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# Working and Living Conditions of Low-Income Migrant Workers in the Hospitality and Construction Sectors in the United Arab Emirates

**A Survey among Migrant Workers through Focus Group Discussions**

GLMM - RR - No. 2/2019

**RESEARCH REPORT**

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**Support:** The Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population Programme (GLMM) receives support from the International Migration Initiative (IMI) of the Open Society Foundations (OSF), the National Priority Research Program (NPRP) of the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP-Kuwait) and relies on the institutional resources of GLMM partners.

# Working and Living Conditions of Low-Income Migrant Workers in the Hospitality and Construction Sectors in the United Arab Emirates

Philippe Fargues, Nasra M. Shah, and Imco Brouwer

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

Migrants form 88 per cent of the UAE's resident population (2010 estimates) and up to 95 per cent of its workforce (Dubai 2017). Sixty to 70 per cent of them are employed in low-income occupations. The country has a GDP per capita among the world's highest and a fairly good reputation regarding the rule of law and justice. Yet, according to numerous reports by media, human rights activists', international organisations and academics, low-income migrant workers in the UAE can be subjected to poor conditions and their rights violated.

### Objectives of the survey

What are the actual living and working conditions of millions of low-income migrants in the country? For lack of empirical knowledge across sectors, this question cannot be accurately answered. While anecdotal stories are plenty, no solid survey has been conducted so far to document practices detrimental to the migrants, such as:

- Unethical recruitment
- Contract substitution

- Substandard living conditions
- Exploitation at the workplace
- Lack of access to information
- Obstacles to accessing justice

Asking the migrants themselves is the best way to capture their situation. Our survey, carried out among low-income migrants employed in the hospitality and construction sectors in Dubai is, to our knowledge, the first of its kind ever conducted in the UAE.

### **Methodology of the survey**

As a large-scale standardised statistical survey is not feasible in the context of the UAE, our survey consisted of focus group discussions (FGDs) each of them lasting approximately two hours, held in Dubai with a total of 94 migrant workers—63 in the hospitality (hotel; restaurants; taxi; cleaning) and 31 in the construction sectors—between September 2017 and March 2018. However, these 94 migrant workers cannot be considered representative of the roughly 9 million foreign workers in the UAE. Therefore, the results cannot be compared to similar studies done with exactly the same methodology in the UAE or other countries. However, in order to get as close as possible to statistical representativeness, workers were selected according to precise guidelines, guaranteeing some form of homogeneity within each FGD and diversity between the FGDs. Moreover, migrants with problems were over-sampled in order to better understand the nature and scope of problems. While our survey cannot provide unbiased estimates of the proportion of migrants who face a particular problem, it provides a wealth of details about the nature of the problems faced by migrants.

### **Findings of the survey on working conditions**

Work is the main reason for migrants to be in the UAE, and this is why their judgement in this matter is essential. Asked to evaluate their working conditions on a scale from 1 to 10, 35 per cent of the migrants gave a score of 7 or more, 37 per cent a score of 5 or 6, and 27 per cent a score of 4 or below.

Yet, there is a widespread sense among the migrants that their working and living conditions are suboptimal:

- Fifty per cent of the interviewed workers consider their workload too heavy for the income it brings
- Sixty-six per cent of the interviewed male workers and 27 per cent of the interviewed female workers reported unpaid sick leaves
- While doing as much overtime as possible to compensate for a low base salary would be a necessity (particularly for workers in the construction sector and drivers), non-payment of overtime is a frequent form of exploitation
- Only the fact that wages are high in comparison with home countries makes hard and difficult working conditions acceptable in the eyes of some of the interviewed workers

The kind of work migrants are requested to perform in Dubai often differs from what they were told before taking the job.

Only 5 per cent of the interviewed men but 0 per cent of interviewed women report appreciation and respect given by their employers, while disrespect of the migrant worker is the rule.

Most of the interviewed migrants complained about restricted freedom of circulation (passports kept by employers) and no freedom of choice in terms of transferring or changing their employment as a result of the *kafala* (sponsorship) system that governs them.

## **Findings of the survey on contracts**

Fifty-six of the interviewed migrants (88 per cent females and 40 per cent males) stated that they were charged unofficial money by brokers in their home country in order to obtain their job in Dubai.

Visa trading—an illegal practice by which work visas are sold to prospective migrants in sending countries—is a widespread reality.

Eighty-five per cent of the interviewed migrants signed a contract in Dubai but most of them could not understand its terms as the contract is written in Arabic and some were not sure if they had received a copy.

Only 6 per cent of the interviewed migrants signed in Dubai the same contract they were offered in the home country and 28 per cent of the interviewed workers signed a different one while the majority was unsure about the issue.

Only 10 per cent of the interviewed workers reported that their salary was the same as written in the contract, while 37 per cent said it was not.

Forty-four per cent of the interviewed low-skilled workers also receive a lower salary than promised compared with 25 per cent of the interviewed mid-skilled workers, while working hours are frequently more than what the contract states.

The difference between expected and actual salary is often due to deductions that were not adequately explained to the worker when offered the job.

Erroneous information provided by networks and recruitment agencies to the prospective worker often explains discrepancies between expected and actual contracts.

Fifty-four per cent of the interviewed migrants reported working hours in excess of that given in their contract. This percentage rises to 72 per cent among females and 60 per cent among low-skilled workers of both sexes.

Between 39 per cent and 66 per cent of the interviewed workers according to various subgroups reported that they were stressed because of their inability to take annual leave at the time they want.

All the interviewed mid-skilled workers but only 71 per cent of low-skilled had a weekly day off as provided for by the law.

## Findings of the survey on salary and payments

Fifty-one per cent of the interviewed migrants (56 per cent of the low-skilled and 41 per cent of the mid-skilled) said that their salary is not adequate while only 10 per cent said it is.

Sixty-three per cent of the interviewed female migrants and 45 per cent of the interviewed males reported that they have not benefitted from any salary increase.

The Wage Protection System (WPS) is incompletely implemented as only 47 per cent of the interviewed workers said that they receive their salary through the bank, while 5 per cent of the interviewed workers said they did not have a bank account.

Thirty-five per cent of the interviewed migrants do not receive their salary on time while 40 per cent do and the remaining 25 per cent did not provide a clear answer to the question. Interviewed construction workers are more often subjected to delayed payment than interviewed hospitality workers (52 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively) and interviewed females more than interviewed males (53 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively).

Forty per cent of the interviewed migrants (55 per cent in the construction sector against 33 per cent in the hospitality sector) did not receive adequate overtime payments.

As a result, 41 per cent of the interviewed migrants (52 per cent in the construction sector against 33 per cent in the hospitality sector) stated that they were not satisfied with their capacity to remit money home, which was the only goal of their migration.

## Findings of the survey on living conditions

All the interviewed migrants in our survey were accommodated by their employers in camps or shared flats.

Thirty-three per cent of the interviewed migrants were positive about their accommodation, 19 per cent negative, and the rest were neutral.

A striking gender difference was recorded, with 41 per cent of interviewed females being dissatisfied with their living conditions compared with 8 per cent of the interviewed males.

The occupancy level of not more than eight persons per room provided by the law is respected in most cases. However, 57 per cent of the interviewed migrants (81 per cent of the females and 45 per cent of the males) said that there were too many persons per room, probably implying that the rooms were too small, contrary to the law requiring a space of 3 m<sup>2</sup> per person.

Regarding bathrooms, the minimum of one toilet for every eight persons provided by the law was either not respected or considered insufficient in many cases: 57 per cent of the interviewed migrants were dissatisfied with the number of persons per bathroom shared by them (78 per cent of females vs. 27 per cent of males).

Thirty-eight per cent of the interviewed hospitality workers (accommodated in shared flats) and only 3 per cent of the interviewed construction workers (accommodated in camps) complained about uncleanliness and unhealthiness resulting from overcrowded rooms and bathrooms.

The interviewed construction workers in camps are provided with food while interviewed hospitality workers cook their own food in shared flats' kitchens. Thirty-six per cent of the latter (59 per cent of females vs. 24 per cent of males) were dissatisfied with the kitchen facilities available to them and 31 per cent were satisfied.

While, according to the law, each accommodated migrant worker must have a 2 m high closet with a lock, 29 per cent of the respondents (59 per cent of females vs. 13 per cent of males) were dissatisfied with the storage space provided, while 22 per cent were satisfied.

Only 15 per cent of the interviewed migrants were not satisfied with the transportation provided to them while the vast majority (70 per cent) was.

## **Findings of the survey on migrants' overall appreciation of their migration to the UAE**

Knowing the actual conditions in the UAE, 40 per cent of the interviewed migrants would definitely have come, only 9 per cent would not have come, and 51 per cent did not express a clear opinion.

For a majority of the FGD participants, reasons that make Dubai attractive are stronger than hardships they endure as migrants. The reasons many of them put forward include:

- Job opportunities
- Safety in the public space
- Strong rule of law

## **Findings of the survey on problems and recommended action**

The interviewed migrants said that in case of problems, no help is available to them.

Twenty-nine per cent of the interviewed migrants said they would not complain since they were afraid they might lose their job, or their visa might be cancelled.

Thirty per cent of the participants complained about the rising costs of living and the newly imposed 5 per cent VAT which applies, among other things, to food.

The migrants' main recommendations are:

- Better implement the law
- Institute labour inspections by the government
- Provide for voting rights for representation in the camps

- Appoint trained healthcare professionals in the camps
- Assign health benefits or health insurance for the workers

## Findings of stakeholder interviews

To complement the survey among workers, 27 stakeholders based in the UAE were interviewed. These included government officials, representatives of the country of origin of migrants, and persons working in business (incl. recruitment; training; certification). In addition, representatives of international organisations and advocacy organisations as well as researchers were interviewed.

**UAE government officials** interviewed asserted that much had been done in terms of upgrading legislation. One interviewed senior government official stated that the *kafala* (sponsorship) system is not the key issue but clear contracts and respecting them are. This government official, as well as others who were interviewed, admitted that significant work needs to be done to improve labour inspection. This would include increasing the number of labour inspectors, their pay, and their expertise. One interviewed official said that the key was developing “smart inspection,” i.e., inspection based on comparing data from different sources and automatically flagging critical cases. This official, however, admitted that for the time being this is not going to happen because data are not shared between various government ministries and agencies.

**Representatives of countries of origin** interviewed, while conceding that the legal framework has improved, were concerned with multiple issues. One of them is that the UAE has no minimum wage. Another one is that it is too easy to change a tourist visa into a work visa without leaving the country (some estimated that 80 per cent of their nationals arriving in the UAE on a tourist visa eventually try to change it into a work visa) undercutting the efforts of the countries of origin to manage and protect their nationals. Furthermore, according to the representatives of the countries of origin, the redress system does not guarantee that workers obtain their adequate remedies. First of all, generally it takes too much time to get their rights (in the meantime, they have to survive without income and housing), and even if they get a sentence in their favour, its execution is not guaranteed. Some of the representatives interviewed stressed that their role was not only protecting their nationals but also to make sure that as many of them will be hired in the UAE and that, in any case, the demand for their nationals to work in the UAE is far larger than the number of them that effectively finds work in the UAE.

**Business community representatives** interviewed said that they favour less regulation. This may explain why more and more companies move to Free Zones (not overseen by the Ministry of Labour and Emiratisation [MoHRE]). A lawyer working in an international law firm asserted that the compliance rate of international companies with international rules of good conduct for businesses is close to zero and that they fully adapt to the practices in the UAE.

**Researchers and representatives of international and advocacy organisations** interviewed expressed similar concerns as the representatives of countries of origin. They, however, stressed that recruitment is still too costly for migrant workers and that no effective measures have been taken to reduce the costs, either by the UAE (where the problem originates) or by the countries of origin.

## PART 1: BACKGROUND

### 1.1 UAE and Dubai, a unique migration context

Nowhere in the world are migrants such an overwhelming majority as in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar. In the former, they represent an estimated 88 per cent of the 9,121,267 inhabitants (end 2017).<sup>1</sup> Dubai, more than any other place on earth, deserves the title of migrant city with 2,465,170 foreign nationals comprising 91.3 per cent of its 2,698,600 residents (GLMM 2018). Despite fairly active and focused Emiratisation policies aimed at replacing migrant workers by natives, especially in some sectors such as banking and the government, the population of foreign nationals has continuously grown faster than that of nationals over the last half of a century.

For decades, Dubai's private sector has attracted foreign workers at all levels of the occupational ladder, while nationals would seek employment in the public sector for it offers higher wages and better security. As a result, foreign workers comprise, at present, 96.0 per cent of the workforce in the private sector. Their proportion varies according to occupation, from 85.3 per cent among clerks to 99.9 per cent and 100 per cent, respectively, among craft and related workers and plant and machine operators (2011 Labour Force Survey). Close to 70 per cent of all foreign workers in Dubai are employed in low-income occupations. The two sectors analysed in this study, hospitality and construction, comprise a significant portion of all low-income occupations in UAE, including Dubai. In fact, in 2017, the construction sector employed 27.6 per cent of all workers, or 598,773 people, and the hospitality sector 108,473 people (less than 1 per cent of them was Emirati).<sup>2</sup> Our sample in this study consisted of 31 construction workers and 63 hospitality workers, or a total of 94 workers.

The UAE is viewed by migration scholars as well as international organisations as a country characterised by a marked discrepancy between legislations, which are overall regarded as good and protective, and the actual situation of low-income migrant workers whose rights can be poorly respected.

Another indicator worth mentioning is the extent of ratification of international human rights and labour standards agreements. In terms of the latter, UAE has only ratified nine ILO Conventions.<sup>3</sup> It has ratified six of the eight ILO fundamental Conventions (including the Forced Labour Convention). The two unratified Conventions address trade union rights. Importantly, however, the UAE has also ratified the principal ILO Convention dealing with labour inspection. The cause of such a discrepancy could be that legislations are insufficiently implemented and not all employers and companies comply with laws that govern the recruitment, work and life of their employees.

According to the World Justice Project, the UAE scores relatively high in terms of rule of law. With a "Rule of Law Index" of 0.65 in 2017-18 (the index varies from 0.29 in Venezuela to 0.89 in Denmark), the UAE ranks first in the MENA region and 32nd globally, just after Italy.<sup>4</sup> Particularly

1. Numbers of migrants include their sons and daughters born and still living in the UAE (i.e., persons who are not themselves 'migrants')
2. <https://gulfmigration.org/uae-dubai-percentage-distribution-of-employed-population-aged-15-and-above-by-nationality-emirati-non-emirati-sex-and-economic-activity-2017/>.
3. See ILO NORMLEX: [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11200:0::NO:11200:P11200\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:103495](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11200:0::NO:11200:P11200_COUNTRY_ID:103495).
4. World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index, 2017-2018 <https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/>

high are UAE's scores in terms of order and security (11th rank globally), absence of corruption (17th), and criminal justice (18th), in contrast with a low score regarding fundamental rights (84th). The UAE also enjoys fairly good rankings in terms of human development (42nd globally in 2015)<sup>5</sup> and the quality of life (21st globally out of 60 countries evaluated in 2016).<sup>6</sup> However, the above indexes are aggregates of several indices that may or may not adequately represent the actual situation of migrant workers.

The reported experiences of migrant workers whose rights are violated by private employers in Dubai are plentiful in international media and NGO reports. Also in the 2018 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN General Assembly Human Rights Council, the UAE was, among other things, questioned and criticised for its treatment of migrant workers.<sup>7</sup> Violations happen at all steps of the migration process, the most often mentioned including: undue recruitment fees charged to the migrant, placing him/her in a situation of heavy debt even before departing from the origin country; unpaid, incompletely paid or delayed wages, in connection or not with debts contracted at recruitment; differences in terms of pay and/or occupation between the contract that was offered before leaving the origin country and the contract actually signed at destination; precarious working conditions entailing risks for health and safety; freedom of movement restricted or denied by practices such as passport retention; forced labour (e.g., unpaid overtime); wretched and unhealthy housing and living conditions; and inaccessibility of legal redress.

## 1.2 Universal rights and specific expectations

In all countries, international migrants are exposed to risks and vulnerabilities specific to their condition as migrants, including violations of their rights. For action to be taken, it is important to acknowledge that some rights are more challenged than others and not all rights are equally useful to all individuals irrespective of their specific circumstances. Most of the rights in the Universal Declaration have been reiterated in legally binding instruments (i.e., the nine core human rights instruments) and in particular the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which the UAE has not ratified. However, the UAE has ratified five core human rights instruments: ICERD, CEDAW, CAT, CRC and CRPD.

In the case of migrants, the importance that they attach to a given right may greatly vary according to individuals but also migration corridors, linking an origin to a destination, and status. A whole spectrum of situations can be found, from migrants who contemplate only a short-term expatriation to those who plan a permanent settlement in a host country and expect that they, or their born-abroad children, will eventually become full members of that country's society.

Persons engaged in long-term migration and settlement at destination are usually expected to gain rights and duties, opportunities, and responsibilities equal to those of natives in a gradual process of integration which according to destination countries is, or is not, supported by state policies. By contrast, persons with short-term migration plans do not seek full integration and are above all attached to those rights that serve their plans.

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WJP\_ROLI\_2017-18\_Online-Edition\_0.pdf.

5. HDI, Human Development Data (1990-2015) <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>

6. Quality of Life Index for Country 2018, [https://www.numbeo.com/quality-of-life/rankings\\_by\\_country.jsp](https://www.numbeo.com/quality-of-life/rankings_by_country.jsp)

7. <https://www.upr-info.org/en/review/United-Arab-Emirates/Session-29---January-2018>.

Low-income migrant workers to the Gulf States typically belong to the second category. For them, return to the home country is at the centre of their migratory project, even before departing from their country. They expect to earn an income that will allow them to save and remit money to families and communities in the home country; to enjoy fair conditions at the place of work and accommodation; to be respected as human beings; and eventually to bring back home enhanced skills and prospects for their future. Gulf migrants are well aware that their migration is essentially temporary in nature and permanent settlement is almost impossible for a large majority of all migrants.

In order to fulfil these expectations, the rights that matter, as reported by our study participants, include the following:

- Economic and social rights including: access to safe and nutritious food; access to health and care; right to housing, right to dignified work under safe and healthy conditions with fair wages; and right to social security. The right to education that would apply to their children in Dubai is of lesser relevance to low-income migrant workers in the UAE for, in most cases, the children do not accompany the migrant. However, the right to education is important in respect of migrants' children back home, and, more often than not, their education (and particularly their further education) is supported by remittances.
- Labour rights and core labour standards including: freedom of association, collective bargaining, protection from forced labour, equality of opportunity and treatment, and social security.
- The rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and particularly:
  - o The freedom of movement within the borders of a state and the right to leave the country, which implies that migrants always stay in possession of their passport;
  - o The free choice of employment, which implies the possibility to transfer sponsorship;
  - o The freedom of peaceful assembly and association, which makes it possible for migrant workers to act collectively.
- Right to the protection of the law.

