

# WORKERS RIGHTS



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# FUTURE SCENARIOS

The working conditions of migrant workers in the different stadiums planned to host the World FIFA Cup in 2022 in Qatar are famous by their status of “modern day slavery”. FIFA and national authorities were well aware, and indifferent, to the systematic abuse of workers on stadiums in which the 2022 World Cup will be host. Employees are forced to work under the Qatari sun, at high temperatures and under the fear of being physically abused by their superiors. Human Rights advocacy organizations criticise that at least 1.200 workers have already died and up to 4.000 could perish before the World Cup starts.

Apart from working conditions, the Qatari system didn't require a register or an official document proving that the employees received their salary. Thus, thousands of workers were not paid and didn't have the possibility to complain. If they complained, then they had to face arrest, end of permission or even deportation. Under the protection of the *Kafala* sponsorship system, migrant workers are not allowed to change their work position or leave the country without its employer's -the *Kafeel*- permission. Migrant workers' living conditions are far from dignity. Most of them are obliged to live in small caps in the desert, sharing a small room with more than 5 workmates and sleeping on the floor after working journeys that can go from 12 to 16 hours of intense work exposed to the sun, sand -which provokes lung cancer-, and other natural phenomenon. Most of the workers are, among others, mainly from South and West Asia, including India, Pakistan or Nepal, which were even denied to visit their loved ones when the earthquake took place in 2015.

The Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs assured that the government was working on some reforms. First of all, to allow employees to move more freely even without the permission of its employer; and secondly, to allow and develop an electronic wages payment system. Fortunately, by November 2016, 86% of the 2.1 Million immigrants working in Qatar were paid through electronic wage payments. This movement came after lots of organizations, led by the UN, put more pressure after years of Qatar and FIFA turning a blind eye on this issue. The electronic payment will allow the government to check if companies actually pay when and what is correct.

Some change is expected to happen, but uncertainty prevails. The conditions of workers have been very bad since the beginning of the stadium constrictions, and future does not seem to be changed substantially in terms of working conditions and protection. *Kafala* abolishment is not likely to shape the Gulf labour reforms. The organization 'Migrant Rights' is making different campaigns, going from trying to set a maximum standard working thermal limits -referred to desert's high temperatures-, to solutions for recruitment process, or even to reform *Kafala*. This movement tries to give voice to those who cannot do it by themselves and also fights for better workers' rights in all the world. One can help them by translating, donating, joining or by spreading the NGO around the world. Electronic payments were the first step towards dignity and accountability regarding migrant workers' rights. The strong pressure of the international community will make the Qatari authorities to take part in the issue, improving the situation and showing the remaining Gulf and Mashriq states that *Kafala* needs to be tackled.