

Blood, sweat and oil

Abusive working conditions
in the Saudi Aramco supply chain



FairSquare



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Executive summary

A FairSquare investigation finds that migrant workers in Saudi Aramco's supply chain in Saudi Arabia are exposed to serious health and safety risks, and that they or their families face significant challenges in claiming compensation in the event of their injury or death.

As Saudi Arabia's national oil company, and the world's biggest oil and gas company, Aramco is one of the wealthiest and most influential corporations in the world. It is the fourth largest company in the world by revenue, holds the second largest proven crude oil reserves and is the top exporter of oil. Saudi Aramco provides two-thirds of the Saudi Arabian government's revenue and is the biggest state-controlled carbon emitter, accounting for 4.28% of global CO2 emissions in 2024. In June 2026, Aramco will be the main sponsor of the FIFA Men's World Cup, providing the Aramco brand with a global platform.

Aramco has a vast supply chain, and the thousands of contractors and subcontractors that ensure the company's smooth operations in Saudi Arabia rely overwhelmingly on migrant workers, primarily from South Asia, to carry out lower-paid roles involving harsh and dangerous working conditions.

FairSquare's research, which is based on interviews with workers employed by 21 different contractors and subcontractors across four regions in Saudi Arabia, indicates that the company is failing to protect migrant workers in its supply chain in Saudi Arabia, leaving them vulnerable to serious abuse and injury, and unable to claim compensation.

The key concerns that arose from FairSquare's investigations were:

- **Extreme heat:** Workers at Aramco sites described being exposed to extreme temperatures of over 50°C. Multiple workers recounted witnessing colleagues faint and collapse while working, as a result of the heat. Another worker described taking a colleague to his supervisor after he collapsed shortly after his arrival in Saudi Arabia, saying, "We thought he would die." One worker who was based at Aramco sites for over a decade said he routinely worked in over 40-degree heat, and back in Nepal suffers from a series of long-term health problems linked to heat exposure. He told interviewers: "I think my blood problem began due to the heat. Then my kidneys failed. I had a heart problem as well." Exposure to excessive heat has wide-ranging physiological impacts, often exacerbating existing health conditions and resulting in disability or premature death.

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- **Excessive working hours:** Several men employed as fuel tanker drivers said they worked excessively long hours without proper breaks and that this created real risks of road traffic accidents with catastrophic potential. One driver described his work transporting a fuel tanker as being “like carrying bombs”. He said that he had fallen asleep at the wheel and driven off the road, and that “due to sleeplessness, many traffic accidents have occurred. People have been killed.” Another driver said he and his colleagues regularly drove for up to 19 hours at a time and that his employer, a contractor for Aramco, expected drivers to sleep in their vehicles. Aramco has acknowledged the problem of road traffic accidents, including fatalities, in its workforce.
 - **Slum housing:** Over a third of workers interviewed as part of this investigation described unsanitary and cramped living conditions which meet the UN-Habitat definition of “slum housing”. One worker told researchers: “We live in a container accommodation. We get electric shocks when it rains.” Workers described being provided poor-quality food, with one comparing it to “what animals eat”. Others said their employers punished them if they cooked their own food. The standards of accommodation described by workers are in violation of both Aramco’s code of conduct and Saudi Arabia’s labour regulations.
 - **Lack of compensation following fatalities and injuries:** In the six cases we examined where workers died or sustained disabilities through their work, adequate compensation was paid to the men or their families in only one of these cases, leaving the rest in debt and unable to meet basic expenses. The process to claim compensation from Saudi Arabia’s General Organisation for Social Insurance (GOSI) is exceptionally complex and challenging, and without support from employers it is close to impossible for most migrant workers’ families to succeed in a claim. Some families whose relatives had died described being persuaded, even pressured, by the employer or Nepali officials to release their relative’s body and proceed without a post-mortem, which companies later said was required to pay out compensation. One man injured in Saudi Arabia and left without compensation and unable to work told us: “My life now is ruined ... My brothers took out a loan to pay my medical bills. Now they say they won’t pay it off. The bank published a notice to put my home in foreclosure. Now, I live in a rented house. I have very difficult times now ... how hurt I am, only my heart knows.” In two cases where workers’ deaths were categorised as “natural death”, families and colleagues of the deceased men were told that no compensation would be payable because their deaths were not work-related, despite both deaths occurring on Aramco premises during work hours. “Natural death” is a descriptor commonly used by Saudi Arabian authorities in the deaths of migrant workers, but which provides no meaningful information about the cause of death and denies the families of the deceased information about their loved one’s death and the opportunity to claim compensation.
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Media and NGO reports regarding Saudi Arabia have extensively documented the serious and systematic abuse and exploitation of the low-paid migrant workers who make up around three-quarters of the country's workforce, and the attendant risks to their health and safety. Aramco has the power, the resources and the influence to ensure that the hundreds of thousands of workers in its supply chain are effectively protected from occupational risks and appropriately compensated if they suffer injury or death.

At the organisational level, Aramco has made a strong commitment to health and safety – considering itself to be a “pioneer” on safety culture – and states that: “The safety and well-being of our employees, their dependents, and our company's contractors is paramount to our strategy and operations.” Aramco says that it employs “specialized tools to track and assess contractor safety performance, promoting adherence to our corporate safety standards”.

This research suggests these commitments are not being put into practice – and it is not the first evidence of abusive working practices in Aramco's supply chain. In September 2025, Human Rights Watch found that hundreds of migrant workers had been unpaid for more than eight months by an Aramco subcontractor, and analysis published by the Business and Human Rights Centre found that Aramco had engaged contractors on renewable projects which then employed migrant workers – directly or through layers of subcontracting – in abusive working conditions. At the Aramco stadium project in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, Muhammad Arshad became the first worker to die at a 2034 World Cup construction site. As of February 2026, his family had still not been compensated, according to *The Guardian*.

Aramco bears a significant responsibility for the protection of the rights of the migrant workers who support its operations and profit generation through its supply chain. FairSquare urges Aramco to take the following steps as a matter of urgency:

- Overhaul and upgrade its human rights due diligence systems, to better ensure that the standards of safety, health and working conditions that it sets for its contractors are enforced across its operations.
- Establish effective grievance mechanisms that are genuinely accessible to workers in Aramco's supply chain and to families based outside of Saudi Arabia.
- Carry out, and publish the results of, independent, expert investigations into all deaths in the Aramco supply chain in Saudi Arabia.
- Require all contractors to provide Aramco with reports on what compensation has been paid to workers and their families in cases of injury or death, and

by which entity, and to fully justify any instances where compensation is not provided.

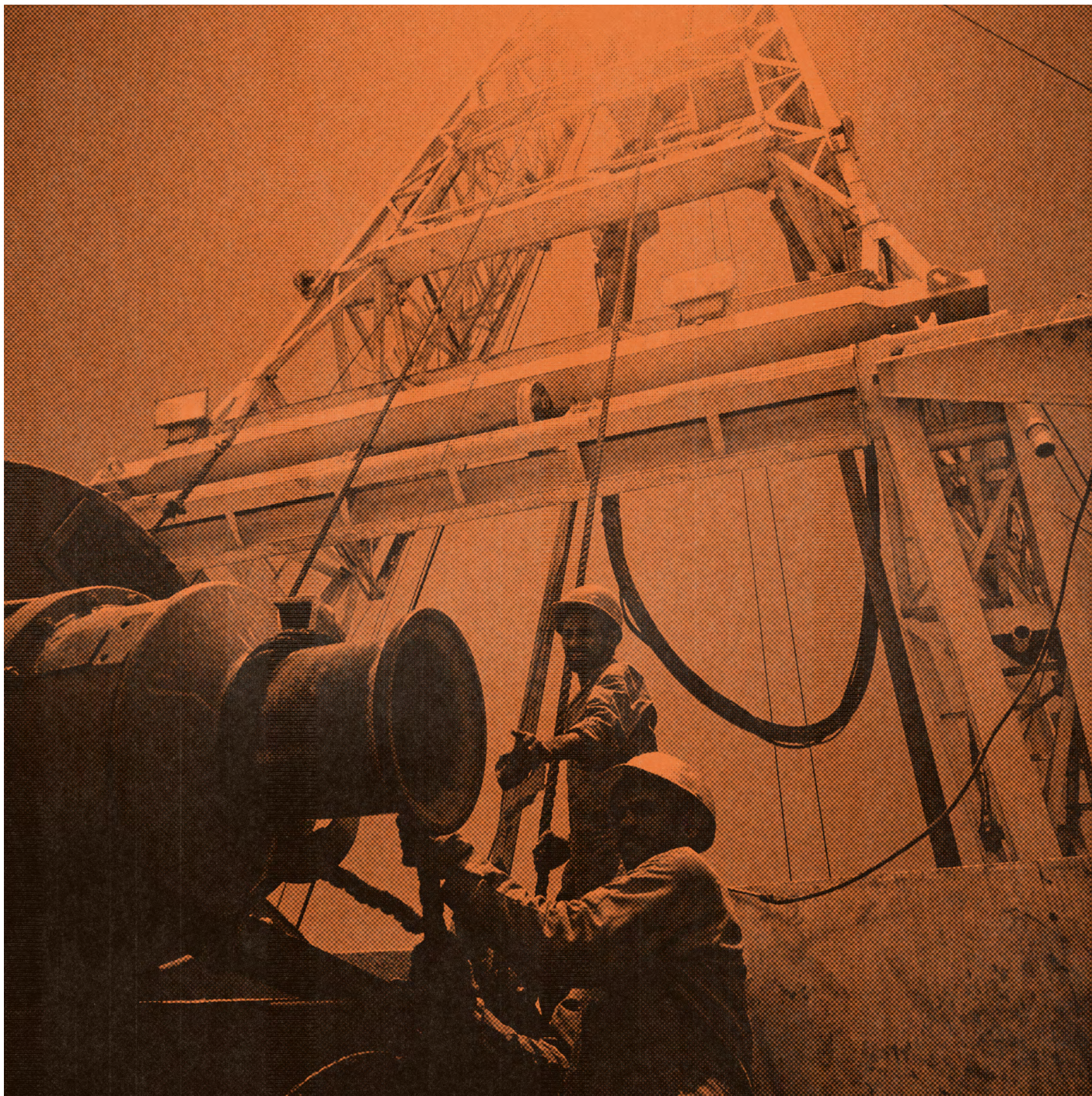
- Implement, monitor and enforce an expectation that, when there is an occupational risk of heat stress, all companies working on Aramco projects are required to provide workers with breaks of an appropriate duration in cooled, shaded areas; mandatory break times should take into account the environmental heat stress risks, along with the exertional nature of the work being performed.
- Urgently upgrade monitoring systems to track whether drivers on Aramco projects have had sufficient time to rest.
- Institute and enforce strict penalties for contractors where it is found that drivers are working excessive hours or not being given days off.
- Commission independent and regular inspections of accommodation housing workers provided to Aramco sites, including unannounced visits and interviews with workers.

