

International  
Labour  
Organization

*A mapping of*  
**MIGRANT RESOURCE CENTERS  
IN THE ARAB STATES**





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IN THE ARAB STATES**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Migrant workers in the Arab States are commonly isolated by language barriers, by the remote nature of their workplaces and accommodation (whether private homes, construction sites or rural farms) and their long hours of work. Having a welcoming, common space for them to meet and interact during their (limited) free time is an important basic right which can support their mental and physical health. Moreover, such a space can be particularly beneficial where it also functions as a 'one stop shop' allowing migrants to access needed services, and be educated and empowered as workers. Such a facility is commonly described as a 'migrant resource centre', yet few such centres have so far been created in the Arab States. While diaspora communities often provide recreational activities or humanitarian support to members of their own nationalities, and different civil society organizations offer a range of specialized services based on different eligibility requirements, there is often a lack of a common space, one where all nationalities can come at their convenience, to express themselves, share their experiences, and be provided with needed information, services or skills training.

This brief mapping exercise identifies six such MRCs in the Arab States and examines how the centres were established, their objectives and activities and how they are run and funded, and collects information on what the centres themselves see as the achievements and challenges of their work.

Although few assessments of MRCs have been conducted in the region, both anecdotal evidence and stakeholder interviews with users of MRCs have shown that often such centres can help to make the workers feel happy, relaxed and has increased their sense of confidence; and that skill-based classes offered at the Centre (e.g. computer and English classes) are seen as steps towards achieving greater social and economic mobility. More importantly, the activities at the MRCs can provide the workers with a sense of dignity and pride in their personal and cultural identity, and this can have intangible positive effects on their mental well-being.

However, establishing and running a MRC in the Arab States is not without significant challenges. Some of the main issues faced include the restrictive environment for civil society activities, and particularly government campaigns that target workers in an irregular situation. Another challenge is that of financial sustainability – while some centres were able to derive funds through small membership fees and subsidized user fees – migrants have limited capacity to pay and thus donor support is almost always required. Relying on donors, particularly short-term funding, also meant a degree of unpredictability in being able to meet migrants' expectations of extent and consistency of services.

It is clear that MRCs fill much needed gap in Arab States countries to provide accessible services to migrant workers and a safe meeting space, for both regular and irregular workers. Many more migrant workers could benefit if more MRCs were created, particularly in Gulf countries where no such facilities currently exist. However, understanding the context is vital – note for example, how the strategies employed by the Al-Hassan Workers' Centre to support garment sector workers in a special economic zone in Jordan differed to Amel's support to urban migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, and the various other approaches applied by the MRCs surveyed. All types of organizations including unions, civil society organizations, associations and religious organizations could consider whether they could support the establishment of a centre, and are encouraged to engage with the ILO to build on the foundation of lessons learnt from existing centres.

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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<b>ARM</b>	Anti-Racism Movement
<b>BWJ</b>	Better Work Jordan
<b>BWI</b>	Building and Wood Workers' International
<b>CLMC</b>	Caritas Lebanon Migrant Centre
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>FENASOL</b>	National Federation of Workers and Employees Trade Union in Lebanon
<b>GCC</b>	Gulf Cooperation Council
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>JGATE</b>	Jordan Garments, Accessories and Textiles Exporters Association
<b>MCC</b>	Migrant Community Centre (Lebanon)
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MRC</b>	Migrant Resource Centre
<b>MTUC</b>	Malaysian Trades Union Congress
<b>NTUC</b>	National Trades Union Congress (Singapore)
<b>POLO</b>	Philippine Overseas Labor Office
<b>SNEF</b>	Singapore National Employers Federation

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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We need a safe space where workers could open their hearts and express themselves without any fear. We need a space where we can talk about our problems. This is what we really need. A place where we can express what is inside of every woman facing all these sufferings and injustices. We are far away from our families and children; we need a place where we can feel that it's our family... and that someone is caring about us. We need a place for all nationalities to meet more people, have more experiences, to laugh together.

*Indonesian female migrant worker in Jordan*

The Arab States of the Middle East region (referred to hereafter as 'Arab States') hosted over 30 million international migrants (including refugees) in 2015. International migrants are particularly predominant in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), where more than 25 million international migrants lived and worked in 2015 (UNESCWA and IOM, forthcoming). The combination of language and cultural differences, limited trade union rights and restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly, exclusion from the protection of labour legislation (particularly for domestic workers), weak enforcement of labour law and the isolated nature of the sectors that migrant workers are employed in (particularly agriculture, domestic work and construction) make migrant workers particularly vulnerable to abuse. They also create circumstances that make workers especially difficult for both unions and civil society organizations to reach and support. In some Gulf countries, the political sensitivity around the work of civil society organizations (CSOs) and trade unions makes outreach to migrant workers even more restricted.

A 'one stop shop' which offers migrants access to needed services and grievance mechanisms, and also provides a space for grassroots coordination and collaboration can be an entry point to empowering migrant workers, particularly where such a facility can be accessed at a fixed, accessible location that is open during the workers' free time (in the evenings, and on the workers' day off). While the primary focus of such a facility may be providing information, advice, training, psycho-social and legal support services, by creating an opportunity for workers to meet and interact, MRCs may also offer a foundation for workers to organize, and strengthen their solidarity with unions (where they exist) to improve their labour and living conditions.

A **working definition of a MRC** is "a physical space where migrants... migrants' families and other community members can visit to obtain information and assistance" (ILO, 2014: 6). While a MRC's services generally do not exclude national workers, their focus is commonly tailored to the specific needs of migrants rather than national workers (including the challenges that come with not knowing the language spoken in the country of destination, lack of eligibility to services available to national workers, etc.)

A MRC can be distinguished from a 'shelter' which provides accommodation to eligible abused workers but rarely function as a 'drop in' centre accessible to all workers (Migrant Forum Asia, 2014).

