



More Workers Migrate for Jobs as Decent Work Disappears

Who Is a Migrant Worker?

- Of the 232 million migrants around the world, [150 million are migrant workers](#).
- They are domestic workers, construction and agricultural workers, factory and service workers, teachers and professionals.
- Women are [45 percent](#) of migrant workers (67 million) and the majority (along with girls) of the [11.5 million migrant domestic workers](#).
- Most migrant workers are in the service sector, 106.8 million workers (71 percent), followed by industry (including manufacturing and construction), with 26.7 million (17.8 percent) and agriculture, 16.7 million (11.1 percent).
- Migrant workers in 2018 are expected to send [\\$596 billion in remittances](#) to their home countries, yet governments often do little to ensure safe and fair migration for them.
- The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries of the Arabian Peninsula are a destination for many migrant workers from South and Southeast Asia (and increasingly Africa), and all except Saudi Arabia rely on migrant labor to fill [more than 90 percent of private-sector jobs](#).
- While an estimated 25 percent of African migrants are in Europe, [the majority of migrants travel for jobs](#) within the continent. [Nearly half are women](#).
- In Latin America, most migrant workers [who remain in the region](#) tend to take low-wage jobs in the informal economy. As a result, [more than half of Latin American workers](#) lack coverage for illness, unemployment and retirement.
- More than 600,000 migrants have tried to [cross the Mediterranean from Northern Africa to Europe](#) over the past four years to seek jobs or flee danger in their home countries.
- For the first time in history, the number of refugees, internally displaced people and asylum seekers [surpassed 60 million people](#), most of whom seek employment to survive.
- With millions of workers [unable to find family-supporting jobs at home](#), labor migration is expected to rise.

Migrant Workers Are Often Denied Their Rights

- Migrant workers often find few or no labor rights protections when they reach their destination and are subject to worker rights violations such as wage theft and unsafe working conditions. They often are targets of abuse and violence.
- Migrant workers typically are excluded from social protection programs like healthcare or pensions. Those who contribute to social security programs typically [do not receive any benefits](#) because of legal restrictions, lack of portability or employer theft.
- In many countries, migrant workers are prohibited from forming or joining unions and worker associations that would enable them to improve wages and working conditions.
- Women are [especially vulnerable to abuse](#) throughout every stage of the migration cycle, including physical, sexual and psychological violence, as well as economic exploitation.



- [Gender discrimination](#) is common as employers segregate migrant women into a limited range of gendered roles like domestic work and child care, and into the lowest-paying jobs, resulting in rampant employment discrimination. Migrant men also face discrimination in sectors or criteria for employment.
- Isolated in private homes, domestic workers are [particularly at risk](#) of exploitation, harassment and abuse, including sexual violence—and have difficulty accessing justice.
- Domestic workers are not the only ones at risk for abuse. Women migrant workers in all sectors are often targets of gender-based violence at work, such as bullying, sexual harassment and rape.

Abuses Throughout the Migration Process and the Connection to Labor Trafficking

- Migrant workers are targets of human trafficking, beginning with the labor recruitment process when unscrupulous [labor brokers](#) may deceive them about their wages and working conditions.
- Recruitment fees for securing work are prohibited under international labor standards.
- Yet nearly all labor brokers charge [recruitment fees](#), often so excessive that migrant workers spend months to years repaying them, resulting in debt bondage.
- Employers often will confiscate passports, trapping migrant workers in the destination country.
- Other abuses of migrant workers include illegal wage deductions; late or underpayment of wages, or non-payment of wages; threats of violence or deportation if workers want to leave their employer; and detention or deportation for trying to form unions and exercise freedom of association. It is very difficult for workers to access justice for these abuses.
- Agriculture, domestic work, seafood and construction sectors have institutionalized practices that result in human trafficking and forced labor, with migrant workers frequent targets.
- Temporary migration programs (also called circular, guest worker, or sponsorship/kafala) tie workers to a particular employer, creating structural opportunities for abuse.
- Migrant workers have few, if any means, to access justice at any step of the labor migration process. Formal labor courts are often difficult or too expensive for migrant workers to access, and workplace grievance systems are often denied to migrant workers.

Steps Forward

- Migrant workers must be free to engage in collective action through unions, worker associations and other organizations to improve their wages and working conditions.
- Governments must better regulate labor recruitment processes and ensure the elimination of recruitment fees.
- Migrant workers must have access to justice in both their origin and destination countries to address wage theft, compensation for on-the-job injuries and illnesses, and other rights violations that occur throughout the labor migration process.
- Employers must be held accountable for violations of migrant worker rights.
- Migrant workers, regardless of status, must be given the same workplace and labor rights as all workers.