Sporting organisations in partnership deals with Aramco have responsibilities, under international human rights standards, to ensure that those relationships are not causing or contributing to harm. Since 2024, Aramco has been a “Major Worldwide Partner of FIFA”, which grants it sponsorship rights for multiple events, including the 2026 FIFA Men’s World Cup, where Aramco will present the Young Player of the Tournament Award.

FairSquare has expressed grave concerns about partnerships between sports bodies, including FIFA and Aramco, in light of a [2023 communication by United Nations experts](#) cautioning that working with Aramco could contravene international human rights law and standards.

With respect to migrant worker rights, FairSquare is calling on FIFA, Concacaf, the International Cricket Council, Formula 1 and Aston Martin, all of whom have major sponsorship deals with the company, to: open a full and frank dialogue with Aramco on human rights issues in its operations, including in relation to migrant worker rights; and to insist that Aramco takes urgent steps to address concerns raised by human rights organisations, including with respect to the protection of workers in the company’s supply chain and compensation for workers and their families in cases of disability or death – to include cases categorised as so-called natural death.

About this report



This report was written by Alex Carlen, FairSquare's Research and Advocacy Manager. Interviews, document collation and case study preparation were carried out by a FairSquare consultant.

FairSquare reviewed 23 cases of migrant workers, originally from Nepal, who worked at nine Aramco sites in Saudi Arabia, based on interviews with workers and their colleagues, as well as family members in Nepal. The investigation involved interviews with 27 people, including family members and former co-workers of deceased workers, to gather testimony on their experiences. The 23 cases involved 21 different contractors and subcontractors operating on Aramco sites in different functions. The interviews were conducted in the second half of 2024 and the first half of 2025.

In order to protect the anonymity of those interviewed, some names have been changed. Ages given are accurate to the time of the interview.

FairSquare reviewed relevant Aramco policies and reporting available on the company's website, including codes of conduct, sustainability reporting, supplier requirements and modern slavery statements. We wrote to Aramco in May 2026, setting out our concerns. To date, the company has/has not replied.

This report builds on FairSquare's prior work on human rights in Saudi Arabia and the other countries that are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including the following.

In May 2025, FairSquare published an investigation into the [deaths of low-paid migrant workers in Saudi Arabia](#).

- FairSquare worked with partners in the [Vital Signs project](#) to produce three research reports in 2022 and 2023 on migrant worker health and mortality across the GCC region. These were on: causes of death; access to health; and the impact of extreme heat and climate change.
- In 2023, we produced an investigation into workers operating in [extreme heat on a UAE construction site](#).
- FairSquare provided support to Amnesty International in the research and drafting of reports on [the deaths of migrant workers in Qatar](#) in 2021 and [human rights risks linked to the hosting of the FIFA Men's World Cup by Saudi Arabia](#) in 2024.

1 The context for migrant workers in Saudi Arabia and at Aramco



Migrant workers at risk in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, the discovery of oil in the 1930s and the subsequent development of the oil industry led to a heavy reliance on migrant labour that continues to the present day. As of mid-2025, [14.1 million of 18.2 million](#) workers in Saudi Arabia were non-nationals, accounting for 77% of the total workforce, up from 9.4 million in 2019. Foreign workers, most of whom are low-paid workers from South Asia, are more heavily represented in low-paid labour-intensive sectors of Saudi Arabia's economy. In 2024, the construction sector, the country's largest employer by a considerable margin, employed approximately [10 times more foreign males](#) (2.47 million) than Saudi Arabian males (0.24 million). These figures do not account for workers who are part of the [large population of undocumented migrants in the country](#), estimated to be over 2 million people.

The country's reliance on migrant workers looks set to deepen over the next decade. The Vision 2030 plan, which aims to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on oil and the state, includes a plethora of "gigaprojects", including the 2034 Men's World Cup, which Saudi Arabia was awarded in 2024 by FIFA, the same year that Saudi Aramco became FIFA's biggest sponsor. Saudi Arabia has reportedly [scaled back](#) some of these plans, adjusting its investment strategies as a result of spiralling costs and fluctuations in the price of oil. However, even downscaled, these plans require the employment of many hundreds of thousands of migrant workers. In 2024, [140,000 migrant workers](#) were working at the NEOM megacity alone.

Kafala and exploitation

Migrant workers in Saudi Arabia are subject to the "kafala" sponsorship system, a set of overlapping legal statutes that tie a migrant worker's status within a country to a sponsor, giving that sponsor influence or control in relation to the worker's residence rights, entry into and exit from the country, and ability to change jobs. In a report prepared with the support of FairSquare, [Amnesty International stated in 2024](#) that: "This [system] leaves workers with limited recourse when subjected to common abuses such as wage theft, excessive working hours, confiscation of passports, deprivation of basic social and health needs, restriction of movement, discrimination and violence."

In a December 2024 report, Human Rights Watch [concluded](#) that migrant workers in Saudi Arabia face widespread labour abuses across employment sectors and geographic regions and that "Saudi authorities are systematically failing to protect them from and remedy these abuses." A [complaint](#) to the International Labour Organization (ILO) made by the trade union federation

Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) in 2024 alleged extensive labour rights violations – including failing to pay wages, passport confiscation, illegal recruitment fees, debt bondage and preventing workers from freely changing jobs – and the widespread use of forced labour. In 2025, African trade unions filed a [formal complaint](#) with the ILO against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regarding the treatment of migrant workers in the country. The complaint describes “a brutal pattern of forced labour, wage theft, physical and sexual abuse and systemic racism, particularly – but not exclusively – targeting African migrant workers”.

In 2017, comparative [analysis by the ILO](#) found that the kafala system in Saudi Arabia had the highest number of “sponsorship related elements” tying workers to their employer. In recent years, the Saudi Arabian government has sought to promote the claim that the kafala system has been reformed and even “abolished”, as part of its “[Labour Reform initiative](#)”. The [Migrant Rights Research Open Repository \(MRRORS\)](#) states that the defining provisions of the kafala system are ultimately still in place:

“Residency and work visas are still tied to the sponsor/employers. Migrant workers must still obtain exit permits, albeit in a different form. Migrant workers still need their employer’s consent to change jobs during their first year in the country ... [S]ponsors continue to wield significant power over their migrant workers, and in no manner is the Kafala system abolished.”

Similarly, in April 2026, UN experts [urged](#) Saudi Arabia to effectively abolish the kafala system, stating that, despite reforms: “Persisting loopholes allow employers to retain excessive control over workers, with reports indicating that enforced exit restrictions and false criminal charges are used to punish those attempting to leave abusive employment.”

Migrant workers face risks during the recruitment process, including being coerced by employment agencies in their home countries to pay exorbitant recruitment fees. Although [charging recruitment fees](#) for private sector jobs is illegal under Saudi law, the practice is widespread. In 2024, Amazon [reimbursed US\\$1.9 million](#) to 700 workers who had been required by Saudi recruitment agents and labour supply companies to pay recruitment fees and other costs. The ILO has [documented human trafficking of Nepali workers](#) to Saudi Arabia.

Health and safety, and worker mortality

Migrant workers in Saudi Arabia operate in a context where they are exposed to exploitation, abuse and discrimination. As a result, they may be exposed to [serious risks to their health](#), including: extreme heat and humidity; air pollution; overwork and abusive working conditions; poor occupational health and safety practices; psychosocial stress; hypertension; and chronic kidney disease. In 2018, [the UN Committee on Racial Discrimination](#) expressed concern at reports that people of Asian and African descent in Saudi Arabia faced discrimination in access to healthcare. The overwhelming majority of Saudi Arabia's migrant workers are not eligible for free non-emergency healthcare. A [2022 report](#) by the Vital Signs Partnership (of which FairSquare is a member) found that the Saudi Arabian health system's effectiveness is heavily dependent on employers paying workers' insurance premiums and actively assisting them to access healthcare, and that the country's gradual shift towards mandatory private health insurance is likely to further restrict low-paid migrant workers' access to care.