While there have been some assessments of MRCs, most have focused on centres in countries of origin,<sup>1</sup> with few studies looking at the specific context of MRCs in countries of destination.<sup>2</sup> In particular, there has been no comprehensive assessment of MRCs in the Arab States, where the context of migrant worker vulnerability, combined with limited public spaces for migrants and restrictions on trade unions and civil society, make the creation of MRCs more challenging but also more needed. A lack of safe public spaces to meet is a common issue in the Arab States, particularly for migrant women, who may be prohibited or discouraged from going restaurants, cafes, swimming pools or recreational facilities without their employers (North 2009; Pande, 2012: 391). Often the only places available to meet are shopping malls, faith services or private homes, but these are limited in size and functionality, and sometimes travelling alone over long distances to access them is not considered safe.

**Usually if we want to meet to see each other and entertain, we meet in private homes. If [there was a MRC], maybe we could meet there.**

*Sri Lankan female migrant worker in Jordan*

**We currently don't have a common space to meet; sometimes we don't fit in my small room. We have different issues, different problems, we need a space to discuss and meet. We need a common space and recreational activities for all nationalities, not only Filipinos. Meet more people, hear their problems, have more experience.**

*Kenyan female migrant worker in Jordan*

Migrant workers are also often excluded from essential services, particularly if they are in an irregular situation.<sup>3</sup> In most cases, migrants are expected to have access to such services through their embassies, however limited funds, prejudice or even a complete absence of an embassy, restrict this option for most migrants.

**Our embassy doesn't help us. If a woman is facing a problem, no one responds to her needs. That's why I don't refer to my embassy. There is no shelter for us. If someone is having problems, she directly goes to "Manila Street" in the second circle to receive protection from her community. But this street is not safe anymore. If police wants to arrest a run-away worker, they go to "Manilla Street" (laughs).**

*Female migrant worker in Jordan*

**[We can't] access health clinic and hospital for free, also irregular workers are usually afraid of accessing these clinics or hospitals because they might ask them about their papers.**

*Sri Lankan female migrant worker in Jordan*

This mapping aims to document the establishment and management of MRCs in the Arab States, especially with regard to promising practices in initial set up, provision of services and empowerment of migrant workers, as identified by the MRCs themselves in their work. Hence, this mapping examines their institutional arrangements (i.e. whether they are part of a trade union, a civil society organization or governmental organizations); and their organizational structures with regard to human resources, administrative and financial systems. Based on real experience, this mapping seeks to offer a brief but pertinent look at how organizations in the Arab States can succeed in setting up a MRC for migrant workers despite the many challenges that exist.

<sup>1</sup> See for example IOM 2015

<sup>2</sup> Though it should be noted that an initial assessment of the Al Hassan Workers' Centre was conducted by Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs in 2016 (see ILO and Columbia University 2016).

<sup>3</sup> An irregular or undocumented migrant is someone who is not authorized to enter, to stay or to work in the country of destination. However, migrants often have little control over the complex factors that determine their status as these frequently come down to administrative circumstances, not necessarily the actions of migrants.

Establishing and supporting MRCs has been a key plank of the ILO's work in promoting fair migration in a number of regions, including in South East Asia. In that region, the ILO supported MRCs in six countries, resulting in direct benefits to more than 50,000 migrant workers and — through referrals and legal assistance — awards of US\$1.62 million in compensation, the bulk of which was provided for complaint cases in destination countries (including Malaysia and Thailand) (ILO 2017). The ILO has also supported the establishment of six MRCs in Ethiopia and was instrumental in the recently established MRCs in Pakistan (implemented with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development).

Along with CSOs, unions can, and have, run successful MRCs in countries of destination, including Malaysia and Singapore. The creation of MRCs was identified as a priority in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Arab Trade Union Confederation, the ASEAN Trade Union Council and the South Asian Regional Trade Union Council, signed in August 2015. The MOU states that the parties will 'build mechanisms for the protection of migrant workers, including providing information, direct services by unions or associated Migrant Resources Centres or referrals to other national centres and parties engaged in migrant work'.

The creation of MRCs was also reaffirmed as a priority in bilateral agreements between individual unions, including the agreement signed between the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions and the National Federation of Workers and Employees Trade Union in Lebanon (FENASOL) signed September 2015. The bilateral agreement states a goal 'to establish information centres for migrant workers as part of their efforts aimed at guaranteeing ways of protecting migrant workers: in countries of origin before they consider migration, in the migration process, and upon arrival in the countries of destination, during their stay and in the process of returning home, with special efforts to provide both potential migrants, and migrants with information material in their native languages'.



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## 2. PROMISING PRACTICES IN ESTABLISHING MRCs

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Since the 1970s, governments, CSOs, unions and intergovernmental organizations have initiated MRCs in both countries of origin and destination.<sup>4</sup> In countries of destination (which is the focus of this study), many of the early MRCs were in high-income countries which had high immigration – including Australia, Canada and countries in Western Europe. These centres generally provided information and services to recent immigrants in dealing with citizenship and residency issues, as well language classes that were commonly funded by the government (IOM 2015: 31).

Increasingly, other countries also started to open MRCs with services available to – and sometimes specifically for – ‘temporary’ migrants. In particular, in Singapore where the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC)<sup>5</sup> and the Singapore National Employers’ Federation (SNEF) established a MRC and Malaysia (where the Malaysia Trade Union Congress, in collaboration with the ILO set up the Migrant Resource Centre). MRCs have been set up through embassies, though these are generally limited to one nationality. For example, since the mid-1980s, the Government of the Philippines has been establishing Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Resource Centres as an extension of their embassy services, including in Singapore, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, among others (IOM, 2010: 14), though the centres vary widely in terms of the services they can provide.

### 2.1 What do MRCs do?

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Although MRCs have different institutional structures and objectives depending on the actors involved in their set-up (see box 1), they share a key role which consists of empowering and protecting migrants. While centres in countries of origin mainly focus on providing migrants with information to protect them from fraudulent recruitment practices before they migrate (as well as such information awareness on their rights in the country they will work in), centres in countries of destination play an important role in facilitating workers’ access to legal, social and medical services (service provision); and, particularly in the case of MRCs run by unions, also focus on direct empowerment and promotion of collective action (empowerment and organizing).

