

## **A Comparative Study of Migrant Workers' Rights in Saudi Arabia and World Cup Host Nations**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study assesses Saudi Arabia's readiness for the 2034 World Cup by comparing it with Brazil's (2014) and Qatar's (2022) preparations, with a focus on the protection of migrant workers. Using a socio-legal approach, the study examines the relationship between the legal framework and the social practices of migrant workers on the ground; a normative-comparative approach is used to examine labour regulations and reforms related to Kafala in the three countries; and a historical approach traces the evolution of migrant policies before and after the World Cup hosting. The results show that Brazil failed to implement significant reforms despite global scrutiny. At the same time, Qatar successfully implemented structural changes, including the elimination of exit permits, the introduction of a universal minimum wage, a dispute resolution mechanism, and a compensation fund. Saudi Arabia has initiated reforms, including the partial relaxation of the Kafala system, the digitisation of contracts, and the strengthening of the wage protection system; however, protection remains limited to specific sectors. The study concludes that Saudi Arabia needs to expand reforms, strengthen oversight, and enhance its partnership with the ILO to meet international labour standards by 2034.

**Keywords:** *Socio-Legal, Migrant Workers, Kafala, Labour Reform, World Cup.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Migrant workers play a pivotal role not only in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, but also in all the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bel-Air & Fellow, 2024). It is estimated that migrant workers represent 69% of the population in Kuwait, 88.40% in the UAE, 88.2% in Qatar, 51% in Bahrain, and 32.30% in Saudi Arabia. Migrant workers surpass nationals in nearly all of the GCC countries, as shown in Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain (International Labour Organisation, 2023).

One can notice that the number of migrant workers in Saudi Arabia is the lowest among the GCC countries, which is due to the country's large population and vast landscape. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia is experiencing a significant boom, with significant and mega projects underway. For instance, in light of the kingdom's Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia plans to build a variety of ambitious projects, including the Line in Neom and the Red Sea projects. Moreover, Riyadh, the kingdom's capital, is a central hub where several significant projects, such as the Square, are underway. Furthermore, Saudi

Arabia is set to host the 2034 World Cup (Admin, 2025). Accordingly, the number of migrant workers is expected to increase in the years to come.

Given the current construction boom, this study examined the rights of migrant workers and how Saudi Arabia can learn from Qatar's experience as the host of the 2022 World Cup. Hosting the World Cup brings with it increased scrutiny regarding compliance with human rights standards; the rights of migrant workers have been a significant issue in both the 2022 and upcoming 2034 World Cups. During 2022, numerous human rights reports were published regarding the migrant workers who assisted in building the stadiums for the World Cup in Qatar. Consequently, Qatar sought the cooperation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to improve conditions for migrant workers. Qatar also implemented several legislative changes and reforms to its laws and regulations, arising from the Kafala (sponsorship) system, regarding the employment of migrant workers. These changes helped move Qatar from being one of the most restrictive countries regarding the Kafala system to a more open one (Team of ILO, 2022).

In this context, this study examined Qatar's legal and regulatory reforms. It determined how Saudi Arabia can replicate and better equip itself to protect the rights of migrants working on significant projects in the country, including the construction of stadiums for the 2034 World Cup.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is undertaking major construction projects that extend beyond the 2034 World Cup. This study will examine various projects, with a particular emphasis on World Cup projects. Needless to say, hosting the World Cup brings unwanted human rights investigations, and perhaps the central issue in both the 2022 and 2034 World Cups is the rights of migrant workers. Several human rights reports addressed the rights of migrants in Qatar, prompting the country to seek cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to improve the situation of migrant workers.

Furthermore, Qatar implemented several legislative changes and reforms to its laws and regulations, which helped transition the country from being one of the most restrictive in the Kafalah system to a more open one. The remainder of this article is structured as follows. We examine the road to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, focusing on the improvements and reforms implemented by the country to enhance the welfare of migrant workers in preparation for hosting the event. We then discuss the 2034 World Cup in Saudi Arabia, examining the kingdom's progress to date in implementing its legal and regulatory reforms. In the subsequent section, we examine Brazil's journey to hosting the 2014 World Cup and the lessons it offers. Finally, we present the conclusion, which includes a comparative analysis of the three countries regarding the scope and depth of the reforms and their enforcement mechanisms.

