

Housing Rights: The Migrant Workers' Housing Conditions in Malaysia and Qatar from 2017 Until 2022

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Abstract

Most countries in the world depend on migrant workers to do the Dirty, Dangerous, and Demanding (3D) jobs in their country. This study will highlight Malaysia and Qatar because both countries depend on migrant workers as a major workforce. Still, the international community criticized the way they treated their migrant workers. This study is important in terms of giving a clear picture and better understanding of the housing condition of migrant workers in Malaysia and Qatar. Does the condition improve or not after the Covid-19 strike? This study aims to analyse the housing condition of migrant workers in Malaysia and Qatar from 2017 until 2022. This article used the qualitative research method. This article was also written based on primary data and document analysis. The primary data for this article was obtained from the field. The researcher conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews and phone calls with ten migrant workers and five locals in Malaysia. For secondary data, document analysis was done using a series of academic journals, reports, and digital materials. This article indicates that the housing condition of some migrant workers in Malaysia and Qatar did improve after the Covid-19 pandemic. However, some of them still lived in the same condition because of their employers' ignorance. The issues of migrant workers' housing cannot be resolved easily without cooperating with stakeholders and taking a long-term comprehensive approach.

Keywords: Migrant Workers, Housing Condition, Malaysia, Qatar

Introduction

Most of the migrant workers migrate to another country to find a job that can improve their income and lives. According to the International Labour Organization's (hereafter ILO) guidelines, a migrant worker is any individual who travels from one nation to another with

the intention of finding job other than on their own expense. This includes anyone who is frequently admitted as a migrant looking for employment. In addition, a migrant worker also defined as someone who will be engaged in, is engaged in, or has previously worked in a remunerated activity in a state of which they are not citizens. This definition is according to the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

The migration of migrant workers is mostly influenced by the economic growth of a country. Most countries in the world whether developed or developing states, depend on migrant workers to do the Dirty, Dangerous and Demanding (hereafter 3D) jobs in their country. This situation portrays that one of the elements which encourage a country's development is the involvement of migrant workers in all economic sectors. This study will highlight Malaysia and Qatar because both countries depend on migrant workers as a workforce. Still, the international community criticized the way they treated their migrant workers. When it comes to migrant workers, issues always arise, and it occurs worldwide. For example, the issues in Malaysia and Qatar were migrant workers living in overcrowded and unhygienic housing that would compromise their health and privacy. For years, inadequate housing for migrant workers has been a part of the worldwide housing issue (Open Society Foundations, 2020).

Moreover, access to adequate housing is considered a basic human right and a component of a decent standard of living. The right to adequate housing is recognised by international law. It is important to fulfil all economic, social, and cultural rights because housing rights are strongly interrelated to other rights. Most international human rights laws have addressed the right to adequate and decent housing. For example, it is addressed in International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereafter ICESCR), International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (hereafter ICRMW) and it also described in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereafter UDHR). Furthermore, housing is an important factor of the right to health, and as such, states must ensure equal access to shelter, housing, and hygiene, as well as a proper supply of safe drinking water (UNCESR, 2000). In addition, according to ILO, the right to adequate housing applies equally to migrant workers on temporary or seasonal employment (ILO, 2016).

However, countries that have not signed the convention relating to migrant workers' rights take the migrant workers' housing rights for granted. Many employers still let their employees live in overcrowded and unhygienic housing. Next, most study on migrant workers' health has indicated that poor living conditions are the main cause of illness. When living in unhygienic and overcrowded rooms with limited air, migrant workers tend to have a cachectic condition. Cachectic illness causes physical wasting, including weight loss and loss of muscle mass (Watson, 2017). Besides, not only are these migrant workers living in cramped and unhygienic housing, but their living conditions are also facilitating the rapid spread of infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, and hepatitis B.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 outbreak has emphasized the true extent of inadequate worker housing in a number of South East Asian countries and Gulf states. In this article, Malaysia and Qatar are highlighted. In many countries, the Movement Control Order had the reverse effect of the social distance expected to decrease infections. The wave of COVID-19 infections had been worsened by poor, cramped living conditions in worker dormitories and housing, with as many as 12 to 20 individuals typically sleeping in each room.

