

Measuring What Matters: A Worker-Outcome Baseline for the Africa–Gulf Corridor

Three Outcome Indicators for the Africa–Gulf Corridor

Do Bold Position Paper · Submitted to the Second Doha Dialogue on Labour Mobility and Employment, Dar es Salaam, 5–6 October 2026

Do Bold's position: The Doha Dialogue should measure labour mobility by what happens to workers after they migrate, not by how many workers are sent abroad or how many agreements are signed. Until workers can leave an employer or return home without the employer's consent or a penalty, and their complaints can reach a remedy, their legal protection will exist only on paper.

Summary

The Africa–Gulf corridor now moves more than 4.7 million African workers ([IOM](#)), yet the Dialogue has no common way to measure whether these workers are better protected today than they were after the first Dialogue in 2024. Do Bold's case-level data on 705 African workers, recorded between 2020 and 2026, shows what they faced. Among workers who sought Do Bold's help, 79% were deceived about the job, working conditions, the wage or the destination before departure, 78% had their passports held by an employer or agent, and fewer than one in ten domestic workers who wanted to leave could do so freely (8 of 96). Most of these cases predate the 2024 Doha Declaration, which makes them a baseline against which progress since can be measured. Do Bold's ongoing contact with Malawian and Sierra Leonean women in Oman and Kenyan women in Saudi Arabia has found no change in these conditions since. These figures are the baseline and the indicators proposed here would measure change against it.

Do Bold can provide an independent baseline from its case data and is ready to work with the joint secretariat on measurement.

Do Bold makes one recommendation: that the Dialogue adopt three Corridor Outcome Indicators in Dar es Salaam (recruitment fees, freedom to leave and birth registration) and report against them for every corridor before the third Dialogue in 2028. Outcome indicators also serve destination states: they would let governments show, with evidence, that their labour reforms are reaching workers.

1. How progress is currently measured

The 2024 Doha Declaration set clear priorities: recruitment, skills, occupational safety and health, access to justice, technology, and the needs of women migrant workers ([IOM](#)). However, it did not create a shared way to measure progress. What is being measured and reported comes from individual governments and is mostly about activities such as agreements signed and new systems launched, rather than reporting what has changed for workers. Tanzania's position is that labour mobility should not be measured only by the number of citizens placed abroad ([The Chanzo](#)).

Measuring outcome is possible. In an ILO-supported ([ILO](#)) pilot project with a construction subcontractor in the Bangladesh-Qatar corridor, workers hired through fair recruitment reported 93 per cent less recruitment-related debt than workers hired before. The indicators proposed here would also give a

measurable form to African states' own commitment to evidence-based migration policy, the Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA; [AU](#)).

2. What case-level data shows

Do Bold's dataset records individual worker cases from 2020 to 2026, across the full migration cycle, from recruitment in the origin country to exit or return. These are cases that reached Do Bold, not a representative sample, so the figures show patterns rather than prevalence. Each figure gives the number of cases with the problem out of those where the answer is known. Percentages are shown only where at least 30 cases are answered. The method and its limits are set out in the Annex. If conditions have improved since these cases were recorded, the indicators proposed here are how governments can show it. Six findings bear directly on this Dialogue's agenda.

Protection fails at every stage, and almost no one reaches a remedy

African workers in Do Bold case data, 2020–26 · cases with the problem, of those where the answer is known



Finding 1: Workers are deceived before they leave (recruitment). 79% of workers (170 of 216) were lied to about the job, working conditions, the wage or the destination before departure. Most had no contract to compare against: 87 of 108 Sierra Leonean women did not sign a contract in a language they understood. Few kept a copy. None of the 390 women Do Bold spoke with for *Mapping Her Journey* could share one, and in a later survey only 7 of 29 women who had signed a contract could provide a photo of it. Without a contract they understand and can keep, workers have no way to prove what they were promised.

Finding 2: Workers pay for their own recruitment, twice (fair recruitment). 93% of Sierra Leonean women in Do Bold's 2020–22 survey paid recruitment fees, a median of US\$700, or about three months' wages (*Mapping Her Journey*, 2022). In the case data, 43% of other African workers (52 of 122) reported paying fees. Workers then pay a second time once they arrive: employers often recover their own hiring costs by withholding two to four months' pay.

