Ewers *et al. Comparative Migration Studies (2023) 11:20*
https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-023-00344-1

Comparative Migration Studies

ORIGINAL ARTICLE Open Access

Beyond vulnerability: contextualizing migrant worker views on rights and wellbeing in the Gulf Arab states

Michael Ewers[1*], Abdoulaye Diop[2], Nathan Duma[3] and Kien Le[2]

*Correspondence:
mewers@uncc.edu

[1] Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, USA
[2] Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI), Qatar University, Doha, Qatar
[3] Nathan Duma, Public Policy Program, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, USA

Abstract

This paper examines migrant workers' subjective views of their rights and wellbeing in the Gulf Arab state of Qatar. Since the announcement of the World Cup, Qatar has been roundly criticized for the living and working conditions of the low-wage migrant workers responsible for building the country's social and economic infrastructure. These critiques, however, either emphasize individual migrant experiences of mistreatment or the kafala migration regime that regulates migration and employment. Few quantitative and representative studies ask migrants how they understand and experience their rights and wellbeing, or how these views have changed as the country has embarked on key labor law reforms in response to international pressure. Therefore, we present results from a large-scale, nationally representative survey of low-wage migrant workers conducted in labor accommodations over four years, supplemented by a separate phone survey. The analysis emphasizes the views of migrants—including satisfaction with rights, awareness of rights, fulfillment of contracts, and quality of life—which are critical to successful policy implementation. We examine the objective factors that best explain these views and study the interaction between subjective and objective wellbeing dimensions. The results inform scholarly understandings of the living and working conditions of migrants and provide essential context for questions surrounding migrant rights and global justice in temporary labor migration regimes.

Keywords: Migrant workers, Temporary labor migration programs, Human rights, Worker welfare, Qatar, Gulf Arab states

Introduction

Out of the 281 million total international migrants in 2020 approximately 169 million were international migrant workers, according to the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) *World Migration Report 2022* (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Most of these workers are governed by temporary labor migration programs (TLMPs), which are strongly criticized for exposing migrant workers to "extreme vulnerabilities and exploitation" (Costa & Martin, 2018, 2). The media, human rights organizations,

and academic scholarship have documented how workers in these programs are subject to poor living and working conditions, physical and mental abuse, and legal peril. Thus, scholars debate how to reform these programs to reduce migrant vulnerability and exploitation while maintaining the benefits of TLMPs for origin and destination countries (e.g., Ruhs, 2013; Weyl, 2018). Yet, such debates focus on mechanisms and content of migration governance, legal frameworks, and employment regulations. Less is known about how migrants *experience* migration regimes. This paper demonstrates how the subjective views of migrants are critical to conceptualizing migrant worker wellbeing, understanding migrant rights, and measuring the success of reforms.

The views of migrants are fundamental to understanding human rights, vulnerability, and regulatory reform in Qatar and the other Gulf Arab states—wealthy countries with some of the highest proportions of migrants in the world (United Nations (UN), 2021). Since the country was awarded the 2022 FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association) World Cup, widespread reports of migrant worker abuse emerged, including confiscated passports and visas, overcrowded living conditions, dangerous work conditions, debt bondage, broken contracts, forced labor, and sexual abuse (Amnesty International, 2013; Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2020a). Despite these reports, it is notable that Qatar has made substantial labor reforms in recent years, reducing worker dependence on a single employer, eliminating the exit permit, allowing migrants to switch jobs and transfer sponsorship to other employers, and establishing the region's first minimum wage (Hubbard & Donovan, 2020).

As with global debates, the arguments about Qatar's treatment of guest workers emphasize Western normative views without considering how migrants feel about their rights and wellbeing. The underlying assumption is that migrants suffer from false consciousness, rating their quality of life positively or placing themselves in harmful situations because they do not know how bad their lives are. In this view, they are victims, unable to consent to unequal treatment. Indeed, they may be. Nevertheless, we argue that understanding migrant workers' subjective experiences of their rights and wellbeing can better help us understand the objective conditions in which they live and work and provide important context for migrant rights and justice questions. We ask three primary questions: How do migrant workers view and understand their rights and wellbeing, and why do these subjective understandings matter? Second, which factors matter the most (or least) in shaping labor migrants' views and ratings of rights and wellbeing? Third, how do subjective ratings relate to objective wellbeing characteristics?

We present results from two large-scale, nationally representative surveys of low-wage migrant workers living in collective housing or labor accommodations in Qatar: the Guest Workers' Welfare Survey (GWWI), conducted annually over four waves between 2017 and 2021 (n = 4138), and the Qatar Labor Law Survey conducted in 2020. In particular, we focus on four subjective assessments as dependent variables: quality of life compared with the home country, satisfaction with rights, awareness of rights, and fulfillment of contracts. Second, we argue that migrant workers' views of their rights and wellbeing are context-specific, shaped by migrant home country, demographic, and employment characteristics, as well as "meanings and understandings that are culturally embedded" (Wright, 2012, 10). Migrant workers formulate their views based on expectations, social comparisons, and relative conditions in their home countries. Finally, we

show how objective conditions (wages) interact with subjective rights assessments. Here we show how wages influence workers' perspectives on contract fulfillment and rights awareness.

Migrant worker rights and welfare in the Gulf and beyond

Temporary labor migration programs

There is a wide variety of international migrants, including international students, forced migrants and refugees, irregular migrants, and legal immigrants. We focus on labor migrants "who migrate for the purpose of work on a temporary basis" (Brock, 2021, 142). The vast majority of the world's 169 million international migrant workers are admitted under TLMPs, which govern their mobility, employment, and integration (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2021a). These programs generally provide work visas that limit the duration a migrant worker can legally remain in a country and limit migrant rights during that period, but countries vary in terms of which rights are afforded, and some offer a path to citizenship. Rich countries use these programs because they provide access to cheap supplies of international labor willing to take jobs for which there is not an adequate local labor supply, especially in an era where many rich countries face declining domestic population growth. TLMPs also allow governments and employers to benefit from temporary contracted labor without facing widespread backlash from those who wish to restrict citizenship or protect local jobs.

The Gulf states are vital destinations for regional and international labor migration flows, comprising migrants from a wide range of national, social, and economic backgrounds (Naufal & Vargas-Silva, 2010). In 2020, the Gulf states had 30 million foreign nationals (Gulf Labour Markets and Migration (GLMM), 2020). These migrants comprise 52% of the region's total population, ranging from about 39% in Oman and Saudi Arabia to 87–88% in Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE). While the official nationality breakdown of Qatar's overall population is not made public, recent estimates (Snoj, 2019) suggest that the top origins are India (21.8%), Bangladesh (12.5%), Nepal (12.5%), Egypt (9.4%), and Philippines (7.4%). Migrant worker data from residency permits are also not published in official statistics, but the proportions of foreign to local workers are certainly higher (De Bel-Air, 2017). In Qatar, for example, migrant workers comprised 95% of the total labor force of 2.2. million workers, including about 1 million construction workers and 100,000 domestic workers (HRW 2020a).

Criticism of temporary labor migration programs

Scholars strongly criticize TLMPs for their negative impacts on migrant rights and welfare. For example, Costa and Martin (2018) describe these programs as "inconsistent with international human rights norms," exposing migrant workers to "fraud, discrimination, economic coercion, retaliation, blacklisting, and, in some cases, forced labor, indentured servitude, debt bondage, and human trafficking" (2). While the IOM (2008) described temporary labor migration as a potential

win–win–win for receiving countries, sending countries, and migrants, the benefits are likely more unevenly distributed (Barry & Ferracioli, 2018).

While the purpose of this paper is not to argue the ethics of TLMPs, the scholarly discourse around this topic sheds important light on how we understand and measure the welfare and rights of migrant workers. Researchers emphasize several channels through which TLMPs exploit migrant workers, including employer mistreatment and labor recruitment fees, host country rights restrictions and violation, and home country social costs from family separation and brain drain (Brock, 2020; Costa & Martin, 2018).

Contracts are especially vital to explaining migrant worker exploitation, as they involve employers and labor recruiters, home and host countries (Barry & Ferracioli, 2018). Lenard and Straehle (2010) describe two ways. First, contracts may include exploitative provisions that limit social rights or violate human rights, requiring migrants to work extreme hours in poor conditions, tying workers to a single employer, or prohibiting collective bargaining. Second, even if contracts are fair or just, violations are widespread. Employers may fail to enforce contracts, including legally stipulated worker protections. States may fail to hold employers accountable or act on migrant worker complaints. Migrants may be afraid to complain out of fear of losing their job, being deported, or being unaware of their rights or conditions in their contracts.

