



International  
Labour  
Organization

# FAIR RECRUITMENT MATTERS FOR BUSINESS

---

Lessons from a pilot study in  
Qatar's construction sector



The issue of fair recruitment is central to our country's labour reform agenda. We are committed to achieving fair recruitment practices, in line with international labour standards and best practices.

Yousuf Mohamed Al Othman Fakhroo, Minister of Administrative Development Labour and Social Affairs of the State of Qatar

## Highlights

- ◆ Demonstrated that fair recruitment benefits business, and can be achieved in a relatively short period
- ◆ Significantly reduced recruitment fees and related costs, and the debt incurred by workers
- ◆ Facilitated informed decision-making around migration and addressed contract deception
- ◆ Led to an effective grievance mechanism reducing the risks of disputes

## The stakeholders

- ◆ Qatar's Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs (ADLSA)
- ◆ International Labour Organization (ILO) Qatar Project Office
- ◆ QDVC, a shareholding company between Qatari Diar and VINCI Construction Grands Projets, undertaking engineering and construction services for major infrastructure projects
- ◆ Structural Technical Services and Contracting (STS), a Qatari company providing recruitment and placement services. A service provider to QDVC
- ◆ Bonanza Overseas (Bonanza), a private recruitment agency in Bangladesh that recruits workers for STS

## WHY FAIR RECRUITMENT MATTERS

---

Over the past few years, the State of Qatar has been implementing an ambitious labour reform agenda, which benefits workers, employers and the economy as a whole.

The ILO has worked closely with the Government to support the reforms, and opened an office in Doha in April 2018.

Promoting fair recruitment practices, primarily through engagement with the private sector, has been a key focus of the [ADLSA-ILO technical cooperation programme](#). While Qatar's Labour Law specifically prohibits charging workers recruitment fees and related costs<sup>1</sup>, migrants all too often end up having to pay hefty sums, and are deceived about their contracts. Debt bondage is a key indicator of forced labour, a crime in Qatar. Being associated with these practices can also carry major reputational risks for companies.

### What is fair recruitment?

According to the ILO [General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment](#), fair recruitment means:

- ◆ Workers should not be charged any recruitment fees or related costs;
- ◆ Terms and conditions of employment should be fully disclosed in a verifiable and understandable manner; and
- ◆ Workers should have access to a free or affordable grievance resolution system.

---

<sup>1</sup> Article 33 of Qatar Labour Law No. 14 of 2004.

# A PROCESS EVERY COMPANY SHOULD CONDUCT

---

In early 2018, QDVC signed a Public Private Partnership agreement with the ILO Qatar Project Office to implement a pilot on fair recruitment. The construction sector was identified for the pilot due to its relatively large reliance on low-wage migrant workers and on often long and complex sub-contracting and supply chains.

To address the vulnerabilities faced by workers within supply chains, the pilot focused on the recruitment practices of STS, a service provider that places workers in QDVC worksites. Due to the large number of workers STS recruited from Bangladesh, the pilot looked specifically at the Bangladesh-Qatar migration corridor. STS's long-time recruitment agency partner in Bangladesh, Bonanza, also agreed to take part in the pilot.

In January 2018, STS, encouraged and accompanied by QDVC<sup>2</sup>, had already adopted a policy of not charging any recruitment fees or related costs to workers. To complement this process, STS and Bonanza felt the pilot would help them address remaining challenges, with the collective expertise of the other partners.

The pilot, which began in mid-2018, followed a rigorous and comprehensive process. The main steps – replicable by other companies – included:

- 1. An independent audit** of STS and Bonanza mapped out the entire recruitment process and identified gaps in policies and procedures to comply with fair recruitment.
- 2. A capacity-building programme**, based on the findings of the independent audit, was implemented. It included a series of training sessions to address the identified gaps. It led to increased cooperation between all stakeholders and transfer of know-how between QDVC and its supply chain partners. Technical support was provided to STS and Bonanza to revise or develop policies and tools to implement fair recruitment.
  - ▷ **The service agreement between STS and Bonanza** was amended to reflect fair recruitment principles. The agreement stipulates that no recruitment fees or related costs should be charged to migrant workers, and features a detailed breakdown of recruitment fees and costs<sup>3</sup> to be paid by the employer, which reduces the possibility of any hidden costs for workers. It also states that the recruitment agency must conduct due diligence of the entire recruitment process.
  - ▷ **Recruitment procedures were improved** to address the gaps identified. A mapping of the recruitment process was carried out by Bonanza to identify risks at each stage of recruitment and implement strategies to address them. Bonanza, for example, advertised jobs through local media and recruited directly from migrants' villages of origin to address the potential risks of intermediaries collecting fees and providing misleading information.
  - ▷ **A pre-departure programme was developed** to avoid deception at different stages of the recruitment process, and stressing workers should not pay any recruitment fees or related costs. In addition to videos and booklets providing details of working and living conditions in Qatar, elected STS workers' representatives in Qatar responded to queries from newly recruited workers in Bangladesh.

---

<sup>2</sup> QDVC has a longstanding working relationship with STS; having been previously audited regularly by QDVC on key aspects of labour rights, including working and living conditions, STS showed a keen interest to improve its recruitment. To help them do so, QDVC shared its relevant resources and tools with STS.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the examples of breakdown of recruitment fees and related costs, please refer to the [Promoting Fair Recruitment and Employment – A Guidance Tool for Hotels in Qatar](#).