The series of risks that these workers face in Saudi Arabia, combined with their inability to access non-emergency healthcare services easily, is likely to be a significant factor both in the number of preventable deaths in the country and the rate of unexplained deaths. A 2025 FairSquare [investigation](#) into the deaths of migrant workers in Saudi Arabia found there was a critical absence of effective policies and processes to determine the cause of migrant worker deaths in Saudi Arabia, and concluded that the surge of construction associated with projects such as NEOM and the 2034 Men's World Cup will in all likelihood lead to thousands of unexplained deaths of low-paid foreign workers in the country. An investigation by [Human Rights Watch](#), also in 2025, found that Saudi authorities had failed to adequately protect workers from preventable deaths, investigate workplace safety incidents, and ensure timely and adequate compensation for families.

International human rights standards and Aramco's supply chain policies

The Saudi Arabian Oil Company, which operates publicly as Saudi Aramco or Aramco, is Saudi Arabia's national oil company. It is the [fourth largest](#) company in the world by revenue, holds the [second largest](#) proven crude oil reserves and remains the top oil [exporter](#) globally. The Saudi Arabian government and the Public Investment Fund (PIF), the country's sovereign wealth fund, own a combined [share](#) of 98% of Aramco. The company has over [75,000 employees](#) and operates in more than 50 countries via a "network of affiliates, subsidiaries, and joint ventures". Its revenues from the sale of oil provide [around two-thirds of the Saudi state's revenues](#).

[The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNGPs) provide the authoritative framework for the human rights responsibilities of companies, requiring businesses to avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities as well as those they are directly linked to through their business relationships. They should carry out human rights due diligence: assessing actual and potential human rights impacts, integrating and acting upon the findings, tracking responses and communicating how impacts are addressed. The UNGPs state that in the case of state-owned companies such as Aramco, governments should take “additional steps” to protect against human rights abuses, including clearly communicating human rights expectations to businesses.

For an enterprise of the size and scale of Aramco, operating in a sector characterised by large projects, geopolitical and safety risks, outsourced delivery models and complex supply chains, and being headquartered in a country with well-documented and severe limitations on fundamental rights such as [workers’ freedom of association](#), its responsibilities under the UNGPs are heightened.

There are various guidance documents on the implementation of human and labour rights standards through the oil and gas supply chain. In 2014, Shift and the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) developed, with the European Commission, comprehensive [human rights guidance for the oil and gas sector](#), covering businesses’ own activities and their business relationships with third parties. The guide recognises that businesses will often have a wide range of relationships across the duration of a project. Oil and gas supply chains involve a [wide variety of actors](#) with differing responsibilities in different phases: upstream (exploration, production and construction); midstream (transport and storage of oil and gas); and downstream (refining into, and marketing of, finished products such as fuels, asphalt, fertiliser, rubber, plastics, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, paints and fabrics).

Aramco has more than 10,000 suppliers in Saudi Arabia, according to [The Wall Street Journal](#). This number may represent the company’s first tier suppliers, with which it has contracts in place. The company’s engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contractors are often [huge multinationals](#) in their own right, and in turn have their own suppliers and subcontractors. For the purposes of evaluating Aramco’s human rights risks and responsibilities, the [Shift/IHRB guidance](#) makes clear that: “Relevant business relationships are not limited to those where the company has a direct contract or agreement; they include relationships one or more steps removed, including deeper levels in the supply chain.” This means that Aramco’s contractors’ subcontractors (and so on) fall clearly within the scope of its human rights responsibilities where their activities are in the service of Aramco’s products, services and operations.

In addition to the Shift guidance, IPIECA – “the global oil and gas association for advancing environmental and social performance across the energy transition” – in 2019 issued a toolkit on [company and supply chain labour rights](#). Its guidance on [labour rights assessments](#) provides information on the design and implementation of an on-site labour rights assessment, outlining approaches for conducting an on-site audit and assessment of contractors following contract commencement. The organisation published the [second edition of its human rights due diligence guidance](#) for the sector in 2021, and has also produced guidelines for [health, safety, security, environment and social responsibility governance in joint ventures](#), as well for [responsible recruitment and employment](#), covering international definitions of labour rights and key principles including upholding freedom of association, paying the minimum wage and respecting working time regulations. Meanwhile, the International Association of Oil & Gas Producers (IOGP) has produced [guidance on temporary onshore accommodation](#), including information on health, hygiene and welfare considerations.

Aramco policies on human and labour rights

A Corporate Human Rights Benchmark [scorecard for Saudi Aramco](#) published in 2023 gave the company a score of just 6.9 out of 100, indicating a very low level of publicly available disclosures on a range of human rights issues. Perhaps responding to such evaluations, Aramco now states on its website that it is [committed to](#) “greater public transparency and wider societal engagement around how we manage human rights impacts across our operations”, and that its approach to human rights has two approaches:

- “Compliance with applicable laws and regulations in each jurisdiction in which we operate”
- “Engagement with global and regional stakeholders in human rights matters related to our operations, and our responsiveness to concerns expressed by them.”

Compliance with laws and regulations is not an adequate starting point for any company seeking to explain its approach to human rights. The [UNGPs](#) make clear that: “The responsibility to respect human rights is a global standard of expected conduct for all business enterprises wherever they operate ... And it exists over and above compliance with national laws and regulations protecting human rights.” There are myriad examples, including in Saudi Arabia, of laws and regulations that do not adequately protect people from human rights violations, and in such cases businesses such as Aramco have the responsibility to take

additional steps to mitigate risks caused by these legal gaps.

Regarding the company's workforce, Aramco [states](#) that: "The safety and well-being of our employees, their dependents, and our company's contractors is paramount to our strategy and operations." The company's [Code of Business Conduct](#) (2022), which applies to all Aramco employees, contract employees, subsidiaries and controlled affiliates, includes high-level principles on health and safety and non-discrimination, and encourages employees to report concerns, outlining channels to "ask questions and speak up". A non-retaliation clause is included for those reporting issues. Aramco has a further [Supplier Code of Conduct](#) which sets out requirements for those working with Aramco, which all suppliers, vendors, manufacturers, contractors and subcontractors must acknowledge and adhere to. These include environmental, health and safety practices, requiring suppliers to ensure they "maintain safe, sanitary, and healthy residential camp and living environments for all their employees". Suppliers are also required to comply with Saudi Arabia's labour laws, including those on "working hours, working conditions, ... end of service benefits, and medical insurance".

aramco publishes an annual report on Safe Operations and People Development. In [2024](#), the report noted fatalities had increased from three in 2023 to eight in 2024, stating that two of the deaths in 2024 were employees and six were contracted workers, and providing some basic details of the causes of death: "Of these fatalities, three were due to injuries sustained from struck-by incidents and two from chemical exposure, while the remaining were from electrical shock, fall from height, and equipment failure incidents." The company stated that it "conducted thorough investigations, with lessons captured and prevention measures implemented to avoid recurrence", and that "evaluations and lessons learned from these incidents have been shared with relevant organizations, and we have implemented remedial actions and enhanced risk management to prevent reoccurrence." The results of these investigations do not appear to have been made public.

The report states, in relation specifically to human rights, that 100% of Aramco sites have had a grievance mechanism in place since 2022, and that 112 grievances were raised in 2024, down from 293 in 2022. No information is provided as to the contents of the grievances or any outcomes resulting from the reports. It is not fully clear whether non-employees of Aramco are able to use these mechanisms. A 2022 [report on the company's commitment to sustainability](#) says that "our suppliers have access to a hotline to report concerns, which are reviewed and investigated to limit the risk of inappropriate activities", without providing any further context as to what this means.

Reported labour incidents on Aramco sites

In recent years, Aramco has faced increasing scrutiny over the treatment of low-paid migrant workers in its supply chain within Saudi Arabia. In September 2025, Human Rights Watch (HRW) [found](#) that hundreds of migrant workers were subject to wage theft, being left unpaid for over eight months by an Aramco subcontractor. The workers were left effectively stranded and forced to choose between funding their own travel to return to their home country, without their outstanding wages, or to continue working while undocumented. One worker on an Aramco site who was owed around 20,000 Saudi riyals (US\$5,330) said: “Our supervisor on-site pressured us to continue working, but we refused.” Aramco did not respond to a request for comment from HRW.

Allegations have also come to light with regard to renewable energy projects created as part of the Vision 2030 diversification push. Analysis [published](#) in 2025 by the Business and Human Rights Centre found that Aramco had engaged contractors that then employed migrant workers directly or through layers of subcontracting, in abusive working conditions. The report identified labour rights violations during recruitment, “unacceptable and egregious working conditions” and workers facing substantial barriers accessing remedies. Aramco has [not responded](#) to these allegations, to date.

