



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

Forum: Human Rights Council (HRC)

Topic: Addressing the Human Rights Implications of the Kafala System in the Middle East

Student Officer: Artemis Venardou

Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

My name is Artemis Venardou and I am a student at St Catherine's British School. This year I am honoured to be your deputy president in the Human Rights Council! I am 15 years old and so far have taken part in 5 conferences. Having started MUN only last year I was nervous to speak and was unsure of how the procedures worked. However as I gradually attended more conferences, learning how debates worked and practicing debating and writing speeches I was building more and more confidence. Before I knew it I was constantly raising my placard to contribute to the debate and engaging with delegates from many different schools.

MUN has not only helped me develop my public speaking skills, it has also helped me understand different perspectives, listen actively and also work together towards a common goal. Now that I have the chance to be your student officer, I want to create an environment that allows you to speak up about your different ideas.

As your Deputy President, my goal is to create an environment where every delegate feels confident to share their ideas, ask questions, and engage fully in the debate. Whether it is your first conference or not I want you to feel supported. I want to encourage you to approach this conference with curiosity and an enthusiasm to speak and learn. I can't wait to see what ideas you all bring and to get to know all of you better. For any questions you may have, whether it's on the conference as a whole or on



this specific topic, do not hesitate to reach out via my email: a.venardou@icloud.com,
or your president's email: danaemoutzouridou@gmail.com

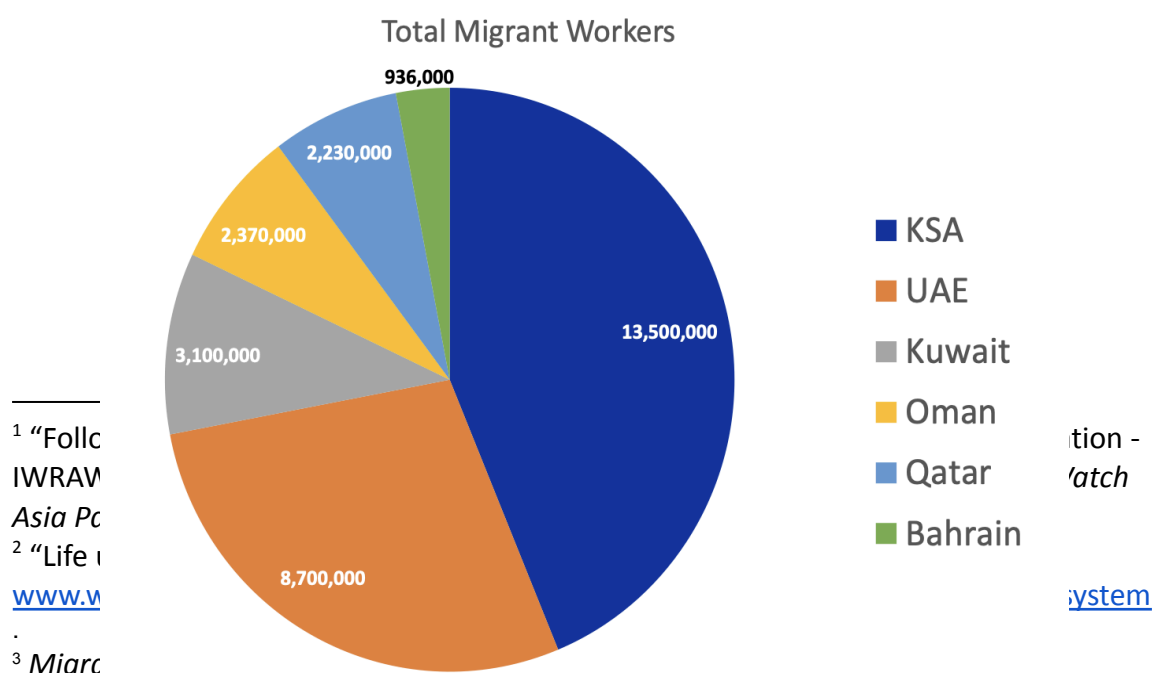
Best regards,

Artemis Venardou

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The Kafala sponsorship system is a legal framework made up of policies and rules that tightly connect migrant workers to their employers.¹ Instead of operating as individual employees, workers rely on a 'sponsor' who controls their legal status and ability to work. In many cases this means that the worker cannot change jobs or leave the country without their employer's permission. Due to the amount of authority placed in the hand of the sponsor, the system creates a large power imbalance from the start. This shapes the workers rights and also their overall sense of freedom. In the worst cases, if a worker does decide to leave their job they risk losing their sources of income and also risk being an illegal immigrant.²

FIGURE 1 - PERCENTAGE OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE GULF STATES³





The legal framework is used in a plethora of middle eastern countries including those in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) , specifically Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as well as in non-GCC countries such as Jordan and Lebanon. The implementation varies by country and region and the rules and the restrictions can differ significantly depending on the countries practices. The system has significantly impacted many industries, specifically construction and hospitality as well as domestic services by offering higher wages and better living conditions than in the migrant workers' home countries.

