"WHY DO YOU WANT TO REST?"

ONGOING ABUSE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS IN QATAR

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

They bought me when they brought me. This is why they can do what they want to me. *– Reina*

Like Reina, a Filipino domestic worker in Qatar, hundreds of thousands of women leave their homes every year in search of a better job abroad. Heading to the unknown, they leave behind children, partners, parents, relatives and other loved ones to work in a stranger's home. A popular destination is Qatar, home to over 173,000 domestic workers from Asia and Africa. More than half of all women migrant workers in Qatar are employed in private homes.

Isolated in their employer's home and heavily dependent on them, many of these women face gruelling working conditions and serious abuses with little protection. They typically work between 14 and 18 hours a day, with little or no rest and rarely, if ever, a day off. In the worst cases they may also be insulted, assaulted or sexually abused. As if this was not enough, their employers may fail to pay them on time or, in some cases, not pay them at all. Governed by the *kafala* sponsorship system – now under reform – there have been few options to escape this abuse.

For many years the *kafala* sponsorship system, which ties migrant workers to their employers, has given employers excessive control over domestic workers, including the power to stop them changing jobs or leaving Qatar. After facing months of abuse or non-payment of their salary, some flee their employers, who then accuse them of "absconding" and other criminal offences. This has left many domestic workers trapped in Qatar, without income, facing lengthy court proceedings.

Recently introduced reforms have brought hope for migrant workers, including domestic workers. These include the abolition in 2020 of the requirement for an exit permit to leave Qatar and a No-Objection Certificate to change employer, and the promise of a new minimum wage from March 2021. Offering greater job mobility and allowing migrant workers to leave the country without the permission of their employer, these changes could, if fully implemented, help them escape abuse and improve their conditions.

While it is still too soon to assess the extent of which these reforms will be effectively implemented, one thing is clear: domestic workers will need more than these laws to protect them because of their vulnerability, isolation in their employers' homes and gender. A plan of action is needed, including specific measures tailored to ensure their protection coupled with strengthening of the Domestic Workers Law, its full implementation, strict inspection mechanisms, and serious action against abusive employers. The lack of action to implement and enforce the Domestic Workers Law introduced in 2017 serves as a clear warning.

Since 2010, when Qatar was awarded the FIFA World Cup 2022, the spotlight has been on the country's migrants workers who would be largely responsible for building the stadiums and infrastructure for the competition. In 2014, following a complaint about its treatment of migrant workers submitted to the International Labour Organization (ILO) by workers' organizations, the government pledged to reform the system. Among other things, it promised to ensure that domestic workers were covered by the Wage Protection System to monitor their monthly pay and to review and implement

legislation covering domestic workers. In August 2017, it enacted the Domestic Workers Law, just before signing an ILO technical agreement committing to bring its laws and practice in line with international standards. The law promised to limit the number of working hours, provide a weekly paid day off and other benefits, and give domestic workers the right to submit complaints to new labour committees, allowing them access to justice mechanisms for labour abuses.

Filipino applicants undergo an intensive course on housekeeping in Manila, Philippines. © 2013 Getty Images

However, three years later, Qatar continues to fail to protect domestic workers from exploitation. As a party to various international treaties Qatar has accepted to guarantee the right to all workers to just and favourable working conditions including rest time, paid leave, renumeration, safe and healthy working conditions, forming and joining trade unions and freedom of movement. Yet these rights continue to be routinely violated and abused, and perpetrators not held to account. As with other migrant workers in the country, they have also borne the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report looks at how the serious flaws in Qatar's laws, policies and systems of implementation are failing the most vulnerable people in the country – the army of women domestic workers toiling from dawn till late at night in private homes, isolated and hidden from the public gaze. It draws on interviews and information gathered from 105 women either currently or recently employed as domestic workers in Qatar, as well as interviews with embassies of labour-sending countries, activists and community leaders assisting domestic workers. The report also reflects information provided by the state of Qatar in response to written requests for information. It also builds on Amnesty International's ongoing research into the situation of migrant workers in Qatar, including its 2014 report "*My sleep is my break": Exploitation of migrant domestic workers in Qatar.*

Amnesty International is indebted to all the women who bravely shared their often-traumatic stories. Without them this report would not have been possible. Their experiences and stories shaped this report and its recommendations.

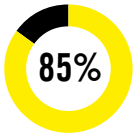
LISTENING TO DOMESTIC WORKERS: PATTERNS OF SERIOUS ABUSE

Me, I have had many bad experiences here… No one follows the rules here. I never had a day off in my three years and eight months of work in Qatar. *– Rosalinda*

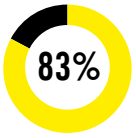
The personal experiences shared by domestic workers show a consistent pattern of serious labour abuses and, in some cases, crimes typically combining several abuses. Chapters 4-10 cover the main abuses reported, highlighting the patterns described through cases and extracts from the women's testimonies, as well as the impunity enjoyed by abusive employers.

Each of the 105 women with whom Amnesty International communicated had her own tale of abuse, but the main recurring themes were long working hours without proper rest or a day off, and passport confiscation. Despite signing contracts specifying a maximum of 10 hours of work per day including overtime and a day off per week, they worked on average more than 16 hours a day without rest or a day off, and in some cases up to 20 hours per day. Most said they were usually the first to wake up and the last to sleep, and were expected to be on call all the time.

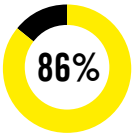
Of the 105 women Amnesty International communicated with:



89 did not have a weekly day off, with most women saying they had never had a day off during their employment.



87 had their passport confiscated by their employers.



90 regularly worked more than 14 hours per day without proper rest, with half regularly working more than 18 hours.

The lack of rest days means that many of the women had been or continued to be confined to their workplace, effectively isolated and trapped there. Women who were allowed to leave the house often could only do so under their employers' watch or when accompanying the family on outings, usually so they could look after the children.

Many of the women said their employers had verbally abused them and subjected them to dehumanizing treatment:

32 said they had been shouted at, insulted or called degrading names.

23 reported being denied adequate food or forced to eat leftovers, while others also reported being denied medical care and made to sleep on the floor.

15 said they had been physically abused, ranging from spitting and slapping to severe forms of assault.

5 reported that they had been sexually abused, in some cases raped.

The psychological impact of such treatment is profound and painful. The women told Amnesty International that they asked for nothing more than to be treated like humans.

The women spoke of their fear of retaliatory measures by abusive employers if they were to complain or try to leave. Under the *kafala* system, their visa and residence permit are still linked to the employer, making it extremely difficult for them to challenge abuses without jeopardizing their presence in the country.

Even after the abolition of the exit permit in January 2020, domestic workers still need to inform their employer before leaving Qatar and risk being accused of "absconding" or theft, which can lead to their arrest and deportation. In any case, just 18 of the 105 women reported having access to their passport, with recruitment agencies passing them directly to their employers upon their arrival in Qatar, never to be seen again despite repeated requests. Amnesty International also spoke to 10 women who had been accused of theft, forcing them to stay in Qatar for months without income awaiting the outcome of investigations to seal their fate.

Representatives of labour-sending countries and migrant workers' organizations confirmed that abuse of domestic workers is rife and that avenues for redress remain limited or ineffective. One embassy representative told Amnesty International that the majority of the weekly complaints they receive are from domestic workers. Others said that the number of cases of domestic workers reporting abuses had not decreased since the introduction of the Domestic Workers Law in 2017. These findings were

The psychological impact of such treatment is profound and painful. The women told Amnesty International that they asked for nothing more than to be treated like humans.

also reflected in the concluding observations and reports on the situation of domestic workers in Qatar published by UN experts following their recent visits to the country.

Amnesty International's research indicates that women working as domestic workers face multiple forms of discrimination as low-income migrant workers and because of their gender and race. Stereotypical attitudes prevail and the government's strategy to protect these women from violence is poor. Even the government's promised shelter to offer refuge to those fleeing abuse is not fully operational.

Furthermore, migrant workers in Qatar are not allowed to join and form trade unions, which stops them being able to collectively negotiate better working and living conditions. This problem is exacerbated for domestic workers whose work usually keeps them isolated in their employers' house with limited or no access to the outside world. While some businesses are beginning to establish worker committees to provide some workplace representation, nothing comparable exists for domestic workers.

Against such a backdrop, a culture of impunity prevails, with people who abuse domestic workers rarely, if ever, held to account. None of the women who spoke to Amnesty International has seen their abusers brought to justice for their actions.

INADEQUATE REFORMS

The sponsors don't follow the rules. They create their own laws. I've heard there are protections for other workers, but not for us. *– Sheila*

Sheila's experience highlights the unconstrained power of employers over domestic workers. She worked 14 hours a day, without a single day off, for over a year for two different employers, and was rewarded with a total of two months' salary and a false accusation of theft. When she asked to leave the second workplace because she was grossly overworked, her employers said she could go if she paid them QR5,000 (about US$1,375). She told Amnesty International, "This is slavery, I won't do it". She eventually fled and her employer accused her of theft even though she was not at the house at the time of the alleged crime. When Amnesty International met her in Doha, she was waiting for the theft case to conclude.

The testimony of Sheila and the other women interviewed highlights the limited impact in practice of the Domestic Workers Law and other recent reforms that have been promoted as measures to protect domestic workers' rights – the subject covered in Chapter 3 of this report. They also serve as warnings about how other recently announced reforms, such as the abolition of the exit permit and No-Objection Certificate, and promised introduction of a minimum wage, will not deliver improvements for domestic workers unless they are fully implemented and accompanied by measures responding to the specific needs of their situation.

The grim reality is that, despite the reforms, the excessive powers and impunity enjoyed by employers, coupled with the lack of adequate inspection mechanisms, continue to foster abuses and impede workers' ability to access justice.

One of the key measures was the establishment of Committees for the Settlement of Labour Disputes (the Committees) in March 2018 to allow migrant workers including domestic workers to submit cases against their employers. This did, to some extent, improve remedial action available for some types of abuse, such as unpaid salaries. However, the process is slow, burdensome and, in some cases, fruitless. The time needed to sort out a simple case of an unpaid salary and secure a ticket home without a place to stay remains a major problem. Moreover, other types of abuse related to domestic work remain largely unreported and are rarely brought to court.

The women interviewed were either unaware of the new law and the Committees, or had not noticed any improvements since their introduction. In any case, the women said they were reluctant to initiate a legal case because they did not trust the system and could not cope with the retaliatory measures they believed they would face.

The grim reality is that, despite the reforms, the excessive powers and impunity enjoyed by employers, coupled with the lack of adequate inspection mechanisms, continue to foster abuses and impede workers' ability to access justice. The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs (MADLSA) told Amnesty International that it favours an approach based on awareness raising campaigns, citing Qatar's social structure, customs and traditions as justification.

Awareness raising campaigns and other initiatives introduced, such as Qatar Visa Centres and Qatar Manpower Solutions (WISA), are important and can improve respect for domestic workers' rights, but must be accompanied by action that makes those rights legal obligations that are enforced, with perpetrators of abuses held to account. As Chapter 10 shows, by failing to hold these perpetrators to account, a "business-as-usual" approach will continue to prevail.

A comprehensive programme to implement recent reforms is urgently needed if domestic workers are to benefit from these changes and see their rights finally upheld. Addressing some elements of an inherently abusive system while leaving others intact is a violation of migrant workers' rights and leaves them at the mercy of unscrupulous employers.

"Many are subjected to harsh working conditions: excessively long workdays with no rest and no days off, passport and mobile phone confiscation, physical and social isolation and, in some cases, physical, verbal or sexual assault by employers and their teenage or adult children." *Extract from the preliminary findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, following a 10-day visit to Qatar in December 2019.*

ACTION NEEDED

I needed to leave this job. If I didn't I was afraid I would lose my morality, I would have another sort of problem, I would lose my soul. It was a very traumatic experience.
– Reina

Amnesty International is calling, among other recommendations, on the Qatari government to:

- Develop a national plan of action to tackle abuses faced by domestic workers, including excessive working hours, the denial of weekly rest days, passport confiscation, and verbal, physical and sexual abuse.
- Include domestic workers in the Labour Law and the Wage Protection System, and in the meantime fully and effectively implement and enforce the Domestic Workers Law.
- Strengthen inspection mechanisms, hold perpetrators to account and support domestic workers to enable them to bring complaints against abusive employers and recruitment agencies.
- Recognize and facilitate the right of domestic workers to organize, collectively claim their rights, and create safe spaces to help break their isolation.
- Build on the abolition of the "exit permit" and "No-Objection Certificate" to further reduce migrant workers' dependency on their employers, including by allowing migrant workers to renew their own residence permits and health cards when needed.
- Decriminalize "absconding" and end the detention of migrant workers for breaching the Sponsorship Law.

It is not rocket science. Employers need to simply treat domestic workers like humans. No overwork. Ten hours per day should be enough. Treat them with respect. Feed them properly. Pay them on time. Allow them to take their day off and to communicate with their families. [Then] they will stay and work happily for you.
– A representative of a labour-sending country in Qatar

1. METHODOLOGY

The heart of this report is based on Amnesty International's communications with 105 women who were either currently or recently working as live-in domestic workers in Qatar. Amnesty International interviewed 65 women in person during field trips to Qatar in May and November 2019 and communicated remotely with 40 others who were currently or recently employed between May 2019 and September 2020. All information and interviews were gathered or conducted in English. In this report, pseudonyms have been used for all the women interviewed to protect them from possible reprisals.

Interviewing domestic workers is challenging as many do not have days off and some are prevented from leaving their workplace or using phones. Some of the women were still employed. Over half had left their employers and others had returned to their home countries or did so after they were interviewed.

Given the difficulty of accessing domestic workers, the interview sample for this report does not claim to be statistically representative of all domestic workers in Qatar. It does, however, include a mix of workers in different situations that allows us to draw conclusions about a significant number of serious and commonly experienced abuses, and provides a way for marginalized domestic workers to have a voice.

The findings demonstrate a high degree of consistency about the patterns of abuse experienced, corroborated by other sources, including the two UN Special Rapporteurs who visited Qatar in 2019, as well as representatives of embassies and migrant workers' organizations who deal with domestic workers' welfare issues in Qatar on a daily basis. All reported that exploitation of domestic workers is rife and that avenues for them to achieve redress remain limited and in many cases ineffective.

This report focuses on women domestic workers because they:

- comprise over 60% of such workers in Qatar;[1]
- are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by their employers; and
- appear to be disproportionally affected by gender discrimination and gender-based violence.

1 In its reply to Amnesty International's request for information on domestic workers, received on 8 October 2020, MADLSA said "The total number of domestic workers in the State of Qatar was 173,300 workers in 2018, of who 109,127 are women and 64,173 are men." According to the ILO office in Doha in September 2018: "Qatar is home to approximately 175,000 domestic workers of whom some 60% are women. Most are from Asia and Africa." See ILO, International best practices on domestic workers discussed in Qatar, 18 September 2018, https://www.ilo.org/beirut/media-centre/news/WCMS_645168/lang--en/index.htm and also https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/statistics/Statistical%20Releases/Social/LaborForce/2018/Annual_Bulletin_Labour_force_2018_AE.pdf

Interviewing domestic workers is challenging as many do not have days off and some are prevented from leaving their workplace or using phones.

However, many of the report's findings are relevant for male domestic workers and live-out domestic workers, who are also at risk of abuse and are not adequately protected in law and practice. Indeed, Amnesty International continues to document serious cases of labour abuse and exploitation of live-out domestic workers, especially those working for cleaning companies.

It is also important to note that this report does not intend to imply that all domestic workers in Qatar face harsh working conditions, or that all employers are abusive. It is also important to state that abuses have been carried out by employers of many different nationalities.

During the course of its research, Amnesty International also met various Qatari authorities and institutions responsible for issues relating to domestic workers, including the Ministry of Development, Labour and Social Affairs (MADLSA). In addition, researchers spoke with staff at three embassies of labour-sending countries; activists and community leaders[2] assisting domestic workers; organizations supporting migrant workers; other independent experts; and a recruitment company in Qatar. Interviews were not sought with employers of domestic workers for fear of placing the women at risk.

Other research analysed the main laws and regulations affecting domestic workers in Qatar, including Law No 11 of 2004 (the Penal Code); Law No 14 of 2004 (the Labour Law) and its subsequent amendments; Law No 4 of 2009 (the Sponsorship Law) and its 2015 amendment; Law No 17 of 2020 related to the minimum wage; and Law No 18 of 2020 amending certain provisions of the Labour Law. Researchers also reviewed relevant international law and standards, including UN treaties and ILO Conventions.

Amnesty International met MADLSA officials in Doha during its visits in May and November 2019 and wrote to MADLSA in 2020 on 27 January and 23 July requesting statistics related to the number of domestic workers, including a breakdown of the complaints brought by them. The organization also wrote to the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) on 13 February 2020 and 3 August 2020 but received no response. On 22 August and 8 October 2020, the Qatar authorities provided written responses to Amnesty International's earlier requests for information, and these are reflected in the report. The organization further sent the Qatari government its provisional findings and recommendations on 24 September 2020.

Amnesty International would like to thank all those who assisted with the research and preparation of this report, in particular all those individuals who gave interviews to researchers and migrant workers' experts and activists, including Migrant-Rights.org who reviewed the report and helped shape its recommendations. Amnesty International also appreciates the willingness of the Government of Qatar to give its delegates access to the country, meet them and respond to correspondence.

2 As requested by those interviewed, Amnesty International will not identify them to protect their identity.

2. BACKGROUND

Since FIFA's decision to grant Qatar the right to host the 2022 World Cup, the eyes of the world have been on this small Gulf country and its ability to build the infrastructure to host such a big sporting event. Almost immediately, attention focused on the 1.9 million migrant workers in the country, especially those entrusted to create the stadiums, roads, hotels, airports and transport needed to realise "Qatar's dream". Soon, damning reports emerged revealing the level of exploitation and abuses faced by these workers and the little protection they have under the sponsorship system.[3] Much less was being reported on other migrant workers in Qatar, including the extremely vulnerable 173,000 domestic workers, most of them women.

VERONICA'S STORY

Veronica, a 33-year-old Filipino nurse employed to care for a disabled child but who was also made to do domestic chores, told Amnesty International that she was exhausted.[4] *"I am on duty from 5.30am until 1.30am, but in between, if there is no work, I sleep a little. They don't give me a day off, they are very strict. This is why I keep complaining to my employer."*

She had worked for the family in Qatar for 10 months. Her duties included caring for a severely disabled girl who is fed through a tube. Veronica was responsible for cleaning the tube, removing secretions from the girl's mouth and nose, changing her nappies, bathing her, giving her therapy and generally caring for her. At the same time, she had to look after the girl's younger brother and complete household chores such as cleaning.