More broadly, are migrant labor contracts valid and ethical? Or are migrants unable to make informed decisions? These academic arguments primarily emphasize the substance of laws and rights but not as much how contracts are viewed and interpreted by migrant workers. Bertram (2019), for example, argues that voluntary migration decisions do not serve as consent to unequal treatment. Others emphasize the agency of migrant workers to make complex decisions that are in the best interest of their lives (Ruhs, 2013). Central to Brock's (2020) argument about global justice for temporary migrant labor is the importance of "minimally fair contracts," with rights that "protect migrants' abilities to make informed choices about employment and provide rights of exit should arrangements violate contract and terms" (164–165). Fair contracting first requires that migrants are provided with basic human rights, but once these are met, Brock justifies restricting some rights for migrant workers, including the conversion of temporary visas to permanent residency while on a labor contract. The need to understand how migrants interpret contracts points to a need for more primary research on migrant populations to understand better their experiences, awareness, and views on the ground.

Gulf labor migration and migrant welfare

While some Gulf migrants succeed in improving their lives and wellbeing through migration, others experience tremendous violence, insecurity, and abuse. One reason for migrant vulnerability is the *kafala* system of labor sponsorship—the Gulf states' temporary labor migration system—which regulates labor migration and foreign employment in these countries, tying migrants to a local sponsor or *kafeel* (Alshehabi, 2019). Abuses have included confiscated passports and visas, overcrowded living conditions, dangerous working conditions, debt bondage, broken contracts, forced labor, and sexual abuse (Jureidini, 2014). Most recently, numerous investigative reports have examined the working and living conditions of the migrant workers building Qatar's World

Cup stadiums (Booth, 2013; Kumar 2019). Even after signing a contract in their home country, many workers arrive to find that the conditions of employment have changed, including different occupations, salaries, or fees (Gardner, 2011). Sponsors' control over workers means employers may withhold pay or passports, threaten to reduce wages or deport workers (Amnesty International, 2013). Workers develop strategies to navigate the vulnerability inherent in the *kafala* system (e.g., Valenta et al. 2020), from switching visa and sponsorship types to absconding from their employers/sponsors to work in the informal sector (Fargues and Shah, 2017). These points indicate that while improving labor regulations and enforcement is essential, we must also consider how migrants view their treatment.

Existing research on migrant labor in Qatar and the Gulf essentially affirms the vulnerability of migrant worker populations, but with little nuance or appreciation for the varieties of migration experiences across migrant groups or how migrant working and living conditions are changing over time in response to various labor law reforms. In other words, rather than speaking of a monolithic form of migrant vulnerability in the Gulf, we need to study how different migrant groups experience these migration regimes and how these experiences vary over time. An important exception is the contribution of Fargues et al. () who utilize a unique model of focus group discussions to survey migrant working and living conditions in the hospitality and construction sectors of Qatar and UAE.

Rights for international labor migrants

International labor standards exist, but enforcement is difficult. Still, it is vital to recognize critical efforts being undertaken to reduce the vulnerability of migrant workers globally. In 2014, the ILO began its Fair Recruitment Initiative, designed to enhance knowledge of international recruitment, improve legal frameworks, promote fair business practices, and empower workers (ILO, 2021b). The IOM has undertaken a related initiative for ethical recruitment called the "International Recruitment Integrity System" (IRIS), which seeks to enhance coordination, transparency, and enforcement of fair recruitment between workers, employers, recruiters, and governments in sending and receiving countries (IOM, 2022).

Most significantly, the UN developed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, a global, multilateral framework endorsed by 152 countries in 2018 (UN, 2018). It incorporated some aspects of the ILO and IOM initiatives and the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and created baselines for international human rights while ensuring national sovereignty over migration policies. These are well-designed initiatives that will have tangible benefits to migrants worldwide. Yet, they say less about how well workers understand and view their rights, how satisfied they are with their rights, or whether contracts are being fulfilled. Most Gulf countries have signed the Global Compact, but questions about its implementation and enforcement remain.

Recent labor law changes in the Gulf

Gulf governments had made numerous labor reform promises before the pandemic, with some countries significantly reducing the requirements for migrants to obtain No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to change employers or exit permits to leave the country

(Naidu et al., 2016; State of Qatar, 2015). More recently, in response to international pressure, Qatar has amended the *kafala* system to reduce worker dependence on a single employer, allowing migrants to switch jobs and transfer sponsorship to other employers (Hubbard & Donovan, 2020). For example, Law No. 17 of 2017 established committees to help settle labor disputes between workers and employers. Under Law No. 18 of 2020, the new minimum monthly salary is $275, and workers are required to receive adequate food and housing allowances in addition to the basic salary (Alsahi, 2020). Recent research in Qatar has found that most citizens (58%) favor maintaining the minimum wage at this level, while 34% want wages increased (Ewers et al., 2023). While this wage level is objectively low, it is a first in the Gulf region and appears to have widespread support among citizens. While Qatar has announced that it is ending its *kafala* system, this seems to indicate the removal of NOCs and exit permits but not the full-scale dismantling of sponsorship (Conn, 2019). There remains criticism that enforcement mechanisms are lacking, and migrants continue to face abuse and exploitation, even after the reforms have been enacted (HRW, 2020b; Lovett, 2019).

Subjective and objective wellbeing, welfare, and quality of life

The debates above emphasize the structure and rules of temporary labor migration programs in rich countries and their impacts on migrant workers and global inequality. The purpose of this paper is less to argue the merits of these debates as it is to say that they fail to adequately account for migrants' views and understandings of their rights and wellbeing. What if temporary labor migration improves one's subjective wellbeing and quality of life relative to their home country, even as it limits worker rights relative to host country citizens? Additionally, the migrant rights described above are painted as objective legal realities: migrants either have certain rights or do not have those rights. How aware are migrant workers of their rights, and how satisfied are they with their rights? Here we describe the objective and subjective dimensions of migrant wellbeing, and how these dimensions relate to the rights they are afforded.

Wellbeing can be applied to an individual, a group, or society, with the concepts of quality of life, life satisfaction, and welfare closely related. Wellbeing includes objective conditions (e.g., wages, employment, and living standards) and subjective assessments of those conditions (satisfaction with work, job, or life) (Wright, 2012). Objective and subjective wellbeing outcomes are shaped by one's broader social, economic, and cultural environment and individual characteristics, such as physical and mental health, education, and personality (Veenhoven, 2000). Such complex underpinnings of wellbeing mean that efforts to measure migrant worker welfare must account for geographic and individual variations.

In the Gulf, for instance, migration experiences vary significantly under *kafala* depending on country of origin (Gardner et al., 2013), company (Johnston, 2017), and skill level (Babar et al., 2019). Migrants from the least economically and politically secure countries may lack the ability to return home or to a new country, while those from the most secure countries may leave when they are dissatisfied with their treatment (Ewers et al., 2021).

How does migration impact wellbeing? It is unclear how or to what degree people are subjectively better off from migration, even though they may be objectively better off

under particular circumstances (Hendriks, 2018). Accordingly, looking at a more holistic interpretation of migrant wellbeing is important, studying the relative importance of specific domains in shaping overall wellbeing. One difficulty is that migration may have conflicting outcomes, such as economic benefits but social costs (Hendriks & Bartram, 2019). In some circumstances, migration can lead to lower subjective wellbeing, especially if a migrant has false expectations about the gains from migration or if they compare themselves to new groups in the host country (Mulcahy and Kollamparambil, 2016). Graham (2009) argues that once basic needs are met, a migrant may positively compare themselves to friends and relatives in their home country, but this outlook may turn negative if that same migrant compares themselves to the wealth and socio-economic status of citizens or other immigrant communities in the host country (Hendriks and Bartram, 2019; Wright, 2012). However, this literature is often based on long-term, even generational changes in integration or socio-economic mobility within immigrant communities instead of among temporary labor migrants (e.g., Zuccotti et al., 2017).

Understanding the frames used to examine migrant wellbeing is also essential. Strabac et al. (2018) usefully distinguish between local/national versus global/international frames in understanding the situation of migrant workers in the Gulf. From a local perspective, migrant workers have relatively low wages and poor working conditions, especially in comparison to Gulf citizens. From an international frame, however, these workers' situations reflect the widespread socio-economic inequalities of global capitalism, and Western countries are not providing an alternative path for legal employment of these same workers.

Moreover, as Harvey (2005) notes, universalism works well for some global problems but not as much for the human rights field, "given the diversity of political-economic circumstances and cultural practices to be found in the world" (178). Thus, capturing the working and living conditions of migrants requires accounting for geographic context and the subjective views of workers.

Methodology

From the above literature, it is clear that there are challenges with universal approaches to migrant rights and wellbeing. Migrant rights and wellbeing vary across geographies and social groups based on objective conditions in which migrants live and work and the characteristics of migration regimes. However, the factors that shape how migrants interpret and understand their rights and wellbeing, including awareness of rights, social comparison, and perceptions of fairness, are less well understood. Therefore, this paper leverages unique survey data from the Gulf State of Qatar to examine how migrant workers in Qatar view and understand their rights and wellbeing, which factors shape labor migrants' views and understandings, and how objective conditions interact with subjective assessments of rights. Finally, we provide practical suggestions for integrating survey-based ratings of subjective wellbeing with existing benchmarks of migration governance.