Hence, this study is important in terms of giving a clear picture and better understanding of the housing condition of migrant workers in Malaysia and Qatar. Does the condition improve or not after the Covid-19 strike? Next, this article analysed the housing condition of migrant workers in Malaysia and Qatar from 2017 until 2022. Besides, this article's first part will portray migrant workers in Malaysia and Qatar in general. Then, the final part of this article discusses the housing condition of migrant workers in both countries.

Migrant Workers in Malaysia



Figure 1. Map of Malaysia

Source: Malaysia (2022) <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Malaysia>

Malaysia is one of the countries in Southeast Asia that depends on migrant workers in all 3D sectors. In Malaysia, the Malaysian government and the world bank estimate the country received between 1.4 to 2 million documented migrant workers and an additional 1.2 to 3.5 million undocumented migrant workers, making Malaysia the biggest migrant-receiving country in Southeast Asia between 2018 to 2020. Migrant workers should not be confused with "Expatriate," a term Malaysians use to refer to foreigners working in highly technical, middle, top-managerial, or professional positions (the Immigration Department of Malaysia, 2015).

Moreover, migrant workers in Malaysia came from Indonesia, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and other Asian states such as India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. They work in industries like construction, manufacturing, plantations, and services, as well as domestic work. Furthermore, the industrial sector's quick growth led to increasing worker demand, particularly in the textile, electrical, and electronics industries. There was also a tremendous increase in small and medium-sized industries such as food and beverages (F&B), metal fabrication, and furniture. Besides, these sectors have a growing demand for experienced and semi-skilled workers. Migrant workers fill the shortages in these sectors. In addition, the amount of money those migrant workers in Malaysia sent back to their home countries in 2018 and 2019 was RM29.2 billion and RM31.2 billion, respectively (Wahab, 2020).

In addition, a large number of migrant workers from Southeast Asia and South Asia came to Malaysia due to wage differences, unemployment, existing social networks, and government demand (Hamzah et al., 2020). This scenario arises due to Malaysia's growing labour demand as a result of rapid development in various sectors. Moreover, other factors that attract migrant workers to Malaysia include political stability, economic prosperity, and safety (Shariff et al., 2020). Malaysia ranks 18th in the world in terms of peace, according to the Global Peace Index (hereafter GPI) 2022 (New Straits Times, 2022). Although there has been

political uncertainty for a brief period from 2019 to 2020, the political system remains in control. Since then, Malaysia's economy has grown rapidly and shows signs of strength. Furthermore, Muslim migrant workers prefer Malaysia since Islam is the official religion, and other religions are granted freedom of practice under the constitution. Plus, migrant workers do not have to worry about religious and ethnic oppression because Malaysia is known for its ethnic diversity that interacts peacefully. The problems with migrant workers' housing rights in Malaysia have existed for a long time, but they have lately increased due to the Covid-19 strike. This situation occurred because migrant workers were frequently accommodated in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions.

Migrant Workers in Qatar



Figure 2. Map of Qatar

Source: Qatar (2022) <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Qatar>

Qatar is a small peninsular in the middle east and shares a border with Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Qatar is one of the richest countries in the world because of its natural gas and oil. Qatar is run by an Emir (Ruler) named Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani. He has been the ruler of Qatar since 2013, and political parties are not allowed in Qatar. In 2010, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (hereafter FIFA) awarded Qatar the right to host the 2022 World Cup. The World Cup offered a welcome opportunity to display Qatar's best features. However, this decision had widely criticized because Qatar is ineligible to host the world cup.