From the beginning, her passport was confiscated. She was not paid overtime. Her employers promised to improve her working conditions, but never did. "*I love to work and I love my patients, I came here to work"*, she said.

On a Friday in early May 2019, her employer kicked her out of the house after an argument: "*I was so tired that I fell asleep during my duty so she shouted at me and said many bad words. I went to the agency on Friday and was taken to the police on Saturday. Madam's [female employer] husband came to pick me up and I was sent back to my employer's house while the agency was looking for another job for me… I need to stay in Qatar and work because I am a single mom of two children."*

Veronica ended up going back to the Philippines, without her last month's salary. She reported her treatment to the agency, providing them with evidence. Two months later she began a new job in Saudi Arabia.

3 Amnesty International, *The Dark Side of Migration: Spotlight on Qatar's Construction Sector Ahead of the World Cup*, 18 November 2013, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE22/010/2013/en/

4 Veronica was interviewed remotely in August 2019.

WOMEN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN QATAR

Women who work as domestic workers are employed directly by households and work in a variety of roles, including as cleaners, cooks, childminders and drivers. These jobs are exclusively performed by non-Qatari nationals and most women migrant workers in the country are employed in these roles.[5]

Coming mainly from Asia and Africa,[6] these domestic workers go to Qatar to secure an income and provide for their families back home. In order to get their jobs in Qatar, many pay hefty recruitment fees and often take out high-interest loans to secure the fees. As a result, they arrive in Qatar with huge responsibilities. Most are mothers of young children, prepared to sacrifice to help their family.[7]

Some of the women interviewed by Amnesty International had worked in other countries such as Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates before going to Qatar. Most had attended trainings sessions in their home countries and seemed to be broadly aware about what to expect in terms of working hours and responsibilities, but not the level and extent of abuse and exploitation that they subsequently experienced. Some said that they knew it was not going to be easy, but had mentally prepared to work hard and cope with being away from their families.

A woman takes a photo at the Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Mohila Technical Training Center in Dhaka, Bangladesh. © Getty Images

Like other migrant workers, once in Qatar, domestic workers are subject to the restrictive *kafala* system (see Chapter 3), which means some end up as victims of forced labour.[8] The system, which is currently being reformed, combined with a lack of legal protection and isolation at work, also means domestic workers are particularly susceptible to serious abuse and exploitation.

Women employed as domestic workers face double discrimination as low-income migrant workers and as women. They also face a third form of discrimination – racism and ethnic stereotyping – particularly women from Africa who, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on racism, may often be "presumed to be sexually available".[9] These intersecting discriminations contribute to their systemic abuse by employers who may see them as lesser human beings without rights, simply existing to serve them.

5 See Table 23, https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/statistics/Statistical%20Releases/General/StatisticalAbstract/2018/labor_force_statistical_analysis_2018_AE.pdf

6 ILO, *International best practices on domestic workers discussed in Qatar,* 18 September 2018. Amnesty International requested details relating to the number of domestic workers in Qatar broken down by gender, nationalities and occupation but did not receive any reply. Migrant workers experts told Amnesty International that countries like the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and increasingly Kenya and other African countries are among the top sending countries of domestic workers to Qatar.

7 Over half of the women interviewed were supporting children in their home countries.

8 Complaint under article 26 of the ILO Constitution concerning non-observance of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO::P13100_COMMENT_ID:3255640

9 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (UN Special Rapporteur on racism) following a visit to Qatar in December 2019 https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/44/57/Add.1

"Among low-income migrant workers, many domestic workers, who are predominantly women, confront distinct and extreme difficulties in Qatar, and face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including extreme human rights violations due to their gender, nationality, temporary worker status and low income." *Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (UN Special Rapporteur on racism) following a visit to Qatar in December 2019.*[10]

All the women interviewed said they faced one or more forms of the abuses documented in the following chapters, including long working hours with no rest, no day off, passport confiscation, delayed and unpaid salaries and verbal abuse. Even those who said they were being treated well and were "happy" at work reported long working hours, lack of rest days, confinement to their home 24/7 and confiscation of their passport. It appeared that as long as they received their pay, felt that they were being treated fairly on some level and were fed properly, they were willing to put up with other abuses of their rights.

I am not here for a vacation. I am here to work, not to make problems *– Alissa*[11]

The resilience of these women to harsh working conditions and other abuses is such that those who flee their workplace have clearly reached breaking point. Almost every woman interviewed after escaping abusive employers said that she would have stayed if her contract had been respected. Almost all of the women had signed contracts back home that stipulated a maximum 10-hour working day with rest time, a day off and, of course, prompt payment of their salaries. Some had signed contracts that stipulated their duties only to discover these duties were significantly expanded and extended once they arrived in their employer's home in Qatar.

She said I wouldn't take care of the baby but when [I] reached the house she said 'baby, cleaning, laundry, cook, all'. *– Mariam*[12]

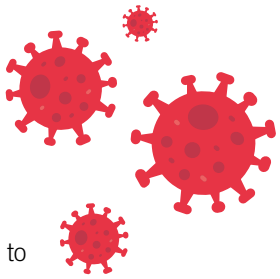
Some of those interviewed expressed a high level of attachment to their employers or the children in their care. Stella, a 40-year-old mother of four from the Philippines, worked for three years in Qatar and is owed QR8,800 (around US$2,400) in wages. When asked why she did not complain when she was not paid after a few months of working, she said: "I did not seek help because I trusted my employer and they promised me they would send me home".[13]

10 Ibid.
11 Alissa, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.
12 Mariam, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.
13 Stella, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.

Louise described how she had to flee her employer's house after she was beaten severely by her female employer, yet she cried when she remembered the baby she had been looking after. She said: "I miss the [sponsor's] children, I loved them. They always say 'I love you'. I wake them up, they're like my kids."[14]

Denise spoke highly of her employer even though she had banned her from leaving the country: "I love Madam, she is like my mother, but I haven't seen my children in three years. She should allow me to go to see them."[15]

IMPACT OF COVID-19



When COVID-19 reached Qatar, the government started to roll out measures to protect public health and slow the spread of the virus.[16] With the infection rate rapidly increasing,[17] it closed down parts of the industrial area on 17 March[18] and soon after extended the lockdown to cover the rest of the country.[19] The authorities then offered free health care and testing, with those infected moved to isolation centres to quarantine and receive care. They also launched awareness campaigns targeting employers and workers, and set up an information centre operating in foreign languages to support migrant workers. In addition, they introduced a QR75 billion (US$20.6 billion) package to reduce the impact of COVID-19,[20] aiming to support small businesses and sectors worst affected such as hospitality, tourism and retail.[21]

The virus peaked at the end of May and then became less prevalent over the following months. By mid-September, there had been over 120,000 confirmed cases, with migrant workers living in crowded and often insanitary conditions at high risk because of the difficulties they faced in maintaining social distancing or taking other measures to protect themselves.[22]

As for other migrant workers in the country, the pandemic exacerbated the dire working and living conditions of some domestic workers. With many schools closed and entire households made to stay at home, the already excessive workload of many domestic workers increased considerably. As a result, they had to work even longer hours, according to migrant labour experts. Further, the minority of domestic workers who were usually able to take a day off were forced to stay at home because of lockdown measures, exacerbating their isolation and potentially increasing their working hours.

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14 Louise, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.

15 Denise, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.

16 Al-Jazeera, *Qatar reports first coronavirus case in citizen who was in Iran,* 29 February 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/qatar-reports-coronavirus-case-citizen-iran-200229144225648.html#:~:text=The%20Gulf%20state's%20health%20ministry,stable%20condition%2C%20the%20ministry%20added.

17 See the Ministry of Public Health announcement on 11 March 2020, https://twitter.com/QNAEnglish/status/1237766511324024838

18 See the Supreme Committee for Crisis Management announcement on 17 March 2020, https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/17/03/2020/Qatar-announces-more-closures-to-beat-coronavirus

19 See Government Communication announcement on 22 March 2020, https://twitter.com/GCOQatar/status/1241631676452737024/photo/1

20 See International Monetary Fund Policy Tracker, '*Policy Responses to COVID-19*', https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#Q

21 Among the measures introduced were six-month exemptions on utilities payments (water, electricity) and on payment of rent for logistics areas and small and medium industries. The Qatar Central Bank established mechanisms to facilitate postponement of loan instalments and obligations of the private sector, and the Qatar Development Bank is administering the National Guarantee Programme to help companies meet wages and rental fees. Measures also included exemptions on customs duties on food and medical goods for six months.

22 Amnesty International, *COVID-19 makes Gulf countries' abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore*, 30 April 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/04/covid19-makes-gulf-countries-abuse-of-migrant-workers-impossible-to-ignore/

Organizations supporting domestic workers told Amnesty International that non-payment of wages increased. Many domestic workers did not receive their salaries for two to three months, possibly because their employers had themselves not been paid or faced other financial pressures. It also became very difficult during this period for domestic workers to submit complaints, despite some initiatives introduced such as MADLSA's hotline, *Amirni* app and SMS service to submit complaints remotely and settle urgent requests, including those made by domestic workers.[23]

An Indonesian domestic worker trainee practices using a vacuum cleaner at a private training and education centre for foreign domestic workers. © Reuters/Beawiharta

An organization supporting domestic workers noted that a growing number of domestic workers were moved out of their rooms or private area to free space for people in the household asked to work from home.[24] As a result, domestic workers ended up sleeping in the kitchen or laundry room.

A positive development was that, according to a migrant rights expert in the Gulf,[25] Qatar's media did not blame migrant workers for the pandemic and refrained from pushing a discriminatory and xenophobic narrative against foreign workers – unlike in some Gulf countries.[26]

In response to Amnesty International's letter to the Government of Qatar on the situation of domestic workers in the country, the GCO replied that since the early stages of the pandemic, MADLSA had been working with relevant authorities to protect all migrant workers, including domestic workers.[27] Some of the steps cited included raising awareness about protective measures through print, text messages and radio programmes;[28] providing free testing, health care and quarantine facilities; loosening conditions on opening bank accounts; and offering services for conflict resolution.

While these are welcome initiatives, advocates supporting domestic workers told Amnesty International that more needs to be done to improve these measures and make them more accessible.[29] Moreover, domestic workers who have not been paid because of the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic appear not to be entitled to any income support other than by lodging claims through the labour committees.

23 GCO letter sent to Amnesty International on 22 August 2020.
24 Meeting with domestic workers' rights advocate on 24 August 2020.
25 Ibid.
26 Migrant-Rights.org, *The COVID-19 crisis is fueling more racist discourse towards migrant workers in the Gulf*, 5 April 2020, https://www.migrant-rights.org/2020/04/the-covid-19-crisis-is-fueling-more-racist-discourse-towards-migrant-workers-in-the-gulf/
27 GCO letter sent to Amnesty International on 22 August 2020.
28 Migrant-Rights.org, *Multilingual SMS campaign to raise awareness amongst domestic workers and their employers*, 7 May 2020, https://www.migrant-rights.org/2020/05/multilingual-sms-campaign-to-raise-awareness-amongst-domestic-workers-and-their-employers/
29 Meeting with organization supporting migrant workers in Qatar on 24 June.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

What can I do? They are my boss, my sponsor. I have to work. I have no other choice *– Emma*[30]

THE *KAFALA* SYSTEM

For many years the *kafala* system has tied migrant workers to their employer and "sponsor". The key elements of this system have included the dependence of a worker on their sponsor to enter the country, obtain their visa and renew their residence permit, as well as the requirements for an employer to give permission before a worker may leave the country or change jobs with an exit permit and a No-Objection Certificate.

There have been important recent laws introduced to significantly reform this sponsorship system, including the abolition of the exit permit and No-Objection Certificate requirements, although some restrictive conditions remain and workers still depend on their sponsor for their visa and residence permit. This means employers can still trigger the deportation of migrant workers by not renewing or cancelling their residence permit.

If properly implemented, these new laws will offer migrant workers greater freedom of movement and job mobility, making it easier to to free themselves from abusive working environments. However, it remains to be seen how strictly they will be enforced, and what impact they will have on domestic workers, including whether abusive employers will exploit potential loopholes to curtail any gains achieved.

Domestic workers also continue to be excluded from Qatar's Labour Law, which provides better protection for workers than the Domestic Workers Law,[31] which itself also suffers from a lack of implementation and enforcement.

If properly implemented, these new laws will offer migrant workers greater freedom of movement and job mobility, allowing them to free themselves from abusive working environments.

30 Emma, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
31 See below for an analysis of the Domestic Workers Law's shortcomings.

EXIT PERMITS

Just two years ago, no migrant worker in Qatar was allowed to leave the country without the permission of their employer, referred to as the 'exit permit'. While this restriction was lifted for most migrant workers in October 2018, the reform was not extended to domestic workers until January 2020 – albeit with conditions.

These reforms followed a series of earlier legal changes that modified the exit permit system, but did not fundamentally overhaul it. For example, in December 2016, the government enacted Law No 21 of 2015 on the Entry, Exit and Residency of Foreign Nationals. Falsely claiming that this reform abolished the sponsorship system, the government maintained the requirement for workers to apply for permission to leave the country but created a process through which workers could appeal if permission was refused. Workers could lodge a complaint via the Exit Permit Grievances Committee, and the committee would give the employer 72 hours to provide evidence of a valid reason for their objection before granting workers the right to exit the country.

In practice, however, it is unclear how many domestic workers successfully secured their exit permit via the Exit Permit Grievances Committee.

According to the 2019 US Trafficking in Person Report (TIP report), between April 2018 and March 2019, the Exit Permit Grievances Committee granted at least 1,000 domestic workers and other workers not covered by the Labour Law the right to leave Qatar after their employers refused to give them an exit permit.[32] MADLSA informed Amnesty International that just 41 cases were granted exit permits through the Grievance Committee between 2019 and February 2020.[33] Representatives of a labour-sending country told Amnesty International that it had had very limited success in securing exit permits for domestic workers through engagement with the committee.[34] This reflects the experience of domestic workers interviewed by Amnesty International who, after fleeing their employers, were trapped in Qatar for weeks waiting to secure their exit permit after their employer refused to grant them such permission.

In 2018, the government announced that it would fully remove the exit permit requirement for migrant workers – but only those covered by the country's Labour Law,[35] excluding domestic workers and others. Then, in October 2019, MADLSA promised a series of reforms to be implemented by January 2020,[36] including extending the removal of the exit permit requirement to domestic workers. Indeed, in January 2020, the Ministry of Interior issued decision No 95 of 2019[37] according to which several new categories[38] of workers – including domestic workers – can leave the country without an exit permit.

32 US Department, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2019, https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-trafficking-in-persons-report-2/qatar/

33 See MADLSA letter to Amnesty International, received on 8 October 2020.

34 Meeting in Doha, 24 November 2019.

35 Employers can still request that up to 5% of their workforce, depending on the nature of their work, need an exit permit following approval from MADLSA. For more details, see Amnesty International, *Qatar: Partial abolition of 'exit permit' lifts travel restrictions for most migrant workers*, 5 September 2018, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/qatar-exit-system-reform-first-step/

36 See Al-Jazeera, "*Qatar moves to announce abolishment of kafala system*", 17 October 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/qatar-moves-announce-abolishment-kafala-system-191017070750729.html

37 See Ministry of Interior Decision No 95 of 2019 on the regulations and procedures regarding the exit of some categories of workers who are not subject to the Labour Law, 1 December 2019, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawArticleID=79754&LawId=8221&language=ar

38 According to article 1 of the Decision No 95 of 2019, the groups include domestic workers; government employees (except the military); those working in the oil and gas sector, at sea and in territorial waters; and those working in agriculture or in temporary jobs.

However, two exceptions were introduced. Firstly, employers can request exit permits for up to 5% of their workforce, depending on the nature of their work. Secondly, domestic workers still need to "inform" their employer in person 72 hours prior to their departure.[39]

This condition imposed on a particularly vulnerable group of workers in a notoriously abusive system is inherently problematic:

- The law curtails the right of certain workers to leave Qatar, breaching their right to freedom of movement, in violation of article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Qatar ratified in May 2018.
- The 72-hour window would give time for abusive employers to use retaliatory measures against workers, such as filing charges against them of "absconding" or theft, to stop them leaving the country.

Amnesty International is also concerned that, without other reforms and monitoring mechanisms to curb the actions of abusive employers, the removal of the exit permit might encourage more employers to confiscate passports and make malicious accusations.

The Ministry of Interior's decision No 95 of 2019 does not mention any legal consequences for failing to abide by its provisions, but when announcing the law on 16 January 2020, the Ministry of Interior said:

"If a domestic worker leaves the country without informing the employer, the worker will be deprived of any financial settlements, tickets and also will be denied returning to work for another employer till the completion of the legal period of four years".[40]

Indeed, article 26 of the 2015 Sponsorship Law stipulates that workers dismissed on disciplinary grounds "shall not be allowed to re-enter the country for work before four years of the date he/she leaves it".[41]

In the absence of available evidence and data it is unclear how these punitive measures are being used against domestic workers or whether, before bans on returning are imposed, proper investigations are carried out into why domestic workers have fled the workplace. It is also unclear how domestic workers, isolated in their employers' homes, can realistically challenge the legality of cases brought against them.

NO-OBJECTION CERTIFICATES

Prior to August 2020, migrant workers in Qatar could not change jobs without a No-Objection Certificate. This particularly affected women domestic workers who often arrive in Qatar to find that they have been deceived about their working conditions, hours and salary. Despite this, they could not change jobs without their employer's consent, the very person responsible for the deception.

However, as part of their reform programme with the ILO, MADLSA announced on 30 August 2020 that all workers will be able to change jobs without the permission of their employers after fulfilling certain conditions, including completing a probation period and serving notice.

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39 Article 2 of the Ministry of Interior Decision No 95 of 2019. Both a tweet posted by the Ministry of Interior's account and a quote in *The Peninsula* article were published on 16 January 2020 but were eventually deleted.

40 ibid.

41 Article 26: "If the worker was fired on disciplinary grounds pursuant to the said labour law or in accordance with the provisions of the laws regulating civil servants; affairs, or any other law for that matter, and the worker does not challenge the decision before a competent court, or has lodged an appeal but was rejected by virtue of a final decision by the competent court, he/she shall not be allowed to re-enter the country for work before four years of the dates he/she leaves it."

