



World Cup & Expo 2020 Construction: COVID-19 & Risks to Migrant Workers in Qatar & the UAE

KEY FINDINGS

- All seven respondent companies and the **Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy** (Supreme Committee) for the 2022 World Cup reported anti-infection programmes for workers.
- While they welcomed the **Supreme Committee's** statement, **FIFA's** own response did not describe any specific steps taken by the sporting body independently to address the situation for migrant workers.
- Cramped worker accommodation & construction sites means social distancing is impossible; no company clearly outlined plans to increase accommodation to allow for this.
- Workers are at risk of suffering severe economic hardship; only four companies - **Bam International, Besix/Six Construct, Laing O'Rourke** and **Vinci/QDVC**— guaranteed job security for workers unable to work; only three – **Bam International, Besix/Six Construct** and **Vinci/QDVC**— stated that workers who had to quarantine would be entitled to their wages in full.¹
- Workers at World Cup sites appear to lack dedicated personal protective equipment (PPE), with the **Supreme Committee** saying that that workers will be asked to use personal scarves when masks are not available.

The COVID-19 pandemic is indiscriminate in who it infects. But it is becoming clear that [migrant workers in high risk industries like construction are particularly vulnerable](#) to the consequences of this pandemic, both of illness and devastating economic hardship. The [rampant spread](#) of COVID-19 through a cramped labour camp which houses hundreds of construction workers resulted in a swift lockdown of a large part of the industrial area affecting thousands of workers, including those working on projects linked to the Qatar 2022 World Cup.² This lockdown has led to claims the labour camps have become a “[virtual prison](#)” and raised concerns for worker welfare, demonstrating the need for quick and decisive action by companies and governments to protect these workers. We asked 14 international construction companies operating in the Gulf as well as **FIFA** and the **Supreme Committee**, to outline the steps they are taking to protect workers in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic; this briefing note

summarises seven company responses and the responses of **FIFA** and the **Supreme Committee**.

In early March, [reports](#) emerged of a sudden jump in the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 among migrant construction workers quarantined in a labour camp in Qatar. The Qatari government responded by locking down camps between Streets 1 to 32 in the Industrial Area. An outbreak in these labour camps should not have been a surprise. Migrant workers to Gulf countries, largely from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, and Kenya, live in tightly packed labour camps, often in unsanitary conditions, some without [access to running water](#). These conditions provide the perfect conditions for the spread of COVID-19. Quarantines and other movement and travel restrictions, like the Qatar lockdown, may inadvertently raise the risk to workers, as well as result in workers suffering severe economic consequences from being unable to work. A lack

¹ An advisory notice published by the Qatari Government at the [end of March](#) addresses a number of concerns around prevention of infection, provision of medical services to workers and payment of wages in full during the outbreak. Since all 7 companies responded to us before this date we appreciate that they may have since taken additional steps to implement these. We would welcome additional information on this.

² Not all workers linked to World Cup projects are Supreme Committee workers. For more information, see FIFA's [Sustainability Strategy](#).

of transparency around government and company steps to protect workers during the lockdown has raised fears that workers do not have access to necessary sanitation, are not being given clear information regarding the outbreak, and are being laid off without wages or a promise of re-hiring.

Both the UAE and Qatar governments have taken considerable steps to protect their citizens by banning all forms of social gatherings and by issuing work from home orders affecting all but “essential” industries. However, construction work continues, with World Cup workers telling the Guardian it was “business as usual”, prompting criticism that “no one cares” about migrant workers’ safety. Although [Qatar has since issued a directive](#) to restrict construction workers’ hours to a maximum of 6 per day and has ordered companies to take a number of steps to protect and educate workers on the disease, it is clear that there is a strong desire that construction is not interrupted. However, we are pleased to see the authorities are now directing construction firms to carry out awareness-raising programmes, increase sanitation measures, and crucially, reduce density of workers at work sites and in accommodation. We will be looking closely at how companies implement these measures and how the government monitors this implementation, and are particularly keen to hear about plans to reduce accommodation density.

FIFA and the **Supreme Committee**’s responses reveal that they are taking considerable steps to raise awareness of COVID-19 among the workforce and have moved quickly to identify at-risk workers and “temporarily

demobilized” them on full salary. However, the **Supreme Committee**’s response suggests that it plans to continue work on World Cup sites even if they don’t have dedicated personal protective equipment (PPE) to guard workers against infections. The **Supreme Committee** notes in its response that “*[i]n the case of shortage of masks, personal scarves used by workers were advised for use*”.

