



DEBATE PACK

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Labour reforms in Qatar

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Background

Qatar has more than 1.5 million migrant workers, making up about 90% of its total labour force. Standards for workers in Qatar, usually migrant workers, [have been criticised](#). Deaths and injuries at work have been compounded by allegations of non-payment of salaries and of a sponsorship system, “kafala”, that makes it difficult for migrant workers to leave their employer, even where abuse is taking place. Some media outlets [have described](#) the conditions of workers, particularly in the run up to the 2022 World Cup, as tantamount to slavery and that the construction for the football competition would cost thousands of lives.

After international pressure, including from the International Trade Union Confederation, and discussions with the International Labour Organisation the Government of Qatar [committed itself](#) to align its laws and practices with international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work; to institute a statutory minimum wage; and to allow monitoring of labour practices.

The reforms would be significant in the region, where migrant labour is used in many oil-rich states and conditions are often very poor, but human rights organisations warn that what matters is the implementation of the reforms, pointing to Bahrain, where thorough justice sector reform was promised after the 2011 disturbances but [implementation was criticised](#).

2. Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[World Cup host Qatar to introduce labour complaint reform](#)

Jordan Times
12 March 2018

[Philippine official lauds Qatar's labour reforms](#)

Qatar Tribune
Ailyn Agonia
8 March 2018

[FA questions Qatar over migrant workers' rights day after signing agreement with World Cup 2022 hosts](#)

Daily Telegraph
Sam Wallace
15 February 2018

[Qatar 2022 World Cup will honour workers' rights with the end of the kafala system, predicts ITUC head](#)

Independent
Anthony Harwood
28 January 2018

[Qatar: Year of Crisis Spurred Rights Reforms](#)

Human Rights Watch
18 January 2018

[ILO drops Qatar migrant workers complaint after reforms](#)

BBC News Online
8 November 2017

[ILO decision heralds new era for workers' rights in Qatar. Saudi Arabia and the UAE must follow its lead](#)

International Trade Union Congress
8 November 2017

[ILO closes workers' complaint against World Cup host Qatar](#)

Gulf Times
8 November 2017

[Its image at risk abroad, Qatar backs labor reforms at home](#)

Reuters
Eric Knecht
2 November 2017

[Qatar: Implementation Will Be Key for Labor Reforms](#)

Human Rights Watch
27 October 2017

[Qatar World Cup workers' rights to improve with end of kafala system, claims union](#)

Guardian
David Conn
25 October 2017

[Qatar Announces Series of Labour Reforms](#)

Institute for Human Rights and Business
25 October 2017

[Qatar introduces minimum wage for first time](#)

BBC News Online
25 October 2017

[Thousands of Qatar World Cup workers 'subjected to life-threatening heat'](#)

Guardian
David Conn
27 September 2017

[Qatar: New Law Gives Domestic Workers Labor Rights](#)

Humans Right Watch
24 August 2017

[Qatar denies violating labor law by blocking migrants from leaving](#)

Reuters
Rejimon Kuttappan
30 March 2017

[UN agency must keep up pressure on Qatar as government's migrant labour reforms fall short](#)

Amnesty International
17 March 2017

3. PQs

[Qatar: Migrant Workers](#)

22 Dec 2017 | 119893

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, what recent representations he has made to his Qatari counterpart on the protection of human rights for migrant workers.

Answering member: Alistair Burt | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Our strong bilateral relations with Qatar allow us to raise a range of issues in our discussions, including how we can work together on migrant labour issues. We support the important legislative and administrative steps taken by Qatar to reform its labour laws, including on wage protection and improvements to exit visas. These have been recognised by the International Labour Organization and NGOs as a positive step.