Finding 3: Domestic workers carry the highest risk (needs of women migrant workers). Domestic workers are over-represented in the most serious abuses: they made up 74% of cases with a known sector (266 of 361), yet they accounted for 95% of confinement cases (113 of 119) and 81% of document-retention cases (169 of 208). While 68% of all workers reported unpaid or late wages (182 of 268), the figure for domestic workers was 79% (134 of 170). Only 8 of 96 domestic workers who asked to leave were able to. They are also covered by separate, weaker rules than other workers. None of the 179 domestic workers in Oman who answered (mainly Sierra Leonean and Malawian) had a weekly day off, including all 70 recorded between 2023 and 2026. Of 108 Sierra Leonean women, 68 worked more than 14 hours a day. In the later cases, most were paid a fixed 80–90 OMR (about US\$208–234) a month

(43 of 48). Combined with held passports, unpaid wages and no way to leave, these are ILO indicators of forced labour.

Finding 4: Workers cannot leave without paying (freedom to leave). 72% of workers (119 of 165) could not leave their employer or return home when they needed or wanted to. Where leaving was discussed, employers or agencies demanded a release fee or repayment in 49 of 55 cases.

Finding 5: Complaints rarely reach a remedy (access to justice). Of 63 workers who sought help in the Gulf, only 9 reached a formal complaint channel, and none received compensation; most of those cases ended in repatriation. The rest turned mostly to their recruitment agency (25) or their embassy (22). Workers avoid formal complaints because doing so, according to the workers, often makes things worse: the most common police response Do Bold recorded was to call the employer and return the worker (*Mapping Her Journey*, 2022).

Finding 6: Children cannot leave either (needs of women migrant workers). Among Kenyan mothers in Saudi Arabia, 99 of 105 children had no birth certificate. Most were born at home (93 of 107) to mothers who had no valid documents or marriage certificates, and for 14 children an unpaid hospital bill was one of the reasons. Without a birth certificate, neither mother nor child can leave: 69 of 82 mothers were trying to return home. 47 of 74 unmarried mothers had taken a DNA test, most with their embassy's help, but only one had received the result.

3. Recommendation

The Doha Dialogue is a voluntary, state-led process. It cannot change national laws, but it can decide how progress is measured, and that is its most important decision in Dar es Salaam. Do Bold therefore makes one recommendation, building on the Doha Declaration's commitment to better data and its priorities on recruitment, access to justice and the needs of women migrant workers.

Measure what changes for workers. The joint secretariat, with IOM, ILO and the AU Commission, should adopt three Corridor Outcome Indicators (recruitment fees, freedom to leave and birth registration) in the Dar es Salaam outcome document; report against them for every corridor before the third Dialogue in 2028; and include independent, non-state data holders in building the baseline. Complaint channels should also publish or share the outcome of every labour complaint, broken down by nationality, sector and gender, including what share of wages claimed was actually recovered and how long it took, so that access to remedy can be measured by the third Dialogue.

Outcome indicators also serve destination states: several have made significant labour reforms, and these measures would let them show, with evidence, that the reforms are reaching workers. The reforms the findings point to are for states to decide; they are set out in the Annex as what progress should look like.

4. Proposed Corridor Outcome Indicators

Three indicators would let the Dialogue track worker outcomes, not only agreements signed. The findings cover the whole journey; these three were chosen because they can be measured now, cover both origin and destination states, and would show change by the third Dialogue. Each can be built on data systems states already run: returnee or labour force surveys for recruitment fees, job-change and

exit records for freedom to leave, and civil registration compared with hospital, consular and independent case records for birth registration. Two build on existing SDG indicators (10.7.1 and 16.9.1). Each should be reported for every corridor, by sector and gender, alongside independent case data. Together they give a measurable form to the Doha Declaration's commitment to better data, and answer the MPFA's call for evidence-based migration policy.

Indicator	What it measures	Do Bold baseline
Recruitment fees	Whether workers pay recruitment fees, to whom, and how much	93% of Sierra Leonean women paid fees, about three months' wages (one corridor, 2020–22)
Freedom to leave	Workers able to change employer or return home without their employer's permission, and whether they were charged a penalty to do so	28% could leave or go home (46 of 165); 8 of 96 domestic workers
Birth registration	Children born to migrant workers in the destination country without a birth certificate	99 of 105 children without a birth certificate (Kenyan mothers in Saudi Arabia)

Baselines: Do Bold case data, 2020–26, describing workers who sought help, not a prevalence estimate. Full definitions, sources and five further indicators proposed for the third Dialogue are in the Annex.

