of disability rights and sustainable development and addressed several key areas: (1) Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (emphasizing the necessity of integrating individuals with disabilities into all facets of society, including education, employment, and public life), (2) Policy Development (encouraging the formulation of policies that uphold the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, aligning with international standards such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) and (3) Sustainable Development Goals (exploring how

[139] Qatar News Agency (2024): Qatar Strengthens International Partnerships in Humanitarian and Development Cooperation Worldwide.
<https://www.qna.org.qa/en/News-Area/Special-News/2024-11/11/0026-qatar-strengthens-international-partnerships-in-humanitarian-and-development-cooperation-worldwide>. Accessed 26 November 2024



disability inclusion is integral to achieving the SDGs, particularly those related to education, employment, and reducing inequalities). A significant outcome of the conference was the adoption of the Doha Declaration, which serves as a reference point for policy development concerning human rights and sustainable development in the context of disability.[140]

Additionally, Qatar's participation in United Nations forums, including its support for the Doha Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries, underscores its engagement in global efforts to reduce poverty and promote equity. By advocating for regional and international collaboration, Qatar positions itself as a proactive member of the global community, contributing to sustainable development goals on an international scale. Two other examples are (1) the 2012 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP18/CMP8) which took place from November 26 – December 8, 2012 in Doha and included an agreement to extend the Kyoto Protocol until 2020 as well as discussions on loss and damage associated with climate change impacts and (2) the 2008 Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development which took place from November 28 – December 2, 2008 in Doha and served as a follow-up to the 2002 Monterrey Consensus, focusing on reviewing the implementation of commitments related to financing for development. The conference concluded with the adoption of the "Doha Declaration on Financing for Development," which reaffirmed the Monterrey Consensus and emphasized the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to development financing.

On several occasions, Qatar has invited UN agencies and Special Rapporteurs to monitor its progress towards the attainment of international standards:

1. From 19-26 January 2014 Qatar invited the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Gabriela Knaul, to examine the independence of the Judiciary and the free exercise of the legal profession including issues related to administration of justice, fair trial, access to justice, legal aid, and the position of women in the justice system.
2. Between 8 to 16 December 2019 the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Koumbou Boly Barry, was invited by Qatar to gather first-hand information on the effectiveness of the right to free, quality and inclusive education for all.
3. Between 24 November to 1 December 2019 the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, E. Tendayi Achiume was invited to Qatar. The Special Rapporteur's mandate was to assess the authorities' efforts in eliminating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.
4. And in 2020 the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan, was invited to Qatar to assess the impact of unilateral sanctions imposed on Qatar by Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on the human rights of people living in Qatar, in the four states imposing the sanctions as well as on other affected people.

While these invitations testify to Qatar's general willingness to work closely with the Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), some of the country visits have also led to questions about Qatar's influence peddling. Especially the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan, to Qatar in 2020 was controversial due to the geopolitical dynamics and perceptions surrounding

[140]United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2019): Doha International Conference on Disability and Development Concludes with 11 Recommendations. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/news/doha-international-conference-on-disability-and-development-concludes-with-> Accessed 26 November 2024.

Qatar's diplomatic and economic blockade by neighbouring countries.[141] Critics, including some of the blockading states, viewed Douhan's visit as biased in favor of Qatar. They claimed her findings might lack impartiality given the UN's complex relationships with member states and Qatar's significant contributions to UN initiatives.[142] The visit focused on the human rights impact of the blockade on Qatar, which aligned with Qatar's portrayal of itself as a victim of unjust unilateral actions. Opponents argued that Douhan's visit did not equally address alleged Qatari policies, such as its ties to groups viewed as destabilizing the region. Thus, the visit was perceived as taking a stand in a polarized regional conflict. By publicly acknowledging the harm caused by the blockade, Douhan's mission was seen as indirectly challenging the legitimacy of the actions taken by Qatar's regional rivals. The visit also came amid fragile diplomatic efforts to resolve the Gulf Crisis, with international actors attempting to mediate. Douhan's findings, which highlighted human rights abuses resulting from the blockade, added a layer of complexity to these negotiations.

Qatar also leverages its financial resources and diplomatic influence to mediate and support global humanitarian efforts. During crises such as the Syrian refugee crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, Qatar provided financial assistance and logistical support to affected regions. In 2021, Qatar contributed 20 million USD to the COVAX initiative, helping ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines in developing countries. Additionally, Qatar has worked through international organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to implement targeted aid programs. These actions reflect Qatar's broader strategy of combining diplomacy and development to address global social challenges.


As a major step to ensure that the Copenhagen Commitments continue to guide the development agenda of Qatar and the governments around the globe, Qatar is currently preparing to host the second World Summit for Social Development in Doha in November 2025. The summit will reconvene to take stock of the progress made and decide on shaping the future of social development. This summit places Qatar at the centre of planning, convening, and offering leadership during the biggest social development happening of the decade. Consequently, the Summit will further add to Qatar's continuous collaboration with the UN systems and its mechanisms – for implementing and monitoring the outcome of the first World Summit for Social Development in Doha and for achieving the goal of worldwide sustainable development in general.

On November 9, 2024, Qatar's Minister of Social Development and Family, Mariam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad, announced that the government would establish the "Qatar Social Observatory" as a tool for analysing social data and providing a scientific foundation for the development of social policies and national plans.[143] The Observatory is intended to work through field, digital, and community dialogue forms of monitoring. The minister further added that the facility is designed to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and forms part of the efforts to achieve Qatar's cohesive social development objectives as set out in the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National

[141]Background: In 2017, Qatar faced a blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, who accused Qatar of supporting terrorism and fostering close ties with Iran. The measures included airspace restrictions, border closures, and economic sanctions. Qatar argued that these actions were unilateral coercive measures (UCMs) that violated international law and had severe human rights implications, particularly for families split across borders, trade disruptions, and the restriction of free movement.