## II. METHOD

This research uses a socio-legal approach (sociology of law). The socio-legal method was chosen because this research not only reviews the normative legal framework (such as reform of the Kafala system, labour policies, and ILO cooperation), but also explores how these laws are implemented in the real lives of migrant workers. By observing social practices in the field, analysing institutional policies, and interactions between

workers, sponsors, and the state, this research captures the dynamics between formal law and social realities in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Brazil (S, 2021).

Complementarily, this research uses a normative-comparative approach to define the legal framework and policies for migrant labour in third countries. From a normative perspective, researchers examine legal documents, such as labour laws, migration regulations, ILO regulations, and other national policies, to identify changes following the World Cup announcement. The comparative approach enables comparisons of legal systems across countries in their adoption and reform of regulations to enhance the protection of migrant workers. Through comparative analysis, this research also highlights similarities and differences in countries' responses to international pressure and how local legal practices adapt to global standards (Reimann & Zimmermann, 2006).

Furthermore, this reform study utilises a historical approach to trace the evolution of migrant labour law from the inception of the Kafala system to the post-World Cup period. Data were collected from credible secondary sources, such as ILO reports, national government documents, human rights NGO reports, international media archives, and academic literature. Data analysis is qualitative, in which researchers interpret the historical development of regulations and policies through the lens of legal and social theory. Within this framework, the study also examines the effectiveness of reforms through social variables, including worker complaints, workplace safety, and institutional oversight. This combination of methods—socio-legal, normative-comparative, and historical—aligns with the scope of LSJS. It supports an in-depth analysis of the relationship between law, society, and social justice in a global context.

### **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The Road to the World Cup: The Case of Brazil**

When Brazil won its bid to host the 2014 World Cup, the result was met with uncertainty. Brazil also faced significant criticism from human rights NGOs, including concerns about the rights of construction workers. Workers went on strike demanding wage payments and better working conditions, which delayed the completion of several stadiums and elicited disapproval from FIFA. In addition, Brazil reportedly used convicts to build some of its 12 stadiums (BBC News Team, 2013).

Brazil was heavily criticised after winning its World Cup bid; construction work on stadiums, airports, and hotels was behind schedule, and human rights organisations accused the country of human rights violations. Reports claimed that workers were coerced, enslaved, or denied wages for their work in the construction of the stadiums. They also stated that several workers had died as a result of poor safety conditions at the construction sites. The reports further claimed that the workers were overworked, and basic safety and health conditions had not been met at the construction sites.

After winning the bid in 2007 to host the 2014 World Cup, Brazil faced a multitude of protests against the dire working conditions, high poverty levels, inadequate public services, and the high costs associated with hosting the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics. The protests were fuelled by the rise in public transportation fees, as stated in a report by Amnesty International. Other reasons, as mentioned, were the high cost of hosting the events (Hills & Maitland, 2014).

The deaths of several construction workers shed light on the poor working conditions they faced. For instance, in November 2013, a crane collapsed during the installation of the stadium's roof, killing two workers. This incident delayed the stadium's completion by several months. In January 2014, a 55-year-old Portuguese worker died while dismantling a crane at the stadium. He was the third fatality at this site, following earlier incidents involving falls from heights. Reports such as these further inflamed Brazilians, and their protests climaxed in 2013 in São Paulo with hundreds of thousands of people in the street. The police reacted violently, using rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse the protesters (BBC News Team, 2013).

Unlike Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Brazil did not contact the ILO to reform its labour standards, despite being an active member of the organisation. Had Brazil reached out, the working conditions for construction workers, especially the relevant health and safety measures, might have improved.

### **The Road to the World Cup 2022 in Qatar**

The FIFA Council's announcement in 2010 that Qatar would host the 2022 World Cup was a monumental moment for the Arab world and the Gulf States. This honour was accompanied by increased scrutiny regarding human rights in the Gulf States, particularly regarding migrant workers. The country came under attack from numerous human rights organisations owing to its record on migrant workers' rights. Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International wrote reports about migrant workers' rights violations, focusing on those employed in the construction sector. This scrutiny led to many GCC countries, including Qatar, modifying their labour laws and other regulations related to migrant workers, thereby providing this vulnerable group with much-needed protection. Qatar collaborated with the ILO and underwent a significant overhaul in its labour law, passing its revised laws in 2020. It also established a regional office for the ILO in 2018 to collaborate closely with it in amending and reforming its regulations and laws, thereby enabling it to meet higher international standards of labour law (HRW Team, 2020).

