POV

Community Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Workers Cup
A Film by Adam Sobel

www.pbs.org/pov
When Qatar won the right to host the 2022 World Cup, a spotlight was shined on this very secretive country. Journalists from around the world attempted to access labor camps and construction sites, but they were stopped and in some cases even arrested. Because our filmmaking team lived in Qatar, we had the relationships and knowledge needed to negotiate access to the camps.

Our team has worked together in Qatar for many years producing films for outlets that include CNN, BBC and HBO. Some of these films focused on migrant workers building World Cup facilities, but they only told a small portion of the story, and the workers themselves were often portrayed as victims. Many times we were obligated to hide the identities of our contributors or to shoot undercover. These stories still offered important insight, but they lacked the intimacy that I believe leads to deep understanding.

In order to make a film of which workers could be proud, I aimed to capture the complexity of their experiences and push beyond the common narrative that migrant workers are casualties of circumstance. My hope is that our film will create empathy rather than sympathy for them.

At its heart, The Workers Cup is a sports film and it employs the narrative conventions of the genre that have proven so effective over time. In particular, I’ve been inspired by documentaries about amateur competitions that serve as powerful illustrations of our social structures and the human spirit.

Soccer provided the perfect access point for this emotional and relatable story. Featuring protagonists from India, Kenya, Ghana and Nepal who are living together in Qatar, The Workers Cup is a portrait of our increasingly globalized world. Yet sport, in all of its agony and ecstasy, is universal. The World Cup is being built on the backs of our protagonists—still, they can’t help but love the game.

This paradox holds the film in balance for me, and I believe it reveals a greater truth about how we find meaning in life.

Adam Sobel
Director, The Workers Cup

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In 2022, Qatar will host the biggest sporting event in the world, the FIFA World Cup. But far from the bright lights, star athletes and adoring fans, the tournament is being built on the backs of an estimated 2 million African and Asian migrant workers, many of whom work for long hours in poor conditions with little pay. The Workers Cup (90 min.) gives voice to some of the men who are laboring to build sport’s grandest stage while competing in a soccer tournament of their own. Their very human stories raise questions about corporate use of foreign labor, government complicity in labor abuses and the world’s willingness to look away, even as millions eagerly watch the carefully crafted media spectacle that is the World Cup.
The Workers Cup is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to athletics, migrant laborers, or Qatar, including My Way to Olympia, Ping Pong, The Learning and Farmingville.
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the “Key Issues” section
- High school students, youth groups and clubs
- Soccer leagues
- Businesses that advertise during the World Cup or sponsor national teams
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal, labor and community groups
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries.

The Workers Cup is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- athletics
- economic development
- FIFA
- football/soccer
- human rights
- labor issues
- Middle East
- migrant labor
- Qatar
- workers’ rights
- working conditions
- World Cup

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use The Workers Cup to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www POV.org/engage
Migrant Workers and Remittances

Migrant workers currently make up the vast majority of Qatar’s population, comprising an estimated 2 million workers from Asia, Africa and elsewhere in the Middle East. Most workers in Qatar come from India, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Egypt. According to the International Labour Organization, there are approximately 232 million migrant workers globally. A large proportion of these workers come from developing countries facing high unemployment and poverty, traveling to countries where unskilled labor is in demand. Women comprise almost half of global migrant workers, and approximately one eighth are between 15 and 24 years old.

The workers send a portion of their wages back to their families—the funds transferred in this process are called remittances—often significantly contributing to their home economies. As of 2016, emigrants globally sent approximately $574 billion (U.S. dollars) back to their home countries, and a report in 2016 from the World Bank found that remittances in developing countries account for more than triple the development assistance received.

World Bank studies have suggested that remittances helped lower poverty rates by almost 11 percentage points in Uganda; however, remittance fees (paid to host countries) average 10 percent and can be as high as 20 percent.