In March 2025, [Muhammad Arshad](#) from Pakistan became the first worker to die at a construction site for a new stadium being built for the 2034 Men’s World Cup. Muhammad fell to his death from an upper level during the construction of the stadium, which is named for and being developed by Aramco. Aramco told *The Guardian* that the safety and well-being of employees was “our highest priority”, and that “the company follows industry best practices in managing and reporting incidents, including determining the facts, sequence of events and root causes”. As of February 2026, Muhammad’s family had still not received compensation, according to [The Guardian](#). In 2024, a [Daily Mail investigation into conditions at the Aramco stadium](#) had found workers saddled with extortionate debts from the illegal fees they were forced to pay to get to Saudi Arabia, and reporting working in extreme heat and facing pay theft.

For direct employees of Aramco, the perceived benefits offered by the company – including decent wages, accommodation and commitment to safety standards – have traditionally earned it a reputation as an attractive place to work within Saudi Arabia. However, high-profile incidents have undermined this reputation. In 2015, a [fire](#) at a residential complex for Aramco employees in the eastern city of Khobar killed 10 people and injured more than 250. In 2020, the [Financial Times](#) reported on allegations of toxic workplace culture, including bullying, mismanagement and racial bias, with several former employees claiming safety corners were being cut, and oversight was poor. The report highlighted the case

of Alwyn Whitcher, an Aramco engineer who died from Covid-19 after allegedly being denied adequate medical care, with his widow blaming his employer and suggesting racist attitudes played a role in her husband's treatment. Aramco told the *Financial Times* it rejected the allegations and “what they insinuate about the way Aramco is managed and run”, saying it was proud of its multinational workforce and safety standards that “are in excess of international standards”, with lower recorded fatality and injury rates than western rivals. It told the newspaper it would “investigate claims of any violations of our standards”. The same year, Aramco was forced to [apologise](#) after a photograph circulated on social media showing a migrant worker at the company's offices seemingly acting as a human hand sanitiser pump during the pandemic.

FairSquare has investigated the experiences of 23 Nepali migrant workers employed on Aramco sites by direct contractors or indirect subcontractors of the company between 2022 and 2024.

Researchers interviewed 15 current workers, four former workers and four families of workers who had died in Saudi Arabia during their employment on Aramco sites.

The 23 men were employed by 21 different contractors and subcontractors operating on Aramco sites. Ten of the men worked as drivers (transporting fuel, other materials or staff for Aramco), nine worked in construction, developing projects for the company, three worked as work permit receivers (an individual responsible for ensuring that all activities requiring permits are performed safely) and one was a warehouse worker. Nine workers were employed by large “tier one” contractors who hold the main contract with Aramco and are usually responsible for project delivery, while the rest of the men worked for smaller companies.

The workers had been employed in several different regions of Saudi Arabia, including:

- at Marjan, Tanajib, Al-Jubail, Ras Tanura and Haradh in the Eastern Province
- at Daba and Tabuk, in Tabuk Province on the Red Sea coast
- in Jeddah, in Mecca Province, and
- in Jizan, near the Yemeni border.

2 Findings: Health and safety of Aramco supply chain workers



The key concerns that arose from FairSquare's investigations were:

- Multiple workers employed by contractors to construct infrastructure for Aramco in outside areas described working in extreme heat, with some linking the impact of heat directly to chronic health issues.
- Drivers of vehicles carrying Aramco products and materials are in some cases forced to drive for dangerously long periods of time, without proper breaks for rest and sleep, creating real risks of major accidents caused by fatigue.
- Workers on Aramco sites are provided with unsanitary and cramped living conditions, in violation of Aramco policy and Saudi Arabian law.
- Only one of the families of workers who died, or workers who sustained disabilities through their work, had received adequate compensation, at the time of interview, leaving them in debt and struggling to make ends meet. Under Saudi Arabian law, companies are obliged to provide compensation for disability or death caused by work.
- Several workers told researchers that their direct employers were able to avoid or subvert safety regulations and standards set by Aramco. The picture they describe suggests Aramco's measures to enforce and implement its standards throughout its supply chain are not adequate.

Heat exposure

Multiple workers employed by contractors to construct infrastructure for Aramco in outside areas described working in extreme heat, with some directly linking the impact of heat to chronic health issues. FairSquare's research evidences the wide-ranging physiological impacts of prolonged exposure to heat. Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, on average experiences [117 days annually](#) when the maximum daily temperature exceeds 40°C, and this is set to increase to between 149 and 183 days due to climate change.

According to [the World Health Organization](#) (WHO), exposure to excessive heat has wide-ranging physiological impacts, often exacerbating existing health conditions and resulting in disability or premature death. Extended periods of high day- and night-time temperatures put cumulative physiological stress on the body and can exacerbate the impact of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and kidney disease. Rapid rises in heat gain due to exposure to hotter than average conditions compromise the body's ability to regulate its temperature and can result in what the WHO describes as "a cascade of

illnesses”, including heat cramps, heat exhaustion, hyperthermia and heat stroke. Even minor differences in seasonal average temperatures are associated with increased illness and death.

Aramco has acknowledged the risks of extreme heat for its workforce and has published [guidance](#) in this respect. Its lead contractors are in some cases apparently required to produce [heat stress prevention plans](#) for the projects they manage, with measures including three-hour work stoppages in the middle of the day during the hottest months, something that is already [required by law in Saudi Arabia](#). Rudimentary summer working hours restrictions of this kind have been heavily criticised by [scientific experts](#), as well as by [FairSquare and the Vital Signs Partnership](#), for failing to offer adequate protection in extreme heat. Workers on multiple Aramco sites told researchers that it was not uncommon to see colleagues collapsing due to the heat.

Kamal, a 27-year-old Nepali worker, had been told before migrating to Saudi Arabia in August 2023 that he would be working indoors in an air-conditioned hotel. Instead, after paying 150,000 Nepalese rupees (US\$1,010) in illegal recruitment fees, he had his passport confiscated on arrival in Saudi Arabia and found himself working for a construction firm which was contracted to one of Aramco’s lead contractors at the Tanajib gas plant. Kamal was working 12-hour shifts in what he said were extreme levels of heat. Shortly after his arrival, he had to take a colleague to his supervisor after he collapsed on-site, apparently as a result of the heat. “We thought he would die. The company sent him home. His money went in vain. But it’s good, he could go home.” After 10 months, Kamal decided to leave Saudi Arabia: “I never thought this would be the situation abroad. This is too much.”

Another worker said that, during June and July, the temperature at the Marjan Increment project (a US\$21 billion offshore and onshore oil field expansion project in the Arabian Gulf) could reach above 50°C, causing workers to faint with what he said was “heat stroke due to lack of water”. Temperatures of 50°C or more [have been recorded](#) in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province in recent years. A worker at the Aramco facility in Jizan, near to the border with Yemen, said he had seen people collapsing due to heat:

“Recently, one friend fainted. He was from Nepal. He fell when he was walking. The vehicle came. Water was sprinkled on him. He was taken to a room with air conditioning for the whole day ... When someone faints, they send them to their room. He will be alone in the room, and anything can happen, ... They stop work when temperatures exceed 50 degrees. Otherwise, they ask workers to work in the shade.”

Udgam, a welder, regularly worked at the Ras Tanura site in over 40-degree heat



and described the humidity as particularly challenging: “Because of humidity, it’s difficult to breathe, walk.” Udgam also said that workers at his site lacked proper rest time in this heat: “We should work for a while and rest. We should pay more attention to our body than work.” [International best practice](#) on heat stress requires that when there is an occupational risk of heat stress, mandatory break times should take into account the environmental heat stress risks along with the exertional nature of the work being performed.

Prasad, a 40-year-old from Gorkha in Nepal, worked in Saudi Arabia from 2010 to 2023, for a contractor that was delivering pipeline-related works at various remote sites linked to an Aramco gas plant in Dammam. He said he worked shifts of up to 14 hours a day, and sometimes as long as from 5 am to 10 pm, and that it was routine for workers to be working in extreme temperatures. In around 2020, doctors told him that he had heart and kidney problems, and prescribed him medication. He believes his working conditions, which involved working in extreme heat, being exposed to gases and lacking enough break time to fill up his water bottle, are to blame for his condition.

“In the summer, people would faint frequently ... I didn’t collapse. But I felt dizzy and blurry sometimes ... It used to be so hot ... It used to be so difficult without water and ice. But we had to work even if we didn’t have water. We had to hit with the hammers, joining pipes. The foremen would ask us to speed up work ... The safety people would say, ‘Don’t work continuously. Work one hour and take a 15-minute break.’ But what to do? The foremen would force us. So, we worked so hard. We continued working ... It would be difficult to work. It would be coughing at work. Sometimes, I felt like my breathing was stopped ... I think my blood problem began due to the heat. Then my kidneys failed. I had a heart problem as well.”

He was encouraged to return home by his company and a doctor who told him, “Your situation is bad. You have to do dialysis. Medicines alone wouldn’t help. The kidneys are failing.” Prasad’s medical notes, seen by FairSquare, show that on 6 June 2023, after he returned to Nepal, he was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease (CKD) and began doing dialysis twice a week. CKD disproportionately affects men performing strenuous work in hot climates. Prasad told researchers that during dialysis he vomited and in the following days he sometimes struggled to walk. His employer had not contacted him since he returned to Nepal and had never discussed compensation. As he was preparing to come home, he was so concerned about his health that he felt he could worry about compensation after his return.

