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Bangladeshi workers abroad: 115 wage theft cases filed in five months

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At least 115 wage theft cases of the Bangladeshi migrant workers have been filed by the Justice For Wage Theft (JWT-Uwazi) platform in the last five months of this year, according to a report launched on Wednesday.

Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) members and partners jointly launched the second volume of the bi-annual analysis on “Crying Out for Justice: Wage Theft Against Migrant Workers During COVID-19” which documented the cases of wage stealing from January through May of 2021.



During the report's virtual launch, it said migrant workers from across India, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Bangladesh were in great distress.

The report marks the first anniversary of the Justice for Wage Theft campaign, a joint effort by a large coalition of trade unions and civil society organisations, inaugurated on 1 June, 2020.

The campaign calls for an urgent justice mechanism building for the migrant workers repatriated due to the COVID-19 pandemic fallout without being paid their due wages, salaries, and end-of-service benefits.

More than a year into the pandemic, millions of workers have still been anxiously waiting for their unpaid wages. Unfortunately, there has been hardly any progress in respect to access to justice.

A total of 1,113 new cases were filed on the JWT-Uwazi platform during the reporting period. In terms of the locations where the cases occurred (country of destination), the United Arab Emirates topped the chart with 357 cases, followed by 252 cases in Saudi Arabia and 182 cases in Kuwait. Malaysia, the Philippines, Bahrain, Qatar, China and Oman each have between 18 and 95 cases.

Counting by countries of origin, 620 cases were India, followed by 200 from Indonesia, 116 from Nepal, 115 from Bangladesh and 62 from the Philippines.

The largest number of cases of wage theft took place in the construction sector (59%). This was followed by the manufacturing sector (13%), domestic works (10.33%) and retailing activities (4%). Compared to 2020, there has also been a significant increase in cases of wage theft in domestic works, retail and office assistants.

Presenting the report at the high-level virtual meeting, William Gois, Regional Coordinator of Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), said, "Prevalence of wage theft is endemic to labour migration."

He said millions of migrant workers have returned homes from the destinations during the COVID-19 pandemic and many of them returned as victims of wage burglary.

Putting emphasis on their corporate responsibility, William Gois said private entrepreneurs should come forward to resolve the problem.

In the previous launch of the first volume of the report, Nnette Motus, Regional Director of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Asia-Pacific said: "There is a continued lack of access to justice mechanisms further revealed in this time of crisis. Undeniably, there is a need for increased, proactive, bilateral multi-stakeholder dialogue and collaboration to address such situations (of wage theft) underlined by the data we all collect, which we have the responsibility to collect."

David Schilling, Senior Program Director of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) stresses the urgency of the situation: "This is urgent, this is not something we can put on an agenda for tomorrow, it is today."

John K. Bingham, Head of Policy of the International Catholic Migration Commission, based in Geneva, Alonzo Suson, Country program director of Solidarity Center Sri Lanka and Dr. Lily Gomes, senior program officer of Solidarity Center in Dhaka took part in the virtual meeting.

With thousands of migrant workers suffering from wage theft in the Asia region, the gravity of the issue across the globe is expected to be much more devastating in scale, said the report.

Without proper procedures in place to document and monitor the grievances of migrant workers throughout the repatriation process, millions of cases of wage theft during the pandemic are predicted to go unaddressed. Moreover, migrants themselves are hesitant or refuse to report or file a case in fear of retaliation from employers and in fear of being unable to pursue new employment opportunities, it added.

In the absence of an effective mechanism that will aid migrant workers in getting back their wages, they will only remain victims to an exploitative and unjust system that will continue to prevail in labour migration governance.