On the other side, gaining political rights strictly defined as the right to participating in the establishment or administration of a government and eventually acceding to citizenship with a right to vote and be elected is not on the agenda of low-income migrant workers to the Gulf States, as would be the case of other migrants going to countries where such options are open.

### **1.3 The need for empirical knowledge<sup>8</sup>**

In the Gulf countries, studies on migrant workers have mainly focused on the *kafala* system in force in all GCC states and the various forms of exploitation it produces, particularly in the context of migrant

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8. This section refers to the following studies: Alhashemi and Habib 2018; Amnesty International 2016; Babar 2011; Bjornsson 2015; Business and Human Rights Centre 2018; Dito 2015; Gardner and Pessoa 2014; Human Rights Watch 2014, 2016; ILO 2015; ILO 2016; IOM 2014; Jayaweera, Shlala 2015; Jones 2016; Jureidini 2016; Jureidini 2017; Keanne and McGeehan 2008; Malit and Naufal 2016; Malit, Ledesma, Naufal, forthcoming; Martin and Malit 2017; Parnas and Sylvey 2016; Segall and Labowitz 2017; Zahra 2015.

domestic workers. Further studies are required to understand the living and working conditions of other low-income migrant workers and document the following aspects.

### ***Illegal/unethical recruitment***

Migrant exploitation is initially rooted in the origin countries where brokers impose illegal recruitment charges contributing to migrant workers' vulnerability and debt bondage.

### ***Contract substitution***

Contract substitution is not only a critical factor of the exploitation of migrant workers' rights and welfare but also a product of the state's failure to enforce existing labour laws and legislation in the host country. The UAE's construction and hospitality sectors are plagued with contract substitution practices. While the UAE government has amended its laws to stop contract substitution (Ministerial Resolution 764), such practices seem to continue.

### ***Living conditions***

Substandard living conditions—lack of healthcare protection, poor housing, overcrowded accommodation, inadequate sewage, unsanitary living and food preparation, low-quality drinking water—have been denounced in connection with the government's failure to monitor, inspect, and protect migrant workers' human rights and welfare.

### ***Working situation***

Working conditions have been extensively denounced as poor and unsafe. In the UAE, practices such as passport confiscation, illegal deduction of wages, or failure to pay overtime work have been evidenced.

### ***Workers' access to information***

The lack of pre-departure and post-arrival orientation programmes and the limited or non-existent access to information about labour laws and regulations exacerbate migrant workers' exploitation in the Gulf countries. Bureaucratic obstacles hamper the implementation of such programmes.

### ***Access to justice***

Migrant workers' access to justice is limited by the *kafala* system as well as by their limited knowledge of dispute resolution systems and weak command of the Arabic language, though the UAE government has taken initiatives to improve the situation in the framework of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD). *Kafala* reform has not been a direct subject of ADD discussions and is not recognised as one of the current priority areas. However, the ADD is working on a Comprehensive Information and Orientation Programme (CIOP), which is relevant to the preceding point (i.e., workers' access to information).

Regarding all these issues, there is a dearth of knowledge based on large scale surveys. This is particularly true in the UAE where data are not made available and legislation puts dissuasive obstacles to independent statistical surveys in the population.

What are the working and living conditions of low-income migrant workers? To what extent does their actual situation conform to rules in force in the UAE and to international standards? How do migrant workers view the way they are treated? Have their initial expectations been met? What sort of action could be taken for improving their situation?

This report aims to answer such questions through a survey of low-income migrants employed in the hospitality and construction sectors in Dubai. For the purpose of the present survey, the hospitality sector—that caters for tourists, business persons, expatriate communities, etc.—is defined in an inclusive way that covers: accommodation (hotels, bed and breakfast enterprises, and other places offering lodging); food and beverage (restaurants, fast food chains, coffee shops, etc.); taxi companies; and cleaning service providers. The hospitality sector employs a variety of workers ranging from maintenance workers, servers, waiters, porters and cooks to marketing agents, administrative staff and managers. Our survey focuses especially on the lower and, to some extent, on the middle levels of skills of the hospitality sector. It also includes low-income, low-skilled construction workers.

A comprehensive statistical survey consisting of face-to-face structured interviews of a representative sample of migrants would have been the most suitable, but this was not feasible in the context of the UAE. Like in many other countries, conducting a statistical survey in the population is subject to administrative authorisation in the UAE. For this, the survey's questionnaire has to successfully pass through a detailed screening process by the authorities, in the case of Dubai by the Dubai Statistical Center (DSC). Tackling a highly sensitive topic—the situation of migrant workers in GCC states which is under the scrutiny of human rights organisations and occasionally in the spotlight of global media—no company capable of implementing the survey was even willing to seek authorisation as they were sure that the survey would be censored and that they would attract negative attention from the authorities. Thus, the best alternative option was to conduct Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), since this did not require authorisation from concerned official bodies, as a statistical survey would entail.

Thus, a survey consisting of twelve FGDs was held in Dubai with a total of 94 migrant workers between December 2017 and April 2018. Four groups included male hospitality workers and the remaining four female hospitality workers. Hospitality workers were selected from India, Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. These nationalities were selected in view of the fact that most low-skilled workers in the hospitality sector in Dubai originate from these countries. A further breakdown was done according to the level of skill to capture any differences present. An additional four groups included male construction workers, primarily from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. While the hospitality sector was the focus of our research, we also interviewed low-income workers in the construction sector to see whether the working and living conditions of low-income workers in both sectors were similar or different. We included workers from large companies as well as smaller companies for both sectors.

A discussion guide was prepared in advance and the moderator followed this guide in all cases.

The survey among migrant workers was complemented by a series of interviews with major migration stakeholders in the UAE. The full methodology is detailed in Appendix A.

## **PART 2: WORKING CONDITIONS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Work is the primary reason for most low-income migrants to be in Dubai. How do they evaluate their working situations and conditions on a scale from 1 to 10? As shown in Table 2.1, all individuals in our sample but 1 (99 per cent) answered this preliminary question and their responses slanted slightly

more towards high scores (35 per cent gave a score between 7 and 10) than low scores (27 per cent gave between 1 and 4), with 37 per cent giving a neutral score (5 or 6). Scores do not vary significantly with the sector of employment. Gender differences are marked with female workers giving the lowest scores (47 per cent between 1-4 vs. only 6 per cent between 7-10). Rather unexpectedly, mid-skilled workers frequently gave a lower score (34 per cent) than low-skilled workers (23 per cent).

**Table 2.1: Workers' overall level of satisfaction with working conditions (%)**

Group / Level of Satisfaction		+	=	-	N/A	T
Total (N=94)		35	37	27	1	100
Sector	Hospitality - Both sexes (N=63)	37	37	25	2	100
	Construction - Males (N=31)	32	39	29	0	100
Gender	Males (N=62)	50	34	16	0	100
	Females (N=32)	6	44	47	3	100
Skills level	Low - skilled - Both sexes (N=62)	34	42	23	2	100
	Mid-skilled - Both sexes (N=32)	38	28	34	0	100

\* Scoring for the level of satisfaction is as follows: 1-4 is negative, 5-6 is neutral and 7-10 is positive

Before going into the details of recruitment, contract and payment, the conversation in FDGs focused on the general reasons why migrants are satisfied or unsatisfied with their work. Most migrants in our sample expressed nuanced views on this question. Rewards, both material and symbolic, are balanced by several negative aspects and stress.

*"I was very honest, I said 50-50 because work gives you the fun and it gives you the money to have fun. At the same time, work is work. Sometimes it gets very stressful because of the industry you are in." (Male hotel driver)*

*"It is 50-50 because sometimes it is good, you feel good like on the days you have an off and you want to go out somewhere. And sometimes work goes overtime, you have to do it, so it is 50-50." [Indian woman employed in a hotel]*

*"[What do I like?] Salary and the benefits that we get ... You have spa and gym access. [And dislike?] You know they are your clients and they are your customers so they can post anything on Facebook. So that kind of thing you have to be careful. Not to be rude to them." [Female hotel receptionist]*

*"I have to deal with different customers and the worst thing is you have to be very careful because of the Dubai media. You know they can post anything bad about the hotel. You have to be very careful and you have to give them the best services. So, to be up to that level you know it is like it destroys your health and it increases your stress levels and all those things are there." [Indian hotel worker]*

## 2.2 Quantity of work vs. income

There is a widespread feeling of being exploited among the migrants. Around half of them report a workload too heavy for the income it brings. Each time this issue was brought up, migrants said that

salary is not commensurate to the quantity of work which is actually requested from them (see Table 2.2C: 53 per cent of women and 44 per cent of men report a too heavy workload). Not only is salary too low but, in many cases, it stops being paid when the migrant is sick. Table 2.2C shows that 66 per cent and 27 per cent of female and male workers, respectively, reported unpaid sick leaves. Moreover, in some FGDs unequal treatment of different nationalities was reported, with some nationalities receiving higher wages than others for the same job (on the economic consequences of such inequalities, see Alfarhan 2018). However, we did not collect detailed data on wage levels according to the nationality of workers.

Some migrants insisted that too much time spent working is detrimental to their quality of life, as they miss out on relaxation to social activities that make a daily life enjoyable.

*“You cannot be with your family or friends because of the offs which you are not permitted. This happens a lot.” [Mid-skilled woman employed in a hotel]*

Moreover, very long working days combined with poor accommodation provided by the employer are a cause of stress for the worker:

*“The place where we get to live given by our company is too crowded, there are six people in one room and sometimes we have to work 12–13 hours.” [Indian hotel driver]*

In some cases, the workload that employers put on their employees exceeds what is provided for by the contract or by norms applying in the country:

*“Per the standard of Dubai, the housekeeping should serve 18 rooms but we are given 28 rooms.” [Male housekeeper in a hotel]*

In other cases, the problem is with lengthy commuting and time wasted waiting for means of transportation organised by the employer:

*“Sometimes even when they leave us early so one problem is that the van will not come on time. The bus will never come on time, you know. Even if we are finishing the work on time we have to wait for two hours, three hours or four hours.” [Mid-skilled hotel worker]*

*“Mostly 9 to 6 duty time but [we] leave by the 7.15 bus or 9.30 bus and we don't get overtime for extra hours [spent waiting for the bus].” [Male housekeeper in a hotel]*

Too much time spent at the workplace can also be due to daily variations in the actual workload, uncoordinated with transportation between the labour camp and the construction site:

*“They don't give us regular work. Fifteen days we are just sitting idle in the room so we don't want to stay idle like this as we came here to work and earn and not to sit idle.” [Indian mason]*

It must be noted that some workers paid on a piecework basis consider this an advantage:

*“Our work is very good. It is a work in which we get a contract [to accomplish a given task]. The earlier you do it the better it is for you. So that is why I say this is good for us.” [Pakistani mason]*

Though long days at the workplace are resented as a burden, low-income workers often need doing as much overtime as possible to compensate for a low base salary. In our sample, this was particularly frequent for workers in the construction sector and drivers in the hospitality sector.

*“When we came to Dubai for the first time there was a lot of work and a lot of overtime too. Our basic agreement is also very low rates. So then when there is a lot of work we have overtime. Then it reduced [...] It was only on basic salary like we would go and do the work for half an hour and then come in the room and watch TV.” [Pakistani construction worker]*

*“If we get some overtime [...] we earn little more [...] no one leaves overtime. But the work is tough.” [Another Pakistani construction worker]*

A recurrent problem, then, is with some employers not paying overtime. This practice can become a major form of exploitation of the migrants and cause of their frustration about working conditions:

*“At times, even after we do overtime, they don’t pay us for that. This is also there. This should not be there. Like we feel bad that even after working so much they don’t pay us.” [Pakistani construction worker]*

*“My boss is not good, I don’t like my boss because first he will say work overtime, I will give you overtime. Sometimes we work 50 to 56 hours, but we don’t get overtime. They totally refuse to give overtime.” [Indian female worker in a hotel]*

*“Sometimes we work many extra hours. 12 hours, 13 hours and sometimes we also work 16 hours... but the company is not willing to pay us any extra benefits.” [Bangladeshi taxi driver]*

*“They promised it is eight hours but it became 12 hours and I think I’m not paid enough for working that much.” [Filipino female employee in a cleaning company]*

Finally, the fact that wages are high in comparison with home countries makes exploitative working conditions acceptable in the eyes of some workers:

*“We have to face certain problems but at least we earn good money. For that reason only we are content to work here and take the pain that at least we make good money in Dubai [...] we are supposed to do a 12 hour shift but sometimes they make us work for 16 to 17 hours a day, salary also gets delayed sometimes, this is the only thing that bothers us.” [Indian low-skilled construction worker]*

## 2.3 Quality of work

Not only how much one earns but also what job one does is a matter of expectation for the migrant. The tasks migrants actually accomplish in the framework of their work may either correspond to or differ from what they expected to do before taking the job. Numerous cases of deception about the nature or the quantity of work were reported in our FGDs, as illustrated by the few examples below.

*“I came because they promised me that I have to work as cashier, but they changed and made me a helper, and now I am working as a helper and messenger, like bring this and bring that.” [Pakistani female hotel worker]*

*“When I came, actually they have sent me on tourist visa here [...] They told me that in my passport it’s written immigration check is required, so we can’t send you employment visa directly. So we will send you on tourist visa and then they will change to employment visa. So I said ok, I don’t*

*have any problem. When I came here it was totally different, the company and the accommodation everything was different” [Indian female cashier in a car renting company]*

*“I expected a receptionist job but when I came here, I found the contract I sign is for office girl to make coffee, tea and photocopy... that doesn't match my education.” [Filipino female hotel worker]*

Dignity and freedom are fundamental principles defining human rights. Firstly, workers expect to receive appreciation and respect from their employers. In our sample, as shown by Table 2.2B and 2.2C, many migrant workers who discussed the issue reported cases of disrespect but very few (5 per cent of men and 0 per cent of women) reported appreciation and respect given by employers.

*“So, it is how they talk to you and how they, you know, they don't listen to you. If you are not well or if you are tired, or if you don't want to do something, so then they don't understand or listen to you.” [Bangladeshi carpenter]*

Secondly, freedom to leave the country and freedom of choice in terms of employment are critical rights for them. However, in GCC states, migrants' dependence on their sponsor is recognised to be a strong hindrance to migrants' ability to move from one employer to another, which restricts their occupational mobility and freedom of choice. Is it easy or difficult to change employer? This question was a matter for discussion in several FGDs. A clear distinction emerged between construction workers, among which no one reported that transferring from one employer to another is easy, to hospitality workers for whom it can be easy (16 per cent).

One important point appears to be safety at the workplace. Migrants typically come from countries where occupational security standards at the workplace are lower than in Dubai. All those who took part in the discussion praised Dubai for the safety its worksites offer:

*“They have smart work instead of hard work. Like here, all the work is done smartly. Like as much work they can do with the help of technology, they do it that way. It is not like you have to break this manually. They have a proper machine to break that. It is all very proper.” [Pakistani construction worker]*

*“For me the positive side [is] I feel safe in my working place.” [Indian professional electrician working in a hotel]*

*“Actually, we work in construction, so we know about our site, the site is good.” [Bangladeshi construction worker]*

**Table 2.2A: Workers' views on their working conditions (%)**

Topic	Total (N=94)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T
Easy to transfer from one employer to another	11	51	13	26	100
Appreciation and respect given by employer	3	55	23	18	100
Taking sick leave is easy and not subject to salary deduction	10	50	40	0	100
Adequate workload and salary	9	45	47	0	100
No disagreements with co-workers	9	55	4	32	100

**Table 2.2B: Workers' views on their working conditions, by sector of employment (%)**

Topic	Hospitality M+F (N=63)					Construction M (N=31)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Easy to transfer from one employer to another	16	51	8	25	100	0	52	23	26	100
Appreciation and respect given by employer	3	52	29	16	100	3	61	13	23	100
Taking sick leave is easy and not subject to salary deduction	11	49	40	0	100	6	52	42	0	100
Adequate workload and salary	13	38	49	0	100	0	58	42	0	100
No disagreements with co-workers	10	51	3	37	100	6	65	6	23	100

**Table 2.2C: Workers' views on their working conditions, by gender (%)**

Topic	Males (N=62)					Females (N=32)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Easy to transfer from one employer to another	6	61	19	13	100	19	31	0	50	100
Appreciation and respect given by employer	5	65	19	11	100	0	38	31	31	100
Taking sick leave is easy and not subject to salary deduction	15	60	27	-2	100	0	34	66	0	100
Adequate workload and salary	6	50	44	0	100	13	34	53	0	100
No disagreements with co-workers	10	65	3	23	100	6	38	6	50	100

**Table 2.2D: Workers' views on their working conditions, by skills level (%)**

Topic	Low-skilled M+F (N=62)					Mid-skilled M+F (N=32)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Easy to transfer from one employer to another	15	48	11	26	100	3	56	16	25	100
Appreciation and respect given by employer	2	55	16	27	100	6	56	38	0	100
Taking sick leave is easy and not subject to salary deduction	15	48	37	0	100	0	53	47	0	100
Adequate workload and salary	8	40	52	0	100	9	53	38	0	100
No disagreements with co-workers	5	40	6	48	100	16	84	0	0	100

## PART 3: MIGRANTS' VIEWS ON CONTRACTS

### 3.1 Introduction

A long-standing problem faced by migrants to the Gulf States concerns the unofficial money that the prospective worker has to pay the intermediaries located in sending and/or receiving countries to arrange a job (Abella 2018; Jureidini 2018). Research from a World Bank/ILO project focusing on multiple migration corridors showed that Pakistani workers to Saudi Arabia paid an average amount of \$4,460, while Indians to the same destination paid an average amount of \$1,386 for securing a work visa (Abella 2018). One of the major reasons for the existence of the high amounts of fees paid by many migrants is the fact that intermediaries can buy work visas from Gulf sponsors (or *kafeels*, that every worker is obligated to have) and sell these visas to migrants in sending countries, all these transactions being illegal under the laws of the sending as well as receiving countries (Shah 2018; Shah 2006). Despite efforts by Gulf countries to curb the practice of visa trading, it remains rampant.

In terms of the legal framework that might regulate the process of visa trading, no specific laws are present. However, both the Federal Penal Code and the Dubai Penal Code make it illegal to offer, give, or agree to give any gratification to any person who is, or, as far as Dubai is concerned, is expected to be a public servant, an inducement or reward for performing or refraining from performing any official act. On the other hand, it is forbidden for public servants to attempt, obtain, accept, or agree to accept, any such gratification, and it is illegal to use a third person as a conduit or intermediary, or to act in that capacity for payment of such gratification. Under Articles 234-237 of the Federal Penal Code, and Articles 118-122 of the Dubai Penal Code, acceptance of bribes of money or donations by a public service official for any undue favour are considered offences.

In our survey of 94 hospitality and construction workers, 56 per cent reported that they had to pay an agent to find a job, indicating that migrants to Dubai are faced with similar situations as other Gulf countries (Table 3A). This was true of male as well as female workers, in each sector of activity, and skill level. The difference by gender was especially large; 88 per cent women said they had paid money

compared with 40 per cent of males. For example, a male construction worker from India had to pay the agent Rs. 1.5 lakh (about \$2,180) to get the job in Dubai, while several female hospitality workers from Indonesia had to pay Dh4,000-5,000 (about \$1,090-1,360).