Company responses have revealed that while many companies are taking extensive steps to prevent the spread of the virus with awareness-raising and hygiene programmes, further vital action is required from both construction companies and governments to ensure the safety of workers both in the camps and on site. In particular, we are calling for urgent changes to worker accommodation to allow social distancing and for assurances workers who cannot work will still be paid.

We contacted 14 construction companies operating in Qatar and the UAE and headquartered across the Middle East, Europe and Asia. We also contacted **FIFA** and the **Supreme Committee** (the Qatari organisation in charge of worker welfare on World Cup projects) to answer the same questions regarding workers on World Cup stadiums and related infrastructure projects.

The **Supreme Committee** provided a statement that addresses our questions. **FIFA** also provided a statement that largely points to the actions of the **Supreme Committee** and the Qatari authorities.

RESPONDENTS (9/16)

- **Bam International** (Netherlands)
- **Besix** (operating through its local subsidiary, **Six Construct**) (Belgium/UAE)
- **Bin Omran Trading and Contracting** (Qatar)³
- **FIFA** (Switzerland)
- **Laing O’Rourke** (UK)
- **Multiplex** (UK)
- **Salini Impreglio** (Italy)
- **Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy** (Qatar)
- **Vinci** (operating through its local subsidiary **QDVC**) (France/ Qatar)

3 Although Bin Omran did not formally address our three separate questions, they did provide evidence of the actions they had taken to date to respond to the infection, such as contingency plans and awareness-raising programmes, in answer to our first two questions.

NON-RESPONDENTS (7/16)

- **AF Construction** (UAE)
- **Al Balagh Trading & Contracting** (Qatar)
- **Al Naboodah Construction** (UAE)
- **Petroserv Limited** (Qatar)
- **Porr** (Austria)⁴
- **TAV Construction** (Turkey)⁵
- **Tekfen Construction** (Turkey)

4 Porr sent a generic statement about their approach but did not respond to our questions. Their statement affirmed that they are following all local government guidance to protect their employees in Qatar, UAE and all other countries where they have operations. Their contribution is not counted as a survey response.

5 TAV Construction replied that with the situation changing so rapidly they decided not to respond to our survey.



Summary of findings

Construction in both Qatar and UAE was initially allowed to continue by authorities despite strict restrictions on other gatherings and the closing of non-essential industries. UAE now appears to be scaling construction back. While Qatar has issued instructions to companies to take protective measures, work is continuing, raising concerns that workers' health is not being properly protected; in particular there are concerns that workers are not being provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) such as facemasks despite working at close quarters.

All responding companies reported initiating detailed infection prevention programmes among their migrant workforces, including awareness-raising in multiple languages, hygiene and cleaning protocols and medical monitoring. All reported hiring medical staff to attend worker camps or contracting with hospitals. The **Supreme Committee** stated it has its own clinics and an in-house doctor co-ordinating the response of all healthcare professionals in accommodation and on project sites.

Although many companies emphasised the steps they are taking to promote social distancing in line with WHO advice, cramped conditions at camps and construction sites in Qatar and the UAE make it impossible for workers to undertake this effectively. Even asleep, most are typically in dormitories of 8-10. This places them at increased risk of infection, particularly in Qatar where the industrial area is in lockdown.

There was less clarity from companies on how they will ensure workers do not suffer disproportionate economic hardship. Most companies mentioned the entitlement of sick pay in their contracts; only three companies committed to continue paying their workers in full during any quarantine period prior to the Government of Qatar mandating this. A lack of pay, coupled with restrictions on movement (including the ability to travel to their home countries, or to send remittances to families) puts workers at risk of extreme and disproportionate economic harm.

Recommendations

COMPANIES SHOULD:

- Develop and continually assess and update infection prevention protocols in consultation with workers. These should focus on awareness-raising, increasing hygiene, ensuring workers have sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE), and guaranteeing access to testing and medical assistance.
- Collaborate with other construction companies and authorities to urgently reform migrant worker accommodation to reduce overcrowding, improve facilities and hygiene to allow workers to practice social distancing and other practices recommended by WHO.
- Commit to pay all workers who have contracted COVID-19 or are quarantined their full salary for the duration for the period they cannot work; ensure that workers do not feel coerced into resigning or taking unpaid leave.
- Commit to ensure all workers who cannot currently enter Qatar or the UAE due to travel restrictions that they will not lose their jobs and will be paid their full salary.
- Work with governments and clients to develop plans so that workers can effectively social distance while on site. If this leads to a reduction in the number of workers required during this period, wages and benefits of workers must be fully protected.
- The quality of companies' action will be greatly enhanced by systematic consultation with workers and their leaders. The workers, made aware of the risks, are most likely to identify the high-risk practices and locations, and the solutions.