Law No 18 of 2020 amended certain provisions of the Labour Law,[42] and Law No 19 of 2020 amended provisions of the Sponsorship Law to allow all migrant workers, including domestic workers, to change employers at any time after the end of their six-month maximum probation period, providing they serve their notice. The notice period is set at one month for the first two years of service and two months for those in service for more than two years. The probation period for domestic workers should not exceed three months.[43]

Law No 19 of 2020 amended certain provisions of the Sponsorship Law to grant workers the right to change jobs according to conditions set by MADLSA.[44] The online transfer request's process is led by MALDSA and should be free of charge for workers. The law came into force on 8 September 2020 following its publication in the *Official Gazette*.[45]

These changes came after a failed attempt in 2015 when the Ministry of Interior announced that it was moving to a "contract-based" system rather than one based on sponsorship.[46] In practice this meant that during the contract – at least two years for domestic workers and up to five years for others who have signed permanent contracts – migrant workers could not change job. Even if they obtained their sponsor's permission, they could only change jobs after they had completed at least a year of their contract.

If domestic workers want to seek justice in courts, they have no place to stay for the duration of the long court proceedings, with the exception of Filipino domestic workers who can stay in the Embassy's shelter.

The Ministry of Interior could, on the instructions of MADLSA, temporarily transfer the sponsorship of the migrant worker to a new employer in case of pending lawsuits with the current employer or "in the event of abuse from the sponsor".[47] However, there is no clear definition of what constitutes "abuse" or what criteria apply when the ministries make such decisions. Because domestic workers are not covered by the Labour Law, their ability to transfer to a new job via this process was limited and required a lot of support,[48] making it extremely difficult for them to secure No-Objection Certificates or challenge their employers for denying them the right to change jobs.

When fleeing abusive employers, domestic workers would find themselves in a Catch-22 situation. They are often without their passports or residence permits, as their employer has them, and are at risk of becoming irregular in the country and accumulating penalties for overstaying if their employer fails to renew or cancels their residency permit or accuses them of "absconding". If domestic workers want to seek justice in courts, they have no place to stay for the duration of the long court proceedings, with the exception of Filipino domestic workers who can stay in the Embassy's shelter. But even then, they will lose months of income while awaiting resolution of their cases in court. Alternatively, domestic workers could opt to stay in Qatar, often illegally, and work on the black market, but this carries the risk of arrest, deportation and potentially a ban from entering Qatar again.

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42 Law No 18 of 2020 amended articles 39, 43, 49, 115/bis, 144, 145, 145/bis of the Labour Law.

43 For more details see, *Changing employers in Qatar: Key information for workers*, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_754449.pdf

44 Law No 20 of 2020 amended articles 21 and 23 and removed article 22 of Law No. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry and exit of expatriates and their residence.

45 For more details see, *Changing employers in Qatar: Key information for workers,* https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_754449.pdf

46 For more details, see Amnesty International, *Qatar – New Name, Old System? Qatar's New Employment Law And Abuse of Migrant Workers*, 12 December 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/5242/2016/en/

47 See article 22 of Law No 21 of 2015 available at: https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=17066&lawId=6809&language=ar

48 Ibid.

I do not have my passport. [The] Agency gave it to Madam. I asked for it but she did not give it to me. *– Olivia*[49]

A detailed plan of action tailored to the needs of domestic workers and their specific conditions is needed to ensure that legal changes deliver practical ones.

Today, the recent legal reforms offer a glimpse of hope for migrant workers, especially domestic workers trapped in abusive working conditions. But for these reforms to bring the changes needed and overhaul domestic workers' experience in Qatar, they must be accompanied by strict and effective monitoring mechanisms to ensure their full implementation. A detailed plan of action tailored to the needs of domestic workers and their specific conditions is needed to ensure that legal changes deliver practical gains. Additional work is required to eliminate legal loopholes such as passport confiscation and "absconding" charges that could still be used by abusive employers to undermine the reforms.

"The Working Group invites the Government to double its efforts to equalise the relationship between employers and employees by, for example, enabling employees to renew IDs themselves and actively pursuing those employers who withhold the documents and salaries of their employees. The workers must be allowed to leave their employers without the fear of being arrested for the so-called crime of absconding and the police must ensure that their investigations into allegations by the employers against workers are objective, respect the presumption of innocence and do not lead to automatic detention of the workers for the time of investigation."

— Working Group on Arbitrary Detention preliminary findings report, November 2019.[50]

49 Olivia, interviewed in Doha, 20 May 2019.

50 Extracts from the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention Preliminary Findings from its visit to Qatar (3-14 November 2019), https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25296&LangID=E

A NEW LAW AND OTHER INITIATIVES

Domestic workers are not covered by the country's Labour Law, although in August 2017 the government introduced the Domestic Workers Law No 15 of 2017.[51] This, combined with a unified contract, offered domestic workers a glimmer of hope.

The hope was short-lived. These reforms, as well as other initiatives such as awareness raising campaigns, still leave domestic workers with less protection than workers covered by the Labour Law and still breach international standards, including ILO Domestic Workers Convention No 189[52] and the Domestic Workers Recommendation No 201[53] (even though Qatar has not ratified the Convention).

I asked for 30 minutes sleep in the daytime but the 20-year-old daughter wouldn't let me. If I go to rest she would pour cold water in my face, pull my hair. She said if I sleep she'll pour hot water in my face. She broke the [bedroom] door, [there are] only curtains there now. *– Mariam*[54]

DOMESTIC WORKERS LAW

Considering the particular vulnerability of domestic workers because of the nature of their job, gender, low income and social status – and given Qatar's international obligations – the law covering their rights should have gone above and beyond the rights contained in the Labour Law. It did not. Indeed, the Domestic Workers Law[55] leaves crucial provisions vague, thereby allowing the status quo to prevail on key issues, such as excessive working hours.

Payment of salaries: The law states that salaries should be paid at the end of the month or no later than the third day of the following month.[56] However, neither the law nor the government specifies measures to ensure that domestic workers are actually paid, or outlines any enforcement measures against employers who fail to pay. Unlike other workers, domestic workers continue to be excluded from the Wage Protection System, a system to monitor electronic payments of salaries.[57]

Working hours and overtime: The law states that the working day should not exceed 10 hours (two more than the government-agreed standard contract), unless there is agreement between the parties. Given the power imbalance between worker and employer, this provides a loophole that is exploited by abusive employers. The law does not refer to paid overtime,[58] nor does it secure

51 Amnesty International, *Qatar: Two new laws on migrant workers signal degree of progress but major gaps remain*, 25 August 2017, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/7002/2017/en/

52 ILO C189 – Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189

53 ILO R201 – Domestic Workers Recommendation, 2011 (No. 201) https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R201

54 Mariam, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.

55 See Law No 15 of 2017, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/MONOGRAPH/105099/128416/F-1438071320/QAT105099%20Eng.pdf

56 Article 8 of Law No 15 of 2017.

57 In November 2015, the government introduced the Wage Protection System, which mandates companies – but not employers of domestic workers – to pay their employees by electronic transfer and improves the government's ability to monitor cases when companies fail to do so.

58 Article 12 of Law No 15 of 2017.

equal treatment for domestic workers with other workers (the Labour Law, which excludes domestic workers, sets a maximum eight-hour working day, with a maximum of two hours overtime per day).[59] International standards insist that domestic workers are treated equally with other workers in terms of normal hours of work and paid overtime,[60] and that overtime and periods of standby should be accurately recorded.[61]

> ***Madam [was] not treating me right. I was alone, cleaning 10 bathrooms, five bedrooms, five salons, one kitchen. I was working all alone. Three floors.*** – *Irene*[62]

Weekly day off: The law states that domestic workers should receive 24 consecutive hours of rest a week, but does not refer to a fixed weekly rest day.[63] It also states that they should not work during their rest period unless there is a prior agreement between them and their employers.[64] Leaving the possibility to work on the day off open to an agreement between parties provides another opportunity for employers to deny domestic workers their right.[65] It also does not make clear that if a domestic worker stays at home on their rest day they should not be asked to work. Both provisions lack clarity and are exploited by abusive employers.

Annual leave: The law states that domestic workers are entitled to three weeks of paid annual leave after each year of work, and that they can choose when, where and how they take it. After two years of service, they are entitled to a plane ticket home.[66] However, there is no mechanism to ensure that these provisions are respected in practice.

The contract: The law does not specify that the written contract should be available in languages other than Arabic, which many migrant workers cannot speak or read. This breaches international standards.[67]

Food and accommodation: The law is vague on minimum standards and provides no effective inspection mechanisms to ensure that adequate food and accommodation is provided. International standards insist that domestic workers are provided with sufficient and good quality food, adapted to the extent reasonable to the cultural and religious requirements, if any, of the domestic worker concerned. The standards also state that domestic workers should enjoy decent living conditions that respect their privacy,[68] and that they have the right to a safe and healthy working environment.[69]

59 Article 73 of Qatar Labour Law.
60 Article 10 of ILO C189 – Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).
61 Section 8 of the ILO Domestic Workers Recommendation, 2011 (No 201).
62 Irene, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.
63 Article 13 of Law No 15 of 2017.
64 Article 7/5 of Law No 15 of 2017.
65 Article 13 of Law No 15 of 2017.
66 Article 14 of the Law No 15 of 2017.
67 Article 7 of the ILO C189 – Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).
68 Article 6 of the ILO C189 – Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).
69 Article 13 of the ILO Convention No 189.

I worked from 5am until 12am, [with] no day off. No food. I was eating leftovers. They treated me like a dog. Sorry [for crying]. I do not want to remember ever again. *– Rosalinda*[70]

Dignity at work: The law states that employers should treat domestic workers in a good manner that preserves their dignity and bodily integrity,[71] but does not include provisions covering complaint mechanisms, temporary accommodation and other measures needed to protect domestic workers.[72]

Sick leave: The law includes no provisions for sick leave, including whether it should be paid, and fails to refer to the Labour Law, which provides for sick pay for other workers.[73]

End of service benefits: The law states that domestic workers are entitled to an end of service benefit of no less than three weeks' salary for every year in service, and allows employers to deduct from it any amount owed by the worker.[74] However, it fails to mention any mechanisms to oversee such deductions or allow workers to challenge arbitrary deductions.

In short, the Domestic Workers Law falls well below international standards. It is also so weakly implemented that in reality it fails to provide the little protection that it does promise. Aware of these problems, the ILO committed in its technical agreement signed with Qatar in October 2018 to both implement the law in full and review it.[75] To date this has not happened.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) summed up in 2019 the weaknesses of Qatari law:

"Domestic workers, who are predominantly women, do not enjoy the same legal protection as other migrant workers whose rights are covered by the Labour Act."

It also highlighted the failure to guarantee domestic workers with,

"… a minimum wage, the right to sick leave, the right to benefits and protection relating to maternity and the right to establish or join labour unions, as well as a guarantee that migrant workers may enjoy daily and weekly rest periods agreed upon between them and their employers, especially in the absence of labour inspections, which may lead to exploitation and abuse".[76]

70 Rosalinda, interviewed remotely, 11 May 2019.
71 Article 7/2-3 of Law No 15 of 2017.
72 Section 7 of the ILO Domestic Workers' Recommendation 2011 (No 201).
73 Article 82 of the Labour Law provides workers with two weeks of sick leave at full pay, four weeks at half pay, and unpaid leave thereafter.
74 Article 15 of the Law No 15 of 2017.
75 See *Annual progress report on the technical cooperation programme agreed between the Government of Qatar and the ILO*, 7 October 2019, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_723203.pdf
76 See *Concluding Observations on the 2nd Periodic Report of Qatar of Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, July 2019, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3827974?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header

A minimum wage has since been agreed and will come into effect in March 2021 (see below).

STANDARD CONTRACT

In 2018, the government introduced the standard contract. This is a standardized document agreed by Qatar, labour-sending countries and recruitment agencies to be signed by both worker and employer. Among other things, it specifies the job description, the worker's right to take time to worship, rest and eat during the working day,[77] the provision of free accommodation and food, paid weekly leave of at least 24 consecutive hours, three weeks paid annual leave and end of service benefits.

In reality, although the contract forms a good start, it fails to fully protect domestic workers' rights. In breach of international standards, it does not specify, among other things:

- details of duties related to the job description;[78]
- the normal working hours and the rate of compensation for overtime and being on standby;[79]
- clear minimum standards regarding provision of adequate accommodation and food;[80] and
- provisions related to sick leave.[81]

Moreover, the contract is only available in Arabic and English, languages that many domestic workers do not understand when signing the contract, in violation of international standards.[82]

COMMITTEES FOR THE SETTLEMENT OF LABOUR DISPUTES

Prior to 2018, domestic workers - both live-in and live-out - had no legal protection against labour abuses. They had no access to grievance mechanisms and were barred from lodging claims against their employers at the Labour Court. Because of their exclusion from the Labour Law, they could not claim essential workers' rights such as limits on their working hours, a day off, annual leave, payment of medical costs, and decent accommodation.

In March 2018, Qatar established the Committees for the Settlement of Labour Disputes (the Committees), which can hear cases from any migrant worker, including domestic workers. These fast-track judge-led courts promised judgments in just six weeks of a complaint being made. This was a welcome step towards treating domestic workers the same as other workers. Despite MADLSA's ongoing efforts to improve the system,[83] it has failed to deliver for three key reasons.

Firstly, domestic workers risk losing their legal status in Qatar, their income and a place to stay while they wait for their cases to go through the Committees. If employers do not cooperate, a simple case of unpaid wages can run for months without being resolved. With the government-operated shelter in Qatar not fully working, the worker would need a safe refuge and income to support them during the process.

Secondly, winning a case does not guarantee payment of dues within a reasonable time, if at all. Some employers either fail to engage with the legal process or refuse to pay, leaving the women without money and trapped in Qatar.

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77 After several modifications, MADLSA confirmed that the current version had been in force since May 2018.
78 See Article 7/d of the ILO Convention No 189 and Section 6 2/a of the ILO Domestic Workers' Recommendation 2011 (No 201).
79 See Article 7/f of the ILO Convention No 189 and Section 6 2/c of the ILO Domestic Workers' Recommendation 2011 (No 201).
80 See Section 17 of the ILO Domestic Workers' Recommendation 2011 (No 201).
81 Section 6 2/b of the ILO Domestic Workers' Recommendation 2011 (No 201).
82 Article 7 of the ILO Convention No 189.
83 In its letter to Amnesty International sent on 22 August 2020, the GCO explained that MALDSA is looking into further enhancing the complaints mechanisms by enabling all migrant workers to lodge and track their complaints electronically on the Ministry's website and its application *Amirni*.

In June 2020, MADLSA and the Supreme Judiciary Council opened an office for the implementation of the Committees' rulings aiming to facilitate and expedite the process for workers.[84] The Government Communications Office stated in its letter to Amnesty International that the Workers' Support and Insurance Fund – which was set up to pay workers who have won their cases at the Committees but whom employers have failed to pay – provided domestic workers with financial relief.[85] However, it is unclear what this financial relief covers and the extent to which domestic workers have benefited from this fund.

Thirdly, the scope of the cases accepted by the Committees is limited to financial claims such as unpaid wages and end of service benefits. Complaints related to harsh working conditions, working hours, overtime and passport confiscation are not examined. Cases of physical and sexual abuse are dealt with by the criminal courts, although the abuses need to be extremely serious for charges to be pressed against employers.[86] Even then, abusive employers are rarely held to account for their crimes.

MADLSA also set up a hotline and mobile application to receive complaints from workers, including domestic workers. However, according to organizations working on issues related to domestic workers, these measures failed to offer the support needed. Indeed, the hotline is not toll-free, leading many domestic workers to refrain from seeking help because they simply cannot afford the call. Additionally, complaints cannot be made anonymously. In the absence of safe shelters, this means domestic workers would remain in their employer's house at risk of retaliatory measures.[87]

COMPLAINING TO THE COMMITTEES

At the start of the complaints process, according to MADLSA, the Ministry's Domestic Workers Department will contact the employer to set a mediation session the following day. This should be concluded within seven days. If this fails, the case is referred to the Committees within three working days and a first hearing should happen between three and seven days later.

The number of complaints from domestic workers received by the Domestic Workers Department is unclear: MADLSA told Amnesty International that between January 2018 and December 2019 the department received 672 complaints from domestic workers, of which 543 were settled in mediation.[88] However, in a meeting with Amnesty in December 2019, officials from the Department said they had received around 100 cases in August 2019 alone, most of them about salary delays, end of service benefits, passport confiscation or requests by the worker to go home before the end of their contract. This appears to be more in line with information gathered by Amnesty International.

MADLSA told Amnesty that most cases are resolved by mediation and only a few proceed to the Committees, but ultimately "all cases are resolved".[89]

However, labour-sending countries told Amnesty International that only around 60% of cases are solved by mediation or within a reasonable time, and that the rest are referred to the Committees, triggering a long and in some cases fruitless process.[90]

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84 *The Peninsula*, "Labour Ministry and Supreme Judiciary Council open office for implementation of rulings", 29 June 2020, https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/29/06/2020/Labour-Ministry-and-Supreme-Judiciary-Council-open-office-for-implementation-of-rulings

85 GCO letter sent to Amnesty International on 22 August 2020.

86 For more details, see Chapter 10.

87 Concerns raised by domestic workers' advocates in Doha.

88 MADLSA letter to Amnesty International, received 8 October 2020.

89 Meeting with representatives of the Domestic Workers Unit at MADLSA, 26 November 2019. This number could include both live-in and live-out domestic workers.

90 Meeting with a labour-sending country's representative in Doha, 24 November 2019.

In practice, mediation appears to be slow partly because some employers do not cooperate with the MADLSA process and partly because cases are usually assigned on a rotational basis, with each embassy only allowed to submit cases on a designated day of the week. MADLSA said this avoids long delays and helps the Committees organize their workload.[91] However, labour-sending countries said that the rotation system cannot deal with the volume of cases they have as it allows them only five cases per week.[92]

The obstacles, the lack of trust in the system and the financial and psychological impact of the process mean that many domestic workers do not seek justice through the Committees.

If mediation fails, the cases are then referred to the Committees. There, the cases tend to take a long time to be processed. Amnesty International spoke to five women who had been waiting for months in Qatar while their cases were going through the Committees. As Maria said:

I filed a case on 10 December 2019… I have had two sessions to date, in mid-April and early May, but Madam is not cooperating. 21 May will be my third session. I can't wait anymore… I need to go back to my family. I am even happy to let go of my money. I can't wait forever. I came here because I wanted to pay for my children's school, now I have no money.[93]

In its letter to Amnesty International, the GCO spoke about the legal assistance provided by MADLSA for domestic workers throughout the complaint process, be it in the form of translation services or legal aid.[94] However, none of the women Amnesty International spoke with appears to have received sufficient legal aid, such as access to pro bono lawyers or legal advice to help them navigate the court proceedings. Instead, they had to rely mainly on their embassies' support for legal assistance in their quest for justice.[95]

In its White Paper on Domestic Workers and Employers in the Arab World, the ILO sums up key concerns related to domestic workers' access to justice that, according to Amnesty International's findings, continue to be the case in Qatar:

"Both conciliation and judicial cases brought by domestic workers in the Arab States face a number of hurdles, key among them being the difficulty of enforcing the participation of the employer; the precarious immigration status of the domestic worker while the dispute resolution is underway; the worker's accommodation/financial ability to support him or herself during the dispute period; and the length of time that dispute resolution entails – which can take months and even years". [96]

91 Meeting with representatives of the Domestic Workers Unit at MADLSA, 26 November 2019.
92 Meeting with labour-sending countries' representatives in Doha, 27 and 28 November 2019.
93 Maria, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
94 GCO letter sent to Amnesty International on 22 August 2020.
95 For more details about migrant workers access to justice see Amnesty International, *All Work No Pay: the struggle of Qatar's migrant workers for justice*, 19 September 2020, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde22/0793/2019/en/
96 See ILO White Paper, *Domestic Workers and Employers in the Arab States: Promising practices and innovative models for a productive working relationship*, p.18, 2017, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_619661.pdf

Indeed, the obstacles, the lack of trust in the system and the financial and psychological impact of the process mean that many domestic workers do not seek justice through the Committees. For those who do, many lose hope during the process and either drop their case or return home without receiving the money owed to them. No other mechanism exists to hold employers to account for violating workers' rights.