The Institute for Human Rights and Business notes, “These workers—and in particular low-skilled migrants—are often among the most vulnerable to exploitation and frequently less able to understand, defend or promote their rights. In the labor market migrant workers can suffer job discrimination, unfair treatment, unequal wages, harsh working conditions and other affronts to their basic dignity. The situations low-skilled migrant workers face are often made worse by excessive debt. This debt is incurred through high recruitment fees they must pay to secure the work.”
Sources


Labor Violations in Qatar

In 2010, Qatar was selected to be the site of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Since then, there has been widespread doubt that Qatar—the first Middle Eastern country to host a major global sporting event and the world’s richest country per capita—can successfully host the tournament. Critics point to allegations of massive corruption during the bidding process, and FIFA’s decision to reschedule the tournament to the winter months to avoid Qatar’s summer heat. Additionally, Qatari officials have announced that alcohol will not be allowed in public spaces in the socially conservative Muslim country and that gay fans should not openly show affection.

Primarily, however, Qatar has been criticized over labor practices. It has promised to build nine new stadiums and renovate three more, at a proposed cost of over $6 billion (U.S. dollars), in addition to updating city infrastructure. The companies working on the World Cup facilities and related projects are under intense pressure—and work in extreme heat throughout much of the year—to complete the ambitious plans, as the country aims to complete the rapid infrastructure development needed to prepare for the competition and the 1.2 million fans expected to visit a country that covers approximately the same area as Connecticut.

International nongovernmental organizations including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have accused contractors, including those working on World Cup stadiums, of turning a blind eye to conditions meeting international definitions of forced labor. The main criticism of the government is its support of the kafala system, which binds workers to their employers. The Qatari authorities are also accused of failing to address the fact that hundreds of migrant workers die each year in unclear circumstances, with serious concern that their deaths could be linked to working in the country’s extreme heat. An investigation by Impactt, a consulting firm hired by Qatar’s World Cup organizers, found that migrant workers frequently work 18-hour days.
Three quarters of the interviewed workers, whose passports are often held by their employers, paid fees in their home countries to be recruited. Migrant workers are not allowed to form or join trade unions, something that is considered a key labor right.

Facing intense pressure over several years, Qatari officials have taken various steps in response to criticism of labor practices in the country. A 2015 law explicitly allows workers who have completed contracts to change jobs, though this law was criticized for not addressing the key elements of the kafala system. In late 2017, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations agency that promotes labor rights and protections, officially closed a three-year case against Qatar over its treatment of the migrant workers. The emirate agreed to enact worker protections, including establishing a minimum wage and dismantling the kafala system that binds workers to an employer. As of early 2018, Qatar had promised to start requiring contracts for workers be filed with the government—to prevent contracts being altered or destroyed after workers had arrived in Qatar—and to ensure workers are no longer required to get permission from their employers to leave the country. Additional reforms regulate hours of work and provide compliance mechanisms. However, it remains unknown whether Qatar will meaningfully reform these practices and implement the laws in place to protect workers.

Sources


Soccer’s Global Following

Soccer, better known as football across the globe, is easily the most popular sport in the world. It requires little equipment and is relatively simple to learn. There are an estimated 265 million soccer players in the world, meaning approximately 4 percent of the global population plays soccer.

Every four years, more than 200 national teams compete for the 32 slots in the World Cup, organized by Fédération Internationale de Football Association, or FIFA. For the teams, there is a monetary incentive to participate: FIFA pays out a total of $400 million to the participating 32 teams, with $38 million going to the champions in the 2018 games. FIFA has claimed that nearly half of the world’s population watched part of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, meaning almost 3.5 billion people tuned in. In 2014, a total of 672 million tweets about the games were sent over the course of the tournament. A 2014 World Cup first-round match in Brazil between the U.S. and Portugal drew nearly 25 million viewers in the United States alone, compared to an average of 15 million viewers for games in the Major League Baseball World Series that same year.

Sources


Selected People Featured in *The Workers Cup*

**Kenneth** ~ 21-year-old captain of the GCC workers’ team from Ghana who dreams of playing professionally.

**Paul** ~ 21-year-old assistant GCC team captain from Kenya who came to Qatar to work because he lost his job after a terrorist attack shut down the upscale mall where he was a bartender; struggles with loneliness and wants to date and fall in love.

