



Migration Dristi's Opinion on Malaysia's New Criteria for Migrant Labour Sending Agencies – 3rd November, 2025

Regarding the new recruitment agency eligibility standards for hiring migrant workers for Malaysian employers—and in reference to the letter issued to migrant-sending countries by Malaysia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 27th October, 2025—Migration Dristi, a Nepal-based migrant rights organisation working towards promoting ethical recruitment across South Asia and beyond, presents our opinion as follows.

We appreciate the Malaysian government's efforts to address problems in labour migration and unethical recruitment practices. However, we also think it's important for the government to look into ongoing rumours—heard for nearly a year—that certain groups are trying to create a “syndicate” of recruitment agencies by financial and political influence on Malaysia's process for hiring workers. This situation is similar to the well-known monopoly that existed in Bangladesh. We are strongly against any unfair practices that could trap migrant workers in financial and other recruitment-related exploitation, and we want to make our opposition clear.

Recruitment agency standards are crucial for addressing common exploitative practices. However, the Malaysian government's criteria sent to sourcing countries are impractical and unmeasurable from our point of view. Specifically, criteria 2, 3, 5, and 6 contradict each other; in our experience, agencies sending more workers tend to exploit more in most cases. Source countries have no systems to assess or certify ethical conduct, and remediation is weak, with exploitation cases often dismissed due to political or financial influence. Additionally, meeting requirements 7 and 9 is unrealistic: for example, physical assessment of over 1,000 Nepali agencies by the November 15 deadline (from an October 27 letter) is unfeasible. Requirements 8 and 10 are unjustified since there are no measurable systems to verify agency partners or their statements, and proving compliance with previous practices is problematic too, as it is unclear which compliance framework Malaysia requires, especially since the 2018 bilateral MOU with Nepal remains unreviewed.

The criteria set for agency selection are mostly impractical and hard to justify. The letter from the Malaysian government has increased concerns about the possible existence of an unfair “agency syndicate” in source countries. It's important to recognise that serious problems for migrant workers—such as high recruitment fees with no receipts, misleading job offers, false ethical recruitment, document confiscation, threats, intimidation, and other forms of exploitation—are still major issues in both source countries and Malaysia. We urge the Malaysian government, labour-sending countries, employers, recruitment agency associations, activists, and other organisations to work together to make labour exploitation a central topic in all discussions.

Overlooking labour exploitation issues while criticising the Malaysian government's ten criteria undermines efforts against potential syndicates and wastes the government's attempts to standardise the recruitment system. We therefore call for immediate action to end migrant exploitation.

Thank you,
Migration Dristi