However, the Kafala system has also been criticized globally for restricting workers rights as well as abuse, exploitation and withholding wages and in some cases confiscating the workers passport. Even though it has contributed to various countries' economic growth and development. In many GCC countries there has been a gradual movement to reform by affording greater labor mobility for migrant workers within labor markets, which is in line with the priorities in national vision plans to further economic growth and development.⁴ However, these challenges emphasize the importance of implementation of laws which will be able to protect these migrant workers.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Trade Union

“An organization that represents the people who work in a particular industry, protects their rights, and discusses their pay and working conditions with employers”⁵

⁴ Cholewinski, Ryszard . “Understanding the Kafala Migrant Labor System in Qatar and the Middle East at Large, with ILO Senior Migration Specialist Ryszard Cholewinski.” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 1 Feb. 2023, gija.georgetown.edu/2023/02/01/the-kafala-system-a-conversation-with-ryszard-cholewinski/.

⁵ “TRADE UNION | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *Cambridge.org*, 2019, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/trade-union.



Legislation

"A law or set of laws suggested by a government and made official by a parliament"⁶

Migrant Workers

"A migrant worker is an individual who relocates, often temporarily, from their permanent residence to find employment, which can occur within their own country or across international borders."⁷

Exit Visa

"An exit visa is a government-issued document granting an individual permission to leave a country. "⁸

Migration

"The process of people travelling to a new place to live, usually in large numbers"⁹

"The movement of people away from their usual place of residence to a new place of residence, either across an international border or within a State"¹⁰

⁶ Cambridge Dictionary. "Legislation." @CambridgeWords, 4 Oct. 2023, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/legislation#google_vignette.

⁷ "Migrant Worker | EBSCO." EBSCO Information Services, Inc. | Wwww.ebsco.com, 2025, www.ebsco.com/research-starters/social-sciences-and-humanities/migrant-worker.

⁸ Kagan, Julia. "Exit Visa: What It Is, How It Works, Examples." Investopedia, 2024, www.investopedia.com/terms/e/exit-visa.asp. Accessed 5 Oct. 2025.

⁹ Cambridge Dictionary. "MIGRATION | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." Cambridge.org, 2019, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/migration.

¹⁰ International Organization for Migration. "Fundamentals of Migration." International Organization for Migration, 2025, www.iom.int/fundamentals-migration.



Kafala

“Means ‘Sponsorship’ in Arabic. The Kafala system is a sponsorship system for migrant workers in Lebanon, as well as several other Arab countries”¹¹

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Origins of the Kafala System

The Kafala system was first established and largely used in the British Colonial period, mainly during the 1920s until the independence of Gulf States in the 1970s¹². The Kafala system was also used in the post World War II era as many of the gulf states experienced very rapid economic growth, meaning they needed a larger and stronger workforce. Ultimately, the system was a mechanism for the management of the large number of migrant workers. These migrant workers primarily came from Southeast Asia, as well as East Africa due to the labour cost reduction¹³, who came seeking for a better life and employment opportunities. As more time passed, it evolved into a system that gave the employers control over their employees.¹⁴ This meant that employees were required to follow specific rules, conditions which were set up by their employers. As the system continued to develop, a set of legal rules were developed that outlined the obligations of each migrant worker.

British colonial administrators first implemented and introduced the sponsorship system to control and regulate labour migration. They saw migrant workers as essential for economic development. The British bureaucratic presence in the gulf states was limited, they delegated control of the migrant workers to local ship captains who acted

¹¹ “Kafala FAQ - Migrant Workers Action.” *Migrant Workers Action*, 2024, mwaction.org/kafala-faq/.

¹² “Policing Labour in Empire: The Modern Origins of the Kafala Sponsorship System in the Gulf Arab States.” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 48, no. 2, 27 Feb. 2019, pp. 291–310, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2019.1580183>.

¹³ Robinson, Kali. “What Is the Kafala System?” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 18 Nov. 2022, www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-kafala-system.

¹⁴ Ibid.



as legal controllers of the migrant workers.¹⁵ Due to this, there were many legal procedures such as entry and residency visas tied to the migrant workers sponsor. Even though at first the system was limited to the pearl industry it later developed because of the sudden boom of the oil industry.¹⁶ The gulf states began rapidly producing oil so the number of migrant workers significantly increased in a short period of time and the system was enhanced to be able to manage them.