OTHER INITIATIVES

The government has announced other initiatives to improve the situation of domestic workers, although promising and welcomed, they have either not been implemented or failed to bring the change needed.

A MINIMUM WAGE

In October 2017, Qatar announced a temporary minimum monthly wage of just QR750 (around US$200).[97] The rate was too low[98] and, in any case, it was never properly enforced. In October 2019, MADLSA announced new legislation related to the draft law on Qatar's minimum wage, which will include domestic workers.[99] The following month, the Council of Ministers was reported to have approved the draft legislation, which was finally passed on 30 August 2020.[100]

Law No 17 of 2020 introduced a mandatory minimum wage for all migrant workers, including domestic workers. The monthly rate was set to QR1,000 (around US$275), plus allowances of QR300 (around US$83) for food and QR500 (around US$137) for accommodation if these are not provided by the employer. A Minimum Wage Committee was also formed,[101] tasked to study and review the rate[102] at least once a year taking into consideration economic factors, including economic growth, competitiveness, productivity and the needs of all migrant workers and their families.[103] The minimum wage will enter into force in March 2021, six months after its publication in the *Official Gazette*.

While the new minimum wage will boost the incomes of some of the lowest-paid workers, including domestic workers earning less than QR900 (around US$245),[104] it needs to be regularly reviewed[105] and progressively increased to secure just and favourable conditions for all migrant workers. The government has promised to do so, but it is still too soon to assess its impact on improving domestic workers' income in Qatar.

97 *The Peninsula*, "Qatar to introduce minimum wage for workers", 25 October 2017, https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/25/10/2017/Qatar-to-introduce-minimum-wage-for-workers

98 The rate was less than the QR900 (around US$248) per month minimum wage that Nepal's Department of Foreign Employment currently demands from Qatari companies seeking to employ its citizens. It was too low to secure just and favorable working conditions for workers and help most of them earn enough to free themselves from the debt bondage caused by payment of illegal recruitment fees.

99 Al-Jazeera, *Qatar moves to announce abolishment of kafala system*, 17 October 2019.

100 Amnesty International, *Qatar: New laws to protect migrant workers are a step in the right direction*, 30 August 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/qatar-annoucement-kafala-reforms/

101 Article 5 of Law No 17 of 2020.

102 Article 6 of Law No 17 of 2020.

103 Article 2 of Law No 17 of 2020.

104 At least four domestic workers interviewed by Amnesty International said they were earning less than QR900 (around US$245) per month.

105 In 2019, the ILO conducted a study to advise on setting a minimum wage. The study has not been made public, but media reports in 2019 suggest it recommended a minimum wage of at least QR1,250 (around US$343).

SHELTER

On 30 July 2019, the authorities inaugurated the first government-run shelter for survivors of abuse including domestic workers, the Human Care Home.[106] In November 2019, MADLSA told Amnesty International that the shelter was to be run by the Red Crescent and would host around 200 women, and that final logistical details were being discussed before it could open "very soon".[107]

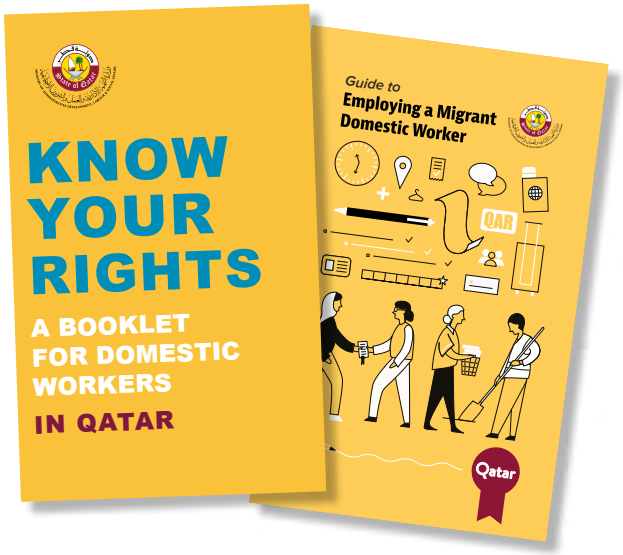
Amnesty International understands that in recent months the shelter began to receive several women, but it appears not to be fully operational. It does not operate as a walk-in centre for women and it is unclear on what basis individuals are offered a place. Even when it is fully operational experts following the situation of domestic workers in Qatar have raised their concern that it could not cope with the potential number of women who would seek refuge there. The lack of a safe refuge for abused women makes it extremely difficult for them to report their exploitation and find the courage to flee a toxic working environment.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Throughout 2019 and 2020 the government, in partnership with the ILO, launched an awareness campaign to educate domestic workers, employers and recruitment agencies about their respective rights and obligations under the Domestic Workers Law [108]. This has included workshops led by the ILO in coordination with MADLSA on good practices, such as recruitment fees, standard contracts and working hours;[109] information material produced with the NGO Migrant-Rights.org;[110] bi-monthly meetings with representatives of labour-sending countries; and events to celebrate International Domestic Workers Day.[111]

MADLSA stressed the importance of this work to help shift the perception of domestic workers and educate both parties, but believes that change should be introduce gradually to "avoid shocking Qatari society".[112]

These campaigns and initiatives are undeniably needed to complement the reform process, shift behaviour and educate both employers and domestic workers about their rights and obligations. However, they must be accompanied by stricter enforcement measures, monitoring and implementation mechanisms to ensure they are fully enforced and lead to the desired changes.



106 *Gulf Times*, "Human Care Centre' launched to protect victims of trafficking", 30 July 2019, https://www.gulf-times.com/story/637897/Hu-man-Care-Centre-launched-to-protect-victims-of-t

107 Meeting with MADLSA officials in Doha, 26 November 2019.

108 See *Annual progress report on the technical cooperation programme agreed between the Government of Qatar and the ILO*, 7 October 2019, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_723203.pdf

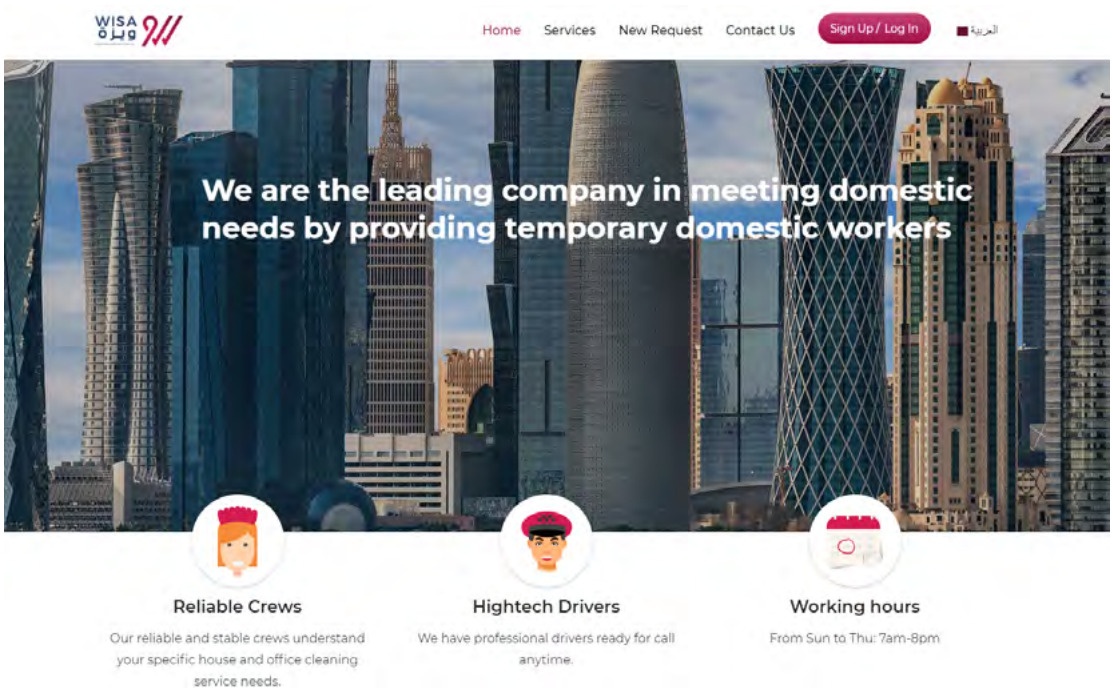
109 See ILO tweet, https://twitter.com/ILOQatar/status/1036948208914714625

110 See the information about the booklet directed to domestic workers *"Know your Rights"*, https://www.adlsa.gov.qa/en/Labour/recruitment/Attachments/Know%20Your%20Rights%20-%20A%20Booklet%20for%20Domestic%20Workers%20in%20Qatar.pdf; and the one for employers *"Your Guide to Employing Migrant Domestic Workers"*, https://www.adlsa.gov.qa/en/Labour/recruitment/Attachments/Guide%20to%20Employing%20a%20Migrant%20Domestic%20Worker.pdf

111 *Annual progress report on the technical cooperation programme agreed between the Government of Qatar and the ILO*, 7 October 2019, p.5.

112 Meeting with Domestic Workers Unit officials at MADLSA in Doha, 26 November 2019.

QATAR MANPOWER SOLUTIONS (WISA)



In September 2019, a new system for live-out domestic workers began, although the extent of its operations remains unclear.[113] Qatar Manpower Solutions Co (WISA),[114] a public company established by the Minister of Commerce and Industry, was set up to recruit and manage domestic workers in households on a live-out basis, an initiative supported by the ILO.[115] The workers will be provided with accommodation and transportation, and will work no more than 10 hours a day including a proper break time. Workers will also be provided with prepaid phone cards to allow them to report any abuses they might face and will be enrolled into the Wage Protection System to allow them to have their monthly wages transferred to their bank accounts.[116] Amnesty International was not able to fully examine WISA's model, including talking with any women housed there, but the initiative sounds promising and could offer a viable alternative to the live-in model, and allow proper monitoring of domestic workers' working conditions, if fully and properly implemented.

113 According to information shared by GCO in its letter to Amnesty International on 22 August 2020, MADLSA commissioned a detailed assessment of WISA in order to help determine the best mechanisms to find alternative employment models for domestic workers in Qatar.

114 See https://wisa.qa/

115 *Annual progress report on the technical cooperation programme agreed between the Government of Qatar and the ILO*, 7 October 2019, p.14.

116 GCO letter sent to Amnesty International on 22 August 2020.

QATAR VISA CENTRES

Since 2018, MADLSA, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, established Qatar Visa Centres (QVC) [117] in six labour sending countries to expedite the recruitment process, facilitate the visa procedure and curb the practice of contract deception.[118] According to MADLSA, the centres' services expanded to include domestic workers. Amnesty International's preliminary findings indicate that the Centres could, if properly implemented, address some abuses in the recruitment process. However, it remains to be seen how far the Centres will go in addressing core recruitment problems, especially eliminating recruitment fees and contract deception for migrant workers.[119]

Prospective migrant workers wait outside the Qatar Visa Centre (QVC) in Kathmandu, Nepal, in January 2020. © Amnesty International

In summary, despite the reforms and positive initiatives, the labour system in Qatar can still leave women domestic workers powerless and at the mercy of abusive employers. The following chapters outline the experiences of the 105 women with whom Amnesty International communicated. Their experiences starkly convey the patterns of abuse they face in Qatar.

117 See https://www.qatarvisacenter.com/
118 According to information shared with Amnesty International on 22 August 2020, Qatar opened centres in six countries: Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, India and the Philippines, and expect to open three more in Tunisia, Kenya and Ethiopia.
119 Since 2019, Amnesty International has been monitoring the Qatar Visa Centres in Nepal and will publish its findings in due course.

4. A LIFE OF WORK WITHOUT REST

> ***I never had a day off in my three years and eight months of work in Qatar.***
> *– Rosalinda*[120]

Excessive working hours was one of the main concerns reported by women to Amnesty International. They worked on average over 112 hours per week, usually without a day off and proper rest – nearly double their contracted hours.

The Domestic Workers Law and standard contract indicate that domestic workers should work a maximum of 10 hours a working day, but leave the loophole that these hours can be extended if agreed by the worker and employer. Bearing in mind that evidence shows that any "agreement" between worker and employer is not based on free consent, the possibility to extend working hours beyond the maximum set in the law tacitly allows overwork without adequate or any remuneration. Women said that they felt scared to refuse their employers' endless requests, even when they needed to rest.

'I HAVE TOO MUCH WORK'

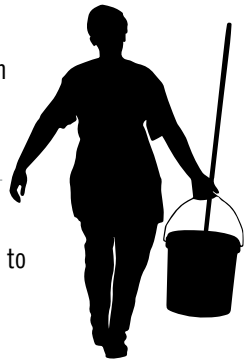
When asked by Amnesty International how many hours per week they usually worked, of the 105 women questioned, 95% said they worked more than the legal limit of ten hours per day:

53 said they worked **over 18 hours per day**

37 said they worked between **14 to 17 hours per day**

10 said they worked between **11 to 13 hours per day**

5 said they worked up to **10 hours per day**



The average was over 16 hours a day, almost always without a day off, amounting to 112 hours per week. None of the women interviewed was consulted about her preferred working arrangement. None of them was paid any overtime.

> ***I am so tired. I did not sit down during my time in their house.*** *– Rosa*[121]

120 Rosalinda, interviewed remotely, 11 May 2019.
121 Rosa, interviewed in Doha, 20 May 2019.

Qatari families tend to be large and employ more than one worker, such as a housekeeper, child carer, cook and driver. However, this does not appear to reduce the amount of daily work expected from domestic workers. On the contrary, the women interviewed reported serious cases of overwork especially around weekly family and social gatherings.

Non-Qatari families who come to Qatar for work, usually from neighbouring Arab countries, tend to employ one domestic worker. With numerous children and in some cases extended family members living in the house, the heavy workload for the domestic worker usually includes housekeeping, looking after the children and cooking.

TYPICAL DAILY ROUTINE

I have to sleep when they sleep, but be the first to wake up *– Mila*[122]

With slight variations, this is the typical daily routine of most of the women interviewed.

5am-7am: Prepare the children for school by dressing them, giving them breakfast and packing their bags.

7am-12pm: Cleaning the kitchen, bedrooms, toilets, outdoors and other parts of the house; and washing, hanging, folding and ironing clothes.

12pm: Preparing lunch either alone or with the help of the female employer.

For some domestic workers, the morning workload will be done while looking after young children – feeding, changing, bathing and settling them down to sleep. Some have already worked the night shift, sleeping in the baby's room. Many reported that they did not have time to sit down to eat lunch.

2pm-6pm: Taking care of the children after they return from school while finishing remaining chores.

The female employer is either still at work or at home resting while the domestic worker is looking after the children. Some domestic workers said they were asked to massage their female employer.

6pm-9pm: Preparing and serving dinner, and showering the children before their bedtime. Many domestic workers said that they only sleep when the children sleep, which could sometimes start very late.

9pm-midnight or 1am: Many have to wait for their employers' permission to sleep at night, which usually happens when the employers themselves go to bed.

Weekends and days off: These are reportedly the busiest and longest days for domestic workers because of social events, family outings and gatherings. They are typically made to join the employers to look after their children.

A typical contract signed by a Filipino woman before arrival in Qatar specifies an 8-hour day with one day off a week, for a monthly salary of QR1,460 (around US$400). A Kenyan woman will be paid around QR900 (around US$245) for the same hours of work.

122 Mila, interviewed in Doha, 21 November 2019.

Ramadan is a particularly tough time for domestic workers because of the daily social gatherings and late-night meals. Rosalinda told Amnesty International,[123]

> ***I want to tell you many things but I don't know how to start. Now I can't talk. I have too much work here now it is Ramadan. No one follows the rules here.***

In some cases women domestic workers recruited as cooks or drivers are forced to do housework, cleaning and gardening in addition to their contractual duties. For example, Reina, a 45-year-old Filipino woman, went to Qatar to work as a driver.[124] After washing the car every day at 5am and dropping off the children at school, she was expected to clean the house although it was not part of her job as specified in her contract. She said,

I had to clean the sala [wide living room] every day. If I do not clean it, they get upset. And if I complain that my job is a driver not a cleaner, they will tell me: "You came here to earn money, you should not complain, if we ask you to clean you clean, if we ask you to cook you cook. You will do whatever we ask you to do!"

Catherine, another domestic worker, said,[125]

Every day I have to clean the swimming pool with the net. If I don't, Mister will shout at me and say bad words.

Often, domestic workers are tasked with looking after babies and young children in addition to their housework. Most of them applied for housekeeping jobs with cleaning and ironing as their main tasks, and have neither been trained nor prepared to care for children.

Nearly all the women interviewed spoke of being given little to no time to rest. Many said that their employer made any rest impossible during the day.

> ***If Madam sees me sitting down, she will find more work for me.*** *– Nicole*[126]

Many women interviewed said that even after 16 hours of work per day they could not take a break to eat or sit.

> ***I was never able to finish my food. Every time I sit down to eat, Madam will call me. I was eating and working at the same time.*** *– Andrea*[127]

123 Rosalinda, interviewed remotely, 11 May 2019.
124 Reina, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.
125 Catherine, interviewed in Doha, 29 November 2019.
126 Nicole, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.
127 Andrea, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.

The lack of rest during working hours breaches both article 12 of the Domestic Workers Law, the standard contract and international standards, including Article 10 of the ILO C189 Convention on Domestic Workers and Article 8 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.[128]

In its White Paper, Domestic Workers and Employers in the Arab States,[129] the ILO found that:

"Domestic workers are often not afforded periods of daily or weekly rest and are instead subject to long 'standby hours' – 'periods during which domestic workers are not free to dispose of their time as they please and remain at the disposal of the household in order to respond to possible calls' (Anderson 2016). Although employers in the ILO surveys often perceived these hours as 'a break', studies show that stand-by hours (particularly at night) are mentally exerting and different from an actual rest period (Anderson 2016)."