**Umesh** ~ 36-year-old player and Manchester United fan who named his sons after professional players; works at mall construction site and dreams of earning enough to buy a house for his family.

**Padam** ~ 28-year-old player from Nepal who, despite years of working in Qatar, still doesn’t earn enough to bring his wife to join him.
Selected People Featured in The Workers Cup

Grahame – General Manager, GCC

Samuel – 24-year-old from Ghana who takes over as goalie; a talented player whose career was stalled at home, he came to Qatar to work construction, but out of pride he lied and told his father that he was coming to play professional football.

David – top goal scorer

Sebastian – GCC coach

Additional players: Dean, Jonathan, Sanjay, Bernard, Eric

Calton – original goalie
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

• If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
• If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask and what would you ask them?
• What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?
• Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they’ve experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions

• What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
• If you could require one person (or one group) to view this film, who would it be? What do you hope their main takeaway would be?
• Complete this sentence: I am inspired by this film (or discussion) to __________.
Labor Policies

What did you learn from the film about what makes migrant workers vulnerable? What situations do they face that would not affect a citizen of Qatar?

According to the film, “Once a worker arrives in Qatar, his residence permit is controlled by his company. He cannot change jobs, quit his job nor leave the country without his company’s permission.” Do you think that FIFA or the United Nations should object to such policies? What about Qatar’s international allies, like the United States, which has an important military base in Qatar? Why or why not?

A worker describes being attacked and cut by his roommate: “He was a nice person and a good man. The only problem is he wanted to go home.” The man believed that his employers would only let him leave if they thought he was “mental.” What does this story suggest about current policies governing freedom of movement for foreign workers in places like Qatar? Should businesses ever be permitted to deny workers the right to leave? Why or why not?

Kenneth is misled by an agent into thinking he will be able to play soccer professionally in Qatar. If you were assigned to write a statement that all companies were required to present to job candidates recruited from other countries, what information would that statement contain? Who should bear responsibility for agents who mislead potential recruits?

Should people ever have to pay fees and take on loans to get jobs?

Sebastian observes, “Because of FIFA 2022 there is a lot of international monitors like the U.N. and Amnesty International. They are more cautious about workers’ rights now.” What would the impact be if such monitoring was global and constant? What would happen to corporations and workers if everyone followed United Nations declarations and legally-binding conventions that included workers’ rights as basic human rights?
Working Conditions

Paul says he hides his life from his friends at home because “Their perception of being abroad is the high life... the nice places you get to visit. But the life that I’m living here... this is no life, man. It’s like you’re trapped or something.” Even if workers were permitted to leave camp they would have few options—the housing is isolated and there is no transportation available. So, as Kenneth says, “All you think about is to get up, go to work, come back and rest.” In your view, do the companies owe their workers anything beyond the paychecks, room and board that they currently provide?

Paul plans to “sneak” out for a date with a woman he met online, because he knows that the company wouldn’t give him permission to leave camp for a date, even with another foreign worker. Under what circumstances would you agree to take a job with a company that controlled your dating life?

Paul notes that he often works with people from other countries and they don’t speak the same language, so he cannot talk to anyone. How does recruiting workers who cannot communicate with one another influence workers’ ability to improve conditions?

Umesh describes the divide between mall patrons and construction workers, who are not permitted to enter public parts of the mall. He comments, “There’s really no reason to go anyway.” He can’t afford to shop at the stores there. How else are the workers kept separate from the Qataris for whom they work? Why would Qatar want to prevent foreign workers from interacting with Qatari society?
Economics

One team member uses the phrase “modern slavery” to describe the situation of foreign workers in Qatar, explaining, “So many immigrants are coming to Qatar to work in search of greener pastures. But maybe a couple of them are not finding this greener pasture. They are staying in Qatar...It’s like against their will but not directly like you’re being enslaved here...you can’t go back so you just stay and work for maybe the small salary.” Do you think the label “modern slavery” is fair? Why or why not?