Legal Constraints within the Kafala System

Many female workers have faced challenges within the system. Globally, these types of work usually limit women and confines them within the household making them less noticeable to authorities. This allows their employers to exploit them and deprive them of payment.¹⁷ In addition, in high income countries household work is typically done by female migrant workers who are constantly monitored and face high risk of violence and discrimination within these households. Because they are being monitored so closely and have limited freedom of movement, it is significantly harder for them to escape abusive situations. Many workers are confined to the employers home, denied rest days and get their phones taken away, which further restrict their ability to find protection or escape exploitative situations.¹⁸

In addition to gender-specific issues, migrant workers often work long hours in dangerous environments and often under long hours exposed to the heat. This puts them at greater risk of accidents and other diseases, heat-related illnesses and deaths are very common. Even among young and healthy individuals. Many migrant workers return to their home countries with long-term health conditions or injuries that they sustained on the job. Employers rarely face consequences for wage theft, confiscating

¹⁵ AlShehabi, O. H. (2019). Policing labour in the empire: the modern origins of the Kafala sponsorship system in the Gulf Arab States. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2019.1580183>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Begum, Rothna. "Migrant Domestic Workers: Overworked and Underprotected | Human Rights Watch." *Human Rights Watch*, 15 June 2016, www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/15/migrant-domestic-workers-overworked-and-underprotected.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

their workers passports, excessive working hours and abuse. The confiscation of passports is illegal. In a report by the ILO it states that in Article 8 of law NO.21 of 2015 it regulates the entry, exit as well as residence. Employers are obliged to return a workers passport after finishing the procedure of issuing a new residence permit and the employer may only keep the passport if the worker has given them written permission and must return it whenever the worker asks. However in many cases passport confiscation continues to be done illegally. Many workers who flee abuse and the system as a whole leave countries unpaid; the legal system fails to guarantee safe shelter, payment of wage or legal representation and legal rights.¹⁹

Case Study - Winnie Linet

Winnie Linet grew up in a big family in western Kenya. In 2013, when she was just 22 years old, Winnie left Kenya and moved to Lebanon; working as a domestic worker under the Kafala System²⁰. A distant relative offered her work and she immediately accepted, hoping for a better life.

She was told after an interview that she would be a patient attendant in a hospital in Lebanon with a contract lasting for two years.²¹ When she landed in Beirut, she had to wait in a room full of people from many different nationalities. Winnie had to wait seven hours before her name was called and she left to meet her employer. Specifically to her story, many of those women in the room had been neglected and left with no food for several days waiting for someone to claim them.²² These situations only reflect a minimum amount of the exploitative conditions that the workers had to work in.

Her first year in Lebanon was difficult. When she compared her jobs to other women in similar circumstances she recognised that finding her family was a fortunate

¹⁹ Begum, Rothna. "Migrant Domestic Workers: Overworked and Underprotected | Human Rights Watch." *Human Rights Watch*, 15 June 2016, www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/15/migrant-domestic-workers-overworked-and-underprotected.

²⁰ "My Name Is Winnie, I Survived Lebanon's Kafala System." *OpenDemocracy*, 2020, www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/my-name-is-winnie-i-survived-lebans-kafala-system/.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

outcome. Winnie was allowed a few hours off work on Sundays and was able to call her family once a week.²³ However, she constantly encountered racism and an assumption that black people were “dirty” when outside. After 5 years working in Lebanon she was finally allowed to return to Kenya, rather than the initially promised 2 due to legal barriers.

Winnie's experience as a migrant worker under the Kafala sponsorship system highlights the conditions these workers had to endure. More specifically, discrimination and systematic exploitation. She along with many others endured long waiting times, neglect and racial assumptions about their identities; these issues do not only occur in Lebanon but in GCC countries as well. Her story shows that labour exploitation and discrimination are closely linked however they vary by country and employer but nevertheless labour systems should strive to include protection against discrimination and safe working conditions.

Benefits of the system for employees

Even though the Kafala System is widely criticised for the exploitation of employees across the Gulf states, it offers some benefits to the employees implemented after the reforms. These benefits include higher wages compared to those in their home countries, providing them with a higher salary and hopefully improving their life conditions.²⁴ While these benefits mainly come from migrating from their home countries to work but also link to the kafala systems framework. There are also more job opportunities available that may not exist and this can help workers gain experience and learn new skills in construction, hospitality or services that can be used for their benefit later in their life²⁵. A large portion of migrant workers work in construction as according to an ILO commissioned report, there is a gap between skills the migrant

²³ “My Name Is Winnie, I Survived Lebanon’s Kafala System.” *OpenDemocracy*, 2020, www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/my-name-is-winnie-i-survived-lebanons-kafala-system/.

²⁴ ---. “What Is the Kafala System?” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 18 Nov. 2022, www.cfr.org/background/what-kafala-system.

²⁵ “Labour Migration | International Labour Organization.” *Www.ilo.org*, 28 Jan. 2024, www.ilo.org/regions-and-countries/ilo-arab-states/areas-work/labour-migration.



workers bring and the market demand. Through construction work, the workers will acquire technical capabilities. Many migrant workers are employed in hospitality services which allow the workers to experience and learn skills which can be transferred to different service sectors.²⁶ According to the ILO and Qatari government recent reforms ensure a non discriminatory minimum wage of 1,000 QAR per month in addition to housing allowances.²⁷

There are also many benefits linked to living conditions. Specific to Qatar, employers there are obliged to provide basic necessities such as free housing or medical care which may not be as good as the healthcare available in their home countries.²⁸ it should be noted that different countries have their distinct systems which affect legal frameworks and how contracts would be . These are part of some of the new laws implemented by Qatar in 2020.²⁹ Even though these are benefits for the employees and significantly improve a small aspect of their lives, it can impact their lives if they are not executed properly. These migrant workers could get exploited and abused. These benefits that exist within the Kafala system show how much the employee has to rely on the employer for the standardized necessities.