We accomplish this by presenting results from two large-scale surveys. First, we conducted a nationally representative survey of low-wage, men migrant workers living in collective housing/labor accommodations in Qatar, conducted over four waves: 2017 (n = 1009), 2018 (n = 1027), 2019 (n = 1036), and 2021 (n = 1066), for a total sample size

of 4,138 migrant workers. These surveys were conducted as part of Qatar University's Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) and formed the Institute's Guest Worker Welfare Index (GWWI). While temporary labor migrants cover a wide range of occupations, skills, and salaries, this paper focuses on male, lower-wage, blue-collar labor migrants working in construction, industry, and service occupations and living in collective housing/labor accommodations during the reference period. Employers typically provide these accommodations or collective housing for migrants, which are concentrated in specific areas apart from regular residential households and are popularly referred to as "labor camps." The number of individuals residing in these housing units varies greatly, ranging from a handful to thousands, and they come from diverse backgrounds, speaking different languages and hailing from various countries. As a result of financial and legal constraints, migrants are typically unable to bring their families with them to Gulf countries, and thus, there are no household units within the accommodations. Unrelated migrants commonly share rooms, while individuals from the same country often reside in adjacent or shared rooms.

For the face-to-face surveys, we began with a detailed list of Qatar's collective housing/accommodations, which we divided into different strata according to the social and demographic features of the accommodations to create a nationally representative sample. The sampling frame for these accommodations, provided by the sole water and electricity company in Qatar (Kahramaa), is stratified by the size of the accommodation (i.e. number of people) and then the selection of respondents is based on a two-stage process. First, the accommodations (or primary sampling unit) in each stratum are randomly selected with probability proportionate to their size. The number of residents sampled per camp is uniform within strata but varies across them—larger clusters are selected from larger camps. Using proportionate stratified sampling, we ensured that the sample frame matched the population proportions in each stratum. Then, we leveraged a multi-stage sample to select survey respondents randomly by the camp and then by the room to ensure that each migrant worker had an equal probability of being selected for the survey (See Diop et al. (2020) and Le et al. (2014) for more information on the methodology). On average, about 87% of the accommodations agreed to participate in the studies, and 95% of workers decided to take the survey. The maximum sampling error was calculated at 3.4 percentage points. Questions were first written in English and then professionally translated into Arabic, Urdu, Tagalog, Nepali, Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, Filipino, and Bangladeshi, the main languages in the accommodations. Each translation was then checked against the original English questionnaire by researchers fluent in English and one of the respondent languages. Trained interviewers, fluent in a target language, administered the surveys using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview). Finally, supervising researchers verified 20% of the completed surveys with respondents to ensure quality.

In addition to the face-to-face surveys, we use additional results from a separate nationally representative telephone survey conducted with 784 lower-wage migrant men between October 2020 and January 2021. For that survey, which focuses on Qatar Labor Law reform, we ask some of the same questions in a different mode to add another perspective to the analysis. To obtain this sample frame, we used information from the country's two largest mobile phone carriers and developed an augmented list that covers

approximately 98% of the population. We randomly selected phone numbers from this frame to be called and then filtered these numbers according to income and citizenship. Here we only present the responses from lower-wage migrants from groups similar to those in the face-to-face survey. Unfortunately, the surveys do not cover female domestic workers, perhaps one of the region's most vulnerable groups of migrants under *kafala* (Malit & Naufal, 2016). Our survey sample also does not include the large number of irregular migrants in the Gulf, who may comprise up to 20%-40% of the region's total foreign population (Shah & Alkazi, 2022).

All survey-based research methods need to account for the problems of social desirability bias and mitigate this bias as much as possible (e.g., Krumpal, 2013; Nederhof, 1985). In particular, we needed to reduce the degree to which survey respondents provide the answers they think we (their employers or the State of Qatar) want to hear. We sought to reduce social desirability bias by taking the following steps: We use interviewers who can develop rapport with migrant workers (respondents) to create the conditions so those migrant workers will not be afraid to answer the questions. We also train and retrain interviewers to better understand the study's objectives and the survey questions to ensure that interviewers ask the questions in the same way so that respondents receive the same stimulus. This practice provides confidence that responses reflect differences from the migrants and not the way the questions were asked.

Additionally, our analytical strategy seeks to overcome remaining biases. First, we pretested and post-tested the telephone and face-to-face surveys with respondents fluent in respondent languages to reduce measurement error. We also carefully described our IRB protocol which protected the anonymity of survey responses. Second, we conducted the face-to-face (GWWI) survey over four waves/years, with representative samples of blue-collar workers. This repeated, cross-sectional approach means that even if some bias exists in a single year's ratings, the data trends over time are accurate and illustrative of changing sentiment. Third, we can control for some demographic or employment variables by using logistic regression, including nationality, income, and remittance levels. More importantly, we can also focus on which factors (mostly objective factors) best predict or explain our (subjective) dependent variables.

Descriptive characteristics

The descriptive characteristics of the face-to-face survey respondents are displayed in Table 1, which presents the percentage of respondents in each category disaggregated by year. About two-thirds (60%) have completed secondary education, but about a quarter (24%) have primary education. The nationality breakdown broadly matches that reported in official statistics, most of whom come from South Asia. This breakdown includes the top three nationalities represented in the survey: India (28%), Nepal (27%), and Bangladesh (22%). The occupation and industry are somewhat challenging to determine, but most come from construction (24%), service industries (28%), and the rest from janitorial, transportation, and manufacturing. Most of our respondents are 25–34 (44%) or 35–44 (36%). The standard blue-collar contract is two years, and about a fifth (21%) of our sample are on their first contract. But a third of workers (34%) have been working in Qatar for seven or more years. Finally, more than half (58%) of workers make less than $411 per month, but this does not include food, transportation, or housing. The year of

Table 1 Descriptive statistics in percent respondents per year

Variable	Category	Percent of respondents				
		2017	2018	2019	2021	Total
Education	Primary	30.0	21.0	21.5	24.3	23.9
	Secondary	60.3	61.9	62.4	59.1	60.9
	Post-secondary	9.7	17.1	16.1	16.6	15.2
Nationality	Egypt	3.7	5.9	1.7	1.9	3.2
	Philippines	1.4	3.4	3.7	2.0	2.7
	India	26.2	29.4	26.9	29.9	28.2
	Pakistan	6.7	9.0	4.9	7.0	6.9
	Sri Lanka	5.0	4.1	4.1	2.6	3.9
	Bangladesh	19.5	17.5	24.5	24.5	21.8
	Nepal	33.7	28.3	28.4	20.5	27.2
	Other	3.8	2.4	5.7	11.7	6.2
Occupation	Construction	29.7	20.2	24.0	21.5	23.6
	Service sector	13.2	28.9	32.5	33.4	27.9
	Other sectors	57.2	50.9	43.5	45.1	48.5
Age	18–24	1.7	3.0	2.8	6.1	3.5
	25–34	39.2	40.6	47.4	46.7	43.9
	35–44	39.4	36.4	35.9	32.8	35.9
	45+	19.7	20.0	14.0	14.4	16.7
Years in Qatar	0–2 years	29.5	26.3	17.9	11.9	20.6
	3–4 years	24.9	23.9	28.1	26.1	25.8
	5–6 years	16.7	18.2	23.7	21.0	20.1
	7 years	28.9	31.7	30.4	41.0	33.5
Salary	Less than $411	66.3	61.5	51.6	54.6	57.9
	$411–$1095	29.7	34.5	45.1	39.4	37.8
	$1096 or greater	4.0	3.9	3.3	5.9	4.4
Number of respondents		1009	1027	1036	1066	*4138*

the surveys is shown for two reasons. First, it provides evidence for the soundness of our sampling strategy, with the key demographics and worker characteristics remaining remarkably stable over time. Second, with the year, we can track changes over time—for example, we can see that salaries appear to be increasing, likely due to the recently implemented labor law and new minimum wage guidelines. However, the impact of Covid-19 is also evident. The remainder is more likely to have been in Qatar for a long time, with smaller proportions in the 0–2-year category. Also, as the World Cup construction winds down, a larger proportion of the labor force is in the service sector.

In the following section, we begin the analysis by presenting descriptive results from our survey, including the four dependent variables and the key (non-demographic) independent variables that capture significant aspects of migrant worker welfare. Then, in "Multivariate analysis of migrant views of rights and wellbeing" section, we describe results from a multivariate analysis of migrant rights and wellbeing views, using the migrant demographic characteristics and migrant welfare characteristics as predictors. Finally, we present two interaction models to understand better how objective factors intersect with migrant views of contracts and rights awareness.