'EVERY TIME I SLEEP, THEY KNOCK ON MY DOOR'

Reina routinely worked from dawn until long after dusk during her seven months employment in Qatar. On 24 September 2019, she had a car accident because she had only had two hours sleep:

On that day I went to sleep at 1am, and at 3am the 17-year-old daughter woke me up asking me to go and buy her a Red Bull [drink]. Then at 5.30am I started my usual working day, washing the car and preparing to drive the kids to school. On that day there was a party so I was asked to do more work and at 10pm I crashed the car into the wall.[130]

Many of the women said they slept on average just five hours a night.

I sleep at 3am because the children do not go to sleep until late, and I have to look after them. *– Maria*[131]

I sleep in the baby's room and need to wake up at night to feed and change him every two hours, so I cannot sleep properly. *– Joanne*[132]

They told me 'if the work is finished, you can go to sleep', but the work never ends. *– Jemma*[133]

128 See International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx
129 See ILO White Paper, *Domestic Workers and Employers in the Arab States: Promising practices and innovative models for a productive working relationship*, 2017, p.15.
130 Reina, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.
131 Maria, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
132 Joanne, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.
133 Jemma, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.

Some sleep even less. Nueva is allowed to go to bed at midnight or 1am and must wake up at 4am to make three types of coffee, bake cakes, prepare the children for school, then wash clothes, clean the large house and prepare food for the family. She said,

Every time I sleep, they knock on my door to make them things. *– Nueva*[134]

Emily worked in Qatar for over three years for a Syrian family of seven, including three young children.[135] She had to stay awake every night until 1am to look after the three-year-old who refused to go to sleep before then, and had to rise at 5am every day to prepare the older children for school. She said,

I am too tired. My face is all black because I do not get enough sleep and if I sometimes sleep again after sending the kids to school, Madam will tell me: 'my house is not a hotel and this is not a vacation'.

Angela told Amnesty International that her work and food were OK, but she struggled because she never had a day off and her sleep was disrupted as she shared a room with the family's baby.[136]

Madam needs to go to work, so the baby stays with me so Madam can sleep well.

She had been working for the family for over two years. She said her normal working hours were from 5.30am to 8pm, when she put the baby to bed. She rarely went to sleep before midnight as she needed to speak to her family back home and wind down watching a movie.

Mila, a Kenyan domestic worker, said,[137]

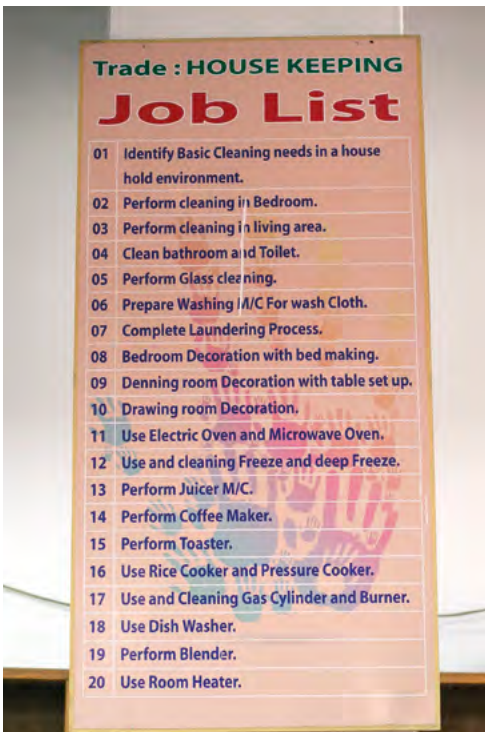
I can only sleep when they are asleep. Even if I am not working I have to stay up, even if this means watching TV with them. It is very tiring… I am the first to wake up in the house, at 6am to prepare the daughter for school.

134 Nueva, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.
135 Emily, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
136 Angela, interviewed remotely, September 2019.
137 Mila, interviewed in Doha, 23 November 2019.

‘WHY DO YOU WANT TO REST?’

When Gloria asked for a day off, she said that her employer’s response was “You need to stay here and work for 24 hours”.[138] She had been working over 20 hours per day and was barely allowed to sleep or rest. After seven months of such treatment, her employer told her to wash the car, plant flowers, do some gardening and carry cement blocks in addition to her normal housework duties. She decided to run away. When Amnesty International met her in Doha, she had been waiting for two years to get her passport back and a ticket home, despite winning her case against her employer in court.

Out of the 105 women Amnesty International contacted, 89 said they did not have a weekly day off and most said they had never had a day off during their employment. For some women this meant working for months and even years without a single rest day. Even though the law and the standard contract entitle domestic workers to a paid weekly rest day, Amnesty International found that many of the women were too scared to ask for it, with good reason. For instance, Amelie said that when she requested a day off after working for nine months without a break,[139]



A sign is posted in a classroom at the Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Mohila Technical Training Center in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The training center provides potential migrant workers with the skills they need to earn a living overseas. © Getty Images

[My employer told me] ‘Why do you want to rest? When you go back to your country then you can have a rest.’

Some women told Amnesty International that on their rest days they sometimes did not do their normal duties but still had to go out to buy groceries or accompany their employer’s family on trips so they could look after the children. This clearly does not constitute a rest day. In fact, the women said such days were sometimes more tiring than a regular day.

Out of the **105 women** Amnesty International contacted,

89 said they did not have a weekly day off

and most said they had never had a day off during their employment.

138 Gloria, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
139 Amelie, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.

Qatari authorities need to send a clear message to employers that a weekly rest day is compulsory and that working on the rest day can only be exceptional and must be rewarded with overtime pay.

In very few cases, domestic workers said that they were given a day off if their employer agreed. Victoria told Amnesty International that this would usually only happen once a month and not every month.[140]

Many said they were required to be on call 24/7, expected to work outside their regular hours and on their rest day. Mary, a Kenyan domestic worker, said:[141]

In addition to being a driver I have to do the house chores. I am also supposed to be on call all the time. I cannot rest in my room. I also have to drive them around and wait for them to bring them home. Some nights I stay up late working but still have to wake up early the following day.

Article 10 of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention states that.

"… periods during which domestic workers are not free to dispose of their time as they please and remain at the disposal of the household in order to respond to possible calls shall be regarded as hours of work to the extent determined by national laws".[142]

In line with their international obligations, Qatari authorities need to send a clear message to employers that a weekly rest day is compulsory, and that working on the rest day can only be exceptional and must be rewarded with overtime pay. They should also amend the text of the law to remove the ambiguity around the possibility of domestic workers working on their rest day to ensure that a rest day is seen as a right and not a reward granted at the discretion of employers. They must also make clear that domestic workers can freely choose how they spend their time off.[143] To make this a reality, the authorities must ensure that employers who continue to flout the law are held to account, thereby ending the impunity for such abuses that currently prevails (see Chapter 10).

140 Victoria, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
141 Mary, interviewed remotely, 11 December 2019.
142 Article 10 of the ILO C189 – Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).
143 Article 9 of the ILO C189 – Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).

5. A LIFE UNDER TOTAL CONTROL: TRAPPED IN ABUSIVE WORKPLACES

I was never allowed to leave the house unless it is with the wife of the sponsor.
– Emily[144]

Almost all the women said they faced severe restrictions on their liberty, freedom of movement and privacy. Most said they were never allowed to leave the house alone – they were always with their employer or accompanying the family. Only one was allowed to leave the house freely at least once a week on her rest day. Such restrictions merely increase their working hours and mean they are expected to be on duty 24/7.

This pattern of abuse was confirmed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance following a visit to Qatar in December 2019:

"I received reports that it is not uncommon for domestic workers to be confined by their employers –Qatari and non-Qatari alike – to the private homes in which these women work. Many are subjected to harsh working conditions: excessively long workdays with no rest and no days off, passport and mobile phone confiscation, physical and social isolation and, in some cases, physical, verbal or sexual assault by employers and their teenage or adult children." [145]

Such practices breach international standards,[146] which grants everyone the right to personal liberty and protects them against arbitrary deprivation of liberty.[147]

The desire and ability of employers to control domestic workers' private life stems from the practice of passport confiscation and, until recently, the exit permit requirement under the *kafala* system, which normalized restrictions on migrant workers' freedom of movement.

Some women said they were not allowed to freely chat with domestic workers in neighbouring houses, and two said they were barred from talking to friends altogether.

144 Emily, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
145 Extracts from the Special Rapporteur on racism's preliminary findings following a 10-day visit to Qatar in December 2019, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25374&LangID=E
146 See Articles 9, 12 and 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Qatar became a state party in May 2018.
147 In its preliminary findings following its visit to Qatar between 3 and14 November 2019, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention stated: "*Every State party to the ICCPR, including Qatar, not only has a duty to ensure that anyone acting on its behalf, such as State authorities and its agents, do not infringe this right, but also has a positive obligation to protect everyone in its territory or under its jurisdiction from violations of this right by private parties*".

I am not allowed to open the curtains because they do not want me to see anyone. I am not allowed to go outside unless I am with them. *– Cheryl*[148]

While most of the women interviewed had phones, almost all were only allowed to use them at the end of their working day. Many women said that by the time they finished their chores, they were too tired to speak to anyone.

I have a phone but cannot use it outside the room, and usually I come to my room to sleep because time is flying so I do not have the time to speak to my family.
– Catherine[149]

In a few cases, the women managed to hide their phone from their employers, fearing they would be confiscated. Confiscating domestic workers' phones appears to be used in some cases as a form of punishment. Three women told Amnesty International that their phones had been taken away following heated arguments during which the employer resorted to verbal and physical abuse.

Joanne said that after four months of surviving on little to eat, she finally found the courage to ask her employer to give her food so that she and the other Filipino domestic worker in the house could cook. The employer became upset and told Joanne that she would stop paying her salary. Joanne told her she would call her agency:

Madam got very angry and wanted to confiscate my phone. I refused because I need it to communicate with my family. She tried to take it by force. She grabbed my mobile, pushed me on the floor and she jumped on my back. She banged the phone on my face and slapped me.
– Joanne[150]

Some of the women interviewed were not allowed to have smart phones but were instead given regular phones only to be used to communicate with their employers. One said:

[She] bought me a phone just so that she can call me on it, but I am not allowed to call my family. In three months I only called my family once. *–Elisa*[151]

Restrictions on freedom of movement and communication lead to severe isolation. Already, the nature of their jobs means live-in domestic workers do not have easy access to the outside world or the peer support usually available in other workplaces. As a result, they are deprived of any emotional and psychological support, which is particularly vital when experiencing distress and abuse. This in turn will exacerbate cycles of abuse and prevent them from seeking help and reporting abuses.

148 Cheryl, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
149 Catherine, interviewed in Doha, 29 November 2019.
150 Joanne, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.
151 Elisa, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has called on Qatar to immediately abolish the sponsorship system and "ensure that all women in Qatar are free to leave the homes of their families and others if they choose to do so".[152]

WORKING GROUP ON ARBITRARY DETENTION

"[Migrant] workers [in Qatar] were reportedly prevented from leaving the residences where they were employed as domestic workers, or having curfews imposed by their employers which prohibit leaving their residences after a certain time of the evening…

"The practice of imposing curfews in the domestic residences of workers should be abolished and all workers should be free to utilise their time off work as they choose.

"… these situations lead to the de facto deprivation of liberty by private actors that are neither stipulated in the national legislation of Qatar nor permissible under international law." [153]

'THEY TOOK MY PASSPORT AWAY'

When I went to their home they took my passport away. It is my first time in the country and I am scared. *– Emma* [154]

Many domestic workers become trapped in their job – and in Qatar – because their employers confiscate their passports. In such cases, embassies could facilitate their departure by issuing a travel document in lieu of their passport, but the process is long and not always successful.

The Sponsorship Law allows passports to be held by the employer but only if the worker requests this in writing, and the employer must then return the passport to the worker on request.[155] The government claims that the practice of passport confiscation is in decline in Qatar partly due to the penalties imposed on offenders, stricter monitoring mechanisms and awareness raising campaign.[156] However, only 18 of the 105 women spoken to by Amnesty International had their passports. When asked, almost all of them said they were not asked for their consent – their passports were given to their employers by the recruitment agencies to process their residence permits, and were simply confiscated.

152 See *Working Group on Arbitrary Detention: Preliminary Findings from its visit to Qatar (3-14 November 2019),* https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25296&LangID=E
153 Extracts from the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention findings following a 10-day visit to Qatar in December.
154 Emma, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
155 See Article 8 of Law No 21 of 2015.
156 GCO letter to Amnesty International, 22 August 2020.

This reflects the findings of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), who in July 2019 noted:

"Despite the law prohibiting the confiscation of domestic workers' passports, 90 per cent of employers still did so, without any consequences".[157]

The widespread practice of passport confiscation defeats the aim of removing the exit permit requirement and continues to hinder the ability of domestic workers to freely leave Qatar.

In its reply to Amnesty International's request for information, the Government Communications Office[158] stated that the Sponsorship Law penalizes employers who confiscate migrant workers' passports with an increased fine of QR25,000 (around US$6,870). It added that cases of passport confiscation are investigated and offenders forced to return the passport and those who fail to pay the fines will be jailed. However, the government failed to provide any data about the number of employers who were investigated and fined for holding their domestic workers' passports despite Amnesty International's repeated requests. Organizations working on domestic workers issues were not aware of any such investigations, not even in cases where employers bluntly refuse to give back passports at the request of MADLSA, which could not do much about it.

DENISE'S STORY

Denise arrived in Qatar to work in November 2016.[159] Leaving behind two children and a partner, she needed a better salary to provide for her family and send her children to a good school.

Initially, she was deployed to a large Qatari family with six children who, she said, were "kicking and fighting all the time". She asked her agency to change her employer. Although she was offered QR700 more per month to continue working for the family, she turned down the offer.

She was then placed in the home of a divorced Qatari woman who had an active social life. Denise's day would start at 7am and end 14 hours later. When there were special social occasions, she would be up until 3am. She was in charge of cooking, cleaning, ironing, cutting grass and massaging her employer. The work, she said, was intense. She was never allowed a day off but could sometimes rest and go out to buy groceries.

When Amnesty International met Denise in November 2019, she was not complaining about her working conditions. Indeed, she spoke fondly of her employer, saying "I love Madam, she is like my mother".

Despite this fondness, Denise's situation had worsened just two months prior when on 1 September 2019, having completed and then extended her two-year contract, she wanted to return home. Her employer asked if she was planning to return, but Denise said she hadn't yet decided. Immediately, her employer's attitude changed and she told Denise that she had lost her passport. After six weeks, Denise told her she was considering coming back to work for her, and the passport "miraculously" reappeared.

157 *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women examines the report of Qatar,* 2 July 2019, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24789&LangID=E
158 GCO letter to Amnesty International, 22 August 2020 and MADLSA letters to Amnesty International received on 8 October 2020.
159 Denise, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.

Subsequently her employer was admitted to hospital and Denise was taken to the embassy to be sent home. In November 2019, three years after arriving to Qatar and 10 days after being forced to leave her employer's house, Denise was still waiting to receive her unpaid salary, passport and ticket, and still hoping that she would arrive home in time to spend Christmas with her children.

Although a domestic worker can now leave Qatar without official permission from her employer, she cannot do so without her passport. Her only hope is to flee to her embassy.

I decided to leave. I put my clothes and phone in the garbage bag and threw it out. Then I saw a taxi passing by. I asked him to take me away. *– Lana*[160]

When employers report a domestic worker for "absconding", they submit her passport to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which is responsible for arresting the woman for having become irregular in the country. This practice indicates that employers do not fear repercussions for keeping their workers' passports, and the CID does not try to establish or investigate why they are holding their workers' passports.

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention raised concerns about credible reports of employers withholding employees' documents and salary as leverage to stop them leaving Qatar, noting that such practices, along with the accusations of absconding,

"… lead to the de facto deprivation of liberty by private actors that are neither stipulated in the national legislation of Qatar nor permissible under international law".[161]

Article 9 of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention specifically states that workers are entitled to keep their travel and identity documents.[162]

160 Lana, interviewed in Doha, 20 May 2019.
161 See *Working Group on Arbitrary Detention: Preliminary Findings from its visit to Qatar (3-14 November 2019).*
162 Article 9 of the ILO C189 – Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).

6. LATE OR NON-PAYMENT OF SALARIES

You come to Qatar and you end up working for nothing. I feel so sad. *– Grace*[163]

These are the words of Grace, a Kenyan domestic worker in Doha. She told Amnesty International that domestic workers who were never paid or were not paid on time faced extreme financial and psychological pressure. If they cannot regularly send money home, it defeats the purpose of migrating and makes them feel they have let down their families. It also potentially amounts to forced labour.

Of the 105 women Amnesty International interviewed, more than half (55) said their wages had either been delayed or simply withheld for months. Both the Domestic Workers Law[164] and the standard contract[165] stipulate that domestic workers' wages should be paid at the end of each month and no later than the third day of the next month.

MADLSA said that it is urging all employers of domestic workers to open bank accounts for their employees to facilitate the payment of their wages and subsequent transfer of funds to their home countries. According to the Ministry, this will also improve the monitoring of payments.[166] However, almost all the women interviewed who were not paid, or not paid on time, said that for months they believed their employers' promises to pay them soon. In any case, they felt trapped by a system that limited their ability to change jobs or report exploitative employers.

I continued working for two years without getting my salary because I do not have a choice. Every month they kept promising me that I will go home to my family. So I kept waiting, but at the end when they were not sending me home and they were not paying me, I decided to leave. *– Wendy*[167]

The claims process through the Committees for the Settlement of Labour Disputes is slow and stressful, particularly for domestic workers who, in order to claim unpaid wages, will have had to leave their employer's home, lose any chance of income and, in most cases, risk being charged with "absconding".

When Alissa fled her employer after not being paid for six months, little did she know how long she would spend pursuing her case at the Committees. When Amnesty International met her in Doha in May 2019, six months had passed since she submitted her complaint. She had attended five court sessions but her employer did not show up at any of them.[168]

163 Grace, interviewed in Doha, 19 May 2019.
164 Article 8 of the Domestic Workers Law.
165 Section 5 of the standard contract.
166 GCO letter to Amnesty International, 22 August 2020 and MADLSA letters to Amnesty International received on 8 October 2020.
167 Wendy, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
168 Alissa, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.

