



International
Labour
Organization

Introduction to the 'My Fair Home' Campaign Targeting Employers of Migrant Domestic Workers

Messaging and Planning Workshop for Lebanon and Jordan

American University of Beirut, 20 September 2016

1. Background – ILO Regional Fair Migration Project in the Middle East (FAIRWAY)

The Middle East is recognized as one of the main destination regions for migrant workers globally. Migration to these wealthy States has provided countless jobs and generated billions of dollars in remittances for migrant workers and their families. In offering the chance to learn new skills and escape poverty in the home country while helping to solve the large labour shortages in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, migration is generally welcomed by both origin and destination countries. However, the complicated and expensive processes associated with migrating for work have created a regime which lends itself to exploitative recruitment and working conditions for migrant workers. Low skilled workers in particular – often from Asia and Africa – face multiple decent work deficits.

The Regional Fair Migration Project in the Middle East (FAIRWAY) contributes to implementing the adopted ILO Fair Migration Agenda in the Arab States. As part of the agreed broader ILO office programme, the project assists ILO constituents to address the decent work deficits of migrant workers in the region, promote fair migration (including fair recruitment) and combat forced labour and trafficking for labour exploitation. The project operates at the regional level and offers country-specific assistance and support (in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates), with particular focus on the sectors in which low-skilled migrant workers predominate – construction and domestic work.

The FAIRWAY project has a three-pronged strategy: (1) to promote labour migration-related policy change for fair migration that is informed by evidence-based policy advice; (2) supporting improved implementation of laws and policies by strengthening institutional mechanisms and operational modalities in target countries; and (3) building a more conducive environment for decent work of male and female migrant workers by addressing discriminatory attitudes and actions towards migrant workers.

2. Migrant domestic workers in the Middle East

Migrant domestic workers are among the most vulnerable workers within the Middle East. ILO figures for 2013 indicate that the region hosts 3.16 million migrant domestic workers – over a quarter of the world's total.¹ In the majority of Middle Eastern countries, migrant domestic workers are excluded from national labour legislation, and are heavily dependent upon their employers through the sponsorship system of Kafala.² Whenever there is progress towards affording migrant workers greater labour rights protections, typically domestic work is excluded.

Domestic workers are subject to long working hours with insufficient rest and sleep time, and often work seven days per week. Excluded from minimum wage legislation, domestic workers' wages are determined by bilateral labour agreements with origin countries. Confiscation of workers' passports

¹ ILO (2015) ILO global estimates on migrant workers, p. 16

² Under the Kafala system, a domestic worker's immigration status is tied to an individual employer or sponsor (kafeel) throughout their contract period. Domestic workers cannot enter the country, transfer employment nor leave the country for any reason without first obtaining explicit written permission from the kafeel.

and cell phones is common practice. The informal, unregulated and isolated nature of their work renders migrant domestic workers vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, forced labour and trafficking.

Given that the work takes place in a family home, rather than a typical workplace, regulation with regards to working hours, wages, occupational safety and health, and living conditions is deemed inappropriate and a violation of the right to privacy of the employing family. It is precisely for these reasons that domestic work needs regulation. In 2011 the Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) was adopted. The Convention affirms that domestic work is work, and outlines labour rights protections for domestic workers with regards to working hours, employment contracts, social security protection, living conditions and personal privacy, among other things. The Convention is not widely ratified, and no countries in the Middle East region are making progress towards ratification.

3. Employer attitudes and practice towards domestic workers

While numerous research studies into domestic workers' working and employment conditions have been conducted globally, research assessing employer attitudes is in its nascence. In the Middle East, three studies assessing attitudes of employers of migrant domestic workers have been undertaken by the ILO in Lebanon, Jordan and Kuwait in 2015 and 2016. These research studies revealed that many restrictions on domestic workers enacted by their employers, such as withholding of wages, preventing the domestic worker from communicating with friends and family, and not allowing the domestic worker to leave the house on a day off, were specifically linked to negative perceptions about migrant women and the occupation of domestic work. Alongside important legislative and policy reform, advocacy to reduce discriminatory attitudes and actions by employers is essential.

4. My Fair Home in the Middle East

The My Fair Home campaign is a global initiative of the ILO and the IDWF, and has been endorsed by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The advocacy campaign aims to elicit attitudinal and behavioural change among employers of domestic workers to improve the working relationship and ensure decent work. A key component of the campaign is an online tool allowing employers to "personally ratify" the principles of Convention No. 189 in their own homes. Domestic workers' organisations from all over the world use the My Fair Home campaign as a tool for awareness raising and organising.³ However the campaign has yet to initiate activities in the Middle East.

Working with the IDWF and local civil society partners, a consultative workshop will be held to identify key campaign messages and strategies for implementation in the region. The workshop will serve as a forum for civil society and workers' organizations to:

- discuss recent research into employers of migrant domestic workers;
- share experiences in reaching out to employers and devising advocacy campaigns; and
- develop key messages and strategies for the implementation of the campaign in the region.

The campaign is envisioned to include the following components: social media, public advocacy, engagement with employer groups and the private sector, implementation with school children, and the development of tools and resources to support a healthy employment relationship. The campaign will be implemented in partnership with media, civil society and trade union organizations.

³ Activities of the My Fair Home campaign have taken place in Sweden, Belgium, Uganda, Guinea, Ghana, Tanzania, Zanzibar, South Africa, Argentina, Mexico, Nepal, the Philippines, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Thailand.