For this reason, Qatar pledged to carry out a massive construction programme beyond anything the world has ever seen. Moreover, to accommodate visitors and participants of the 2022 World Cup, eight stadiums, hotels, airports, new metro system, thousands kilometre of new highways and a new city had to be built. The Doha International Airport (DIA), which stopped accepting commercial flights in 2014, will reopen, and an expansion is being constructed at Hamad International Airport (DOH). The new terminal's purpose was to reduce air traffic congestion issues (Miguens, 2022). Besides much money, Qatar also needs a lot of labor to make this reality. Qatar has brought in hundreds of thousands of extra migrant workers from Asia and Africa to do the hard work.

The Qatari economy is heavily depended on migrant workers. Moreover, Qatar is also known as a country developed by migrants, a huge number of migrant workers being brought in to build bridges, run businesses, and clean streets. There are more than 2 million migrant workers who play a vital role in the economy of Qatar. Based on figures announced by Doha's Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour, and Social Affairs, in December 2017, there were 2.1 million migrant workers in Qatar. Most of them are employed by World Cup indirect

projects like the construction of new ports, roads, and metro systems (New Vision, 2017). Approximately 1 million migrant workers are employed in construction, while around 100,000 are domestic workers.

Migrant workers are governed by the system called *Kafala (sponsorship) System*. The *Kafala System* is a legal framework used in Qatar, Lebanon, Jordan and all Arab Gulf countries except Iraq. It established the connection between migrant workers and their employers. Moreover, the system was also developed to provide ample cheap labor during rapid economic growth. Its supporters claim that the system helps drive development and benefits local businesses (Robinson, 2021). In *Kafala System*, the migrant worker must have *Kafeel* or sponsor to enter the country and to work. The sponsor has the right to revoke a worker's sponsorship at any time and for any cause, leaving them without documentation and subject to deportation.

Furthermore, the main reason why migrant workers migrated to Qatar is the jobs opportunity. For lower-paid workers, Qatar provides something that life in Asia or Africa cannot, such as a job, a steady income, and the capacity to support a family back home (Hancock, 2011). Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that many migrant workers are derived to working in the Gulf countries, particularly in Qatar, due to higher average pay than in their origin countries. To sum up, Qatar has the world's greatest migrant-to-citizen ratio. Its economy would come to a standstill without these workers. However, Qatar has been accused of mistreating its migrant workers, such as letting migrant workers live in overcrowded housing that accommodated 30 to 40 people in one house (Riley, 2022).

Literature Review

Over the last two decades, Asia has played an important role in migration as a destination and origin country. Migrant workers' migration has been influenced by push and pulls factors such as job opportunities, wage differences, and the economic conditions of both the destination and origin countries. Migrant workers prefer to work in countries that offer job opportunities with higher wages so that they can improve their family's economic situation (Asian Development Bank Institute, 2018).

According to Institute for Human Rights and Business (hereafter IHRB), it is estimated that 35 million migrant workers who lived and worked in the Gulf Cooperation Council (hereafter GCC) countries came from Africa, Asia, and Southeast Asia. The GCC countries consist of United Arab Emirates (hereafter UAE), Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, it is also stated that approximately 10 million migrant workers are employed and living within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (hereafter ASEAN) countries, with key destinations including Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand (IHRB, 2020). This situation portrays that migrant workers are the major workforce in these countries.

Housing is essential since poor housing conditions can expose migrant workers vulnerable to diseases, injury, and death. Adequate and proper housing conditions, on the other hand, not only protect people from health threats but also serve to improve physical health, economic productivity, psychological well-being, and social activity (World Health Organization, 1989). Based on this statement, it proves that housing conditions are interrelated with the health condition of migrant workers. Besides, research by Kort and Dunn (2021) stated that housing conditions heavily influence migrant health. Migrant workers suffered poor living conditions even before COVID-19. Migrant worker accommodation is frequently overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and short of safe drinking water. These unsanitary environments increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Most of the time, migrant workers are excluded from their host countries' social and labour protections and always encounter difficulties accessing social

security benefits to which they are entitled. For example, there are many issues with having their rights to adequate housing from their employers. Migrant workers may encounter a number of obstacles to safeguarding their housing rights, including fear of immigration enforcement, a lack of legal resources, and discriminatory or ineffective dispute resolution systems (Kort & Dunn, 2021).

