
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Qatar's World Cup Workers



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Beth

And I'm Beth.

Neil

Every four years the best players in the world gather for one month in the summer to take part in the biggest event in football – the World Cup. But this year, for the first time ever, the competition is taking place in winter. Why? Because the 2022 World Cup is happening in Qatar.

Beth

Over a million fans from all over the world are expected to visit Qatar for the World Cup which starts on the 20th of November. Because temperatures in Qatar exceed 45 degrees in the summer, the competition was moved to the winter. But the decision to hold the World Cup in the tiny, oil-rich Gulf state has been controversial.

Neil

One of the richest countries in the world, Qatar has no tradition of playing football and some have criticised the focus on money instead of sport. And there are other criticisms too – about human rights and the treatment of the migrant construction workers who built the football stadiums, roads, transport systems and hotels without which the World Cup could not happen.

Beth

In this programme we'll be asking: is it right for Qatar to host the World Cup? And of course, we'll be learning some new and useful vocabulary as well.

Neil

But before that I have a question for you Beth. Which country has won the World Cup the most times? Is it:

- a) Italy?
- b) Brazil? or,
- c) Germany?

Beth

I think it must be Brazil.

Neil

OK, I'll reveal the answer at the end of the programme. Advertising for the Qatar World Cup shows football fans staying in new hotels and watching matches in air-conditioned stadiums. But hidden behind this, the lives of the migrant workers from Nepal, India and other South Asian countries reveal a very different story.

Beth

The population of Qatar is tiny and 95% of the total workforce are foreigners working in extreme heat, housed in poor quality accommodation, and often underpaid. Rothna Begum, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, explained their situation to BBC World Service programme, Business Daily:

Rothna Begum

We're still recording and documenting migrant workers facing abuse and **exploitation** in Qatar. They include workers reporting having paid **exorbitant** and illegal recruitment fees to secure work abroad on two-year contracts, and then finding out they're coming on three-month visas, which means that they're not able to make up or recoup the price that they've paid to actually get this job, and may well be sent home **in debt** on top of everything else.

Neil

Migrant workers face **exploitation**. **Exploitation** means treating someone unfairly to get some advantage for yourself. Many of the World Cup workers were exploited by being paid less than agreed, being paid late, or not being paid at all.

Beth

The construction jobs seemed a good opportunity for migrant workers to save money to send home to their families. Many paid **exorbitant** fees – fees which were much bigger than they should be, just to get a job in Qatar.

Neil

But despite being given two-year job contracts, some workers were only allowed to stay three months. Because they couldn't make enough money, many returned home in **debt** – owing money to someone that they will have to pay back. What's worse, many have died building the football stadiums, in accidents, or due to overwork and heat stress.

Beth

So, with all this criticism, added to the billions of dollars Qatar spent preparing for the competition, was it worth it? James Dawsey is an expert on the politics of football in the Middle East. Here he explains to BBC World Service's, Business Daily, that for Qatar, hosting the World Cup is more about improving its international reputation than economics:

James Dawsey

But this is not about economics for Qatar. Qatar is a small state. It is **sandwiched between** two regional **behemoths**: Saudi Arabia and Iran. And so its whole policy is geared towards **soft power**, whether that's sports, whether that's the airport and the airline...

Neil

Qatar may be rich thanks to its oil, but it's not a large country unlike neighbouring Saudi Arabia and Iran, countries which James Dawsey called **behemoths** – something which is extremely large and powerful.

Beth

Qatar is **sandwiched between** these larger countries. If you're **sandwiched between** two things you're in a narrow, tight space between them. Because Qatar isn't as powerful as its bigger neighbours, it uses **soft power** – the way a country uses its economic and cultural influence to persuade other countries, instead of using military power. Hosting an important international event like the World

Cup is a part of Qatar's soft power strategy to be considered an important country on the world stage.

Neil

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the debate, this will be the first Arab nation to host the World Cup, although it's unlikely that the Qatari team will actually win - unlike a more famous footballing nation, Italy, who won the first World Cup they hosted in 1934.

Beth

And speaking of World Cup winners, what was the answer to your question, Neil? Which country has won the most World Cups? I guessed it was Brazil...

Neil

Which was.... the correct answer of course! With five title wins, Brazil is the most successful World Cup team followed closely by Italy and Germany with four titles each. OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned starting with **exploitation** - treating someone unfairly in order to benefit yourself.

Beth

If the price of something is **exorbitant**, it's much higher than it should be.

Neil

A **debt** is an amount of money that you owe to someone else.

Beth

A **behemoth** refers to something which is extremely large and powerful.

Neil

And if you're **sandwiched between** two things, you're in a in a tight, narrow space between them.

Beth

And finally, **soft power** describes strategies used by a country to increase its power through economic and cultural influences, instead of fighting wars. Once again, our six minutes are up. Goodbye for now!

Neil
Bye!

VOCABULARY

exploitation

treating someone unfairly in order to gain an advantage for yourself

exorbitant

much bigger or more expensive than it should be

debt

an amount of money that you owe to someone else

behemoth

something which is extreme large and powerful

sandwiched between

in a tight, narrow space between two larger things

soft power

a country using its economic and cultural influence to persuade other countries to do something, instead of using military (hard) power