Table 2 Dependent variables reported in percent of respondents per year

Dependent variable	Response	Percent of respondents				
		2017	2018	2019	2021	Total
(1) Contract Fulfillment: Were conditions in the contract(s) you signed fully honored on your arrival to Qatar?	Fully honored	63.3	79.9	58.9	78.8	70.6
	Partially honored	28.8	17.1	31.4	17.7	23.5
	Not honored at all	7.9	3.0	9.8	3.5	5.9
(2) Satisfaction with Rights: How satisfied are you with the way your rights are respected here in Qatar?	Very satisfied	37.4	50.5	37.3	64.8	48.3
	Somewhat satisfied	47.6	35.4	49.9	29.3	40.1
	Neither satisfied/dissatisfied	10.4	9.2	5.6	4.1	7.0
	Somewhat dissatisfied	3.7	2.9	2.9	1.0	2.5
	Very dissatisfied	1.0	2.0	4.3	0.8	2.1
(3) Relative Quality of Life: How is the quality of life in Qatar compared to your home country?	Much better	28.3	32.6	34.6	57.9	39.4
	Somewhat better	50.4	35.8	44.2	30.2	39.5
	About the same	11.6	11.9	8.7	7.9	9.9
	Somewhat worse	8.0	13.4	7.3	3.4	7.8
	Much worse	1.7	6.2	5.2	0.6	3.4
(4) Informed About Rights: How well informed are you about your rights as a worker?	Very well informed	10.2	34.2	28.3	26.4	25.6
	Well informed	30.1	35.2	45.8	49.5	41.2
	Not well informed	32.6	22.2	18.1	17.2	21.7
	Not well informed at all	27.1	8.4	7.9	6.9	11.5

Descriptive views on rights and wellbeing

Table 2 displays the distribution of responses to the four dependent variables, presented in total and by year of the survey. It should be noted that this table shows all of the options for each question, which we collapse into dummy variables for the logistic regression in the next section (the recoded (binary) version of Table 2 is included as Appendix Table 5). The first question relates to contract fulfillment and asks workers whether the contract conditions were fully honored. The legal requirements for labor contracts are critical to discussing migrant welfare. But what about whether or not migrants feel their contract was fulfilled? Previous research has found that the most crucial driver of migrant worker welfare is in the Gulf, whether or not a contract was fully honored (Diop et al., 2020). On average, across all of the GWWI survey waves, less than three-quarters (71%) of respondents stated that their contract was "fully honored," and 6% said their contract was "not honored at all." Significantly, between 2017 and 2021, the proportion stating "fully honored" rose from 63 to 79%, although the 2018 and 2019 results were mixed.

Second, we ask workers about their satisfaction with how their rights are respected in Qatar. Are migrants themselves satisfied with their salary and treatment? What factors matter the most to migrants in terms of shaping that satisfaction? For example, many scholars argue that temporary labor migration programs are unjust without a path to citizenship for migrants, especially if they have been in the country for a long time (e.g., Lenard & Straehle, 2012). The tradeoffs involved are less understood. While less than half (48%) of migrant workers overall reported being "very satisfied," it is again worth

noting the increase from 37% of respondents in 2017 to 65% in 2021 being "very satisfied." Is this a reflection of the worker rights improvement in Qatar or the relative situation in one's home country? To what degree should we use migrant satisfaction to measure policy outcomes? While we cannot answer that question directly, we believe such questions are worth asking and investigating. We also asked the same question in our QLL phone survey to validate these results. From those results, 49% of migrant workers overall reported being "very satisfied," 43% "somewhat satisfied," 5% "somewhat dissatisfied," and 3% "very dissatisfied." While we did not include a "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" option, these results closely mirror our total/overall average responses from the face-to-face survey, although they are lower than the 2021 results.

The third question asks about the relative quality of life and how respondents compare their quality of life in Qatar with that in their home country. Migrants rate their wellbeing and quality of life in Qatar highly and significantly better than in their home country. On average, about 80% of workers feel their quality of life in Qatar is either "somewhat better" or "much better" than in their home country, while only about 11% stated that it is "somewhat worse" or "much worse." Yet, it is essential to indicate to what, where, or who one's host country conditions are being compared. Migrant workers' host country conditions may be poor from a Western perspective, but they also may be relatively better than the situation in the migrant's home country. Migrants are willing to tolerate difficult conditions to improve their livelihoods and families in the sending country. Should migrants be able to choose a place with low objective rights if they are satisfied with the situation?

Finally, we asked migrant workers how well-informed they are about their rights as a worker. While about a quarter (26%) state that they are "very well informed," the responses vary by year. Few studies discuss migrant awareness or knowledge of their rights, which seems foundational to improving migrants' legal rights or measuring the implementation of reforms. Human rights-based legal frameworks are critical, but migrants' views on these rights are also important. These results show improved workers' views of their rights and quality of life. One reason is that between 2017 and 2021, Qatar implemented numerous improvements to its labor laws, and migrant workers appear to take note of these improvements, which have real impacts on perceptions of rights, contracts, quality of life, and awareness of rights. In collecting the data, we took all the necessary precautions to create a safe and private environment conducive to a good interview so that migrant workers were comfortable enough to respond to our questions. Even if one believes that the actual ratings of migrants are lower than we have reported, they represent migrant workers' genuine feedback at the time of the survey. As a qualification, however, the pandemic prevented us from conducting the survey in 2020. The pandemic prevented many from migrating to Qatar, while others were forced to leave the country during the pandemic. As a result, those left have been in the country slightly longer than the average pre-pandemic. Our 2021 sample comprises more respondents who on average have been in Qatar for 7 years or longer (41% in 2021 vs 32% in 2018). Fortunately, we can control for these factors using logistic regression.

While this paper focuses on views of rights and wellbeing, our study does not capture the ability of migrants to realize projects in their homelands, nor do we directly ascertain expectations for successful return migration. Qualitative research has documented a complex sociology of migration remittances shaped by local cultural, social, and political dynamics (Rahman & Fee, 2012). This includes, for example, the pressures migrants feel to meet ambitious savings goals during their work contracts to achieve personal aspirations, meet family demands, and even "Keeping up with Kerala's Jones's" (Pattath, 2020, 23). (Permanent) return migration generally occurs once migrants have met their savings goals, or in response to the unexpected loss of job, illness, or age (Rajan & Zachariah, 2019). Yet, the purchasing power of salaries in migrant home countries can change over time, along with potential returns from remittance-based investments. Often, migrants will engage in recurrent migration to the Gulf to meet personal or family goals, or in response to financial or other difficulties in their home countries

Table 3 Migrant wellbeing characteristics

Category	Question	Responses	Percent of respondents
Employment	Work outdoors or indoors?	Mostly outdoors	29.7
		Mostly indoors	41.0
		Equally outdoors/indoors	29.4
	Asked to work on your rest day?	No	65.1
		Yes	35.0
	Work more than 10 h a day on average?	No	82.6
		Yes	17.4
Living conditions	Air conditioning in room?	No	6.73
		Yes	93.3
	Number of beds in room?	Less than 6 beds	68.7
		6 or more beds	31.3
Health and benefits	Have medical insurance?	No	16.1
		Yes	83.9
	Needed medical care but did not receive?	No	72.9
		Yes	27.1
	Receive non-salary benefits?	No	19.7
		Yes	80.3
Salary	Receive salary on-time?	No ("sometimes" or "never")	9.0
		Yes ("always" or "usually")	91.1
	Pay money to work in Qatar?	No	44.8
		Yes	55.2
	Remittance sent annually	Less than $3845 USD	62.7
		More than $3845	37.3
Contracts and passports	Job same as described in contract?	No	15.4
		Yes	84.6
	Who holds passport?	Myself	68.5
		Employer or recruitment agency	31.5
	Do you have a copy of your contract?	No	44.6
	Total Respondents 4138		

(Valenta, 2022). To provide some additional context, we present responses to questions about satisfaction with salary/income and level of remittances in Appendix Table 6. These results generally match trends seen in our main dependent variables.

Objective wellbeing characteristics

Table 3 presents responses to key questions regarding objective migrant wellbeing characteristics, including working and living conditions, health and benefits, salary and remittances, and contracts and passports. In the next section, these indicators predict the dependent variables described above. Here, we will describe a few notable responses. Workers are required to have a rest day and cannot work more than 10 h daily, yet many do. While some workers live in crowded conditions without air conditioning, most do not. More than three-quarters of workers have medical insurance or a medical card and can receive medical care when needed. Most receive their salary on time, but, notably, slightly more than half (55%) of workers had to pay money in their home country to obtain a job in Qatar. The average amount of remittances sent home is about $3845 annually, a substantial sum in many migrant home countries. Finally, about 15% of workers describe having a job that is not the same as on their contract, and 45% do not have a copy of their contracts. About one-third (32%) of migrants have their passports withheld by their employer or a recruitment agency, although most of the time this is out of choice to keep it safe from theft.