Prior to hosting the World Cup, Qatar was considered one of the most restrictive countries in the Gulf in terms of implementing the Kafala system. Under this system, for instance, migrant workers were not allowed to leave the country without their sponsors' permission, which was referred to as the exit permit. As part of Qatar's reforms regarding migrant workers' rights, Qatar abolished the exit permit requirement in accordance with the Minister of Interior Decision No. (95) of 2019, which came into effect in 2020 and applies to all migrant and domestic workers. Furthermore, Qatar instituted a minimum wage requirement in the new labour law to protect the rights of migrant workers, as many were being paid insufficient wages; thus, a minimum wage requirement was introduced in the new labour law. Moreover, as part of the reforms in Qatar and the changes to the new labour law, migrant workers are now allowed to transfer from one employer to another without needing the consent of their previous employer. The new law also implemented several new penalties for violating the law to strengthen enforcement. The latest amendments were introduced in 2020, and an estimated minimum of 669,000 migrant workers benefited from this transfer reform between September 2020 and October 2023 (State of Qatar's Government Communications Office, 2025).

These reforms, resulting from Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup, paved the way for a new and more just working environment for migrant workers in the country, and

were part of the reforms implemented as a result of hosting the 2022 World Cup. The country has completed several major construction projects following significant reform of its labour laws. In Qatar, an estimated one million migrant workers are part of the construction sector alone. Accordingly, the country implemented a new heat regulation in 2020 as part of its reforms. It followed the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) rules, which are part of the ILO, that set limitations on working hours in extreme heat conditions. Qatar, through the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs, issued Ministerial Decree No. (17) of 2021, it adopted the OSH rules in 2020, where employees are forbidden to work outdoors between 10:00 am and 3:30 pm from 1 June to 15 September (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2021). This rule has also been implemented in other GCC countries, including Kuwait, which implemented the fourth-mentioned rule in 2015. However, according to the ILO, Qatar's decree restricts work in the heat the least compared to the rules in other GCC countries.

As mentioned above, in 2021, Qatar became the first country in the GCC to implement a minimum wage for all workers in all sectors, regardless of nationality. Prior to that, wages were based on nationality and the type of work performed. The minimum wage was set at QAR 1,000, covering all workers across all industries, including domestic workers. Employers were required to provide an additional QAR 500 per month for accommodations and QAR 300 per month for food. The move is indeed a welcome one, as wages prior to the change were based on nationality and the type of work performed. The change also included migrant domestic workers. The change was a welcome step, as it protects all migrant workers, who are entitled to know their rights and the minimum wage to which they are entitled. Due to the change, approximately 13% of migrant workers experienced a wage increase (ADLSA Team, 2023).

Moreover, many migrant workers fall prey to exploitive recruitment in their home countries. To counteract this recruitment practice, which often occurs in their country of origin, Qatar established more than 20 visa centres in many countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Philippines. Such centres were established to expedite recruitment and ensure that workers are not exploited in their home countries.

Since the announcement of Qatar hosting the World Cup in 2010, Qatar has come under attack from many Human Rights Organizations due to its record on the issue of migrant workers' rights. To address these issues, Qatar partnered with the ILO and underwent a significant overhaul of its labour law, passing its revised labour law in 2020. Qatar also opened a regional office for the ILO in 2018 to work closely with the ILO on amending and reforming its regulations and laws, and raising the standards of its labour laws. That included what we mentioned before. The abolishment of the exit visa allowed employees to change their employer without obtaining the written consent of their previous employer, thereby providing greater mobility to migrant workers. Last but not least, the introduction of a minimum wage for migrant workers is an excellent protection for migrant workers. The new law also introduced several new penalties for violating the aforementioned law, intending to protect migrant workers in Qatar (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Another violation of the rights of migrant workers in Qatar was the failure of companies to pay their workers, even after months of delays. To remedy this problem, the government of Qatar imposed significant penalties on companies and established a

specialised fund in accordance with Law No. (17) of 2018. Since its inception, the fund has distributed over 360 million USD to migrant workers who fell victim to non-payment of wages. The fund provides care for workers, guarantees their rights, and provides a healthy and safe working environment.

