



## Labour Rights in Qatar: An ITUC briefing for trade union delegates to the UN Climate Changes talks in Durban,

**Qatar Facts: Population:** 1.7 million **Capital:** Doha

**Labour market:** 6% of workforce is Qatari **Main nationalities:** 425,000 Qataris; 500,000 Indians; 350,000 Nepalese; 160,000 Filipino.

**Income:** \$88,000 per head, the richest nation in the world according to IMF

**Average salary of migrant worker:** Nepalese construction worker \$3,600 a year. A Filipina domestic worker \$2,500 a year. Often working 18 hours a day

**2011 Reported Violations:** 90 Arrests

Migrant workers make up the majority of the workforce in Qatar and are often exploited. Qatari citizens don't drive taxis, wait on tables or install plumbing. Their economy is dependent on the manual labour of migrant workers hailing mostly from south Asia, the Philippines or more recently East Africa. The law provides for a single trade union system and trade union activities are heavily curtailed.

Qatar is one of the richest countries in the Gulf region thanks to its oil and gas reserves. It is the worlds largest emitter and has been a permanent barrier in climate negotiations.

All power is concentrated in the hands of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani who has been in power since 1995 when he deposed his father. He is also head of the armed forces and Minister for Defence. The 2005 Constitution provided for the creation of a parliament in which two thirds of the members must be elected, but as no elections have taken place as yet, this has not been implemented.

### Trade union rights violations

**Migrant workers exploited:** Migrant workers make up the majority of the workforce – 87% of the total population (the large percentage of migrants in the Gulf region). Only 25.8% of the migrant population are women. Migrants are often exploited because their employment contracts give broad powers to their employers. The latter often confiscate the migrant workers' passports and some refuse to pay their salaries on time. Women domestic workers are prime targets for violence and sexual attacks in particular.

**Domestic workers exploited:** In 2010, over 1000 domestic workers sought shelter at a safe house run by the Philippines Overseas Labour Office in Doha. Most fled their employers complaining of overwork or unpaid wage, but almost 300 reported physical abuse, and 75 said they had face sexual abuse or harassment.

**90 migrant workers expelled following a strike:** In September 2010, the Nepalese media reported that approximately 90 Nepalese migrant workers in the construction sector were arrested and subsequently deported from Qatar following their participation in a strike. Their company, Albadar, had refused to increase salaries by 10% in accordance with a previous agreement.

### Trade union rights in law

Trade union rights are seriously restricted in law. The Labour Code allows for only one trade union: the General Union of Workers of Qatar, made up of General Committees or for workers in different trades or industries. Each of the General Committees must have a minimum of 100 members. Government employees as well as non-Qatari nationals are not allowed to organise. Furthermore, a Committees' permissible activities are regulated in the law, and the Minister of Labour may dissolve any Committee

that engages in political activity, distributes materials that insult the state or the government, or accepts gifts without the Ministry's approval.

Although trade unions are allowed to bargain collectively, the government controls the rules and procedures for bargaining, including restrictions on the content, scope, duration and interpretation of the agreements. The right to strike is recognised, but it is very difficult to carry out a lawful strike. Three-fourths of the General Committee must approve of the strike, and the time and place for the strike must be approved by the Ministry of Labour. A lengthy dispute resolution procedure must also be exhausted before a lawful strike can be called. Civil servants and domestic workers are not allowed to strike, and no worker in a public utility, health or security service can strike if it harms the public or causes damage to property. Workers in petroleum- and gas-related industries, seaports and all forms of transportation fall under this category.

**Categories of workers prohibited or limited in law from forming or joining a union, or from holding a union office:**

>Domestic workers

People performing domestic work, such as drivers, nurses, cooks, gardeners and similar workers are not allowed to organise.

>Agricultural workers

Workers employed in agriculture and grazing, apart from self-employed persons and those who are permanently employed in the operation or repair of necessary agricultural mechanical appliances, are not allowed to organise.

>Other civil servants and public employees

Government employees are not allowed to organise.

>Police

>Armed forces

>Others categories

Workers employed at sea as well as casual workers are not allowed to organise.

**Additional information: Labour rights legislation can be found in the ITUC Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights and the ITUC's special investigative report "Hidden faces of the gulf miracle" at [www.ituc-csi.org](http://www.ituc-csi.org)**