A key function of MRCs in destination countries is facilitating migrant workers to exercise their rights and protect themselves from exploitation and abuse, including by inviting migrant workers to the centre to collect brochures or attend training. MRCs collect information on up-to-date relevant employment laws and procedures, including through participation in governmental migration-related committees, such as in Sri Lanka, Portugal, Lebanon, and Australia (IOM, 2010: 27).

Disseminating information to migrants is achieved in different ways by MRCs. For instance the MRC in Colombia, the MRC in Portugal and Pakistan’s MRCs have specific **programming on radio channels** which promote their work and explain migrant-related issues (IOM, 2010: 28). Moreover, many MRCs ensure that their

<sup>4</sup> A MRC can be run by a CSO, a trade union, an embassy, an employer or government, however in most cases it is CSOs and trade unions that have been most actively involved in establishing such centres.

<sup>5</sup> In January 2016, the NTUC also set up the Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE). It runs a 24-hour hotline and provides counselling and mediation services between employers and domestic workers.

information and services are accessible to migrants by targeting cultural events (ILO, 2014a: 6) or working in areas densely-populated with immigrants (ILO, 2014b: 1). In addition to their physical presence, most MRCs also ensure their services' accessibility through **hotlines, websites, newsletters, and extended working hours**. This kind of accessibility enables migrants, regardless of their location and sometimes their mobility restriction, to know about the services they provide and to get the information they need. MRCs also heavily rely on networking with people and organizations involved in migration issues (ILO 2014a: 24).

In addition to gathering and disseminating information on rights, the provision of individualized **support services and counselling** is often a central component of the work of a MRC. Such services commonly comprise **legal services**, including assistance with filing police reports, translation of documents required for a complaint and assistance in going to court. In South East Asia, MRCs provide support in the recovery of unpaid wages and in accessing compensation for accidents suffered at work.<sup>6</sup> Numerous cases referred by service providers in Cambodia and Viet Nam have been resolved through consultation with MRCs in Thailand and Malaysia. This experience shows how support at both ends of the migration process can be a key feature of the MRC model (ILO, 2013: 3).

One of the most challenging aspects of legal claims is to encourage workers in the countries of destination to file claims. For example, in surveys of migrants in Malaysia 19 per cent of respondents did not file a complaint against an employer because they did not know where to complain and 24 per cent did not complain because they did not want to cause trouble (ILO 2011). Thus, the legal support provided by the MRCs run by unions (MTUC) and CSOs – which are seen as more user-friendly by migrants than government services (where they exist) – is vitally important. While some MRCs employ their own legal staff, the majority rely on pro bono lawyers, though these can sometimes be in short supply (ILO forthcoming).



**Medical and health care** services are also commonly offered in MRCs and can include medical treatment by the MRCs' medical staff, referral to volunteer medical doctors or relevant government services. MRCs may organize mobile health clinics and also provide after care support (ILO forthcoming: 22).

Other services provided by MRCs are varied and may include **employment-related training** such as vocational courses, language courses and computer classes. Services provided by a MRC may also include humanitarian services including **rescue of abused workers, food distribution, repatriation of bodies, schooling for**

<sup>6</sup> The Tripartite Action to Protect the Rights of Migrant Workers (the GMS TRIANGLE project) (2010-15) operated in six countries: Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. The project aimed to strengthen the formulation and implementation of recruitment and labour protection policies and practices and (ILO, 2013: 1).

**children.** In the case of faith-based organizations, **pastoral care and support of spiritual needs** are also addressed by the MRCs.

**Empowering and organizing migrant workers** is an important goal of several MRCs and may include such diverse activities as training migrants on the use of phone applications to report a complaint, supporting migrants to organize their own associations and groups, or to help to organize migrant workers under the union to engage in public advocacy, policy development, and collective bargaining negotiations (ILO forthcoming: 19).

### **BOX 1: TYPOLOGY AND EXAMPLES OF MRCs IN ASIA**

#### **MRC RUN BY 'TRIPARTITE COALITION' (SINGAPORE)**

Set up in 2009 by NTUC (unions) and SNEF (employers), the MRC in Singapore operates with the support of the Singapore Government, trade union movement and employers. When it was set up, NTUC appointed a former labour Member of Parliament to oversee the centre. The Manpower Ministry also deployed two of its officers to set up the centre. One of them later joined NTUC full-time to run the centre's day-to-day operations. The centre received a number of donations in its start up phase, including from the then Manpower Minister, which helped kick start activities.

The centre now has 17 staff members and 500 volunteers. It targets migrant workers in the construction, marine and manufacturing sectors. The centre runs a 24-hour hotline, two MRC locations, as well as a travelling 'help kiosk' at different recreation centres, and a shelter. It has directly assisted more than 20,000 migrant workers with problems and conducted outreach to more than 650,000 migrant workers since 2009.

Although sometimes criticized due to links to the government, unions or employers, the centre's chairman was recently quoted saying that "at the end of the day, workers trust us and still come to us for help. They see us as effective and that is what matters."

*Source: Chuan 2016*

#### **MRC RUN BY GOVERNMENT (REPUBLIC OF KOREA)**

The Korea Support Center for Foreign Workers was established in December 2004 by the Human Resources Development Service of Korea to protect the rights and welfare of migrant workers. The center implements various educational programs that are necessary for migrant workers, and informs them about the traditional culture of Korea. The centre provides counseling services as well as a number of welfare facilities. A key goal of the centre is also to promote a positive image of the Republic of Korea.

*Source: Korea Support Centre for Foreign Workers website*

#### **MRC BY FAITH GROUPS (TAIWAN, CHINA)**

The Hope Workers' Center was established in 1986 by a Catholic missionary society to support local workers. Seven years later, the center's focus expanded as its founders recognized the needs of migrant workers as well. Now the centre provides services largely to migrant workers and has five primary program areas of support: assistance, education, lobbying and advocacy, community enhancement, and pastoral programs. As part of its assistance, the centre helps workers with resolving work-related problems through casework and housing support (through full-time caseworkers who are experts in the Taiwanese labour law), and also offers a shelter for men and women who are victims of abuse in the workplace or victims of human trafficking.

