

UPR Info Pre-session 47 on the State of Qatar - Labour Justice for Migrants in the Gulf

1. Background

Distinguished Delegates

1.1. It is an honour to participate in the UPR Info Pre-sessions on the State of Qatar. I am Mustafa Qadri, the CEO of Equidem. Equidem is a rightsholder-led, Global Majority-first, human rights organization. I present this statement as a member of the Coalition on Labour Justice for Migrants in the Gulf, the global labour coalition demanding fundamental labour and human rights for the millions of migrant workers in the Gulf region. The coalition, which came together in 2023, includes international trade union bodies, labour rights, and migrant rights organizations that have been monitoring the labour rights situation in the State of Qatar for over a decade.

1.2. Qatar's labour force is comprised of over 2.1 million migrant workers, accounting for 90% of the total workforce, mostly from Asia and Africa, on temporary visas tied to their employer. During Qatar's third cycle Universal Periodic Review, 52 recommendations were made to protect migrant workers, with 39 supported and 13 noted by the government. Despite labour reforms, Qatar's implementation record remains weak, including existing laws on worker-paid recruitment fees and wage theft. Our coalition has spoken to over 200 migrant workers, finding evidence of ongoing significant rights violations, indicating insufficient protections.¹

1.3. In my statement today, I will review these specific reforms and those introduced earlier under previous reporting cycles, assessing their impacts on migrant worker rights.

2. The failure to ratify international human rights conventions

2.1. Qatar's accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Decree No. 40 of 2018) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (Decree No. 41 of 2018) was a step in the right direction. Yet, Qatar included formal reservations that undermine the treaties' protections for women and migrant workers. Additionally, it stated that it would interpret the term "trade unions" according to its national law, thereby limiting the rights of migrant workers to form unions.²

2.2. The State of Qatar should ratify and implement key ILO and UN conventions related to migrant workers, including:

- i. Migrant workers' rights: International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW, 1990)
- ii. Freedom of association and collective bargaining: ILO Conventions C087 (1948), C098 (1949), and C100 (1951)
- iii. Occupational safety and health: ILO Conventions C155 (1981), C187 (2006), and P029 (2014) on forced labor
- iv. Domestic workers' rights: ILO Convention C189 (2011)

3. Labour Recruitment

¹ **Construction sector:** From September 2020-October 2022, Equidem investigated the experiences of migrant workers employed on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 stadium construction sites, including interviews with 60 migrant workers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Kenya, and Uganda.[#] In 2023, Equidem continued to monitor the construction sector in Qatar. **Domestic work:** IDWF 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.

Security sector: Equidem spoke with more than 80 migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, The Gambia, Kenya, Ghana, and Sudan who had signed 6 month contracts in August and September of 2022 with Stark Security.

² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/qatar-finally-joins-two-key-human-rights-treaties-but-what-does-it-really-mean-for-migrant-workers/>

3.13.1. Qatar's labour law (Art.33, Law No. 14 of 2004) prohibits worker-paid recruitment fees. Despite establishing labour recruitment bureaus and Visa Centers , following the second UPR review cycle³ (April 2014 – May 2019) in key countries, this issue persists..⁴

3.2. Yet these measures have failed to tackle worker-paid recruitment fees. Research conducted by Equidem since September 2020 found all of the workers interviewed paying illegal recruitment fees, ranging from USD 99 to USD 4,500.⁵ These fees lead to debt, causing a vicious cycle that affects workers both in Qatar and upon their return home. Qatar has failed to hold fraudulent recruiters and companies accountable, despite a 2023 conviction of six individuals and closure of a company involved in labour trafficking.⁶

3.3. The State of Qatar should

- Improve monitoring of visas and impose strict penalties on labour recruiters and sponsors who charge recruitment fees and deceive workers about their jobs and subject them to forced labour practices.
- Improve awareness among migrant workers about legally permissible contracts and amendments to labour laws.

4. Wages and related benefits

4.1. Act No. 1 of 2015, which amended provisions of the Labour Code (Law No. 14 of 2004), introduced a “wage protection system for workers who are subject to the provisions of the Labour Code” and stipulates that wages are to be paid into an account the worker has at a bank in the country.⁷ However, our coalition has documented numerous cases of non-payment, late payment, and underpayment among migrant workers, particularly construction workers.⁸ Some workers receive no wages at all, while others are paid less than they are owed or forced to work overtime without compensation.⁹

4.2. In March 2021, Qatar introduced a minimum wage of 1,000 Qatar Riyal, which applies to all employees across all sectors in Qatar, including domestic workers.¹⁰ However, in reality migrant workers continue to earn salaries that are often well below the minimum wage. For example, construction workers reported monthly wages ranging from 600 to 3,500 Qatar Rials (\$165-\$960), with most earning between 910 and 1,800 Qatar Rials (\$250-\$500).¹¹

4.3. The State of Qatar should:

³ [https://www.mol.gov.qa/admin/LawsDocuments/Law%20No.%20\(14\)%20of%202004%20Promulgating%20the%20Labour%20Law.pdf](https://www.mol.gov.qa/admin/LawsDocuments/Law%20No.%20(14)%20of%202004%20Promulgating%20the%20Labour%20Law.pdf)

⁴ <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/q19/057/65/pdf/q1905765.pdf?token=wIEGcaDton9Pofq4T8&fe=true>

⁵ Equidem, “If we complain, we are fired”: Discrimination and Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Stadium Sites, available online: https://www.equidem.org/assets/downloads/Equidem_Qatar_World_Cup_Stadiums_Report_Final.pdf
Evidence from 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.