[142] European Centre for Law and Justice (2022): How Qatar and China are funding UN "independent experts". <https://eclj.org/geopolitics/un/how-qatar-and-china-are-funding-un-independent-experts>. Accessed 26 November 2024.

[143] Qatar News Agency (2024): Minister of Social Development and Family announces preparations for launch of Qatar Social Observatory. <https://www.qna.org.qa/en/News-Area/News/2024-11/09/0016-minister-of-social-development-and-family-announces-preparations-for-launch-of-qatar-social-observatory>. Accessed 24 November 2024.



Development Strategy of the State of Qatar 2024-2030. Commendably, the observatory in addition to a partnership with the National Planning Council, will involve aspects of civil society. To this end, the ministry has entered a partnership with Ibn Khaldon Center for Humanities and Social Sciences at Qatar University. Against this background, it is important to note that both the National Planning Council and the Ibn Khaldon Center are state owned entities. This brings into question the effectiveness of the involvement of civil society. It is therefore imperative in the spirit of the 10th Copenhagen Commitment for Qatar to open its monitoring mechanisms to independent civil society actors at the national, regional, and international level.

4. Conclusion

Qatar's hosting of the 2025 World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) offers an opportunity to spotlight its progress and challenges in adhering to the 1995 Copenhagen Commitments. Over the decades, the nation has made significant strides in areas such as economic development, universal access to education, and healthcare investments. Notable initiatives like the Qatar National Vision 2030 highlight Qatar's commitment to advancing social development. Furthermore, the country's role as a mediator in global conflicts (as contentious as it might sometimes be) and its contributions to least-developed countries through aid and education initiatives underscore its proactive stance on international cooperation.

However, Qatar's internal policies reveal critical gaps in fully realizing the commitments made in 1995. Persistent labour abuses, despite reforms to the Kafala system, highlight the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and legal protections. Civil society remains tightly controlled, with non-governmental organizations operating under significant constraints, limiting advocacy for marginalized communities. Women's rights, though improved in education and employment, remain hampered by patriarchal norms and legal restrictions on autonomy and representation. Additionally, the treatment of religious minorities and non-citizens highlights contradictions in Qatar's approach to inclusivity and equality.

For Qatar to present itself as a credible leader in global social development, it must address these challenges comprehensively. Strengthening judicial independence, expanding civil liberties, and ensuring fair treatment of migrant workers are critical steps. As the WSSD approaches, Qatar has an unparalleled chance to align its domestic policies with international standards, demonstrating a genuine commitment to the principles of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration.

5. Recommendations

1. Labour Reforms

- Ensure effective implementation and enforcement of laws prohibiting forced labour and exploitation, particularly for migrant workers
- Establish independent oversight mechanisms to monitor labour rights violations and provide accessible grievance redressal systems
- Reassess the non-discriminatory minimum wage to reflect the high cost of living in Qatar and enforce timely wage payments

2. Civil Society and Freedom of Expression

- Reform Law No. 12 of 2004 to allow the independent operation and registration of civil society organizations without undue government interference
- Expand freedoms for advocacy groups, including labour unions, to operate without fear of arbitrary detention or dissolution
- Provide avenues for peaceful assembly and public participation in policymaking to strengthen grassroots engagement

3. Judicial Independence

- Reduce executive influence over the judiciary by limiting the Emir's role in appointing judges and ensuring the independence of the Supreme Judiciary Council
- Transition non-Qatari judges from short-term contracts to secure employment terms that safeguard judicial impartiality
- Enhance access to justice for women and non-citizens, particularly for cases involving labour disputes or human rights violations

4. Gender Equality

- Eliminate legal restrictions on women's autonomy, including male guardianship rules, to enable equal access to education, employment, and healthcare
- Introduce measures to increase women's representation in political decision-making, aiming for gender parity in public offices
- Enact comprehensive anti-discrimination laws to address workplace inequalities and ensure equal pay for equal work

5. Religious Freedom

- Expand worship facilities for non-Muslim communities to accommodate growing numbers and reduce overcrowding at the Mesaymeer Religious Complex
- Recognize and register minority faiths, such as the Baha'i community, to ensure freedom of belief and association
- Implement anti-discrimination policies to protect religious minorities from harassment and ensure equal opportunities in public and private sectors

6. Social and Economic Inclusivity


- Extend social security coverage to include migrant workers, providing access to pensions, healthcare, and unemployment benefits
- Invest in affordable housing projects for low-income workers to address disparities in living conditions
- Develop policies to combat income inequality, ensuring fair distribution of Qatar's wealth across all demographics

7. Transparency and Accountability

- Publish comprehensive data on labour, education, and healthcare access to enable accurate assessments of progress toward social development goals
- Implement transparent reporting mechanisms for Qatar's international development aid to ensure alignment with humanitarian principles and counter accusations of geostrategic motivations
- Collaborate with international organizations to independently review Qatar's adherence to the Copenhagen Commitments

8. Education and Health Access

- Address disparities in the quality of education provided to children of migrant workers by subsidizing tuition fees for low-income families
- Expand vocational training programs to increase employment opportunities for both citizens and non-citizens
- Improve access to healthcare for migrant workers by mandating employer-provided health cards and ensuring equal treatment in medical facilities



These recommendations aim to position Qatar not only as a successful host of the 2025 WSSD but also as a credible champion of global social development, who is aligned with the principles and the ten commitments of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration.

Note

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