



## WORKER RESIDENTIAL VILLAGES: THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Abdelatif Qamheieh<sup>1</sup> and Saif alZahir<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

During the last two decades and due to its huge oil reserves and industry, United Arab Emirates has been renovated to an international hub for business and tourism. Such dynamics created a colossal influx of foreign workers to meet the huge demand for skilled and unskilled workers in the various economic sectors.

The State statistics show that the ratio of expatriates to UAE national is 80% to 20% respectively. This huge foreign workforce has created an unprecedented change in the UAE society, and challenged its traditional and relatively undisturbed values, even its day-to-day lifestyle in some cases. The large numbers of foreign workers, especially unskilled workers have historically lived in poor, unhealthy, and mostly overcrowded conditions within urban centers. In attempt to improve their living conditions, and to address internal societal challenges, the authorities opted to establish worker-only dedicated villages outside the major urban areas. In this paper, we scrutinize the concept of Worker Residential Villages (WRCs) within the Context of Abu-Dhabi, and investigate the applicability of Defensible Space (DS) theory to such model. Our results show that DS theory failed to provide a successful model to worker residential villages in UAE due to social and economic impairments.

**Keywords:** Worker Residential Villages, Defensible Space, Multicultural Societies.

### 1.0 Introduction

The abundance of oil and natural gas in the Arabian Gulf area has caused remarkable growth in infrastructure projects over the last few decades in most Gulf Cooperative Countries (GCC) in general and in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in particular. More recently, the cities of Dubai and Abu-Dhabi have been the Mecca for construction companies and design firms alike. This has been in response to a construction boom resulting from the country's drive to become a commercial as well as a financial hub in the Middle East.

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<sup>1</sup> ALHOSN University, Abu Dhabi, UAE, [a.qamheieh@alhosnu.ae](mailto:a.qamheieh@alhosnu.ae)

<sup>2</sup> University of N. British Columbia, BC, Canada, [zahirs@unbc.ca](mailto:zahirs@unbc.ca)

The UAE has a population of approximately 8.9 million residents according to the latest government statistics. Out of this number, only 20% are UAE nationals (Emiratis) whereas the rest are expatriate workforce (UAE Government, 2009). Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi represent the largest expatriate communities in the UAE with nearly 1.75 millions from India, 1.25 millions from Pakistan, and 500,000 from Bangladesh. The rest of the foreign workforce originates mostly from European, Arabian, and North-American countries (Gulf News, 2009). This colossal foreign workforce has created an unprecedented change in the UAE demographic structure and its societal values and customs.

Although the expatriate workforce enters the country with legal and mutually agreed upon company or government contracts, and despite the government's attempts to regulate and safe guard the rights of temporary workers, the labor conditions leave much to be desired. The UAE has been criticized repeatedly by the international community for its treatment of the expatriates especially the blue-collar labor force, in particular for the treatment of the temporary workers employed by the construction industry (Human Rights Watch, 2006; 2007; 2009). Unskilled and semi-skilled foreign workers are usually subject to harsh working conditions, and infringements on some of their basic rights, mainly by their employers — the construction companies (Keane D. & McGeehan N. 2008). Some of these workers have their passports withheld by their employers to guarantee that they don't attempt to change jobs or leave the country without notice. Also, some of them experience extended periods of employment without pay and without any consequences for the employer (2008); others suffer from long work hours even in the extreme desert heat where the average summer temperature during July and august could range between 42-52 degrees Celsius (115-130 Fahrenheit).

One area that has received major criticism is the living and accommodation conditions of these workers (Gulf News, 2009). Historically, worker accommodations in Abu Dhabi have taken one of two distinct forms: first, employer sponsored on-site accommodations, especially for construction workers using temporary / prefabricated structures; secondly, private market accommodations arranged by the workers themselves, or by their employers in some cases. In the later scenario, the workers live within existing buildings or villas in the city or its suburbs. Both of these approaches have had their merits and demerits, but in both cases, the living conditions are usually extremely poor. Space shortages, overcrowding, and unsanitary living arrangements are very commonplace.