“Saudi Aramco is the richest company in Saudi Arabia ... Aramco became rich because we labourers worked there. But when I needed them, they didn’t do

anything. They should do something for me now because I'm sick. But they haven't done anything."

Deception and exploitation: Promised a job as an Aramco employee

In addition to workplace exploitation, several interviewees reported having paid recruitment fees in order to migrate to Saudi Arabia. Under [international standards](#), no recruitment fees or related costs should be charged to, or otherwise borne by, workers or jobseekers.

Amrit, a 31-year-old man working at Aramco's Marjan Increment plant, told researchers he had decided to come to Saudi Arabia after financial burdens began building up after his young son fell from the roof of a two-storey house. Told he would be getting a free air ticket and visa, he had to pay 200,000 Nepalese rupees (US\$2,160) to travel to Saudi Arabia, which he paid by taking out a loan with an annual interest rate of 36%. Told he would be working as a direct employee of Aramco, he instead found himself working for a supply company, who sent him initially to the Ras Tanura Aramco project in Jubail. On arrival, Amrit said his passport was confiscated and he was made to work 14-hour days but only received pay for 10 hours. He said his role involved carrying weights of 100–150kgs, with two or three other workers.¹ "Sometimes, workers' hands and legs are broken and fractured. Sometimes, workers faint." On 2 May 2021, he collapsed at work and was hospitalised. After three days of rest, he was back at work, and was forced to pay for part of his treatment.

Amrit's story of misrepresentation and harsh conditions was echoed in the testimony of other workers. Despite recruitment fees being [illegal](#) in Saudi Arabia, Amrit was one of five workers interviewed who had paid fees ranging from 70,000 to 150,000 Nepalese rupees (US\$465 to US\$1,000). These vast fees are often funded by loans, leaving the employee in a weaker position on arrival, having to tolerate highly challenging conditions to keep up with repayments. Workers may also be recruited on false pretences ■

1 The US National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health recommends 23kg as "the maximum load nearly all healthy workers should be able to lift under optimal conditions". <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/110725>

Dangerously long working hours for drivers

Aramco is a heavy user of road transport. The company states that in 2024 it used more than [11,000 company road vehicles](#), covering more than 240 million kilometres, and over 420 buses, covering over 22 million kilometres. Several men employed as drivers involved in transporting Aramco's products and materials told researchers they worked excessively long hours and that this created safety risks. Exceptionally lengthy working hours for drivers of fuel tankers raise serious concerns about the potential for catastrophic accidents. A [2018 study](#) by the US Department of Transportation's Office of the Inspector General found that a 15-minute increase in average dwell time – the total time spent by a truck at a facility while waiting for loading or unloading – increases the average expected crash rate by 6.2%.

Aramco's [General Instruction Manual 6.030 on Traffic and Vehicle Safety](#), which applies to contractor drivers, requires that the company's departments include fatigue in their evaluations of whether it is appropriate for employees to make a particular journey. However, a tanker driver at the Tabuk Bulk Plant said that tanker drivers may be left waiting inside plants for between 12 and 13 hours for their vehicles to be filled up, after which they immediately drive, as they must comply with tight delivery deadlines and are subject to salary deductions if they are delayed.

Sahil arrived in Saudi Arabia when he was 21 and had been working for 12 years as a driver. He told interviewers that during his time as a driver at the Duba project, on the Red Sea coast, he would wait for over 10 hours for his tanker to be filled and would then drive overnight, without any sleep. Sahil said that if drivers were caught sleeping on the Aramco site while waiting for their vehicle to be loaded, they faced being barred from ever working at Aramco again.

Bishal, from the Siraha District in Nepal, was employed by a Saudi Aramco transport contractor and transported petroleum from multiple Aramco plants in several locations across Saudi Arabia to businesses and petrol stations. He described driving 18–19 hours a day as normal for him and said he had even travelled over 20 hours in one particularly long trip. He says he was only able to take short breaks to sleep during his journeys and that he and other drivers would regularly sleep in their tankers.

One man, who said he had heard of multiple incidents of drivers coming off the road due to tiredness, said that, "nobody cares about drivers – whether they have eaten or not, whether they were in traffic or not. They don't care ... We don't have weekly days off. We even didn't get days off during Covid lockdown. We work for 30 days. We don't have days off, we don't have public holidays. No matter whether the Saudi king dies, Aramco work never stops."

One driver described his work transporting a fuel tanker as being “like carrying bombs”. He said that he had fallen asleep at the wheel and derailed from the road, and that “due to sleeplessness, many traffic accidents have occurred. People have been killed.” Aramco has acknowledged the problem of road safety and engaged in various [programmes](#) to reduce accidents and fatalities among its workforce. In its [Suppliers Safety Management System](#), published in 2011 and still live on its website, Aramco says that deadly traffic accidents among its suppliers are of concern to the company, stating that “[our suppliers] must also address the operation of motor vehicles, since traffic accidents continue to be the largest percentage of the total occupational fatality statistics”.

Slum housing

Low-paid migrant workers in Saudi Arabia are regularly housed in [poor quality accommodation](#) that meets the UN definition of slum housing. UN-Habitat defines slum households as ones in which the inhabitants suffer from one or more of the following: lack of access to improved water source; lack of access to improved sanitation facilities; lack of sufficient living area; lack of housing durability; and lack of security of tenure.

Eight of the workers interviewed for this report described unsanitary and cramped living conditions. Sahil told researchers: “We live in a container accommodation. We get electric shocks when it rains.” Multiple workers also described being provided with poor food, as well as punishments for cooking their own food. Amrit told researchers: “The food is like what cattle or animals eat. If we cook and eat and they find it, they charge us a fine.” Similarly, Shrawan said: “They put many workers in a room. Food was provided, but it was dirty. Many workers became sick due to that.”

Aramco’s [Supplier Code of Conduct](#) requires subcontractors to maintain “safe, sanitary, and healthy residential camp and living environments for all their employees” and to comply with Saudi Arabia’s labour laws. Aramco’s [Contractor Accommodation Management Guide](#) includes provisions for third-party assessment of accommodation sites, regular visits and for inspection findings to be considered as part of contract performance.

According to the [Saudi Gazette](#), under Saudi Arabia’s new labour standards, accommodation must include access to sanitary facilities, laundry and kitchen areas, a quarantine room, cooling, heating, and drinking water. For larger sites with over 5,000 workers, a first aid room and medical professional are required. Several workers told us that they lacked easy access to healthcare. For instance, a worker who was later injured at work complained about the lack of nearby health facilities: “There was no clinic, hospitals were far away.”

The company wouldn't provide transport service to go to the hospital."

Poor living conditions are a major contributor to both physical and mental ill health, and can compound other risks migrant workers face, including isolation from their families and abusive working conditions. [Psychosocial stress](#) arising from these conditions can lead to anxiety and depression and, in extreme cases, suicide, while prolonged exposure is linked to a range of chronic physical illnesses.

Fatalities and disabilities: failure to investigate or compensate

Aramco has set out in public its policies towards its employees in cases of death, injury or illness resulting from work, stating that the company grants an [ex gratia death benefit](#) equal to 24 months' base pay if death is from an industrial accident and 12 months' base pay if death is non-industrial accident related. It is not clear to FairSquare what requirements Aramco makes of its contractors and subcontractors in this respect.

Under [Saudi Arabia's Labour Law](#), if an injury results in a permanent total disability or the death of the injured person, the injured person or his family "shall be entitled to a compensation equal to his wages for three years". In practice, it is mandatory for employers to register workers with the General Organisation for Social Insurance (GOSI). In the event of an accident, [responsibility for compensation is transferred](#) from employers to GOSI. Under [Saudi Arabia's Social Insurance Law](#), non-Saudi workers who suffer a work-related injury or death are entitled to lump sum compensation from GOSI – the equivalent of 84 months' salary in cases of permanent disability or death, or 60 months' salary in cases of partial disability. However, previous research from [FairSquare](#) and, separately, [Human Rights Watch](#) has found that the families of workers who die in workplace accidents in Saudi Arabia routinely struggle to access compensation. This is due to their being unaware of the Saudi law entitling them to compensation, to lengthy and inaccessible processes and/or as a result of deaths being wrongly certified as "natural". [UN experts](#) stated in April 2026 that: "Families of deceased workers often encounter challenges in seeking information, accountability and compensation from abroad."

FairSquare reviewed the cases of four workers who died while working on Aramco sites – two from workplace accidents and two whose deaths were classified as "natural causes" – and two cases of disability, one caused by an accident and the other by a sudden collapse on-site. While workers and their families in several cases were able to claim some compensation in Nepal, in only one of the six cases did a worker's family receive compensation from Saudi Arabia's GOSI.

Some families whose relatives had died described being persuaded, even pressured, by their employer or by Nepali officials to release the body and proceed without a post-mortem, which companies later said was required in order to pay out compensation.

Profoundly disabled after collapse, left without compensation

Gagan, 43, from Myagde, a rural region in Nepal, was on a video call with his wife on 11 November 2022 when he dropped his phone and collapsed, she told researchers. Gagan had been in Saudi Arabia for about 15 years and had been working as a work permit receiver at the Marjan Increment project, an Aramco-owned oil complex, at Tanajib for just under a year. A colleague said that Gagan's job had involved monitoring safety at the worksite: "He had to be present at the site. The work was under the sun." The colleague said he believed that Gagan had had high blood pressure prior to his collapse. His wife had no knowledge of any prior condition: "His health was good ... he didn't have anything. Not even fever and headache. He never went to the hospital. Suddenly it happened."

