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3 steps that India can take to address wage theft of Indian migrants in Arab Gulf



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Since March, when the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak happened in the Arab Gulf countries, thousands of Indian migrant workers were forced to return home giving up their unpaid wages.

Citing the COVID-19 induced economic crisis, employers were shirking of their responsibility to honor migrant workers' rights and the migrant workers were forced to return empty handed.

At this juncture, below given are three steps that can be adopted to address the Wage Theft.

Step 1

Document and do so accurately: One of the greatest barriers to addressing the cases of wage theft is the *lack of a rapid, systematic collection and registration of information*. In the rush to repatriate, neither countries of origin nor the countries of destination have been able to successfully capture the scale of the phenomenon of wage theft experienced by migrant workers. Cases of wage theft continue to be under-reported and remain unaddressed: there is a lack of official, reliable documentation that is key to prove migrant workers' cases. To this end, missions of countries of origin are urged to put in place robust and easily accessible reporting systems to document whether migrant workers have been paid their due wages and benefits upon termination of their employment contract. To document accurately, missions should set up an online complaints mechanism, a walk-in option, and a 24 hour hotline.

Importantly, migrant workers must be allowed to file a grievance even in the absence of formal employment documentation, as the employer may have refused to provide it.

Step 2

Lighten the burden of accessing justice: Collection of documentation must be accompanied by practical actions. Missions of the countries of origin must intervene to *facilitate power of attorney procedures* prior to initiating any return procedures for those workers who have not received their due wages or benefits. This will ensure that workers are able to access justice even after their return to their countries of origin. Where workers prefer to remain in the country of destination until their cases are resolved, missions should provide workers with the necessary assistance.

Countries of origin must set up booths at local airports and quarantine facilities to give returning workers the opportunity to register claims upon arrival to the country of origin.

Once migrant workers have returned, countries of origin must ensure that they continue to have the opportunity to come forward and register their claims and

grievances, for free. To facilitate this, countries of origin must rapidly set up platforms where workers can lodge online complaints and also put in place hotline numbers that workers can call on any day to learn about how to come forward and register their claims for wage theft. Migrant workers must be provided regular and prompt updates on the progress and the outcome of their claims against wage theft.

Step 3

Inform and empower: to enable the migrant workers to effectively claim their rights, the state must use all means of communication available including public and social media, to inform them of the mechanisms through which they can claim their rights and register their grievances.

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