



OMAN

SUBMISSION TO THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW, 51st SESSION OF THE UPR WORKING
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CONCERNING ISSUES RELATED TO IMMIGRATION DETENTION AND MIGRANT RIGHTS

Submitted by:

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ABOUT THE GLOBAL DETENTION PROJECT

The Global Detention Project (GDP) is committed to ending arbitrary and harmful migration-related detention practices around the world, and to ensuring respect for the fundamental human rights of all migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. To achieve this, we seek to:

- Increase public knowledge and awareness of immigration detention policies.
- Expand coverage of immigration detention by human rights monitoring bodies and other international agencies.
- Expand partnerships with local and international civil society organisations working to end arbitrary and harmful immigration detention practices.
- Strategically target research and advocacy so that it effectively challenges arbitrary and harmful detention laws and policies.

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Submission to the Universal Periodic Review, 51st Session of the UPR Working Group (January/February 2026)

Concerning Issues Related to Immigration Detention and Migrant Rights

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This submission for the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Oman has been prepared by the Global Detention Project, a nonprofit organisation based in Geneva that promotes the human rights of people who have been detained for reasons related to their non-citizen status.
- 1.2 This submission focuses on human rights concerns with respect to the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers—in particular, their vulnerability to arrest, detention and deportation.

2. MIGRATION AND DETENTION CONTEXT

- 2.1 Oman has long been an important destination country for migrant workers. As of 30 June 2025, there are almost 2.3 million foreign nationals in Oman (2,296,984), representing 43 percent of the country's population (5,306,976 persons)ⁱ—most of whom originate from south and south-east Asia and east Africa. Most are employed within manual and service work, including construction and retail/hospitality, and a significant number of (predominantly female) migrant workers are employed as domestic workers.ⁱⁱ The country does not refer to foreign nationals as migrant workers. Instead, in its official response to the 3rd cycle of the UPR, it noted: “There are no “migrant workers” in Oman, but rather “expatriate workers.”ⁱⁱⁱ
- 2.2 Since 1988, authorities have vigorously pursued a nationalisation project to decrease the proportion of foreign workers in the country's labour force. This “Omanisation” policy has included setting quotas for specific employment sectors determining the percentage of the workforce who must be Omani.
- 2.3 In particular, the Sultanate is targeting private sector jobs for Omani employment, including lower-income jobs, with specific targets such as 30 percent Omanisation within the hospitality sector, and 20 percent within the wholesale and retail sector.^{iv} Importantly, however, domestic work—which has very few regulations in place—has a 0 percent Omanisation target.
- 2.4 In 2024, the Ministry of Labour [issued Ministerial Resolution No. 501/2024](#) (replacing Resolution No. 235/2022), which broadened the list of professions exclusively restricted to Omanis—including roles such as hotel reception manager, lifeguard, travel agent, aircraft loading controller, forklift driver, and computer maintenance technician.^v If a foreign national is found working in a profession reserved for Omanis they are to be deported and banned from re-entering the Sultanate, with the employer responsible for covering the costs of their deportation.^{vi} Such a policy disproportionately affects migrant workers—many of whom are unaware of changes in Omanisation regulations and have no control over their employment terms. Moreover, as Migrant-Rights.org has noted: “Migrant workers, many of whom have invested

substantial sums to secure employment in Oman, are now facing deportation without recourse, leaving them with significant financial losses.”^{vii}

- 2.5 Large numbers of migrant workers are arrested and deported each year. Authorities conduct frequent raids, in which they apprehend migrant workers for violations such as expired visas, work in unauthorised jobs, absconding, or minor legal issues like traffic violations. The Ministry of Labour (MoL) reported arresting 12,319 individuals on the grounds of “illegal labour practices” between January and May 2025—and deported 7,615 foreign workers during that same period. Meanwhile throughout 2024, 23,566 were arrested and 18,053 deported.^{viii}
- 2.6 Recently, there have also been several reports of irregular arrivals being apprehended by the Police Coast Guard following interception at sea.^{ix}
- 2.7 Article 29 of the Law on the Residency of Foreigners (Law no.16 of 1995) provides that any foreigner who enters Oman irregularly may be expelled, and that the costs for their removal are to be covered by the deportee or their employer. Article 31 allows for the General Prosecutor to revoke a residency permit of any foreigner and order their deportation in three circumstances: 1) if they undertake any activity that harms the security of the Sultanate or if they violate general order and morals; 2) if they undertake any activity that harms the well-being of the Sultanate in its external relations with other countries; 3) if they are not earning a living legally. Article 32 provides for detention if a person does not depart by a specific deadline and the measure is deemed necessary to carry out a deportation order.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS DURING THE 3RD CYCLE