Economic and Social Impacts of the Kafala System

Host economies benefit from cheap labour through lower production costs in addition to inexpensive labour offering economic growth. The economic impact of the Kafala system has raised many significant concerns, by tying migrant workers' legal status to their employer, it gives employers power and allows them to withhold wages, with

²⁶ *Labour Migration Research on Sri Lanka What Do We Know? What Don't We Know?* International Labour Organization.

²⁷ "Dismantling the Kafala System and Introducing a Minimum Wage Mark New Era for Qatar Labour Market | International Labour Organization." *Www.ilo.org*, 30 Aug. 2020, www.ilo.org/resource/article/dismantling-kafala-system-and-introducing-minimum-wage-mark-new-era-qatar.

²⁸ "Dismantling the Kafala System and Introducing a Minimum Wage Mark New Era for Qatar Labour Market | International Labour Organization." *Www.ilo.org*, 30 Aug. 2020, www.ilo.org/resource/article/dismantling-kafala-system-and-introducing-minimum-wage-mark-new-era-qatar.

²⁹ Ibid.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

many workers in various gulf countries taking on high debt to pay employment fees. This system limits workers' ability to move freely between jobs or find opportunities to develop their skills which can reduce their potential for professional growth. Meanwhile, sending countries become heavily dependent on remittances (sum of money sent from one party to another), a dependence that creates vulnerability if labour conditions worsen or host-country policies change. While it generates total revenue, it also makes countries reliant on labour export.

Socially, the Kafala system severely restricts workers' freedom as many have their passports confiscated, are unable to change jobs, and risk deportation if they leave an abusive employer. Families may experience separation and financial insecurity due to the system's structure. In places like Lebanon, migrant domestic workers are excluded from labor law protections (such as minimum wage or rest days), and they face exploitation, forced confinement, and even human trafficking. Human rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, argue that these conditions amount to "modern-day slavery", calling for a complete abolition of the Kafala system.³⁰

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date of the Event	Event
1928 - 1929	The first example of the Kafala system was in the pearl diving industry in the British Colonial Protectorate of Bahrain. ³¹
1993	Birth of Support for Lebanese Detained Arbitrarily (SOLIDA) by human rights activists, Wadih Al- Asmar and Marie

³⁰ Khan, Azfar. "Why It's Time to End Kafala." *The Guardian*, 26 Feb. 2014, www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/feb/26/time-to-end-kafala.

³¹ Walk Free. "Life under the Kafala System." *Walk Free*, 2022, www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/findings/spotlights/life-under-the-kafala-system/.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

	Daunay, who were located in France. ³²
2006	Lebanon Centre for Human rights (CLDH) created by Franco-Lebanese movement Support for Lebanese Detained Arbitrarily (SOLIDA) ³³
2009	The Bahraini government attempted to reform the kafala system by transferring migrant workers' sponsorships from private citizens to the Labor Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA). ³⁴
February 2011	Kuwait permitted workers to change employers in 2011 but excluded domestic workers ³⁵
September 29, 2015	The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced labour reforms to be enforced from January 1 that aim to curb abuse and protect the rights of millions of foreign

³² "CLDH." *Cldh-Lebanon.org*, 2019, www.cldh-lebanon.org/WhoWeAre/Index/storyContant. Accessed 6 Nov. 2025.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights. (2019). *Advocating for human rights in the Gulf region*. https://www.ecdhr.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019.06_Bahrain_Migrant-workers%E2%80%99-rights.pdf

³⁵ "The Kafala System - UCF Global Perspectives and International Initiatives." *UCF Global Perspectives and International Initiatives*, 13 Dec. 2024, ucfglobalperspectives.org/blog/2024/12/13/the-kafala-system/.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

	workers. ³⁶
2019	The government of Qatar announced sweeping improvements to its labour laws, including the end of the kafala system ³⁷
September 8, 2020	The standard unified labor contract issued by the Lebanese Ministry of Labor. ³⁸
September 8, 2020	Qatar reformed its labour laws so workers could change jobs freely, get a minimum wage, and have clearer contract rules, with penalties for bad employers. ³⁹
2020	The ILO, in collaboration with Qatar, introduced a number of new labour laws mainly about minimum wage for migrant workers employed in Qatar. ⁴⁰
March 2021	Saudi Arabia introduced labor reforms that will ease restrictions and allow some migrant workers to change jobs without

³⁶ "UAE Announces Labour Reforms to Protect Foreign Workers." *Www.aljazeera.com*, www.aljazeera.com/economy/2015/9/29/uae-announces-labour-reforms-to-protect-for-eign-workers.