The problems associated with temporary-worker accommodations are neither new nor exclusive to the UAE or the GCC countries. A significant number of industrial nations have had their share of experiences dealing with such conditions. Examples from South Africa (Hartwig and Marais, 2005), Singapore (Phang, 1999), china (Ngai, 2007), and the US (Goodno, 2003) are testaments to the complexity of such situations. Most temporary-worker housing arrangements are plagued by poor accommodation

arrangements for the workers and abuses by employers and the authorities in some cases. Still, the heart of the matter is not necessarily housing availability, but the low wages and minimal rights such temporary workers receive. These problems are even more prevalent in the cases of unaccompanied (bachelor) workers whom are usually the least paid, and are the ones who are most likely to be treated with suspicion by nearby communities.

In an attempt to improve the living conditions for the foreign workers within the city of Abu Dhabi, and to curb employer abuses, the authorities set-out to establish new worker-only residential cities, with a goal of making this arrangement the sole form of worker accommodation. In this paper, we focus on these Worker Residential Cities, with a special focus on the cities within the metropolitan area of Abu Dhabi as an example.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: in section 2 we will present various international responses to worker housing projects in different parts of the world including some industrial countries. In section 3, background information about worker conditions and housing policies within Abu Dhabi will be provided. Section 4 will include discussion and analysis of the worker cities phenomenon in Abu Dhabi, and finally in section 5 we provide our conclusions.

## **2.0 International Responses to Worker Housing**

Worker villages or cities are not a new phenomenon. The 20th century has seen numerous examples of worker encampments in different names such as worker camps and factory dormitories. In the US for example, housing of the seasonal farm workers has been a significant challenge for the authorities. Mostly workers are bachelor's migrants, and in some cases illegal immigrants, the living conditions of these workers have been extremely poor (Housing Assistance Council, 2001). These workers usually do not have stable incomes, and move from one area to another depending on the agricultural season. Locating accommodation is usually a great challenge, and most of them live in extremely poor conditions, with 10 – 15 individuals often sharing a room. Farm-owners sometimes provide them with on-farm housing in the form of barracks or mobile homes. In other cases, the workers have to fend for themselves, living in private residences, parks or in the open (2001).

The state of Florida has some of the largest seasonal farm-worker force with a population of around 200,000 each year. These workers work only during certain periods of the year depending on crop harvest cycles, and are mostly from South American origins. Due to their limited income they do not only struggle to find accommodation, but they have limited access to basic services such as health care and education (Flocks et al., 2002). The biggest expense they have to pay is money for accommodation, and the majority of them pay significant portions of their income to live

in low-quality, even run down housing, while usually sharing such accommodations with other - unrelated individuals. Although some of them receive on-farm accommodations from their employers as we mentioned earlier, but those who do not receive such arrangements are usually the ones who live the worst conditions (2002).

In an attempt to improve the conditions of workers, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) through its Rural Housing Service (RHS) program has attempted to regulate the situation in order to protect the rights of such a crucial workforce. A number of federal programs target the issue of farm worker housing specifically, and the general direction of these programs revolves around two main concepts: grants for developers to build low cost-good quality for workers, and direct rental assistance subsidies for some of the workers. In some cases, the USDA also has developed some farm-workers only residential communities or villages. A good example of such development would be the Everglades village in Florida. Although most of these initiatives target workers with families, and they provide housing for single workers who represent the bulk of the population, they are still extremely complex, and workers remain living in sub-par conditions (Goodno, 2003). Despite the success of some of these programs, they continue hampered by insufficient funding to match the high demand, NIMBY issues originating from the communities where worker housing is needed, and resistance from some developers and landlords who risk losing some of their clients as a result of these government assistance programs.

South Africa has its share of farm-worker housing issues as well. Similar to the US, the large number of seasonal farm workers struggle to find decent accommodations for themselves and their families. The country is home to around 60,000 commercial farms, which in turn create work opportunities for around 900,000 farm workers (as of 2005). Historically, most of these workers receive little, if any, labor protection, and were subject to discrimination and unfavorable work and living conditions. More recently, legislation to protect labor rights has been introduced in the country. These new regulations focus mostly on wage and working hours, but not necessarily on accommodation, despite the fact that nearly 80% of these workers live on the farms according to employer arrangements. In some areas of the country, farmer - initiated off - farm housing projects have taken place. These projects are usually heavily subsidized by the local authorities, and provide very basic shelter units and amenities. Such examples are showing signs of success within the South-African context especially since they provide the workers with certain ownership rights. Yet, the cost issues keep amenities at absolute minimum, and the workers are relatively isolated from the surrounding areas and worksites, and have to rely a great deal on the availability of public transportation (Hartwig and Marais, 2005).

