

Fair Labour Standards

Migrant colleagues in the Middle East

In the Middle East, BESIX Group has been a major construction company since 1965. Over the years, the Group has carried out some of the most ambitious and decisive projects for the development of certain countries, in particular the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. These projects reflect the expertise of BESIX Group's engineers, but also the work of thousands of blue collars. They are almost all migrant colleagues, from India, Bangladesh and Nepal. There are 5,000 of them currently on the BESIX Group payroll, working on the company's construction sites. It is also with them, with the local authorities and with international organisations that BESIX Group has set a precedent in respecting and promoting fair labour practices in the broader region, a commitment that is now widely acknowledged, including by foreign states, international institutions and non-governmental organisations.



BESIX Group's internal policies

BESIX Group has implemented strict internal policies regarding the respect and promotion of migrant colleagues' rights, often going beyond its legal obligations. These measures are of course mandatory for each branch or subsidiary of the Group. Among the measures are for instance the fact that these colleagues are employed and paid directly by the Group, without intermediaries and that the company covers their full health insurance. Migrant colleagues are hired through official agencies that do not require them to pay any fees or back payments. Migrant blue and white collars retain their identity documents at all times and are provided with qualitative, comfortable accommodation, including places of worship for each religion and culturally appropriate menus. They freely appoint representatives to relay grievance or requests to the company and have access to all information in a language they know.

Independent monitoring

In recent years, the living and working conditions of migrant colleagues have been independently audited on a number of occasions, including in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. In addition to those carried out by local authorities, these audits were mainly conducted by the Building and Woodworkers' International (BWI), an international federation of 351 trade unions from 127 countries, representing around 12 million workers. This follows the signing of an international framework agreement with BWI in December 2017, providing the promotion of fair labour practices and the establishment of a monitoring mechanism. In this context, BWI has free access to construction sites and migrant blue and white collar' housing, when they live in accommodations provided by the BESIX Group.



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A lasting societal role

BESIX Group does not only focus on its own practices, the Group also requires its subcontractors to provide documentation demonstrating that they meet high standards in various areas, including living conditions and recruitment processes.

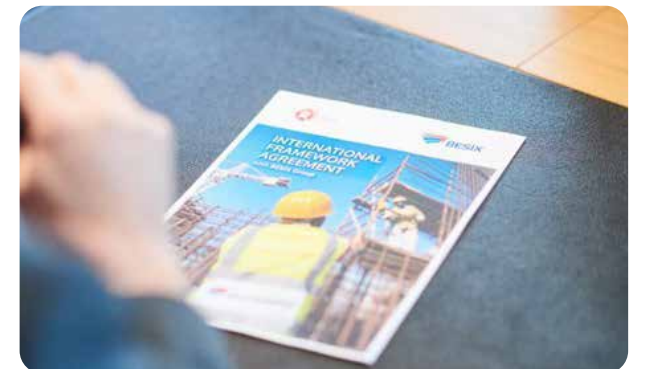
BESIX Group requires them to sign a code of conduct which obliges them to respect the Group's standards and allows audits to be carried out in their facilities. When breaches are found, the priority is to help them improve and find solutions.

For example, BESIX Group has hosted subcontractors' blue collars in its own accommodation when subcontractors' facilities were audited as not up to par with BESIX standards. It has also happened that the Group paid the unpaid wages of subcontractors' employees and deducted them from the payments due to the subcontractor in events where subcontractors were failing to compensate their employees adequately.

In the event of unwillingness or blatant breach of standards on behalf of subcontractors, a range of provisions, which local laws allow, provide for financial penalties or even outright termination of the contract.

What experts say about BESIX

In recent years, eminent figures from international organisations have publicly cited BESIX Group as a reference in promoting worker welfare in the Middle East. This is the case for the former Chairman of the Governing Body of the ILO, Luc Cortebeek, who declared in the press and Flemish Parliament that BESIX's practices were among the best in this field. The director of Amnesty International Belgium did the same in the Belgian press, presenting BESIX as an example to follow. The Secretary General of BWI (Building and Wood Worker's International), Ambet Yuson, has also expressed himself publicly on several occasions, explaining that BESIX Group applies standards in the Middle East that are equal to those in Western Europe.



FIFA World Cup in Qatar

The FIFA World Cup was held in Qatar from 21 November to 18 December 2022. BESIX Group has been operating in the country for several decades, renovated the Khalifa Stadium and designed and built the Al Janoub Stadium from 2014 to 2019. BESIX was openly not in favour of a boycott of the World Cup. It was the Group's opinion that the World Cup could set a precedent for the respect of workers' rights. Since construction work for the World Cup started, huge steps have been taken to improve the rights of migrant workers. This has led to an unprecedented reform of the country's labour legislation. BESIX Group shares this position with the ILO of the United Nations, the BWI, the Royal Belgian Football Association and several Belgian trade unions. BESIX Group encourages the continuation of the efforts already made and is committed to further cooperation with the Qatari authorities, international organisations and trade unions. The Group is committed to continue to play its role as a large company to this end. This is how BESIX wants to keep acting: by applying high standards, similar to the Belgian ones and by pushing its partners and subcontractors to apply them in turn.

Excelling in safety

Safety at work is BESIX Group's number one priority on all its sites. This is also the case in the Middle East where BESIX Group has one of the best safety records in the region. This is generally similar to that of the Group's other sites around the world, including Europe. Most sites often achieve several million working hours without an accident resulting in work incapacity. This was the case in July 2022 for the Dubai Waste-to-Energy team with 5 million safe man-hours and for the Dubai Uptown Tower team in October with 20 million safe man-hours since the project began in January 2019.



Number one in the construction sector

In October 2022, BESIX Group's subsidiary in the Middle East, Six Construct, was awarded the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry CSR Label for the 10th consecutive time. It is also the only construction company in the country to achieve this.



Adapting the work to the warmer seasons

Working hours are adapted according to the season. For example, in the United Arab Emirates, work is interrupted from 15 June to 15 September between 12.30 and 3 pm. BESIX Group sometimes extends this rule, especially when the humidity and temperature reach levels that are considered too high. In addition, on site, employees are provided with quality equipment, cool and ventilated areas for breaks, drinking water and refreshing towels.