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:

- Provide full transparency on the conditions in labour camps and ensure that any workers under lockdown have access to all necessary amenities such as food and medical treatment including testing and hospital care where necessary.
- Work with construction companies to provide additional accommodation to enable social distancing.
- Consider measures to ensure that construction workers can practice social distancing in order to protect them from infection including, if appropriate, the closure of sites or reducing the number of workers on site.
- Carry out labour inspections both in accommodation and work sites to ensure that safety standards are being met and measures are in place to prevent infection and allow social distancing.
- Deliver on commitments to financial aid for companies suffering from the economic down-turn to ensure that workers who cannot work due to COVID-19 - whether due to quarantine, illness or the need to practice social distancing - do not suffer economic hardship.
- Not deport migrant workers against their will for breaking quarantine in order to access food and basic amenities.

FIFA & THE SUPREME COMMITTEE SHOULD:

- Ensure that all workers have the necessary PPE equipment, such as facemasks, without delay and that workers do not bear cost or responsibility for acquiring these themselves.
- Work with the Government of Qatar and construction companies to ensure workers can practice social distancing, including, if appropriate, the closure of sites or the scaling down of workers on site.
- Work with the Government of Qatar and construction companies to provide additional accommodation to enable workers to practice social distancing.

Why are migrant workers at risk?

The 2022 Qatar World Cup and 2020 Dubai Expo have contributed to a [construction boom](#) in which migrants provide the labour. Recruited *en masse* by agencies in countries of origin, these workers send back [billions of dollars in remittances](#) each year and make up around [90% of the UAE workforce](#) and [95% of the workforce in Qatar](#) — mainly in low-wage, low-skilled and often hazardous work such as construction.

Workers in the construction industry suffer abuse, racial [discrimination](#) and exploitation, and have minimal access to remedy. The *kafala* system in [many Gulf countries](#) ensures the balance of power remains with the employer on whom employees are dependent for sponsorship, permission to leave the country, permission to change employers and visas to remain in the country. While there have been [some reforms, most recently in Qatar](#), allegations from advocates on the ground and [our own research](#) demonstrate that companies continue to flout regulations, endanger workers, and leave them unpaid.

The cramped and unhygienic living conditions of construction workers, which has provided the perfect conditions for the spread of viruses, is an issue of longstanding concern. After visiting construction sites in 2016 Amnesty [described](#) the *“squalid labour camps”* housing World Cup projects workers. A 2019 [investigation by German broadcaster DW](#) again highlighted the poor and cramped living conditions of World Cup workers. Two Human Rights Watch UAE reports revealed substandard living conditions of workers on projects on [Saadiyat Island, despite government reforms designed to protect workers](#).

The authorities in both Qatar and the UAE have taken wide-reaching steps to protect their citizens and bring the spread of the virus under control. In Qatar *“all forms of gatherings”* have been outlawed by government order, and schools, restaurants and non-food stores have been ordered to close. In contrast construction has been allowed to continue and has only recently come

under any restrictions at all. As recently as 26 March the Guardian reported workers telling them it was *“business as usual.”* Although [Qatar issued a directive in early April](#) to restrict construction workers to 6 hours per day and has ordered companies to take a number of steps to protect and educate workers on the disease, it is clear that there is a strong desire that construction continues. From 29 March, all public and private employees in the UAE must work from home. However, construction is one of a few “essential” industries allowed to continue. It does appear from information on the ground that most UAE worksites have currently been shutdown, although we are aware that a number of sites, employing thousands of workers, are still operational. Despite this mixed picture, the decision to give the construction industry special status has prompted criticism that *“no-one cares”* about migrant workers’ safety.