- 3.1 During the 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (37th session, January/February 2021) Oman supported numerous recommendations relevant to the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers, including:

Labour rights and the *kafala* system

- 134.125 Continue to ensure that the labour rights of all workers are protected by laws, including domestic migrant workers
- 134.131 Take further measures to guarantee foreign nationals a choice of job and employer through the “no objection” conditions introduced recently (Eritrea)
- 134.239 Enact reforms to end the *kafala* employment sponsorship system (United States of America)
- 134.249 Continue to strengthen efforts to prevent and combat abuse of migrant domestic workers in the country by ensuring full implementation of international and domestic laws (Ghana)

Human trafficking

- 134.115 Strengthen measures to combat human trafficking and ensure the protection of the rights of victims, as well as the rights of migrant workers (Nigeria)

Access to justice

- 134.227 Ensure that access to justice and remedies are available to all, including vulnerable groups such as migrant workers (Philippines)

Other important recommendations, meanwhile, were “noted.” Several of these recommendations related to the treatment of foreign and domestic workers, and included:

- 134.30 Ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (Honduras) (Senegal)

- 134.232 Continue to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of the rights of workers, in particular migrant and domestic workers, by ratifying and implementing the International Labour Organization Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), and facilitating the rights to lodge criminal complaints with the authorities (Switzerland)
- 134.252 Adopt national asylum legislation in line with the international standards and provide safeguards against refoulement (Afghanistan)

4. UPDATES SINCE THE 3rd CYCLE

Labour Rights and the *Kafala* System:

- 4.1 Since Oman's third periodic review, the country has introduced a new Labour Law (Royal Decree no. 53 in 2023). This introduced important protections, such as prohibiting employers from confiscating passports or private documents without the employee's permission; decreasing the maximum number of weekly working hours; permitting employees to change employers without the employer's consent in cases of employer violations (although the process for exercising this right remains vague and unclear); considering the termination of employment due to pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding as "arbitrary"; and permitting migrant workers who initiate legal proceedings to recover dues from employers, to remain in the country. The Labour Law also introduced stricter "Omanisation" measures.
- 4.2 Importantly, while the new law prohibits passport confiscation, employers may still retain passports with a worker's written consent, leaving room for manipulation, and no specific penalties or enforcement mechanisms are mentioned.^x
- 4.3 Critically, too, the Labour Law does not regulate domestic workers; instead, their employment remains regulated by the Ministerial Regulation no. 189 of 2004 that failed to provide effective protections. As such, a large number of migrant domestic workers remain vulnerable to poor working conditions; harassment and abuse; non-payment of wages; excessive working hours; denial of food; movement restrictions; passport confiscation (despite this practice being illegal according to Circular No. 2 of 2006); and difficulties in changing jobs unless they can provide proof of abuse.^{xi} Domestic workers have reported that attempts to obtain support from authorities, including the police and the Ministry of Manpower, are often futile. With little chance for redress, domestic workers in exploitative or unwanted employment situations may wish to leave their place of employment—however leaving without permission is considered "absconding," which is punishable with fines, detention, and deportation.^{xii} Although Article 32 of the Law on the Residency of Foreigners provides that detention for deportation can last up to two weeks, it can last much longer—and domestic workers who do not have a consulate in Oman to assist them are particularly vulnerable to lengthy periods of detention.
- 4.4 While Oman stated in its response to the 3rd cycle of the UPR that "there is no *kafala* system in Oman,"^{xiii} the *kafala* system does continue to operate in the country, as workers' visas remain tied to their employer. This creates a relationship rooted in dependency, particularly in the case of migrant domestic workers, and often leaves workers facing situations that amount to arbitrary *de facto* deprivation of liberty. As the GDP highlighted in its 2020 submission to the UPR Working Group ahead of Oman's third periodic review, the *de facto* deprivation of liberty at the hands of private individuals has been recognised and noted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.
- 4.5 The country's failure to extend appropriate legislation to domestic workers was highlighted by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Violence against Women

(CEDAW) in 2024. It urged Oman to: “adopt a specific law regulating domestic employment, which includes provisions regarding the effective protection of domestic workers, particularly women migrant domestic workers, from abuse, exploitation and violence, and which explicitly prohibits and sanctions the deportation of an “absconding” worker, the withholding of passports of domestic workers and the failure to provide adequate housing, food, medical expenses, daily breaks or weekly rest days and provides for free legal aid, a confidential and independent complaint mechanisms for women migrant workers under abusive employment contracts and a well-funded monitoring system that can carry out regular labour inspections at the workplaces and dormitories of women migrant workers.”^{xiv}