Stella had been working for three years in Qatar.[169] Every month she was sending QR1,000 to her family in the Philippines and saving the rest with her employer. In April 2019, her employer could not pay her salary, so she decided to leave and submitted a claim with MADLSA for what she was owed. When Amnesty International spoke with her, she had already attended six sessions at the Committees, but her employer had not turned up. She had no idea how long the process would take or if she would receive her outstanding wages. She said,

I need to go home to see my family and I am very worried because the last time I sent money was on 3 October, now we are in November and I am worried about whether they have anything to eat.

The delays and in some cases ineffectiveness of the process mean many domestic workers lose hope, drop their case and return home penniless.

Valeria had been in Qatar since March 2019, working from 6am to 10pm every day without rest.[170] She received her salary for the first few months but then the payments stopped. When she asked her employer about her salary, he listed reasons why he could not pay her yet, such as his daughter was getting married, but promised to pay her later. He never did. When she threatened to leave and call her agency, her employer locked her in a room and told her she was not going anywhere. He then forced her to sign her name in a notebook to allow her to leave. She found out later from her agency that he had written next to her signature that she had been paid the full amount for her work.

Valeria was owed three months' of pay and submitted a complaint to the Committees. A few months later, she told Amnesty International that she had dropped the case and returned home despite the clear coercion and fraudulent behaviour by her employer:

I decided not to fight the case because they told me I have zero per cent chance in court. And it takes many months to face each other in court so I decided, instead of staying and waiting and do nothing in Qatar, to go back home to the Philippines to start a new life, because time is precious and I need money.

Sarah, aged 35, recounted how she had started working in Qatar in April 2017 and until April 2019 was paid her salary, although always late.[171] Then, for the next three months, she was not paid so she stopped working.

[My sponsor] said she had money problems, but I said 'I am a mother, you are a mother'. I asked my agency to help. They said 'you have to file a case at Ministry of Labour'.

Such cruel exploitation of low paid and vulnerable women will continue in Qatar until the government imposes strict regulations and ensures that employers are prosecuted and punished if they fail to pay domestic workers, in full and on time, the salaries specified in their contracts. Ultimately domestic workers should be enrolled in the Wage Protection System so that their monthly payments are monitored,[172] and action taken against employers who fail to pay on time.

169 Stella, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.
170 Message sent by Valeria to Amnesty International, 24 January 2020.
171 Sarah, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.
172 See *Technical cooperation between Qatar and the ILO (2018–20)*, p. 31, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_586479.pdf

7. VERBAL, PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE

She got very upset and hit [me] on my head, pulled my hair and beat me. I am not a punching bag. *– Diana*[173]

Amnesty International spoke to 40 women who said they had suffered a wide range of verbal, physical and in some cases sexual abuse. Often this involved degrading treatment, shouting and insults. In some cases, the verbal abuse had been accompanied by physical assaults, including spitting, beating, kicking, punching and hair-pulling.

Both Qatari law and international standards stress the importance of treating domestic workers with respect and protecting them from violence.

According to international standards, a state can be responsible for violations of rights by third parties and private actors if it failed to act with due diligence to prevent these violations or investigate and punish them.[174] The CEDAW has emphasized the importance of due diligence obligations that require states to prevent violence or violations of human rights; protect victims and witnesses from violations; investigate and punish those responsible, including private actors; provide access to redress for human rights violations; and "ensure that private actors do not engage in discrimination against women and girls".[175] The failure of the government to investigate and document such cases allows this form of violence against women to continue.

Both the 2015 Sponsorship Law and the Domestic Workers Law state that employers should treat domestic workers "in a way that preserves their dignity and wellbeing", avoids "exposing their health or life to danger" and ensures they are not physically or psychologically harmed in any way.[176] However, both laws are vague on the measures employers should take to fulfil these obligations and what consequences they will face if they fail to do so.

The ILO Domestic Workers Convention No 189 calls on member states to "take measures to ensure that domestic workers enjoy effective protection against all forms of abuse, harassment and violence",[177] and No 201 urges member states to establish:

"… accessible complaint mechanisms to report cases of abuse, harassment and violence; ensuring that all complaints of abuse, harassment and violence are investigated, and prosecuted, as appropriate; and establishing programmes for the relocation from the household and rehabilitation of domestic workers subjected to abuse, harassment and violence, including the provision of temporary accommodation and health care."

173 Diana, interviewed in Doha, 20 May 2019.
174 See CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 19 (IIth session, 1992) on Violence against Women, para 9, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CEDAW/GEC/3731&Lang=en
175 See Joint general recommendation/general comment No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices, para 10.
176 Article 7, Law No 15 of 2017.
177 Article 5 of the ILO C189 – Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).

‘I AM NOT AN ANIMAL’

I am a human, I am not an animal. Madam will say I am a monster, I will cut your tongue, I am scared. She will tell me, “will kill you”, always bad words. I am only a* khadima *[maid], and I can’t do anything. *– Emily*[178]

Some 32 women said they were insulted and shouted at during their employment. For some, the dehumanizing treatment was the final straw that pushed them to leave their employer.

I would have stayed in my job if I was treated like a human. The work I can accept, but insults are painful. I can’t handle not being treated like a human. *– Elisa*[179]

Women cited the derogatory names they had been called such as “*kalba*” (dog), “*hamara*” (stupid), “*hayawana*” (animal), “*charmouta*” (bitch). Even when the insults were spoken in Arabic – a language not spoken by most domestic workers in Qatar – they had memorized and painfully remembered them.

Madam was always shouting at me using bad words. I know a lot of bad words in Arabic: kalba, hayawana. *– Hannah*[180]

Some employers were extraordinarily cruel to their domestic workers.

Last time I went with Madam [outside the house] I asked to go to the toilet, but she followed me and was outside the toilet and said ‘where are you, you’re not in the toilet’, but I was. The next day she wouldn’t let me go to the toilet, so I peed in my pants. *– Irene*[181]

Many women said that their vast workloads made it difficult to complete their chores, which triggered outbursts and ill-treatment by their employers.

Sometimes I am just too busy with the kids that I can’t finish all the work and can’t do everything. Why say bad words to me? *– Emma*[182]

178 Emily, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
179 Elisa, interviewed in Doha, 28 November 2019.
180 Hannah, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.
181 Irene, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.
182 Emma, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.

Some women said they accepted verbal abuse as long as it did not turn into physical violence.

> ***If it was only shouting I could take it. It goes in one ear and out the other. But hitting I cannot take.*** *– Louise*[183]

'MADAM SLAPPED ME'

> ***I know sometimes I make some mistakes, but Madam will point her fingers in my face and spit on me.*** *– Emma*[184]

What starts as aggressive and insulting behaviour towards domestic workers may turn into physical violence. Amnesty International spoke to 15 women who said that they faced physical abuse at the hands of their employers or other family members. In some of these cases verbal abuse had evolved into serious physical assaults.

> ***Madam continued to shout at me, saying bad words. She pulled my clothes and Baba [male employer] spits at me saying bad words.*** *– Hannah*[185]

> ***Madam slapped me on the face. Baba was good, he shouted at Madam and asked her why she slapped me in the face. I was crying. The following day Madam started shouting at all khadimas [maids]… she started spitting on us and slapped me again… Before this incident she also kicked me on my back.*** *– Joy*[186]

Some women also said that their employers' children attacked them. The employers usually knew about the assaults, failed to stop them and excused the violent behaviour.

> ***[The children] beat me even when I was driving. They called me 'zombie', 'idiot' sometimes in front of the parents who remain silent. These children always asked me to go faster and not respect the road signs… If I do not do it they will beat me with slippers like animals.*** *– Reina*[187]

Some employers even blamed the domestic worker for upsetting the children. Indeed, victim blaming appears to be a common practice among abusive employers, psychologically damaging domestic workers.

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183 Louise, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.
184 Emma, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
185 Hannah, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.
186 Joy, interviewed in Doha, 28 November 2019.
187 Reina, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.

The kids are spoiled brats. They hit me and bite me. Madam says 'it is ok, they are just kids'… the kids tell me that I am an animal, they throw things on me… They bite me and it hurts. I cried many times because of the pain. They throw their toys at my face, my eyes. *– Emma*[188]

The two- and four-year-olds would punch me, pull my hair, kick me and [make me crawl on the floor and] ride me like a motorbike." *– Jane*[189]

'HE TOUCHED ME'

When Madam goes out, Baba will call me and tell me 'wash my clothes', but he's not wearing anything. I don't want to tell Madam because she might think I'm tempting him. He touched me and asked me to have a relationship. *– Kim*[190]

Five women said they had been sexually abused by their employers or visiting relatives. The sexual abuse ranged from harassment to fondling and rape. These are not just human rights abuses but are also in some cases serious crimes, yet not one of these women felt they could complain to the police for fear of retaliation by her employer and the system, or because they felt too ashamed to talk about it.

Anna, a 26-year-old Filipino woman, went to work in Qatar for "my mother and my baby, and my dreams". Her employers immediately confiscated her passport and phone, forced her to work 17-hour days, barely fed her, made her sleep on the floor, sexually harassed her and towards the end of her time there, did not pay her. She summed up her experience:

No food, no salary… Baba would touch me, Madam would spit at me.

For Kim, it all started on a January night when, almost a year after her arrival to Qatar, her male employer entered her room, started touching her and grabbed her breasts. He then pushed himself on her. From that night on, the aggression and sexual assaults became frequent.

None of these women felt they could complain to the police for fear of retaliation by her employer and the system, or because they felt too ashamed to talk about it.

188 Emma, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
189 Jane, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.
190 Kim, interviewed in Doha, 27 November 2019.

Eventually she told the other Filipino woman working in the house about her ordeal. To her surprise her colleague said she too had suffered similar sexual abuse. Both women were afraid to report it because his wife had often threatened to kill them if she saw them talking to her husband.

In another case, Ruth heard someone trying to open her door one night while she was sleeping. The door was locked, but over time she noticed that part of the door had been chipped away and she was afraid the lock wouldn't hold. Eventually, Ruth and her colleague escaped and sought refuge. When Amnesty International met her there in May 2019, almost two weeks after she fled, she was still waiting for her passport and ticket. Her employer had filed a case against her for "absconding" and she was worried about the consequences. She decided not to file a case against her employer. She said:

I am a mother, I feel so bad to be away from my children. I cannot tell them what happened.[191]

Julia, a 44-year-old mother of two, began working in Qatar in July 2018.[192] Despite working excessively long hours, she was content because she was paid on time and was allowed to call her family. The situation changed when her sponsor, the son of her employer, visited the house and attempted to rape the other Filipino woman working with her.

He called her upstairs to do some work and this is when he attempted to undress her. She came down to me, shaken, and told me what happened to her. The sponsor then came down to offer us some money to keep quiet, but we refused and said we want to file a case.

Julia and her friend were taken to the police, then the hospital and finally their embassy. The police investigator looked into the case, accused Julia and her friend of "making up stories", and eventually dropped the case. Julia told Amnesty International that the investigators told them that their employer would buy their tickets if they signed a statement:

It was in Arabic so we did not understand and the investigator said not to waste his time. We signed it because of the ticket, better to go home than go back to this employer's house.

The horrific ordeals suffered by these and other women were not investigated thoroughly or at all. Indeed, the obstacles facing domestic workers who try to seek justice, coupled with their lack of trust in the criminal justice system, mean that cases of sexual abuses are rarely reported. Even in the rare cases when domestic workers do report such abuses and press charges, they risk being accused of "illicit relations" and face an arsenal of retaliatory measures arising from the *kafala* system.

In its visit to Qatar in November 2019, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that,

"… individuals charged with certain misdemeanours or non-violent crimes, such as drug-related offences, adultery and sexual relationships out of marriage, had been denied the right to legal assistance".

191 Ruth, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
192 Julia, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.

The lack of information on cases[193] related to sexual violence brought by domestic workers coupled with the lack of data on prosecutions and sentencing of perpetrators make it much harder to combat sexual abuse of domestic workers in Qatar.

In 2019, CEDAW expressed concerns about the lack of information relating to,

"… the number of complaints about violence, including sexual violence, brought by women migrant workers during the reporting period; and the number of investigations and prosecutions and the sentences imposed on perpetrators".

It called on the government to:

"Ensure that victims of gender-based violence, including women domestic workers, have effective access to justice, protective measures, appropriate support services, rehabilitation and adequate redress and reparation, including compensation [and ensure that] abusive employers are held accountable and punished with sanctions commensurate with the gravity of the offence".[194]

The same concern was echoed by the Committee Against Torture in its report on Qatar in June 2018 regretting,

"the lack of information in the State party's report on the number of complaints, investigations, prosecutions, convictions and sentences imposed in cases of gender-based violence against women during the period under review (arts. 2 and 16)".[195]

193 The only data MADLSA was able to provide in response to Amnesty International's request for information on this dated back to 2013, in which they reported: three convictions for rape of domestic workers (resulting in one year in prison), and 12 convictions for violence against domestic workers (incurring penalties of on average one month in prison plus a fine).

194 See *Concluding Observations on the second periodic report of Qatar of Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, July 2019.

195 See *Concluding Observations on the third periodic report of Qatar of the Committee Against Torture*, June 2018, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT/C/QAT/CO/3&Lang=En

8. DENIED ADEQUATE FOOD, ACCOMMODATION AND HEALTHCARE

I read my contract before I left the Philippines. It said I should work eight hours a day, would have sufficient food and accommodation and one day off per week. But that was not the case. I was working from 5am to midnight and did not get enough food. *– Ruth*[196]

Ruth arrived in Qatar in February 2018 believing her agent, who had told her that it was a good place to work and she trusted the words in the contract. She saw the job as her only chance to provide for her three children. But after around 16 months of overwork, verbal abuse and dire conditions, she felt she had no choice but to flee her employers. She told Amnesty International:

Working inside the home is like a kind of torture. They play with your mind, there is a lack of food, you are overworked, and sometimes there is sexual abuse.

Some of the women interviewed by Amnesty International complained about a lack of food, poor accommodation and denial of access to healthcare, breaching the conditions promised in their contract. Most felt too afraid to complain.

Their treatment is in clear breach of Qatar's international obligations.[197] As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Qatar has a duty to protect the people living under its jurisdiction against abuses committed by non-state actors, including employers of domestic workers who abuse the rights of women living in their household. When such abuses occur, the state should take immediate action and put in place effective remedies for the victims.[198]

'I WAS TOO HUNGRY'

At least 23 women interviewed said they were not given enough food and felt hungry during their employment in Qatar.

Sometimes Madam didn't give me breakfast. I only got it secretly, without her knowing. *– Rose*[199]

196 Ruth, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
197 Article 11 of the ICESCR.
198 See United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, *Right to Adequate Food*, Fact Sheet No 34, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet34en.pdf
199 Rose, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.

Some said there were allowed only one meal a day. Others were only offered leftovers.

> ***I have bread and coffee in the morning, a small lunch at 3pm and dinner only sometimes, not always. I was very hungry.*** *– Lauraine*[200]

Ruth said that she and the other domestic worker in the house were always hungry.[201] They were not allowed to cook for themselves, so had to eat Arabic food which they did not like. Whatever was cooked for lunch was their food for the day, but there was never enough, especially since they had to share it with the driver:

I kept asking to the wife of my sponsor 'please, let us go out and buy our own food. We will use our own money, it will be no cost to you. We are getting so hungry and we just want to eat something.' But Madam will tell me 'when you go to your own country, you can do what you want, but not here'.

Some women complained that long working hours and lack of proper breaks meant that they could not find the time to eat properly.

> ***We had to eat leftovers after the family finish eating, but anyway we never had the time to finish our food.*** *– Elisa*[202]

Two of the women said they were not offered food when accompanying their employers to a restaurant. In a few cases, domestic workers were told to buy their own food.

> ***I arrived 65kg. I am now 51kg. I am so tired and do not eat well. When we go to the mall they are eating but they do not offer me food. I sit next to the kids to feed them while I am hungry... At the end my body gave up, I started peeing blood. I had no ID or passport.*** *– Elisa*[203]

Diana was not given enough food to sustain her, so she asked her employer for more.[204] She said they told her:

'You have money, why don't you buy your own food?' But according to my contract my employer was supposed to provide food… I opened up the cupboards and there was so much food in this big house – but I couldn't have any of it. There were cameras in the house and I would have been caught.

200 Lauraine, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.
201 Ruth, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
202 Elisa, interviewed in Doha, 28 November 2019.
203 Ibid.
204 Diana, interviewed in Doha, 20 May 2019.

The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance learned of similar experiences during a visit to Qatar:

"I heard testimonies from domestic workers who reported being denied food for prolonged periods, being regularly forced to subsist on leftovers or insufficiently nutritious food, and, in some cases, starvation".[205]

The Domestic Workers Law states that "employers should provide food". The standard contract states that "the employer is also committed to provide the worker with decent food". Neither indicates what is considered to be adequate food or what measures should be taken to ensure that live-in domestic workers are indeed receiving decent food. The ILO Domestic Workers Recommendation No 201 stipulates that, taking into account national conditions, food should include "meals of good quality and sufficient quantity, adapted to the extent reasonable to the cultural and religious requirements, if any, of the domestic worker concerned".[206]

'I SLEPT IN THE LAUNDRY STORAGE ROOM'

We were four Filipino sharing one room, two of us did not have our own bed and slept on a mattress on the floor. *– Joy*[207]

Some of the women interviewed said that they did not have a private room, bed or a private space to rest. In houses where more than one live-in domestic worker is employed, the women tend to share a room even if is too small to accommodate them. Two said they had no bed, just a mattress on the floor.

I slept in the laundry storage room on a thin mattress. The AC didn't work. *– Mariam*[208]

Three other domestic workers said that they slept in the children's room, usually on the floor.

I do not have my own room. I sleep in the same room with the children. For me it is OK because I like the kids and I also look after them at night when they wake up.
– Jemma[209]

With temperatures reaching 50°C in summer, some women interviewed complained about the lack of proper air conditioning in their rooms, making it very difficult for them to rest or sleep.

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205 See *End of Mission Statement of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Prof. E. Tendayi Achiume, at the Conclusion of Her Mission to Qatar*, 1 December 2019, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25374&LangID=E

206 See ILO R201 – Domestic Workers Recommendation, 2011 (No. 201).

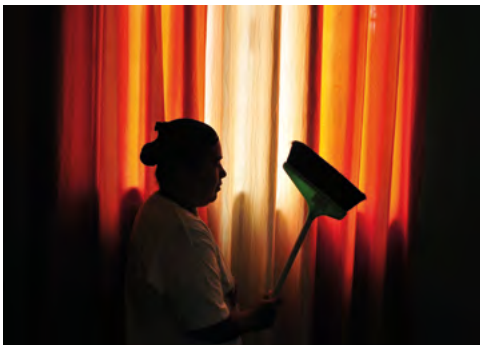
207 Joy, interviewed in Doha, 28 November 2019.