Furthermore, Qatar introduced several health and occupational safety measures that align with the ILO's safety standards. Nevertheless, many human rights reports indicate a high number of deaths among migrant workers working in the construction sector. The Qatari government stated that between 2014 and 2020, 37 labourers died at World Cup stadium construction sites. By contrast, the ILO noted that the number of migrant deaths related to the World Cup construction projects reached 50 in 2020, and another 50 lost their lives in 2021. Some reports even estimated the number to be more than 6,000. At the same time, the ILO reported that 50 migrant workers lost their lives in 2020. Qatar denied these reports, responding that they were inaccurate and that the data provided by human rights NGOs was inaccurate and misleading because many of the deaths were not related to World Cup construction. In another statement, Qatari official Mr Hassan al-Thawadi estimated the total number of migrant deaths to be between 400 and 500 workers (Amnesty International Ltd, 2022).

The death of even a single migrant worker is an unfortunate event, and even one death is one too many. However, considering the total number of construction workers (approximately one million), the percentage of deaths is 0.05%, which may be a function of the scale of the major projects or is expected due to many factors not necessarily related to the work itself. Furthermore, the number of deaths is much less than that reported by other major World Cup host countries.

The ILO report suggested that efforts to improve conditions for migrant workers should continue beyond the end of the World Cup. Qatar stated that it was improving and would continue to enhance the health and safety features for migrant workers, remaining committed to preventing and safeguarding the well-being of these workers. Nevertheless, accidents have still occurred. All reports indicate that the Qatari government should do more to protect vulnerable migrant workers, particularly in the construction sector (ILO, 2024).

The new labour law established a committee within the Ministry of Labour called the 'Labour Dispute Resolution Committee'. The committee was established to settle labour disputes, including those of migrant workers; expedite the justice process; and deliver a verdict that is just for both the team member and the employer. Furthermore, this committee is headed by a judge from the first instance court. It includes a representative from the Labour Ministry and an expert in accounting, chosen by the Minister of Labour. Several subcommittees review labour disputes to streamline the process and ensure the prompt delivery of a verdict.

Qatar established the Wage Protection System (WPS) in 2015 to ensure that migrant workers receive timely and accurate payment for their services. The system ensured that private sector employees were paid on time and at the wages agreed upon in their contracts. Prior to the introduction of this system, companies would withhold wages from migrant workers for months.

### **Saudi Arabia's Road to the 2034 World Cup**

In 2010, Saudi Arabia announced that it would reform the long-established Kafala system for regulating migrant workers, and subsequently revamped this system as part

of the kingdom's Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia has abolished the Kafala system for several occupations, including, but not limited to, doctors, accountants, engineers, sales managers, and nurses. Individuals in these professions would not need to be sponsored by a local company or person. However, it is imperative to note that the Kafala system remains in place for other occupations, including construction workers and low-paying jobs, leaving such workers vulnerable to exploitation by their sponsors (Saudi Press Editorial Team, 2025).

The new amendments to the Saudi labour regulations also permitted workers wishing to transfer from one employer to another to do so without consent from their former employer, in specific cases. Prior to reform, this consent requirement was used by many employers to exploit migrant workers; some even demanded a specific amount of money in exchange for allowing the transfer.

Moreover, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development officially announced the abolition of this system for several professions, as mentioned, while introducing new mechanisms for transferring sponsorship. This change granted these professionals freedom of movement under clear and transparent conditions. However, the old Kafala system still regulates other occupations. Furthermore, the amendments do not apply to domestic workers.

Similar to the rules in Qatar and other GCC countries, Saudi Arabia has passed a ministerial regulation to curb working under the intense heat of the Saudi summer. The regulations stipulate that workers are prohibited from working under the scorching sun, particularly since the temperature can rise to 49° Celsius and sometimes even higher during the summer. With climate change exacerbating the heat, regulations were passed to protect workers from heat stroke and other related health conditions. According to the regulation, the ban on work lasts from mid-June to mid-September from 12:00 noon to 3:00 pm.

According to Cabinet Resolution No. (195) of 2022, Saudi Arabia started digitising its labour contracts, which helps safeguard worker rights, especially for migrants. Suppose any dispute arises from implementing those contracts, such as a labour dispute regarding salaries or contract conditions. In that case, the Ministry has a copy and can submit it to the designated authority. In the event of disputes between employers and migrant workers, the digitally preserved contract can save time and money for the migrant worker, as its terms can be easily retrieved to check for relevant information (Business Today Editorial Team, 2025).

