

= Foreign workers in Saudi Arabia =

Foreign workers in Saudi Arabia , estimated to number about 9 million as of April 2013 , began migrating to the country soon after oil was discovered in the late 1930s . Initially , the main influx was composed of Arab and Western technical , professional and administrative personnel , but subsequently substantial numbers came from Southeast Asia . Saudi Arabia has become increasingly dependent on foreign labour , and although foreign workers remain present in technical positions , most are now employed in the agriculture , cleaning and domestic service industries . The hierarchy of foreign workers is often dependent on their country of origin ; workers from Arab and Western countries generally hold the highest positions not held by Saudis , and the lower positions are occupied by persons from Africa , South Asia and Southeast Asia . The Saudi government has faced criticism from legal bodies and employers over the treatment of foreign workers .

= = Background and history = =

Saudi Arabia was one of the poorest and most undeveloped countries in the world when oil was discovered in the late 1930s . The country therefore needed foreign expertise and labour to exploit its vast oil reserves . As a result , in the years after World War II there was a growth in the numbers of foreign technical , professional and administrative personnel , mainly from other Middle Eastern countries but also supplied by Western oil companies , many of whom worked for ARAMCO (Arabian @-@ American Oil Company) . A much greater increase in the numbers of foreign workers came with the oil @-@ price boom following the 1973 oil crisis . Infrastructure and development plans led to an influx of skilled and unskilled workers , principally Palestinians , Egyptians , Yemenis and others from Arab countries , but also Indians and Pakistanis , leading to a doubling of the Saudi population by 1985 . Beginning in the early 1980s , South and East Asian countries , such as Thailand , Philippines and South Korea , increasingly provided migrant workers .

From 1985 the declining oil price led to a decreased demand for foreign labour , resulting in a substantial drop in migration from Asia . However , at the same time , there was a significant increase of female " guest workers " from Sri Lanka , Bangladesh , Philippines and Indonesia who filled roles in the services sector ? particularly in hotels and as domestic servants . The Gulf War of 1991 sparked a series of expulsions of guest workers suspected of disloyalty , including the removal of 800 @,@ 000 Yemenis . The numbers of foreign workers reached a plateau in the 1990s , but from the end of the decade the inflow of migrants resumed its increase . According to official figures in 2012 , foreign workers filled 66 per cent of jobs in Saudi Arabia , despite an official unemployment rate of 12 per cent amongst Saudis , and expatriates sent , on average , US \$ 18 billion each year , in remittances to their home countries .

Although the country 's reliance on foreign workers has been a concern to the Saudi government since the mid @-@ 1950s , the situation has persisted because of a reluctance by Saudis to take on menial work and a shortage of Saudi candidates for skilled jobs . This has , in part , been blamed on the Saudi education system , which has been criticized for its emphasis on religion and rote learning . The Saudi economy has , therefore , remained dependent on Westerners for expertise in specialised industries and on the Asian workforce for the construction industry as well as for menial and unskilled tasks . In response , since 1995 the Saudi government has initiated a policy of Saudization , replacing foreign workers with Saudi nationals . For example , in 2000 , it was decreed that the work force of businesses with more than 20 employees must be at least 25 per cent Saudi . In the private sector , there has been a reluctance to employ Saudis and Saudization is generally considered to have been a failure . Saudis themselves may be unwilling to take certain jobs , considering them to lack social value .

The Saudi government only recognises contracts for foreign workers written in Arabic . Where bilingual contracts are available , the Arabic language one is authoritative . The contracts , which must contain the terms of employment , are held in duplicate , one for the sponsor and one for the worker . Wages for foreign workers vary , depending on the position , although in general Saudis holding similar positions earn more .

== Composition and numbers ==

The 2010 edition of the Central Intelligence Agency 's World Factbook estimated that non @-@ nationals represented 5 @, @ 576 @, @ 076 out of a population of 25 @, @ 731 @, @ 776 in Saudi Arabia . However , official 2010 census figures stated that there were 8 @, @ 429 @, @ 401 expatriates out of a total population of 27 @, @ 136 @, @ 977 or roughly 31 per cent of the total .

The results of the 2004 census indicates that only about 15 per cent of foreign workers are in the skilled category , with the remainder mostly working in agriculture , cleaning and domestic service . Country of origin has been an important factor in determining foreign workers ' occupational roles in Saudi Arabia . Saudi businesses have traditionally adopted an ethnically defined hierarchical organisation . For example , a recent academic study of a Danish manufacturing company 's Saudi subsidiary noted that a manager had to be European , a supervisor had to be Egyptian , Filipino employees often had technical roles , and Indians , the lowest in the hierarchy , worked in production . Foreign workers ' presence in Saudi Arabia tends to be transitory : only 3 % remain in the country for more than six years .