Migrant workers are among the most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in the world. Malaysia and Qatar are no exceptions. In both countries, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown the actual situation of migrant workers' housing, and the government has taken proactive steps to improve migrant workers' living conditions. In Malaysia, there is a case where migrant workers who live in Selangor Mansion share a 900sqft housing unit with 15 other people. In one situation, migrant workers who live in Selangor Mansion share a 900sqft housing unit with 15 other people. According to reports, a unit accommodates an average of 10 migrant workers. However, other interviews reveal that approximately 16 to 24 migrant workers can be found living in one unit. Each worker just has 38 to 56 square feet of housing space in such numbers (Tham & Omar, 2020).

As for Qatar, migrant workers are living in so-called labor camps. Qatar's Industrial Area in Doha has been home to a huge number of migrant workers. They were accommodated in horrible conditions, sleeping in bunk beds in overcrowded dorms with insufficient sanitation and, sometimes, with no electricity or running water (Amnesty International UK, 2020). The labour camps in Qatar are notably overcrowded, and the lack of clean water and sanitation means that workers are unable to defend themselves from diseases.

As human beings, migrant workers should get their rights as everybody else as guaranteed under the UDHR. This is because if their housing rights are not given, society is highly likely to be affected when something terrible happens; for example, the high numbers of Covid-19 infections. Moreover, the host countries are also being criticized by international human rights groups. This situation will tarnish the image of the country.

Research Methodology

This article used the qualitative research method. In addition, this article was also written based on primary data and document analysis. Due to the nature of this research objective, case study method is a suitable approach for analysing the housing condition of migrant workers in Malaysia and Qatar from 2017 until 2022. The primary data for this article was obtained from the field. The researcher conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews and phone calls with ten migrant workers and five locals in Malaysia. In qualitative research, ethical issues are often brought up. Before any interviews, the researcher contacted the potential informants and requested their permission to interview them for this research. After receiving verbal approval, the researcher scheduled appointments based on the informants' available times and locations. The population for this article is migrant workers who worked at construction sites in Malaysia particularly in Terengganu, Kelantan, and Selangor. Moreover, for secondary data, document analysis was done using a series of academic journals, reports, newspapers, digital materials, and websites. All primary and secondary data in this article concentrated on the housing condition of migrant workers in Malaysia and Qatar. The researcher used data triangulation to ensure the data and information gathered were reliable, consistent, and valid.

Discussion & Result

As mentioned in the introduction, the housing rights of migrant workers are covered under international human rights laws such as ICRMW and ICESCR. According to the United Nations, everyone has the right to adequate and decent housing, including non-citizens such as refugees, asylum seekers, stateless individuals, migrant workers, and victims of international trafficking, regardless of legal status or documentation (ILO, 2022). The ICRMW has detailed laws safeguarding the rights of migrant workers. According to Article 70 of the ICRMW, parties to the convention must ensure that the working and living conditions of migrant workers and their families meet the standards of safety, health, and fitness, as well as core human dignity values, in a normal state. Article 43 (1) (d) of the ICRMW specifies migrant workers' housing rights. It emphasized that migrant workers must be treated equally as citizens of the state in terms of access to housing, especially social housing schemes and rent exploitation protection (OHCHR, 2022).

Moreover, based on Article 11 (1) of ICESCR, the covenant's signatories must recognize that everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family. This statement comprises proper clothing, food, housing, and living development (ICESCR, 2022). However, Malaysia is not a signatory to the ICRMW and ICESCR, while Qatar only ratified the ICESCR. Besides, all workers should be treated equally, fairly, and with dignity regardless of whether they are local or migrant workers. The migrant workers should have the same benefits and employment rights as other local workers.