The lockdown of the industrial area in Qatar has led critics to say it has been converted into a [coronavirus prison](#) with workers [reporting that they face deportation](#) even if they leave the camps to obtain daily essentials. There are conflicting reports regarding what supplies are reaching the workers confined under lockdowns in Qatar, with at least one case of almost 100 workers in a labour camp reporting problems accessing adequate food supplies for at least three days. Our partners on the ground are reporting that there is a lack of clear communication to workers regarding companies’ crisis management action plans. Reflecting our own findings, companies are conducting awareness-raising in workers’ local languages, but plans are apparently not being communicated clearly. Workers at a major local construction company in the UAE reported a prolonged lack of access to food and no transparency from employers on when they would be able to access basic necessities. The allegedly poor condition of waste management systems in the camp has also raised concerns that workers do not have access to basic hygiene there.



Company responses

We contacted the 14 construction companies, **FIFA** and the **Supreme Committee** to invite them to answer three questions on the steps they are taking to prevent the spread of COVID-19, to assist workers who become infected, and to ensure workers do not suffer disproportionate hardship as a result of the outbreak (see full set of questions we asked [here](#)).

We were encouraged that companies which responded appear to be well-aware of the potential impacts and severity of the COVID-19 outbreak and were willing to share their approach to the crisis, with all providing information addressing at least two out of three questions. However, while companies provided detail on how they were acting to prevent the spread of the virus, tellingly they

provided far less detail on how they are addressing worker hardship.

We were pleased to receive responses from both **FIFA** and the **Supreme Committee**. However, **FIFA's** response largely just referred to the action taken by the **Supreme Committee** and we would urge it to take a more proactive approach to ensure workers are protected, particularly in light of **FIFA's** high-profile [awareness-raising](#) programmes with [celebrity footballers](#). We are disappointed that only 50% of companies responded. While we appreciate companies are facing unprecedented challenges resulting from the pandemic, we urge all companies to publish a public action plan detailing how they are protecting migrant workers from both the medical and economic effects of the virus.

PREVENTION OF VIRUS SPREAD

We asked companies to detail what steps and protocols they have put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in labour camps, and in particular whether they have provided any equipment such as masks or hand sanitiser. We also asked how they were ensuring access to testing for workers.

Since our outreach [Qatar has ordered companies](#) to take a number of steps to protect and educate workers on the disease, carry out awareness-raising programmes, increase sanitation measures and crucially reduce density of workers at work sites and in accommodation. We will be closely monitoring how companies implement these measures and are particularly keen to hear about plans to reduce accommodation density.

All seven respondent companies indicated they had taken steps to safeguard the health of migrant workers, consistent with local law and/or World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance and are monitoring these on an ongoing basis. All respondent companies have established an emergency action plan and/or taskforce designated with overseeing their response to COVID-19, including specifically to protect worker welfare.

Responders, including the **Supreme Committee**, reported extensive awareness-raising programmes to educate workers in multiple languages on COVID-19 symptoms, its transmission, and the importance of hygiene, accompanied by the distribution of multi-lingual posters and leaflets. **Salini Impregilo** (which has operations in Qatar and UAE) reported it had *“[a]wareness videos continuously played in dining areas in different languages native to the workers”*;

Vinci/QDVC explained how its awareness-raising forums were trying to *“break social stigmas/panic associated with precautionary measures”* like social distancing.

Laing O'Rourke reported seeking feedback from workers on their awareness-raising sessions and stated that this feedback has informed the approach they have taken. These responses from companies contrast with reports that many workers are experiencing high levels of anxiety within labour camps due to lack of information or transparency. We would like to see all companies institute similar awareness-raising programmes, and to do so in collaboration with workers directly.

In terms of hygiene measures, all companies and the **Supreme Committee** reported undertaking additional cleaning of camps as well as increasing the number of hand sanitisers available. Interviews with workers reveal that while many employers are providing hand sanitiser on both construction sites and in labour camps, they are more often doing so on sites rather than in accommodation (where they are in closer proximity). **Besix/Six Construct, Laing O'Rourke, Salini Impregilo, Multiplex and Vinci/QDVC** said that they had identified likely sites of transmission and were cleaning these more regularly. However, although hygiene measures such as distributing hand sanitiser at labour camps and on construction sites are welcome, workers have raised concerns regarding the dangers of having flammable hand sanitiser in proximity to heat sources. It is imperative that a full risk assessment in respect of these concerns is conducted without delay.