Gagan's colleague said that when he was taken to the nearest hospital in Nariyah, the HR representative of his employer – a large Aramco contractor – asked him, "Who will pay his bills?" Subsequently, the colleague said, a group of workers had to argue with the company to persuade them to agree to Gagan's transfer to a more suitable (and more expensive) hospital in Khobar. Medical documents from a Saudi Arabian hospital, reviewed by FairSquare, show that on 15 November 2022, Gagan was diagnosed as having suffered a stroke. About a month after his initial collapse, and unable to use one of his arms, Gagan was sent back to Nepal from Khobar without any compensation. His wife received no contact from his employer. After asking for help from Gagan's co-workers in Saudi Arabia, they sent her a total of around 60,000 Nepalese rupees (US\$400). Back in Nepal, Gagan collapsed again in March 2023, after which he was unable to walk, talk or eat orally. His wife told researchers:

"I keep looking at him, late at night, I can't sleep, I caress him and I say to him, 'Talk to me, Why are you angry at me?' He looks passionately at me, sometimes he sheds tears. When tears drop, I feel like he knows people and understands what I say. But I don't know whether he does."

After March 2023, Gagan was initially treated in a neurological hospital in Kathmandu, which the family paid for by using savings, selling jewellery and taking out a mortgage, but he had to be discharged due to the pressure of medical bills. At the time she spoke to researchers, Gagan's wife had spent 6 million Nepalese rupees (around US\$40,000) on his treatment and was

accruing interest on a 4.5 million rupee (US\$30,000) loan. Two-thirds of her 35,000 Nepalese rupee (US\$235) monthly salary as a primary school teacher went towards loan repayments, and she relied on donations for the further 35,000 rupees (US\$235) she was spending on his medicines each month. She was unable to afford the fees for her son to study computer science.

“I have no-one, I have nothing ... I don’t know the reasons why [the company didn’t provide compensation]. But they should have. If a worker becomes sick at my home, I should be responsible.”

Unable to work as a result of workplace accident on Aramco site

Shrawan Shah Rauniyar suffered broken legs in 2022 while working as a warehouse helper at an Aramco project in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia near Jubail. He told researchers that a forklift operator was unloading a steel beam from a lorry, but the beam slipped off and fell onto Shrawan’s legs. At the time of his accident, Shrawan was employed by a contracting company that was providing workers for a larger contractor on an Aramco project.

After his injury, Shrawan was taken to a government hospital in Saudi Arabia, where he underwent an operation involving the insertion of steel pins in three places across both of his legs. While he was in the hospital, representatives of the large contractor he had been working for told him that, as they were not his direct employers, they were not responsible for his compensation.

After a week in the hospital, Shrawan was transferred by his employer to a hotel room. There he was visited by representatives from the company who employed him and sponsored his visa, who told him he should return to Nepal. After refusing to leave without compensation, Shrawan was threatened: “You won’t get compensation. You go. Otherwise, I leave you outside [the company accommodation]. I won’t provide food and a room. Do whatever you want.” Shrawan said that representatives of the company gave him a ticket to Nepal, “forcibly removed” him from the hotel and took him to the airport, telling him, “You go home. Otherwise, I’ll kill you. Nobody will help you.”

Shrawan told researchers that even before his accident his employer had not provided him with medical care, refusing to take him to the hospital when he was sick and imposing salary deductions for taking days off. He regularly suffered from fevers, which he believed were a result of exhaustion due to overwork and insufficient water at the work site. He said his accommodation was overcrowded and dirty, and workers had been given rotten food. Shrawan had attempted to complain and was threatened by a representative of his employer, who said,



“You want to go to the police? Go. Who do they listen to? You or me?”

Despite his surgery in Saudi Arabia, Shrawan sustained serious damage to his right leg, as the operation had failed to hold the bones together. He told researchers that he was unable to afford the follow-up surgery his doctor in Nepal recommended on his return. He had originally gone to Saudi Arabia to earn enough money to repay loans and pay for his mother’s medical care after she was diagnosed with cancer. Now, Shrawan says the accident has left him unable to work: “In this situation, I can’t work anywhere. Wherever I go to work, I must lift weights. And I cannot.”

He had received no compensation from his employer in Saudi Arabia, and without work, Shrawan said he had missed the payments on his loans for over two months when researchers spoke to him in 2025.

“My life now is ruined. I don’t have anything. I have a house. But I have loans. My brothers took out a loan to pay my medical bills. Now they say they won’t pay it off. The bank published a notice to put my home in foreclosure. Now, I live in a rented house. I have very difficult times now ... When I recall the incident, I feel very bad. I can’t explain my pain in words – how hurt I am, only my heart knows. If I could, I would show you my inner heart.”

No compensation from Saudi Arabia after fuel tanker crash death

In April 2023, Manoj Thapa, a 33-year-old fuel tanker driver employed by a subcontractor working for Aramco, died in a road traffic accident in the region of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia. Manoj, who was originally from the Tanahun District in Nepal, was returning to his accommodation having completed his duty for the day when the crash occurred. Manoj’s wife was five months pregnant at the time of the accident.

Manoj had been working in Saudi Arabia, for a transportation firm which works mainly for Aramco, for about nine months before his death. His wife, Menuka, said he found the job difficult due to the extreme hours:

“He would say, ‘Work is difficult. We cannot sleep. The work is tough.’ He also had to drive at night. He would say that he had to travel and could sleep only for 2–3 hours ... he had to go to load, and after unloading [fuel], he could go to the room and sleep 2–3 hours. After that, he would get another trip, so he would go again. So, every other day, he would have a new trip. He would transport diesel and petrol.”

Manoj's death certificate, seen by FairSquare, states the immediate cause of his death was sudden cardiac arrest and that in a road traffic accident he sustained severe injuries to his head, chest and abdomen, and internal haemorrhaging.

Neither Manoj's widow nor a work colleague who spoke to FairSquare have been provided with full details of the accident. Both said they had been told that his vehicle veered off the road into a raised area of ground, and that no other vehicle was involved. This is consistent with images of the crash site seen by FairSquare. An incident report seen by FairSquare, produced by Saudi Arabian authorities, states that Manoj was "100% responsible" for the accident, without further explanation. Manoj's wife believes her husband may have fallen asleep at the wheel.

Manoj Thapa's family did not receive any compensation from any entity in Saudi Arabia. Being held responsible for a work-related accident should not have any bearing on entitlement to compensation – under Article 139 of the Labour Law and Article 55 of the Social Insurance Law, compensation is ruled out only in cases where workers are found to have intentionally caused the accident which led to their injury or death. The Social Insurance Law in fact states that family members should receive the full amount "regardless of the causes and circumstances leading to the contingency".

Under [Nepal's Foreign Employment Act 2007](#), migrant workers travelling abroad are required to obtain life and accident insurance, and in Manoj's case, this was the only significant payment his family received following his death. Manoj's wife received an insurance payout of 1.4 million Nepalese rupees (US\$9,340), which she used to repay 250,000 rupees (US\$1,600) in outstanding debt from a loan Manoj had taken to cover recruitment fees for his job in Saudi Arabia. She also received a payment of US\$450 from his employer, which she understood to be his outstanding salary, but nothing more.

"His co-workers contacted me. They collected some money and sent it to me. But the company management people didn't call me. At one time, the company sent 65,000 rupees [US\$450] ... I don't know if it was his salary or something else. Except that, the company didn't send anything else."

A colleague of Manoj in Saudi Arabia believed his employer had determined that, despite the fact that the accident took place in a company vehicle, it was not work-related because it was outside work hours, telling researchers: "The company didn't give his family anything, saying he died off duty time." However, under the [Social Insurance Law](#), an accident that "occurs to a contributor [to the GOSI scheme] during his regular commute between his place of residence and his place of employment, or between his place of employment and the place

where he usually eats or prays”, is considered a workplace accident.

Manoj died before meeting his son – something his wife, Menuka, finds particularly difficult to deal with:

“My son looks at his photo on the phone and says, ‘Baba [father].’ It’s hard to control my emotions. But what to do? I have to learn how to handle it. I don’t have any support from my family. This is my life.”

Compensation secured after fatal vehicle accident

Krishna Bahadur Gurung, a Nepali driver from the Tanahun District who was responsible for transporting Aramco staff, was killed in a road traffic accident on 18 May 2024.

Colleagues of Krishna told FairSquare that his car was initially hit by another vehicle when he was driving on a road near to Abqaiq in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province. After his car was hit, Krishna got out of his car to check the damage and he was hit from behind by another vehicle. Official documentation produced by Saudi Arabian authorities in relation to the accident, seen by FairSquare, states that there were two collisions – one minor, involving two vehicles, and then a third car striking the motionless vehicles still in the road. Without apparently stating any reasons for its judgement, it holds Krishna to be “75% responsible” for the accident.

