

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

Story

NGOs call for justice mechanism & protections for repatriated Asian workers during Covid-19 crisis

On 1 June 2020, a coalition of NGOs and unions launched an urgent appeal letter calling for an urgent justice mechanism for workers who have been impacted and repatriated as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The economic fallout from the pandemic will include an estimated 195 million lost jobs, including an estimated 5 million in the Middle East, many of these held by migrant workers. There are serious concerns that without proper controls or procedures, repatriated workers may not receive with due wages, compensation and benefits, and that millions may be burdened with debt bondage as they struggle to pay of growing recruitment fees.

In light of these risks, the letter highlights the challenges posed by mass repatriation, including that employers may take advantage of the situation to terminate and return workers who have not been paid due compensation, wages and benefits. They call for states to ensure that companies and employers are fulfilling their human rights obligations, warning that without proper oversight states may become "complicit" in a situation where workers do not earn their wages, have workplace grievances heard, nor receive justice.

The letter was launched by Migrant Forum in Asia, Lawyers Beyond Borders Network, Cross Regional Centre for Migrants and Refugees, South Asia Trade union Council, and Solidarity Center, and endorsed by a group of international and national unions and labour rights groups, including the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre.

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. Millions will suffer if this crime goes unnoticed. We cannot see this as collateral damage brought by the pandemic... The pandemic must not stifle our will, our spirit and commitment for justice. If we are to 'Build Back Better', we cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the issue of wage theft that has been persistent across migration corridors for years, and will be unprecedented in the case of repatriated migrant workers in the COVID 19 pandemic.

William Gois, Regional Coordinator of Migrant Forum in Asia

On 10th July the coalition reiterated their call, outlining three proposed areas for reform including: establishing an International Claims Commission, establishing a Compensation Fund for

A Large Civil Society and Global Trade Unions Coalition Launch a Call for an Urgent Justice Mechanism for Repatriated Migrant Workers



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compensation in wage theft cases; and, requesting states "rebuild migrant-centered justice systems at the national level" to ensure workers can access justice and hold employers to account.

On 12th August the campaign released an appeal (see below in full) to businesses outlining the responsibilities of businesses during the pandemic, and 14 steps for employers to take to ensure they are protect migrant workers from wage theft.

You can sign the [Justice for Wage Theft petition](#) to demand governments act to respond to the needs of migrant workers and establish justice mechanisms to address the crisis of mass terminations and wage theft caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Say Yes to Justice video



Yes to Justice campaign: Migrant Forum in Asia

Story timeline

Call for an Urgent Justice Mechanism for Repatriated Migrant Workers



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