³⁷ "U.S. Department of State Praises Global Unions Works to End Kafala in Qatar and Monitor Labor Law Reform." *UNI Global Union*, uniglobalunion.org/news/kafala_us_dept/.

³⁸ "The New Standard Unified Labor Contract: A First Step in Abolishing the Kafala System?" 22 كفي, Sept. 2020, kafa.org.lb/en/node/428? Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

³⁹ ---. "Qatar: Significant Labor and Kafala Reforms." *Human Rights Watch*, 24 Sept. 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/24/qatar-significant-labor-and-kafala-reforms.

⁴⁰ "Dismantling the Kafala System and Introducing a Minimum Wage Mark New Era for Qatar Labour Market | International Labour Organization." *Www.ilo.org*, 30 Aug. 2020, www.ilo.org/resource/article/dismantling-kafala-system-and-introducing-minimum-wage-mark-new-era-qatar.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

	employer consent ⁴¹
May 26, 2021	Saudi Arabia was the first country in the GCC to sign the International Labour Organization's Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention. ⁴²
June 2025	Saudi Arabia announced the abolition of the kafala system. ⁴³
September 29, 2025	The Human Rights Council adopts the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) outcome decision on Kuwait. ⁴⁴
October 2025	Saudi Arabia officially abolished its 50-year-old Kafala sponsorship system. ⁴⁵

⁴¹ "Saudi Arabia: Labor Reforms Insufficient." *Human Rights Watch*, 25 Mar. 2021, www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/25/saudi-arabia-labor-reforms-insufficient.

⁴² "Saudi Arabia Becomes First Arab Country to Launch National Policy on Forced Labour and Worker Rights." *Walk Free*, Minderoo Foundation, 31 Jan. 2025, www.walkfree.org/news/2025/saudi-arabia-becomes-first-arab-country-to-launch-national-policy-on-forced-labour-and-worker-rights/.

⁴³ Middle East Briefing. "Saudi Arabia Ends Kafala System: Implications for Business." *Middle East Briefing*, 24 Oct. 2025, www.middleeastbriefing.com/news/saudi-arabia-ends-kafala-system-implications-for-business/.

⁴⁴ Human, UN. "Outcome of the Universal Periodic Review :: Kuwait : Decision /: Adopted by the Human Rights Council on 29 September 2025." *United Nations Digital Library System*, UN, 8 Oct. 2025, digitallibrary.un.org/record/4090561. Accessed 17 Nov. 2025.

⁴⁵ "Saudi Arabia Ends Kafala System after 50 Years: All You Need to Know about the Landmark Labour Reforms - the Logical Indian." *The Logical Indian*, 30 Oct. 2025, thelogicalindian.com/saudi-arabia-ends-kafala-system-after-50-years-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-landmark-labour-reforms/.



MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Lebanon

The Kafala system grants employers control over the lives of many migrant workers. In Lebanon (a non GCC country) a journalist called Sharika Wa Laken collected accounts of women workers who have had to experience the system. These include sexual assault, food deprivation, beatings, denial of days off and some cases leading to death or suicide. As a result, many of these crimes are overlooked and dismissed. In many of these situations in Lebanon the employers are operating illegally due to weak enforcement of labour laws and the absence of contracts; the employees have no contract or salaries. In Lebanon, migrants cannot leave their job without their employer's permission.⁴⁶

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a country that heavily relies on migrant labor, and over 6.3 million⁴⁷ migrants comprise more than 80%⁴⁸ of the private sector workforce. Due to this dependence, migrant workers face many challenges such as passport confiscation and wage delays, sexual exploitation, excessively long working hours and the denial of essential necessities such as food, rest, and medical care. In March of 2021 some new laws were put in place. These laws allow migrant workers to change jobs after completing their contracts. Additionally, they can switch jobs during the term of their contracts as long as they inform their employers within a specified timeframe.⁴⁹ Overall, the reforms aim to reduce the dependency the employee has on the employer and give them more job opportunities.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch. "Lebanon: Abolish Kafala (Sponsorship) System." *Human Rights Watch*, 27 July 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/27/lebanon-abolish-kafala-sponsorship-system.

⁴⁷ "The Kafala System in Saudi Arabia - ECDHR." *Www.ecdhr.org*, 5 Mar. 2024, www.ecdhr.org/the-kafala-system-in-saudi-arabia/.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "The Kafala System in Saudi Arabia - ECDHR." *Www.ecdhr.org*, 5 Mar. 2024, www.ecdhr.org/the-kafala-system-in-saudi-arabia/.



Qatar

Qatar is the first country in the Arab Gulf region to allow all migrant workers to change jobs before the end of their contracts without having to obtain their employer's consent beforehand. Qatar has also introduced new labor reforms which are known as some of the most significant to date. These labour reforms are part of Qatar's broader labour modernization efforts. If these are carried out effectively they could significantly improve migrant workers' living and work conditions. Qatar's migrant workforce is made up of approximately 2 million⁵⁰ people, which makes up nearly 95%⁵¹ of the workforce in a country with a population of just 3 million people⁵². New laws which have been recently implemented allow migrant workers to end their contract at their own will as long as they notify their employer first within a set notice period.