The centre offers seminars and informational pamphlets about law that concern workers and also has a lobbying and advocacy goal, meeting regularly with the Ministry of Labor to shape legislation and regulations, including through collaborative action with the Migrants Empowerment Network of Taiwan. The centre also acts to welcome and encourage migrants to celebrate their culture through festivals and public events and offers Pastoral Programs including weekly mass in English (with 2,000 regular parishioners).

*Source: Hope Workers' Centre website*

#### **MRCs BY CIVIL SOCIETY (MALAYSIA)**

Tenaganita – a civil society group which runs both a shelter and a MRC – has developed a case management system that includes counseling on rights for informed decision making; legal support for increased access to justice through labour courts; and negotiations for settlement with employers. This assistance is provided irrespective of the workers' legal status or nationality. More than one thousand women migrant workers referred to Tenaganita in 2015 were provided with access to justice. Tenaganita Centre offered them legal and medical assistance (including hospital visits), and shelters for cases of physical abuse. Their shelters provide support, protection and safe repatriation to trafficked survivors.

*Sources: ILO 2012; ILO unpublished*

#### **MRCs BY TRADE UNIONS (MALAYSIA)**

The Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) in collaboration with the ILO, set up MRCs in the Northern, Central and Southern region of Peninsular Malaysia to provide support services to migrant workers. These centres provide services including negotiating with employers for amicable settlement; supporting workers to file a claim with the labour office (including for unpaid wages); reporting and following up on violations pertaining to Immigration Law such as withholding passport/failure of employer to renew work permit; supporting workers in defending immigration charges or deportation orders; and helping to blacklist employers and recruitment agents who repeatedly breach the law. The MTUC also follow up on medical and psychiatric treatment of abused workers and help victims to lodge police reports. In cases where workers are deported, the MTUC helps to facilitate safe repatriation and follow up, as well as broader advocacy work. This case work is in addition to the Union's industrial relations activities such as collective bargaining and advocacy to improve and amend the labour law, which is closely informed and guided by the case work that the union's MRCs undertake.

*Source: ILO 2017; Viajar 2017*

## **2.2 How do MRCs provide support?**

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Effective planning, research and preparation can help to ensure a successful MRC. As a first step, it is necessary to analyse whether a centre can legally be established and by whom. It is also important to appraise the 'political reality' of establishing a centre. Given the restrictive environment for CSOs particularly in special economic zones, labour camps and other confined environments, an activist CSO or union is unlikely to be an acceptable option and the best scenario may be a government-led or employer-led initiative (with active worker involvement). Interference from immigration authorities (trying to 'catch' irregular workers) may influence how the centre is set up and whether its structure can give the migrant workers any immunity to safely use the MRC space (e.g. in some cases unions have such immunity from government interference on its premises). Thus, it is necessary to review what type of arrangement is going to be most effective in support migrant workers in the circumstances – whether through an independent association, an existing union, a civil

society organization, or a government agency – and what might be the opportunities and challenges connected with any one option.

The next priority is to carry out a **needs assessment** to identify the main potential client base, including the most disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups, noting that domestic workers might be particularly difficult to access given many are not permitted to leave the house, or have a free day off per week. Target group analysis can be carried out through one-on-one interviews, focal group discussions or confidential (online) surveys with migrants and other stakeholders such as civil society and unions, as well as reviewing existing data and research.

This preliminary data collection can help to identify which groups will be targeted as potential clients, and lead to further research including where the group lives, what languages they speak, as well as a mapping of what other local stakeholders provide so that the proposed MRC can complement existing support.<sup>7</sup> For example, the establishment and operation of the Al-Hassan Workers' Center in Jordan (discussed below) benefited from a number of sound research exercises that assisted the ILO and the sectors' stakeholders in making informed decisions throughout the process. This included a study to assess the workers' interest in establishing the Workers' Center, as well as a financial due diligence exercise considering elements of capital investment, annual operating expenses and cash flow.

Once a target group has been identified, there is a need to determine how best to provide services to this group, which might include: face-to-face consultations in the MRC, telephone information services or hotlines, web-based material, outreach services through churches, embassies, and mobile centres, as well as referrals to other services and agencies (IOM 2014: 29-30). It is important to ensure that services can be provided in a coordinated way, and thus MRCs must **build networks and partnerships with government, trade unions, CSOs and employers** at the national and international levels, who can engage in a referral mechanism with the MRC, but also help to gain migrants' confidence in accessing in the MRC (ILO 2014a).

Running a successful MRC incurs costs including office rental and set-up, computers and other office equipment, utilities, staffing costs, travel and outreach costs, interpretation and translation, communication activities and media events. This means, planning from the start, how to cover these costs and ensure **financial sustainability**. Many MRCs are founded

## BOX 2: Steps to develop a MRC

- 1. Research the laws and assess the 'political reality'** of establishing a MRC and identify the organizational and legal base for the MRC
- 2. Carry out a needs assessment** to identify target groups, needed services and key challenges to consider
- 3. Decide on how services will be provided** including by building network with local partners
- 4. Draw up a budget and develop a financial strategy** including a fundraising plan
- 5. Determine policies and operating procedures**, including monitoring and evaluation
- 6. Find an appropriate location**
- 7. Draw up a communications strategy and outreach strategy** for both members/beneficiaries and volunteers

<sup>7</sup> A needs assessment can also provide baseline data to assess progress made by MRCs at regular periods after implementation. It should not be restricted to the set-up period. Given the changing nature of immigration rules and procedures, MRCs' role to continually respond to the needs and interests of migrants requires maintaining contacts with migrant communities in a participatory manner. For example, the Al-Hassan Workers' Centre engaged the Columbia School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) to conduct two assessments of the Workers' Center in 2014 and 2016, as well as a survey of 295 workers through questionnaires between May and October 2017. The outcomes of these studies were used to improve the operations of the Center and enhance its effect on the workers.

based on short-term funding projects and must regularly apply for new grants, though in some cases centres have been included in government development frameworks which often guaranteed long-term funding plans. Charging subsidized fees can be an important mechanism to help with income generation, while also encouraging migrants' ownership of the centre. However, given limited capacity, other means of funding will need to be determined – whether it is a proportion of trade union dues, allocation of a civil society's regular budget, or other mechanisms.