In Qatar, male workers can only get visas for their wives if they earn more than $2,750 per month. Despite working in the country for eight years, Padam earns only $400 per month and says that even if he worked for another eight years he wouldn’t earn enough to have his wife join him or “afford a car back home.” How do companies and countries benefit from policies that keep families apart? Qatar could lower the threshold. Why do you suppose they don’t?

Umesh says he does this work so he can build a house for his family: “With all of this struggling what’s the point of our lives anyway? It’s for the good of my children that my own life is thrown away.” Have you ever heard similar expressions of sacrifice? Where and when?

Sebastian says, “One day you’ll be telling your grandchild, ‘You know that stadium, I also built it.’ Then your grandchild looks at you and says, ‘You don’t even own a thatched house yet you built a big stadium.’ Then what are you?” How would you answer that question? What would you say to the grandchild?

Padam recalls friends and others who died on job sites. Look around your own community at large construction projects. What price did workers pay to bring those projects to fruition? Why do those who finance the projects, rather than the people who actually build them, tend to reap the most glory and the lion’s share of the economic benefits?
**Tournament Benefits**

The GCC team asks for time off to train. Why would the company grant that request? GCC estimates that fielding a Workers’ Cup team costs them about $27,500. What return does the company get from that investment?

What is the benefit of the Workers’ Cup to the players? How about to workers who aren’t on the team?

Qatar states, “This tournament demonstrates how much we care about corporate social responsibility.” In contrast, Calton says, “It is not about the worker. It was never about the worker.” If you were rating both Qatar and FIFA on a ten-point scale, how much would you say that each appears to care about corporate social responsibility?

Kenneth hopes that there will be professional scouts looking for players at the Workers’ Cup. If you were in his shoes, and assuming there were scouts at the games, would you consider that opportunity reward enough for the sacrifices made?

How does the tournament raise the hopes of workers like Kenneth?

What are team members implying when they accuse the Tanzifco team of not using real workers because the players have “big tummies”?

After a loss, ethnic tensions are revealed, with some claiming favoritism for African players and others reporting racial “jokes” that they don’t find funny. What unifies the GCC team and how do/could they overcome their differences?

Sebastian says, “When we started this game I thought… they want to boost this game in Qatar. They want these guys to participate in Qatar. It is just mockery. Doing some article or photograph in the newspaper and showing the white people we are doing perfect here. They have a very big pressure because they are abusing the humans here. We have rights! We are not slaves! We have rights!” Based on what you see in the film, what role does race or racism play in the treatment of Qatari’s foreign workers?
Long-Term Effects

In Qatar, blue-collar migrant workers vastly outnumber the native Qatari population. What do you think the long-term impact of this arrangement will be?

We see Padam on the phone arguing with his wife. Umesh talks on the phone with his children. What do you imagine the effects of distance and working conditions are on the workers’ families?

Looking for answers to an interviewer’s question, one player asks his teammates what they think freedom is. Their answers include:

“I think freedom means... maybe not being under slavery but having access for everything. Your movement, for expression.”

“Freedom is... like living in Kenya with free democracy.”

“You’re free to talk to whoever you want. You’re free to express your feelings to any lady you want. That’s freedom!”

“Freedom... is emancipating yourself from mental slavery.”

How do you think their experiences as foreign workers shaped their understanding of “freedom”? Do any of their answers ring especially true to you? How would you have answered the question?

Trying to unify his team Sebastian says, “Don’t make barriers inside you. It will demolish you... We should be good human beings. That is the most important thing and that is not happening worldwide.” How could the experiences of the workers featured in the film prepare them to lead the way in showing the world how to be “good human beings”?

Additional media literacy questions are available at: www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php
Taking Action

- Make and post a PSA-style ad about the working conditions of those who built the World Cup facilities. Talk about what your call to action should be. Publicize your video in chats during the World Cup.