All companies have reported introducing some social distancing measures. Access to the labour camps by visitors has been restricted to decrease the risk of transmission from outside, and the importance of avoiding social gathering is being emphasised. All seven companies reported setting up separate quarantine blocks for workers who exhibit symptoms or for those who have recently arrived. **Salini Impregilo** and **Besix/Six Construct** reported that they have rearranged buses taking workers to sites to allow for social distancing. **Vinci/QDVC** and **Laing O'Rourke** stated that they are encouraging distancing within dining halls, and **Salini Impregilo** noted it has converted other recreational spaces into canteens to increase space.

However, while the measures cited by companies to increase space in communal areas are welcome, it is far from clear how workable they are in practice or what difference they can make given the crowded nature of the accommodation where workers typically share [bedrooms with 8-10 others](#). The **Supreme Committee** provided very little information on how they will maintain any social distancing in workers' accommodation, and no information on how this may be maintained on project sites. Although their own [Worker Welfare Standards](#) do mandate that no more than four workers should share a room with a minimum of six square metres per person, their response states that **"the SC is currently evaluating the possibility of relocating workers residing in a non-SC accommodation to a centralized SC compliant and managed accommodation"**. It is unclear why these workers are not already housed in SC-compliant accommodation and raises the likelihood they are currently living accommodation that is considerably more cramped. **Besix/Six Construct** was

the only company that addressed the issue of cramped rooms in their response stating they were reallocating rooms in order to comply with government regulations in the UAE. But the reality is that social distancing guidelines are impossible for workers to follow in labour camps or on sites without taking steps to provide more accommodation. No company reported a plan to increase available housing in order to effectively distance workers beyond what was required by current law. As the [Government has now mandated](#) that the population density in the workplace and accommodation should be reduced and specifically stated that there should be a maximum of four workers per room we will be following up with companies to understand how they will be implementing this.

As construction in Qatar is currently excluded from lockdown measures and at least some sites remain operational in UAE it is vital that virus prevention measures extend to construction sites. However, there have been concerning [reports](#) that workers have had to supply their own masks and in its response the **Supreme Committee** states that **"in case of shortage of masks, personal scarves used by workers were advised for use. Disinfection measures have been applied to these scarves using separate washing machines."** This suggests it plans to keep workers on World Cup sites in the absence of dedicated PPE. However, the **Supreme Committee** does go on to say that work on **Supreme Committee** sites will be considered on a **"case-by-case basis and will take the necessary measures to protect the health and safety of all construction workers and direct staff, which may include temporary suspension of work as and when required."**

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED TO WORKERS WHO BECOME INFECTED

We asked companies what steps they were taking to assist workers infected with COVID-19, whether they have an emergency response protocol if a case is confirmed, and if they are providing or funding free medical assistance.

All responders provided details of medical assistance given to migrant workers, ranging from daily assessments to the provision of free medical insurance and/or coverage of medical costs in line with local labour law. Since we approached companies to answer these questions, Qatar has since issued an advisory notice announcing free provision of health services relating to COVID-19.

All companies reported they either had medical staff attending worker camps or had a specific contract with a hospital. Importantly, **Vinci/QDVC** indicated it is also providing free psychological support to workers to address mental health issues – a welcome move given heightened anxiety reported by workers. The **Supreme Committee** stated its clinics and a dedicated team of nurses and doctors are monitoring the health of workers on all projects and reporting any suspected cases on a daily basis. In line with the **Supreme Committee's** Worker Welfare Standards, workers' healthcare is provided free of charge. They have also developed an electronic support system to ensure **"uninterrupted anytime, anywhere access to workers' medical information"**.⁶

⁶ It will be important to clarify how this data is protected to ensure that workers' privacy is respected.

We were more puzzled by the **Supreme Committee's** move, in consultation with its in-house doctor, to *“identify a list of food items that are both recommended for consumption as well as those that should be prohibited (as these items make them more vulnerable to COVID-19).”* We have not been able to find any advice from the WHO about certain foods making people vulnerable to COVID-19 and would therefore urge the **Supreme Committee** to concentrate its efforts on well-

WORKER HARDSHIP

We asked companies to explain how they would ensure workers do not suffer disproportionate and devastating health or economic hardship as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. NGOs are concerned that workers are being coerced into resigning or taking unpaid leave. We specifically asked if companies will guarantee wages for sick or quarantined workers, and keep jobs open for workers who cannot return to the country at this time because of the virus.