== Skilled workers ==

Most specialized technical workers are American or Western European , and are occupied particularly in the defence and petrochemical industries . Westerners generally feel that they are paid well and have excellent living conditions and housing with schooling paid for by their employers . They often live in compounds or gated communities , such as the Saudi Aramco compound at Dhahran Camp . However , many Westerners left the country in 2003 and 2004 following the terrorist attacks in Riyadh , Khobar and Yanbu . A significant number of U.S. workers are English teachers .

Additionally Egyptians have long migrated to Saudi Arabia to take up professional jobs such as doctors , nurses , teachers and engineers , as have Filipinos to work in the health , oil and manufacturing sectors .

== Domestic workers ==

According to The Guardian , as of 2013 there were more than half a million foreign @-@ born domestic workers in Saudi Arabia . Most have backgrounds in poverty and come from Africa , the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia . To go to work in Saudi Arabia , they must often pay large sums to recruitment agencies in their home countries . The agencies then handle the necessary legal paperwork . Some falsify their dates of birth , allowing them easier access to the country . These workers can bring much @-@ needed capital to their home countries , sometimes in the billions of dollars .

== Restrictions ==

All visitors to Saudi Arabia must have a sponsor , which is usually arranged months in advance . Unlike countries which recognize the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which declares in part " Everyone has the right to leave any country , including his own ") Saudi Arabia requires foreign workers to have their sponsor 's permission to enter and leave the country , and denies exit to those with work disputes pending in court . Sponsors generally confiscate passports while workers are in the country ; sometimes employers also hold passports of workers ' family members . Foreign workers must be free of infectious disease , including HIV .

== Abuse and scandals ==

Many domestic servants in Saudi Arabia are treated adequately , but there have been numerous

cases of abuse . Foreign workers have been raped , exploited , under- or unpaid , physically abused , overworked and locked in their places of employment . The international organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) describes these conditions as " near @-@ slavery " and attributes them to " deeply rooted gender , religious , and racial discrimination " . In many cases the workers are unwilling to report their employers for fear of losing their jobs or further abuse . Other forms of general discrimination , such as a lack of freedom of religion for non @-@ Sunni Muslims , are also applicable .

Some American English teachers have complained they were not informed of a 90 @-@ day probation period .

According to a spokesperson from HRW , Saudi Arabian law does not provide strong legal protection for migrant workers and housemaids . As such , they face " arbitrary arrests , unfair trials and harsh punishments " and may falsely be accused of crime . Amnesty International reports that those charged are often unable to follow the court proceedings , as they are often unable to speak the language and are not given interpreters or legal counsel . Foreign workers have been charged with various crimes , including theft , murder and " black magic " . After a worker is convicted and sentenced to death , in many cases the worker 's home government is not notified . When the country 's representatives are notified , it is often difficult for them to argue for a commutation of sentence . Efforts by the Indonesian government in 2011 , for example , required the victims ' families to grant clemency and be given diyya (" blood money ") in the millions of riyal before the Saudi government would consider the case . As of January 2013 , the majority of foreign workers held on death row in Saudi Arabia come from Indonesia .

These conditions have sparked condemnation both inside and outside of Saudi Arabia . In 2002 , Grand Mufti Abdul @-@ Azeez ibn Abdullaah Aal ash @-@ Shaikh argued that Islam required employers to honour their contracts and not intimidate , blackmail or threaten their workers .

Several executions have sparked international outcries . In June 2011 Ruyati binti Satubi , an Indonesian maid , was beheaded for killing her employer 's wife , reportedly after years of abuse . A video of the execution , posted online , prompted extensive criticism . In September 2011 a Sudanese migrant worker was beheaded for " sorcery " , an execution which Amnesty International condemned as " appalling " . In January 2013 a Sri Lankan maid named Rizana Nafeek was beheaded after she was convicted of murdering a child under her care , an occurrence which she attributed to the infant choking . The execution drew international condemnation of the government 's practices and led Sri Lanka to recall its ambassador . These are not isolated cases . According to figures by Amnesty International , in 2010 at least 27 migrant workers were executed and , as of January 2013 , more than 45 foreign maids were on death row awaiting execution .