United States of America (USA)

In the USA, similar to the kafala system, a worker's legal rights to stay in a country depend on the employer sponsoring their visa. In the U.S. However, if they lose that job, they may lose the right to stay and must find a new sponsor or leave. In addition, workers cannot freely switch employers and doing so can result in losing their legal status which is very similar to the rules implemented for migrant workers in the kafala system.⁵³ If an employer terminates the contract the worker immediately becomes undocumented and can easily be deported. Migrant workers in the USA, who are already travelling for the job often live in remote or employer controlled housing⁵⁴, which reinforces dependence and limits outside world support and this leads the

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch. "World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Qatar." *Human Rights Watch*, 2019, www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/qatar.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Authorized Status, Limited Returns: The Labor Market Outcomes of Temporary Mexican Workers." *Economic Policy Institute*, www.epi.org/publication/authorized-status-limited-returns-labor-market-outcomes-temporary-mexican-workers/.

⁵⁴ *Improving Protections for Workers in Temporary Agricultural Employment in the United States*.



employees finding it financially impossible to leave the employer.⁵⁵ Many of these workers often are reluctant to file complaints against these rules due to their fear of termination of their contract.⁵⁶

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Human Rights Watch is an international non-governmental organization that dedicates its effort to investigating and reporting abuses happening all over the world. It advocates for change by bridging these human rights concerns to international attention.

HRW's reports have repeatedly criticized the Kafala system multiple times for the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers. Their reports have consistently documented that many workers face problems such as their wages being withheld, passport confiscation, and restrictions on changing their jobs and leaving the country without employer permission.⁵⁷ These findings show the various vulnerabilities within the Kafala system and the urgent need to spread awareness.

Furthermore, HRW has also highlighted the particular risks faced by domestic workers which are often excluded from labour laws and these workers are particularly vulnerable to overwork and various forms of abuse⁵⁸. HRW recognizes the critical need for improved laws in order to protect the migrant workers. HRW⁵⁹, which is a member of a working group headed by the International Labour Organizations (ILO) (is an organization dedicated to promoting human rights, raising awareness and also advocates for more ethical labour practices within the Kafala system⁶⁰.

⁵⁵ *Improving Protections for Workers in Temporary Agricultural Employment in the United States.*

⁵⁶ *H-2A VISA PROGRAM Agencies Should Take Additional Steps to Improve Oversight and Enforcement United States Government Accountability Office. 2024.*

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch. "World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Qatar." *Human Rights Watch*, 2019, www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/qatar.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.



Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global non governmental organization with over 10 million workers, as well as over 100 volunteers worldwide.⁶¹ Its main aim is to create a world where everyone has rights⁶² and where their rights are respected. The organization's members stand with victims and actively support those who have been impacted by human rights violations.

Amnesty International has strongly opposed the Kafala system, a practice in many middle eastern countries. They describe it as a form of forced labour that places migrant workers in situations with limited mobility and restricted access to fair working conditions. The organization has made many detailed reports regarding the numerous cases of wage theft, forced labour, unsafe working conditions and restriction of movement. These unsafe working conditions are concerning for those employed in domestic services or construction.

An example of a report is one about a state owned rubber and palm company called SOGUIPAH, which is based in Guinea. While this situation is not the kafala system, it bears important similarities, particularly in the power imbalance and the ways workers' vulnerability can be exploited. SOGUIPAH has been held accountable for its serious abuses against its workers and other farmers. Amnesty International discovered that many workers are paid below the legal minimum wage and work without proper safety equipment. Farmers supplying SOGUIPAH often receive very low prices and experience significant payment delays. These workers fear speaking about this issue due to their fear of possible punishment.

⁶¹ "Volunteer." *Amnesty International*, www.amnesty.org/en/volunteer/.

⁶² Amnesty International. "Who We Are." *Amnesty International*, 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/about-us/.



RELEVANT UN TREATIES CONVENTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

UN report - A/78/292: "Violence against women migrant workers" (July 2021 – June 2023)⁶³

The report was prepared under the General Assembly resolution 76/141 which covered the period spanning from 1 July 2021 until 30 June 2023 and on 19 December 2023 the General Assembly adopted the resolution A/RES/78/180 on the same issue.⁶⁴

The report highlights and focuses on the difficult situations faced by women who migrate to other countries to work. These women are exposed to physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence in workplaces, homes and even in public transport. They face these severe issues due to the weak legal and institutional gaps that limit access to justice, services, and safe working conditions, while also noting the lack of reliable data.

Proposed solutions ensure transparency in contracts and terms and conditions, timely payment of wages, and proper working conditions. It also suggests implementing monitoring systems on the migrant workers as well as their employers making sure that they respect rights and do not abuse their employees.