Like any organization, the smooth running of a MRC relies on having clear **operational procedures** in place which ensure transparent recruitment and retention of qualified staff, quality of services (including regular monitoring and evaluation) and determining the opening times of the centre (which, as noted above, should match the availability of the target migrant group). Developing procedures should extend to the MRCs' potential partner organizations, for example in determining referral mechanisms to specialist services.

**Choosing a location** for the MRC will depend on the research taken initially as this will help to determine the most accessible area for the migrant group. Transport accessibility and safety of the location should also be primary considerations and the specific needs of male and female migrants should be taken into account. While MRCs should generally be easy to find with clear street signs, some migrants (especially those in an irregular situation) may prefer to access a facility which is more discreet. Safety from interference by government authorities is another important consideration. For example, the three branches of the Migrant Community Centres in Lebanon (MCCs, discussed below) are located respectively in the middle of their towns, which provides easy access to the migrants. They are not exposed to the police and away from neighbourhoods that might otherwise cause problems especially during campaigns by immigration' with 'commonly be targeted by campaigns of immigration' (so it will say 'away from neighbours that might commonly be targeted by campaigns of immigration authorities

Finally, developing and implementing a **communication and outreach strategy** will allow the MRC to quickly spread the word about its facilities and services and draw a base of volunteers which may be necessary to offer services such as language classes.



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### 3. MAPPING OF MRCs IN THE ARAB STATES

*This section outlines the information collected from MRCs surveyed in the region, and reflects on the key experiences and challenges of these centres.*

#### 3.1 About the mapping

This mapping of MRCs in the Arab States focussed on:

- 1) centres/institutions offering migrants a **regular, permanent meeting space** and which
- 2) provide migrants with a **range of services** to support, protect and/or empower them; and
- 3) are **available to all nationalities** of migrant workers.

The study was limited to those centres that were currently active and responded to requests for information by the authors of the study. The mapping was based on ILO referrals, desk research and discussions with key persons working on the subject of migrant workers in different countries. During July-August 2017, interviews were conducted with the several identified organizations (which were largely in Lebanon and Jordan).<sup>8</sup> Interview data were complemented by information available on the organizations' websites and Facebook pages, as well as internal reports provided by the interviewees.

Given the number of criteria above, the study does not claim to include all the organizations that are providing services to migrant workers in the Arab States. A number of organizations identified included in the mapping met one or two (but not all) of the criteria and thus were not included in the analysis. This included the following organizations:

Type of service	Examples
<b>Embassy worker centres, and workers' centres operated by diaspora</b>	The Indian government has set up two Indian Workers' Resource Centres in Dubai (since 2010) and Sharja (since September 2017). The centres operate a 24 hour helpline in order to provide advice, and a team of advisors conduct visits to labour camps to give out basic information. <sup>8</sup>
<b>Emergency hotlines</b>	Such services operate in the Gulf without a physical centre, and include 'MigCall', Migrante ME Crisis Hotline, Support for Overseas Filipino Workers and the Emergency SMS Helpline.
<b>Trade union support services</b>	The Kuwait Trade Union Federation established a migrant workers office in 1993 and in 2015, was considering the establishment of a migrant worker committee to advocate for migrant workers' rights (ILO 2015). However the centre became largely inactive from 2016 and did not function as a drop-in space for migrants at the time of writing in December 2017.
<b>Faith-based services</b>	Religious establishments including churches such as St Mary's Catholic Church in Dubai provide a public space and opportunities for migrants to gather and interact, including large services that draw hundreds of migrants from many nationalities. <sup>9</sup> However the services provided are currently only faith-based and do not extend to the other types of support services analysed in the study.
<b>Government-run shelters for abused workers</b>	Government-run shelters for abused workers (in Kuwait, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates) were not included in the study given – as noted above, shelters serve a different function to MRCs.

<sup>8</sup> The interviews were conducted in person and over the phone, based on a questionnaire covering set-up process, institutional arrangements and the organizational structures, the outreach strategies, the provision of services and facilities, and the challenges and prospects regarding financial sustainability. The interview questions varied according to the different experiences of each organization. Furthermore, some interviewees could not provide more than 30-60 minutes of their time, so the consultant addressed only key questions.

<sup>9</sup> Nagara 2017

Based on the specified criteria, the mapping of MRCs in the Arab States suggests that only six organizations are currently running MRCs – four in Lebanon and two in Jordan (though none, at present, in the Gulf countries).

Three focus group discussions were undertaken with a total of 30 migrant domestic workers in Amman, to better understand the needs and priorities of workers with regards to a possible centre. The participants – from various Asian and African nationalities – were approached through the legal awareness sessions provided by Tamkeen<sup>11</sup> and the Jordanian Women's Union<sup>12</sup>, with discussions conducted largely in Arabic and English.<sup>13</sup> In October, short interviews were also undertaken with migrant workers who accessed services at the Migrant Community Centre in Beirut, Lebanon. Additional perspectives from migrant workers were obtained through the research of the Al-Hassan Workers' Centre, carried out by the ILO and the Columbia School of International and Political Affairs.

## 3.2 About the selected centres

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### The Migrant Community Centers (MCCs), Lebanon



Established by the Lebanese CSO Anti-Racism Movement in Beirut in 2011, the MCC has four regional locations in Lebanon (Achrafieh from 2011, Hamra from 2015, Saïda from 2016 and Jounieh from late 2016). The MCCs offer migrant workers free classes and other educational, social, and capacity-building activities including:

- English, French and Arabic language classes and computer classes
- health and rights awareness sessions
- advocacy training

The MCCs also serve as a hub where initiatives are launched, there is a space to have celebrations and get-togethers, and a casual space for migrant workers to spend time with each other. The target groups are migrants of Asian and African origin, with a special focus on women migrant domestic workers.<sup>14</sup>

### Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center, Lebanon



Established and supported by the global organization Caritas Internationalis, the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (hereafter 'Caritas Lebanon Migrant Centre' or CLMC) runs four shelters for migrants. Among them is the shelter in Dora, Beirut which is a temporary shelter and a community center (MRC). In 2000, CLMC initiated efforts to expand its activities on a wider range and to reach out to more vulnerable migrants. The community center has a number of activities including a mass on Sundays, pastoral activities, migrant community leaders' meetings and community activities (preparations for traditional food, meals for prisoners, community leaders' preparations for special events of their respective countries, such as Independence Day, and cultural events). The centre also facilitates celebration of special events on special occasions like Christmas, Easter, Ramadan, International Migrants' Day, and International Labour Day.