Migrant Workers' Housing Conditions in Malaysia

Although Malaysia has not ratified the two human rights conventions, the Malaysian government has taken proactive measures by enacting laws to safeguard the housing rights of migrant workers. Malaysia had established regulation relating the minimum standards of housing for workers and their families, including migrant workers in 1990. The regulation known as The Employees' Minimum Standards of Housing, Accommodations, and Amenities Act 1990 (hereafter Act 446). However, it only extended to miners and their families, as well as plantation or agricultural estates larger than 20 acres.

For years, most migrant workers in Malaysia stayed in small rooms, dormitories, or huts at a construction site called 'Kongsi.' As humans, migrant workers have the right to decent treatment, healthy living conditions, and accommodations on par with local workers. The most significant contributor to workers getting unwell is their living conditions. Migrant workers also died due to the unsanitary conditions in which they work and live, such as the lack of safety equipment in plastic factories and the cramped quarters where they must share space with many others. There is a case 5 people live in a room of 200 square meters without any ventilation, and it's also the room where they cook, dine, sleep, and entertain themselves. Furthermore, in 2019, the government amended the Act 446 to oblige employers to provide decent accommodation for migrant workers in all sectors. According to Act 446, the list of requirements outlines the minimum standards for migrant workers in terms of accommodation, basic utilities, hygiene, and safety. Employers are responsible for ensuring that worker accommodation, whether a dorm or not, has access to electricity and the main water supply. Additionally, these facilities must have secure electrical connections, fire safety features, and medical aid. The Malaysian government approved the amendment to Act 446 in 2019, which would be set to take effect in June 2020. However, employers and centralised housing providers were allowed a three-month preparation period from June 2020 to August 2020 before the full implementation of Act 446 in September 2020 (Lim, 2020).

When the Covid-19 second wave arrives in Malaysia in 2021, the most of new infections will be linked to migrant workers from Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, and Indonesia. Authorities are concentrating on overcrowded worker dormitories as a major factor to the virus's spread. In response to an increase in Covid-19 cases among migrant workers, the government revised Act 446 with the Emergency Ordinance (Employees' Minimum Standards of Housing, Accommodations, and Amenities) Amendment 2021 ("Emergency Ordinance"), which took effect in February 2021. The Emergency Ordinance also empowers the Director-General of the Department of Labour to issue a notice to an employer or centralised accommodation provider requiring them to replace, change, or repair any accommodations or facilities that do not meet the Act's minimum criteria or rules (Alagaratnam & Quin, 2021).

According to Datuk Seri M. Saravanan, Minister of Human Resources, employers must also come forward and register on their undocumented migrant workers, who must be vaccinated as part of the planned national Covid-19 immunisation programme. Act 446 was again postponed until December 2021 to provide employers more time to ensure that their employees are vaccinated and that employers can provide housing as required by the Act.

Nevertheless, it was reported in Berita Harian (2021) migrant workers still living in cramped and unhygienic places known as Kongsis. Plus, to save money on rent, some houses are renovated into four to five rooms to allow more than ten occupants or multiple migrant worker families in one unit (Ikhsan et al., 2021). Similarly, according to Zahratulhayat in the News Strait Times, more than 20 migrant workers in a tile processing factory in Simpang Pulai, Perak, have been living in unclean, overcrowded, and dangerous conditions for years. This is due to the accommodations did not meet Perak Labor Department regulations. In order to access electricity, the workers also placed improper wiring in each room (Zahratulhayat, 2022). This situation is unsafe, and the workers' living accommodations are risky to live in. It can be said that, this kind of situation always happened in Malaysia because the ignorance of the employers.