### 3.2 Written (promised) contracts and reality

Under UAE Labour Law (1980), Arabic is the language to be used in contracts (Art. 2). The employment contract is to be signed in duplicate and one copy should be handed to the worker (Art. 35). It should also specify the dates of commencement of work and conclusion in the case of limited-term contracts, type and place of work, and the agreed upon salary (Art. 36).

In 2015, the UAE adopted Ministerial Decree No. 764 on Ministry of Labour-approved Standard Employment Contracts. The decree requires the employer to submit the offer letter, which needs to be compliant to the newly adopted Standard Employment Contract and signed by the worker, to the Ministry of Labour for approval (Art. 1). Both the Ministry and the worker must approve any changes to the contract and only if those changes benefit the worker (Art. 4).

A written contract is required both to specify the terms and conditions of work and to protect the worker (as well as the employer) in case of any violations by either party. Most of the respondents in our survey (85 per cent) said that they had signed a contract in Dubai, regardless of whether they had a copy or not (Tables 3A-D). Some were not sure whether they had been given a copy and others were not sure if they could find the copy they had received. Most could not understand the contract since it is generally written in Arabic, as indicated by different workers, who stated:

*“If it’s brought in front of me, I would not get to know. How will I know, sir? I have been given the contract copy, don’t remember where I have kept it.” (Mid-skilled Bangladeshi male hospitality worker)*

*“We don’t have any copy, the PRO takes us from the airport and makes us sign the contract but don’t give us a copy. We don’t know Arabic language so I am not sure... They just make us sign it once and then they take it back with them. I just signed it without reading it and they made me sign it so quickly without giving me any chance or time to even understand it. I don’t know that... I don’t know how to read. I am illiterate. So, I had to agree whatever was written in that contract” (Various low-skilled Indian male construction workers)*

Among the leading problems highlighted in previous research regarding contracts and salaries in the Gulf, two major ones relate to violations of the terms and conditions laid down in the contract and the non-payment or delayed payment of salaries (Jureidini 2016). Also, the terms specified in the contract the worker signs (or is shown, or told about) in the home country are not necessarily the same as those specified in the one they sign (or receive, or are shown) in the Gulf. Data gathered from the 12 FGDs in Dubai generally support the findings of earlier research. Only 6 per cent of the participants reported the contract to be the same, while 28 per cent reported it to be different, and 41 per cent did not comment on this issue. The salary was frequently lower than what the workers had been told, or promised, or had signed for. Only 10 per cent of the participants reported that their salary was the same as written in the contract, while 37 per cent said it was not. A large gender difference was present; about 66 per cent of the females said the salary/leave was less than the contract compared with 23 per cent of

males. Low-skilled workers also reported receiving a lower salary than promised compared with mid-skilled workers (44 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively). The number of working hours was frequently more than what the contract stated, and promised leave was not always granted, as illustrated by the opinion of a low-skilled Bangladeshi construction worker:

*“The system is different there and here. The agents’ contract form is different from the original contract. The contract there has facilities. Only after coming here we find out that we have no facilities. There are two different contracts forms. One form stays with the company. The contract we sign there (in Bangladesh) means nothing. We just have to work for however long they ask us to work for.”*

Regardless of the actual terms of the contract, which is written in Arabic in Dubai and the worker is unlikely to be able to read, expectations are also based on who arranged the job and what the intermediaries told the prospective worker. The two main channels through which workers come to Dubai consist of friends’/relatives’ networks and formal recruitment agencies. Agencies maintain formal and informal contacts in the sending country to facilitate migration. We found that in several cases, erroneous information was provided to the prospective worker by both the mentioned channels. The picture that the intermediaries paint on the working and living conditions is much rosier than what exists. However, relatives are generally considered as a more reliable source for arranging employment in Dubai.

As stated by a Bangladeshi low-skilled construction worker,

*“Most people come through relatives. With relatives, we know where we are going. There is a lot of fraud through agents. That’s why through relatives it’s safe. Our relatives tell us if any good work please let us know. We also will check properly for our relatives.”*

### **3.3 Working hours and salary discrepancies**

The working hours as set by UAE Labour Law are eight hours per day, 48 hours per week. In certain sectors such as the hospitality and construction sectors, the number of daily working hours may be increased to nine hours (Art. 65).

In accordance with Ministerial Decree No. 401 of 2015 Concerning the Determination of Midday Working Hours, workers who have to work under the sun and in open areas may not be required to work during the midday hours of 12:30 pm–3:00 pm (Art. 1). Moreover, the daily working hours must not exceed eight hours for workers who work in shifts. Any extra working hours must be considered as overtime and paid for accordingly (Art. 2).

The excess in the required hours of work compared to the worker’s expectation, or contract, was stated by 54 per cent of all workers. Furthermore, 72 per cent of the females and 60 per cent of low-skilled workers reported longer working hours than they were promised, compared with fewer of their respective counterparts (Tables 3A–D). In some cases, the number of hours in excess was substantially more than the worker had been promised. For example, an Indian male construction worker stated that they are

*“Supposed to do a 12-hour shift but sometimes they make us work for 16 to 17 hours a day”.*

Also, a low-skilled female hospitality worker stated:

*“Contract said eight hours but it’s 12 hours working, they signed like eight hours, but I come here it’s really different, like sometimes more than 12 hours.”*

The actual salary earned upon arrival in Dubai was also reported to be less than the promised one, in several cases, as illustrated below:

*“The contract shown to me says that my duty is for 10 hours, but when I come here, I am told that my duty is for 16 hours! I was also promised 900, I will get good accommodation, I will have to work only for nine hours. But when I came here, I was made to work for 12 hours. And the salary that I got was 700.” (Pakistani construction worker)*

*“They told me initially that they will pay me 1,600 dirhams. The first two-three months they paid me that but later reduced it to 1,200 dirhams. Yes, initially they paid me 1800 but since three to four months they have stopped my salary; neither the company increase salary nor they pay us good overtime.” (Indian low-skilled construction worker)*

*“I was told that salary would be around 1500, but when I came here they said that I will get salary 1200. But here they gave me 750 dirham and they had said they will increase after six months and they increased and now they give me 950.” (Indian low-skilled male hospitality worker)*

*“When I came here salary was 1300 and accommodation was free but no food; but in Indonesian contract there is food allowance. Their contract is much different, like about salary they mentioned 3500 Dubai money but actually I get 1800.” (Low-skilled female hospitality worker from Indonesia)*

These examples indicate that there is sometimes a wide gap in the information provided to the prospective migrant about the salary and benefits and the reality upon arrival in Dubai. In several cases, migrants take extensive loans to finance their migration that may be based on the assumption of a higher salary than they actually obtain upon arrival in the Gulf. In case of differences in the promised and received salary, it is often unclear to the worker whether the difference is due to some deductions that are made from the salary, and the details are not adequately explained to the worker.

However, not all the workers were unhappy with their salary and benefits, as indicated by the opinion of an Indian taxi driver:

*“I am happy with my work and salary because my company deposits my salary 1-2 days before the month starts and my company gives me allowance also and my duty is for nine hours. But sometimes if I work overtime for 1-2 hours, then it gives me money accordingly. That’s why I am happy.”*

### 3.4 Annual leave and off days

Annual leave is regulated under UAE Labour Law, which stipulates that for each year of service, a worker is entitled to no less than two days of leave per month if s/he has been working for more than six months but less than one year. Once the worker has been in service for more than a year, s/he is entitled

to 30 days of annual leave (Art. 75). The employer may determine the dates for annual leave and divide into no more than two periods (Art. 76).

Thus, the legal framework entitles the employer to determine the timing of the annual leave, regardless of the desires and preferences of the worker.

In terms of leave being the same as in contract, about half of the workers were neutral while 26 per cent said it was the same and 14 per cent said it was not (Tables 3A-D). When asked if they could take annual leave according to their wished timing, only 15 per cent said they could while a majority (52 per cent) said they could not. The inability to take leave at the time they wanted was expressed by 39 per cent to 66 per cent of workers in various subgroups, which could be the source of considerable stress for the workers, as illustrated by the following examples:

*“Because last time I told them I want to go at that time, they said no because the rate is very expensive so you have to go on this one, so I don’t have choice. I chose December to go and see my family, but my company said no because ticket is expensive. Then they told me you can go on this month, and in this month, there is nothing happening in Philippines. Yes, it was the 60th birthday of my mom, it is a big thing, so I wanted to go to Philippines at that time and they didn’t allow me. I tried many times, three times and one time I cried in front of my HR.” (Filipino low-skilled female hospitality worker)*

*“It depends on management, not giving during December. If off season, they will send us on vacation; if there is busy season, they will adjust.” (Mid-skilled male hospitality worker)*

*“They decide only if there is any function in the family. We said to boss we can leave for a week. Only five days you can cut from salary like you feel family need us. They say no we will deduct your salary for two months, is it ok? Then we kill our emotions. Every year I think I just celebrate Diwali with my family. I mean this is very big occasion for us but from three years they give me the leave on odd timing when even I don’t want to go when I prefer to go, I can’t get leave.” (Low-skilled Indian female hospitality worker).*

Finally, in terms of having a weekly day off, a large majority (81 per cent) stated that they had a day off, while 3 per cent said they did not. All the mid-skilled workers reported getting a day off compared with 71 per cent of low-skilled workers.

**Table 3A: Workers' reports on contract (verbal or written) and discrepancies with ground reality (%)**

Topic	Total (N=94)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T
Salary/leave same as in contract	10	37	37	16	100
Promised leave given as stated in contract	26	52	14	9	100
Working hours same as in contract	3	43	54	0	100
Contract signed (whether they have copy or not)	85	12	3	0	100
Have off days (holiday)	81	7	3	9	100
Same contract as originally given in home country	6	41	28	24	100
Can take annual leave whenever they wish	15	24	52	9	100
Money paid to agent for job in Dubai	56	18	26	0	100

**Table 3B: Workers' reports on contract (verbal or written) and discrepancies with ground reality, by sector (%)**

Topic	Hospitality (N=63)					Construction (N=31)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Salary/leave same as in contract	13	35	40	13	100	3	42	32	23	100
Promised leave given as stated in contract	25	49	13	13	100	26	58	16	0	100
Working hours same as in contract	5	41	54	0	100	0	45	55	0	100
Contract signed (whether they have copy or not)	79	17	3	0	100	97	0	3	0	100
Have off days (holiday)	86	11	3	0	100	71	0	3	26	100
Same contract as originally given in home country	6	27	30	37	100	6	71	23	0	100
Can take annual leave whenever they wish	13	29	59	0	100	19	16	39	26	100
Money paid to agent for job in Dubai	60	22	17	0	100	48	10	42	0	100

**Table 3C: Workers' reports on contract (verbal or written) and discrepancies with ground reality, by gender (%)**

Topic	Males (N=62)					Females (N=32)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Salary/leave same as in contract	15	39	23	24	100	0	34	66	0	100
Promised leave given as stated in contract	39	39	10	13	100	0	78	22	0	100
Working hours same as in contract	5	50	45	0	100	0	28	72	0	100
Contract signed (whether they have copy or not)	82	15	3	0	100	91	6	3	0	100
Have off days (holiday)	85	0	2	13	100	72	22	6	0	100
Same contract as originally given in home country	3	48	11	37	100	13	28	59	0	100
Can take annual leave whenever they wish	18	21	48	13	100	9	31	59	0	100
Money paid to agent for job in Dubai	40	21	39	0	100	88	13	0	0	100

**Table 3D: Workers’ reports on contract (verbal or written) and discrepancies with  
ground reality, by skills level (%)**

Topic	Low-skilled (N=62)					Mid-skilled (N=32)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Salary/leave same as in contract	2	31	44	24	100	25	50	25	0	100
Promised leave given as stated in contract	26	58	16	0	100	25	41	9	25	100
Working hours same as in contract	5	35	60	0	100	0	56	44	0	100
Contract signed (whether they have copy or not)	87	11	2	0	100	81	13	6	0	100
Have off days (holiday)	71	11	5	13	100	100	0	0	0	100
Same contract as originally given in home country	6	37	32	24	100	6	50	19	25	100
Can take annual leave whenever they wish	23	32	45	0	100	0	9	66	25	100
Money paid to agent for job in Dubai	60	15	26	0	100	50	25	25	0	100

## PART 4: MIGRANTS’ VIEWS ON SALARY, INCREASE, AND PAYMENTS

### 4.1 Introduction

About 51 per cent of all workers said their salary and increase in salary was not adequate, while 10 per cent said it was. A larger percentage of females than males were dissatisfied with their salary/increase (63 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively). Also, a larger percentage of low-skilled workers were dissatisfied than mid-skilled workers (56 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively). (Tables 4A-D). For example, a Pakistani male construction worker said:

*“Like if someone is working here for 10 years also, his salary will be the same only. His salary will be the same as the new person joining in. They don’t see the difference in the experience. So, for example, if he is getting a salary of 2,000 something. And then when I join the company new and I have no experience and I don’t know what all work to do. Like this is my first day. So then in my contract also they will write about this 2,000 only, that way it is. Means like we don’t have a scope for any salary raise even in 2-4 years.”*

The above sentiment was echoed by a mid-skilled Indian male hospitality worker:

*“I have been working for six or seven years for the same company and there is no growth at all ---- your salary is less than what you are for working. If you are working in India in a same position you will get more. Yes, India situation is like that, people are earning better. In India from January 2017 onwards, salary is become double but not here, what salary was here 10 years before, now also the same.”*

Another mid-skilled female hospitality worker stated:

*“Whenever I say to increase my salary to my boss, as my child is growing and I have to send some money to my family in India, and now VAT has also come so it is very tough to send money to India*

*or ask for increments. Also, salary comes late. Whenever I ask for increment, they only say we will look after it just relax.”*

In addition to the adequacy of salary and salary increase, the respondents were also asked about whether they are paid their salary during annual leave. About two-thirds said that they receive salary for annual leave, while 12 per cent said they did not. More construction workers as compared to hospitality workers did not get such salary (26 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively).

According to an Indian low-skilled construction worker:

*“They give the ticket too and that month salary (paid leave) we get once we come back.”*

Occasionally, a worker mentioned that they may not renew their contract as in the case of a low-skilled Indian female hospitality worker:

*“I will not renew my contract because my salary is not increasing. According to my experience, I expect a little raise in salary.”*

With regard to the mode of payment, about 47 per cent workers said they had a bank card and received their salary through the bank; 5 per cent said they did not have a bank card, and 40 per cent provided a neutral response on the question. The percentage with bank cards was highest among the mid-skilled workers (59 per cent) (Tables 4A-D).

## 4.2 Salary payment through bank and delayed salary payment

The payment of salaries in the UAE was regulated by Ministerial Decision No. 788 of 2009 regarding the Protection of Wages. In accordance with Article 1 of this decision, all establishments registered at the Ministry must pay its workers at least once a month, or as stipulated in the work contract. They must also provide proof of payment of wages to the Ministry. Art. 2, which came into effect on September 1, 2009, required all establishments to transfer the wages of their workers to banks and financial institutions within the country using the WPS. This decision was repealed and replaced by Ministerial Decree 739 of 2016 Concerning the Protection of Wages, which requires all companies employing 100 or more workers to pay their employees within 10 days of the date stipulated in their contracts. If not stipulated in the contract, then the payment should be done at least once every two weeks. All establishments are required to provide proof of payment of wages through the Wages Protection System (Art. 1). Penalties for failing to comply with this requirement subjects the violating establishment to a ban on issuance of work permits if the salary is sixteen days overdue. If the salary is still unpaid after 29 days of the due date, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization shall refer the case to the courts, which have the authority to prevent the employer from registering new companies, and reclassifying the establishment as high risk, which leads to requiring it to pay higher bank guarantees. Finally, if after 60 days the salary has still not been paid, administrative fees shall be imposed (Art. 2).

These laws highlight the seriousness with which the government aims to ensure timely payment of wages. Heavy penalties may be imposed on companies that are non-compliant with the laws. However, several workers are faced with delays in wage payment, in violation of the laws, as reported by participants in our survey, probably due to the ineffective implementation of the laws.

Among the 94 participants, 40 per cent said they received their salary on time while 35 per cent said they did not (Tables 4A-D). A larger percentage of workers in the construction sector reported delays in wage payment compared with those in the hospitality sector (52 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively). Also, a larger percentage of females reported delays compared with their male counterparts (53 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively).

Employment in a large company seems to facilitate timely payment, as mentioned by a male Pakistani construction worker:

*“Like in our company the date for salary is 26. So, then we get the salary on 24 or 25th only, we don’t have to wait till 26th also. As in even if it falls as Friday so then I will get the salary on 23rd. They will not let us wait even a day, like not even 24th or so. In big companies, the advantage is that you will get your salary on time here. If there is any issue, all people can complain together in a big company. But in a small company, you can’t do it there or else they remove you from jobs.”*

Withholding part of the salary seems to be an especially important problem, as indicated by the experience of a female Filipino hospitality worker:

*“The salary is the same (as in contract) but they give it to me half and half; it means sometimes they give me only half of the salary and give me the other half the next month.”*

In other cases, the delay can be very substantial, according to various workers:

*“It’s almost three or four months, we haven’t received the salaries from the office. They are saying you don’t have any issues we are giving you the accommodations and transport, then what is the issue, and our salary cards are also not with us, it’s with them. So, there is problem for us, we don’t know that the salaries are coming in the account or not, we can’t even go to labour” (Mid-skilled female hospitality worker)*

*“They block our salaries for up to months, sometimes four months; wages are not also paid on time this month, which is about to end now. But they pay us on the 15th or 20th of the month for the last month salary.” (Low-skilled Indian construction worker)*

### 4.3 Overtime payments

The regulation of overtime work and payment under the UAE Labour Law requires employers to treat any time spent working outside the normal working hours as overtime and payment for those hours shall be increased by at least 25 per cent of the normal wage (Art. 67). If the overtime work is performed between the hours of 9 pm and 4 am, then the worker is entitled to an increase of at least 50 per cent of the normal wage (Art. 68). The number of overtime hours must not exceed two hours each day except where work is essential for preventing a substantial loss or a serious accident or dealing with the impact of the latter (Art. 69).

Despite the apparently clear guidelines for overtime payment by employers, lack of overtime payment for work outside the normal working hours was a widely prevalent occurrence, as illustrated below.

