As Dubai prepares for the EXPO, how are workers in the UAE impacted by labour abuse?

On 1 October the Dubai EXPO, a six-month international fair which expects to welcome 25 million visitors, will open in the United Arab Emirates.

Our data shows migrant workers across the country continue to suffer severe and frequent labour abuse. The almost 8 million workers in the UAE remain at risk of suffering severe abuse facilitated by employment via the exploitative Kafala system, with poor enforcement of regulation and workers' freedom to change employer curtailed.

Data based on publicly reported allegations of labour abuse against migrants by businesses (January 2016 - August 2021). Read our methodology and a discussion of the challenges and limitations.

What are the most commonly reported types of abuse?

- Conditions of employment: 76%
- Arbitrary denial of freedoms: 42%
- Health and safety: 38%
- Precarious/inequitable housing: 56%
- Verbal/physical abuse: 13%
- Human trafficking/modern slavery: 5%
- Deaths: 5%
- Injuries: 4%
- Deaths: 5%

Where is abuse taking place?

- Dubai: 49%, 86 cases of abuse
- Abu Dhabi: 24%, 42 cases of abuse
- Sharjah: 11%, 19 cases of abuse
- Ras Al Khaimah: 3%, 5 cases of abuse
- Ajman: 3%, 5 cases of abuse
- Offshore: 5%, 9 cases of abuse

At a glance:

- 177 cases of abuse recorded in the UAE since 2016 - the highest of the GCC countries, making up 36% of all cases in the region
- 26,900 workers impacted in 177 cases
- 49% of cases in the UAE took place in Dubai
- Construction and engineering saw the highest level of abuse (22%) followed by hotels, security and logistics, transport, catering, cleaning, and domestic work.
- Workers from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan were most frequently affected by abuse.