<sup>10</sup> However, while this provided the space for migrants to meet, the churches generally did not offer specific services to migrants other than religious guidance, and thus were not considered as part of this study.

<sup>11</sup> Tamkeen website: <http://tamkeen-jo.org/about-us-2/>

<sup>12</sup> Jordanian Women's Union website: <http://jwu.org.jo/Home.aspx?lng=1>

<sup>13</sup> The sessions were conducted with between 9 and 12 participants in each group, selected according to their common languages, and took between one and a half hours and 2 hours each. The discussions aimed to assess what access to support services workers have, the migrants' views on the need for a MRC, and what kind of facilities and services they would be interested in.

<sup>14</sup> Anti-Racism Movement's website: <https://www.armlebanon.org/about>

The CLMC offers social, medical, and legal assistance through its shelters, but this is largely for victims of trafficking in Lebanon. Moreover, the Centre conducts advocacy activities through its role in the National Steering Committee for Migrant Domestic Workers.<sup>15</sup>

### Amel Association International, Lebanon



Amel, a Lebanese CSO established in 1979 in response to the humanitarian crises resulting from the Lebanese civil war, established their migrant centre in 2011 as part of an EU-funded program for the support of Migrant Domestic Workers and Victims of Human Trafficking. Whilst offering services (legal, health, psychosocial and social) on a needs-basis in eight centres across Lebanon, Amel currently has two permanent centres offering weekly empowerment activities to women migrant domestic workers in Beirut, namely in Chiah and Burj Al-Barajneh, including:

- language classes
- employment-related vocational training
- literacy classes

Migrants can also benefit from a wider range of services including legal support and counselling, psychosocial and social support as well as health support and repatriation where necessary. Amel's goal is to enhance the personal and professional development of vulnerable populations, as well as covering their psychosocial, health needs, and medical when feasible.

### Domestic Workers Union, Lebanon



The Domestic Workers Union is under the National Federation of Workers and Employees Trade Union in Lebanon (FENASOL) and offers a space in Beirut accessible to all members and potential members of the union on Sunday (and occasionally on Saturday) (common days off for domestic workers) in order to allow migrant workers to come on a 'drop in' basis. The centre offers ad-hoc training on such topics as sexual and reproductive health, communication strategies and has in the past offered language classes.

### The Al-Hassan Workers' Center, Jordan



In 2014, the BetterWork Jordan Programme (a partnership between the ILO and the International Finance Corporation) initiated the establishment of a Workers' Center in Al-Hassan - the largest garment export zone in Jordan. In total, there are approximately 17,000 garment workers in this zone, of which the majority are migrant workers. The Centre's role is especially crucial given the remote location of the industrial zone where CSOs do not operate, thus making access to legal, health, and psychosocial services challenging. The centre offers a number of activities including:

- skills development training in computer and English language. The facilities of the computer room (also referred to as the computer lab) are also available for the workers' personal use after the class hours
- exercise facilities provided through the gym/dance studio including exercise machines and equipment in addition to dancing and karate classes
- recreational services through the canteen that offers hot and cold drinks, snacks, Wi-Fi internet, television and games (billiard table, table tennis)
- room rent services where two rooms of the center are available for groups of workers who wish to use them for celebrations, gatherings and prayers. Yoga classes are also organized in these

<sup>15</sup> The CLMC Facebook page: [https://web.facebook.com/pg/CaritasLebanonMigrantCentre/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://web.facebook.com/pg/CaritasLebanonMigrantCentre/about/?ref=page_internal)

rooms on a weekly basis

- health clinic services, which were offered as a pilot on Fridays between January and May 2017. The health clinic services were stopped to obtain required permits from relevant government agencies.
- general counselling and advice through referrals to the relevant service providers (i.e. legal aid organizations)
- hair dressing salon

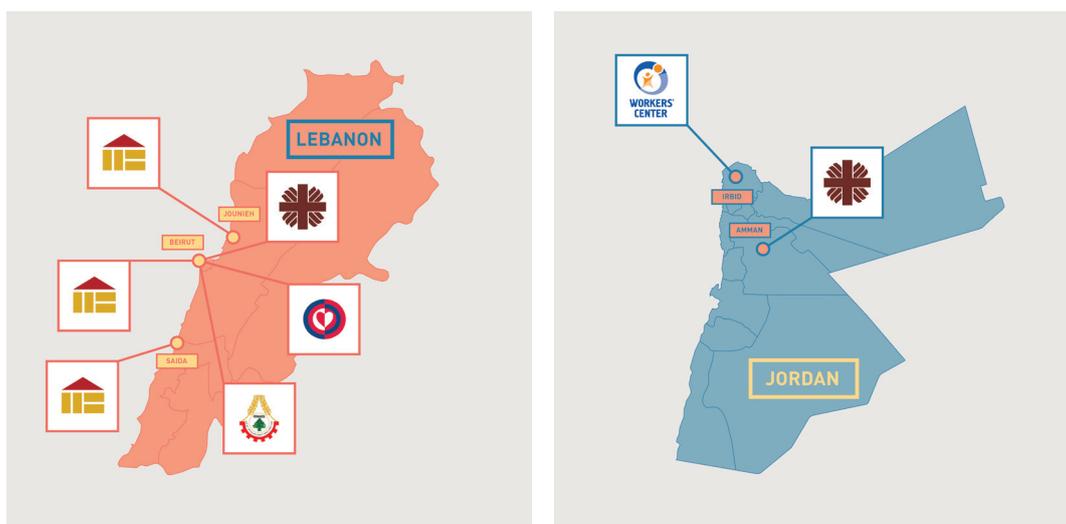
The Al-Hassan Workers' Centre was established (and newly built) following a number of workers' rights violations, including incidences of gender-based violence, and became a key tool in providing a mix of social, health, and empowerment opportunities for migrant factory workers. The centre serves more than 1,000 workers per month, offering skills training, access to legal aid, social, and health opportunities, and strategies to respond to sexual harassment within the garment sector.

