

Helping to protect workers' rights in the Middle East

The welfare of construction workers in countries across the Middle East is a frequent focus of attention in the media, both within the region and worldwide. This means that responsible employers in the Middle East face the challenge of demonstrating that they're complying with high standards in how they treat their workers, if they're to gain a deserved reputation as businesses that do the right thing.

One organisation that – under the monitoring of PwC – has been tackling this problem head-on is the Tourism Development and Investment Company (TDIC) of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). TDIC is a major investor and developer of tourism, cultural and residential destinations in Abu Dhabi, with a portfolio of developments that includes the Abu Dhabi franchises of the world-famous Louvre and Guggenheim museums.

Back in 2009, TDIC became the first major developer in the Middle East to roll out an Employment Practices Policy (EPP) to safeguard the welfare of workers who are employed by the contractors (and their sub-contractors) on high-profile construction projects on Saadiyat Island. In each of the past four years, a joint team of PwC specialists drawn from the Middle East and UK firms has conducted an independent monitoring review for TDIC of its major contractors and subcontractors.

The PwC team conducts confidential interviews with workers, performs documentation testing on ethical recruitment areas, visits the company's sites, and compiles a detailed report – including action points – which is published externally by TDIC. In 2015 the review covered six contractors and eight subcontractors, engaged on seven TDIC projects employing a monthly average of some 5,555 workers.



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Key outcomes of the EPP initiatives that the PwC team is involved with include:

- The freedom for workers to speak out without fear of reprimand
- Increased level of welfare facilities at the workers' accommodation and work sites
- Greater awareness by workers of their basic rights
- Ripple effect across organisations, countries and regions to set higher level of worker welfare standards
- Greater understanding by employers of their workers' concerns and addressing them to ensure a happier/motivated workforce
- Enrichment of migrant workers' communities through such activities as sports competitions, welfare forums and educational initiatives.

Says PwC UAE partner Adnan Zaidi: “As well as providing external stakeholders with transparent and credible insights into the welfare of workers on TDIC's sites, our monitoring work has also brought many benefits within TDIC. These include contributing directly to improvements in TDIC's contractor management and workers' conditions, together with protection of their rights in areas such as health and safety training, accommodation and healthcare.”