A majority (40 per cent) of all participants reported that they were dissatisfied with overtime payments, while 31 per cent said they received adequate overtime payments (Tables 4A-D). Those in the construction sector were considerably more dissatisfied than those in the hospitality sector (55 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively). There was no difference between low and mid-skilled workers, about 40 per cent of each reporting dissatisfaction with lack of overtime payments. As stated by a Pakistani construction worker:

*“At times, even after we do overtime, they don’t pay us for that. This is also there. This should not be there. Like we feel bad even after working so much, they don’t pay us. Like they tell us do overtime and we will pay you for it. But then when the salary is given, we don’t have extra overtime in it. In contract, these people don’t mention anything about overtime; they only talk about the actual duty hours. Overtime is something that I will do out of my own choice. But if my foreman makes me work for extra hours, I don’t have a proof that he has done it so.”*

A low-skilled Filipino female hospitality worker noted that:

*“Also, the worth of overtime is not paid, I should work for eight hours, but I come here to find it more than 8 hours. The same contracts but the only thing they are not following is the accommodation and overtime, they mentioned it is nine hours but almost like 13-14 hours without paying.”*

Among the group of Indian construction workers, five of the eight stated that they did not get paid for their overtime work, narrating their experience as follows:

*“When we come here, we have to work 10 to 12 hours each day and the salary we get is for eight hours shift only; but the company is not willing to pay us any extra benefits...”*

*They still owe me overtime of 150 hours for the work I did in November and December...*

*Overtime is not fixed as such, it depends upon the manager (Arbab). We are supposed to do eight hour shift, but sometimes we work for 12 hours or 16 hours and sometimes if he is in a good mood, he will give us 100 or 200 dirhams. They make us work by saying you will get overtime, but later they say the company doesn’t have money so we won’t be able to pay you overtime...*

*They deduct our salary. If you don’t do overtime, if we have 13-hour shift if you don’t work for one or two hours, they will deduct the salary for full day.”*

In contrast to these situations, a Bangladeshi construction worker mentioned that he is satisfied with overtime payments:

*“We get paid for anything more than eight hours. We don’t have timing. We sometimes work for 15-20 hours also. The party asks us to finish fast, so we do overtime. If we do overtime, then we get paid extra. We also get a holiday the next day. Overtime is advantageous for us.”*

#### **4.4 Satisfaction with savings and remittances**

The ability to save money to support families in the home country is the overwhelming motivation for most low-skilled Gulf migrants. Of the 94 respondents, 41 per cent stated that they were not satisfied with their capacity to send money home (Tables 4A-D). A larger percentage of construction workers were dissatisfied with their ability to send the desired amount of money home compared with hospitality

workers (52 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively); a similar situation was present in terms of females vs. males (53 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively) and in terms of low-skilled vs. mid-skilled workers (53 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively). Some of the men stated that while they faced difficulties, they could at least fulfil their responsibility to feed the family. It is possible that women have greater ambitions regarding the benefits they would like to reap from their migration experience and may therefore be less satisfied. Relative to other subgroups, those in the mid-skilled category were the most satisfied with their ability to remit and save, with 56 per cent providing a positive response. The following opinions by various low-skilled construction workers amply illustrate the views expressed by various subgroups:

*“Nobody is able to do any savings. Plus, it is so expensive here (cost of living is so high).” (Indian male construction worker)*

*“The person can only earn as much he can manage his monthly expenses. Like here, whatever we earn we spend that here and some we send to our family also. So, then we have some 100–200 dirhams left which we keep it. Because when we go back after a year we have to buy toys for our kids and things for our brothers and sisters. So that gets exhausted in that only. I am spending 300 and send back 700 to my country. What is 700 today? Around 20,000 rupees? How is it going to really help my family? Today I am sending back home around 30,000 and yet the family says that there is no money.” (Pakistani male construction worker)*

*“We want to save some money in the bank for emergency. It’s been 11 months and I have nothing saved in the bank. Problem for me is that I am unable to save money. It never meets expectation—---it’s just enough to sustain.” (Bangladeshi male construction worker)*

Inability to save enough to send sufficient money home is a source of frustration for several workers, such as a female hospitality worker from Indonesia:

*“Because especially the salary is less, it’s very hard to manage 500 monthly here because the rest I have to send 2000, so I have 500; so by 500 within one month especially food is not free, so it’s very difficult. I can’t save my money why should I come here? Like sometimes it’s like being greedy; like why I come here even; why I didn’t get job in my country if we get like this salary? So why did we come here, so that at least we get more salary than in my country, so we can save money and make come true our dreams.” (Female hospitality worker from Indonesia)*

In contrast to these situations, some workers are happy since they can send home enough money, on time

*“... I get my salary on time, I am sending money back home on time. Ensure my family receive on time...” (Mid-skilled Bangladeshi hospitality worker)*

**Table 4A: Workers' views on salary and payment (%)**

Topic	Total (N=94)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T
Adequacy of salary/ salary increase	10	39	51	0	100
Timely payment of salary	40	24	35	0	100
Adequate payment of overtime	31	29	40	0	100
Salary bank card with worker	47	40	5	7	100
Ability to send desired money home/ save money	35	23	41	0	100
Salary given during annual leave	65	23	12	0	100

**Table 4B: Workers' views on salary and payment, by sector (%)**

Topic	hospitality (N=63)					Construction (N=31)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Adequacy of salary/ salary increase	14	33	52	0	100	0	52	48	0	100
Timely payment of salary	43	30	27	0	100	35	13	52	0	100
Adequate payment of overtime	32	35	33	0	100	29	16	55	0	100
Salary bank card with worker	43	41	5	11	100	55	39	6	0	100
Ability to send desired money home/ save money	44	19	37	0	100	16	32	52	0	100
Salary given during annual leave	75	21	5	0	100	45	29	26	0	100

**Table 4C: Workers' views on salary and payment, by gender (%)**

Topic	Males (N=62)					Females (N=32)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Adequacy of salary/ salary increase	8	47	45	0	100	13	25	63	0	100
Timely payment of salary	47	27	26	0	100	28	19	53	0	100
Adequate payment of overtime	29	34	37	0	100	34	19	47	0	100
Salary bank card with worker	55	31	3	11	100	31	59	9	0	100
Ability to send desired money home/ save money	39	26	35	0	100	28	19	53	0	100
Salary given during annual leave	68	19	13	0	100	59	31	9	0	100

**Table 4D: Workers' views on salary and payment, by skills level (%)**

Topic	Low-skilled M+F (N=62)					Mid-skilled M+F (N=32)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Adequacy of salary/ salary increase	6	37	56	0	100	16	44	41	0	100
Timely payment of salary	40	27	32	0	100	41	19	41	0	100
Adequate payment of overtime	31	29	40	0	100	31	28	41	0	100
Salary bank card with worker	40	44	5	11	100	59	34	6	0	100
Ability to send desired money home/ save money	24	23	53	0	100	56	25	19	0	100
Salary given during annual leave	71	19	10	0	100	53	31	16	0	100

## PART 5: MIGRANT WORKERS' REPORTS ON THEIR LIVING CONDITIONS

### 5.1 Introduction

In 2016, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation enacted Ministerial Resolution No. (591) of 2016 Concerning the Commitment of Establishments to Provide Accommodation to their Workers. The resolution requires employers (employing 50 or more employees) to provide accommodation to employees whose salary, under the Wages Protection System, is less than Dh2,000. The quality of accommodation must be in line with regulatory standards, applying Ministerial Resolution 212 of 2014 for less than 500 workers and Cabinet Decision No. 13 of 2009 for more than 500 workers.

All the participants included in our study lived in accommodation provided by the company employing them. None of them were renting their accommodation on their own. The low-skilled male construction workers were typically housed in camps especially designed for them. As shown by the narratives of FGD participants, the accommodation for low-skilled hospitality workers often consisted of buildings or flats rented by the concerned company. Some of the mid-skilled hospitality workers lived in hotel accommodation of a slightly better quality. Most workers shared the living space with several other workers, and the level of crowdedness, cleanliness, and comfort varied across the different groups.

The respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their living conditions on a scale from 1-10. Their responses were then categorised as low if the score was 1-4, neutral if score was 5-6, and positive if score was 7-10. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 5. In terms of their overall rating, one-third of all respondents were positive, 19 per cent were negative and the majority (48 per cent) were neutral. According to subgroups, a striking gender difference was noted: 41 per cent of females were dissatisfied with their living conditions compared with only 8 per cent of males. On the other hand, almost half of all males and the mid-skilled workers were satisfied with their living conditions.

**Table 5: Migrants' overall level of satisfaction with living conditions (%)**

Group / Level of Satisfaction*		+	=	-	N/A	T
Total (N=94)		33	48	19	0	100
Sector	Hospitality - Both sexes (N=63)	33	44	22	0	100
	Construction - Males (N=31)	32	55	13	0	100
Gender	Males (N=62)	48	44	8	0	100
	Females (N=32)	3	56	41	0	100
Skills level	Low-skilled - Both sexes (N=62)	24	58	18	0	100
	Mid-skilled - Both sexes (N=32)	50	28	22	0	100

\*Scoring for the level of satisfaction is as the following: 1-4 is negative, 5-6 is neutral and 7-10 is positive.

## 5.2 Number of persons to a room, per bathroom, and cleanliness

In accordance with Cabinet Decision No. (13) of 2009 Approving the General Standards Manual for Group Labour Accommodation and Related Services, the number of workers allowed per bedroom is 8 to 10 workers while observing the specified space area for each worker. Each worker shall have a space of not less than 3m<sup>2</sup> (Art.3.2).

In the case of common bathrooms, one toilet should be available for every eight persons, and any common bathroom should have at least two toilets. One urinal should be provided for every 25 persons. One shower and one washbasin should be provided for every eight persons. Sufficient quantities of toilet paper should be available in the toilets. The bathrooms and toilets should enjoy sanitary conditions and should be cleaned at least once a day (Art. 3.3).

This law seems to imply that the employer is responsible for arranging the cleanliness of the worker bathrooms and toilets. However, a large majority of all participants stated that they clean the bathrooms themselves.

Responses of our participants about specific living conditions are shown in Tables 5A-D. In general, the mandated occupancy level of not more than eight persons per room is usually followed in most cases. However, we were unable to obtain a clear picture of the space available per person, and thus the degree of crowding. Of all the participants, 57 per cent reported that there were too many persons per room, and 45 per cent were dissatisfied with the number of persons per bathroom shared by them. Major differences were present by gender. A notably larger percentage of females than males were dissatisfied with the number of persons they shared the room and bathroom with compared with males (81 per cent vs. 45 per cent and 78 per cent vs. 27 per cent, respectively). Also, a considerably larger percentage of low-skilled workers (69 per cent) were unhappy with the number of persons per room than their mid-skilled counterparts (34 per cent).

The following statements reflect the perceptions and sentiments of various participants in terms of the crowdedness and cleanliness of their accommodation:

*"They promised me that there will be only two people in the room, but they don't write this in the contract but said verbally. But when I came here, there were six to eight persons in one room."*

*(Mid-skilled female hospitality worker)*

Some female workers reported that they had to share the accommodation with males, that made them very uncomfortable:

*“The accommodation also is mixed, males and females. I don’t feel comfortable because you know Philippines .... in the accommodation we are 12, three men and the rest are ladies and of course when we are in the morning, all of them .... for example, four of the ladies and three guys, you want to dress up inside the room and somebody is inside, the toilet is full.” (Low-skilled Filipino female hospitality worker)”*

A low-skilled Indian female hospitality worker sums up the situation about many different aspects of her dissatisfaction with the living arrangements:

*“I have to share the room with eight girls and I stay in 2BHK (i.e. 2 bedrooms, hall and kitchen flat) and there is only one bathroom. I have to wake up at 4:30 and lot of my things are lost. If I keep curd or milk in the fridge, you will not find it the next day and you cannot keep anything in the room, there is no lock; for cleaning we have to do on our own, we have to wash our clothes and when we keep our clothes for drying, the other girls will just remove it and throw it on the bed, and the clothes are still wet, because they want to dry their own clothes. So we have to think about that, and we have to cook on our own and eat and we have to do cleaning also. There is no pest control, everything is dirty. There is no lock in the cupboard and many times my things were lost also and we have to cook on our own. Like when we cook and leave, Bangladesh people also cook and we are vegetarians, and they make fish. So whatever food we cook, that we cannot eat because the fish smell goes in our food also and there is only one room only and it gets suffocating.”*

Among the males who expressed dissatisfaction with their living conditions, one noted that crowding was positively associated with increase in rents:

*“Earlier, we were four people in the room but the rent has increased, that’s why there are two more people staying in the room; as the rent is increasing, the number of people living in the room is also increasing.” (Indian taxi driver)*

Crowdedness of the bathrooms was a problem mentioned by many workers, as illustrated by the following accounts:

*“There are eight people in my room, there is problem to go to the washroom because it is already occupied when I want to go to the bathroom. So it is very difficult sometimes and on Fridays, everyone is washing their clothes and we have to stand in long queues in front of the washroom.” (Indian male taxi driver)*

*“I wake up at 4am just to take a bath and sleep again; the only problem is about bathroom, you have to wake up very early because the timing is different. So, 16 persons using one washroom.” (Low-skilled Filipino female)*

*“There are 8-10 girls and there is one bathroom. One is on this side and the other is on the other side and there are eight girls in one and it is difficult to adjust with them because everyone is of different caste and some are from low class and some don’t keep cleanliness and there is kitchen with gas so everyone cooks on their own time.” (Low-skilled Indian female hospitality worker)*

Lack of cleanliness was pointed out as a problem resulting from overcrowding and sharing of rooms and bathrooms. As shown in Tables 5A-D, the percentage of workers who were satisfied with the cleanliness of their living facility was higher among hospitality workers than construction workers (38 per cent and 3 per cent), males than females (32 per cent and 0 per cent), and among mid-skilled than low-skilled (34 per cent and 15 per cent). Some views expressed were as follows:

*“There is no cleanliness and there are a lot of bed bugs, and like we want new mattresses because there are so many people who must have slept there, so it has become very dirty. There is no cleanliness at all; we Indians keep the house clean and the Filipinos don’t keep the house clean.”* (Low-skilled Indian female hospitality worker)

*“Only that there are many cockroaches ... they don’t do proper maintenance but no matter how much you clean the room, the cockroaches always come.”* (Low-skilled Indian male construction worker)

### 5.3 Food and kitchen facilities

The 2009 Cabinet Decision requires that kitchens meet certain requirements, as follows: each residential unit has a kitchen that is compliant with applicable public health standards. The kitchen should be managed by a licensed food service company or by a food staff appointed by the accommodation facility management, equipped with washable tables, and it should be kept clean (Art. 3.4). Specifications for the mess hall are: it should be close to the kitchen and be supplied with enough tables and chairs in addition to a water cooler and washbasin; each person should have an area of his own of at least 1.4 m<sup>2</sup> in the mess hall (and in the TV and rest halls), which should accommodate at least one third of the total number of residents in the unit; a schedule specifying the meal times should be placed at the entrance of the mess hall; and it should be kept clean at all times (Art. 3.5).

This law seems to be designed for labour camps where the workers are provided food in a mess hall. Only some of our participants residing in labour camps would thus be covered by the law. Most of the hospitality workers were living in buildings or flats rented by the company for them and several were cooking their own meals.

We found that the situation of workers differs according to whether they are provided food or not. Construction workers housed in camps are usually provided food. Most of the hospitality workers are provided kitchen facilities to cook their own food. Some are provided food coupons. Tables 5A-D show that 36 per cent of all respondents were dissatisfied with the kitchen facilities available to them while 31 per cent were satisfied. A large gender difference was again present: 59 per cent of females were dissatisfied compared to 24 per cent of males. Construction workers were more dissatisfied compared with hospitality workers (42 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively).

Dissatisfaction with facilities was expressed by various respondents in the following terms:

*“We are not demanding chicken, mutton and beef every day. But the least we expect is that our Dal-Subzi should be good. Even that doesn’t happen. It happens only on the checking days. When the checking is over, everything goes back to the routine. Ultimately, it always comes down to the labour’s life being compromised.”* (Pakistani male construction worker)

*“I am a little unsatisfied with the housing/ accommodation condition because there is no kitchen and I have to eat outside in the restaurant and go to sleep in the room, so if the company gives us a separate room with the kitchen, then it would be better.” (Indian male taxi driver).*

Sharing the kitchen also results in dissatisfaction for several workers:

*“The only problem is the dirt they cause in the kitchen; we always ask to clean after using the kitchen. For me, I don’t like to use the kitchen if it is dirty; so I tell myself, even if I’ll do it every day, that’s for me not for them. But one time I became angry because I just cleaned morning.... but what about bathrooms? Many people use bathroom.” (Low-skilled Filipino female)*

*“Sometimes when you get home, you are tired and go to the kitchen, find someone cooking and you have to wait. And then it ends up with go to sleep without eating.” (Low-skilled Filipino female)*

*“In one room, there are Indians, and in one room, there are Filipinos. So when they make pork, it is a problem for us, and we have told them, but they are telling us to adjust.” (Low-skilled Indian female hospitality worker)*

## 5.4 Air conditioning and recreational facilities

The General Standards Manual for Group Labour Accommodation issued by Cabinet Decision No. 13 of 2009 specifies that “all the rooms, kitchens, mess halls, corridors, offices and halls should be provided with ventilation and central air conditioning systems as per the standards and conditions adopted by the competent local authorities. In case there is no central air conditioning system, the rooms should be supplied with individual air conditioning” (Art. 2.4.1).

Articles 3.7.1 and 3.10.1 of the Manual, respectively, specify that workers should have a rest hall with comfortable seats and a TV (within the mess hall) and that courts should be provided for workers who wish to exercise in their spare time.

Relative to other aspects, workers were generally satisfied with air conditioning in their accommodation. About 46 per cent of all participants were satisfied while 12 per cent were dissatisfied and 26 per cent were neutral. A larger percentage of females were dissatisfied compared with males (22 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively). The ones who were dissatisfied complained that if the air conditioning broke down, it took too long for the building owners to fix it. Occasionally, the male workers were able to do minor repair and maintenance work on the air conditioning in their accommodation.

As one respondent observed,

*“I do also complain about the AC because the AC is not like good AC. Like there is too much sound. After work we are so tired, the ac is a problem. The company say they cannot change because that belongs to the apartment; sometimes ac is not working, sometimes working.” (Low-skilled female hospitality worker)*

In terms of recreational facilities, 31 per cent of all respondents were dissatisfied and about 27 per cent were satisfied, while 35 per cent were neutral (Tables 5A-D). A large difference was again present between the satisfaction level of females and males, with 47 per cent of the former and 23 per cent of the latter being dissatisfied.

*“(Recreational space not adequate) Because they closed the living area to make it one room, originally they are three and they made it four.” [dwelling initially had a recreational area that was then converted to living space for workers] (Low-skilled female Filipino worker)*

## 5.5 Space for storing valuables

In accordance with Article 3.2.5 of the General Standards Manual for Labour Accommodation, each person should be provided with a bed, side table and a 2m high closet with a lock.

