

MFA SEEKS ON-THE-GROUND CASE STUDIES OF THE NON-PAYMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS, IN SUPPORT OF THE JUSTICE FOR WAGE THEFT CAMPAIGN

The Migrant Forum in Asia seeks reports of payment theft to strengthen its campaign for wage justice, CBP bans imports of products from China's Xinjiang region into the U.S., and several new reports flag up the increased risk to children as a result of the pandemic.



The Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) is seeking submissions – from organizations and individuals – which document the non-payment of wages, benefits and dues owed to migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, in support of the Justice for Wage Theft campaign and its [Call for an Urgent Justice Mechanism for Repatriated Migrant Workers](#) appeal.

Foreign workers are among the groups that have been worst affected during this period, and migrants in various destination countries have found themselves in dire situations. The impact of COVID-19 has resulted in a surge in violations and abuses against migrant workers, including the exacerbation of the long-standing problem of wage theft. Faced with possible deportation, many are forced to accept the withholding or reduction of their wages without any guarantee that they will be reimbursed at all, a practice which is in breach of labour standards. And tens of thousands of migrant workers have found themselves jobless and with no option but to return home – a situation which increases their risk of non-remuneration.

In Bangladesh, [more than 300 returning migrants](#) have been detained upon arrival so far. Although they had been cheated by local agents and exploited abroad, they were sent to jail under section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which allows the police to arrest someone on the basis of having 'reasonable suspicion' that they may be involved in an offence outside Bangladesh. After months of confusion, [Nepal's government](#) has finally stepped forward to take care of undocumented Nepali workers in various labour destination countries, who have been left out of the COVID-19 pandemic repatriation scheme. Last week, [Indonesia repatriated 52 Indonesian migrant workers](#) who were stranded in Saudi Arabia and have been unpaid since 2018. Also last week, a [petition](#) was filed in an Indian court seeking legal remedy from the Indian government for all workers, and asking for the claims and grievances of all repatriated Indian migrants to be documented.

In the wake of the pandemic, adequate and timely policy responses from both remittance-sending and remittance-receiving countries are critical for migrant workers. In June, a large coalition of civil society organizations and trade unions launched the Justice for Wage Theft campaign – a call to action urging UN agencies, governments and businesses to act responsibly in addressing these issues and to ensure justice for migrant workers in their countries of destination and origin. The first two appeals call for a justice mechanism to address the situation of migrant workers who have been repatriated without their due wages and benefits, and the third urges private sector employers to protect migrant workers who have either lost jobs or are facing difficulties as a result of wage theft during the pandemic. Earlier this summer, MFA held a webinar on *Transitional Justice: Towards "Building Back Better"*, in relation to the campaign.

Currently, the campaign is seeking support from organizations on the ground to aid the documentation of wage theft cases. [Submissions](#) can be made through the online portal or using this [offline form](#).

Individuals are encouraged to [sign the petition](#) and circulate the campaign widely on their social media and other online platforms.

Here's a round-up of other noteworthy news and initiatives:

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials have issued five Withhold Release Orders (WROs) to block imports of products from China's western region of Xinjiang, due to accusations of forced labour and systemic human rights abuses against the Uighur people. The products include electronics, hair products, cotton and apparel, as well as those made in a state-sponsored re-education center described by CBP as an 'internment camp'.

According to media reports, the Brussels prosecutor's office was informed of the movements of two Vietnamese minors and their involvement with human traffickers days before they boarded a lorry to the UK, where they were found dead along with 37 other victims in October last year. The two youths had been staying in a reception center for minors in the Netherlands from where they were picked up by a Belgian taxi.

Blue Dragon Children's Foundation explains how traffickers in Vietnam are adapting their operations to work around the COVID-19 pandemic, and how anti-trafficking organizations need to stay agile by design, ready to shift and change gears just as the traffickers do.

After four years at HOME's shelter in Singapore, a migrant domestic worker was fully acquitted at the High Court of charges of theft that had previously been levelled against her. In a blog post, HOME (Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics) shares the story and also highlights the systemic difficulties faced by migrant workers in Singapore when they are wrongfully accused.

In the newest Risk Bulletin of Illicit Economies in Eastern and Southern Africa, the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime presents a special report on the alarming rise of the recruitment of children by gangs in South Africa and Kenya since the start of the pandemic. School closures and economic hardship have left vulnerable children more at risk than ever.

The newest part of the *Migrants from Another World* series focuses on investigations into human trafficking and drug cartels along the migrant route through the Americas. In recent years, the trafficking business has boomed as new routes to the area have emerged, especially from countries such as Nepal, India and Bangladesh.

Brazil, together with UNODC and other partners, has launched the 'Freedom in the Air' (Liberdade No Ar) initiative to raise awareness of human trafficking among flight attendants, ground staff at airports and passengers.

Join the [Survivor Alliance](#) for a unique online event on 17 September, on the links between historical and contemporary forms of forced labour and insights into the need for anti-racism in the modern anti-slavery movement.

The University of Nottingham's Rights Lab, which delivers research to help end modern slavery, is seeking a [Research Associate/Fellow in Survivor Journeys and Support](#).