

- (v) For redressal of grievances at Dubai at the Indian Workers Resource Centre (IWRC) there is a 24X7 toll free multilingual helpline.

Other Missions also have helpline/help desk to attend to grievances of Indian nationals.

- (vi) Computerized emigration clearance system exists in all POE offices. Security stickers are now pasted on the passport, giving information about the RAs, name of foreign employer, occupation, wages, insurance policy number, passport/visa number and the helpline number.

- (vii) Memorandum of Understanding on employment of workers (MoU): India has signed Labour agreements with Jordan and Qatar in 1980s. The Ministry, after its creation in 2004, made concerted efforts to enter into bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with the major receiving Countries for ensuring protection and welfare of our emigrants. MoU were signed with United Arab of Emirates (UAE) in December, 2006, with Kuwait, in April, 2007, with Oman in November, 2008, with Malaysia in January, 2009, and with Bahrain in June, 2009, Saudi Arabia in January, 2014. An Additional Protocol to the existing Labour Agreement between India and Qatar was signed in November, 2007.

- (viii) In addition, the Government has taken the following measures for protecting the safety and welfare of women workers of the ECR (Emigration Check Required) category to emigrate to 17 notified countries:

- (i) Age restriction of 30 years for women emigrating on ECR passports to ECR countries.
- (ii) Minimum referral wage for emigrants fixed by Mission.
- (iii) Security deposit of US\$ 2500 to be paid by foreign employer
- (iv) Compulsory pre-attestation of employment documents by the Indian Mission concerned for all women emigrants.
- (v) Pre-paid mobile phone facility for Housemaids to be provided by foreign employer.
- (vi) Operating shelters for distressed emigrants by Indian Missions.

Labour migration policy with Saudi Arabia

1328. SHRI AHMED PATEL: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether thousands of Indian workers are languishing in Saudi Arabia in unfair working conditions;

(b) whether Saudi Arabia is the only Gulf Cooperation Council country with which India has not yet signed a labour agreement, despite the fact that India is the largest labour exporter to Saudi Arabia;

(c) if so, whether Government proposes to sign a detailed labour migration policy with Riyadh/Saudi Arabia;

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor; and

(e) the steps Government is taking to protect the interests of Indian workers in Saudi Arabia?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (GENERAL (RETD.) V.K. SINGH): (a) Saudi Arabia is host to over 25 lakh Indians. The number varies, depending on the arrival of new workers and departure of those who complete contract period. Complaints from Indian workers concerning unfair working conditions are in the nature of non-renewal of *Iqama* (residence permit), non-payment of salary, underpayment, delay in payment of salaries and other benefits, non-provision of medical benefits, overworking, false filing of a case at the labour office declaring that the worker is absconding, refusal to provide exit permit so that the worker cannot leave the country, withholding benefits, and misbehaviour on the part of the employers, etc.

(b) to (d) No, Sir.

Though Memorandum of Understanding on Labour has not been signed with Saudi Arabia, an Agreement on Labour Co-operation for Domestic Service Workers (DSWs) between India and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been signed on 2nd January, 2014. The Agreement provides for facilitation of the recruitment of Indian domestic workers for working in the Saudi Arabia, ensure the authenticity of the employment contract which will protect the rights of the workers and the terms and condition of employment, protection and welfare of domestic sector workers under the Saudi labour laws and regulations, facilitate expeditious settlement of labour disputes, constitution of a Joint Committee to implement the provisions of the agreement.

(e) The Government has taken the following steps to protect the interests of Indian workers in Saudi Arabia:

- The Indian Mission in Riyadh has a 24x7 helpline and a helpdesk to deal with various problems of Indian labourers in Saudi Arabia.

- A Toll-Free number has also been installed for easy access to the Embassy by the community.
- Counselling and necessary assistance is provided from the Mission regularly through helpline and helpdesk.
- Assistance of the social workers/volunteers spread across the areas coming under the consular jurisdiction of the Embassy of India, Riyadh, is also availed in the efforts to redress the grievances of the workers.
- A shelter is run by the Embassy for runaway housemaids and women in distress. These maids are provided food and emergency medical care during their stay in the shelter. Once their exits are cleared by the Saudi authorities, they are also provided with the necessary travel documents (Emergency Certificates: ECs) and where required, air tickets are also provided from Indian Community Welfare Fund based on a means-tested basis.
- Embassy officials have been regularly visiting jails and deportation centres, meeting the Indian inmates; providing them with ECs, where required, and also arranging their repatriation (after completion of their sentences and their release by the local authorities) in cases where they do not have adequate means to fund their own departure to India.
- The Ministry has also set up Overseas Workers Resource Centre which is an institutional arrangement to provide information to intending migrants and overseas workers. OWRC is linked to the Migrant Resource Centers (MRCs) in Kochi and Hyderabad. They can also register complaint against Foreign Employer through call or log their grievances through the web application. It operates round the clock (24x7x365) to provide need based information in 11 languages (English, Hindi, Punjabi, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, Marathi, Odiya) through the toll free number 1800113090 in India and +91-11-40503090 for Indian emigrants working overseas.

On receipt of labour complaints, the Mission takes up the issue with the Saudi sponsor and, where necessary, with the Saudi Government authorities concerned. The Mission also deposes officials to visit Labour/General Courts and the companies concerned for assisting the aggrieved Indian labourers. The Embassy of India deploys an Arabic-knowing interpreter on a daily basis to assist Indian workers in lodging their complaints. Most of these cases are settled satisfactorily.