This law was not implemented by several employers who provided the accommodation, a point that was especially pointed out by females. About 29 per cent of all participants were dissatisfied with the storage space provided while 22 per cent were satisfied. Views of the various subgroups did not differ according to sector of work, or skill level. However, a very large difference was present between females and males, with 59 per cent of the former and only 13 per cent of the latter being satisfied with the storage space for valuables. Inadequate space to store valuables may be a source of considerable stress and dismay for some workers. The following examples illustrate the views of various workers regarding their dissatisfaction with this aspect:

*“Once before I had a bath and I remember clearly that I had 200 D. separately in my wallet as I was paid for extra work. When I came back, I checked my wallet before I sleep, because I usually check, the 200 D wasn’t there.” (Low-skilled Filipino female hospitality worker)*

*“Every time I go to the bathroom, I bring along my bag.” (Low-skilled female hospitality worker)*

## 5.6 Transportation

The requirements for transportation set forth by Article 9 of the General Standards Manual for Group Labour Accommodation are extensive. Among them are that the vehicle should be air-conditioned; the passengers’ stop should be near their destination to avoid crossing the main roads, unless pedestrian lanes are available; transportation to and from the nearest public transportation point should be provided during the weekends, unless the transportation point is close to the residential unit where the worker can reach it on foot (2km); and a contact number should be clearly placed on the vehicle for remarks and complaints.

Relative to all other aspects, satisfaction with transportation was quite high. About 70 per cent said that they were satisfied with the transportation provided to them while 15 per cent said they were not. Larger percentages of construction workers were dissatisfied compared with hospitality workers and more females were dissatisfied than males. The positive perception of transportation was reflected by one worker as follows:

*“Our bus is bigger, it’s a 40 seater, the bus is very clean with A/C.” (Mid-skilled Bangladeshi male hospitality worker)*

The level of satisfaction was lower among construction workers, as illustrated by the following examples:

*“In the morning, they wait for us, but in the evening, we have to wait for them. During summers specially, it is a big problem as on one seat three people are sitting, we are all squashed, so it becomes extremely hot and unbearable.” (Low-skilled Indian male construction worker)*

*“The bus will never come on time. Even if we are finishing the work on time, then we have to wait for three hours, two hours, or 4 hours. It is sometimes too much. It is too much because you are in one place where you cannot sleep and cannot do anything also. Somedays you know they don't arrange transport, so I have to pay from my pocket, and they will not reimburse it. Like in some sites they give the transport, and, in some sites, they say it is very far. If we give you, then we will charge 300 dirhams or 400 dirhams; otherwise, you can come by your conveyance. Then they didn't give me single dirham.” (Mid-skilled male construction worker)*

## 5.7 Better living conditions reported by males vs. females and mid-skilled vs. low-skilled workers

A comparison of the gender and sectoral dimensions across the FGDs led to the identification of a relatively more positive experience expressed by males compared to females and mid-skilled workers compared to their low-skilled counterparts. Several examples of the views expressed by female workers have been reported previously. The following narratives of some skilled male workers seem to distinguish them from the rest of the subgroups as the ones with the most positive experiences:

*“The company is good, food is good, room is good. What else can you ask for; the rooms are very good, well-maintained and clean.” (Mid-skilled Bangladeshi male hospitality worker)*

*“Now we are living in Silicon Oasis. We have pool, we have gym, we have everything, such a nice place. It's like own room. .... I mean it's good for our personal activity.” (Mid-skilled male hospitality worker)*

*“For me, it's spacious, we are given big villa, it is very quiet, its very cosy and it becomes really comfortable for stay....it has all facility, wifi, swimming pool, gym. You will be comfortable, so relaxed.” (Mid-skilled male hospitality worker)*

*The rooms are very good, well-maintained and clean. Cleaning we don't do it ourselves; there comes a guy who does all the cleaning.” (Mid-skilled male hospitality worker)*

It may be noted that several of the mid-skilled male workers who made these positive assessments were employed by large hotel chains such as Holiday Inn or Rotana, and most had completed secondary level of education, while some had attended or completed university level education.

**Table 5A: Workers' views on various aspects of living conditions (%)**

Topic	Total (N=94)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T
Adequate number of persons per room	18	24	57	0	100
Adequate number of bathrooms	19	36	45	0	100
Adequate kitchen facilities or food provided	31	16	36	17	100
Adequate air conditioning	46	26	12	17	100
Adequate recreational facilities	27	35	31	7	100
Satisfied with the cleanliness of the facility	21	24	22	32	100
Adequate space for storing valuables	22	24	29	24	100
Adequate transportation	70	16	15	0	100

**Table 5B: Workers' views on various aspects of living conditions, by sector (%)**

Topic	hospitality (N=63)					Construction (N=31)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Adequate number of persons per room	21	22	57	0	100	13	29	58	0	100
Adequate number of bathrooms	17	35	48	0	100	23	39	39	0	100
Adequate kitchen facilities or food provided	25	16	33	25	100	42	16	42	0	100
Adequate air conditioning	24	38	13	25	100	90	0	10	0	100
Adequate recreational facilities	38	33	29	0	100	3	39	35	23	100
Satisfied with the cleanliness of the facility	30	30	29	11	100	3	13	10	74	100
Adequate space for storing valuables	11	22	30	37	100	45	29	26	0	100
Adequate transportation	86	3	11	0	100	39	39	23	0	100

**Table 5C: Workers' views on various aspects of living conditions, by gender (%)**

Topic	Males (N=62)					Females (N=32)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Adequate number of persons per room	23	32	45	0	100	9	9	81	0	100
Adequate number of bathrooms	24	48	27	0	100	9	13	78	0	100
Adequate kitchen facilities or food provided	29	21	24	26	100	34	6	59	0	100
Adequate air conditioning	58	10	6	26	100	22	56	22	0	100
Adequate recreational facilities	31	35	23	11	100	19	34	47	0	100
Satisfied with the cleanliness of the facility	32	15	5	48	100	0	44	56	0	100
Adequate space for storing valuables	26	24	13	37	100	16	25	59	0	100
Adequate transportation	71	19	11	0	100	69	9	22	0	100

**Table 5D: Workers' views on various aspects of living conditions, by skills level (%)**

Topic	Low-skilled M+F (N=62)					Mid-skilled M+F (N=32)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Adequate number of persons per room	11	19	69	0	100	31	34	34	0	100
Adequate number of bathrooms	15	37	48	0	100	28	34	38	0	100
Adequate kitchen facilities or food provided	35	13	39	13	100	22	22	31	25	100
Adequate air conditioning	55	29	16	0	100	28	19	3	50	100
Adequate recreational facilities	24	35	29	11	100	31	34	34	0	100
Satisfied with the cleanliness of the facility	15	21	29	35	100	34	31	9	25	100
Adequate space for storing valuables	26	21	29	24	100	16	31	28	25	100
Adequate transportation	68	16	16	0	100	75	13	13	0	100

## PART 6: MIGRANTS' OVERALL APPRECIATION OF MIGRATION TO DUBAI

### 6.1 Introduction

Leaving home for working and living in a foreign country is a decision that individuals make after a careful evaluation of the expected costs and benefits of their expatriation. Expectations play a critical role in the choice to migrate or to stay home. The overall evaluation of their migratory experience in Dubai and whether their initial expectations have been met or not are vital issues for migrants on which most are keen to engage.

At the beginning of each FGD, the discussion leader asked participants to describe why they chose to come to the UAE and, should they go back in time, would they still come knowing the actual conditions in the country and would they encourage or discourage friends to come to Dubai? In most FGDs but one, a vivid discussion took place around these questions, which also served to build trust within the group.

### 6.2 Diversity of migrants' experience from severe hardships to overall satisfaction

Should they have to decide in full knowledge of the facts, 40 per cent of the participants declare that they would still migrate (or recommend friends to migrate) to Dubai rather than stay home; 39 per cent expressed no particular opinion (plus 9 per cent belonging to a group of low-skilled women in the hospitality sector that held no discussion on this point); and only 12 per cent of the migrants responded negatively (Table 6).

**Table 6: Workers' response to the question on whether they would still come/encourage friends to come to Dubai (%)**

Group / Response		+	=	-	N/A	T
Total (N=94)		40	39	12	9	100
Sector	Hospitality - Both sexes (N=63)	43	37	8	13	100
	Construction - Males (N=31)	35	45	19	0	100
Gender	Males (N=62)	53	34	13	0	100
	Females (N=32)	16	50	9	25	100
Skills level	Low-skilled - Both sexes (N=62)	34	39	15	13	100
	Mid-skilled - Both sexes (N=32)	53	41	6	0	100

Low-skilled, male migrants employed on construction sites were those who expressed, in the strongest terms, dissatisfaction about their condition and a feeling that their expectations were not met. A Pakistani mason who arrived in Dubai three years ago summarises their view:

*“I wouldn’t come here again. Because if you want to settle with your wife and kids, you don’t have a salary to keep them [...] In this mason work, they make us work a lot and pay little. So, there are lots of difficulties.”*

Not only had migration brought severe hardships but, because it was misinformed, the decision to migrate resulted in missed opportunities at home, as expressed by another Pakistani construction worker:

*“I should not have come as my father and family are in Pakistan [...] I should have worked with my father there only.”*

For this migrant, the emotional cost of expatriation is not worth it, and he warns his fellow-citizens who may contemplate migrating to Dubai:

*“Stay in your country with your parents and family. Just try to earn so much that you can give them one meal. And the rest of the time spend it with them happily.”*

For another construction worker, a Bangladeshi citizen, the reality of working conditions in Dubai is an overwhelming deterrent in itself:

*“Only when you come here, you get to know about the job and timings. [...] I don’t think we would come back here if we knew all these details. We are not happy now.”*

While a number of low-skilled construction workers have the feeling they were not prepared for the severe difficulties they would encounter in Dubai and perhaps they made a wrong choice in leaving their countries, not all of them would tell the truth to relatives and friends at home. Resilience responds to hardships:

*“Before I came here, I thought Dubai is a big city and a very good place, but once here, I came to know how it is. [...] We can’t tell about all that at home [...] we can’t make our parents or wife or children tensed for us. We will take all the hardships to keep our family easy and happy.”*

Resilience may also overcome doubts about having made the correct choice. Other construction workers insisted that their decision to come to Dubai was ultimately right for the simple reason there was no real choice:

*“We have to come here. We need to earn money. Life is hard here, but we need to earn. I would do it again.”*

Or:

*“I would come again. I have a lot of expenses. I need to make my child study [...] I have to give money to my parents also.”*

Solidarity is a complementary response to hardships. Being integrated in local migrant communities of the same national origin alleviates some of the difficulties new migrants encounter when settling in Dubai, as expressed by an Indian construction worker willing to help fellow citizens:

*“If my friend has problems, then I would bring him here to help him. [...] When we came first, we were in a bad position. [...] If I call someone now, I would make sure they don't suffer the same way.”*

Several participants express the opinion that it is not the general situation in Dubai as much as a too low position in the occupational ladder that explains the hard time they have in this country. Insufficient skills and the way low-skilled workers are treated are a cause of strain.

An Indian construction worker said:

*“I would want to come here but after upgrading my skills [...] what I have learnt here in six years had I done it there and come, then it would have been better.”*

A Pakistani citizen put it almost the same way:

*“I will tell my friends that first you try in Pakistan. If you can't get anything there and if you have a good degree, then you come here. Only then can a person settle here.”*

Contrasting with negative views among construction workers, migrants employed in the hospitality sector tend to evaluate in overall positive terms their migratory experience in Dubai:

*“Once you come to Dubai, you don't want to go to another country. You want to come back here again.” (Bangladeshi taxi driver)*

*“When I returned from vacation in May, I put one statement in social media like going back. Dreams come true. This is Dubai!” (Nepali mid-skilled worker in hotel administration)*

*“I would say my point is safety and apart from that, it is a good life in Dubai.” (Filipino mid-skilled female worker in hotel management)*

*“It's nice and beautiful in Dubai. The most important is their government very disciplined. Little or no corruption if you compare with the Philippines. Here the law is very strong, no one can play” (Filipino male worker in a cleaning company)*

Gender is a critical dimension, however. While most male migrants (53 per cent) expressed an overall positive appreciation of Dubai, a majority of their female counterparts either remained neutral (50 per cent) or did not express any views (25). Only 16 per cent of the female participants were positive about being a migrant in Dubai.

### 6.3 What makes Dubai attractive to migrants?

Tables 6A-D provide the main positive factors given by migrants. Not all participants expressed an explicit opinion on each factor (on average around 30-40 per cent) but positive opinions outnumbered negative opinions.

#### ***Job opportunities***

Finding employment in Dubai is considered to be easy. Workers in both the hospitality and construction sectors share this view, men stressing it more often than women. A related view is that migrants already settled in the country facilitate job search for relatives and friends. Opinions expressed by migrants therefore corroborate the critical role played by networks in perpetuating migrant flows. Proximity to

home country (Indians), and the fact that migrants find in Dubai many fellow-citizens, is recognised as an attractive feature of Dubai. Abundance of job opportunities do not apply only to migrants' main occupation but also to secondary, part-time activities they may find once employed in the country, even though the latter may be illegal and may pose certain risks for the worker. Finally, those migrants who have multiple migratory experiences regard Dubai as the best choice in terms of employment opportunities, including when compared with major receiving countries in the West.

*"If you are going to Canada, you need to have all kinds of certificates and for people like us who have just completed 12th, it's really not easy. Dubai is a more friendly country." (Mid-skilled female worker in the hospitality sector)*

*"Life is good here [...] will definitely choose Dubai. For me, two things are very important. It is a Muslim country, plus I had some family members in Dubai. I have been in Germany as well. [...] I felt it was much better leaving Germany and come to Dubai." (Indian female worker in a cleaning company)*

*"It's good for business. I do some other type of work as well like mobile selling. [...] Go to friend's shop [...] have hobbies like visiting places which I do frequently [...] and I like. Dubai has very good rules and regulations [...] everything is good over here." (Indian mid-skilled worker in hotel management)*

It must be stressed that when migrants compare Dubai with other places, which they have either personally known or simply heard about, they express an informed opinion. Migrants are keen to keep aware of what's happening elsewhere:

*"We all have Wi-Fi; we get to know about the world from Wi-Fi. We can't see news on TV. We don't have time for that. We get to know everything from YouTube and Facebook." (Bangladeshi mason)*

### ***Safety in the public space***

A majority of migrants employed in the hospitality sector, women (56 per cent) as well as men (58 per cent) and mid-skilled (63 per cent) more than low-skilled (34 per cent), consider Dubai as a very safe place, in which many feel more secure than in their own country. Male workers in the construction sector do not share that view however, as 61 per cent of them remained neutral and 23 per cent did not have a conversation about safety.

In a lower proportion (26 per cent on average, 29 per cent in hospitality, and 19 per cent in construction), migrants value the existence of strict rules in Dubai, to which they attribute the security the Emirate offers to all individuals including the migrants.

*"It is safe here, especially for women." (female Filipino worker in a hotel)*

*If you are coming, then be a legal person in Dubai, strictly follow the rules. [...] Actually, these rules are for us and our safety." (Indian driver)*

*"From my experience, I went to other countries like Singapore and Hong Kong, the best place is Dubai because people are friendly. As long you have a salary, you enjoy your life, you can go anywhere with your friends, you are not afraid" (female Filipino worker in a hotel)*

### ***Freedoms***

In relation to security and the rules that keep public order, some migrants (23 per cent on average) put forward the variety of individual freedoms they enjoy in Dubai. Once again, this positive appreciation is more frequent among hospitality (30 per cent) than construction (10 per cent) workers. It is also more frequent among women (38 per cent) than men (10 per cent) whatever the skills level.

*“When I go home to the Philippines, I say to my relatives that Dubai is very clean, very peaceful, and they follow the laws and rules.” (low-skilled Filipino female worker in a hotel)*

*“The rules are strict here and they are good [...] In case of an emergency, you just take your passport and you can go to the airport and leave.” (Indian taxi driver)*

*“There is freedom here [...] you can get a job, a place to stay.” (Filipino male worker employed by a cleaning company)*

*“This is a Muslim country, but we can dress however we want. There is freedom.” (low-skilled Indian female worker in a hotel)*

### ***Leisure and urban environment***

A migrant’s day in Dubai is frequently spent largely on working and resting. But, for several of them, there is also free time for leisure and engaging in social life.

Another positive factor, mostly highlighted by migrants employed in the hospitality sector, is the beauty of Dubai’s urban landscape, its infrastructure, the diversity of shopping malls and entertainment facilities, most of which are open to everyone. A number of participants expressed the pride they take in living in such a modern city as Dubai.

*“Amazing. Can you imagine how they build the tallest building in the world? Everything that is impossible, here they can do it. They make a 119 hectares zoo recently. All what you want to see is only here in Dubai.” (Filipino male waiter in a cruise company)*

In brief, a paradox seems to emerge from migrants’ overall evaluation of their experience. On the one side, their appreciation of working and living in Dubai ranges from bitter frustration and unhappiness to general satisfaction, in relation with the sector of employment (construction vs. hospitality) and the level of skills. On the other side, there is unchallenged recognition of several factors that make Dubai an attractive place for migrants.

Problems are many, however, and some of them among the most serious. But migrants faced with hardships and problems do not put the blame on Dubai per se as much as on the employer, and their specific conditions of working and living.

**Table 6A: Workers' reports on things they like about Dubai (%)**

Topic	Total (N=94)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T
Dubai safe and secure	44	49	0	7	100
Dubai offers freedoms other countries don't	23	60	0	17	100
Good (easy) job opportunities	39	52	0	9	100
Rules are strict and implemented well	26	33	0	41	100
Salary much higher than in home country	30	41	4	24	100
Ability to find part time, second jobs	14	46	16	24	100
Family/friends informed/found job	50	47	3	0	100
Family members living in Dubai	36	47	0	17	100
Many from same country in Dubai	28	48	0	24	100

**Table 6B: Workers' reports on things they like about Dubai, by sector (%)**

Topic	Hospitality - Both sexes (N=63)					Construction - Males (N=31)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Dubai safe and secure	57	43	0	0	100	16	61	0	23	100
Dubai offers freedoms other countries don't	30	57	0	13	100	10	65	0	26	100
Good (easy) job opportunities	37	51	0	13	100	45	55	0	0	100
Rules are strict and implemented well	29	33	0	38	100	19	32	0	48	100
Salary much higher than home country	37	46	5	13	100	16	32	3	48	100
Ability to find part time, second jobs	19	48	21	13	100	3	42	6	48	100
Family/friends informed/found job	51	49	0	0	100	48	42	10	0	100
Family members living in Dubai	40	48	0	13	100	29	45	0	26	100
Many from same country in Dubai	35	52	0	13	100	13	39	0	48	100

Table 6C: Workers' reports on things they like about Dubai, by gender (%)

Topic	Males (N=62)					Females (N=32)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Dubai safe and secure	37	52	0	11	100	56	44	0	0	100
Dubai offers freedoms other countries don't	16	58	0	26	100	38	63	0	0	100
Good (easy) job opportunities	44	56	0	0	100	31	44	0	25	100
Rules are strict and implemented well	23	40	0	37	100	31	19	0	50	100
Salary much higher than home country	26	44	6	24	100	38	38	0	25	100
Ability to find part time, second jobs	11	35	16	37	100	19	66	16	0	100
Family/friends informed/found job	60	35	5	0	100	31	69	0	0	100
Family members living in Dubai	40	47	0	13	100	28	47	0	25	100
Many from same country in Dubai	24	52	0	24	100	34	41	0	25	100

Table 6D: Workers' reports on things they like about Dubai, by skills level (in %)

Topic	Low-skilled - Both sexes (N=62)					Mid-skilled - Both sexes (N=32)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T	+	=	-	N/A	T
Dubai safe and secure	34	55	0	11	100	63	38	0	0	100
Dubai offers freedoms other countries don't	26	61	0	13	100	19	56	0	25	100
Good (easy) job opportunities	37	50	0	13	100	44	56	0	0	100
Rules are strict and implemented well	21	29	0	50	100	34	41	0	25	100
Salary much higher than home country	23	39	2	37	100	44	47	9	0	100
Ability to find part time, second jobs	13	61	15	11	100	16	16	19	50	100
Family/friends informed/found job	47	48	5	0	100	56	44	0	0	100
Family members living in Dubai	32	42	0	26	100	44	56	0	0	100
Many from same country in Dubai	23	40	0	37	100	38	63	0	0	100

## PART 7: PROBLEMS FACED AND ACTION RECOMMENDED BY MIGRANTS

### 7.1 Introduction

Migrants are in the best position to know what is good and what is bad for them. Listening to their voice is necessary for recommending action on their working and living conditions. At the end of each FDG, by way of wrap up, participants were asked to highlight problems that particularly compromise their working and living conditions. They were also asked to suggest possible solutions for improving their working and living conditions and whether they felt they could approach their consulate or any other agency for help if needed. Discussions about these issues are summarised in Tables 7A and 7B.