United Nations Human Rights Council report on Kuwait - (A/HRC/WG.6/49/KWT/3)⁶⁵

The United Nations Human Rights Council report on Kuwait (A/HRC/WG.6/49/KWT/3), released in February 2025, looks at Kuwait's progress on human rights based on input from 23 stakeholder groups. It calls on Kuwait to sign more international human rights treaties, protect freedom of speech, and ensure fair treatment for women, migrant workers, and the stateless Bidoon community. The Bidoon, are a largely stateless Arab

⁶³ "Document Viewer." *Un.org*, 2025, docs.un.org/en/A/78/292. Accessed 12 Oct. 2025.

⁶⁴ "Violence against Women Migrant Workers : Resolution / Adopted by the General Assembly." *United Nations Digital Library System*, 19 Dec. 2023, digitallibrary.un.org/record/4030849. Accessed 17 Nov. 2025.

⁶⁵ "Document Viewer." *Un.org*, 2025, docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/WG.6/49/KWT/3.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

minority descended from tribes who settled in Kuwait but were not included as citizens at the time of the country's independence in 1961.⁶⁶ The report urges Kuwait to improve its justice system by making sure each worker would receive the same legal protections no matter if they are a local worker or a migrant worker.

Many organizations such as HRW and the Kuwait Society for Human Rights (KSHR) asked Kuwait to end the Kafala system, claiming it gives employers too much power over workers and can lead to abuse. They recommended that Kuwait replace it with a government-run system, making it a simpler process for workers to change employment. The government would manage work visas, permits as well as employment contracts, this would also ban passport confiscation and ensure timely payment of wages.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

International Labour Organization (ILO) / Qatar

The International Labour Organization is a United Nations specialized agency which is dedicated to promoting justice as well as human and labour rights which are globally recognized. The ILO is supportive of these laws created in collaboration to Qatar and has helped with the implementation of them.

In 2020, Qatar once again collaboration with the ILO introduced Law No. 17, a law stating that a minimum wage of 1,000⁶⁷ Qatari riyals (QAR) which is approximately 234 euros must be the minimum wage. This minimum wage will be applied to all workers both domestic and migrant workers and regardless of which sector of the workforce

⁶⁶ "Country Policy and Information Note, Kuwait: Bidoons, August 2024 (Accessible)." GOV.UK, 2024, www.gov.uk/government/publications/kuwait-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-kuwait-bidoons-august-2024-accessible.

⁶⁷ "Dismantling the Kafala System and Introducing a Minimum Wage Mark New Era for Qatar Labour Market | International Labour Organization." *Www.ilo.org*, 30 Aug. 2020, www.ilo.org/resource/article/dismantling-kafala-system-and-introducing-minimum-wage-mark-new-era-qatar.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

they work in and their nationality. As well as this, employers must make sure that workers are also paid an extra allowance with a minimum of 300 QAR for food and 500 QAR for housing.⁶⁸ These reforms show the significant step taken towards improving migrant workers security and living standards.

The ILO has also specifically supported the development of new evidence based research on sponsorship reform as well as the internal labour market mobility for migrant workers.⁶⁹ This law was added as a result of the successful implementation of Law No. 19, implemented on the 30th August, 2020. Law 19 states that migrant workers can now change jobs before the end of their contract without first having to obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from their employer. The NOC is a letter from your employer stating that they have no problem with your request in this case ending your contract. Additionally, the ILO's global reports also highlight the issues in many sponsorship systems and strive for the need for workers to have the freedom to change employers.⁷⁰ These reforms in Qatar carry significant human rights impacts as they reduce workers' vulnerability to exploitation, increase their power, and promote autonomy, and safer working environments for migrant workers.

The ILO's sponsorship reform and internal market mobility for the migrant workers in the Arab states published in 2023 emphasizes that in many of the Arab states migrant workers visas and work contracts are tightly linked with their sponsor. This setup increases the risk of abuse, exploitation and forced labour. The report also mentions the risks of the current system and how it violates labour rights and human rights of the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Sponsorship Reform and Internal Labour Market Mobility for Migrant Workers in the Arab States." *International Labour Organization*, 23 July 2023, www.ilo.org/resource/other/sponsorship-reform-and-internal-labour-market-mobility-migrant-workers-arab.

⁷⁰ International Labour Organization. "Sponsorship Reform and Internal Labour Market Mobility for Migrant Workers in the Arab States." *International Labour Organization*, 23 July 2023, www.ilo.org/resource/other/sponsorship-reform-and-internal-labour-market-mobility-migrant-workers-arab.



migrant workers and by allowing workers to switch employers more freely can make labour markets more efficient and boost countries economies.