After the emergence of Covid-19, the government started acknowledging the need to safeguard migrant workers' housing rights. However, this acknowledgement has not yet been adopted by all Malaysian employers. This statement was proven when in 2021, The Department of Labor in Terengganu took action against employers at two building construction sites in Kuala Terengganu's city centre for failing to provide workers with adequate housing. The housing for 299 migrant workers lacked basic facilities such as beds, mattresses, and lockers. The employers were considered to have failed to obtain a Certificate of Accommodation and to provide employees with facilities. Furthermore, the provided open toilet is filthy and unsanitary. This circumstance was in violation of Act 446, and the employers must be charged. One of the government's efforts to ensure that migrant workers' housing rights are guaranteed, the government is providing migrant workers with Centralised Labour Quarters (hereafter CLQ) through the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (hereafter DOSH). The company must register with DOSH, and the company will be assigned the closest CLQ in the area of the construction sites.

In Malaysia, The Department of Labor (JTKSM) carried out The Integrated Worker Accommodation Compliance Operation (Act 446) with the collaborations of the Social Security Organization (SOCSO), the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSHS), and the Malaysian Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) to ensure that employers obey with Act 446. Even though Act 446 had been enforced and enforcement officers were constantly conducting raids on construction sites to ensure employers' compliance, a few

employers continued to violate Act 446. Their migrant workers were still housed in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions.

Based on interviews with migrant workers, when the construction site is far from town, employers prefer to put migrant workers in rented houses and renovated cabins into dormitories. Other interviews expose the reality. The employer placed five migrant employees in a single room with a mattress, bunk bed, and closed cabinet prior to obtaining the Certificate of Accommodation. To apply for the certificate, the employer must meet all of the requirements outlined in Act 446. However, after obtaining a Certificate of Accommodation, the number of migrant workers in one room increased to ten. After that, some workers slept on the floor without a mattress (Interviews, migrant workers, 2022). It is clear that such an employer is solely concerned with the company's profits. They adopted Act 446 to protect companies from being penalised for abusing migrant workers' housing rights. In addition, some migrant workers who work in rural areas are still living in Kongsis and rented houses, while those who work in towns living in company-provided CLQs and DOSH-provided CLQs. Some migrant workers are unaware of Act 446, yet they claim that their housing conditions have improved. Migrant workers living at CLQ indicated that the conditions were excellent because they had to keep cleanliness, and all basic amenities, such as a dining area with a table and chairs and a bedroom with a bed and locker, were given. This is due to the fact that CLQ will be visited every two weeks by the Company's Site Safety Supervisor. Site Safety will ensure that the house is constantly clean, no other migrant workers stay in the company's CLQ, and that the CLQ's surroundings are in good and safe conditions. Migrant workers in CLQ stated they are aware of Act 446 and are thankful that it exists. They have the indication that they are being well taken care of (Interviews, migrant workers, 2022).

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought many challenges, but for migrant workers, the Covid-19 pandemic is a blessing because it has revealed the reality of their housing provided by employers. Their housing conditions have also improved because of Covid-19.

Migrant Workers' Housing Conditions in Qatar

Migrant workers in Qatar live in Labour Camps. It is a small room that usually accommodates 8 to 10 people sleeping on bunk beds and sometimes in unhealthy conditions. But after being criticised worldwide, the Qatari government took action by providing a "showcase labour camp" to the public. Benjamin Best, a human rights journalist, stated that journalists are prohibited from approaching the labor camp. Around the labour camp, security personnel and police officers patrol in civilian clothes. Anyone who conducts interviews with workers or goes into the camp without permission will be arrested (Benjamin Best, 2019).

A professional journalist will be taken to the showcase camp when they visit Qatar. There is room for 40,000 migrant workers, and it is clean inside and out. The journalist can interview only a few workers, and the interpreter is the workers' superior. The showcase camps appear to be operating smoothly. The actual situation is the migrant workers do live in cramped with poor hygiene. 200 residents use a shared outdoor toilet, which is completely unclean and scorching (40°C). Discarded broken beds and bulky garbage were in the ground floor's corner. The staircase was extremely filthy, and 8 people lived in a small, dark room. In reality, the real labour camp is 360 opposite to the showcase labour camps. The migrant workers are forced to stay in that situation because they have no choice and cannot do anything.