**Table 7A: Problems especially pointed out by workers (%)**

Problem	Total (N=94)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T
Salary not received in full and on time	43	0	9	49	100
Initial misinformation about salary and job	26	26	0	49	100
Threat to cancel visa/lose job if complain	29	46	1	24	100
Rising cost of living, especially VAT, rents	30	62	0	9	100

Respondents were asked to highlight specific problems they felt compromised their working and living conditions. As shown in Table 7A, 43 per cent complained about not receiving their salary in full and on time, 30 per cent complained about rising cost of living, and 26 per cent complained about initial misinformation about their salary and their job. About 29 per cent of all participants stated that they would be afraid to complain because their job and visa could be terminated if they did so. Some of the major problems identified by respondents were as follows.

### 7.2 No help available

Several respondents felt that they could not get help from anyone, including their embassy, employer, or labour courts, as illustrated below. The labour courts are expected to settle disputes between workers and employers in the most fair and amicable manner possible.

*“We don’t get help from there (embassy). They will ask for money from us. We will still not get the help. If we were rich, the embassy people would come behind us. They don’t even look at us because we are poor people.” (Bangladeshi male construction worker)*

*“I once tried to speak to the manager, I called him, but he hung up my call and said don’t call me again otherwise I will cancel your visa. So once even I told him if you want to cancel then go ahead and send me cancellation right now, why do you threaten me always like this. If we make a case and go to labour, and if our company gets to know about it, then they will make us sit in the camp and not let us work, and God knows it might take so many months, even embassy will not help us if we go to labour court here. Then it would create a lot of problem for us. They will not let us work or give us work, they will also stop our salaries. So where will we eat from? How much money will we ask our relatives to send us from India?” (Indian male construction worker)*

*“Somebody tells me there is law for those also, there is law for kafeel also, there is law for owner also, there is law for everybody. But if you go to this ministry or you go to any, the people over there, they are rude, they don’t listen, they don’t guide you, they will tell you, you go to counter number 4, counter 4 will say, go back to the reception and ask them, and everybody knows, counter 4 person also knows, what to do, the reception guys also know what all to do, but they will not help. Here they think they are busy and the person who come, he is not too honest because you can tell from his attire that he is not wearing kandura or he is not looking big guy, then it is not needed to listen to him. They will not listen to and they will not try to solve the issues. Law is there, I know, law is there but the people...” (Mid-skilled construction worker)*

*“I (could complain) in labour court but that is not very easy, and they might put a ban on you, and they might cancel my visa so it can be a problem for me.” (Low skilled Indian female hospitality worker)*

### 7.3 Rising cost of living

About 30 per cent of the participants felt that the rising cost of living, especially the newly imposed Value Added Tax (VAT) of 5 per cent on all consumables, put a dent in the worker’s income, since they had to pay tax on even small consumer goods such as soft drinks or a cup of tea.

*“Nowadays, I heard that taxes are going to come in this country, so we will have more expenses and salary will be the same, so this must be checked and rectified” (Mid-skilled hospitality worker)*

### 7.4 Misinformation by intermediaries

Among the problems, misinformation about the salary was mentioned by 26 per cent of all participants, exemplified by the opinions of some workers:

*“...Many times for the salary, I was upset, very upset and very disappointed, because in Indonesia they said we paying 2,500 but here only 1,300. So really I’m very sad because I pay more money in Indonesia almost around more than 5,000.” (Indonesian low-skilled female hospitality worker)*

*“He promised me a cashier job but now I am working here only as a helper and messenger. They give us accommodation and transport also but no food.” (Mid-skilled female hospitality worker)*

In addition to the above, some groups are faced with problems unique to them. For example, the Bangladeshi workers pointed out that there was a ban on Bangladeshi visas to the UAE, which not only prevented new migrants from coming but also made it impossible for the Bangladeshi workers in Dubai to gain occupational mobility within the country, as illustrated by the following example:

*“New visa is completely closed but those who are staying here are also not allowed to change employer because of visa issues. I have got a new job, salary was good but because of visa issue, I could not change my job.” (Mid-skilled Bangladeshi hospitality worker)*

## 7.5 Suggested solutions

The two main suggestions about improvements were related to increase in salary according to experience and payment of overtime, expressed by 60 per cent of all respondents. Improvement in living conditions by reducing crowding in rooms and bathrooms was suggested by 34 per cent of participants. Regarding the salary increase and better accommodation, some of the following suggestions were given

*“I feel that considering the present circumstances, our basic salary should be 2,000. Whether we get overtime on top of it or not, it is another question. But 2,000 has to be our starting salary.” (Pakistani construction worker)*

*“Increase of wages because the wages is too small, and next year they will implement the VAT; also yearly bonus.” (Filipino male hospitality worker)*

*“Salary should be raised, and the timings should be less, not 12 hours; at least they should appreciate what we are doing by increasing our salaries. At least ten per cent should be increased after working for three years; some increment and salary should be given; overtime and bonus should be given or appreciation should be given like star of the month etc., and the timings should be followed according to the agreement.” (Low-mid skilled female hospitality worker)*

*“Less people per room, should have cleaners to clean the facility because most do not have the time to do so after their shift. Provide cleaning products if they are doing the cleaning themselves. Groceries are stolen; suggesting that the company should provide each person with groceries, so they don't steal each other's food.” (Low-skilled Indian female hospitality worker)*

Active monitoring of working and living conditions by the Dubai government was suggested by some respondents in each of the three groups, as some examples illustrate

*“Dubai Municipality must come and check the things from ground level, the worker and their working conditions, whether they are happy or not, what are the obstacles they are facing. They must come and check regularly because nowadays too many people are coming to Dubai for opportunities. So, whether they have placed in proper management company or they are in trouble etc. The Dubai Municipality should have an eye on private sector as well for increment, bonus. They should keep an eye on the employer whether they are increasing their salaries or not.” (Mid-skilled male hospitality worker)*

*“You know (checking) the accommodation condition should be the duty of government. Without complaint, the municipality should do inspections, they will come and talk to people to see if everything is okay. It's not the responsibility of the labour to go and complain, they should be like they make inspection, they go monthly or weekly, they will go check if it's okay or not.” (Mid-skilled construction worker)*

In addition to these suggestions, six respondents recommended that a medical attendant should be provided in the camp/accommodation. Two persons recommended that the passport of the workers should be kept in the camp, with the management, in case an emergency arose and a worker had to travel. One respondent suggested that worker's opinions about the company should be elicited through voting.

**Table7B: Solutions to problems recommended by workers (in %)**

Recommended action	Total (N=94)				
	+	=	-	N/A	T
Need labour inspections by government	10	24	0	66	100
Should have voting in camp	5	3	0	91	100
Passport should stay in camp	2	6	0	91	100
Appoint trained health care professional in camp/assign health benefits or insurance	10	23	0	67	100
Improve living facilities	34	32	0	34	100
Pay for overtime/salary increase with experience	60	32	0	9	100

## PART 8: STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS

### 8.1 The stakeholders

For this report, a diverse set of stakeholders were interviewed, ranging from representatives of the UAE government to those of governments of the countries of origin of migrants and related actors including recruitment and training companies/organisations, human resource managers of businesses, international organisations, and advocacy organisations.

These stakeholders had different and often opposing views which, of course, reflect their divergent objectives which range from improving the situation of migrant workers to maximising profit. Actually, stakeholders often have competing objectives and, therefore, a trade-off needs to be found, e.g., regulating and limiting the size of the foreign workforce while ensuring reasonable working and living conditions (UAE government officials); placing as many as possible nationals in the UAE and assuring that all these nationals receive adequate salary and treatment (labour attachés); hiring as many workers as necessary with the required skills, minimising the costs of labour, and fully abiding by the law (business).

Thus, stakeholders have perspectives that differ from those of individual low-income workers who generally have limited school education and are in the UAE primarily to earn an income and remit it back to their families usually left behind in the country of origin.

All stakeholders were asked their opinion about the UAE legislation relevant for low-income foreign workers, whether there had been positive developments over the recent years, and what are the issues that most urgently need to be addressed.

See Appendix A Methodology for more detailed information on how many stakeholders were interviewed, how they were identified, and what questions were asked.

## 8.2 General assessment

Generally speaking, labour attachés agree that in recent years legislation for foreign labour has improved—including labour mobility within the country, WPS and the domestic workers law—even if the labour law itself is rather dated. This assessment is shared by many others, including persons working for international organisations and advocacy organisations and researchers.

At the same time, however, labour attachés share the opinion that much more should be done in terms of introducing legislation and especially in terms of effective implementation, effective control, accessible and effective redress for workers, and effective sanctioning of those who do not observe the law (employers, recruiters).

In interviews, human resource managers complained about the burden put on them by sometimes unannounced new regulations (e.g., the need to produce a certificate of good conduct). However, there are also human resource managers in the construction sector who complained that contract substitution is widespread and that this creates unfair competition among companies between those that practice contract substitution and those that don't.

A number of stakeholders cited the “culture of possession” among employers in the UAE in their attitudes towards foreign workers which has a negative impact on their situation. This could manifest themselves in statements such as: I hired you, you get a good deal, so you have to be available and do not complain or ask to do less or be paid more. Stakeholders said that this is specially but by no means exclusively true in the domestic work sector but also in smaller companies and cannot be changed by only adopting laws.

A senior official of the UAE government said that the country continued to introduce new regulations such as the Decree 764/2015 Ministry of Labour-approved standard employment contracts; Decree 765/2015 Rules and Conditions for granting a permit to a worker for employment by a new employer; 766/2015 Rules and Conditions for granting a permit to a worker for employment by a new employer as well as 739/2016 Regarding the Protection of Wages. However, the official said also that more needed to be done in several domains, including making sure that the workers have the necessary skills for their work in the UAE.

A former employee of the UAE government also provided data that would corroborate the progress made by the introduction of new laws. For example, according to official figures in 2017, 3.7 million workers were registered under the WPS and the cases of changing employers (sponsorship transfers) rose from 28,700 in 2004 to 170,000 in 2014.

New UAE legislation is often triggered by specific concerns of the UAE policy makers about the UAE economy and society, not because of concern for the foreign workers. For example, the introduction of the Tadbeer Centers in early 2018 to manage the recruitment of domestic workers was, according to another senior UAE official, triggered by national concern that only “suitable non-violent domestic workers” would be hired, and not to provide more guarantees to domestic workers.

One former officer of the MoHRE said that there are too many decrees and regulations that seek to adapt to new situations implying that this should be superseded by a new comprehensive law eliminating both outdated parts as well as contradictions. The same officer also observed that an increasing number

of companies that originally were registered outside Free Zones are now moving into the Free Zones which are under the control of the Ministry of Interior (MoI). Such movement allows them greater flexibility and fewer constraints since they are not regulated by MoHRE, and labour inspectors would have no access, potentially allowing for a greater exploitation of low-skilled workers.

### 8.3 Recruitment

Most countries with large numbers of their nationals working in the lower income jobs in the UAE (e.g., India and the Philippines) have specific regulations and official channels through which workers may be recruited for foreign employment. Their regulations, among other things, foresee minimum wages for their nationals in order to be authorised to migrate (e.g., Dh 1,500 for Filipinos) and contracts to be approved by them. These are put in place to enhance the working conditions and reduce exploitation.

The Philippines, which has nationals with high demand in the UAE but also a strong determination to protect its migrant workers, banned its workers being recruited to the UAE (and other GCC countries) because of the lack of guarantees against abuse. A UAE delegation visited Manilla and, according to a senior MoHRE official, an MoU has been signed, but the ban has not yet been lifted by the Philippines.<sup>9</sup>

It is therefore no surprise that at least some countries of origin complain about the fact that one can come into Dubai on a tourist visa and transform it into a work visa (actually there are said to be travel agents in Dubai who especially target migrant workers who do not want to or cannot follow the official channels). For some countries, especially those with a ban on working in the UAE, the number of workers that enter the UAE on a tourist visa is estimated at 90 per cent. On the other hand, other Asian countries such as Vietnam claim that as little as 5 per cent of their workers do not follow the official channels. Workers who do come in on a tourist visa are generally known to accept contracts that are not approved by their countries' authorities and often accept less pay and potentially worse conditions and have less protection.

Payment by workers for recruitment is widespread according to virtually all stakeholders, including the officials of the sending as well as the host country. UAE government officials generally claim that these problems occur exclusively in the countries of origin while some representatives of the countries of origin, though to some extent acknowledging that there may be problems in their countries for those who migrate outside the official channels, are convinced that the problems are generated by UAE employers and recruiters and are possible because of the lack of effective control.

Besides the protection of nationals from exploitation and abuse, labour attachés generally also have the mandate to promote the employment of their nationals abroad. This is especially the case of countries with large populations and high unemployment. These countries face the challenge to increase the hiring of their nationals in the UAE where the supply of low- and mid-skilled migrant workers is bigger than the demand. Other countries are facing a ban on new hiring of their nationals in the UAE (e.g., Bangladesh) and their governments seek to (at least partially, gradually) lift the ban on the hiring of their nationals. Last but not least, there are countries that seek entry into the UAE labour market. For

9. There are studies arguing that such bans are discriminatory (against women) and counterproductive in that they encourage irregular migration and the risks associated with it. See the ILO research on migration bans in Nepal: [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/publications/WCMS\\_428686/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/publications/WCMS_428686/lang--en/index.htm). See also: [https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS\\_555974/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_555974/lang--en/index.htm).

example, Afghanistan seeks to open up the UAE labour market to place 2,000 of its nationals through an agreement with the World Bank without putting any specific wages or other conditions.

A major concern for the UAE government is to make sure that the foreign workers have the necessary skills to work efficiently in the positions they take up. For this, it engaged in pilot projects with main countries of origin of migrants with the objective to achieve verifiable skills through training and certification. A number of these projects were reportedly aborted because of demands for minimum wages by the countries of origin. In principle, the workers enrolled in such programmes would have benefits in terms of upskilling and salaries. The UAE argument is that without cooperation with countries of origin, effective upskilling cannot be achieved. Thus, a number of recruitment, training and other companies have stepped into pre-departure and post-arrival orientation as well as training and certification to make sure that workers have the necessary skills and fit well into the requirements of the UAE labour market. Some stakeholders argue that while workers may benefit from such measures, there is a great risk that the costs of being recruited will increase.

In general, human resource managers of companies abide by the rules but favour less regulation instead of more. For any new regulation that is adopted, they want the legislator to make sure that it does not add an unreasonable burden on the recruitment and management of workers. As mentioned previously, human resource managers of some companies actually prefer more control to punish those who do not abide by the rules in order to create a level-playing field.

## **8.4 Wages and payments**

Representatives of countries of origin confirm many of the issues that we have learned from the FGDs:

- Salary deductions are frequently made from the amount agreed (in the contract) (e.g., Dh1,200 salary minus Dh400 for various items such as food allowance, transportation, etc.)
- Timely payment is a major issue for many workers; many are not paid on time. This seems to be especially true in the domestic work sector but also in cleaning services which partially have taken over from in-house domestic services.
- Working hours are often longer than those specified in the contracts.
- And even with many workers registered with WPS, many abuses (generally deductions) are taking place.

The countries of origin favour the introduction of minimum wages. In fact, an increasing number of countries have introduced their own minimum wages following the lead of the Philippines (Dh1,500). The UAE business community, on the other hand, is against the introduction of minimum wages. Some stakeholders commented that the MoHRE is not necessarily against its introduction but does not have sufficient motivation and/or authority to push it forward. A senior official at MoHRE stated that it is mainly interested in attracting skilled workers and for those incentives are given while minimum wages are not relevant.

## 8.5 Control

Effective inspection is considered to be key and this is missing, according to both representatives of countries of origin and senior UAE officials. Also, a senior lawyer of an international law firm stated that there were only about 100 active labour inspectors in Dubai, approximately 60 of them focussing exclusively on health and safety issues, and not on any contractual issue). According to a senior UAE official, the UAE government is estimated to have a maximum 400 labour inspectors for the entire country catering to labour inspection needs of approximately 300,000 companies and five million workers (these do not include companies and workers in the Free Zones which fall under the MoI).

According to another senior UAE government official, however, the relatively small numbers of inspectors vis-à-vis the number of companies and workers are not an issue because of “smart inspection” using various datasets that would flag high risk companies, which would then be investigated. The same stakeholder, however, admitted that in the spring of 2018, the lack of data sharing by various ministries and agencies was still a main obstacle to implementing smart inspection. Finally, the salaries of labour inspectors, according to yet another official, are low by UAE government standards and the positions are not very desirable among Emiratis which, according to our interlocutor, may result in few inspectors having the necessary skills for effective inspection, let alone for “smart inspection.” The official who first spoke about ‘smart inspection’ said that work with the ILO aims at upgrading labour inspection.

One labour attaché mentioned that the chances of problems for low-income workers were higher in smaller companies than in larger, international ones. For example, larger companies have lockers and do not retain passports. Smaller companies often retain them (for safety) but occasionally use this as blackmail. Furthermore, the conditions in the hospitality sector are considered generally better than in the construction sector.

These statements seem to be at least partially contradicted by one stakeholder working in a large international firm that provides advice to foreign firms that invest in Dubai, often making agreements with local partners that operate as franchisers. According to the lawyer, the compliance rate with international standards that these companies have to apply is “close to zero.”

## 8.6 Redress

A former official at the MoHRE cited the following figures in 2014. There were 89,442 labour disputes, an estimated 2 per cent of the persons falling under the MoHRE. For 80 per cent, a solution was found through the Tasheel and the mediation section at the MoHRE while almost 20 per cent (17,808) went to the federal court. Tasheel is a public-private initiative which takes care of many aspects of the employment of private sector workers, including the complaint section.