Similar to the systems in Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE, the WPS in Saudi Arabia was established to ensure the timely payment of wages to employees in the private sector. It requires all private establishments with 10 or more employees to pay salaries through the WPS, which helps monitor compliance with the Saudi Labour Law. The WPS was introduced in the kingdom in 2009 and became mandatory in 2013; the extended period allowed companies to implement and adhere to this system. The Ministry gave certain companies, depending on the number of workers, until 2017 to comply fully with the WPS.

More GCC countries are implementing WPS-type systems to keep track of companies' payments to their workers, as non-payment of wages or payment other than the contractually agreed-upon wage were the most common complaints by employees. The WPS protects migrant workers from foul play, aiding them in legal disputes if their

employers fail to adhere to and fulfil their obligations to pay the agreed-upon wages on time.

Saudi Arabia should establish a fund for migrant workers similar to the fund that Qatar set up to compensate migrant workers for non-payment and injuries or deaths that occur during work. Moreover, Saudi collaboration with the ILO is imperative to reform its labour law and regulations to meet international standards. Although the kingdom has already addressed many of Qatar's pitfalls, working alongside the ILO can bring many positive changes to Saudi Arabia. Similar to Qatar, Saudi Arabia, as part of its labour reforms, abolished the long-standing permit that required the consent of the employer (sponsor) for a migrant worker to switch to another employer. The kingdom should establish a regional office, as Qatar has done, to elevate its partnership with the ILO to the next level. Saudi Arabia started its first phase of cooperation in 2018, which lasted until 2021. This was followed by a second phase of collaboration in 2022. This included the implementation of the National Occupational Safety and Health Policy to ensure safe working environments, which are crucial for migrants working in the construction sector for the 2034 World Cup. The cooperation also involved aligning national policies with international labour standards. Saudi Arabia's reforms are not only a response to winning the bid to host the World Cup, but also a key component of its 2030 vision. Improving the health and safety conditions of migrant workers is paramount to avoid Qatar's missteps, as reported by human rights organisations (HRW Team, 2020).

## **Comparative Analysis**

### ***Scope and Depth of Reforms***

Qatar and Saudi Arabia imposed the infamous Kafala system on migrant workers, which tied workers to a sponsor, preventing them from changing employers without the sponsor's consent. By contrast, Brazil used local workers and convicts. Many human rights NGOs have attacked the Kafala system because it leaves migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation by their sponsors. Human rights organisations have repeatedly highlighted the system as the leading human rights issue. In response, both Qatar and Saudi Arabia announced that they were abolishing the sponsorship system (Diop et al., 2015).

Qatar amended its laws to allow workers to change employers without the consent of the previous employer. Furthermore, Qatar agreed to abolish the exit visa requirement. Most human rights NGOs hailed both reforms, but the Qatari government did not abolish the Kafala system entirely. Nevertheless, Qatar had one of the strictest sponsorship systems in the region; therefore, its reforms have transformed it into a more open and welcoming country. Nevertheless, some categories of workers are still tied to sponsors. Despite some conflicting reports about the ability of migrant workers to change sponsors, the numbers provided by the government show that the majority were able to do so. Moreover, abolishing a system set since the 1950s is difficult without having an appropriate alternative in place.

Although Saudi Arabia announced that it would abolish the Kafala system, it neglected to mention that it was implementing only a partial reform. The removal of the Kafala system applies only to specific occupations, as mentioned in Section 3.1. Furthermore, domestic workers are still governed by the Kafala system (Saudi Press Editorial Team, 2025). Saudi Arabia is undergoing a significant shift and is on its way to becoming a regional hub; the kingdom is reforming its labour laws, including the Kafala system, and partially abolishing it. Similar to Qatar and other GCC countries, Saudi Arabia is



now under attack for human rights abuses owing to the deaths of several migrant workers, and all eyes will be on Saudi Arabia for the next few years to witness the reforms it will make. By further amending the Kafala system, Saudi Arabia can pave the way for other GCC countries. Admittedly, this will not be easy, as the system was established in the 1950s, and unravelling it and replacing it with reasonable alternatives will take time.