Human Trafficking, Access to Justice

- 4.6 Despite Oman supporting recommendations to combat human trafficking and protect the rights of victims, including migrant worker victims, trafficking and forced labour remain pervasive issues in the country. Numerous reports have highlighted the cases of women tricked into working in Oman (many are trafficked across the porous border from the UAE).^{xv} According to an important 2022 investigation by DoBold, of 469 Sierra Leonean domestic workers in Oman interviewed by the organisation, 468 reported experiences consistent with forced labour or trafficking.^{xvi} Moreover, 99 percent reported not having a day off each week; 80 percent were forced to work between 16 and 20 hours a day; 78 percent were deceived during their recruitment (such as deception regarding their wage, the type of work they would do, even the country that they would be in); 91 percent were unable to leave their employer’s property by themselves; 77 percent reported being humiliated, insulted, or discriminated against; and 57 percent reported physical abuse.^{xvii}
- 4.7 Although there is extensive evidence of trafficking and “domestic servitude,” the Omani government continues to fail to take steps to protect those affected. In 2024, it was reported that—for the sixth year in a row—the government did not investigate or prosecute any alleged traffickers for exploiting migrant workers.^{xviii}
- 4.8 Like other Gulf states, Oman criminalises sex work, and those who engage in this practice can be detained for up to three months and deported, often without any screening to ensure there are no indicators of trafficking.^{xix}
- 4.9 CEDAW similarly highlighted this issue in 2024, noting in particular the low prosecution and conviction rates concerning labour exploitation in domestic servitude. The committee urged Oman to: “Strengthen measures to identify and provide support to women and girls at risk of trafficking, particularly women migrant workers, including by providing systematic capacity-building to government officials on how to recognize and respond appropriately to crimes related to trafficking, expanding public awareness programmes and campaigns that promote the identification of possible victims and perpetrators, and raising awareness of preventative measures and avenues for assistance that ensure that victims can report their cases without fear of deportation or retribution.”^{xx}

Detention Facilities and Conditions

- 4.10 As was the case in 2020, when the GDP last submitted information to the UPR working group on Oman, information regarding the sites in which immigration detainees are held remains sparse. This lack of transparency surrounding detention sites and conditions raises serious concerns regarding detainees’ treatment and impedes independent monitoring and accountability—raising the risk of ill-treatment or arbitrary detention, particularly for vulnerable groups such as trafficked persons.
- 4.11 As we noted in 2020: “The wikileaks cables from the U.S. Embassy in Oman reported the existence of two dedicated facilities as of 2006, in the cities of [Salalah](#) and [Sohar](#).

According to these cables, U.S. officials had visited the Sohar facility and reported that an estimated 400 “Pakistanis and other nationals” were deported from the facility every month.^{xxi} The existence of these two facilities was more recently confirmed by the U.S. State Department in its 2018 human rights report. The report states, “Authorities generally detained in centers in Salalah or the northern port city of Sohar, where they were held an average of one month before deportation to their countries of origin. Several sources have also confirmed that non-nationals can be held in the Central Prison in Sumail, alongside ordinary prisoners.”^{xxii}

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 In light of the above information, the Global Detention Project encourages Oman to:

- Ensure that immigration detention is only used as a measure of last resort, when it is necessary and proportionate.
- Clarify where non-nationals are detained and ensure access to independent monitors and observers.
- Ensure that disaggregated data on the number of migrants who are detained and deported is made publicly available.
- Suspend the arrest and detention of migrant workers accused of “absconding,” as well as those apprehended as a result of their employers or sponsors flouting labour and immigration laws.
- Ensure that the 2023 Labour Law is extended to cover migrant domestic workers.
- Investigate and prosecute any alleged traffickers for exploiting migrant workers, particularly in forced labour cases, and ensure that complaint mechanisms are easily accessible to workers.
- Ensure that victims of trafficking are protected against detention and deportation by implementing systematic, proactive screening and identification procedures, and provide victims with access to appropriate shelters and safe-spaces.
- Develop public awareness campaigns so that potential victims are aware of the avenues of assistance available to them.
- End the *kafala* system, and instead ensure that residency is tied to the state rather than employers.
- Ensure that immigration law does not undermine labour rights, particularly in cases where a worker’s visa or residency status is cancelled. Migrant workers should retain their right to seek redress, claim unpaid wages, and report abuses regardless of their immigration status.
- Ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
- Ratify the International Labour Organization Domestic Workers Convention (2011, no.189).

ENDNOTES

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- ^x U.S State Department, "2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Oman," accessed 14 July 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/oman/>
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- ^{xv} See: BBC, "How a Malawi Whatsapp Group Helped Save Women Trafficked to Oman," 18 March 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-68565425>; Migrant-rights.org, "Freetown to Captivity: Sierra Leonean Women Trafficked to Oman Await Rescue," 1 December 2020, <https://www.migrant-rights.org/2020/12/freetown-to-captivity/>
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