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Qatar: Proposed Domestic Workers law must protect human rights and prevent abuse

Amnesty International today called on the Qatari authorities to ensure that a draft domestic workers law currently under consideration provides robust legal protections from abuse and enforceable mechanisms for workers to hold abusive employers to account.

On 8 February, Qatar's Cabinet announced the approval of a draft law regulating the employment of domestic workers. This follows nearly a decade of government promises to regulate the employment of domestic workers, who are currently excluded from the provisions of the 2004 Labour Law that offers basic protections for much of the country's workforce. The draft law on domestic workers has not been published and no timeline for has been published for its finalization and implementation. The Cabinet announcement stated that the draft law "applies to sponsors and domestic helpers, specifies their rights and duties and regulates the relationship between them." However, no further detail was provided about the content of the law.

In 2012, a draft domestic worker law was shelved. The fact that the regulation of domestic workers' employment is back on the table is potentially a positive sign, but to effectively prevent abuse and exploitation, the Qatari authorities must ensure that the new law includes enforceable protections that comply with international law and standards, in particular the [International Labour Organization Convention 189 on domestic workers, which Qatar has not ratified](#).

According to census data from 2010, there were 132, 401 domestic workers in Qatar and this number is likely to have increased significantly since then. The majority of domestic workers are women employed as cleaners, cooks and child-minders, with many households also employing men as drivers or gardeners. Domestic workers have no legal rights to limits on their working hours or entitlements to a day off every week, or annual leave. They cannot challenge their employer at the Labour Relations Department if they are facing abuse or exploitation.

Between 2012 and 2014 Amnesty International [documented cases](#) of women employed as domestic workers describing a range of abusive treatment including: deception about their working conditions and salary; late or non-payment of wages; extreme working hours with few rest days; passport confiscation; inadequate living space; severe restrictions on their freedom of movement and communication; and being subjected to verbal harassment and dehumanising treatment. In some cases, their treatment amounted to forced labour and human trafficking and in the most extreme cases, the abuse of domestic workers involved

physical and sexual abuse. Victims faced serious obstacles to accessing the authorities to lodge complaints, seek assistance and hold their abusers accountable.

While all migrant workers in Qatar are at risk of abuse due to the [country's highly restrictive sponsorship system](#), domestic workers are additionally exposed as they are isolated in their employer's home and subject to a high degree of control. Domestic workers fleeing abusive employers are often treated as offenders and detained for "absconding" from their employer.

Amnesty International is calling on the Qatari authorities to ensure that the rights of domestic workers are fully respected, compliant with all relevant international standards, including by:

- placing legal restrictions on their working hours and mandating a minimum weekly day off;
- requiring employers to provide safe and decent accommodation;
- requiring employers to provide medical care;
- ensuring that Qatar's Wage Protection System includes domestic workers' salaries;
- giving domestic workers access to the Labour Relations Department and Labour Court, to lodge complaints against abusive employers;
- prohibiting employers from placing restrictions on employees' freedom of movement and ability to communicate;
- ensuring that domestic workers enjoy effective protection against all forms of abuse, harassment and violence; and
- ratifying ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Workers and incorporating its provisions into law, policy and practice.

Amnesty International also urges the authorities to take the opportunity of drafting a new law to overhaul its approach to protecting domestic workers from abuse in the home. In particular, the government should never detain people for the sole purpose of having "run away" from their employer, and should develop a strategy to ensure that domestic workers can complain of violence, including sexual abuse, without fear or harassment, that their complaints are thoroughly and impartially investigated and that where sufficient admissible evidence exists, perpetrators are prosecuted.