In China, the boom in the export-industry has created a tremendous need for labor force especially in the south of the country. In the 1970s, the Chinese government created a number of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) that acted as commercial or industrial

incubators for foreign companies. These special zones depended on manual laborers who were mostly migrant - female workers from the countryside and continue to be so. These migrant laborers live and work in these economic zones, and are given accommodations within these areas in a system known as the labor dormitory system. In this system, employers provide their workers with buildings or dorms in close proximity to the factories with an aim of increasing production and efficiency, while controlling the mostly rural migrant workforce. The workers are prohibited from living in urban centers, and are confined to these dormitories. Most of the dormitories are within walking distance from factories, which limits the need for transportation and thus effectively reducing cost for the employers. The dormitories also act as a pool for employers, and help them in securing fast, readily available workers to keep-up with the manufacturing process' rapid demands (Ngai, 2007).

### **3.0 The Labor Force in the UAE**

Like all other countries, UAE labor force comprise of two types: (i) the professional white-collar workforce who earn decent income and on par with the national GDP; and (ii) the unskilled or semi-skilled labor workforce who earn very low income in comparison. In UAE, an unskilled construction worker could earn anywhere between AED 400 – 650 a month, whereas a worker with more experience could earn between AED 750 – 1,500 a month. These numbers are very low in comparison to the national GDP, yet due to the poor economic conditions and differences in the standard of living in the workers' own countries, the influx of workers continues, and most of the money they make finds its way to the countries of origin of these workers in the form of remittances (Gulf News, 2009).

Majority of the workers in the UAE are young single males. Married workers are forced to leave families behind due to the high cost of living in the UAE. Due to their limited income, workers usually seek shared accommodation in some of the older apartments and villas within the cities. It is not uncommon to find between 10 – 15 people sharing one room due to the very high rent prices in Abu-Dhabi. In some cases, employers do provide accommodation for the workers. Sometimes a flat could be provided and shared by a number of people. In other cases, the mezzanine level of a shop could be transformed into an accommodation of some sorts. Some large construction companies usually construct workers' accommodation on site using barracks or temporary structures, but the living conditions in such arrangements are extremely harsh, and such arrangements were mostly unregulated until fairly recently (Abu Dhabi Municipality, 2010).

The situation with workers' accommodations has created a number of problems for the city of Abu Dhabi. First, the presence of large numbers of mostly male, bachelor workers living next door has proven to be a point of discontent for the local population.

Traditionally conservative Muslims and with mostly Bedouin-derived cultural traditions, gender sensitivities are expected to be adhered to within the public realm and issues like the harassment of women (even if minor) are not taken lightly. Generally speaking, workers are treated with mistrust, and are accused of being responsible for robberies, violent crimes, traffic congestion, noise, littering, and even diseases in some cases — similar to some of their counterparts in other countries. Despite the fact the workers rarely cross any of the society's red lines due to fear of harsh punishments and employment termination, and despite the relatively low crime rates within the country (UNODC, 2008), the local families (or Emiratis) and some expat communities – have made their voices heard, and demanded that the authorities find a solution for what they viewed as a serious problem and threat to their communities.

Secondly, most employers are required to provide housing accommodations for their employees. Due to negligence and abuses by some, the living provisions are usually in very bad shape, if not dangerous in some cases. Overcrowded, dark, and unhealthy living arrangements are very common; workers are even forced to live in the business itself in some situations, with nothing more than a mattress provided (Abu Dhabi Municipality, 2010). These abuses harm the workers and complicate their lives, and have forced the authorities to crackdown on employers who do not provide adequate accommodations for their employees. Finally, the large concentration of workers in some buildings and areas has led to neglect by landlords, and caused the image and physical conditions of these buildings and areas to decline rapidly.

### **3.1 The non-existence of low-income class in Abu-Dhabi**

Abu Dhabi is a growing city with nearly one million people. This population is projected to grow to three millions by 2030. The city has a severe shortage in rental apartments due to limited supply of new buildings to match the demand. What exacerbates the situation even further is that Abu Dhabi is located on an island, and is bounded by the sea from three directions making horizontal expansion very limited. Due to the global economic downturn in last few years and the crash of the housing market in Dubai in 2009, the demand for housing in Abu Dhabi has increased drastically especially due to businesses and individuals relocation to the city from neighboring Dubai. Unfortunately, this increase in demand was accompanied by a slowdown in construction due to investor and financial institution fears. The new environment made Abu-Dhabi rental market a very expensive one - peaking in 2009. As of Q1 2011, the average annual rent for a single bedroom apartment in the city ranges anywhere between 30,000 AED to 120,000 AED (\$8,000 – to – \$32,000) depending on location and quality (Astecoreports.com, 2011). On the other hand, Abu Dhabi has the highest average per capita GDP in the world - estimated at around 325,000 AED per capita (\$88,000) as of 2009 until present. These numbers could be a bit deceiving though as the wealth distribution is skewed in favor of the country nationals, which represent a minority at nearly %20 of the total

