

June 2, 2020 2:30PM EDT

Ensure Justice for Migrant Workers Sent Home

Hasty Repatriation During Covid-19 Leading to Labor Violations



Workers walk towards the construction site of the Lusail stadium which will be built for the upcoming 2022 Fifa soccer World Cup during a stadium tour in Doha, Qatar, December 20, 2019. © 2019 REUTERS/Kai Pfaffenbach

(Beirut) – Countries around the world that send and receive migrant workers should enact a justice mechanism through which hastily repatriated workers can seek redress for human rights and labor violations, Human Rights Watch said today in endorsing a [joint letter](#) by a coalition of migrants rights and labor organizations.

The Covid-19 pandemic has severely affected millions of migrant workers in destination countries, many of whom have lost their jobs, been forced by employers to take unpaid leave or reduced wages, or not received their wages at all. Many migrant workers struggle with whether to return home despite their outstanding labor claims, while others remain stranded in cities or border areas in precarious conditions without access to services or support.

“Migrant workers worldwide are suffering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic,” said [Rothna Begum](#),

senior women's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The least governments can do is make sure that these workers get the salaries and compensation they have earned before they were forced to leave their jobs."

Each year, millions of dollars are lost in potential remittances due to wage theft. Repatriation of migrant workers without due diligence by the countries involved in the time of the pandemic will only exacerbate the injustices to which migrant workers are often subjected.

Human Rights Watch for instance has documented over several years how many migrant workers in the Middle East, mostly from Asia and [Africa](#), have been forced to leave the country they were working in without being paid wages owed to them.

Countries of destination and origin have begun procedures to [repatriate](#) migrant workers. The groups endorsing the joint letter warned that without adequate oversight by the authorities, [employers might take advantage](#) of mass repatriation programs to terminate and return workers to whom they have not provided full compensation, wages, and benefits.

The groups [said](#) that countries of origin and destination should work together to urgently put in place a justice mechanism through which repatriated workers who lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic can address labor disputes. Such a mechanism should be fast, accessible, affordable, and efficient. The mechanism should ensure that all repatriated workers with legitimate claims are able to access justice and compensation.

The mechanism should also provide safeguards and mobilize resources to ensure that migrants are able to pursue their cases after they return to their countries, the groups said. They should have access to legal advice and support, a way to facilitate power of attorney procedures, and ways to ease requirements for in-person testimony. The countries of destination where the migrants worked should require employers and businesses to keep all employment records and allow workers to take copies of their records with them.

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