



QATAR MIGRANTS

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Qatar: New laws to protect migrant workers are a step in the right direction

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The Qatari authorities have taken a significant step towards protecting migrant workers by passing two laws which could strike at the heart of the abusive kafala system, but full implementation remains key if the country aims to truly end labour exploitation, Amnesty International said.

The Emir of Qatar today abolished restrictions on migrant workers changing jobs without their employer's permission and introduced a monthly minimum wage of 1,000 Qatari riyal, plus basic living allowances for some workers.

“ For too long, laws that ban workers from changing jobs without their employer’s permission, along with widespread low pay, have left migrant workers in Qatar at the mercy of abusive employers. We welcome the enactment of these laws, and now call on the Qatari authorities to ensure they are swiftly and properly implemented. ”

Steve Cockburn, Amnesty International’s Head of Economic and Social Justice

“For too long, laws that ban workers from changing jobs without their employer’s permission, along with widespread low pay, have left migrant workers in Qatar at the mercy of abusive employers. We welcome the enactment of these laws, and now call on the Qatari authorities to ensure they are swiftly and properly implemented,” said Steve Cockburn, Amnesty International’s Head of Economic and Social Justice.

“If implemented as promised, the removal of restrictions on workers changing jobs should make it easier for workers to escape abuse. This is an encouraging sign that Qatar may finally be heading in the right direction, and we call on Qatar to go further with these reforms, including removing the charge of absconding, to make sure that the rights of all workers are fully protected.”

The two reforms were first announced by the Emir of Qatar in October 2019 and were signed into law today.

The first will abolish the ‘No-objection certificate’ which prevents migrant workers from changing jobs without the permission of their employer. Under the new law, workers will be able to leave their job by providing a one-month written notice if they have worked for the employer for less than two years, or a two month notice if they have worked for them for longer. The worker will not have to pay these costs, and the transfer request would be processed by the Ministry of Labour.

However, the reforms have not removed the ability of employers to file criminal ‘absconding’ charges against workers who leave their job without permission. Employers will also remain responsible for renewing and cancelling their workers’ residence permits, thus retaining considerable power over their employees.

The second reform introduces a 1,000 Qatari riyal monthly minimum wage (\$275/£211), plus allowances of 300 QAR for food and 500 QAR for accommodation if these are not provided by the company. This wage applies to everyone, including domestic workers who have previously been excluded from reform measures. In 2019, the ILO conducted a study to advise on setting a minimum wage level. The study has not been made public, but media reports last year suggest it recommended a minimum wage of at least 1,250 QAR.

The minimum wage replaces a temporary minimum wage of 750 QAR introduced in 2017, although some nationalities already had higher minimum wages negotiated via bilateral agreements. Nepali workers were already paid a minimum of 900 QAR, for example, and Filipino workers 1,400 QAR per month.

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“This will need to be accompanied by much tougher action against employers who fail to pay their employees properly, or at all. To guarantee everyone’s right to a decent standard of living, Qatar must also

clamp down on illegal recruitment fees that leave many migrant workers in debt bondage.

“These reforms are a positive development, but the Qatari authorities have much more work to do to end the systematic abuse of migrant workers. With these new laws in place, we call on Qatar to implement strong inspection and complaints mechanisms to allow workers who have been victims of human rights abuses to swiftly access justice and remedy.”

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