population in the Emirate as mentioned earlier. It could also be fair to say, that within the city's and emirate's nationals, a low-income population does not exist. In comparison, the average per capita GDP for some unskilled labors is around 13,500 AED, which translates into roughly 1,200 AED per month (Statistics Center – Abu Dhabi, 2009). Against these odds, the accommodation options for workers are extremely limited and most of them end-up sharing rooms in older run-down villas and flats and in very unsanitary conditions sometimes.

### **3.2 Abu Dhabi Middle Income and Housing Policies**

Historically, and until this moment, most government housing policies focus on housing for the local population only (Abu Dhabi Government, 2011). These policies are also geared towards homeownership with no assistance for the rental market. The Emirati nationals receive land grants from the government, and are provided with generous and long-term interest free loans to build homes. Some are also granted a readily built house(s) assuming they meet certain age, income, and marital status criteria. On the other hand, expats are not allowed to own property within the emirate and are forced to rent properties from local landlords. More recently, some special development zones have been created where expats are allowed to own residential units, but with certain restrictions and for certain durations (2011).

In the year 2007, the government established Abu-Dhabi's Urban Planning Council (UPC) with a mandate to regulate and monitor the growth within the city of Abu Dhabi and the entire emirate. The UPC developed Abu-Dhabi's 2030 master plan and projected a population of 3,000,000 in the city by 2030 (UPC, 2007). The 2030 plan is a rather ambitious one and proposes significant growth to the capital in the coming years. One of the most recent regulations introduced by UPC as part of the plan has been the "Middle Income Rental Housing Policy" (UPC, 2010). This policy requires large-scale developers to dedicate 20% of the proposed total Gross Floor Area (GFA) in the form of middle-income housing. From the perspective of the middle-income residents of Abu-Dhabi, the policy could be a step in the right direction, and it is the first time that rental subsidies are provided in the state of Abu-Dhabi.

Unfortunately, the UPC and the 2030 plan are only requiring rental subsidies for middle-income households, but no provisions for low-income housing are included or even proposed. The irony of the situation is that UPC's policy appears to be derived from some of the American lower-income housing rental assistance programs, namely from the Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) system (Orlebeke, 2000). In such systems, the developer provides a certain percentage of subsidized rental housing units and receives tax credits or other forms of easements in response. The LIHTC system aims at reducing expenses for the government, and at dispersing lower-income households throughout the society, as opposed to concentrating them and isolating them

in one location. It seems rather counter-intuitive for the UPC to exclude the lower-income segments of society from this new policy (2000).

On the other hand, most of the unskilled workers' income level is extremely low, and will not qualify them for any of these subsidies as they exist right now. In fact, within the context of the UAE, it could be fair to say that the unskilled/semi-skilled workers are exclusively the low-income segment of the society. Even in the unlikely case of qualifying for such assistance programs, the restrictions imposed on them by their employers, and the resistance from the community for having workers live amidst them could prevent them from benefiting from these programs.

This point raises a further important question about how these workers are viewed by the regulating authorities and policy makers. Similar to all expats in the UAE, most of the workers come to the country on contracts of three years duration, and usually end-up staying for more than one contract period. Some expatriates, especially those originally from neighboring Arabic countries, could live for decades in the UAE. Alternatively, most government policies are catered to the local population only in the first degree – and understandably so. Yet, what makes the situation rather unique and challenging is the sheer number of this foreign workforce, as they represent the vast majority of the population. It appears that this lower income class is viewed by the policy makers as a temporary class, and not as part of the overall housing policy.

