Research Report

Leiden Model United Nations 2015
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Forum: *Economic and Social Council*
Issue: *The Rights of Migrant Workers in the Gulf Region*

Position: *Deputy President*

Introduction

Millions of people have left their home countries in search of employment. In 2005, there were about 191 million migrant workers working in other countries, this is about 3% of the world's population. Today, this number has grown to over 200 million.

Many countries are affected by this, including the countries in the Gulf Region. There are over 15 million migrant workers in the Gulf Region, and they face a lot of difficulties, including abuses like unpaid wages. Even though migrant workers are engaged in every sector of development in the Gulf Region, they are treated really badly. Due to the economical crisis, there are more migrant workers than ever before.

Migrant workers often leave their countries because of poverty and/or unemployment. Developed countries have increased their demand for workers, so migrant workers go there to find employment. As a result, many workers and their families travel to countries other than their own. Migrant workers contribute to the economy of the country in which they live; yet they do not enjoy social protection and are vulnerable to human trafficking. Skilled migrants are less vulnerable for exploitation, but they have deprived their home countries of valuable labour needed for their own economies. They believe that if they find a job in another country than their own, they can support their families and have a better life.

Definition of Key Terms

Migrant workers

The definition of this term is broad, but it includes anyone working outside their home country.

Gulf Region

Also known as the Arab States of the Persian Gulf. The Gulf Region exists of seven states that have a border on the Persian Gulf, namely Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Kafala System

This system restricts workers from moving to a new job before their contract ends, unless they obtain their employer's permission. This causes a great deal of financial

pressure, because the workers usually have to support their families and pay off the debts caused by their recruitment. The recruitment agencies overcharge the migrant workers, deceive them about the working conditions and fail to assist them in finding a job.

Gulf Cooperation Council
The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, also known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a regional intergovernmental union consisting of all Gulf States, except for Iraq. It is a political and economical union.

Domestic Workers
This term is often confused with the term "Migrant Worker". A domestic worker is, however, a person who works within his/her employer's household.

General Overview

There are five phases of the migration of workers to the Gulf Region:

The first phase started in the period before the 1970s oil boom. Over 80% of the migrant workers were Arab, mainly from Syria, Egypt, Yemen and Palestine. Iraq and Oman were net transporters of manpower. This made them major labour importing countries. In the second phase, the migration intensified, triggered by the post-1973 oil price hike, and the number of Arab migrant workers rose. There were about 1.3 million migrants in 1975.

The third phase started in the late 1970s, early 1980s. Because of the second oil price hike in 1979, the government revenue rose in one year. The Gulf States had more ambitious development plans, the Cavish Project and more generous welfare projects. This caused a demand for an extra 700,000 migrant workers in 1980.

In the fourth phase, there was a decline of oil prices in 1982, the development projects slowed and the demand for migrant workers slackened.

The fifth phase was in the 1990s, at the end of the Cold War. New migrant workers came to the Gulf Region, especially from China and former Soviet States. This caused a lot of competition in the labour market. After the second Gulf War, a great deal of people was displaced. It is estimated that it was a displacement of about 1.5 million people: 1 million Yemenis, 200,000 Jordanians, 150,000 Palestinians and 158,000 Egyptians. Because of this, there were many job vacancies in the Gulf States; South Asians filled these.

The Kafala System, which applies in most countries, restricts workers to move to a new job without their employer's consent. The migrant workers suffer many abuses, because their employers treat them poorly. These abuses include unpaid wages, confiscation of passports, forced labour and physical abuse. In Saudi Arabia and Qatar, migrant workers cannot leave the country without their employer's consent for an

"exit permit" provided by the government. Some employers refuse to pay the wages, return passports or to provide an exit permit.

Migrant workers are extremely vulnerable to abuse, since they left their countries in search for employment, and they will do a lot to make sure they keep the job they find in a new country.

The Human Rights report, "I Already Bought You", and the Amnesty International report "My Sleep Is My Break" show that there are signs of abuse towards the migrant workers in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These include unpaid wages, no breaks, excessive workloads, food deprivation, confinement in the workplace and in some cases even physical/sexual abuse and forced labour: trafficking. There are about 600,000 victims of trafficking in the Gulf Region, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). These consist of migrant workers, mostly from Asia and Africa.

Some people fear that migrant workers are a threat to their home countries. However, migrant workers can add a lot of positive aspects to the country. They often bring new technical skills such as IT technologies and they can fill job and intelligence gaps. They also bring unique cultural and complementary skills to the jobs. Migrant workers that do not have a high education fill the jobs that the inhabitants of the country do not want to fill.

Major Parties Involved

The Arab States of the Persian Gulf
consisting of Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These countries are directly involved with the matter.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Labour Organisation, International organization for migration
These are all organizations which are engaged in creating awareness about the pressing situation of migrant workers in the Gulf Region and in improving their situation.

China and former Soviet States
These countries provided many migrants at the end of the Cold War. Nowadays, a great deal of South Asians still lives in the Gulf Region.

Timeline of Events

1950s-1960s	Oil boom in the Gulf Region, which caused a demand on labour
18 December 1990	The United Nations convention on the protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families treaty was signed
2004	Resolution concerning a fair deal for migrant workers in a global economy at the International Labour Conference in Geneva
26-27 November 2014	Abu Dhabi Dialogue in Kuwait

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

- 2014 Abu Dhabi Dialogue in Kuwait: a convention initiated to increase the dialogue between Asian countries and Gulf states about the labour situation in that area.
- The United Nations convention on the protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families: "a United Nations multilateral treaty governing the protection of migrant workers and families. Signed on 18 December 1990, it entered into force on 1 July 2003 after the threshold of 20 ratifying States was reached in March 2003. The Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW) monitors implementation of the convention, and is one of the seven UN-linked human rights treaty bodies." (See the Useful Documents section for more information about this convention)
- Resolution concerning a fair deal for migrant workers in a global economy: a resolution that protects the rights of migrant workers in the current economic system.

Possible Solutions

- Improve labour law protection in the Gulf States: this will prevent the abuse of migrant workers in the region, and create better working conditions.
- Reform abusive immigration policies: this will also prevent the abuse of migrant workers.
- Increase dialogue with trade unions and non-governmental organisations (NGO's): this will make more people aware of the issue and establish help for the migrant workers.
- Create guidelines, under which migrant workers are able to establish a decent working situation.

Useful documents

The UN Convention on the protection of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families treaty:
https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg_no=iv-13&chapter=4&lang=en

Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Convention_on_the_Protection_of_the_Rights_of_All_Migrant_Workers_and_Members_of_Their_Families

General information on the Kafala System:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kafala_system

Appendix/Appendices

https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/11/23/gulf-countries-increase-migrant-worker-protection
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_states_of_the_Persian_Gulf
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Migrant_worker
http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/11/gulf-states-urged-protect-migrant-workers-201411239393775227.html
http://www.mei.edu/content/migration-and-human-rights-gulf
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