Unlike the other cases examined by FairSquare, Krishna’s family received the equivalent of seven years’ salary from GOSI, amounting to approximately US\$40,000. His family also received 300,000 Nepalese rupees (US\$1,990) from his employer, a logistics company that provides transport services to Aramco, 1.4 million Nepalese rupees (US\$9,300) from his mandatory Nepali insurance and 700,000 Nepalese rupees (US\$464) from Nepal’s Foreign Employment Board.

Sources familiar with the death of Krishna said that the particular company he was working for is generally cooperative and responsive with respect to ensuring that workers and their families receive compensation after accidents and deaths. It appears that the company’s actions in the aftermath of Krishna’s death may have played a significant role in his family having the correct documents required in order to apply for and receive a payment from GOSI, which Human Rights Watch describes as “rare”, as many families of migrant workers never receive such payments.

The challenge of claiming through the General Organisation for Social Insurance

Krishna's case demonstrates that it is possible in some cases for the families of workers killed in the line of duty in Saudi Arabia to receive adequate compensation through GOSI. However, this appears to be highly dependent on whether workers' employers are willing to support families in the aftermath of such tragedies. As noted above, the process involved in securing compensation through GOSI is lengthy and complex, placing a huge burden on families who may lack knowledge of, and networks in, Saudi Arabia. The compensation process must be initiated by the employer providing notification of the injury or death, according to [GOSI](#) and the [Philippines Embassy in Riyadh](#). After this notification, GOSI contacts the worker's beneficiaries by sending forms in hard copy. The relatives must then provide extensive legal documentation, have this notarised in their home country and mail it back to Saudi Arabia. The [Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia](#) states that: "Death compensation cases involve an extremely lengthy and cumbersome process and in some cases it [can even take] years". Potential issues the embassy lists as leading to inconclusive or delayed outcomes include those entirely outside of the claimant's control, such as judges being absent and "non-attendance of the court hearings by the Causer [of the death]."

In the context of this highly challenging process, workers and families whose employers support them in making GOSI claims are much more likely to have a chance of success. It is therefore incumbent on Aramco to prioritise this issue in its engagement with subcontractors, selecting and retaining only those businesses that have a demonstrable record of proper processes following worker injuries and deaths, and monitoring their performance on this issue throughout the duration of their business relationships ■

Death from "natural causes" leaves family bereft

Mun Bahadur Magar died on 9 April 2024 at the age of 39, leaving behind a wife and two young daughters. He was a driver whose job involved loading petroleum at Aramco's Doha Bulk Plant Terminal on Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast and driving it to Tabuk, a journey of around 125 miles. FairSquare researchers spoke to his wife and a colleague about the circumstances of his death, and have seen Nepali and Saudi Arabian documentation relating to his case.

In the days leading up to his death, according to his co-worker, he had been telling colleagues at the transport company that he was not sleeping well and was feeling exhausted due to his workload:

“He had told other friends that he hadn’t been able to sleep well for 10 to 12 days. He had said that he kept driving and he didn’t have enough sleep. He said that he was exhausted because of constant work.”

On the day of his death, according to co-workers, at around 3 pm or 3.30 pm Mun Bahadur Magar parked his lorry – full with fuel to be unloaded – in the Aramco parking lot at Tabuk and went to use the bathroom, 200 metres away from the parking lot. At 10 pm that evening, Aramco security guards called the transport company’s offices to tell them to remove their vehicle. On arriving at the site to try to find Mun Bahadur Magar, his colleague said that Aramco’s security guards became angry with him, telling him, “We checked everywhere. He is not here. If you don’t believe me, go and check the toilet and Masjid [prayer room] to see if he is sleeping there.” Mun Bahadur Magar’s colleague then went to the toilet and at around 11 pm found Mun Bahadur Magar lying unresponsive inside a cubicle, where it appeared he had been for seven or eight hours. Aramco staff removed his body from the cubicle around 12.30 am.

“They took the body out. Two ambulances came. People were running around. We thought, ‘Is he still alive?’ After 10 to 15 minutes, the ambulances went off leaving him lying on the ground. Then a van came and took his body.”

Kamala Thapa Magar, Mun’s wife, who had spoken to her husband shortly before his death, became concerned when she didn’t hear from him. However, she only discovered the news of his death three days later, after Mun Bahadur Magar’s brother visited her and broke down in tears. Mun’s employer never contacted her, she told researchers. His body was returned to Nepal a month after his death, along with an English translation of his death certificate (seen by FairSquare), stating that his death was the result of “natural causes”.

Mun Bahadur Magar’s colleague said he and his co-workers were told by Nepali consular officials in Saudi Arabia that, because of the way he had died, there would be no compensation payable: “They said, ‘You won’t get money, because he died on his own.’” Kamala Thapa Magar said she received a total of 121,000 Nepalese rupees (about US\$800) from his final salary payout.²

2 A document issued by the Nepali Consulate-General dated 25 April 2024 and seen by FairSquare states that 3,419.80 Saudi riyals was payable in “compensation” to the family (roughly equivalent to 121,000 rupees in mid-2024).

Not only did the family receive no compensation, but Mun Bahadur Magar's wife and his colleague said that his employer deducted the cost of the ambulance, post-mortem and flight ticket from his final salary. The experience has left Kamala with a deep sense of anger and the responsibility of providing for two children alone:

"They said it was natural death ... I have two children. They should give compensation for them. What to say, I lost my husband. The company should [compensate] because he died on duty ... My husband worked on other people's land for our children's future but died."

"Natural deaths"

Previous [research by FairSquare](#) has found that in deaths that did not result from workplace accidents, road traffic accidents or other violent deaths, Saudi Arabia death certification documents appear to state the cause of death as "natural death", which includes little to no information about the cause of death, nor information provided by medical professionals.

A 2019 study by a Saudi pathologist examined all death certificates from a Riyadh hospital between 1997 and 2016 and found that in [100% of cases the cause of death was "either incorrect or absent" and that in 75% of cases there was no cause of death given at all](#). A 2022 [peer-reviewed academic paper](#) by five physicians from King Saud University described how "the medical environment [in Saudi Arabia] is generally opposed to autopsy" and found that: "There is no system for medical autopsies and no training program that trains pathologists to do medical autopsy."

FairSquare has called on the Saudi Arabian authorities to overhaul their systems for the investigation and certification of deaths: commissioning independent investigations into the causes of migrant workers' deaths; carrying out autopsies in the case of sudden and unexplained deaths of migrant workers; and improving the quality of available data on mortality statistics for migrants.

The failure to properly investigate and certify the deaths of migrant workers has serious and far-reaching consequences, including undermining effective public health measures that could prevent future injuries and deaths, depriving workers' countries of origin of accurate information about the causes of their nationals' deaths and denying families both

the right to know how their relatives died and the opportunity to claim compensation. Families are generally unable to claim compensation to which they may be entitled under Saudi labour and civil law because “natural causes” is not treated as a work-related cause of death, regardless of the actual circumstances or the context of the death.

Quoted in a 2022 [investigation published by MRRORS](#), a representative of the Nepali government said it was aware of the increasing number of “natural” deaths of its citizens in Saudi Arabia, stating that it “cannot do anything since the Saudi government does the investigations” ■

Death from “natural causes” on a building site

Manjay Sah was a 41 -year- old scaffolder working at the Marjan increment project. A father of four from Siraha in Nepal, Manjay had worked in the Gulf for more than a decade, and had been in Saudi Arabia for one year. His brother, Santosh Sah, described him as an experienced, skilled and talented worker. However he said that Manjay had described his work as “hard”, and that he did not always get a day off each week. Other workers interviewed at the same site describe highly regimented conditions, long shifts, and waiting several months for a day off.

On the morning of 6 December 2023, Manjay spoke to his wife Babita before she went out to the field to cut paddy rice and he began his work. His co-worker told researchers that after getting to the worksite and signing in, Manjay and his colleagues waited to be assigned their work for the morning:

“We got to work at around 5.30 am or 5.45 am ... We all were sitting on the ground. We were talking to each other. At that time, suddenly, what happened was, he collapsed.”

According to his brother, Manjay’s colleagues gave him medical attention on the spot, and took him to a small medical clinic onsite where the staff said they could not treat him, and he needed to go to Jubail, over an hour and a half away by car from the Marjan project. Manjay’s brother and sister were ultimately left unsure about the exact circumstances of his death but believed he died on his way to the hospital. Manjay’s co-worker told researchers:

“An ambulance took him away. I don’t know what happened inside the ambulance. This is the truth. We were together. He was my friend”.

Shortly after his death, Nepali officials in Saudi Arabia contacted Manjay's brother and asked him if the family wanted a post-mortem, and said that if they did, this would mean a three-month delay to repatriation of the body. "I asked the embassy whether carrying out a post-mortem affects potential compensation or not ... they said, 'Whatever they give us, I'll send that.'" Ultimately, Manjay's family wanted his body to be returned as soon as possible for religious reasons, and so chose not to have a post-mortem. Another of Manjay's brothers said:

"Some say the company would have given compensation had the post-mortem been performed. But it would have taken more than three months had they done post-mortem. At home, they were helpless."

The English language translation of his death certificate, seen by FairSquare, states that the cause of death was "natural death". Manjay's brother asked a supervisor at Manjay's employer, a lead contractor for Aramco, about compensation, since his death happened "on the site ... he was already on duty":

"The company supervisor ... didn't talk about compensation at all. I have asked questions time and again about the compensation, but he didn't listen to me ... I told him, 'The company should provide compensation for my brother's case.' He said, 'Talk to your embassy. They're the ones who settle it.'"