### **3.3 Worker Residential Cities – Al Raha City Example**

The mounting internal pressures for a housing solution to the expat workers, international criticism, and due to the absence of any lower-income housing policy, the government of Abu Dhabi set out to build new worker residential cities, WRCs, for the labor workforce. These WRCs are purposefully built residential areas located in the outskirts of Abu Dhabi, complete with housing, amenities and services. The government of Abu Dhabi entrusted Zones Corporation with the task of building and administrating these cities. The Higher Corporation for Specialized Economic Zones (Zones Corporation / Corp) is a government run agency established in 2004 to administer and establish economic investment zones within the emirate, and was later entrusted with the task of establishing these residential cities (Zonescorp, 2011). According to the corporation's publications, the WRCs are supposed to be built to the highest urban design standards, and are supposed to provide the workers with improved accommodations and ample amenities and services. The goal is to prevent overcrowding and sub-par living conditions for workers throughout Abu-Dhabi and reduce employer abuse while also limiting friction between the local and the worker populations (Khaleej Times, 2010).

Up to date, eighteen 18 WRCs have been completed within the city of Abu-Dhabi metropolitan area limits and its surroundings, with a capacity of 300,000 beds, and with a current population of around 149,000 workers. Out of these 18 cities, 3 are intended to be long-term villages, whereas the rest are of a more temporary nature surrounding major construction projects (Al-Etihad Newspaper, 2011). The numbers of cities are to be increased to house 800,000 workers by 2012 (Gulf News, 2008). To ensure quality control, the government authorities make regular inspections of the cities to make sure that the facilities are well managed and controlled. It is also a requirement now in Abu Dhabi for all construction companies to relocate their workers to these cities, with other industries soon to follow.

As part of this research, we were able to visit one of the WRCs named Al-Raha Residential Village (workercities.com, 2011). The city is a newly established worker community in the outskirts of Abu-Dhabi, located in Al-Wathba area approximately 40 kms away from Abu-Dhabi. The city is near completion with a full capacity of 34,000 workers. The current population of Al-Raha is around 22,000 workers and the total area of the city is around 5 km squared. Figure 1 shows the main approach way to the city. It is clear that the city is outside the city and in an isolated area. Company busing is the only available mean of transportation of its inhabitants.



Figure 1: Al-Raha Worker City main approach road

Al-Raha (translation: rest area) consists of a number of residential dormitory style buildings, some are open spaces, and some are common facilities. The common facilities

include a number of dining facilities, a shopping center, a small medical center, a mosque, a main security center and a banking facility among others. In house laundry facilities are also provided for the city's inhabitants. Figure 2 depicts the outside dormitory building of the Al-Raha city.

In our site visit, we found that most of these facilities and equipments are already visible and operational.



Figure 2: Overall view of some dormitory buildings

As part of the contract with the employers, the village management provides the workers with room cleaning services, 3 daily meals, and laundry services for an additional cost. The average cost for each worker is approximately AED 390 per-month per-bed, which is paid by the employers. The price includes coverage of electricity and water fees. The employers could also subscribe to a meal plan ranging between 400 - 450 AED per-month for each worker, although the subscription to this plan is optional. Finally, for an additional 50 AED per-month, laundry services could be provided for the workers, as the villages do have in-house laundry service facilities (Al-Etihad Newspaper, 2011).

In the villages, unskilled workers (the vast majority) have the least space allocation at 3 meter squared per person, and accommodation is usually in the form of one large room with 10 bunk beds as shown in Figure 3. Skilled workers receive a little bit more space at 9 meter squared per person, with 4 sharing a room. Finally, supervisors receive the most space at 12 meter squared per person, with 2 sharing a room and with a private small bathroom. Each floor in these residential dormitories has 12 rooms for unskilled

workers, 6 for skilled workers and 2 rooms for supervisors. With the exception of supervisors, all floor residents share a common bathroom facility.



Figure 3: Unskilled-workers' room with 10 bunk beds

#### **4.0 Discussion and analysis**

The Al Raha residential city and other similar worker cities in Abu-Dhabi represent a rather dramatic approach to solving a multifaceted and complicated problem. The design, facilities and amenities themselves are to be commended, and the cities could be considered an upgrade when compared to some of the run-down accommodations for workers within the city. The cities do provide the workforce with low cost accommodations, and help improve their living conditions. They also provide the workers with much-needed amenities and services, which are usually lacking in their current living arrangements. WRCs achieve another extremely important goal which is regulating the housing arrangements for such labor forces, since without this drive to regulate by the government, workers are under the mercy of their employers, and historically wide-spread abuses have been documented and represented in the poor living arrangements they are forced to cope with. By creating these cities, employers are forced to either allocate space for their employees in these cities, or provide accommodations which are at least of equal quality.