### Caritas Jordan Community Centre, Jordan



Established and supported by the global organization Caritas Internationalis, Caritas Jordan Community Centre (hereafter 'Caritas Jordan') was established in 2002 to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to refugees and migrant workers.<sup>16</sup> The Centre offers cash assistance to migrants in need, access to medical services, social and legal awareness sessions and vocational trainings.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 2:** Mapping of location of MRCs



## 3.3 Set-up process and sustainability

### Institutional set-up

The process through which MRCs were **founded** differed significantly and – it should be noted – is also influenced by the freedom of CSOs in some countries and contexts, relative to others. The foundation of the Anti-Racism Movement, and later the migrant community centres (MCCs), began with a group of feminists from 'Nasawiya' in Beirut conducting outreach activities to recruit women, including migrant women, to their organization.<sup>18</sup> Through their

<sup>16</sup> Caritas Jordan website.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Mr. Omar Abawi, Programme Manager, Caritas Jordan, on August 25, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Nasawiya is a group of young feminists who seek to fight sexism in Beirut.

conversations with migrant women, they realized that women who face multiple layers of discrimination and oppression do not have community safe spaces to meet and organize in Beirut. In 2011, Anti-Racism Movement activists were already in contact with informal networks of migrant workers who met regularly to discuss their issues and to help other workers in need of services and assistance.

In collaboration with migrant worker community leaders and with the financial support of the Open Society Foundations, Anti-Racism Movement's activists established the first Centre in 2011 in Naba'a, which is an area densely populated with migrants. The Naba'a Centre, which was subject to constant police raids targeting migrants, later moved to Achrafieh, a middle-class area in central Beirut.

In contrast to the MCCs' grassroots institutional arrangements, MRCs run by Amel (Lebanon), CLMC and Caritas Jordan established departments or programs within their CSOs to offer physical spaces for migrants to receive information and services. Established consecutively in 1994 and 2002, CLMC and Caritas Jordan were mainly funded by Caritas Internationalis which is a confederation of over 160 members. The Amel program for the support of migrant domestic workers and victims of human trafficking was launched from an EU regional project in 2011 and was developed through a number of subsequent projects. The program subsequently developed a close collaboration with IOM, sharing technical expertise and case management to become specialized in providing support to victims of human trafficking.

The organizations varied in terms of their **geographic outreach**. CLMC and Caritas Jordan are centralized (with each one having a centre in the capital city – Dawra in Beirut, and Weibdeh in Amman). Based on efforts starting in 2011, Amel established two centres in the suburbs of Beirut offering services and activities for migrants on a regular basis. Amel has an additional seven centres which can be accessed by migrants but provide services more broadly to vulnerable populations in Lebanon. These centres, in the Bekaa, Beirut suburbs and South Lebanon offer social, health and legal services to vulnerable populations; with staff also trained to identify victims of human trafficking, and implement ad-hoc activities for migrants.<sup>19</sup> Only the MCC has managed to expand from Beirut capital to the two cities of Saida (40kms south of Beirut) and Jounieh (20km north of Beirut) in 2016, creating a challenge for meeting the needs of migrants not based in the capital (which is a sizeable portion of migrants).

**We expanded to Saida and Jounieh after five years of experience in Beirut. During these years, we gained lots of experience on how to logistically organize events and activities, how to do proper community work that is inclusive of the different people we are working with, at the same time, redefining our politics. MCC Achrafieh (central Beirut) expanded in terms of recruiting more volunteers and members and organizing more activities and campaigns which attracted the attention of migrant workers, the media, and human rights organizations.**

**We were only three full time employees and two migrant assistant coordinators managing the whole centre. We decided to expand when the space was not able to accommodate anymore the number of weekly visitors (for classes, meetings, case work, and other activities); and more importantly because many visitors were coming from outside of Beirut. In the same period, we had a funding opportunity from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation to expand our work beyond Beirut.<sup>20</sup>**

*Beirut Coordinator of MCC*

<sup>19</sup> Amel centres also conduct outreach to employers and school children in these remote areas related to awareness on migrants' rights.

<sup>20</sup> Ramy Shukr, MCC Beirut coordinator, Anti Racism Movement (ARM).

The target population of the various MRCs differs. For example, while Amel originally established a centre for empowerment activities that welcomed all nationalities, it was later evaluated that the learning would be enhanced by establishing a centre for each nationality that caters to the cultural specificity of each group. Thus, one of the MRCs (in Chiah) caters mainly for Ethiopian migrants, while Bengali migrants mainly access the MRC in Burj Al-Barajneh. However, the social, legal and health services still capture all nationalities.

**Unfortunately, we felt a discontentment from migrant workers themselves when mixing nationalities in the same classroom, that's why we decided to divide the beneficiaries according to their nationalities and make a Centre for each nationality. This allowed for enhanced learning to meet the needs, culture and educational background of each nationality. We provide other nationalities with services, including health services.<sup>21</sup>**

*Programme Coordinator at AMEL*

However, the MCCs were successful in running mixed spaces in terms of nationality, sector and gender. This might be partially because MCC coordinators made efforts at the very start to make centres collaborative spaces. The coordinators avoided dealing with 'community leaders' as representatives of a certain nationality; instead preferring to engage them as mobilizers of migrant communities in general.

Unlike the above-mentioned MRCs which were founded by CSOs, Al-Hassan Centre in Jordan is characterized by its tripartite support and roots. This can be seen as pragmatic decision, given the restrictive environment of special economic zones, where employers and governments have greater control over workers, and access by CSOs to workers may be limited. In 2011, Better Work Jordan held discussions with a range of partners including the Ministry of Labour, the Jordan Garments, Accessories, and Textiles Exporters Association (JGATE) and the Garment Union, international brands and the US Government concerning garment workers' lack of access to basic services and facilities. Better Work Jordan proposed the development of Workers' Centres in multiple special economic zones, with the first one to be piloted in the Al-Hassan Industrial Zone. From the start, the Centre placed an emphasis on workers' ownership of the centre and building sustainability through the reasonable and affordable fees that workers pay for services, so that the centres would become independent from outside support.