- ▷ **Grievance procedures were revamped.** STS adopted a grievance policy, and developed complementary procedures. As part of an effective grievance mechanism, STS also set up a WhatsApp forum and a grievance hotline<sup>4</sup> where workers can ask questions and directly report any violations that occurred during the recruitment process, such as the collection of fees and costs by intermediaries. Similarly, Bonanza introduced grievance forms and set up a call-centre to respond to any queries or complaints from workers during the pre-departure phase.

**3. An impact assessment of the pilot** was conducted by Tufts University<sup>5</sup> to determine the impact on workers and potential benefits for employers. The impact assessment was carried out across 15 months. For comparison across the different groups, data was collected from workers recruited before and after the pilot intervention upon 8 to 16 months of their arrival in Qatar. Through in-depth interviews with 343 workers recruited by STS before and after the pilot, the impact assessment was essential to gauge the effectiveness of the policies and procedures related to fair recruitment, and identify any remaining gaps.

## IMPACT OF FAIR RECRUITMENT

---

The impact assessment highlighted many positive changes after STS adopted a policy of not charging any recruitment fees or related costs to workers in January 2018.

Key findings included:

- ◆ **A sharp drop in recruitment fees and related costs paid by workers.**
- ◆ **A major reduction of workers' debt.**
- ◆ **Fewer cases of deceptive contract practices.**

---

<sup>4</sup> STS reported a total of 239 calls received in the grievance hotline during May to December 2019. These calls were related to seeking more information on the terms and conditions of employment, recruitment process, and departure date; and reporting external intermediaries asking for recruitment fees and related costs.

<sup>5</sup> The impact assessment was carried out by Tufts University's Department of Economics, which has vast experience using econometric models to analyse economic, political and social issues, in collaboration with the Associates for Community and Population Research. The ILO has collaborated with them in the past to assess the impact of its fair recruitment pilot in the garment sector.

	<b>Recruited before STS policy changes<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Recruited before the pilot but after the STS policy changes</b>	<b>Recruited after the pilot</b>
<b>Average recruitment fees and related costs paid by the worker</b>	\$3,408 Estimated 11.7 months of average total monthly wage	\$669 Estimated 2.7 months of average total monthly wage	\$300 <sup>7</sup> Estimated 1 month of average total monthly wage
<b>Had no debt related to migration</b>	45% <sup>8</sup>	90% <sup>9</sup>	93% <sup>10</sup>
<b>Contract changed during migration process</b>	35%	17%	8%
<b>Workers who learned about working hours and wage only after migrating</b>	10%	3%	0%

The assessment also showed improvements in relations between workers and management, significantly better mental health among workers and an increased willingness to migrate for work again in the future.

In addition, the Qatari construction sector and the country as a whole benefit from the availability of contractors and subcontractors whose practices are aligned with the ILO's fair recruitment principles.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to its decision not to charge recruitment fees to workers, STS further amended policies and procedures after conducting an assessment in early 2018.

<sup>7</sup> The most common and expensive costs reportedly paid by workers on average were costs to obtain a passport, and costs related to local travel and lodging during the recruitment process in Bangladesh.

<sup>8</sup> After 2 years in Qatar.

<sup>9</sup> After 2 years in Qatar.

<sup>10</sup> After 1 ½ years in Qatar.

## MAKING FAIR RECRUITMENT A REALITY

---

The pilot showed implementing fair recruitment is possible with **commitment and transparency amongst all actors involved**. **The concrete tools** developed through the pilot are easy to use and adapt, to address coercive and deceptive recruitment practices.

It demonstrated that **companies can achieve fair recruitment in a relatively short time span**. It took just a few months to reach a massive drop in the average recruitment fees and related costs paid by workers, as well as deceptive practices; to deeply reform company policies and practices; and to achieve fair recruitment.

The pilot highlighted the **benefits to workers**, while demonstrating that companies can **reduce the risks of unfair recruitment** while facilitating **better selection** of workers<sup>11</sup>.

While it focused on recruitment of workers in Bangladesh for the Qatar construction industry, **the pilot can serve as a case study for similar initiatives in other countries and other sectors**.

---

<sup>11</sup> STS terminated 21 percent of the workers, recruited prior to the pilot, in the first 18 months of work as compared to 0 percent of workers recruited after the pilot.



“  
This pilot provides an important lesson: when there is a will, there is a way! Across and beyond the construction industry, clients and contractors have a key role in driving change towards fair recruitment.

Henriette McCool, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager, QDVC/VINCI

“  
As a recruitment agency, having better recruitment policies, better grievance mechanisms and assessment procedures in place gives us competitive advantage when working with our clients.

Mahsoun Choudhury,  
Bonanza Overseas

“  
The pilot was a good opportunity for us to improve our internal systems and processes for fair recruitment and make sure they are up to standard. Although the pilot focused on Bangladeshi workers in the construction sector, we have been able to use the policies and replicate the tools for other sectors and areas of our work.

Sebtain Nasser, HR and Operations Director STS

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the International Labour Office (ILO) or by the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs of Qatar (ADLSA) of the opinions expressed in them.

Reference to names of firms and commercial products and processes does not imply their endorsement by the ILO nor ADLSA, and any failure to mention a particular firm, commercial product to process is not a sign of disapproval.