Looking at the extremely inflated rent prices in Abu Dhabi and the region in general, such cities make even more sense as workers cannot afford decent accommodation

arrangements based on their low wages and limited economic means. WRCs also limit the friction between workers and the local population, and address the cultural concerns of this population as indicated earlier. It is worth noting here that the general drive to improve labor work and accommodation conditions has been commended by international observers, even by the Human Rights Watch themselves (7days.ae, 2009).

On the other hand, and despite the positives of the WRCs approach and some improvements in the living conditions, a number of issues are important to consider. First, these cities isolate the workers from the surrounding communities. The access to the cities is controlled, and the workers are not free to leave at any time. They are expected to leave the cities only to work, and through employer arranged transportation. This is an issue with potentially serious ramifications for the workers as it does greatly limit their freedom. It also prevents them from mingling with the local communities, and socially isolates them from their surrounding and even other workers in other villages.

Secondly, the villages are located in the outskirts of the city, and mostly in desert areas with a harsher than usual climate. Aside from the climate, the geographic distances they have to travel every day to reach their employment sites takes a significant time out of their days, and only adds to their everyday harsh work conditions. It is also worth noting here that most buses that transport workers to and from construction sites are of poor quality, and appear to be lacking air-conditioning which is extremely important in such climate.

Thirdly, these villages are for males-bachelor workers only, and provide no arrangements for workers with families or even female workers. Zonescorp indicated their intention to establish family-oriented worker villages (Gulf News, 2008), yet none of these have materialized until this moment. Although most of the work force are male and bachelors accommodation arrangement for workers with families should be considered, and the dynamics of a family oriented community are much different than those of a male only community. Even more, these male only mandatory living arrangements prevent workers from hosting their families if their economic means allow for such arrangements.

Fourthly, looking at lower-income housing policies worldwide, and especially the American system, the model of isolated and concentrated living arrangements for lower-income segments of the society has proven to be a failure worldwide. It could create tremendous resentment within the worker population, and will most likely lead to complex social ills including crime and violence. Finally, these worker residential cities put the worker communities in an out of sight-out of mind status. It makes their needs and problems less apparent to the society, and only masks the greater problem which is their fragile existence within the UAE. It also makes them easily subject to infringements on their rights by the regulating authorities.

## **Conclusions**

In this paper, we have presented Abu Dhabi's experience with workers residential cities. The residential cities approach is a commendable approach, though not without some areas of concern. It does assure a certain amount of protection for the workforce, and provides them with necessary basic needs which they could be otherwise lacking. Similar approaches have been used in other international examples, including some western democratic states. Probably the most positive aspect of this approach is that it brings the issue of workers' rights into the mainstream debate, and that it emerges from a general drive by the authorities to improve worker conditions in general.

Still, in the case of Abu Dhabi, we found that this approach points to a larger problem within the overall society, which is the attitude towards this workforce. It also highlights the low-income levels of such work force in comparison to the national levels – hence raising valid and just questions about fair compensation. The dynamics that create this situation are definitely unique: The small local population in the UAE, the relaxed immigration policies relating to workers and the dire economic needs of these workers in their home countries creates a huge influx of workers, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. This influx has changed the country's society, and has made this subject an extremely complicated and sensitive one. By creating these cities, some of the workers' rights might have been upheld, and the friction with local community might have been reduced to a certain extent. Still, this solution infringes on some of the workers' basic rights such as their freedom to choose where and how they live, their right to move freely, and the right to be active members in the overall society. These cities in the current format only complicate their lives even further despite their provision of basic and much needed services.

We believe that this worker residential cities approach is merely a band aid, and truly avoids the core question which is if this 'majority' population is a population of temporary residents with rights and obligations or is a population of temporary workers only. What is needed is to rethink immigration and labor policies in the country and in a way which better protects the workers' rights and addresses the labor needs within the UAE, while also protecting the country's interest and wellbeing. We also believe that general improvements in worker conditions and income levels are still needed, and recommend better enforcement of labor laws, with harsher punitive measures targeting abusive employers. Also needed are comprehensive and just lower-income housing programs - which are currently lacking in the UAE - and for the worker population to be included in policy formulation, especially considering their large numbers. Such housing programs if adopted could help reduce the need for such WRCs, and could even help address the residential needs of the middle-income expatriate work force and the countries nationals alike.



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