Mission statement

ITUC-Asia Pacific Mission to Qatar:

Major advances in labour reform set a solid platform for worker protection beyond 2022

The ITUC-Asia Pacific conducted a three-day technical mission to Qatar from 9 to 11 March 2022 to better understand the labour reforms and their implementation in Qatar, to identify remaining gaps in the full protection of human and labour rights and put forward recommendations to further improve living and working conditions of migrant workers.

The mission composed of trade union migration experts from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, the ITUC Asia Pacific and the ITUC met with representatives of the government of Qatar from the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Interior as well as with labour attaches from embassies of different countries of origin. The mission also met with global union community liaison officers and other migrant community leaders. The delegation observed a meeting of the Central Labour-Management Consultation Committee of Qatar Foundation’s main contractors and visited the labour conciliation tribunals, a migrant workers’ clinic operated by the Red Crescent, and a compound for shared accommodation.

The regional mission complemented an ongoing global dialogue between the government of Qatar and the ITUC and global union federations through bi-annual meetings that have shaped the labour reforms from 2017 onwards.

In addition to the abolishment of the kafala system that has allowed 242,000 workers to move to better work in Qatar between October 2020 and October 2021, the delegation welcomed the most recent changes that seek to better protect migrant workers in Qatar against abuse, including in particular the entry into force in March 2021 of the law on the minimum wage. It is currently set at QAR 1000 plus decent food and accommodation or a monthly allowance of at least QAR 300 for food and QAR 500 for accommodation and covers all workers of all nationalities in all sectors, including domestic work. (Law No.17 of 2020). Since then, over 280,000 workers or 13 per cent of the total workforce have seen their basic wage increase to the minimum and many more have benefited from the compulsory allowances. A Minimum Wage Commission will make recommendations on future adjustments.

Since May 2021, new heat stress legislation prohibits work between 10am and 3.30pm during the summer months and all outdoor work is banned when temperatures rise above 32.1° on the WBGT index. This has resulted in a significant decline in heat related cases treated in the Qatar Red Crescent Clinics for migrant
workers. 338 businesses were shut down for non-compliance during a targeted campaign by the labour inspectorate in the summer of 2021.

In 2021 the standard contract for domestic workers was revised to equate certain rights of domestic workers with those of other workers in the private sector, in particular in relation to overtime pay, termination and conditions of employment.

14 Qatar Visa Centres were set up in several origin countries to address contract deception and substitution.

38 joint committees were set up to facilitate worker participation in companies. A new agreement was signed with ITF to further expand the practice and discussions are underway with the BWI and UNI Global Union to establish joint committees in their respective sectors.

An online complaints platform was created to increase workers’ access, and efforts are still ongoing to address the backlog of dispute settlement cases after the COVID pandemic prevented hearings. Further expansion of capacity is needed, while at the same time reducing demand by awareness raising and strong enforcement of regulation.

The mission welcomes the significant advances in the remuneration and working conditions of migrant workers in Qatar and complements the government for its continued commitment. Qatar is by far the regional leader in terms of workers’ participation and social dialogue, labour mobility, labour law and international cooperation and transparency.

Nonetheless, the mission also observed that the implementation of the labour policies and programmes is highly complex. Clearly, challenges remain in enforcement and changing a corporate culture of impunity, too many complaints linked to non-payment of wages and employers refusing to let workers go continue to be reported.

False absconding charges are too easily introduced by employers and can have disproportionate consequences for migrant workers resulting in detention and deportation. The issue needs to be urgently and structurally addressed.

The role of the Qatar Visa Centres is important and can be expanded. The mission welcomed the proposal by the government to explore this further through a number of study visits where the government of Qatar and social partners in origin countries can discuss how to improve accessibility and effectiveness of the Centres.

The mission heard from migrant workers directly that the charging of fees to workers for recruitment remains a pervasive problem despite a legal ban. It therefore calls on the government to continue to closely monitor the industry and welcomed the
government’s recent show of determination by shutting down 17 unscrupulous recruitment agencies for non-compliance with the new regulation. The mission also recognised the responsibility of governments and business in origin countries in this matter. It welcomed Qatar’s engagement in the ILO’s Fair Recruitment Initiative and shares the vision that it offers a good framework to increase transparency and accountability in the recruitment process in partnership with social partners in countries of origin. The mission recommends the integrated use of the Migrant Recruitment Advisor developed for this particular purpose, together with the consultation with trade unions on bilateral agreements on labour migration between the governments of Qatar and origin countries to ensure that the agreements respond to labour market realities and respect labour rights of workers.

The mission recognised the important role of community leaders in Qatar. In order to further disseminate information about the reforms and help workers navigate the complaints process, the mission suggests to expand the number of community leaders. The trade unions in origin countries can play a key role in training these community leaders.

Recognising the critical role that the migrant workers play in the country, the mission requests the Qatari government to persist and be bold in advancing labour reforms that are supported by strong implementation, including by ensuring that employers are sanctioned for labour rights violations in order to deter future offences.

The mission welcomed the express commitment from the government that the labour reforms will be consolidated and continue in the framework of the Qatar National Vision 2030, beyond the World Cup at the end of 2022. In this regard, the mission welcomed the proposal of the government of Qatar to institutionalise the longer-term presence of the International Labor Organization in the country to continue support to the process.

The mission, the ITUC and the ITUC-Asia Pacific would like to thank the government of Qatar for its openness to frank discussions as part of an ongoing and constructive dialogue and the ILO for facilitating the mission.

The mission, the ITUC- Asia Pacific and the ITUC look forward to continued engagement with the government of Qatar to further lead the path to social justice for migrant workers in the Gulf region.