About Do Bold

Do Bold is an independent research and advisory organisation working on labour migration and worker protection in the Gulf, with a focus on the Africa–Gulf corridor. It holds the largest case-level dataset on forced labour risks in the region, with more than 2,100 documented cases. Its team brings over a decade of field experience with governments, the ILO, IOM, and the private sector.

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Sources

- [Doha Declaration on Labour Mobility, 22 May 2024](#)
- [African Union: Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action \(2018–2030\)](#)
- [African Union: MPFA Executive Summary](#)
- [IOM: Ministers from Africa and the Gulf set for high-level labour mobility talks in Dar es Salaam](#)
- [The Chanzo: Tanzania puts labour protection at centre of Doha Dialogue](#)
- [ILO: Fair recruitment roadmap, a guide for national action](#)
- [ILO: The Doha Dialogue paves the way for improved labour mobility governance](#)
- ILO (2012), ILO Indicators of Forced Labour

- Do Bold (2022), *Mapping Her Journey: Documenting Widespread Issues Affecting Sierra Leonean Domestic Workers in Oman*
- Do Bold (2025), Submission for the 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report on Oman, to the US Department of State (unpublished)
- Do Bold case data, KoboToolbox forms and WhatsApp case conversations, 2020–2026 (anonymised; not public)

Annex: Indicator definitions and baselines

Indicators 2, 6 and 7 below (the shaded rows) are the three proposed for adoption in Dar es Salaam. The other five are proposed for the third Dialogue, once states begin recording the data. Indicator numbers in this Annex follow this table.

Indicator	Definition	Do Bold baseline
1. Contract held and honoured	Share of workers who (a) signed a contract in a language they understand before departure, (b) hold a copy, and (c) whose job, wage and employer match it	(a) 87 of 108 Sierra Leonean women did not; (b) none of 390 could share a copy (<i>Mapping Her Journey</i>); 7 of 29 in a later survey; (c) 79% deceived (170 of 216)
2. Recruitment fees	(a) Share of workers who paid any recruitment fee or cost; (b) fees paid, in months of earnings (SDG 10.7.1)	(a) 93% (Sierra Leone survey); 43% (52 of 122, case data); (b) ≈3 months (Sierra Leone)
3. Timely wage payment	Paid in full and on time in the last three months	32% (86 of 268)
4. Document retention	Worker does not hold their own passport or ID	78% (295 of 376)
5. Access to remedy	(a) Share of workers seeking help who reach a formal complaint channel; (b) share of complaints resolved with payment of wages or compensation	(a) 9 of 63 reached a formal complaint channel in the Gulf; (b) none received compensation; 1 of 9 recovered part of their wages
6. Freedom to leave	Of workers who wanted to leave: (a) able to change employer without their employer's permission; (b) able to return home without their employer's permission; (c) charged a penalty beyond the notice period	(a) and (b) combined: 28% (46 of 165); domestic workers who asked to leave 8 of 96; (c) 49 of 55 where leaving was discussed
7. Birth registration	Children born to migrant workers in the destination country without a birth certificate	99 of 105 children without a birth certificate
8. Rest and working hours	Share of domestic workers with (a) a weekly rest day; (b) a working day of less than 12 hours	(a) 0 of 179 (mainly Sierra Leonean and Malawian women, Oman); (b) 18 of 108 (Sierra Leonean women, Oman)

Baselines: Do Bold case data, 2020–26 (705 African cases), unless another source is named. These describe workers who reached Do Bold, not prevalence. Indicator 1(c) counts deception about the job, working conditions, the wage or the destination before departure. Indicator 1(b) counts only copies workers could share, so it may understate how many hold one. Indicator 2 for Sierra Leone uses *Mapping Her Journey* (2022): a median fee of US\$700 against an 80–90 OMR monthly wage. Indicator 3 counts any unpaid or late wage during employment. Indicator 6(a) and (b) are combined, as the data does not yet separate them. Indicator 7 covers children of Kenyan mothers in Saudi Arabia, from a form designed for children without a birth certificate, so it shows the problem exists, not how widespread it is.