⁶ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/qatar/>

⁷ Labour Law No. 14 of 2004, and Entry, Exit and Residence Law No. 21 of 2015, Available online at:

[https://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/1037/Law%20No%20\(14\)%20of%20the%20Year%202004.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/1037/Law%20No%20(14)%20of%20the%20Year%202004.pdf)

⁸ Equidem, “If we complain, we are fired”: Discrimination and Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Stadium Sites, available online:

https://www.equidem.org/assets/downloads/Equidem_Qatar_World_Cup_Stadiums_Report_Final.pdf

⁹ Equidem, “If we complain, we are fired”: Discrimination and Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Stadium Sites, available online: https://www.equidem.org/assets/downloads/Equidem_Qatar_World_Cup_Stadiums_Report_Final.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/tax/documents/2020/qatar-new-legislation-statutory-minimum-wage-workforce-flexibility.pdf>

¹¹ Equidem, “If we complain, we are fired”: Discrimination and Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Stadium Sites, available online: https://www.equidem.org/assets/downloads/Equidem_Qatar_World_Cup_Stadiums_Report_Final.pdf

- Establish a living wage, indexed to inflation, to ensure workers can afford a decent standard of living.
- Enhance wage transparency and accountability by:
 - Requiring employers to use the Wage Protection System (WPS) for timely payments.
 - Mandating transparent salary grades based on objective criteria.
 - Ensuring contracts and WPS payments reflect these salary grades.
- Strengthen contractor compliance by:
 - Requiring proof of timely wage payments through WPS.
 - Demonstrating adherence to international labor standards.

5. Barriers to Changing Employers

5.1. Despite the Act No. 21 of 2015 regulates the entry, departure, and residency of migrant workers and abolishes all restrictions on the ability of migrant workers to change employers¹², and the removal of the No Objection Certificate (NOC) requirement in 2020 (Law No.19 of 2020)¹³ our research has found that many workers from countries such as the Gambia, Nigeria, Pakistan, India, and Kenya were unaware of the new procedures or their rights on this front, and continued to face obstacles when attempting to switch jobs.

6. Occupational Health and Safety

6.1. During the third UPR review cycle (May 2019 – November 2024) Qatar enacted two key reforms: extending summer working regulations to prevent heat stress and mandating health insurance for all expatriates and visitors¹⁴ Despite reforms, our coalition's research found construction workers violating the midday outdoor work ban, working up to 12 hours a day in extreme heat. FIFA World Cup stadium workers reported similar abuses, including inadequate safety measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵ Domestic workers also faced exploitation, including months without pay, poor living conditions, and lack of food or food stipend.¹⁶

7. Worker Organizing

7.1. By 2019, the government mandated the formation of labour committees for collective bargaining in companies with more than 30 workers (Art. 124. Law No. 14 of 2004).¹⁷ Despite these, our research has found that workers in FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 projects were forced to work long hours under constant threat of job loss¹⁸ and domestic workers also report facing verbal abuse, threats, and intimidation for making complaints.¹⁹

The State of Qatar should:

- Ratify and implement ILO and UN conventions on migrant workers' rights, including domestic workers and freedom of association.
- Enact laws recognizing workers' rights to: a)Freely associate and organize b)Bargain collectively c)Form trade unions

¹² <https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/home>

¹³ Law No. 19 of 2020, Available online at: https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/qatar/WCMS_754881/lang--en/index.htm

¹⁴ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/documents/genericdocument/wcms_794519.pdf

¹⁵ Equidem, "If we complain, we are fired": Discrimination and Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Stadium Sites, available online: https://www.equidem.org/assets/downloads/Equidem_Qatar_World_Cup_Stadiums_Report_Final.pdf

¹⁶ Data held on file with Coalition partners.

¹⁷ https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@arabstates/@ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_742257.pdf

¹⁸ Equidem, "If we complain, we are fired": Discrimination and Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers on FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Stadium Sites, available online: https://www.equidem.org/assets/downloads/Equidem_Qatar_World_Cup_Stadiums_Report_Final.pdf

¹⁹ Data held on file by Coalition partners

- Conduct regular labor inspections to identify and address violations, prioritizing domestic worker
Launch an awareness campaign to inform migrant workers about their rights, including a) Freedom to change employers without restrictions b) Removal of the NOC requirement c) Accessible mechanisms for reporting and resolving related issues.