

Bahrain, India moot scrapping scheme to protect migrant maids

by Rejimon Kuttappan | Thomson Reuters Foundation
Wednesday, 22 February 2017 12:56 GMT

ABOUT OUR TRAFFICKING COVERAGE

"If it is removed, it will put the workers in a much a more difficult situation"

By Rejimon Kuttappan

MUSCAT, Feb 22 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - India and Bahrain are considering scrapping a financial guarantee scheme used to protect migrant maids who are not paid by their employers, in a move activists fear could expose thousands of Indian women in the Arab nation.

There are more than 300,000 Indian migrant workers in the tiny Gulf state of one million people, according to the [Indian embassy in Manama](#).

Most are men employed as construction workers, gardeners and drivers. There are also about 15,000 women working as maids.

Bahrain's Labour Market Regulatory Authority said in a blog published earlier this month that the two countries are studying a proposal to cancel the scheme, which gives financial aid to migrant maids, but did not give further details.

"If the study to scrap the financial guarantee in domestic workers' recruitment is agreed by the Indian government, it will leave domestic workers less protected," said Rafeek Ravuther, director at the Centre for Indian Migration Studies in India.

Bahraini and Indian officials were not immediately available to comment on why they were considering ending the protection.

Due to widespread reports of abuse committed against Indian workers in Gulf nations, India and Bahrain have an agreement whereby employers of domestic workers must provide a bank guarantee certificate of \$2,500 to the Indian embassy in Manama.

This aims to protect the domestic worker if an employer fails to pay wages, or the maid is subjected to abuse, such as physical or sexual violence, and requires compensation and financial aid to return home.

Josephine Valarmathi of National Domestic Workers Movement in India said New Delhi should carefully consider the vulnerability of workers before changing the scheme.

"If it is removed, it will put the workers in a much a more difficult situation," she said. "By removing the bank guarantees, the government is easing the rules and putting workers in a difficult situation without financial guarantees."

(Reporting by Rejimon Kuttappan. Editing by Nita Bhalla and Lyndsay Griffiths. Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, property rights, climate change and resilience. Visit <http://news.trust.org>)

THEMES