### ***Enforcement Mechanisms***

Announcing and implementing reform are important steps. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on the strength of the enforcement mechanisms. Therefore, Qatar established the Labour Dispute Resolution Committee, a judicial entity tasked with hearing workers' grievances and resolving disputes between them and their employers through binding verdicts. Before referring the matter to the committee, the Ministry tries to resolve the dispute amicably. If the parties do not settle, the matter is referred to the dispute resolution committee, headed by a judge. Qatar also introduced an online complaint mechanism to simplify the process by which workers could launch their grievances. Additionally, Qatar established several labour offices to house dispute resolution committees in various regions of Qatar, aiming to streamline cases and disputes between employers and workers.

The practicality of the complaint system has drawbacks, considering that most migrant workers, especially those in the construction sector, are illiterate. Thus, they would have difficulty utilising the online platform. However, launching it was a significant step in simplifying the process and, by extension, highlighting the issue of illiteracy. Qatar should launch awareness campaigns to familiarise the workers with the means of protecting their rights.

As a result of Qatar's reforms in the complaint mechanism for migrant workers, labour complaints increased owing to the simplicity of the process. Between 2020 and 2021, the number of complaints to the Qatari Ministry of Labour increased from an estimated 11,000 to 25,000. Furthermore, the number of complaints increased significantly in 2022 and 2023, reaching over 31,000 and 25,000, respectively. These numbers indicate that the Qatari reform paid off. The ILO noted that in 2023, 60% of the complaints from migrant workers were settled amicably. Additionally, in the same year, 23% of the complaints by migrant workers were referred to labour courts. The remaining 17% were complaints that were being reviewed by labour courts.

Perhaps the only downside is that the process of filing a complaint, attempting to settle the matter amicably, and going through the dispute resolution committee is lengthy, and the migrant worker may not be familiar with it. Thus, the best solution is to adopt and carry out a campaign in order to familiarise migrant workers with the process.

According to Saudi law, when a migrant or Saudi worker files a complaint, the complaint should be settled and resolved within 21 days. If not settled amicably, the complaint is referred to the labour court, which specialises in all disputes related to employment and labour issues between employer and employee. This streamlining of the justice process is especially beneficial for migrant workers, who often find themselves in a weaker position than their employers.

Saudi Arabia has made significant strides in its reforms since it was awarded the 2034 World Cup. However, the experience of Qatar offers valuable lessons for the kingdom, especially regarding the establishment of a kiosk to file complaints from migrant

workers in multiple languages. Saudi Arabia has not confirmed if it has a complaint hotline or if it is available 24/7. Interestingly, Saudi migrant workers are familiar with this process because they can file their complaints online in Qatar (A Global Review of the Science, 2024). Thus, Saudi Arabia should install and publicise a complaint hotline.

Additionally, the kingdom lacks an official repository for tracking the number of complaints filed by migrant workers and the current status of those complaints. Saudi Arabia has collaborated with the ILO, and the availability of such data is expected soon. The takeaway is that Saudi Arabia can learn from Qatar's hosting of the World Cup and the labour reforms that occurred in the process.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the experiences of Brazil and Qatar as World Cup hosts highlight how international pressure, accelerated development, and global scrutiny of human rights violations can spur significant reforms in migrant worker protection. Brazil failed to capitalise on this momentum, allowing violations such as wage delays, hazardous working conditions, and even worker deaths to occur without the support of effective oversight mechanisms or a strategic partnership with the ILO. In contrast, Qatar responded more progressively to global criticism through a series of structural reforms, including restrictions on work during extreme weather conditions, the establishment of a dispute resolution committee, the implementation of a universal minimum wage, the abolition of exit permits, and the creation of a compensation fund. While implementation remains challenging, Qatar demonstrates that major reforms can be achieved in the context of massive development and international scrutiny.

By comparing these two experiences, this research assesses Saudi Arabia's readiness for the 2034 World Cup. Initial reforms, such as the partial easing of Kafala, the digitisation of contracts, and the strengthening of the wage protection system, indicate a positive direction for change. However, they do not yet cover the most vulnerable sectors—particularly construction and domestic workers. Lessons from Qatar demonstrate that successful reforms require expanded legal protections, an intensive partnership with the ILO, an easily accessible multilingual complaints mechanism, and transparent data on the conditions of migrant workers. To avoid repeating the problems experienced by Brazil and Qatar, Saudi Arabia needs to strengthen regulatory commitments and implementation oversight to ensure that the major transformations within the Vision 2030 framework align with international labour standards and global expectations by 2034.

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