

# The 2022 FIFA World Cup: Soccer or Sportswashing?

Anna Johnson

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Anna Johnson - The [World Cup](#) is the most watched sports event in the world, beating out the Super Bowl and even the Olympics in terms of concurrent viewership. Some host countries view the World Cup as an economic boon, bringing in millions of soccer fans to boost local economies. But for the two most recent hosts - Russia and Qatar - the World Cup was an opportunity to revamp their international reputation, overshadowing their history of human rights abuses, economic exploitation, or imperialism with the glamour of world-class sports. Qatar has used this process, called [sportswashing](#), to distract from their treatment of [migrant workers](#) - even while relying on the flow of workers across boundaries to make the tournament possible.

The [flow](#) of migrant workers into Qatar is necessary for the state to function. Migrant workers make up over 80% of the total population, though exact numbers are unavailable since the Qatari government does not track these workers. People come from countries like India, Nepal, and Bangladesh on contracts, ones they have to pay to acquire, to work and send funds back to their families. Contracted labor abroad is not only vital to Qatar, but also to the home countries of these workers who rely on the flow of money for up to a quarter of their economic input. When a contracted laborer arrives in Qatar, they are often met with lower wages, longer hours, and harsher conditions than those they agreed to in their contract. In the ten years between when Qatar was awarded the 2022 World Cup and the beginning of the tournament earlier this month, the number of contracted jobs skyrocketed. Qatar's government invested an estimated \$300 billion dollars to

build infrastructure, hotels, and even seven new stadiums, before a ball was ever kicked in the tournament. These jobs bolstered the flow of money from Qatar, but also led to another much more deadly flow. Some estimates from human rights groups have tied thousands of migrant worker deaths to construction for the World Cup, but the official count from Qatar's government only shows 37 deaths directly linked to the tournament. Still, even those calling for reforms to the contract work system hesitate to push too hard, since their own country's economies would falter if the flow of workers and their money stopped.

While governments are mutually reliant on this system of flows, the system has also been bolstered by [non-state actors](#) like FIFA, the global body that governs international soccer. FIFA, a notoriously corrupt organization that relies on bribes and under-the-table agreements to come to any decision, has been working hard to protect Qatar from allegations of sportswashing, calling critics of the Qatari government "hypocritical" and saying that their "moral lesson-giving" ignores the critic's own exploitation of migrants and history of discrimination. While some reforms have been instituted in recent years, including the establishment of a minimum wage of \$275 a month, the mutual reliance each of these international bodies has on these migrant workers, and the worker's desperation to work through even the direst conditions, means the flow of Qatari money into these countries, and the reciprocal flow of workers, is destined to continue.