Multivariate analysis of migrant views of rights and wellbeing

Table 4 presents our multivariate analysis of migrants' views of rights and quality of life, displaying the adjusted odds ratios yielded from four logistic regression models—these models represent our four rights and wellbeing dependent variables (Table 2). The selected independent variables comprise the demographic characteristics of migrant workers from Table 1 and the migrant wellbeing characteristics from Table 3. It is important to note that all our predictors are objective characteristics rather than subjective ratings. Instead, we use objective wellbeing characteristics to predict subjective views and understandings of rights and wellbeing. They are presented as adjusted odds ratios to make the results comparable, which measure the association between a predictor and a dependent variable. An odds ratio (OR) of 1 indicates no association, an odds ratio of less than 1 indicates a negative relationship and a greater than 1 is a positive one.

The demographic variables have a varying impact, depending on the dependent variable being examined. Education only seems to impact being informed about rights as a worker. Compared with those who have primary education or lower, those with secondary and post-secondary education are more likely to report being well informed about their rights as a worker. Those with post-secondary education are about 2.4 times more likely to be well informed. Age only significantly impacts satisfaction with the way rights are respected in Qatar. Older workers are about 60% less likely to be satisfied with how their rights are respected than workers under 25. Migrants who have lived in Qatar for a longer duration rate their quality of life and rights the highest. This may be because these individuals have positively navigated within the Qatar labor market, adapting to the local context and sponsorship system in a way that provides a comparably higher quality of life.

Table 4 Multivariate analysis or migrant worker welfare conditions in Qatar. Presented in adjusted odds ratios

Variables	(1) Conditions in the contract(s) fully honored	(2) Satisfaction with way rights respected	(3) Quality of life in Qatar versus home	(4) Well-informed rights as a worker
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Demographic				
Education (base: primary or less)				
Secondary	1.074 (0.797–1.449)	1.000 (0.719–1.391)	0.820 (0.625–1.076)	1.338** (1.051–1.705)
Post-secondary	1.251 (0.770–2.033)	1.008 (0.571–1.779)	0.856 (0.549–1.336)	2.399*** (1.600–3.597)
Age category (base: under 25)				
25–34	1.045 (0.587–1.860)	0.573 (0.221–1.483)	0.706 (0.392–1.270)	1.048 (0.615–1.783)
35–44	0.949 (0.520–1.733)	0.420* (0.159–1.110)	0.698 (0.380–1.282)	0.911 (0.516–1.606)
Age 45+ (yes)	1.084 (0.569–2.065)	0.367* (0.130–1.037)	0.749 (0.394–1.424)	0.918 (0.500–1.688)
Years of living/working in Qatar (base: 0–2 years)				
3–4 years	0.887 (0.631–1.246)	1.006 (0.717–1.413)	1.423** (1.049–1.931)	0.945 (0.696–1.282)
5–6 years	1.106 (0.764–1.600)	1.082 (0.700–1.674)	1.817*** (1.270–2.600)	0.852 (0.610–1.189)
7+ years	1.219 (0.836–1.779)	1.974*** (1.269–3.070)	1.183 (0.820–1.706)	0.738* (0.530–1.028)
Nationality (base: Egypt)				
Philippines	0.158*** (0.0469–0.532)	0.433 (0.0815–2.303)	0.617 (0.207–1.837)	0.122*** (0.0303–0.492)
India	0.345* (0.117–1.024)	0.682 (0.169–2.754)	0.819 (0.296–2.270)	0.190*** (0.0547–0.663)
Pakistan	0.481 (0.144–1.611)	0.407 (0.0879–1.887)	0.937 (0.292–3.003)	0.297* (0.0810–1.091)
Sri Lanka	0.267** (0.0791–0.899)	0.432 (0.0969–1.931)	0.397 (0.124–1.269)	0.0979*** (0.0258–0.371)
Bangladesh	0.288** (0.0952–0.872)	0.586 (0.144–2.385)	1.124 (0.397–3.185)	0.130*** (0.0365–0.461)
Nepal	0.345* (0.114–1.042)	0.529 (0.133–2.104)	0.920 (0.323–2.626)	0.171*** (0.0486–0.601)
Other	0.227** (0.0710–0.728)	0.289 (0.0609–1.377)	0.535 (0.173–1.655)	0.0908*** (0.0228–0.362)
Employment				
Occupation (base: construction worker)				
Service worker	0.884 (0.627–1.247)	1.232 (0.775–1.959)	1.145 (0.801–1.637)	1.195 (0.830–1.721)
Other	0.857 (0.635–1.157)	1.230 (0.850–1.779)	0.955 (0.693–1.316)	1.100 (0.834–1.452)
Work environment (base: mostly outdoors)				
Mostly indoors	1.171 (0.886–1.547)	1.310 (0.905–1.895)	1.233 (0.904–1.683)	1.019 (0.765–1.356)
Equally outdoors/indoors	0.912 (0.663–1.253)	1.196 (0.805–1.777)	1.132 (0.828–1.548)	0.982 (0.733–1.317)
Work on rest day (yes)	0.755* (0.567–1.004)	0.732* (0.535–1.000)	0.775** (0.609–0.987)	0.801* (0.624–1.028)
Work hours per day (10+)	1.200 (0.868–1.657)	1.020 (0.670–1.552)	0.736* (0.538–1.006)	0.819 (0.607–1.105)
Living conditions				
Air conditioning	3.044*** (1.828–5.070)	3.355*** (1.974–5.703)	2.059*** (1.338–3.169)	1.227 (0.783–1.922)
Number of beds in room	1.001 (0.961–1.043)	0.986 (0.940–1.033)	0.995 (0.951–1.041)	0.988 (0.945–1.032)
Health and benefits				
Medical insurance? (yes)	2.587*** (1.877–3.565)	2.487*** (1.686–3.668)	1.126 (0.785–1.616)	2.043*** (1.410–2.960)
Difficulties med. care (yes)	0.560*** (0.431–0.729)	0.408*** (0.295–0.564)	0.683*** (0.530–0.882)	0.834 (0.651–1.070)
Non-salary benefits (yes)	3.220*** (2.242–4.624)	0.848 (0.527–1.364)	1.055 (0.705–1.579)	0.621** (0.409–0.942)
Financial				
Current basic monthly salary range (base: less than $411)				
$411–$1095	0.967 (0.691–1.353)	0.838 (0.557–1.260)	1.311 (0.907–1.895)	1.415** (1.048–1.912)
$1096 or greater	2.793** (1.108–7.044)	0.788 (0.269–2.314)	1.665 (0.773–3.586)	2.980*** (1.327–6.692)
Salary on-time (yes)	2.106*** (1.380–3.215)	1.728** (1.089–2.742)	2.010*** (1.315–3.071)	1.063 (0.668–1.691)
Pay to obtain job (yes)	0.911 (0.686–1.208)	0.665** (0.470–0.940)	0.778* (0.598–1.013)	0.732** (0.569–0.942)

Table 4 (continued)

Variables	(1) Conditions in the contract(s) fully honored	(2) Satisfaction with way rights respected	(3) Quality of life in Qatar versus home	(4) Well-informed rights as a worker
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Remittance sent annually (base: less than $3845 USD)				
More than $3845	1.402** (1.060–1.854)	1.758*** (1.186–2.606)	1.199 (0.870–1.652)	1.182 (0.928–1.506)
Contracts and passports				
Job same as contract (yes)	2.521*** (1.900–3.345)	1.681*** (1.184–2.385)	1.100 (0.826–1.464)	1.364** (1.036–1.795)
Who holds your passport? (base: myself)				
Employer or sponsor	0.934 (0.681–1.281)	0.599*** (0.426–0.843)	0.702** (0.531–0.927)	0.679*** (0.520–0.886)
Copy of contract? (Yes)	1.997*** (1.543–2.583)	1.785*** (1.313–2.426)	1.424*** (1.110–1.828)	1.891*** (1.484–2.409)
Survey				
Year (base: 2017)				
2018	1.599** (1.076–2.377)	0.935 (0.554–1.579)	0.416*** (0.275–0.630)	3.230*** (2.171–4.807)
2019	0.629** (0.412–0.960)	1.410 (0.812–2.448)	1.012(0.661–1.550)	5.613*** (3.737–8.430)
2021	1.864*** (1.208–2.877)	2.012** (1.092–3.706)	1.237 (0.794–1.929)	5.173*** (3.373–7.933)
Constant	0.086*** (0.0207–0.358)	1.784 (0.282–11.27)	1.643 (0.386–6.986)	1.499 (0.311–7.218)
Observations	2950	3002	2996	2973

CI = Confidence intervals in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Nationality has a robust negative effect on a contract being honored and being well-informed on rights as a worker, but no impact on rights satisfaction or quality of life. Compared to Egyptians, all nationalities are significantly less likely to report that their contracts were fully honored. They are also less likely to report that they are well informed about their rights. It is worth noting that, as both Arabic speakers and predominantly Muslim, Egyptians have the closest cultural proximity of any nationality group in our sample to Qatari nationals. Conversely, as predominantly Christian and non-Arabic speaking, Filipino migrants are about 84% less likely to report having the conditions in their contracts fully honored—the lowest of any group. These effects are stronger for being well-informed of rights as a worker, with Filipino migrants about 87% less likely to be well-informed and Sri-Lankan workers about 91% less likely to be well-informed of rights as a worker. Again, Egyptians are the only native Arabic speakers in our sample. It is essential to read the language of law and contracts in that country to know one's rights in a country.

