

KEEP WATCHING QATAR'S TREATMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS AFTER THE WORLD CUP 2022

ACHRS STATEMENT | MARTINE RØNDE BJERG



ACHRS has concerns that the media spotlight after the World Cup will stop and lead to Qatar falling back into the old (and still used) patterns of human rights abuse. ACHRS thus strongly urges the international community to continue to watch Qatar and the treatment of migrant workers, as the end of the world cup does not equal the end of the massive labor import.

Since Qatar was granted the opportunity to host the World Cup 2022, the international community has observed human rights conditions in the country. Especially the conditions of the migrant workers building the stadiums for the World Cup have sparked debates among human rights organisations.

Qatar has built seven stadiums for the World Cup finals, a new airport, metro system, roads and about a hundred new hotels.

Qatar stated that 30,000 migrant workers were hired just to build the stadiums, most of which come from India, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Nepal. Overall, 90 % of Qatar's labor force consists of foreign labor, which was the case before getting granted the World Cup 2022 host role.

Leaked documents from the Guardian show a shocking number of 6500 deaths of migrant workers. Amnesty International estimates of that over 15.000 migrant workers have died in Qatar since 2010. The Qatari authorities try to hide them and rarely do abductions of the deceased, although leaked documents show that most of them are young men dying from heart attacks, likely due to long working hours and heavy physical work in extreme heat.



Over the last 12 years, scholars, journalists and human rights organisations have investigated migrant workers' rights in Qatar, and documented several human rights abuses, including harsh working conditions, lack of freedom of movement, and lack of salary. These abuses are largely enabled by the kafāla system (نظام الكفالة).

The Kafāla System Enabling Exploitation

The controversial kafāla system is an immigration policy used in the Gulf states for labor immigration.

The intention of the system, created under the GCC's big need for labor import under the oil boom, was to create temporary work visas to support the rapid development. What is distinctive about this system is the role of the kafeel, (كفيل) the sponsor in-land, either an individual or a company, which is responsible for the migrant worker legally and financially.

The execution of the kafāla system has shown to be problematic, mostly because of the distinct power imbalance in favor of the kafeel, which allows the kafeel to exploit the worker and easily ignore the working conditions agreed upon in the contract, e.g., by giving longer working days, not paying for accommodation as they are legally required to do, paying lower salaries or no salary at all.

The delayed or non-existing salaries are often devastating to the migrant worker since their families rely on the remittances, and the migrant worker can do little to nothing to protest this. The almost complete control over the migrant starts with the migrant indebteding him or herself before arrival, thus being vulnerable to economic changes, and continues with the isolation and widespread tendency of the kafeel confiscating the workers' passport.

Reforms After Media Spotlight

The migrant worker has until recent policy changes only been allowed to change employer if the kafeel agrees and has only been allowed to issue complaints over working conditions if the kafeel agrees – which is of course unlikely.

The international media spotlight has led to significant reforms of the immigration policy, for example the abolition of the kafāla system. Now, the confiscation of passports is illegal, and the migrant worker has the right to change employers. Besides that, FIFA has announced that affected families will receive compensation for their losses.

However, according to several reports, implementation of the new reforms is executed poorly, and most families affected by the exploitation have not received any help. The latter is because the lack of obductions leads to the deaths not being considered as work-related under the Qatari labor law, leaving the family without the right to compensation.

ACHRS' Position

ACHRS denounces the treatment of migrant workers and strongly criticizes the lack of implementation of otherwise positive reforms.

ACHRS has concerns that the media spotlight after the World Cup will stop and lead to Qatar falling back into the old (and still used) patterns of human rights abuse. ACHRS thus strongly urges the international community to continue to watch Qatar and the treatment of migrant workers, as the end of the world cup does not equal the end of the massive labor import.

Sources:

Amnesty 2020; Human Rights Watch; DR; the Guardian; bbc; Forces; The Guardian; Aarthi, S.V; Sahu, Mrutujanaya. 2021. "Migration Policy in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States: A Critical Analysis" Contemporary Review of the Middle East 8(4) 410– 434, 2021;

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Picture source: <https://www.sportsintegrityinitiative.com/>