[Qatar: Football](#)

26 Oct 2016 | 49548

Asked by: Andrew Gwynne

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will meet his counterparts in the Qatari government to discuss the human rights situation and working conditions of foreign workers assisting that country in building stadia for the 2022 World Cup.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Foreign Secretary, my Rt Hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Mr Johnson), last spoke to Qatar's foreign minister on 7 September about preparations for the World Cup. He offered continued UK support in partnering with Qatar to deliver a successful event in 2022. We continue to raise the issue of workers' rights with the Government of Qatar; most recently on 15 September to offer UK expertise in addition to support we already give. I am meeting my Qatari counterpart in Doha later this year and will raise this issue again then. We support the steps that the Qatari Government has taken to respond to concerns about the treatment of migrant workers and we welcome the Government of Qatar's commitment to the ongoing, systematic reform of Qatar's labour laws.

[Qatar: Football](#)

21 Oct 2016 | 49134 and 49133

Asked by: Andrew Gwynne

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterparts from (a) Nepal, (b) Bangladesh and (c) India on the human rights situation and working conditions of citizens of those countries who are working in Qatar.

Asked by: Andrew Gwynne

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has held with his counterparts in Qatar on the human rights situation and working conditions for foreign workers building stadia for the 2022 World Cup.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We continue to support Qatar's efforts in preparing for the FIFA World Cup in 2022, including ensuring UK businesses involved adhere to international and Qatari labour laws, and we support the steps that the Qatari government has taken to respond to concerns about the treatment of migrant workers. We continue to discuss implementation with the Qatari government and we welcome the Government of Qatar's commitment to the ongoing, systematic reform of Qatar's labour laws.

[Qatar](#)

22 Dec 2014 | HL3706

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports of the ill-treatment of North Korean labourers working in building World Cup facilities in Qatar; and whether they have raised those reports with the government of Qatar.

**Answering member: Lord Wallace of Saltaire
| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We are aware of reports of the ill-treatment of North Korean labourers working in Qatar. We take the issue of the treatment of migrant workers very seriously. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), recently raised human rights issues with the Qatari government during his visit to Doha on 15 October, and the issue of migrant workers was raised with the Emir of Qatar during his visit to the UK on 28-30 October. We support Qatar's intention to reform the current labour law and we continue to encourage the Qatari government to address human rights concerns and stand ready to support those efforts where we can.

[Qatar](#)**27 Nov 2014 | HL2872****Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reported cases of abuse against North Korean workers in Lusail City, Qatar; and what steps they are taking to ensure that Qatar meets its International Labour Organisation obligations and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Answering member: Baroness Anelay of St Johns**| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We are aware of reports that state-run North Korean bodies have been expropriating large proportions of their workers' salaries earned in Qatar. We take the issue of the treatment of migrant workers very seriously. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), recently raised human rights issues with the Qatari government during his visit to Doha on 15 October, and the issue of migrant workers was raised with the Emir of Qatar during his visit to the UK on 28-30 October. We support Qatar's intention to reform the current labour law. We continue to encourage the Qatari government to address human rights concerns and stand ready to support those efforts where we can.

[Qatar](#)**18 Nov 2014 | 214145****Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the government of Qatar on human rights abuses in that country.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

I recently raised human rights issues with the Qatari Government during my visit to Doha on 15 October, and the issue of migrant workers was raised with the Emir of Qatar during his visit to the UK on 28-30 October. The Government welcomes in particular the serious manner in which the Qatari Government is responding to concerns about the treatment of migrant workers, and supports Qatar's intention to reform the current labour law. We continue to encourage the Qatari Government to address human rights concerns and we stand ready to support those efforts where we can.

[Qatar](#)

03 Sep 2014 | 905136

Asked by: Mary Glindon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions the Government has had with Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy on the safety and wellbeing of migrant workers preparing that country for the 2022 World Cup.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We have raised our concerns about the safety and wellbeing of migrant workers with the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy at Ministerial and Ambassadorial level. We welcome the serious manner in which the Qatari Government is responding to concerns and fully support Qatar's intention to reform the current labour law. We are encouraging the government of Qatar to put forward a timetable for passing and implementing the proposed legislation and stand ready to support these efforts where we can.