Some of the issues that were brought up by stakeholders are as follows:

- Redress takes a lot of time and determination on the part of the worker and the labour attachés.
- Issues are more problematic with influential national business owners who may even not show up in court when a case is brought against them and there is no police intervention against them.
- Labour courts work well but implementation and enforcement are often not fast or effective.

- In case of complaints, labour attachés can only refer to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) which has to decide whether to refer issues to the MoHRE or the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Labour attachés can only intervene directly with the employer if he has the same nationality.
- These procedures take too much time and therefore workers need support from the representation of their countries or work irregularly since the worker is without income.

## **8.7 Relationship of UAE government with labour attachés**

The UAE government and the governments of the countries of origin of migrants, as demonstrated in this section, both have interests to cooperate with their counterpart on a number of issues. While multilateral cooperation exists in the form of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD), the preferred way for both sides is bilateral agreements. However, agreements are not easily reached since the demands of the parties are not often accepted by the counterparts.

While relations exist between the MoHRE and the labour attachés, formally the labour attachés are supposed to have relations only with MoFA. There are no regular meetings between labour attachés and the MoFA or MoHRE concerning the foreign workers.

The various UAE ministries and agencies have all the data relating to foreign nationals. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has entry/exit data; Emirates Identity Authority (EIDA, an independent federal authority) has all civil data on foreign nationals' dealings; MoHRE has all data on employment (but not of the workers employed in the free zones). However, only the approximate total figure is shared upon request of the ambassador or labour attaché, while no data on sector of employment or other information is provided.

Labour attachés observed that the government of the UAE does not inform them when new laws are discussed and approved which would affect mainly, if not exclusively, their nationals and do not inform them when they enter into force (e.g., the Tadbeer Centers that were established in early 2018 to channel recruitment of domestic workers, cleaners and other service workers).

Countries which saw an increase in the number of their citizens working in the UAE recently have appointed, for the first time, a labour attaché and may have a particularly high need of assistance.

Thus, the labour attachés favour the establishment of a focal point at the MoHRE and regular consultations.

## **8.8 Stakeholder suggestions for fixing problems**

Suggestions made by various stakeholders include the following:

- Establish a minimum wage for the various jobs. The UAE government and the business sector both oppose this.
- Stop the possibility to enter with a tourist visa which can be transformed easily into a work visa and allows for entering the labour market on a lower pay, less guarantees and without getting on the radar of the country of origin.

- Increase the number of inspectors, train them better, pay them better, and provide them with all necessary hardware and software as well as legal means.
- Review, and improve, the redress system of Tasheel and mediation at the MoHRE.
- Adopt a law so that workers will continue to be paid in full when they start a procedure against their employer until the case has been decided and executed.
- Make sure that foreign franchising companies will be able to enforce international standards and that national franchisers abide by them.
- Consult countries of origin when designing new laws or, at least make sure that they receive them as soon as possible with explanations.
- Training and certification may be a good development but needs to be monitored and, above all, the costs should not be devolved to the workers.
- Create a focal point at the MoHRE where labour attachés can make inquiries.
- Apply the labour law and regulations to the Free Zones.
- Set up a committee of MoHRE and the labour attachés which meets every month to review cases and issues.

## PART 9: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

The GCC states and the UAE, in particular, are going through a period of deep changes, several of which could impact their migrant workforce. Internally, economic developments—from those temporarily boosting the demand for a migrant workforce such as Expo 2020, to those potentially limiting that demand in the longer term such as the financial crisis of the early 2010s and the collapse of oil prices that started at the end of 2014, and regional tensions—favour the emergence among Gulf rulers of a new vision of the labour market and the role of the private sector which employs almost all the migrant workers. Externally, steps taken by international organisations to reform the governance of labour migration, efforts made by human rights organisations to highlight and improve the situation of the lower segments of the workforce, as well as the general atmosphere of questioning created by the wave of uprisings across the entire Arab region, instil a new spirit for openness and changing the status quo.

Some reforms have already seen the light of day, such as the Wage Protection Systems (WPS) through which the obligation to pay wages by traceable bank transfers instead of cash payments intends to counteract abusive practices of late or incomplete payments by employers (Jureidini 2018). Potentially far-reaching changes are emerging with governments challenging the *kafala* and contemplating its abolition despite the attachment of citizens to a system that brings them benefits (Diop & al. 2018). In various aspects, a process of top-down transformation has begun. However, that process is not easy to implement and meets various obstacles including the lack of appropriate tools to implement and monitor policies in the face of resistance by private sector employers to change practices that are profitable to them.

Our survey was conducted at a critical moment (last quarter of 2017–first quarter of 2018) when changes may have been triggered but, in most cases, too recently or too softly to affect the actual working and living conditions of a majority of low-skilled migrant workers. The views collected during 12 FGDs with 94 low-income migrants employed in the construction and hospitality sectors reflect the reality of their experience. While the sample is too small to quantify conclusions, it reveals at the same time common features and differences in the experience of migrants and their evaluation of their experience.

In addition, various UAE-based stakeholders were interviewed: officials of the UAE government, representatives of countries of origin, managers of business (including construction, hospitality, recruitment, training and certification) as well as officials working for international organisations and advocacy organisations. They provided their respective views on the issues related to the living and working conditions of the migrant workers and provided additional factual information. This report also benefitted from the exchanges with fellow researchers.

A quantitative analysis of the transcripts of FGDs complemented by selected quotations of the workers' words and the views of strategic stakeholders enables the following general conclusions.

Migrants experience hardships, some of them severe, at the workplace and in the camp or flat where they are accommodated. Yet, their overall evaluation is more often rather positive (40 per cent) than negative (12 per cent). This reflects a fundamental reality that transpires from discussions held with them: given the situation they left behind and are likely to face back in the home country, the hardships in Dubai are probably perceived as less severe. This is especially true for migrants employed in the hospitality sectors than in the construction sector, especially if they work in large companies, for males than for females, and for mid-skilled than low-skilled workers.

We found several discrepancies between the legal framework provided by the government to regulate the working and living conditions of migrants and the lived experiences of the workers. For example, the number of hours of work specified in the law is 8-9, which is exceeded in 54 per cent cases. Also, the law requires that workers must be paid on time to avoid severe penalties such as the company being put on a high-risk list; yet delayed payments were reported by more than half of construction workers as well as females employed in the hospitality sector.

A majority reported that contracts are violated in terms of number of hours 'promised' vs. actually demanded, and they are asked to work longer hours than they expected or were told. About 40 per cent of all workers, 55 per cent of construction workers, and 47 per cent of females were not paid any overtime for the extra hours worked. The contract usually does not carry any details of overtime payments, despite the clear guidelines provided for overtime payment in the law.

Those employed by small companies in construction or hospitality have worse working and living conditions than those employed in large companies. The latter seem to be more satisfied with the timing of salary payment as well as their accommodation and food. However, a majority (60 per cent) felt that the salary should be increased, and a regular system of salary increase according to experience should be instituted, along with adequate overtime payments.

Among hospitality workers, females report the hardest working as well as living conditions compared with males; about 47 per cent of females were dissatisfied with their working conditions and 41 per cent

with their living conditions. Larger proportions of females reported that they lived in crowded rooms and shared a bathroom with as many as 12 or more persons, resulting in unhealthy conditions.

Most are happy with transport facilities as well as with air conditioning in their accommodation. However, a few construction workers reported very long waiting time while they waited for transportation to and from work.

Salary is frequently less than was 'promised.' It is unclear whether the respondents are told the details about the deductions from the total sum that they are promised, or are misinformed by intermediaries resulting in misperception on the part of prospective migrants. This appears to be especially so in the case of females.

Most workers sign a contract at home as well as in Dubai. They usually are unable to read the one in Dubai since it is in Arabic as required by the law; some were probably unable to read the one in their home country either. Hence verbal communication about terms is vital, and inaccurate information seems to be widespread.

Inaccurate information about the terms and conditions is often provided by intermediaries, whether relatives or recruitment agents.

Respondents' expectations are often not met, since they were provided a rosier picture of the working and living conditions than they find upon arrival in Dubai. However, a majority evaluate Dubai as a work destination in highly positive terms and they would still choose to come back and encourage their friends and relatives to do so.

One example of potentially good legislation but poor observance is WPS which was introduced in 2009 as the first GCC country. Among the workers we studied, about fifty percent were paid in cash, and not through the bank. Furthermore, even in cases where their dues are transferred to the workers' personal bank account, frequently camp/company staff withdraws money for them, generally charging a commission. Statistics on how many workers effectively have a bank account to which all the payments are made (and withdrawn by the worker himself/herself) are not publicly available. But even these figures would not be able to tell how many workers actually manage their account in full and how many do not.

From stakeholder interviews, we have learned that the redress system does not work sufficiently well. The system including the Tasheel complaint section, the labour arbitration court and the Federal Court on paper protects workers but de facto workers are not sufficiently informed about these institutions and do not have the instruments or skills to navigate the system. With or without legal assistance, the system is too costly and even if the outcome eventually is in favour of the workers, takes too much time. Often workers do not start a complaint but even if they start one they may not get the redress (generally payments) and may have to leave the UAE without them. Workers frequently said that they would be afraid to complain since they were convinced that they might lose their job if they lodged a complaint with the authorities.

Another major concern are the finances of the workers. Low-income workers seem to accept the fact that they pay substantial fees to be recruited and that it takes them on average one year to pay off their debts. This issue is not sufficiently addressed by companies, countries of origin or the UAE.

But also beyond the recruitment costs, workers have other financial challenges. Often, they are paid less than originally agreed, they are not paid extra or not paid at all for overtime, they are charged fees they should not be charged, the pay for expensive medical and other certificates while their income may not have risen for years, even after contract renewal. In addition, the cost of living in the UAE has continuously been rising, and one element of that is the introduction of VAT.

Last but not least, while not easy to tackle, the fact that the vast majority of workers feel disrespected at the workplace should be addressed.

## **Recommendations**

We have recommendations for three categories of stakeholders.

### ***A. Companies***

1. Abide by rules. Ensure that the terms of the contract are not violated, workers are not asked to work longer hours without adequate compensation, and workers are provided accommodation in line with the legal prescriptions.
2. Conduct internal monitoring and reporting to make sure that the workers are treated fairly.
3. Use good practices to advertise job openings to minimise misinformation and fraudulent hiring by intermediaries.

### ***B. Government of countries of origin***

1. Increase efforts to eliminate all recruitment costs incurred by workers to procure a job in the UAE.
2. Invest more in assistance to nationals, especially in cases where mediation between employers and the workers is needed, and any other kind of protection and aid is required.
3. Engage the UAE government through establishing bilateral agreements, with effective follow-up and implementation. Get as much data as possible on their nationals in the UAE.

### ***C. UAE government***

#### **General recommendations**

1. Critically review legislation and practices in the UAE using standards based on principles spelled out in the Global Compact on Migration (GCM).
2. Understand that adopting legislation is not sufficient to address issues.
3. Monitor adopted legislation using various sorts of data, do widespread unannounced labour inspections, and conduct (and commission) independent surveys among workers.
4. Publish much more data that would facilitate more research, better understanding, and more efficient and effective knowledge-based policies.
5. Engage proactively with stakeholders (business community and countries of origin of migrants) as well as with (independent) researchers.

### Specific recommendations

1. Evaluate critically and extensively the WPS system, going beyond counting the number of worker's bank accounts and the number of workers. Do confidential interviews with workers to ascertain effective implementation of the system. Check the entire procedure and electronic system for loopholes and eliminate them. Make sure that the results of the evaluation are used in reviewing the WPS system and the way inspections are done. Publish the results.
2. Evaluate of the entire redress system, focussing on all the cases brought to the complaint section of Tasheel; the arbitration (reconciliation) court; and to the Federal court as well as to the senior officials at the MoHRE who are responsible for the relations with representatives of the countries of origin. Focus on the number of cases; the type of complaint; the complainant; the employer; the outcome of the complaint, how much time it took from the first complaint to the final decision; how the worker sustained him- or herself; whether the workers actually obtained their dues and got justice. Make sure that a person who seeks information to file a complaint and those who effectively file a complaint are fully protected against any repercussions, including deportation.
3. Take labour inspection seriously by better training of inspectors, their monitoring and evaluation instruments, etc. Design a system that minimises the chances that labour inspectors can be corrupted without being detected. Make labour inspection accessible to workers. Protect whistle-blowers. After a seven days' delay in payment, make sure that immediate inspection is triggered. The data sharing by different agencies is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for effective implementation of what has been defined as "smart inspection." In the absence of data sharing alternatives should be developed.
4. Introduce legislation on overtime, clocking for measurement, and institute effective payment as part of the contract.
5. Make more efforts to ensure that workers understand their rights and the system of redress, also by designing a bilingual contract, and make sure the workers actually get a copy.
6. Review the system through which persons who entered on a tourist visa can change their visa into a work visa seeking to understand the impact on the workers' working and living conditions.
7. Explore whether the introduction of a minimum wage system would protect the most vulnerable workers better than the present system.
8. Design a mechanism of mandatory increase of salary every year on the basis of increasing cost of living and time on the job.
9. Review the documents needed by workers to obtain sick leave and other issues and the costs associated with them (including typing and translation) and seek to simplify and reduce costs.
10. Inspect and improve housing conditions, especially persons per room, room size, and cleaning, regularly and unannounced (not only as part of the check for obtaining the authorisation to recruit).

11. Compare what labour (and migration) related data that are published by the UAE and data that are published by European countries, the US, Canada as well as by other countries such as Singapore and design and implement a plan to make sure the existing gaps are closed.
12. Seek more cooperation with international agencies that aim at providing fair and rewarding working and living conditions for workers to reap the greatest benefits for the UAE as well as the migrant workers.
13. Finally, continuously conduct research to evaluate in-depth the living and working conditions of workers and publish the data.

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## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

### 1. Relevant previous studies

Scholars have used three sorts of methods to analyse the working and living conditions of low-income migrant workers in the Gulf: participant observation, semi-structured individual or group interviews and statistical surveys based on structured questionnaires.

One of the rare examples of participant observation is the study carried out by Bruslé in Qatar (2012). It provides a unique understanding of daily lives and practices of a group of migrants, but no systematic assessment of their working and living conditions.

A good example of semi-structured individual interviews, again in Qatar, can be found in Gardner, Pessoa and Harkness (2014). Twenty-five interviews with migrant workers who had some interaction with the justice system and 24 with experts provide a detailed picture of how low-income workers relate to justice. However, this material says nothing about the experience of those who could not or did not access to justice, and not much about the web of individual and contextual factors that bring migrants to the justice system.

Finally, a Qatari survey of 2012 (SESRI, 2015; Gardner, Pessoa, Diop, Al-Ghanim, and Le Trung 2013) provides detailed descriptive statistics of a large number of individual variables.<sup>10</sup> It contains only univariate analyses however: each variable is described separately by the distribution of the sample among broad categories and, for quantitative variables, the mean and standard error. Key questions on “what conjunction of individual and contextual factors result in what particular experience?” are not asked, and therefore not answered. The survey does not inform about processes. It provides a “portrait”: a high-resolution snapshot, but still a static picture.

### 1.2 Survey among migrant workers: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The first methodology that came to mind in our case was a statistical survey consisting of face-to-face structured or semi-structured interviews of a representative sample of migrants in each of the hospitality and construction sectors. Such a survey, however, proved not to be feasible in the context of the UAE. In this country, like in many others, conducting a statistical survey in the population is subject to administrative authorisation. For this, the survey’s questionnaire has to successfully pass through a detailed screening process. Tackling a highly sensitive topic—the situation of migrant workers in GCC states comes every now and then under the scrutiny of human rights organisations and the spotlight of global media—it appeared that the questionnaire could have been censored and the whole survey would be undoable. The best alternative option was to conduct focus group discussions (FGDs).

The FGD methodology we applied is expected to fill some of the gaps of the survey method as well as the case study method. While in some ways it has limitations with respect to quantitative surveys

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10. Age, nationality, marital status, number of dependent children, education, religion, duration of stay, recruitment process, fees paid in the process of obtaining first employment, passport withholding; moving to GCC despite being aware of difficulties; signing a contract prior to arriving to the GCC Housing Accommodations; Food Allowances; Transportation to and from work Weekly Rest Days; Annual Leave; Health & accident insurance provided by employer financial situation and Remittances; Amount of Money Sent in the Past 12 Months Remittance Methods; Satisfaction with the workplace; Level of migrant workers satisfaction towards wages / salaries, housing, food, transportation and medical care; Nationalities of workers’ friends; Future intentions.

(small samples gathered in FGDs do not allow detailed statistical analysis, or quantitative conclusions), it also has significant advantages:

- Interviewed persons have plenty of room for pointing out critical issues that a fixed questionnaire may have missed, as for example coping strategies of migrant workers;
- The collective dynamics and exchange of experience within a group of peers is well adapted to capture processes, and not only situations;
- Comparative analysis is built in the informed selection of individuals in such a way to maximise the internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity of the groups; in particular, the proposed distribution of FGDs by nationality / age / and skills level within the sectors of hospitality and construction work offers a good substitute for representativeness;
- Discussion procedures can be adjusted from one FGD to the next in order to maximise the quantity and quality of information collected.
- It is expected that the relatively informal and secure setting of the FGD would enable respondents to speak more freely than they might in a labour camp situation or a mall. The FGDs in our study were held at the office of the company which assisted us in doing the FGDs, a neutral and secure location where the participants could be brought for the group discussion accompanied by refreshments.

For the purpose of the present survey the hospitality sector -that caters for tourists, businessmen, expatriate communities, etc.- is defined in an inclusive way that covers: accommodation (hotels, bed and breakfast enterprises, and other places offering lodging); food and beverage (restaurants, fast food chains, coffee shops, ...); taxi companies; cleaning service providers. The hospitality sector employs a variety of workers from maintenance workers, servers, waiters, porters and cooks to marketing agents, administrative staff and managers. Our survey focuses on the lower and middle levels of skills.

#### *a) Sampling*

FGDs are carried out with a small number of participants in each group, ideally between seven and nine, in order to manage a sufficient time for each participant (10-20 minutes) without exceeding a total reasonable duration beyond which the participants' attention inevitably decreases (ca. 1.5-2 hours). On the other side, the number of FGDs was itself limited by budgetary constraints. In the case of Dubai, 12 FGDs were conducted with a total of 94 participants. Because this number is at the same time too small for allowing statistics but big enough for capturing a wide spectrum of situations, sampling is a crucial step.

A representative sample is usually constructed by randomly selecting individuals in a list containing all the eligible individuals in the population (sampling frame). Moreover, in order to allow meaningful univariate as well as multivariate analyses, a sample must have a sufficient size to be calculated on the basis of the desired accuracy of survey estimates. In our case, none of these two conditions is present: no list of all migrant workers in the hospitality and construction sectors in Dubai is available, and budget constraints limit the sample size to a number of individuals too small to make it possible to calculate basic statistics, beyond percentages.

In order to take full advantage of the FGD methodology, we opted for an informed sample based on our prior knowledge about the composition of the population by key characteristics, and insights on

their possible relationship with the migrant's working and living conditions. The resulting sample, while not fully representative of the population of interest, adequately reflects the diversity of situations.

