

Migrant Worker Rights Violations in Qatar

Briefing for the Universal Periodic Review Pre-Session 47 (2024)

At Qatar's last Universal Periodic Review in 2019, it received 52 recommendations related to the protection of migrant workers, supporting 39 and noting 13. Yet Qatar demonstrated a weak record of implementing recommendations, including on existing worker protection laws on recruitment fees and wage theft. As a result, **migrant workers continue to experience significant rights violations – including discrimination, forced labour conditions, and exposure to serious health risks. Combined with barriers to freedom of association, migrant workers face intimidation, threats for reporting violations, and lack remedy and access to justice.** In construction, hospitality, security, and domestic and care work, workers report abusive workplace conditions, particularly related to exposure to excessive heat without proper occupational health and safety precautions. Despite Qatar's initiatives with the ILO to streamline grievance mechanisms and strengthen labour inspections, rights violations remain largely unchecked.

Key recommendations to the Government of Qatar

- **Ratify and/or effectively implement all relevant ILO conventions related to migrant workers' rights,** notably the ILO freedom of association (C087) and collective bargaining conventions (C098).
- **Pass legislation recognising workers' right to freely associate,** organise, bargain and form a trade union in line with Article 22 of the ICCPR and international labour conventions.
- **Protect migrant workers from paying recruitment fees** to employers and recruitment agencies by initiating investigations and legal actions against those who impose such fees on workers.
- **Ensure all workers are paid equally for equal work in line with international standards,** including non-discriminatory minimum wage and wage protection systems for all migrant workers.
- **Penalise all companies that subject workers to forced labour conditions, and provide appropriate remedy for workers** – including meaningful penalties for sponsors such as the inability to purchase a subsequent business license.
- **Prohibit employers from filing “absconding” charges or cancelling residency permits in retaliation** for workers making complaints, and hold non-compliant employers accountable with appropriate penalties.
- **Strengthen labour inspections of workplaces** – particularly for domestic workers – to ensure that they occur on a regular basis, involve direct worker engagement, and lead to a process to remediate issues.

Qatar insufficiently implemented its third cycle recommendations

Migrant Workers Face Barriers to Freedom of Association: Qatar does not allow migrant workers to form or join trade unions. Qatar noted six recommendations calling for ratification during the third cycle, suggesting lack of commitment to action.¹ To date, Qatar has not ratified the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (C87), the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98) nor the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICPMW).

¹ 134.3 (Republic of Moldova), 134.13 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), 134.1 (Mexico, Senegal), 134.2 (Honduras), 134.4 (Egypt), 134.5 (El Salvador).

Violations Amount to Indicators of Forced Labour: During the third cycle, the Government of Qatar supported six recommendations pertaining to forced labour and forced labour indicators. Yet coalition partner investigations found that migrant workers in Qatar were subjected to various combinations of all 11 of the ILO indicators of forced labour during the reporting period.²

Rights violations are tied to the kafala system: The Government of Qatar supported five recommendations related to the *kafala* system³ and noted one.⁴ In spite of 2020 legislative changes,⁵ workers continue to report challenges in leaving and changing employment. Domestic workers reported receiving threats from employers when requesting to change jobs, and that employers often threaten “absconding” charges, which result in deportation, to deter domestic workers from leaving their jobs.⁶

Workers report discriminatory minimum wages: The Government of Qatar supported one recommendation calling for effective labour laws and systems for migrant workers.⁷ Despite the 2020 establishment of minimum wage protections,⁸ salaries for migrants continue to be low, and nationality-based wage discrimination persists: coalition research finds that in Qatar’s low-wage sectors, it is widespread, systematic, and carried out in plain sight. Migrant workers also experience rampant wage theft and/or withholding of wages – occurring notably leading up to the FIFA World Cup.⁹

Deceptive recruitment fees are charged: There were no recommendations noted or accepted on recruitment, but Qatar has collaborated with the ILO on recruitment-related projects. Although Qatari law prohibits the practice of charging recruitment fees, 54% of low-wage workers report paying them.¹⁰ Coalition research identified contract substitution practices and deceptive recruitment fee charges – sometimes for jobs which were sometimes not accurately depicted in their contracts, fostering deception and abuse of vulnerability, contributing to creating conditions of forced labour.¹¹

Labour inspections are limited and ineffective: Qatar’s Labour Inspection Department received support from the ILO in conducting campaigns to raise awareness on heat stress legislation, conditions in shared accommodation, and the top causes of occupational injuries.¹² Yet coalition partners have documented systematic employer practices aimed at preventing workers from reporting rights violations, and inconsistent penalties to employers for confirmed rights violations¹³.

The **Coalition on Labor Justice for Migrants in the Gulf** is a coalition of international human and labor rights organizations, migrant rights organizations, and independent trade unions. We are calling for governments and employers to respect the agency of migrant workers in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to exercise their fundamental human and labor rights throughout recruitment, migration, employment, and return. We focus on the construction, hospitality, and domestic work sectors.

² Equidem, [If we complain, we are fired: Discrimination and Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Stadium Sites](#), 2022; Coalition partners held 2 focus groups with migrant workers in Qatar – primarily migrant domestic workers – between September and November 2023 with workers from India, Ghana, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Kenya.

³ 134.265 (Belgium), 134.240 (France), 134.258 (Uganda), 134.255 (Switzerland), 134.259 (United States)

⁴ 134.50 (Netherlands)

⁵ ILO, [Law No. 19 of 2020 \(Removal of NOC requirement\)](#).

⁶ ILO, [What has changed for migrant workers in Qatar?](#) (November 2022, updated in November 2023); Coalition focus groups (2023), *op.cit.*

⁷ 134.256 (Thailand)

⁸ Qatar, [Law No. \[17\] of 2020](#).

⁹ Equidem, 2022. *op.cit.*

¹⁰ ILO, [What has changed for migrant workers in Qatar?](#) *op.cit.*

¹¹ Equidem, 2022. *op.cit.*

¹² ILO, [What has changed for migrant workers in Qatar?](#) *op.cit.*

¹³ Equidem, 2022. *op.cit.*