[Qatar](#)

03 Sep 2014 | 905123

Asked by: Steve Rotheram

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to address the treatment of workers in Qatar during the construction of World Cup 2022 venues.

Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

I raised our concerns with the Qatari authorities on 24 July. We welcome the serious manner in which the Qatari Government is responding to concerns and fully support Qatar's intention to reform the current labour law. We are encouraging the government of Qatar to put forward a timetable for passing and implementing the proposed legislation and stand ready to support these efforts where we can.

4. Early Day Motions

MIGRANT WORKERS IN QATAR

EDM 1289 (session 2013-14)

10 April 2014

Jim Murphy

That this House commends the Sunday Mail for its investigation into the rights of construction workers in Qatar, the host of the 2022 World Cup; welcomes the work of Mark Aitken and Tony Nicoletti in exposing the conditions endured by the workers they met in worker camps outside Doha, including allegations of the withholding and underpayment of wages, the illegal confiscation of passports, the lack of health and safety provision resulting in injury, overcrowded and unsanitary accommodation, and workers trapped in Qatar unable to see their families for years; regrets the silence of the English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish football associations on workers' rights in Qatar; further welcomes the assurances made by Qatari officials that reforms to labour laws and rules governing the treatment of workers will be introduced; and calls on FIFA to take urgent action to insist on better and fairer treatment for the migrant workers building the infrastructure that will help deliver the 2022 World Cup, to ensure that practices exposed by the Sunday Mail are brought to an end.

QATAR WORLD CUP AND MIGRANT WORKERS

EDM 1244 (session 2013-14)

1 April 2014

Steve Rotheram

That this House commends the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians and Building & Woodworkers International for organising a mission to Qatar to draw attention to the appalling health and safety standards on construction sites to which migrant workers are subjected; welcomes the exposé by Kevin Maguire of the Daily Mirror, highlighting the labour camps where tens of thousands of migrant workers are forced to live in abject squalor in overcrowded, insanitary accommodation; condemns the endemic poverty pay where skilled migrant workers, such as carpenters, receive as little as 56 pence per hour; deplores the widespread practice by unscrupulous employers of withholding wages for many months leaving workers destitute and starving; is appalled that 1,200 migrant workers have been killed in Qatar since it was awarded the 2022 World Cup; deprecates the system of sponsored employment in Qatar, known as the Kafala system that denies workers freedom of movement and prevents workers leaving the country without the approval of their employer; regrets the Qatari authorities' refusal to ratify International Labour Organization conventions allowing freedom of association; and therefore calls on FIFA to put Qatar on notice that its right to host the 2022 World Cup will be removed unless action is taken within the next 12 months to stop the exploitation of migrant workers by ending the Kafala system, ensuring all migrant workers are covered by the standards contained in Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy Workers' Charter and

allowing migrant workers to elect their own site committees and representatives.

MIGRANT WORKERS IN QATAR AND THE 2022 WORLD CUP

EDM 1095 (session 2013-14)

24 February 2014

John Mann

That this House notes that since Qatar won the bid to host the 2022 World Cup the country has experienced a construction boom; further notes that in the last two years hundreds of Indian and Nepalese migrant workers have died working on construction projects in Qatar; moreover is extremely concerned that in the build-up to 2022 hundreds more migrant workers will die due to unsafe working conditions; and calls on the Government, the international community and FIFA to act to urge Qatar in the strongest possible terms to drastically improve working conditions, review the migrant worker sponsorship scheme and properly compensate the families of migrant workers who have been injured or killed.

5. Further reading

UK Government

[FOI release: world cup 2022 and building workers](#)

- A series of FOI releases related to employment conditions for construction workers on world cup 2022 projects in Qatar, from 1 January 2014 to February 2017
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
3 September 2017

International Labour Office

[Complaint concerning non-observance by Qatar of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 \(No. 29\), and the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 \(No. 81\), made by delegates to the 103rd Session \(2014\) of the International Labour Conference under article 26 of the ILO Constitution](#)

International Labour Office – Governing Body
31 October 2017

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