

Sign in

Support us →

News Opinion Sport Culture Lifestyle

World ▶ Europe US Americas Asia Australia **Middle East** Africa Inequality



Human rights in focus

Qatar firms' failure to pay leaves migrant workers destitute - report

Despite government measures, thousands left struggling during Covid outbreak as companies withhold salaries and benefits, research shows

Supported by



[About this content](#)

Pete Pattison

Thu 26 Nov 2020 07.30 GMT

Companies in [Qatar](#) have failed to pay “hundreds of millions of dollars” in salaries and other benefits to low-wage workers since the coronavirus outbreak, according to new research by the human rights group Equidem.

In its [report](#), Equidem describes how thousands of workers have been dismissed without notice, put on reduced wages or unpaid leave, denied outstanding salary and end of service payments, or forced to pay for their own flights home.

The report’s findings appear to amount to “wage theft” on an unprecedented scale, leaving “worker after worker” destitute, short of food and unable to send money home during the pandemic, in one of the richest countries in the world.

“I came here to work for my family, not to be a beggar living on my own,” said a cleaner from Bangladesh, who said he had not received his salary for four months.

In separate [research](#), the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre found that unpaid or delayed wages were cited by workers in 87% of cases of alleged labour abuse affecting almost 12,000 workers since 2016.

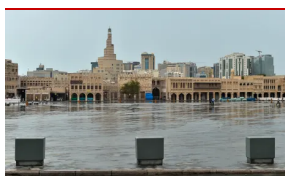
Around 2 million migrant workers - mostly from south Asia - work in Qatar, many on [construction projects related to the 2022 World Cup](#).

Equidem praises some measures put in place by the Qatar government during the coronavirus pandemic. In March, the government made it mandatory for companies to continue to pay workers in quarantine or government-imposed isolation, and set up a [£625m loan scheme](#) to help companies do so, but the report warns of “widespread failure to comply” with this and other regulations.

The government later [permitted](#) companies that had stopped operating due to Covid restrictions to put workers on unpaid leave or terminate their contracts as long as

they complied with requirements of the labour law, including giving a notice period and paying outstanding benefits.

The report highlights a number of companies that exploited or ignored this directive. Up to 2,000 workers employed by one construction company were laid off on the spot, workers claim. Most did not receive their outstanding salary or end of service settlement, a payment equivalent to three weeks' salary for each full year of work.



Qatar's migrant workers beg for food as Covid-19 infections rise

[➔ Read more](#)

“Many migrant workers are in an extremely vulnerable position with no real ability to assert their rights or seek remedy for violations,” says the report.

Mustafa Qadri, the director of Equidem, said the lack of a lawful right to organise or join a trade union has been particularly damaging. “It has prevented workers from having a seat at the table with government and employers to negotiate an equitable share of funds,” he said.

The report describes similar findings in the [United Arab Emirates](#) and Saudi Arabia, as well as policies in response to the pandemic which amount to racial discrimination. In both countries, the authorities required private companies to continue to provide wages and benefits to nationals, but allowed them to reduce wages or stop paying non-nationals.

In a statement, the Qatar government said its response to the pandemic, “has been driven by the highest international standards of public health policy and the protection of human rights”.

The government has provided free testing and treatment and said, “employers failing to pay their staff on time or withholding end of service payments have faced disciplinary action, including heavy fines and bans that prevent them from operating”.

News is under threat ...

... just when we need it the most. Millions of readers around the world are flocking to the Guardian in search of honest, authoritative, fact-based reporting that can help them understand the biggest challenge we have faced in our lifetime. But at this crucial moment, news organisations are facing a cruel financial double blow: with fewer people able to leave their homes, and fewer news vendors in operation, we're seeing a reduction in newspaper sales across the UK. Advertising revenue continues to fall steeply meanwhile as businesses feel the pinch. We need you to help fill the gap.

We believe every one of us deserves equal access to vital public service journalism. So, unlike many others, we made a different choice: to keep Guardian journalism open for all, regardless of where they live or what they can afford to pay. This would not be possible without financial contributions from those who can afford to pay, who now support our work from 180 countries around the world.

Reader financial support has meant we can keep investigating, disentangling and interrogating. It has protected our independence, which has never been so critical. We are so grateful.

We need your support so we can keep delivering quality journalism that's open and independent. And that is here for the long term. Every reader contribution, however big or small, is so valuable. **Support The Guardian from as little as \$1 - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.**

Support The Guardian →

Remind me in January

VISA



Topics

Qatar / **Human rights in focus**

Middle East and North Africa / Saudi Arabia / United Arab Emirates / World Cup 2022 / news



Most popular

World ▶ Europe US Americas Asia Australia **Middle East** Africa Inequality

News Opinion Sport Culture Lifestyle