- Investigate the policies in place at FIFA or other international athletic bodies (e.g., the International Olympic Committee) in terms of what they require from host nations regarding treatment of workers. Use what you find to engage those who organize international events in discussions or actions to enforce or improve those policies.

- Join watchdog organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch or Solidarity Center to hold event organizers, companies and countries accountable for preserving the basic human rights of workers.
**FILM-RELATED WEB SITES**

**THE WORKERS CUP**
www.theworkerscupfilm.com
General information about the film.

**AL-JAZEERA: “UN CLEARS QATAR OVER TREATMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS”**
This article provides an overview of Qatar’s efforts to improve conditions for workers.

**BBC: “HAVE 1,200 WORLD CUP WORKERS REALLY DIED IN QATAR?”**
A BBC report on mortality rates for foreign workers in Qatar, including those working to build facilities for the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

**BUSINESS & HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCE CENTRE**
This website covers companies involved in construction projects in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

**FIFA**
www.FIFA.com

**FIFA’S HUMAN RIGHTS**
https://resources.fifa.com/mm/document/affederation/footballgovernance/02/89/33/12/fifashumanright-spolicyNeutral.pdf
This is FIFA’s official human rights policy as of May, 2017.

**GCC**
www.gulfcontracting.com
GCC (Gulf Contracting) is the employer of the team featured in the film.

**GULF CONSTRUCTION TRACKER**
https://gulftracker.business-humanrights.org/
A project of Humanity United tracks construction contracts that employ migrant laborers in Gulf Countries, including Qatar.

**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION**
www.ilo.org
This agency of the United Nations recommends and reports on labor practices to ensure fair treatment of workers. Qatar is a member state of the agency.

**SOLIDARITY CENTER**
https://www.solidaritycenter.org
This Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization is aligned with the AFL-CIO labor federation.

**SUPREME COMMITTEE FOR DELIVERY & LEGACY**
sc.qa
The website of the committee organizing the World Cup in Qatar.

**UNITED NATIONS GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**
The key reference for how businesses are supposed to ensure they respect human rights of people affected by their work.

**UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS: “GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES ON DEVELOPING A HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY”**
This guide includes guidance on fair labor practices.

**WORKERS’ CUP**
www.workerscup.qa/
The official website of the tournament featured in the film, which continues annually.

**POV**
pbs.org/pov/workerscup
The POV website for the film includes further resources such as a streaming trailer, additional film clips, a lesson plan and a reading list.
HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order The Workers Cup for home use, go to http://www.theworkerscupfilm.com.

Produced by American Documentary, Inc., POV is public television’s premier showcase for nonfiction films. Since 1988, POV has been the home for the world’s boldest contemporary filmmakers, celebrating intriguing personal stories that spark conversation and inspire action. Always an innovator, POV discovers fresh new voices and creates interactive experiences that shine a light on social issues and elevate the art of storytelling. With our documentary broadcasts, original online programming and dynamic community engagement campaigns, we are committed to supporting films that capture the imagination and present diverse perspectives. POV films have won 37 Emmy® Awards, 21 George Foster Peabody Awards, 12 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards®, and the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award. The POV series has been honored with a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, three IDA Awards for Best Curated Series and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP) Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity. Learn more at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Spark (www.pbs.org/pov)

Since 1994, POV Digital has driven new storytelling initiatives and interactive production for POV. The department has continually experimented with web-based documentaries, producing PBS’ first program website and the first Snapchat-native documentary. It has won major awards for its work, including a Webby Award and over 19 nominations. Now with a singular focus on incubating and distributing interactive productions, POV Spark continues to explore the future of independent nonfiction media through its co-productions, acquisitions and POV Labs, where media makers and technologists collaborate to reinvent storytelling forms.

Front cover: Umesh at Al Sadd stadium in Doha, Qatar attends a game of the Qatar Stars League before his team’s opening match.
Photo courtesy of The Workers Cup LLC.

POV Engage (www.pbs.org/pov/engage)

The POV Engage team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 800 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia arts organization dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. AmDoc is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

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