Surprisingly, one's occupation and work environment have no impact on views and understandings of rights and wellbeing. We suspect this is because these were known factors when deciding to take work in Qatar. Conversely, being forced to work on one's rest days or work more than 10 h per day—each unexpected and potentially unlawful in Qatar—negatively impact perceptions of rights and wellbeing. Living conditions have contradictory results. Those with air conditioning in their rooms are about three times as likely to report contracts fully honored and satisfaction with rights. The positive effect of air conditioning may demonstrate that employers who care about the basic comfort of their workers' living conditions in Qatar's extreme heat are also more likely to care about contracts and rights.

Medical care and non-salary benefits had a strong impact across the board. Those with medical insurance are about twice as likely to report contract honoring, satisfaction with rights, and being informed about rights. Conversely, those with difficulties receiving medical care are about half as likely to report contract honoring, satisfaction with rights, or high comparative quality of life.

Not surprisingly, those with the same job on their contract and who have copies of their contract are significantly more likely to rate each of the four dependent variables positively. Those who receive higher salaries are nearly three times as likely as those receiving lower salaries to report that their contract was honored, while those who receive their salary on time are twice as likely to report contract honoring. This finding is echoed by Fargues et al. (2019a 2019b) who also find that relatively higher wages in Qatar "makes hard and difficult working conditions acceptable in the eyes of some workers" (5). Having one's passport withheld by an employer or recruitment agency also negatively affects rights satisfaction, awareness, and quality of life.

The survey year also has a significant positive impact on many of our variables of interest. The most substantial result is being well-informed about workers' rights. Respondents in 2019 and 2021 are more than five times as likely to report being well-informed compared to the 2017 baseline. This finding suggests that the new legislation and initiatives—which accelerated in preparation for the 2022 World Cup—have had a meaningful, positive impact on the sentiment of migrant workers. The Technical Cooperation Programme between the ILO and Qatar's Ministry of Labour is critical to this improvement, which began in earnest with the 2018 opening of an ILO office in Doha. In addition to important minimum wage reforms, this cooperation has created new platforms for workers to lodge complaints about their employers and new joint committees for management and (elected) worker representatives to promote social dialogue within companies (ILO, 2022).

The relationship between objective and subjective dimensions

There is a complicated relationship between objective and subjective conditions. The subjective/objective dichotomy is valuable, but there are instances in which we should try to move beyond the existing variables and look at other dimensions of migrant lives. In this section, we use conditional marginal effects to examine how the two are related. Figure 1 shows the association between "Is your current job the same as the one on the contract" and Basic Monthly Salary for the contract-honored dependent variable. We compute the marginal effects of "current job" on the contact-honored dependent variable for different levels of basic monthly salary. The marginal effects are based on the same regression model in column 1 of Table 4 (except that we use a continuous variable for basic salary instead of a range). Workers whose jobs match their contracts are more likely to say their contracts have been fulfilled, but this only holds for those with low basic salaries. For high salaries, there is no difference between the two groups. While contract honoring increases with pay, it does so at a decreasing rate. In short, if workers earn high enough salaries, they overlook that their contracts are misleading. The contract being honored is more of an issue for people with lower salaries. Less educated people may also have a poor understanding of their contracts.

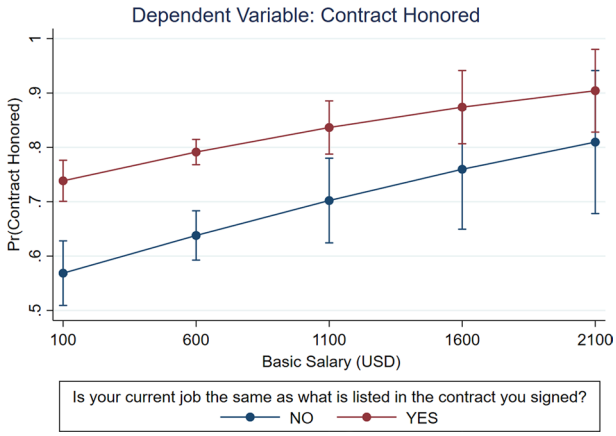

Fig. 1 Association between "Is your current job the same as contract" and basic salary

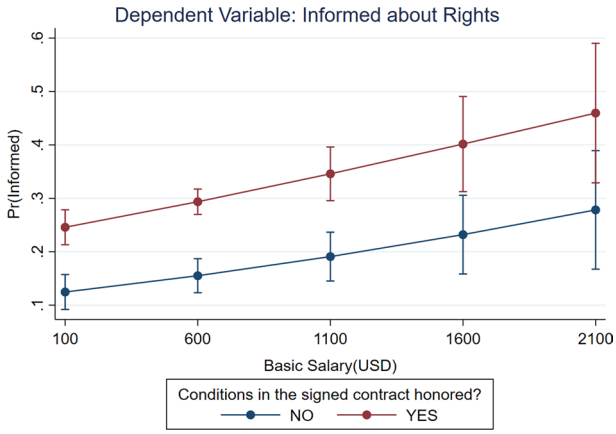

Fig. 2 Association between "Was your contract honored?" and basic salary

Figure 2 shows the association between the variable "Was your contract honored?" and "Basic Salary." We compute the marginal effects of "contact honored" on the "well informed" dependent variable for different levels of basic monthly salary. The marginal effects are based on the same regression model in column 4 of Table 4, except with a continuous variable for salary and an additional dummy variable for whether the respondent felt their contract was honored. The respondent's subjective assessment of how well informed they are about their rights increases with salary regardless of whether they feel their contract has been honored. Individuals who think their contracts have been honored rate themselves as being more informed about their rights, but this only holds for those with low basic salaries; for high salaries, there is no difference between the two groups. Respondents with high enough salaries consider themselves informed about their rights even when they feel their contracts have not been wholly honored.

We attribute these findings to three main points. First, expectations do matter. Those who earn more money or are more highly educated may have higher expectations for how they should be treated and could be more disappointed when they look at how they are treated upon arrival in Qatar. Second, money matters. If workers make high enough wages, they are willing to overlook rights violations or broken contracts, which

complicates scholarly efforts to describe minimal acceptable rights. Third, and finally, ideas about knowing one's rights and whether a contract was honored vary across migrant groups because these views are developed outside of Qatar, in migrant's home countries, and with their families and schooling.

Conclusions

Here we argued that migrant workers' views of their rights and wellbeing can help us better understand the objective conditions in which they live and work. Despite a lively conversation and engagement between journalists, activists, and scholars, there is no agreed-upon definition for migrant worker wellbeing or method for its measurement, nor any understanding of how or whether welfare can be compared across places or migrant groups. A key reason is that migrant welfare depends on the definitions being used, the perspectives of those who define it, and the methods used to examine it. Likewise, academic literature on migrant rights focuses on legal frameworks and implementation rather than how migrants experience and understand labor laws. Seldom are migrants' views on their welfare taken seriously. They may not be considered to have a legitimate choice in migration decisions or are seen as too afraid to describe their living and working conditions accurately.

Our approach is unique in how we attempted to overcome some of these challenges. First, we used rigorous survey methodology, including probability-based, representative sampling methods, to accurately capture diverse migrant groups in labor camps and over the phone with fluent speakers of migrant languages. During these surveys, we carefully described the IRB process and the anonymity of responses. Second, we asked the same questions over multiple years with different but still representative samples of migrants. Finally, we used logistic regression to control for crucial individual and group characteristics. We control for purchasing power by including both basic salaries and annual remittances.

The findings demonstrate that migrant views and ratings of rights and wellbeing are geographically specific, dependent on differences between home and host countries, and socially, through how individuals experience and perceive these differences. Migration regimes vary across countries based on working conditions, immigration laws, occupational regulations, physical environments, cultures of work, and potential for citizenship and inclusion. Migrants may experience these regime characteristics differently based on home country conditions and socio-economic and cultural factors. This means that even if there is an agreed-upon set of objective measures, the subjective interpretation of these measures will be based on socially and culturally embedded meanings and understandings (Wright, 2012). One's interpretation of welfare and fairness, awareness of rights, understanding of contracts, or tolerance for mistreatment, are likely determined by experiences and education in one's home country.