208 Mariam, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.

209 Jemma, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.

I used to fold a piece of paper into a fan and use it, it was so hot. *– Diana*[210]

The Domestic Workers Law stipulates that employers should provide "decent accommodation for domestic workers".[211] The standard contract states that the employer should "provide decent and free accommodation… [and] provide him/her with electricity, water, beds and the appropriate water closet in accordance with the health conditions."[212] Neither gives any details as to what is meant by "decent" or meets the guidance provided by the ILO Domestic Workers Recommendation No 201, which states:



Filipino applicants undergo an intensive course on housekeeping in Manila, Philippines. © 2013 Getty Images

"(a) a separate, private room that is suitably furnished, adequately ventilated and equipped with a lock, the key to which should be provided to the domestic worker;

(b) access to suitable sanitary facilities, shared or private;

(c) adequate lighting and, as appropriate, heating and air conditioning in keeping with prevailing conditions within the household."[213]

The disturbing accounts shared by some of the women points to the failure of the Qatari authorities to protect domestic workers, particularly their failure to conduct workplace inspections to examine living conditions. In fact, MADLSA confirmed to Amnesty International that it cannot conduct inspections in private homes unless the Public Prosecutor provides written permission, so instead it periodically inspects labour recruitment agencies.[214]

'I HAD TOO MUCH PAIN'

Rose, a 37-year-old mother of five, had arrived to in Qatar in November 2018 with one aim – to work to pay her children's school fees.[215] Despite her daily 12 hours of work, salary delays and passport confiscation, she carried on working. Then she became ill with a gall stone problem. After enduring months of pain, she finally fled her employer's house, only for her employer to file an "absconding" case against her.

When Amnesty International met her in Doha in November 2019, the hospital had denied her tests or treatment. She was hoping to settle the "absconding" case against her and get her agency to buy a ticket so she could fly home to receive medical treatment.

210 Diana, interviewed in Doha, 20 May 2019.
211 Article 7/1 of the Domestic Workers Law.
212 Section 7 of the standard contract.
213 Section 17 of the ILO R201 - Domestic Workers Recommendation, 2011 (No. 201).
214 GCO letter to Amnesty International on 22 August 2020 and MADLSA letters to Amnesty International received on 8 October 2020.
215 Rose, interviewed in Doha, 26 November 2019.

I feel this pain [points to stomach] since the last week of June. By 2 July she [female employer] took me to the health centre and the doctor said I need an ultrasound but she didn't take me to hospital. She said she's busy with her son's wedding.

On 22 October I had too much fever… [On] 23 October I called my agency and said they need to call my Madam. I had to keep working. I had too much pain. She said 'drink panadol'. The agency called her then she got angry. After that, everything was wrong. Madam said to the agency she had booked a doctor's appointment in three months. I said I can't wait until January, [I had] too much pain. She wouldn't take me to a private hospital, said it was too much money.

In November I had ...a fever for one week. On 11 November I had chills and didn't leave my room. I said 'if you don't take me to hospital I want to go home'. She said 'pay QR12,000'. I called 999 for an ambulance.

Five other women described to Amnesty International how they were denied proper medical treatment and continued working despite being unwell. For them the long hours, poor conditions and lack of medical treatment damaged their health to the point where they had no choice but to flee their employers' homes. Andrea said,[216]

Eventually my health conditions worsened because of the overwork and fatigue, leading to difficulties in walking. I asked to leave because I was sick.

Mariam, aged 46, told Amnesty International,[217]

After three months I told my sponsor I needed to go to hospital because I had so much pain when I ate. She said 'just drink hot water and ginger'. But one day I fell down holding the baby and was vomiting, so she took me to hospital. She took me on Wednesday and on Saturday she wanted to take me back home, but the doctor said no.

Both the Domestic Workers Law and the standard contract oblige employers to provide "appropriate medical care, medicine, and medical equipment in the case of sickness, or injury during the performance of his/her duties, or as a result therefrom, without incurring any financial burdens on the domestic worker".[218] However, both are vague about what constitutes "appropriate care", again leaving it to the discretion of the employer.

Qatar's authorities should set clear guidelines on what is meant by appropriate medical care for domestic workers. They should also treat domestic workers the same as other workers and ensure that employers provide them with health cards and medical care, and allow them to take sick leave when needed.

216 Andrea, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.
217 Mariam, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.
218 See Article 7 Law No. 15 of 2017, which relates to domestic workers, and Section 7 of the standard contract.

PROMOTE DOMESTIC WORKERS' VOICES

Bearing in mind the specific working and living conditions of domestic workers, which make them vulnerable to serious abuses and exploitation in Qatar and beyond, it is crucial that extra efforts are made to empower these workers to organize and advocate collectively for their rights. As the ILO notes:

"There is very limited scope for a single domestic worker to enter into a genuine negotiation about the terms of his or her employment contract. This may leave individual domestic workers vulnerable to accepting work in conditions that are contrary to the terms of the standard unified contract, national law (where it covers domestic workers), or basic human rights."[219]

With migrant workers in Qatar banned from forming or joining trade unions and no plans to remove the ban,[220] alternative models should be explored to promote the voice of domestic workers, such as establishing a system of workers' representatives as seen in some pilot projects involving other categories of migrant workers.[221] This would allow domestic workers to share their experiences and jointly raise issues and concerns that need to be addressed.

Dialogue between employers and domestic workers' groups should also be encouraged. Additional efforts should be made to reach out to otherwise isolated domestic workers to ensure their concerns are heard. This will help bridge the gap between employers and domestic workers, helping them to understand their mutual rights and obligations.

Domestic workers' organizations should also have a place on the negotiating table when legal texts and standards concerning them are being discussed and agreed.

219 ILO White Paper, *Domestic workers and employers in the Arab states: Promising practices and innovative models for a productive working relationship*, 2017, p. 24.

220 Amnesty International, *Qatar finally joins two key human rights treaties – but what does it really mean for migrant workers?*, 13 June 2018, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/qatar-finally-joins-two-key-human-rights-treaties-but-what-does-it-really-mean-for-migrant-workers/

221 *Annual progress report on the technical cooperation programme agreed between the Government of Qatar and the ILO*, October 2019, p. 7.

9. MALICIOUS PROSECUTIONS

> ***In Qatar it is so easy to just accuse someone without any evidence. And it is unfair. We are just here to work.*** *– Bea*[222]

Although some aspects of the sponsorship system have been modified, migrant workers are still bound to a sponsor during their stay in Qatar. This legal link gives employers the right to file "absconding" and other criminal charges against their workers, which facilitates the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers.

CHARGED WITH 'ABSCONDING'

According to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, detention resulting from the "absconding" charges amounts to arbitrary detention, which violates international law.

The offence commonly referred to as "absconding" appears to stem from article 11/6 of the 2015 Sponsorship Law, which prohibits migrant workers from working for any employer, with or without pay, if not agreed by their sponsor. According to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, detention resulting from the "absconding" charges amounts to arbitrary detention, which violates international law.[223]

At least 13 women interviewed had an "absconding" case filed by their employers even in cases where they claimed they were fleeing abuses. In reporting domestic workers to the Criminal Investigation Department at the Ministry of Interior, employers discharge their responsibilities as a sponsor and hand over the worker's passport. As a result, the worker's residency in Qatar is cancelled and any penalties for illegally staying in the country are borne by the worker. If they do not clear the "absconding" charges brought against them, they can also face a six-month ban on re-entering the country imposed by the Ministry of Interior, or for longer in criminal cases.

The system appears to encourage employers to report their domestic workers for "absconding" to prevent them still being considered their official sponsors, effectively leaving workers extremely vulnerable after losing their right to stay in Qatar.

> ***Those who do flee find themselves treated not as victims of human rights abuses, but in the "accused box", facing charges, stripped of their residency permit and at risk of arrest and deportation. Meanwhile, little or nothing is done to investigate abusive employers.***

222 Bea, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
223 See *Working Group on Arbitrary Detention: Preliminary Findings from its visit to Qatar (3-14 November 2019).*

It is also unclear how many employers were investigated or faced prosecution or any punitive measures for filing "absconding" charges against their domestic workers.

MADLSA officials told researchers that "absconding" charges will not be considered until after the resolution of ongoing labour disputes,[224] though representatives of labour-sending countries and migrant workers' organizations noted that in practice both processes are separately led by different entities, making it challenging for domestic workers to navigate the processes.

This punitive system exacerbates the problems facing domestic workers enduring serious exploitation and other abuses. Some will not risk fleeing, so remain in a toxic workplace. Those who do flee find themselves treated not as victims of human rights abuses, but in the "accused box", facing charges, stripped of their residency permit and at risk of arrest and deportation. Meanwhile, little or nothing is done to investigate abusive employers.

The government failed to provide Amnesty International with information on the measures introduced to curb the practice of filing "absconding" charges to retaliate against domestic worker. They claimed instead that "absconding" cases were declining, but offered no statistics to demonstrate this.[225]

Two labour-sending countries refuted this claim, stating that "absconding" charges were still being used as a counter-suit by a large majority of employers against women who flee their employer. One added that the fine had recently doubled to QR12,000 (US$330).[226]

It is also unclear how many employers were investigated or faced prosecution or any punitive measures for filing "absconding" charges against their domestic workers. Organizations supporting migrant workers on the ground told Amnesty International that they were not aware of any employer being investigated or held accountable for filing "absconding" cases in retaliation against a domestic worker who had fled the workplace or taken them to court.[227]

Women accused of "absconding" are not always informed about the charges brought against them, increasing the risk of their arrest and deportation once the 72-hour window following the complaint expires.[228] Once filed, the charges trigger a legal process that, according to a migrant rights expert, is a real challenge for the women accused. With legal procedures held in Arabic – a language that most domestic workers do not speak – and unable to afford lawyers, the women have little chance of winning their case. The process can also drag on, especially when employers fail to appear in court.

Domestic workers who have "absconding" charges against them cannot exit the country unless they clear the charges first, which would then give them the possibility of returning to Qatar in the future. Charges of "absconding" also have a psychological cost for the women accused. Many of those interviewed said they felt scared. All were unsure about the legal process triggered against them or how long it would take before they could go home or legalize their status in Qatar. No action is taken against employers who file false "absconding" charges.

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224 Meeting with MADLSA officials in Doha, 26 November 2019.
225 Meeting with MADLSA officials in Doha, 26 November 2019.
226 Meeting with a representative of a labour-sending country in Doha, 24 November 2019.
227 Meeting with organizations supporting domestic workers, 24 June and 24 August 2020.
228 According to a migrant rights expert on the situation of domestic workers in Qatar, workers are usually informed of absconding charges on their phones. But with some employers confiscating phones and numbers changing, the one registered with their Qatar ID is not necessarily the one they may use regularly. As a result, workers may not receive the message informing them of the charges against them.

The women's apprehension was reflected by the Special Rapporteur on racism, who noted that some workers wanted to report their employers,

"… but feared their employers would retaliate by terminating their contract or falsely accusing them of leaving work, which is popularly referred to as "absconding"… The very use of this terminology, even if it is not present in the law, indicates the indentured or coercive labor conditions that are the reality for too many low-income workers in Qatar."[229]

ACCUSED OF THEFT

Why I am still here? I am stuck. The police checked everything, and they never found evidence that I stole from my employer… How is it that there can be no evidence against a person, but they can still charge that person with theft?… This has just been a nightmare for me. I don't know what I have done wrong or what I have done to deserve this.

Just four months into her job, Bea's employer accused her of stealing a watch and pen, a charge she adamantly denied.[230] The police searched her belongings but did not find the items. The next day her employer took her to the police station, where she remained for three days until someone from her embassy came to help her. When Amnesty International met her in Doha in May 2019, she had been waiting for 10 months without a court date for the criminal case against her. She described the terrible impact this had had on her and her family, particularly because she could not pay her children's school fees.

Amnesty International interviewed at least 10 women who had been accused of theft, a crime that carries up to seven years in prison under the Penal Code.[231] Some women claimed that the allegations against them had no evidence other than the employer's accusation. Nevertheless, even when police failed to find evidence, the legal process triggered by the accusation dragged on, resulting in months of lost income.

Amnesty International is not claiming that all cases of theft against domestic workers are malicious. Indeed, some cases could be legitimate. However, it is the organization's assessment that some cases are filed in retaliation against domestic workers. The prospect of facing a lengthy legal process coupled with the lack of legal assistance, financial support and safe refuge for those accused make the accusation in and of itself a daunting experience for domestic workers.

On 24 October 2019, 22-year-old Juliana, a mother of two, fled her employer after a year with the family to escape long and onerous working hours without rest or days off, delayed payment of salary, and an "always angry" male employer. She left with only her clothes and documents. Four days later, her employer accused her of stealing QR7,000. She was held for six days in Umm Salal prison for investigation before being taken in by her embassy. When Amnesty International met her a month later, on 25 November, she had attended two court sessions and was hoping that the police would drop the case so she could return home.[232]

229 See *End of Mission Statement of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Prof. E. Tendayi Achiume, at the Conclusion of Her Mission to Qatar*, 1 December 2019.
230 Bea, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
231 Article 341 of Penal Code specifically mentions theft cases committed by employees stealing from their employers.
232 Juliana, interviewed in Doha, 25 November 2019.

WHY I AM STILL HERE? I AM STUCK

The police checked everything, and they never found evidence that I stole from my employer… How is it that there can be no evidence against a person, but they can still charge that person with theft?

Some of the women still working said they feared that their employer would falsely accuse them of theft as a retaliatory measure if they refused to do something or tried to leave. For example, Emily said her employer accused her of stealing jewellery two months after she refused to have a sexual relationship with him. She said she believed the accusation was brought as a reprisal for "not giving my employer what he wanted".[233]

For many, the fear of being accused of theft imprisons them in abusive households. Cheryl told Amnesty International that after her female employer's father began sexually harassing her, she begged them to allow her to go home.[234] "I could not stay one more year under these circumstances," she said. Despite her desperate requests, her employer insisted she complete her two-year contract. Finally she was told she could go home, but was terrified that she would be accused of theft.

The next morning, they packed all my things. I was happy to finally be in a safe place, but I was very scared that they might have put something in my bag and will accuse me of stealing.

233 Emily, interviewed in Doha, 16 May 2019.
234 Cheryl, interviewed in Doha, 16 November 2019.

10. IMPUNITY FOR ABUSIVE EMPLOYERS

None of the women who spoke to Amnesty International has seen their abuser held to account for their actions. Practices such as passport confiscation and unpaid wages, which indicate forced labour, are not being automatically investigated even when employers refuse to hand passports over or pay dues. The government failed to provide Amnesty International with data on the cases of human trafficking, forced labour and other labour abuses being investigated and prosecuted. In fact MADLSA confirmed in its letter to Amnesty International that "A search of the court records did not reveal that any case had been registered."[235]

According to the Domestic Workers Law, employers who breach their obligations or key provisions related to working hours, living conditions, weekly rest day, annual leave and end of service benefits will be fined QR5,000 (around US$1,375).[236] The fines double if an employer fails to pay the worker on time.[237]

Migrant labour organizations working on the ground told Amnesty International that these provisions appear to be rarely enforced, confirming the lack of accountability for abusive employers. Despite requesting it, Amnesty International did not receive any information related to the number of employers sentenced for breaching provisions of the Domestic Workers Law or any measures taken against them.

Accountability for labour abuses remains one of the most critical deterrents of abuse. It is key to ensuring full implementation of laws and regulations that would see abusers facing the consequences of their actions. This in turn would send a strong message to employers that labour rights' abuses and related crimes will be tolerated no longer.

The government should also take steps to address and tackle the underlying gender stereotypes and intersectional discrimination that perpetuate some of these abuses.

The failure of the government to hold abusive employers to account seriously undermines the government's reform efforts and feeds into the culture of impunity that prevails in Qatar under the *kafala* system. This is for three key reasons.

Accountability for labour abuses remains one of the most critical deterrents of abuse. It is key to ensuring full implementation of laws and regulations that would see abusers facing the consequences of their actions.

235 MADLSA letter to Amnesty International received on 8 October 2020.
236 Article 21(1) of Law No 15 of 2017.
237 Article 21(2) of Law No 15 of 2017.

The failure of the government to hold abusive employers to account seriously undermines the government's reform efforts and feeds into the culture of impunity that prevails in Qatar

First, there is a dismal lack of inspection and other mechanisms to ensure the already weak and vague protections offered by Qatari law are implemented. The conservative aspect of Qatar's society and sanctity of homes are often evoked as an excuse for the lack of inspection and monitoring mechanisms relating to the working and living conditions of domestic migrant workers. The inability of inspectors to enter private homes without written permission from the Public Prosecutor makes it difficult for MADLSA to conduct in-house inspections, but some alternative models could be explored. This could include, for instance:

- mandatory inspections of households prior to the deployment of domestic workers;
- voluntary inspections with the employer's consent;
- private outreach work and interviews with domestic workers; and
- coordinating efforts with ethical recruitment agencies to periodically check on the women in their workplace to break their isolation.[238]

Workers' rights organizations have also raised their concerns about the poor quality of inspections of labour recruitment agencies. As part of its technical agreement with the ILO,[239] the government committed to strengthen and build the capacity of labour inspectors,[240] but more needs to be done to ensure the most vulnerable groups of migrant workers are protected.

Secondly, the overwhelming majority of domestic workers who have suffered abuses do not report them because they fear retaliation, detention or deportation, and rightly have no confidence that the system will deliver them justice. According to a migrant rights expert in Qatar, even when domestic workers file a complaint, they are still expected to provide all details of her employer, even when they are still living in their home, with no assurance that they will be removed and made safe. As a result, it is impossible for domestic workers to give all the pertinent information. The situation is even more challenging for domestic workers who do not have embassies in Qatar, have no access to shelters and lack any support to guide them through the process.

In its final observations on the second periodic report on Qatar, the CEDAW Committee noted:

"Women migrant workers, in particular domestic workers, continue to face significant barriers to bringing complaints against their employers and obtaining redress in cases of abuse, including owing to fear of retaliation, detention or deportation."[241]

This observation was backed up by US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report), which stated that:

"… victims who lodged complaints were sometimes the subject of spurious counter charges by their employers that resulted in administrative deportation proceedings".[242]

238 For more recommendations, see final chapter of this report.
239 See text of the technical cooperation between Qatar and the ILO (2018–20), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_586479.pdf
240 See *Annual progress report on the technical cooperation programme agreed between the Government of Qatar and the ILO,* 7 October 2019.
241 See *Concluding observations on the 2nd periodic report of Qatar: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, July 2019.
242 US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report – Qatar entry,* June 2020, https://qa.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/136/2020QATAR-TIP-Report.pdf

A domestic worker escorts a child in Doha, Qatar. © Joerg Boethling/Alamy Stock Photo

Of the 23 women who told Amnesty International they had suffered physical and sexual abuse, only one lodged a complaint against her employer for severe physical abuse. Although she won her case, her employer's three-year prison sentence was not implemented for medical reasons.[243]

Thirdly, the authorities systematically fail to investigate allegations of exploitation, abuse and violence against migrant domestic workers to ensure that abusive employers are held to account and punished with sanctions commensurate with the gravity of the offence. The TIP Report noted that the government did not report convicting any Qatari employers or recruitment agencies for forced labour; convictions for sex trafficking declined; and the government did not provide any data on cases of passport retention.