Method and limits

The dataset covers 2,145 cases recorded between 2020 and 2026, of which 705 are African workers, mainly from Sierra Leone (378), Kenya (144) and Malawi (106), working in Oman (482), Saudi Arabia (129), the UAE (66), Kuwait and Qatar. Cases come from eight forms that workers completed on their phones and from one-to-one WhatsApp conversations with workers or their relatives. Do Bold's WhatsApp records hold about 1,900 one-to-one conversations. For this paper we used 307, chosen by fixed criteria rather than by what they contained: all conversations still active after May 2024, all from African home-country numbers, and a pilot sample. This produced 177 worker cases. Group chats and voice messages were not analysed. Recruitment-fee figures for Sierra Leone come from Do Bold's *Mapping Her Journey* survey (2022; 469 verified responses from Sierra Leonean domestic workers in Oman). Working hours, rest-day and salary figures for domestic workers in Oman come from two forms, “Daughters of Mama Salone” (2020–21) and SuMaSi (2023–26). Records were deduplicated and matched across sources. After anonymisation, AI tools were used to help analyse the data; Do Bold checked the results against the source records. Totals differ between figures because each form asked different questions; each figure counts only the cases where that question was answered, and the same worker can appear in several figures. All figures are aggregated; no individual, employer or agency is identifiable.

The data reflects workers who came into contact with our support channels, so it likely over-represents workers in difficulty. It is best read as a pre-Declaration baseline and a signal of where protection is failing, not as a prevalence estimate for the corridor. Most African cases (619 of 705) predate May 2024. Do Bold continues to monitor the same communities through regular conversations. That monitoring has not identified any change since 2024, and the 86 cases recorded since May 2024 show the same pattern (passports held in 35 of 45, workers unable to leave in 30 of 35), but they are too few to measure change statistically. Two-thirds of African cases are from Oman.

What progress looks like

The findings point to the following reforms. They are for states to decide; the indicators would show whether they are working. Each is worded so it can be written into a bilateral agreement or national law.

1. **Make the freedom to leave the first test of progress.** *Doha Dialogue:* every worker, including domestic workers, should be able to end their contract with reasonable notice, or immediately in cases of abuse, unpaid wages or confinement; to change employer; and to leave the country,

without needing the employer's consent. No penalty should apply beyond the notice period: no release fee, repayment of recruitment fees, withheld documents or earned wages, absconding report or re-entry ban. This applies equally to mothers and their children. *Indicator 6.*

2. **Make complaints safe and lead to a remedy.** *GCC destination states:* ensure that bringing a complaint, whether to the police, labour authorities or the courts, never leaves a worker worse off. No worker should be returned to the employer they are complaining about, face retaliation, or be repatriated before their case is decided. Workers should be able to stay legally in the country and change employer while the case is open. Complaints that are upheld should end in payment of wages owed or compensation. *Origin-state embassies:* record every case brought to them and refer it to the formal complaint channel. *Indicator 5.*
3. **Give domestic workers the same protection as other workers.** *GCC destination states:* ensure domestic workers have the same protection as workers under the labour law, whether through the labour law itself or through domestic-worker legislation. This should cover, at minimum, the freedom to leave as set out in point 1, a minimum wage, paid overtime, a weekly rest day, limits on daily working hours, wage protection and holding their own documents. Many of these already exist in law or regulation; the gap is enforcement. Labour inspectors should be able to act on domestic workers' complaints, including through procedures for inspecting private homes, and employers who breach these rules should face penalties. *Origin and destination states:* cover domestic workers explicitly in every bilateral agreement under the Dialogue, including in joint monitoring. *Indicators 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8.*
4. **Register every child at birth.** *GCC destination states and origin-state embassies:* ensure every child born in the destination is issued a birth certificate, regardless of the mother's marital or visa status, whether the birth took place in a hospital or at home, and whether or not hospital fees have been paid. Registration should never be withheld to recover a debt. Embassies should complete DNA testing and issue identity and travel documents within a fixed time. *Indicator 7.*
5. **Every worker holds a contract they understand.** *Origin and destination states:* no worker should travel without a signed employment contract in a language they understand, and it should be signed before departure and before they pay anything. The worker keeps a paper and digital copy, and the contract is registered in a system both governments and the worker can access. The registered contract is the one that applies in the destination, and any less favourable substitute is void. Bilateral agreements under the Dialogue should include this as a standard contract annex. *Indicator 1.*
6. **Employers pay for recruitment, not workers.** *Origin and destination states:* write the principle that the employer bears all recruitment fees and related costs into every bilateral agreement and standard contract. Make everyone in the recruitment chain (sub-agents, origin and destination agencies, and the employer) jointly responsible for any fee a worker has paid. A worker should be able to claim a refund in the destination country, from the employer or the destination agency, which can then recover the fees from the agencies it worked with. *Indicator 2.*