From our conditional marginal effect models, we saw a complicated relationship between objective and subjective working conditions, highlighting the importance of looking at labor and human rights reforms in a multi-dimensional manner. For example, if workers make high enough wages, they are willing to overlook rights violations or

broken contracts. If the ILO or other bodies sought to measure the implementation of contract reforms, these organizations' results could be misleading.

Migrant workers' views on rights and wellbeing raise several critical issues for scholars and policy professionals who ostensibly want to improve the welfare and livelihoods of migrant workers and their home country communities. Western scholars, media outlets, and think tanks describe migrant conditions in Qatar or other countries as poor (which they are), but these conditions may be objectively and subjectively better than in a migrant's home country. This relative welfare may be why migrant workers report high subjective wellbeing, quality of life, and life satisfaction, even if their objective wellbeing is low from a Western (or Gulf) perspective. Understanding relative welfare does not excuse the Gulf states from their responsibilities to human rights, but it raises questions about the social and class disparities that exist under global capitalism. A recent headline from *The Guardian* exemplifies this challenge: "What do Qatar's World Cup workers fear most? Being sent home" (Pattisson, 2022).

Nevertheless, we recognize some key limitations in our study, especially the finding of overall increased satisfaction with rights and wellbeing. We attributed these improvements to recent labor reforms undertaken in preparation for the World Cup and the international criticism accompanying this preparation. However, Covid-19 may have impacted some results, especially as those not forced to return home may have rated their satisfaction higher in 2021. Additionally, Arab workers, over-represented in the country after the Saudi-UAE blockade of Qatar, may have felt a greater sense of social belonging than South Asian workers. Finally, while we ask about satisfaction with salaries and remittances, and control for absolute income and remittance levels, we do not inquire directly about how migrants view their ability to realize projects in their home countries or their expectations for successful return migration. We hope that our paper will inspire others to explore these issues further.

Many debates about migrant worker welfare and rights in the Gulf and beyond focus on migration governance, legal frameworks, and macro-level statistics. We have shown that the views of migrants—including satisfaction with rights, awareness of rights, fulfillment of contracts, and quality of life—are critical to successful policy implementation. Moreover, assessments collected via surveys and interviews can also improve our ability to measure and monitor migrant rights and wellbeing. For example, what if migrant rights have improved, but migrants are unaware of their rights, unsatisfied with their rights, or yet to see the improvements promised in legislation? Such evaluations could never replace the vital work being done by international agencies, but they cannot provide an essential context for how migrants understand and experience migration regulations that can help to reduce precarity in temporary migration regimes. We recommend, therefore, that the UN's Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, and national efforts in the Gulf countries to improve migrant rights and welfare, be complemented and informed by the survey- and interview-based evaluation.

Appendix

See Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 Dependent variables coded as binary variables for logistic regression, presented in percent of respondents per year

Dependent variable	Response	Percent of respondents				
		2017	2018	2019	2021	Total
(1) Contract fulfillment: were conditions in the contract(s) you signed fully honored on your arrival to Qatar?	Fully honored	63.3	79.9	58.9	78.8	70.6
	Not fully honored	36.7	20.1	41.1	21.2	29.4
(2) Satisfaction with rights: how satisfied are you with the way your rights are respected here in Qatar?	Satisfied	85	85.9	87.2	94.1	88.4
	Dissatisfied/neither	15.1	14.1	12.8	5.9	11.6
(3) Relative quality of life: how is the quality of life in Qatar compared to your home country?	Better	78.7	68.4	78.8	88.1	78.9
	Same/worse	21.3	31.5	21.2	11.9	21.1
(4) Informed about rights: how well informed are you about your rights as a worker?	Well informed	40.3	69.4	74	75.9	66.8
	Not well informed	59.7	30.6	26	24.1	33.2

Table 6 Satisfaction with salary and remittances reported in percent of respondents per year

Dependent variable	Response	Percent of Respondents				
		2017	2018	2019	2021	Total
Satisfaction with salary: how satisfied are you with the following aspects of life in Qatar? [Salary]	Very satisfied	23.3	29.6	24.3	44.5	31.1
	Somewhat satisfied	41.4	37.4	48.0	36.6	40.8
	Neither satisfied/dissat	12.3	14.2	6.6	7.3	9.8
	Somewhat dissatisfied	13.8	10.1	10.8	8.4	10.6
	Very dissatisfied	9.2	8.8	10.4	3.3	7.8
Satisfaction with remittances: overall, how satisfied are you with the current amount of money you are able to send?	Very satisfied	28.8	33.4	26.3	38.9	32.1
	Somewhat satisfied	47.7	45.7	50.2	46.7	47.6
	Somewhat dissatisfied	16.5	13.1	14.2	10.9	13.5
	Very dissatisfied	7.0	7.7	9.3	3.5	6.8

Abbreviations

CAPI Computer Assisted Personal Interview
FIFA Federation Internationale de Football Association
GWWI Guest Workers' Welfare Survey
HRW Human Rights Watch
ILO International Labour Organization
IOM International Organization for Migration
IRIS International Recruitment Integrity System
NOC No objection certificates
SESRI Social and Economic Survey Research Institute
TLMP Temporary Labor Migration Program
UAE United Arab Emirates
UN United Nations

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for the feedback received on this paper at the conference "New Perspectives on Middle East Migrations," held at North Carolina State University's Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies on July 11–12, 2022. We also thank two anonymous reviewers for providing valuable comments and suggestions for improving the manuscript.

Author contributions

(1) ME—writing, analysis, questionnaire development, conceptualization and design of paper, supervision. (2) AD—writing, analysis, questionnaire development and fielding, project administration, funding acquisition. (3) ND—substantial contribution in data analysis, visualization, interpretation, validation. (4) KL—substantial contribution in survey design, sampling, weighting, data cleaning, validation.

Funding
This publication was made possible by NPRP Grant # NPRP11S-1205-170065 from the Qatar National Research Fund (a member of the Qatar Foundation). The findings achieved herein are solely the responsibility of the authors. Funding was used to develop one of the surveys on which this project is based.

Availability of data and materials
Researchers from any country can request this data for personal use by filling out a SESRI Data Request Form. https://www.qu.edu.qa/static_file/qu/research/SESRI/documents/SESRI%20Data%20Request%20Form%20v2.pdf.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate
Approved by Qatar University IRB under Research Ethnics Approval Number QU-IRB 719-A/17.

Competing interests
We have no financial or non-financial competing interests to declare.

Received: 6 October 2022 Accepted: 14 June 2023
Published: 11 July 2023

References

Alsahi, H. (2020). *Covid-19 and the intensification of the GCC workforce nationalization policies*. Arab Reform Initiative. Retrieved: https://www.arab-reform.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Arab_Reform_Initiative_en_Covid-19-and-the-intensification-of-the-gcc-workforce-nationalization-policies_14948.pdf.

Alshehabi, O. H. (2019). Policing labour in empire: The modern origins of the kafala sponsorship system in the Gulf Arab States. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 48*(2), 1–20.

Amnesty International. (2013). *The dark side of migration: spotlight on Qatar's construction sector ahead of the world cup*. Amnesty International, London. Retrieved: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE22/010/2013/en/.

Babar, Z., Ewers, M., & Khattab, N. (2019). Im/mobile highly skilled migrants in Qatar. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45*(9), 1553–1570.

Barry, C., & Ferracioli, L. (2018). On the rights of temporary migrants. *The Journal of Legal Studies, 47*(S1), S149–S168.

Bertram, C. (2019). The openness-rights tradeoff in labour migration, claims to membership, and justice. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice, 22*(2), 283–296.

Booth, R. (2013). Qatar World Cup construction 'will leave 4,000 migrant workers dead'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/sep/26/qatar-world-cup-migrant-workers-dead.

Brock, G. (2020). *Justice for people on the move: Migration in challenging times*. Cambridge University Press.

Brock, G. (2021). *Migration and political theory*. Polity Press.

Conn, D. (2019). Qatar to abolish 'Kafāla' labor next January before 2022 World Cup. *The Guardian*. Retrieved: https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2019/oct/16/qatar-abolish-Kafâla-january-world-cup-2022.

Costa, D., & Martin, P. (2018). *Temporary labor migration programs: Governance, migrant worker rights, and recommendations for the UN global compact for migration*. Economic Policy Institute.

De Bel-Air, F. (2017). *Demography, migration, and labour market in Qatar*. Gulf Labour Markets and Migration GLMM—EN—No. 3/2017. European University Institute (EUI) and Gulf Research Center (GRC).

Diop, A., Mustapha, S., Ewers, M., & Le, K. T. (2020). Welfare index of migrant workers in the Gulf: The case of Qatar. *International Migration, 58*(4), 140–153.

Ewers, M., Diop, A., Le, K. T., & Bader, L. (2023). Resilience and sustainability in the Gulf migration regimes: Kafâla in the era of Covid-19. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 21*(1), 28–44.

