

24-Hour Helpline, New Centre To Help Indian Workers In Gulf

An extension of the Indian government's safe migration awareness programme, the centre will also invite workers to camps to educate them on their rights.

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There are about 6 million Indian migrants in the six Gulf countries (Representational Image)

Chennai: A new resource centre for Indian migrants employed in Gulf states will help reduce the risk of workers being trafficked to fake jobs and exploited, officials said Tuesday.

With a 24 hour helpline and a team of advisers, the Indian Workers' Resource Centre in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates aims to help the thousands of Indian workers in the region who may be at risk of exploitation.

"There are numerous fake job rackets that result in migrant workers finding themselves without proper documentation, low salaries or even without a job once they arrive here," said Dinesh Kumar, an official at the Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi. "Help for Indian workers in distress will be a phonecall away."

Government figures show there are some 6 million Indian migrants in the six Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Oman.

Over the years, the Indian government and non-governmental groups have received a steady stream of complaints from migrant workers, ranging from non-payment of wages to torture and abuse.

To register these complaints, a multilingual toll free number (800 INDIA) will be run 24/7 at the Sharjah centre, where job offer letters will also be verified to ensure they are not fake.

Besides being duped by job agents, many workers are trapped in low paying jobs, unaware of how to seek legal or financial help, Mr Kumar said.

In many cases, the difference in culture, language and food habits becomes a hurdle for workers migrating from poor Indian families, he added.

"Counsellors will be available at the centre to help workers cope with the place and talk about their worries," Mr Kumar told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a phone interview.

An extension of the Indian government's safe migration awareness programme, the centre will also invite workers to camps to educate them on their rights.

"We are largely dealing with blue collar workers, many of them illiterate and unaware of the terms surrounding their work contract," said Ankit Agarwal of Alankit, the firm collaborating with the Indian government to run the centre.

"At the camps, we give out basic information and tell them how to reach us when they are in trouble."

In 2010, the Indian government opened its first resource centre in Dubai. In 2016, the Dubai centre received nearly 25,000 calls from workers and more than 2,000 letters, faxes and phone messages, including one from a university professor who wasn't paid his dues.

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