The next cases are many migrant workers sleeping on the construction sites since they can't afford to pay for accommodations. The companies that sponsor these migrant workers for city construction projects do not pay them enough. Additionally, these same companies do

not offer accommodation for thousands of workers. As a result, many migrant workers wind themselves sleeping in the streets. Migrant workers often live on the upper floors of construction subcontracting companies, in shipping containers, or in other temporary accommodations on construction sites as additional to dormitories. In other situations, small rooms accommodate up to 30 workers without air conditioning or enough ventilation, and cockroaches abound. Frequently, only one toilet is shared by up to 80 individuals or more (IHRB, 2020).

Covid-19 has made the situation getting worse. Most migrant workers are stranded in camps, including in Qatar, as the globe fights to stop the COVID-19 pandemic. Workers can defend themselves less against the virus since labour camps are typically congested and lack proper water and sanitation. Close contact with workers in crowded camps also prevents social separation (Amnesty International, 2020). Moreover, the kafala system also contributes to the vulnerability of migrant workers to a series of abuses, such as forced labour, delayed wages, and passport withholding. Besides, migrant workers had to obtain an exit permit from the Kafala in order to leave Qatar and a Non-Objection Certificate (hereafter NOC) to change jobs. This situation showed that the Kafala System created a power imbalance between migrant workers and employers.

The government of Qatar had promised improvements after widespread international protests against the horrific exploitation there. Qatar aimed to replace the kafala system with a contractual system involving the direct renewal of residence permits with migrant workers rather than through employers. After several reforms in Qatar's policy, the exit permit and NOC policy were finally officially abolished in August 2020 (Nguyen, 2021). For changing jobs, workers can now process their job transfers independently and without incurring any fees. According to the rules, employees must tell their employer of their desire to change jobs and submit the necessary documentation via the Labor Ministry's electronic notification system. However, changing jobs remains a government-regulated process (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Qatar's Labor Ministry also has attempted to add a protection in its instructions on changing jobs. This protection includes if the employer fails to meet the rules set by Qatar's Labor Ministry, the employee is not required to give the notice period to change jobs. A full-time employee can quit if the employer breaches the employment contract, assaults the workers, and endangers the employee's health. This provision benefits workers who endure abuse because it allows them to resign without notice and, apparently, without paying their employer compensation. However, the employer is always one step ahead. The workers cannot process their job transfer application because the employer withholds all related documents, including their passports.

In 2022, a month before the kick off of FIFA World Cup 2022, Qatar has demolished apartment buildings that housed hundreds of migrant workers in the same parts of Doha's central economic district where visiting soccer fans will stay during the World Cup. Authorities had evacuated and closed down more than a dozen buildings, forcing the mostly Asian and African workers to seek wherever accommodation they could, including sleeping on the pavement outside one of their former houses (Mills, 2022). Before migrant workers were forced to live in crowded houses, and now they are left without a place to live. Even after various reforms, it still depends on how effectively the government enforces and monitors employers and whether they comply with the law or not.

Conclusion

In conclusion, migrant workers' housing rights should be protected and given to the migrant workers. Malaysia and Qatar are highly dependent on migrant workers for the economy and the issues of migrant workers' housing cannot be resolved easily without cooperating with stakeholders and taking a long-term comprehensive approach. Numerous industries will suffer massively if there is a major decrease in migrant workers. As a result, huge production reductions will occur, and an increasing number of delayed construction projects. This situation will result in a significant slowdown in the state's economic growth. There is no immediate solution for the problem, which requires careful handling due to the potential severity of its effects on the industry. Although the government has made various initiatives to protect the migrant workers' housing rights, it is still up to the employer or the company itself whether they want to comply the acts or not. Clearly, the company or employer only cares about the company's profit and does not care about the well-being of their migrant workers at all.

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