Instead of routinely investigating cases of passport confiscation, withholding of wages and labour abuses, the authorities tend to arrest, detain and deport potential victims for immigration violations or "absconding". The TIP Report further noted that:

"… the government lacked a clear and efficient judicial process to prosecute trafficking offenses or enforce labor law violations".[244]

It added that:

"… several government agencies did not categorize the abuse of domestic workers as forced labor or human trafficking cases due to a lack of evidence or witnesses and therefore sometimes failed to identify victims; however, some domestic workers voluntarily left the country in lieu of filing complaints or pursuing charges against their traffickers."

The Special Rapporteur on racism called on Qatar to step up efforts to investigate allegations of exploitation, abuse and violence against migrant domestic workers and hold perpetrators accountable for their conduct. It also called on the government to implement relevant recommendations made by CEDAW in its concluding observations, including ratification of ILO Domestic Worker Convention No 189.

243 Amnesty International researchers reviewed the court documents and other legal evidence related to the case.

244 US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report – Qatar entry*, June 2020, https://qa.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/136/2020QATAR-TIP-Report.pdf

QATAR'S INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

As a party to various international treaties prohibiting forced labour and other human rights abuses, including International Labour Organization Conventions 29, 105 and 189 and the UN International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention Against Torture and the Arab Charter on Human Rights, Qatar is obliged to protect all workers, including domestic workers, from being exploited in its territory.

In ratifying the ICESCR, Qatar has accepted to guarantee the right to work to all employees within the country and that this "includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right"[245] and to "recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work", including remuneration, rest time, paid leave, limited working hours and decent living conditions for workers.[246]

As a result, Qatar is obliged to ensure that all people working on its territory receive fair remuneration requiring regular, timely and full payment of fair wages,[247] and that they are provided with decent living conditions including, among other things, "an adequate standard of living, including food, water and sanitation, housing, clothing and additional expenses such as commuting costs".[248]

As recognised in international treaties ratified by Qatar, it should also respect everyone's right to join and form unions[249]. However, when ratifying the ICESCR, Qatar stated that it will interpret the scope of the right to freedom of association in line with the Labour Law,[250] essentially preventing all migrant workers – about 90% of the country's population – from exercising this right. Despite objections to the reservation[251] Qatar has continued to fail to uphold the fundamental right of all workers to form and join trade unions.

245 Article 6 of ICESCR.
246 Article 7 of ICESCR.
247 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 23 (2016) on the right to just and favourable conditions of work (article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), UN Doc. E/C.12/GC/23, 10 p. 4.
248 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 23 (2016) on the right to just and favour
249 Article 22 of the ICCPR and 8 of the ICESCR.
250 Reference: C.N.262.2018.TREATIES-IV.4, 21 May 2018, available at: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-3&chapter=4&clang=_en
251 The Government of Sweden objected to the reservations made by the Government of Qatar when ratifying both ICCPR and ICESCR.

As a state party to the ICCPR and the Convention Against Torture, Qatar has also an obligation to ensure that no one, including domestic workers on its territory, is subjected to torture or any cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment[252]. Qatar is also obliged under Article 9 of the ICCPR to protect everyone's personal security and safety including with respect to physical and sexual assaults including rape.

Furthermore, as a state member to a wide range of international treaties, Qatar is not only under a duty to ensure the full respect and protection of people's rights living and working in Qatar but also to provide remedies when those rights are being violated.[253] The right to remedy is recognized under various international human rights treaties many of which have been ratified by Qatar,[254] and it encompasses the victims' right to equal and effective access to justice, and adequate, effective and prompt reparation for the harm suffered. Consequently, Qatar is required to provide appropriate and effective remedy for victims as part of its obligation to take all appropriate measures to implement the rights recognized in these treaties, protect them from undue interference by private parties and to do so in an affordable and timely manner.[255]

252 Article 7 of the ICCPR.

253 Article 2(3) of the ICCPR

254 Article 2(3), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Article 2, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Article 6, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; Article 13, Article 12 and Article 23, Arab Charter on Human Rights

255 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 9, The domestic application of the Covenant, UN Doc. E/C.12/1998/24, para. 9.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is not rocket science. Employers need to simply treat domestic workers like humans. No overwork. Ten hours per day should be enough. Treat them with respect. Feed them properly. Pay them on time. Allow them to take their day off and to communicate with their families. [Then] they will stay and work happily for you.
– A representative of a labour-sending country in Qatar

Overall, what is on paper has improved. More processes are in place, but the actual practices have not improved much. There is a lot of work needed for proper implementation. Rather than thinking of the image of the country, we need a stronger push towards implementation and holding people accountable.
– Advocate for domestic workers' rights in Qatar

Amnesty International's research has shown that for many years the restrictive *kafala* sponsorship system has given employers excessive control over domestic workers. The recent reforms that allow them to exit the country and change jobs without permission from their employers will – if fully implemented – help to rebalance the power dynamics between employers and migrant workers. However, they will not be enough to stop the specific abuses faced by domestic workers linked to their gender, the nature of their job, their isolation in homes and their heavy reliance on their employers.

Information gathered from 105 women domestic workers revealed highly consistent accounts of patterns of abuse and exploitation. The women had routinely had their rights violated, including in many cases being subjected to criminal acts.

Working on average at least 16 hours a day, the women who spoke to Amnesty International had little rest and rarely, if ever, a day off. Some were kept in degrading conditions. Often they were insulted and shouted at. Sometimes they were assaulted and sexually abused. Many were paid late or not at all. If their spirit broke and they fled, their employers often accused them of "absconding" or theft on the basis of little or no evidence. This left them trapped in Qatar, without their passport or income, facing lengthy court proceedings. In some cases, their treatment may amount to forced labour and human trafficking.

The 2017 Domestic Workers Law and other initiatives have so far failed to end the pattern of abuses faced by domestic workers, and serve as a warning that reforms announced in recent months will mean little if not fully implemented. More reforms are still needed, but ultimately the government needs to put in place effective mechanisms to enforce laws and monitor progress.

As the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment said,

"… in cases where States are or ought to be aware of patterns of continuous and serious abuse in a particular region or community, due diligence obligations require taking reasonable measures to alter outcomes and mitigate harms, ranging from the strengthening of domestic laws and their implementation to effective criminal proceedings and other protective and deterrent measures in individual cases."[256]

Amnesty International is calling on the Qatari authorities to urgently implement the following recommendations so that women migrant domestic workers can work without exploitation, live free from fear and have their basic human rights respected and protected.

TO THE QATARI GOVERNMENT

LEGAL PROTECTION FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS

- Develop a national plan of action to tackle abuses faced by domestic workers, including excessive working hours, the denial of weekly rest days, passport confiscation, and verbal, physical and sexual abuse.
- Include domestic workers under the Labour Law, and meanwhile bring the Domestic Workers Law and the standard contract in line with international standards, including ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Workers. This includes specifying that domestic workers are free to spend their weekly day off outside the home; should not work on their day off unless in exceptional circumstances; and are rewarded with overtime pay.
- Ratify ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Workers.
- Include domestic workers under the Wage Protection System to ensure that payment is electronically monitored and action is taken when monthly payment is not made.
- Fully enforce reforms allowing migrant workers to change jobs without the permission of their employers and provide adequate support for domestic workers seeking to change employers.
- Remove the requirement in the Sponsorship Law for domestic workers to inform their employers before leaving the country.
- Decriminalize "absconding" and refrain from detaining migrant workers for having "run away" from their employer.
- Allow domestic workers to organize themselves and remove reservations introduced to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) limiting the ability of domestic workers to form and join trade unions.
- Build on the abolition of the "exit permit" and "No-Objection Certificate" to further reduce migrant workers' dependency on their employers, including by allowing migrant workers to renew their own residence permits and health cards when needed.
- Amend Article 8 of Law No 21 of 2015 to ensure that employers cannot retain migrant workers' passports and residence permits in any circumstances.

256 *Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, 2016*, A/HRC/31/57.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

- Sign bilateral agreements with labour-sending countries to impose ethical conditions on the recruitment of domestic workers, including commitments to zero-cost recruitment processes.
- Identify ethical recruitment agencies in labour-sending countries and in Qatar, and work with them to recruit domestic workers into the country.
- Work closely with governments of labour-sending countries to prevent payment of recruitment fees and curb the practice of contract deception, including by building on the Qatar Visa Centres.
- Hold regular training and orientation sessions for recruitment agencies on human rights standards.
- Identify, investigate and penalize abusive recruitment agencies and ultimately close down those that repeatedly fail to comply with the law.
- Maintain a public "blacklist" of owners of abusive recruitment agencies and prevent them from operating recruitment agencies in the future.
- Update the list of agencies divided into three categories: those convicted of overcharging or having unlicensed operations; those whose licences have been revoked or not renewed; and those who have received written warnings for poor conduct, such as withholding passports of workers.
- Penalize recruitment agencies that intentionally provide fraudulent information to prospective migrant workers.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

PRIOR TO DEPARTURE:

- Work with countries of origin to establish decent, realistic and free-of-charge pre-departure training and orientation programmes for domestic workers seeking jobs in Qatar.
- Training should prepare domestic workers for their life in Qatar, including by equipping them with basic language skills to enable effective communication with their new employers.
- Training should brief them about their rights and obligations, and the support mechanisms available to them if they face abuse.

ONCE IN QATAR:

- Conduct mandatory training for domestic workers to educate them about their rights and obligations under the law based on the domestic workers booklet developed and promoted by MADLSA entitled *Know Your Rights*. The training should also introduce domestic workers to the hotline, complaint mechanisms and other support measures available to them should they need to report abuse.
- Conduct mandatory training for employers seeking to recruit domestic workers about their legal obligations. This should be based on the *Guide to employing migrant domestic workers* developed and promoted by MADLSA and should also tackle gender-based violence, racism and discriminatory attitudes.
- Continue to develop and distribute social media and other forms of awareness raising and accompanying materials to educate both employers and domestic workers about their rights and obligations. These materials should challenge negative perceptions and racialized stereotypes of domestic workers and remind employers about the penalties they will face should they breach the Domestic Workers Law.

INSPECTION AND ENFORCEMENT

- Establish mandatory pre-employment visits to check on domestic workers' future living and working conditions, including her living space, expected chores and the number of people in the household; and follow up privately with the worker no later than within a month of her starting the job.
- Set up adequately resourced and trained inspection mechanisms with the support of recruitment agencies and embassies to strengthen implementation of the law, and enforce key provisions including:
  - living conditions and treatment (Article 7)
  - working hours including rest time (Article 12)
  - weekly day off (Article 13)
  - monthly payment of salary (Article 8)
  - paid annual leave (Article 14)
  - payment of end of service benefits (Article 15).
- Publish periodically the findings and data related to these inspections.
- Given the limitations of in-house inspections, develop an alternative model that ensures domestic workers can report freely about their working conditions.
- Reach out systematically to domestic workers on the phone numbers provided upon their arrival in Qatar to check how they are and request that they report in person to the inspectors for a private check-in. If unable to reach a worker directly, follow up with her employer.
- Reach out systematically to employers and request a home inspection with their consent. If consent is not given, request employers meet inspectors at an external location and follow up privately with the domestic workers themselves.
- Reach out to domestic workers whose residence permits have expired but are still in the country, investigate these cases – as this may indicate abuse has occurred – and ask employers to report to MADLSA. Refrain from arresting migrant workers for breaching immigration regulations.
- Ensure that domestic workers have access to personal phones and can use them regularly to communicate with their families during their stay in Qatar.
- Ensure that domestic workers are provided with valid health cards and receive adequate access to health care, and ensure proper follow-up, especially in cases of sexual abuse.
- Continue to promote the live-out domestic workers' model as an alternative to live-in, to better monitor and control the working and living conditions of domestic workers.
- Strengthen the hotline for domestic workers, make it toll free, accessible in the languages of domestic workers, and ensure that prior to being deployed in their employer's house, domestic workers are aware of the hotline, familiar with it and feel entitled to use it when in need.

INVESTIGATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Penalize employers for violating the Domestic Workers Law in ways that ensure the penalties deter potential abusers, including those failing to:
  - pay domestic workers on time
  - allow domestic workers breaks
  - ensure that domestic workers do not work more than 10 hours per day
  - pay domestic workers overtime
  - allow domestic worker a rest day per week in a place of her choice
  - renew domestic workers' residence permits.
- Investigate, prosecute and penalize abusive employers and publish figures of cases of:
  - forced labour and human trafficking
  - verbal, physical and sexual abuses
  - labour abuses, including long working hours, denial of day off and passport confiscation as indicators of forced labour
  - false "absconding" and other malicious accusations
- Ensure that cases of sexual violence are registered, action taken, and justice is done, irrespective of the migrant workers' legal status. Set up a robust mechanism to prevent and address sexual violence faced by women migrant workers, including by establishing clear procedures and lines of accountability and making the mechanism survivor-centred with confidentiality and privacy respected.
- Follow up properly on reports of abuses, including those received through the hotline, to ensure they are quickly and thoroughly investigated and remedial action taken. Sensitize medical staff and police officers to report any domestic workers' abuses they may encounter while on duty, and ensure that these reports are regularly brought to the attention of MADLSA, investigated and remedial action taken.
- Refrain from bringing a case to the attention of the employer whilst the domestic worker is still in the house to ensure her safety and avoid possible retaliation.
- Ask recruitment agencies to share a list of employers whose domestic workers complain regularly.
- Keep a record of convicted employers to prevent them and members of their households from recruiting new domestic workers.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND REMEDY

- Expedite domestic workers' access to justice and establish a special committee within the Committees for the Settlement of Labour Disputes, with judges and personnel trained to look into cases referred to them by MADLSA's Domestic Workers Unit.
- Expand the competence of the Committees to look into other cases of labour abuses beyond unpaid salaries, such as working and living conditions, passport confiscation and contract deception.
- Set up a special unit to offer legal support for domestic workers who take their cases to court.
- Ensure that domestic workers have full access to the Workers' Support and Insurance Fund when their employers refuse to pay them their dues and other financial benefits, and access to an air ticket home. The Fund could be supported by contributions from agencies or employers.
- Coordinate efforts between the Ministry of Interior and MADLSA to ensure that criminal charges brought against domestic workers such as "absconding" or theft do not infringe on claims of unpaid salaries or other labour abuses.
- Set up a mechanism in coordination with labour-sending diplomatic missions to ensure that returnee domestic workers are able to pursue their cases from their home countries.
- Penalize employers who fail to engage with the Committees' process or comply with their decisions.
- Provide gender-based training for police, judges, officials, medical staff and inspectors dealing with domestic workers who have experienced abuse and/or gender-based violence.
- Promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of people towards domestic workers and take immediate steps to eradicate harmful gender stereotypes and racism.
- Set up a mechanism to ensure that no domestic workers will leave the country without having received all her salaries and end of service benefits.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES

- Take steps to ensure that victims of domestic and sexual violence, in particular domestic workers, have adequate access to government-funded shelters and specialized support, including medical care and psycho-social assistance.
- Facilitate the establishment of centres to provide a safe and friendly environment for domestic workers where they can meet during their time off to seek peer support, interact with each other and share their concerns and experiences without fear.
- Ensure that domestic workers are allowed to spend their day off outside the home and support them, in coordination with their embassies, to build community groups to connect and support each other.
- Ensure that the Human Care Home is fully operational, resourced and equipped with staff and professionals to support the women during their stay, including psychological, financial and legal services.
- Ensure that prior to their deployment in households, domestic workers are aware of the shelter and its location.

AMPLIFY DOMESTIC WORKERS' VOICE

- Increase efforts to amplify domestic workers' voice and allow them to have a forum to organize themselves and collectively raise concerns, and make special effort to include otherwise isolated domestic workers.
- Work with the ILO to identify ways in which the voices of domestic workers could be effectively represented as part of Pillar 5 of the partnership agreement related to the 'Promotion of Workers' Voice', and give this at least equal priority to initiatives being promoted for other categories of migrant workers
- Encourage dialogue between employers and domestic workers' groups to help bridge the gap between them and help them better understand their mutual rights and obligations.

TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF LABOUR-SENDING COUNTRIES

- Ensure diplomatic missions in Qatar are adequately resourced and increase their ability to support migrant domestic workers facing exploitation or abuse, including by providing a hotline as well as financial and legal support to those in need.
- Improve data collection systems and transparency to help follow-up on cases and input on policy decision-making.
- Strengthen and enforce regulation of recruitment agencies and laws to protect workers from predatory recruiters, ensuring that agencies that breach regulations face appropriate penalties.
- Support domestic workers to pursue cases against abusive employers in the Committees for the Settlement of Labour Disputes and other courts, including by providing them with legal and language support.
- Set up a mechanism to help returnee domestic workers pursue their claims remotely after leaving Qatar.
- Ensure that all migrant workers, regardless of whether they migrated via "official" routes, have access to a transparent and effective complaints mechanism through which they or their families can seek redress if they were trafficked and forced to work under exploitative terms or conditions, or if they are deprived of the benefits to which they are entitled as a result of accident, illness or death while abroad.
- Sign bilateral agreements with the Government of Qatar and ensure they offer strong protection for domestic workers' rights.
- Ratify ILO Domestic Workers Convention 189.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS TO ONE PERSON, IT MATTERS TO US ALL.

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“WHY DO YOU WANT TO REST?”

ONGOING ABUSE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS IN QATAR

Hundreds of thousands of women leave their homes every year in search of a better job abroad. Heading to the unknown, they leave behind children, partners, parents, relatives and other loved ones to work in a stranger’s home. Many of them are destined for Qatar.

This report looks at how the serious flaws in Qatar’s laws and systems of implementation continue to fail the most vulnerable people in the country – the army of 173,000 domestic workers, most of whom are women.

Despite the introduction in 2017 of a new Domestic Workers Law, many of these women continue to face gruelling working conditions toiling from dawn till late at night in private homes, isolated and hidden from the public gaze. They typically work between 14 and 18 hours a day, with little or no rest and rarely, if ever, a day off. In the worst cases they may also be insulted, assaulted or sexually abused. As if this was not enough, their employers may fail to pay them on time or, in some cases, not pay them at all. Governed by the kafala sponsorship system – now under reform – there have been few options for them to escape this abuse.

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