The Standard Unified Contract for Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon

A new Standard Unified Contract for domestic workers was adopted by the Ministry of Labour in Lebanon in September 2020⁷¹. This contract has been used as the starting point for future discussions and consultations between the ILO, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Caritas, the Legal Agenda and a representative of the *L'Orient-Le Jour* newspaper and the Ministry of Labor for over a year.⁷² The new contract aimed at granting migrant domestic workers a number of rights which had been provided to other kinds of workers under the Labour Code many years ago. The contract includes a 48-hour work week, a weekly rest day, overtime pay, sick pay, annual leave, and the national minimum wage, with some deductions permitted for housing and food.⁷³

Lebanon Centre for Human Rights (CLDH)

Lebanon Centre for Human Rights (CLDH) is a local non-profit, Lebanese human rights organization based in Beirut and one of the Lebanese Civil Society Organizations. CLDH was created in 2006 by the Franco-Lebanese Movement SOLIDA (Support for Lebanese Detained Arbitrarily), which had been active since 1996 in the struggle against torture, and the exemption of those perpetrating human rights violations, struggles against arbitrary detention, torture and disappearance⁷⁴. By documenting abuses and publishing reports, SOLIDA aims to bring international attention to the problem and urge Lebanon to fulfill its obligations under international law.⁷⁵ CLDH's components include advocacy campaigns, rehabilitation programs for victims of torture and families of enforced

⁷¹ "The New Standard Unified Labor Contract: A First Step in Abolishing the Kafala System?" 22 كفى, Sept. 2020, kafa.org.lb/en/node/428? Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ "The New Standard Unified Labor Contract: A First Step in Abolishing the Kafala System?" 22 كفى, Sept. 2020, kafa.org.lb/en/node/428? Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

⁷⁴ "CLDH." *Cldh-Lebanon.org*, 2019, www.cldh-lebanon.org/WhoWeAre.

⁷⁵ *Torture in Lebanon: Time to Break the Pattern Alkarama for Human Rights*. 2009.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

disappearances, and the provision of legal services for migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups.⁷⁶

UNI Global Union

UNI Global Union is a trade union federation which brings together workers from over 150 different countries in the service economy to achieve better jobs and better lives. UNI helps workers build power by growing unions through organizing, protecting and expanding collective bargaining as well as holding corporations and governments accountable to workers.⁷⁷ UNI has reached over 50 agreements worldwide with multinational companies to secure the rights of workers through their global operations.⁷⁸ These agreements are crucial to ensure that workers can organize and collectively negotiate without disruptions from their employer. These are especially important in places where governments and local management ignore and do not support these rights.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Allowing migrant workers to change jobs without employer consent & removing employer approval for exit and re-entry visas

By allowing migrant workers to change jobs ,without employer consent after their contracts expire, gives them greater control over their employment, potentially leading to better working conditions and opportunities. By removing the requirement for employer approval for exit and re-entry visas it would give workers greater freedom and allow them to travel to their home countries without restrictions. Similarly, strengthening government oversight of employment conditions is also essential to ensure that labour laws are properly enforced and that employers follow fair practices. This should include regular inspections, thorough investigations of complaints, and

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ "About." *UNI Global Union*, uniglobalunion.org/about/.

⁷⁸ Ibid.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

meaningful penalties for violations. Allowing workers to change jobs both during and after their contract helps protect them from situations that could potentially lead to forced labour. This addresses one of the key mechanisms which forced labour occurs through: dependency on an employer. This can be achieved through reforms that remove employer control and changing visas to increase freedom and reduce dependency. The outcomes of these reforms will lead to increasing migrant workers autonomy and reducing the risk of exploitation and forced labour. It also gives them greater personal freedom and improves the enforcement of labour laws.

Standardized minimum wage

In addition, enforcing a minimum wage for all nationalities guarantees that every worker receives fair pay, regardless of their country of origin. This helps reduce exploitation and promote economic equality. This has already been enforced in Qatar in 2020 and has proven to be successful. They have reduced the power employers have over their employees and promote autonomy for workers. These measures, taken together, represent a significant step towards protecting the rights and improving the well-being of migrant workers. In addition to this governments can create trade unions that employees can freely join with a small yearly fee, this will allow them to have protection from legal constraints their employers have on them as well as going on strikes to improve their wages and working conditions. Enforcing a standardized minimum wage for all nationalities guarantees that every worker receives fair pay regardless of their country of origin, nationality or religion. This reduces exploitation and promotes equality. This standardized amount makes sure all workers receive the same compensation and reduces wage inconsistency. Overall, this improves economic quality and worker well being.

Creating trade unions for migrant workers

Trade unions could be created and established in all countries where the kafala system is a large part of society. These trade unions would work towards protecting workers rights by bargaining with employers about wages, living conditions and certain benefits.



St Catherine's British School Model United Nations | 2026

Once these trade unions have been established, they would strengthen the collective power of migrant workers which would enable them to challenge these types of practices and look for legal support. Trade unions have already significantly improved societies and have introduced national minimum wages, improved worker safety, added minimum holiday and sickness entitlements as well as equal legislation and even abolished child labour. Establishing trade unions requires legal frameworks to operate but provide many benefits. These benefits include the strengthening of migrant workers collective power which can be used to improve their working conditions, legal protection and long term benefits.

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