Since we approached companies to answer these questions the Qatar Government issued an advisory notice which states *“All workers in isolation, quarantine or receiving treatment will still be paid their basic salary and receive their allowances irrespective of whether they are entitled to sick leave benefits”*. However, NGOs have raised concerns about whether this will also apply to workers whose work sites have closed, but are not in isolation, quarantine or unwell. The UAE labour ministry has made the decision [to allow companies to cut salaries and workers during the outbreak](#), in a [discriminatory](#) move applying only to non-citizens. While they do state they should be taken only with the agreement of the workers and applied gradually, the reality is that coupled with a pre-existing unequal employer-employee relationship these steps will [disadvantage workers further](#).

Another concern raised by workers in Qatar is reliable access to wages during the pandemic; the advisory note in Qatar goes some way to removing uncertainty for these workers at least because there was far less clarity and detail from companies regarding the issue of worker pay and hardship. However, in a country where workers frequently experience non-payment of wages and the electronic payment system has come under much criticism, the closure of banks and money exchanges leaves many workers wondering how employers will pay them, or how they will be able to send money home to their families and dependents. The system also raises concerns that [workers could be burdened with the weight of bank loans](#) taken out by employers. In light of past systemic failures of the process, assurances from both government and companies

balanced nutrition, and other areas identified for action that can prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Although governments in both countries are acting to take charge of the treatment of those infected, it is positive that some companies have indicated a willingness to cover additional medical costs and have also put in place some additional medical resources at the camps.

that wages will be protected if gained through bank loans would be welcome.

Even prior to the [Qatari advisory notice being issued](#), all but one company did state that workers are entitled to sick leave in line with either their internal policies or local labour law, but it is unclear how or if this is being informed by the particular impact of COVID-19, including if illness stretches beyond the number of paid sick leave days. Only three companies - **Bam International**, **Vinci/QDVC** and **Besix/Six Construct** - stated that workers who had to quarantine due to exposure would be paid normal wages in full, and in **Vinci/QDVC's** case, with no additional impact to their sick leave allowance. By contrast, **Multiplex** and **Bin Omran** failed to meaningfully address this question. While **Multiplex** did state that they are ensuring all workers receive sick pay in line with UAE labour law, **Bin Omran** provided no information on measures they are taking regarding worker pay or leave. The **Supreme Committee** acknowledged workers' entitlements to sick leave with pay under Qatari Labour Law, and merely stated that *“companies may provide benefits beyond the law at their own discretion”*. This is particularly disappointing as they acknowledge the benefit of widespread quarantining to give *“a greater chance to control the virus spreading to our workforce and Qatar's wider population”*.

In accordance with the advisory note, we expect the **Supreme Committee** and all other responders operating in Qatar to comply fully with the directive to continue to pay all workers their basic salary. As the situation for workers is less assured in UAE it is essential that there is greater clarity from companies on how workers will be paid during any period they are unable to work due to the pandemic (not just if they are sick).

Both Gulf countries and workers' home countries have [enforced travel restrictions](#) meaning many workers are unable to return to work for the foreseeable future. We received mixed information on workers' job security when they finally can return. Four companies - **Bam International**, **Laing O'Rourke**, **Vinci/QDVC** and **Besix/Six Construct** - stated that those unable to return to work would not face terminations. **Laing O'Rourke**, **Salini**

Impreglio and **Vinci/QDVC** also stated that they will arrange the return and quarantine of workers who have been unable to travel, with **Laing O'Rourke** committing to bear the additional costs of changes to workers' travel. In the anticipated eventuality that travel out of Qatar is banned, **Vinci/QDVC** report they are ensuring that all demobilised workers continue to receive wages and be provided with food, housing and care until they are able to return home. The **Supreme Committee** did not address this point in its response to us but we would urge it to consider requiring contractors to pay their workers who are kept outside of Qatar due to travel bans, particularly in light of the Qatar [Government's suggestion](#) that companies place workers outside of the country on *"extended unpaid leave because they are not serving the companies"*.

The vulnerability of these workers, who have very limited rights under the **kafala** system, during such an extraordinary event as a worldwide pandemic cannot be understated. It is therefore vital that we see companies commit to ensure workers are paid in full in both the UAE and Qatar during any period they cannot work, whether through illness, or quarantine, or demobilisation. The **Supreme Committee** with its numerous contractors, is in a unique position to effect widespread change in the construction industry and lead by example. Not only will this ensure workers don't suffer disproportionate hardship, it will also mean there are not perverse incentives to hide symptoms.