

**International Migration Review Forum**  
**Multi-stakeholder Hearing: Thematic discussion II**  
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Under the existing temporary migration policies and programs in the MENA region, especially the sponsorship system or Kafala, that ties workers to their employers, migrant workers face exploitative recruitment processes including high recruitment fees and workplace abuses such as restricting workers' movement, wage theft, forced overtime, substandard housing, harassment, discrimination, no access to social services and protections, injuries, no access to justice, and physical or verbal abuse. They are often separated from their families for years at a time, and generally excluded from social protections. They are denied the right to organize and collective bargaining. COVID has only exacerbated these injustices.

Due to discriminatory policies and practices, women migrant workers in the MENA region often face additional hardships, including gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work and in their communities, unequal pay and access to social protection.

Fear of losing a visa in retaliation for reporting abuses too often silences workers and allows employers to exploit workers with impunity. Moreover, the border acts as a barrier to justice, as temporary migrants have little avenue for legal recourse once they have been sent home.

As trade unions and labor rights activists, we call on the governments in the MENA region to adopt a new framework for labor migration that shifts control over the labor migration process from employers to workers, elevates labor standards for all workers, responds to established labor market needs, respects family unity, ensures equity, human rights, and access to justice, and affords migrant workers an accessible pathway to residency. The demanded alternative labor migration model incorporates migrant worker control over their own visas with meaningful government oversight and accountability of employers. With such a shift, power imbalances between migrant workers and their employers would be corrected. Fundamental flaws in the temporary labor migration programs would be stemmed. The current system would be replaced with a coherent rights-based model that restores the dignity of work to all workers, by protecting their rights and freedoms, such as self-determination, freedom of movement, freedom from economic coercion, freedom of association and engagement in the social dialogue, freedom from discrimination and GBVH, freedom from intimidation and retaliation, migration as a family, equal labor rights protections, access to justice and access to services. We also call on the governments in the MENA region to:

1. Abide by the international human rights and labor rights standards to put an end to the sponsorship system, which is a form of modern-day slavery.
2. Intensify the cooperation with countries of origin and transit to address the drivers of forced migration and to develop better, more fair, regular pathways - calling for the elimination of the use of temporary (circular, sponsorship, or guest-worker).

3. Dedicate states sovereignty and borders management to fight trafficking and get the traffickers accountable, rather than criminalizing irregular migrants, who instead must be protected and given full access to services, justice and remedy.
4. Create new social protection systems that include migrants in social security that is portable, end-of-service compensation, pensions and maternity funds, and cover them with health insurance, occupational health and safety, protection from occupational diseases and compensation for work injuries.
5. Fight discrimination, xenophobia and GBH and promote racial justice.
6. Regularize the unregulated sectors, where migrant workers are concentrated.
7. Create enabling atmosphere for constructive and social tripartite dialogue that is inclusive to migrant workers.

We appreciate all the efforts made by the UN network on migration to engage stakeholders in the dialogue around migration. The whole of society approach must be improved to involve migrants in this dialogue, because nothing about migrant workers can be done without them.

The labor movement in the MENA region pledges to continue to be in solidarity with migrant workers, defend their rights, adopt organizing approach that is more inclusive to migrant workers, because we believe migrant workers are workers regardless of their migration status, race or gender, and therefore are entitled to their full human and labour rights and social protections, recognizing their agency to act collectively and demand better wages and working conditions.