The only money Manjay's family received from Saudi Arabia was his remaining salary – an amount of 135,000 Nepalese rupees (US\$900). Following his death, Manjay's family were able to successfully claim money from the Nepali insurance scheme for migrant workers, securing 1.7m rupees (US\$11,000). At the time of speaking to the family, they had not received a further 700,000 Nepalese rupees (about US\$4,600) they were expecting from their country's Foreign Employment Board.

Aramco and its contractors

Aramco states that it employs "[specialized tools](#) to track and assess contractor safety performance, promoting adherence to our corporate safety standards". However, several workers told researchers that their direct employers were able to avoid or subvert safety regulations and standards set by Aramco. The picture they paint suggests Aramco's policies and processes to enforce and implement its standards through its supply chain are not adequate.

A driver for a major Aramco contractor working on the Marjan Increment project explained that Aramco safety officials inspect the site. However, he said that as site managers would be told in advance about safety visits, they were able to prepare, and to temporarily upgrade their safety standards:

“Safety measures, like provision of harnesses and drinking water, are fully enforced when Aramco people come. But when [Aramco inspectors] are not there, [my managers] don’t care at all.”

Shrawan, who broke his legs while working on an Aramco site, believes Aramco “is a good company” but that it fails to pay attention to the conditions and standards being enforced on its sites. Shrawan has not received compensation from his employer for this accident, and argues that Aramco should have taken responsibility for ensuring he was given financial support after his injuries left him unable to work: “It’s their responsibility. They should pay attention to the workers ... they should think of workers how they live their lives afterwards ... I feel like Aramco has become rich selling our sweat and blood.”

Milan, a work permit receiver at the Marjan Increment project in Tanajib told researchers that while he believed Aramco asked contractors to “ensure 100% safety”, he had no way of raising concerns with Aramco, as he had no direct relations with them. Milan was also worried about reprisals from his employer if he complained:

“We don’t have any direct relation with Aramco. The company has to do it. We cannot complain. If I complain, they might target me, they might send me home.”

Another worker interviewed said that if he raised issues with Aramco, his employer would complain to him, since Aramco might not then issue the company with work permits: “If permits are not granted, the company asks me, ‘Why are you sharing [information]?’ So I don’t share everything, out of coercion.”

Some workers said that Aramco was doing less monitoring than it had in the past. One said: “In the project I worked on before, Aramco people would come to the sites and ask, ‘How’s your food? Show me your food.’ They would check how my salary was, etc. But they don’t ask for it anymore.”

Sahil, who regularly drives his tanker without having had sufficient sleep, told interviewers he unsuccessfully attempted to raise concerns about driver safety after he fell asleep while driving: “There are no senior Aramco bosses in the plants. We cannot meet the senior bosses. If we complain about it to the junior bosses, they say, ‘Your company is not good. We know.’” As noted above, multiple drivers, including those later involved in accidents, had serious concerns regarding the length of the shifts and lack of proper rest time.

A driver injured at an Aramco site while working for a subcontractor said protections given to those working at Aramco were different to contractors’ workers: “For the drivers who worked at Aramco, they would have shoes,

glasses, helmet – the entire set ... But we were not like that. The rule was not strict at our company.”

Amrit, who arrived in Saudi Arabia expecting to work for Aramco but found himself working for a subcontractor with very poor conditions, and who had collapsed at work, had a message for Aramco:

“You arrange everything for the [contractor]. You give facilities and a lot of money to the [contractor]. You want workers to be working safely. But these companies don’t do it. They just want to do everything cost-effectively. The food and water should be checked. Whether workers have rest or not. What kinds of work they’re doing.”

Aramco is the largest and most important company in Saudi Arabia, and one of the most significant and impactful corporate entities on the planet. As such, it bears a significant responsibility for the protection of the rights of migrant workers employed through its supply chain, who support its operations and profit generation.

That means it has to take account of the laws and practices in Saudi Arabia that give rise to widespread abuse of workers, and of the well-documented tendency for contractors and subcontractors throughout the contracting and supply chains to seek to cut costs and increase margins at the expense of worker protections. The fact that Aramco may have health and safety, human rights or worker welfare standards built into contracts, and carries out some monitoring of these, is evidently not sufficient to ensure they are being followed consistently by its suppliers.

Given the seriousness of the risks to workers, FairSquare urges Aramco to take the following steps as a matter of urgency:

Human rights management system

- Overhaul and upgrade its human rights due diligence systems, to better ensure that the standards of safety, health and working conditions that it sets for its contractors are enforced across its operations.
- Establish effective grievance mechanisms that are genuinely accessible to workers in Aramco’s supply chain and to families based outside of Saudi Arabia.
- Notify contractors and subcontractors that if Aramco becomes aware of any instances of retaliation against workers who use Aramco’s grievance mechanisms, they will be removed from the Aramco supply chain.

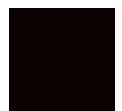
Deaths, disability and compensation

- Carry out, and publish the results of, independent, expert investigations into all deaths in the Aramco supply chain in Saudi Arabia.
- Select and retain only those businesses that have a demonstrable record of proper processes following worker injuries and deaths; monitor their performance on this issue throughout the duration of their business relationships, requiring all contractors to provide Aramco with reports on what compensation has been paid to injured workers and the families of deceased workers.
- Open direct dialogue with the families of deceased workers in the Aramco supply chain to verify what information they have been provided, with respect to their relatives' deaths, what support they have received from the employers in making claims to GOSI and what compensation they have received.
- Put in place arrangements with contractors to ensure that where the death certificates of workers in the Aramco supply chain state "natural causes" – meaning that GOSI will likely not pay compensation – workers' families are provided with compensation at the same level as for workplace accidents, unless Aramco has compelling evidence certified by an independent, qualified medical professional that proves a cause unrelated to working conditions.

Slum housing

- Commission independent and regular inspections of accommodation housing workers provided to Aramco sites, including unannounced visits and interviews with workers.
 - Enforce penalties against contractors providing accommodation to workers that does not meet the standards and procedures set out in Aramco's [contract accommodation guidelines](#), including third-party approval of site safety, evidence of adherence to company and national standards, and conducting weekly accommodation visits. Persistent failures to uphold standards should result in contract termination.
 - Require that tier one contractors monitor and inspect worker accommodation provided by their subcontractors.
 - Establish a safe and anonymous grievance mechanism specifically for accommodation issues, accessible to all individuals working on Aramco projects.
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3 FairSquare's calls on Aramco and its sporting partners



Extreme heat

- Implement, monitor and enforce an expectation that, when there is an occupational risk of heat stress, all companies working on Aramco projects are required to provide workers with breaks of an appropriate duration in cooled, shaded areas; mandatory break times should take into account the environmental heat stress risks, along with the exertional nature of the work being performed.
- Require all contractors to ensure workers have easy access to water and chilled food storage facilities at work sites, and have fully air-conditioned accommodation.
- Commit to funding the healthcare costs, including kidney dialysis, of migrant workers who return to their countries requiring treatment for chronic kidney disease that they developed while working on Aramco projects.

Driver safety

- Urgently upgrade monitoring systems to track whether drivers on Aramco projects have had sufficient time to rest.
- Institute and enforce strict penalties for contractors where it is found that drivers are working excessive hours or not being given days off.

Sporting organisations in partnership deals with Aramco have responsibilities under the UNGPs to ensure that those relationships are not causing or contributing to harm. Since 2024, Aramco has been a [“Major Worldwide Partner of FIFA”](#), creating a new category of sponsorship and granting Aramco sponsorship rights for multiple events, including the 2026 FIFA Men’s World Cup. The company has been a [“Global Partner”](#) of Formula One since 2020, and the Spanish Grand Prix has been officially [renamed](#) the “Formula 1 Aramco Gran Premio de España”. In total, Aramco increased its global sponsorship portfolio to at least [900 deals](#), worth upwards of [US\\$1.3 billion](#), with organisations including the International Cricket Council, Concacaf and Aston Martin. These partnerships allow Aramco to promote an alternative view of its role in the climate crisis and have attracted scrutiny and criticism on human rights grounds.

A 2023 [communication](#) sent by several UN Special Rapporteurs and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights to Aramco raised serious concerns about the company’s activities. According to the website of the [UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), Aramco did not respond. In October 2025, FairSquare was part of a [coalition of 10 human rights and](#)

[climate organisations](#) that wrote to sporting bodies partnered with Aramco to express “grave concerns” that Aramco’s sponsorships risk undermining human rights law, global climate goals and the sports’ own sustainability commitments. No sporting body replied.

FairSquare has also expressed its [grave concerns](#) about sports bodies’ partnerships with Aramco. With respect to migrant worker rights, it is calling on FIFA, Concacaf, the International Cricket Council, Formula 1 and Aston Martin to open a robust and comprehensive dialogue with Aramco on human rights issues in its operations, and to insist that Aramco takes urgent steps to address concerns raised by human rights organisations, including with respect to the protection of workers in the company’s supply chain and compensation for workers and their families in cases of disability or death – to include cases categorised as natural death.