Ewers, M. C., Gengler, J., & Shockley, B. (2021). Bargaining power: A framework for understanding varieties of migration experience. *International Migration Review, 55*(4), 1121–1151.

Fargues, P., & Shah, N. M. (2017). *Skilful survivals: Irregular migration in the Gulf*. Gulf Research Center, Cambridge University.

Fargues, P., Shah, N. M., & Brouwer, I. (2019a). *Working and living conditions of low-income migrant workers in the hospitality and construction sectors in Qatar: A survey among migrant workers through focus group discussions*. Gulf Labour Markets and Migration (GLMM) Research Report. No. 1/2019a. Gulf Research Center/European University Institute.

Fargues, P., Shah, N. M., & Brouwer, I. (2019b). *Working and living conditions of low-income migrant workers in the hospitality and construction sectors in the United Arab Emirates: A survey among migrant workers through focus group discussions*. Gulf Labour Markets and Migration (GLMM) Research Report. No. 2/2019b. Gulf Research Center/European University Institute.

Gardner, A. (2011). Gulf migration and the family. *Journal of Arabian Studies, 1*(1), 3–25.

Gardner, A., Pessoa, S., Diop, A., Al-Ghanim, K., Le, K., & Harkness, L. (2013). A portrait of low-income migrants in contemporary Qatar. *Journal of Arabian Studies, 3*(1), 1–17.

GLMM [Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population (GLMM) Programme]. (2020). GCC: Total population and percentage of national and non-nationals in GCC countries (national statistics, 2020) with numbers. Retrieved: https://gulfmigration.grc.net/gcc-gcc-pop-1-2-total-population-and-percentage-of-nationals-and-non-nationals-in-gcc-countries-national-statistics-2020-with-numbers/.

Graham, C. (2009). *Happiness around the world: The paradox of happy peasants and miserable millionaires*. Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.

Hendriks, M. (2018). *Migrant happiness: Insights into the broad wellbeing outcomes of migration and its determinants*. Erasmus University Rotterdam. Retrieved: http://hdl.handle.net/1765/104017.
Hendriks, M., & Bartram, D. (2019). Bringing happiness into the study of migration and its consequences: What, why, and how? *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 17*(3), 279–298.
HRW [Human Rights Watch]. (2020a). *Qatar: Little progress on protecting migrant works*. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved: https://www.hrw.org/news/2020a/08/24/qatar-little-progress-protecting-migrant-workers.
HRW [Human Rights Watch]. (2020b). *Qatar country report*. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/qatar#b94615.
Hubbard, B., & Donovan, L. (2020). Laid off and locked up: Virus traps domestic workers in Arab States. *The New York Times*. Retrieved: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/06/world/middleeast/coronavirus-saudi-domestic-workers-maids-arab.html.
ILO [International Labour Organization]. (2021a). ILO global estimates on international migrant workers—Results and methodology—Third edition. International Labour Office: Geneva. Retrieved: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_808935.pdf.
ILO [International Labour Organization]. (2021b). ILO fair recruitment initiative strategy 2021b-2025. International Labour Office: Geneva. Retrieved: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_817166.pdf.
ILO [International Labour Organization]. (2022). Labour reforms in the state of Qatar: Coming together around a shared vision. International Labour Office: Doha. Retrieved: https://www.ilo.org/atar/countries/atar/WCMS_859843/lang—en/index.htm.
IOM [International Organization of Migration]. (2008). *World migration 2008: Managing labour mobility in the evolving global economy*. International Organization of Migration.
IOM [International Organization for Migration]. (2022). IRIS ethical recruitment. Retrieved: https://iris.iom.int/.
Johnston, T. (2017). Authoritarian abdication: Bargaining power and the role of firms in migrant welfare. *Studies in Comparative International Development, 52*(3), 301–326.
Jureidini, R. (2014). Migrant labour recruitment to Qatar: Report for Qatar Foundation Migrant Worker Welfare Initiative.
Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: A literature review. *Quality & Quantity, 47*(4), 2025–2047. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-011-9640-9
Kumar, S. (2019). 1,400 migrant workers die in Qatar building World Cup football stadiums: TV documentary. *Arab News*. Retrieved: https://www.arabnews.com/node/1508061/media.
Le, K. T., Diop, A., Wittrock, J., Al-Emadi, D., & Elawad, E. (2014). Gender prespecified sampling for cost control. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 26*(4), 441–452.
Lenard, P. T., & Straehle, C. (2010). Temporary labour migration: Exploitation, tool of development, or both? *Policy and Society, 29*(4), 283–294.
Lenard, P. T., & Straehle, C. (2012). Temporary labour migration, global redistribution, and democratic justice. *Politics, Philosophy & Economics, 11*(2), 206–230.
Lovett, S. (2019). Amnesty International: Qatar's migrant workers still being exploited. Retrieved: https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/world/qatar-2022-world-cup-migrant-workers-amnesty-international-report-a8763831.html.
Malit, F. T., Jr., & Naufal, G. (2016). Asymmetric information under the Kafala sponsorship system: Impacts on foreign domestic workers' income and employment status in the GCC countries. *International Migration, 54*(5), 76–90.
McAuliffe, M., & Triandafyllidou, A. (2021). *World migration report 2022*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration (IOM).
Mulcahy, K., & Kollamparambil, U. (2016). The impact of rural–urban migration on subjective wellbeing in South Africa. *The Journal of Development Studies, 52*(9), 1357–1371.
Naidu, S., Nyarko, Y., & Wang, S. (2016). Monopsony power in migrant labor markets: Evidence from the United Arab Emirates. *Journal of Political Economy, 124*(6), 1735–1792.
Naufal, G., & Vargas-Silva, C. (2010). Migrant transfers in the MENA region: A two way street in which traffic is changing. *Migration Letters, 7*(2), 168–178.
Nederhof, A. J. (1985). Methods of coping with social desirability bias: A review. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 15*(3), 263–280.
Pattath, B. (2020). Keeping up with Kerala's Joneses. In S. I. Rajan (Ed.), *India migration report 2020: Kerala model of migration surveys* (pp. 23–54). Routledge.
Pattisson, P. (2022). What do Qatar's World Cup workers fear most? Being sent home. *The Guardian*. Retrieved: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/commentisfree/2022/sep/23/qatar-world-cup-migrant-workers-fear-being-sent-home-most.
Rahman, M. M., & Fee, L. K. (2012). Towards a sociology of migrant remittances in Asia: Conceptual and methodological challenges. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 38*(4), 689–706.
Rajan, S. I., & Zachariah, K. C. (2019). Emigration and remittances: New evidences from the Kerala migration survey 2018 (*working paper 483*). Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India: Centre for Development Studies.
Ruhs, M. (2013). *The price of rights: Regulating international labor migration*. Princeton University Press.
Shah, N. M., & Alkazi, L. (2022). COVID-19 and threats to irregular migrants in Kuwait and the Gulf. *International Migration*.
Snoj, J. (2019). *Population of Qatar by nationality—2019 report*. Priya D'Souza Consultancy. Accessed at: http://priyadsouza.com/population-of-qatar-by-nationality-in-2017/.
State of Qatar. (2015). Law No. 21 of 2015 regulating the entry, exit, and residence of expatriates. October 27. Retrieved: https://gulfmigration.org/law-no-21-of-2015-regulating-the-entry-exit-and-residence-of-expatriates/.
Strabac, Z., Valenta, M., & Al Awad, M. (2018). Temporary labour migration to United Arab Emirates: A complex story. *Migration and Development, 7*(3), 352–365.

UN [United Nations]. (2018). *Global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration*. Intergovernmentally Negotiated and Agreed Outcome July 13, 2018. Retrieved: https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180713_agreed_outcome_global_compact_for_migration.pdf.
UN [United Nations] (2021). *International migrant stock 2020*. UN Division of Economic & Social Affairs. Retrieved: https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock.
Valenta, M. (2022). Itinerant labour: Conceptualising circular, serial and stepwise migrations to the Arab Gulf and onwards. *Migration and Development, 11*(3), 674–696. https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2020.1810897
Valenta, M., Knowlton, K. E., Jakobsen, J., Al Awad, M., & Strabac, Z. (2020). Temporary labour-migration system and long-term residence strategies in the United Arab Emirates. *International Migration, 58*(1), 182–197.
Veenhoven, R. (2000). The four qualities of life. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 1*(1), 1–39.
Weyl, E. G. (2018). The openness-equality Tradeoff in global redistribution. *The Economic Journal, 128*(612), F1–F36.
Wright, K. (2012). *International migration, development and human wellbeing*. Palgrave Macmillan.
Zuccotti, C. V., Ganzeboom, H. B., & Guveli, A. (2017). Has migration been beneficial for migrants and their children? Comparing social mobility of Turks in Western Europe, Turks in Turkey, and Western European Natives. *International Migration Review, 51*(1), 97–126.

Publisher's Note