INDUSTRY CONSTRUCTION SAFETY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Are there innovative ways of improving safety? Why are construction workers at risk?

Over recent years the construction sector in the Middle East has experienced rapid expansion, resulting in a dominant migrant-based workforce who often experience delayed payment and dangerous working conditions.

What is the impact of wage delay? Workers may find themselves trapped in unfair employment as they are paid first, even if other payments are due. Therefore, workers who have not been paid by their employer can claim against the wages of workers of subcontractors if the latter fails to do so. In Spain and Italy, the client can request proof of payment of wages by contractors and subcontractors and notification when workers of subcontractors are paid. In France and Poland, the client and principal contractor are jointly liable for payment to subcontractors who can claim against the wages of workers of subcontractors if the latter fails to do so.

In the sponsorship scheme of countries in the region does not allow workers to be paid. The families of migrant workers who rely on remittances for things like medical treatment, school fees and everyday expenses. Wage delay increases the debt migrant workers often carry from payments not paid on time.

What can be done to improve safety? Schemes such as this are increasingly being recognised as initial measures to protect workers' safety. As seen in a survey by the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre in 2016, 18,000 workers failed to receive timely payment. In the Middle East, governments should introduce legislation that makes the principal contractor and/or the client jointly liable with the immediate employer.

Governments should promote safe working conditions to protect migrant workers in the region, giving examples of what has ensured their protection elsewhere as well as programmes promoting decent work for all women and men. Founded in 1919, the International Labour Organization brings together governments, employers and workers to shape compliant and enforced standards.

To avoid this, clients should ensure that there are clear standards to price separately for safety items in their contracts at: Hong Kong’s ‘pay for safety’ scheme requires contractors to price and to advise and instruct employers on compliance with the regulations. This results in language barriers and difficulties in coordinating measures to protect workers’ safety.

Workers are often not directly employed by the principal contractor, they are hired by outsourcing or subcontracting companies and are much further down the supply chain. Therefore, workers who have not been paid by their employer can claim against the wages of workers of subcontractors if the latter fails to do so. In Spain and Italy, the client can request proof of payment of wages by contractors and subcontractors and notification when workers of subcontractors are paid. In France and Poland, the client and principal contractor are jointly liable for payment to subcontractors who can claim against the wages of workers of subcontractors if the latter fails to do so.

Clients often look for contractors promising the lowest price who neglect occupational safety and health (OSH). To avoid this, clients should ensure that there are clear standards to price separately for safety items in their contracts at: Hong Kong’s ‘pay for safety’ scheme requires contractors to price and to advise and instruct employers on compliance with the regulations.