### ***b) Distribution of FGDs***

Groups were constructed separately for the two sectors, hospitality and construction. Each group was assembled in order to build trust and stimulate frank and open discussions among all participants about sensitive issues. Sharing a language was a first condition: it could be the migrants' native tongue (then limiting the diversity of nationalities around the table) or English for those whose occupation presupposes a good knowledge of this language (mid-skilled workers in the hospitality sector). Being of the same sex and having the same level of skills were other conditions. Within these constraints, twelve groups of eight participants each (except FGD#3 and #4 which had only seven participants) were constructed as follows:

- FGD#1 Construction - Low Skilled - Pakistani - Males
- FGD#2 Hospitality - Mid Skilled - Mixed nationalities - Males
- FGD#3 Hospitality (Taxi Drivers & Related) - Low Skilled - Indian - Males
- FGD#4 Construction - Low skilled - Bangladeshi - Males
- FGD#5 Hospitality - Low / Mid Skilled - Mixed nationalities - Females
- FGD#6 Hospitality - Low / Mid Skilled - Filipino - Males
- FGD#7 Hospitality - Mid Skilled - Bangladeshi - Males
- FGD#8 Hospitality - Low Skill - Filipino - Females
- FGD#9 Construction - Low Skilled - Indian - Males
- FGD#10 Construction - Mid Skilled - Mixed Nationalities - Males
- FGD#11 Hospitality - Low Skilled - Indian - Females
- FGD#12 Hospitality - Low Skilled - South Asia - Females

### ***c) Screening***

Characteristics used for screening individuals were the following:

- Sex
- Age
- Family composition in the origin country (marital status and number of children)
- Duration of stay in the UAE
- Citizenship and native language
- Occupation
- Company's name and size
- Contract signed in the home country and in Dubai
- Salary paid in bank or by bank transfer
- Problems faced by migrants

Regarding the last two items in the above list, because the goal is to detect work-related problems faced by migrants and the first six groups happened to have no one with such problems, it was decided to add them as extra screening conditions for the remaining six FGDs. Inspired by the case-control approach, this could allow to understand what circumstances are conducive to the emergence of problems.

An example of screening is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Screening example: FGD#11 - Hospitality - Low Skilled - Indian - Females**

No of Children	Occupation	Education	Duration of stay in UAE	Age	Charged for recruitment	Signed contract in home country	Signed contract in Dubai	Difference between both contracts	Salary payment	Problem experienced
1	Helper	Finished Intermediate	1 to 3 Years	36	No	No	Yes		Bank	Yes (Accommodation & Salary)
2	Cleaner	No School Education	1 to 3 Years	35	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Bank	Yes (Duty timings, Salary & Accommodation)
2	House-keeper	Finished Intermediate	3 to 5 Years	40	Yes	No	Yes		Bank	Yes (Several Problems)
NA	Cleaner	Finished Elementary Education	1 to 3 Years	35	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Bank	Yes (Salary & Overtime)
2	Cleaner	Finished Intermediate	1 to 3 Years	39	Yes	No	Yes		Bank	Yes (Duty timings, Salary)
4	Cleaner	No School Education	1 to 3 Years	36	Yes	No	Yes		Bank	Yes (Salary)
NA	Helper	Finished Elementary Education	1 to 3 Years	29	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Cash	Yes (Leave, Salary & Overtime)
2	Cleaner	Finished Intermediate	1 to 3 Years	48	Yes	No	Yes		Cash	Yes (Salary)
NA	Cleaner	Finished Intermediate	3 to 5 Years	29	Yes	No	Yes		Bank	Yes (Duty timings & Overtime)

***d) Discussion guide***

At the beginning of each FGD, the discussion leader reads a statement explaining the academic purpose of the survey; who are the sponsors; what is researched (working and living conditions as they are perceived by the worker); for what purpose (understanding the reality and providing scientifically sound information for potentially improving situations); that their identity and answers will be protected; and then formally asking permission (informed consent) of each participant.

The discussion itself is structured along the following lines (see Discussion Guide in Appendix B):

- Part 1: Introduction of the participants
  - o Individual characteristics
  - o General appreciation of migration to Dubai
- Part 2: Working Conditions
  - o Recruitment: Who (agency, mediator...) and How (charges, contract ...)?
  - o Salary: Paid in full and on time? Cash or bank transfer? Allowances?
  - o Annual Leave: How many days? Paid? When?
  - o Working Hours: As stated in the contract? Overtime? Sick leave?
  - o Kafael: Evaluation? Negative incident? Change of kafael?
- Part 3: Housing and Living Conditions
  - o Level of Satisfaction
  - o Specific questions for construction workers / other categories
- Part 4: Engagement with Fellow Citizens
  - o Solving problems
  - o Referring to embassy ...
- Part 5: Conclusion
  - o What should be done to improve working and living conditions?

Each FDG was recorded (audio and video) with consent of the participants. The audio was transcribed in its original language and subsequently translated into English if the discussion was held in a migrant's native language. As soon as the transcripts and translations of an FGD was fully checked, the audio and video tapes were destroyed by the company (in addition, all records used to recruit the participants into the FGDs were destroyed immediately after the FGDs had taken place.

***e) Method of analysis***

FGD transcripts provide a wealth of qualitative information (a total of approx. 500 pages) that is used for the analysis in the two following ways: coding and quoting.

Coding: the entire content of each FGD transcript is transformed into a series of simple statements corresponding to the list of topics in the discussion guide. Opinions expressed by participants on each topic are interpreted and coded in three categories: positive (statement reflects satisfaction), neutral

(opinion expressed cannot be classified), and negative (statement reflects disapproval). It must be noted that not all participants in a given FGD express an opinion about each of the topics that were tackled in the course of the discussion, as some participants may stay silent if they consider the topic irrelevant to them or they generally agree with others but did not verbalize their opinion. Results of coding are summarised in our EXCEL database providing, by FDG and statement, the following indicators:

+ Number of positive views

= Number of neutral views

- Number of negative views

N/A Number of participants in FDGs in which the particular statement was not made.

Quoting: Whenever the words of the migrants themselves are quoted to reflect the exact opinions of the participants, we cite them verbatim as far as possible. Punctuation or minor addition is sometimes provided within brackets for achieving greater clarity of meaning.

### 1.3 Stakeholders' interviews

#### a) Objectives

The objectives of stakeholder interviews included:

- Obtaining information essential to making a comprehensive assessment of the working and living conditions of the low-income workers.
- Obtaining views of actors that formulate, implement and enforce policies or try to change them.
- Establishing direct relationships with the stakeholders as one of the main channels of outreach for communicating the findings and recommendations of the project.

#### b) Categories of stakeholders

Persons interviewed included representatives of:

- UAE governments (5)
- Countries with nationals working in the UAE (8)
- Hospitality and construction companies (4)
- International organisations (3)
- Recruitment companies (2)
- Training and certification agencies (2)
- International advocacy organisations (2)
- Law firms (1)
- Researchers (4)

It should be clarified that representatives of international organisations and international advocacy organisations were not formally interviewed (except one) but informal discussions were held with them

on the working and living conditions of low-income workers in the UAE.

While researchers may not be considered as stakeholders, they were also approached to discuss the focus of this research because they are very well informed about the subject and their insights could provide useful input.

***c) Identification of and access to stakeholders***

Institutions/persons to be interviewed were identified as follows:

- Using GLMM's address book.
- Looking at the institutional websites.
- Asking stakeholders for suggestions of other stakeholders to be interviewed.

On average the stakeholders who were approached for an interview accepted, notably the labour attachés and international stakeholders but others were more reluctant, notably the business sector.

***d) Interviews***

- The interviews with Dubai-based stakeholders were all conducted in person by a GLMM staff member who on a number of occasions was accompanied by a GLMM collaborator member.
- The interviews with non-Dubai-based stakeholders took place either in person by a GLMM staff member or via email or Skype.
- The interviews in Dubai took place between November 2017 and May 2018 and with some international actors not based in the UAE also in the period June-September 2018.
- All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity. Therefore, the names and institutions of stakeholders do not appear in this report. Also, the information contained in this report has been worded, as far as possible, in a manner that would not allow identification of individuals.

***e) Approach to stakeholders***

The approach used in the interviews included:

- Clarifying upfront: the identity of GLMM; the purposes of the research; that we focus not only on the UAE; that we attempt to interview all categories of stakeholders; that we also interview workers; that we also rely on written documents (laws), materials published by others.
- Guaranteeing anonymity of the interviewee (that we will not publish the list of interviewees nor quote or cite, nor allow for indirect identification).
- Asking four questions to all interviewees, tweaking them where necessary.
- Interfering as little as possible and letting interviewees speak freely.
- Picking-up new information and leads that were relevant for the project.
- Asking additional, specific questions, based upon what the interviewee said or what other interviewees had said in previous interviewees.
- Asking for other stakeholders who might be interested in being interviewed.

*f) Questions asked to stakeholders*

In all interviews the following four basic questions were asked:

- What is your general opinion about the working and living conditions of low-income workers in the UAE, especially of those in the construction and hospitality sectors?
- During the last 5-10 years, has the UAE made sufficient efforts to improve the working and living conditions of workers in the above two sectors.
- If you were to identify three major problems faced by workers in the above two sectors, what would they be?
- What else, from your perspective, is important to mention / focus on concerning the working and living conditions of low-income migrant workers?

*g) Limitations and advantages of stakeholder interviews*

Stakeholder interviews have a number of limitations:

- Access to certain stakeholders is limited, notably to the ones based in the UAE and, among these, the ones working in the business sector because of the sensitivity of the topic.
- Stakeholders cannot be selected randomly and are approached either directly (email, phone) -something which had little success- or through third parties. Thus there is a strong selection bias.
- Generally, stakeholders who accept to be interviewed are well prepared and may give only a “polished” version from their perspective.

Stakeholder interviews have also a number of advantages:

- One may succeed in accessing persons who are strategically located and therefore their answers may be considered important and adequately representative.
- Stakeholders likely convey information that otherwise might not have been available.

## APPENDIX B: DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Introduction

Thank you for coming tonight, we are glad that you accepted our invitation.

Our discussion will last for around one hour and a half and it will be addressing the Working Conditions of People like you living and working in the UAE. We would love to listen to your success stories and address the problems or obstacles that you have faced during your stay here.

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers, whatever you say is of importance to us. Just feel free to say what you feel, and rest assured that your answers will be treated with extreme confidentiality.

The whole session will be recorded just for the sake of report writing. No third party will be allowed to listen to the tapes or have access to the material. Recording is important only to make sure that we do not miss any idea while preparing our report.

Please put your mobiles on the Silent mode. And I want every one of you to participate in the discussion.

Let's start by introducing ourselves.

### Section I: Participants' Profile

- General Introduction
  - Name (just for the communication purpose)
  - Social status (Married- Single)
  - If married: do you have kids? How many?
  - Do your kids live with you in UAE/ Dubai or do they live back home?
  - Occupation/nature of work
  - Education (grades completed)
- For how long have you been in UAE/ Dubai?
- Why did you choose UAE/ Dubai in specific? Probe
- If you went back in time, would you still have come to UAE/ Dubai? Why? Why not?
- If you were to describe UAE/ Dubai to your friends in few words, what would you say? Probe
- Would you encourage them to come to UAE/Dubai?
  - Why? Why not?
  - Which aspects would you emphasize on, in both cases? Probe
- Do you ever get any spare time to do things for yourself? What activities do you engage in on your spare time? what are your Hobbies? Do you practice these hobbies?
- What do you do in your holidays? (Weekends / Public Holidays)

## Section II: Working Conditions

- If you were to measure your Level of Satisfaction with the Current Working Conditions, on a 10-point scale, how would you rate it?
  - Why do you say so? What are the aspects<sup>11</sup> that instigated you to give this rating?
    - What are the liked aspects about your working conditions? Probe
    - Are there any disliked aspects? Probe

Moderator: Let us talk in details about some aspects related to your work:

### *Recruitment*

- What were the procedures followed by you to come to UAE/Dubai?
  - How did you know about the job?
  - How did you apply? Through which means? (Through a recruitment agency? The employer himself? A mediator such as friend or relative? Through other means: the web? Social media? Any other means)
  - Did you have to pay a certain amount of money to be brought to Dubai?
- What was the amount paid?
- To whom was it paid?
  - Did you sign a contract with your employer?
  - Do you have a copy of the contract? If not, did you read it?
  - Did the Contract give you sufficient details about aspects like:
- Salary?
- Annual Leave?
- Working hours?
- Overtime?
  - In reality do you get the items that were stated in the Contract? Probe

### *Monthly Salary and Payment / Remittances*

- Do you think that what you earn as a monthly salary is sufficient enough for you to live a decent life and send money back home? Probe?
  - Are you satisfied with what you earn as a monthly salary from your current job? Why? Why not?
  - Does it match with the efforts that you put into the job?
- Compared to your initial expectations, is the amount that you earn monthly from your work is it about the same as you expected? Less than you expected? More than you expected?
- In addition to your basic salary? Are you entitled to any other allowances? What are they? Probe:

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11. Participants might spontaneously indicate to the housing issues, salary issues, contract...etc.

- o Bonus
- o Housing Allowance
- o Transportation
- o Food Allowance
- o What else?
- Do you usually receive your salaries on time or do you encounter delay in getting your salaries? How frequent are the delays?
- How do you get paid your salaries? In Cash/ in Cheques /Directly in the account by a Bank Transfer...etc.
- Is this Job the only source of income for you? (Probing will be done to know whether they do another part time job)

#### ***Annual Leave***

- How many days of Annual Leave are you entitled to per year?
- Is it a paid leave?
- Does it happen on yearly basis? Or once every two years?
- Are you given the freedom to select the period of your Annual Leave or is it Determined by the management?

#### ***Working Hours***

- How many hours on an average day do you actually work?
- Was this clearly stated in the contract? Probe
- Do you have to work overtime?
- How often are you asked to work overtime?
- Are you paid for the overtime? Probe
- Are you entitled to a sick leave? How many days per year?

#### ***Kafeel***

- Is this your first employer or you have had other employers previously? Is it the second one?
- If the second one, how did the change (transfer) take place?
- Were there any obstacles faced by you?
- What can you say about your current Kafeel? How would you describe him?
- Was there any disagreement / negative incident with your Kafeel?
- Can you talk more about that incident? What happened? why? Probe

### Section III: Housing and Living Conditions

- If you were to measure your Level of Satisfaction with the place where you are currently staying (Housing) and the current Living Conditions in that place, using a 10-point scale, where 10 indicates the best conditions and 1 indicates the worst conditions, and 5 is just average, so what number would you give it?
  - Why did you say so? What are the aspects that led you to give this number? Probe
- Does your employer provide you with the accommodation? Probe

#### *For Construction Workers*

- Can you describe your living place, please? Mod: give everyone a chance to freely talk about their place of living, then probe on the following:
  - How many individuals like yourself share the same bedroom? The same bathroom?
  - How many beds are there in the room?
  - Do you have enough bed sheets and pillow covers?
  - Is the room equipped with an AC? Is the AC working properly?
  - Do you have a safe place to keep your private items?
  - Is there a kitchen in your place of living? Is it a common kitchen?
  - Do you prepare your own food?

#### *For Other Categories*

- Can you describe your living place? How is the accommodation designed? How many rooms is it comprised of?
  - Is it spacious enough? Probe
  - Is it well maintained?
  - What about the furniture?
  - Do you have all the facilities needed?
  - Do you have Internet connection?
  - Do you have Satellite TV connection?
- How can you describe the area around your living place?
- Do you have facilities in the area like restaurants? Malls? Laundry?
- Do you do the cleaning yourselves? Or does the company hire someone to do it?
- If you do it yourselves, do you share the cleaning?
- What about transportation to and from work, is it provided by the company? Probe
- If provided by the company, how can you describe the vehicle? Fully equipped (clean seats, spacious, AC, comfortable seats...etc.)

#### **Section IV: Engagement with Fellow Citizens**

- Have you ever encountered a problem that needed you to ask for assistance or help from someone else?
  - o If yes, what was it about? can you describe briefly what you ran into?
  - o Did you refer it to your embassy or national association?
  - o was there any action taken?
  - o Were the results satisfying?
- For those who said No (did not encounter problems): If in future you ever encounter a certain problem, to whom would you refer to help you solve or settle the problem? (The embassy/ private national clubs or associations / private organizations, National Association...etc.)
- Do you think that referring to this specific place/party might help you? In what sense? Probe
- Generally speaking and thinking of stories that other people relate, what are the common problems that people get into? what else?
- Who provides help to solve these problems? how does it usually end?

#### **Section V: Conclusion**

- In your opinion, what should be done to improve your working and living conditions?
- What else? Probe...
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Philippe Fargues** is a French demographer. He is a part-time Professor at the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute and an Affiliate at the Middle East Initiative of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard Kennedy School. He was the founding Director of EUI's Migration Policy Centre. He is a founding member and Scientific Director of GLMM.



**Nasra M. Shah** recently joined the Lahore School of Economics, Pakistan, as Professor of Migration and Development. Prior to returning to her homeland, she was Professor of Demography at the Department of Community Medicine and Behavioral Sciences at the Faculty of Medicine, Kuwait University for about 30 years. Prof. Shah received her doctoral degree in Population Dynamics from the Johns Hopkins University, School of Public Health, Baltimore, USA, in 1974. She is a founding member and Scientific Director of GLMM.



**Imco Brouwer** is a political scientist specialised in the Arab World and Migration and has focused on the GCC countries for the last seven years. He has managed programmes and projects on the Arab World and Migration for more than 30 years and is affiliated with the GRC since 2009. He is a founding member and Executive Director of GLMM.



**Publication Reference:** Citations and quotations should always include either the long or the short reference provided here. Generally the long reference should be used but in exceptional cases (e.g., not enough room), the short reference may be used.

**Long Reference:** Philippe Fargues, Nasra M. Shah, Imco Brouwer, "Working and Living Conditions of Low-Income Migrant Workers in the Hospitality and Construction Sectors in the United Arab Emirates," Research Report No. 02/2019, Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population Programme (GLMM) of the Migration Policy Center (MPC) and the Gulf Research Center (GRC), <https://gulfmigration.org>.

**Short Reference:** Philippe Fargues, Nasra M. Shah, Imco Brouwer, "Working and Living Conditions of Low-Income Migrant Workers in the Hospitality and Construction Sectors in the United Arab Emirates," Research Report No. 02/2019, GLMM, <https://gulfmigration.org>.

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**GLMM Activities:** The Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population (GLMM) Programme has a wide range of activities, including: Collecting and elaborating data and documents; Researching and analysing key issues; Publishing various types of papers; Training; and Organising panels and workshops.

**GLMM Publications:** The Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population Programme (GLMM) produces an array of publications addressing all major issues in different formats: Explanatory Notes, Research Reports, Policy Briefs, and Volumes.

**Downloading and Further Information:** This report can be downloaded from the Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population programme website: <https://www.gulfmigration.org>. For further information: [info.glmm@grc.net](mailto:info.glmm@grc.net).