However, major stakeholders contributed to the initial costs for setting up and running the Centre. Factories within Al-Hassan, as well as international brands, covered the construction of a new building. Brands also donated furniture and computers in-kind, and the Irbid Chamber of Industry contributed in furnishings and landscaping. The Jordan Industrial Estates Corporation provided a 10-year lease of the land for the Workers' Centre (at symbolic 1 JD (US\$1.40) cost). Umniah Communications Company provided in-kind donations in internet and communications services, computers, and training. While tripartite support, and more importantly the employers' monetary contribution (predominantly the Classic Company) to this Centre was very positive in terms of the start-up of the centre, it also created initial challenges related to workers' trust to use the Centre.

**Since Classic, the biggest factory in Al-Hassan [Qualifying Industrial Zone] QIZ, has built the building through its construction unit, workers from other factories thought that it is the Workers' Center of Classic only. It was very difficult to convince them that it's not only for Classic workers but to all workers. Moreover, the fact that the employers built the Center has made many workers worried about accessing it, even Classic workers. Hence, huge efforts have been made to assure the workers that this is their own space. I was regularly visiting them in the dormitories to encourage them to visit the Center. We organized many ceremonies and activities which helped workers to feel more comfortable in accessing the Centre.<sup>22</sup>**

*Advocacy Officer at Al-Hassan Workers' Centre*

<sup>21</sup> Zeina Mohanna, Programme Coordinator, AMEL, on August 4, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Mervat Jemhawi, advocacy officer at Al-Hassan Workers' Centre.

The Al-Hassan Centre is managed by centre staff but overseen by a specifically created non-profit organization called the Workers' Centre Association which was legally established in September 2012 with a Board of Directors that includes the above-mentioned tripartite constituents, to oversee the activities of the centre. While initially the Board included migrant worker representatives, a new law passed by the Government of Jordan created a new set of requirements for associations, including that Board members had to be Jordanian nationals. Thus, while workers can join as members of the Board, attend meetings and elect Board members, their ownership of the centre is restricted by the provisions of the law. The tripartite nature of the Association has been important in terms of ensuring a space to discuss key issues that affect migrant workers, however it also created challenges in decision-making, given different viewpoints of each of the parties.

**It's been very complicated. My predecessors and I have spent too much time on setting up the issues of the association, encouraging and supporting the Board to progress with administrative tasks.**

*Project Coordinator at Al-Hassan Workers' Centre*



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**Table 1:** Institutional framework of mapped MRCs

	Amel	CLMC	MCCs	Domestic Workers Union	The Al-Hassan Workers' Center	Caritas Jordan
<b>Date of establishment</b>	2011	1994	2011	2015	2014	2002
<b>Location(s)</b>	Beirut, Lebanon	Beirut, Lebanon	Beirut, Saida and Jounieh, Lebanon	Beirut, Lebanon	Irbid, Jordan	Amman, Jordan
<b>Funding sources</b>	Various short term projects based on donor projects	Caritas Internationalis	Donor as well as membership fees	Donor projects	Donor project as well as employers (factory owners) and membership/ user fees	Caritas Internationalis
<b>Run by</b>	CSO	CSO	CSO	Union	Association created with tripartite representatives	CSO
<b>Number of full-time staff</b>	23 staff <sup>22</sup>	Specifically in the MRC there are 3 staff, but more than 60 total incl. in shelters <sup>23</sup>	6 staff <sup>24</sup>	Currently only part-time staff	4 staff <sup>25</sup>	10 staff but not specific to migrant workers



© ARM

<sup>23</sup> Comprising two program/project coordinators, one field coordinator, two lawyers, nine teachers/co-teachers, eight social workers, a finance officer, consultants/reviewers when needed, and additional administrative staff working in Amel and supporting the program for migrant domestic workers

<sup>24</sup> Comprising administrators, lawyers, social workers, and advocacy workers. Additionally, there are 13 migrant counsellors.

<sup>25</sup> Including a coordinator in each of the MCCs, and an overall 'regional' coordinator.

<sup>26</sup> Including a coordinator, an advocacy officer, an outreach officer, and a security guard.

## Outreach

Outreach activities refer to the work that MRC staff and volunteers do to spread messages and information outside the MRCs, including informing migrant workers about the services offered at the centre. In the case of CLMC, which is the first Centre for migrants in Lebanon, Caritas staff **visited and mobilized migrant workers** in the areas where they live, in churches and in the airport upon arrival; they also targeted their **social and religious events**. Staff discussed with migrants their problems and followed up on their cases. They also communicated with organizations and networks in their countries of origin to coordinate on pre-departure training. In addition, CLMC receives **referrals for case work** from CSOs, recruitment agencies, the Directorate General of the General Security (equivalent to the Ministry of Interior) and various relevant ministries. Later, Caritas also started utilizing **social media mobilization**.

Similar to CLMC, Amel and the MCCs mobilized migrant workers (and particularly migrant domestic workers) through migrants' events, a hotline, expanded working hours, social media platforms and 'community leaders'. The latter are generally chosen based on their long experience in Lebanon, their knowledge of the local context and the language, and their ability to mobilize other workers. Migrant community leaders often play an intermediary role between the centres and the migrant communities. They refer cases to the centres and invite migrants to activities and events run by the MRC. As part of their outreach strategy, the MCCs will launch soon a radio programme presented by migrants (in Arabic and migrants' languages) to recruit more members to the MCCs.

These outreach strategies are crucial to recruit migrants to the centers and gain their confidence, but they often need to be complemented with a sustainable provision of services and facilities, as discussed in Section 3.3.

## Financial sustainability

The majority of surveyed centers consider financial sustainability a major challenge since they heavily rely on **short-term funding** projects.

All the centers noted that they operate based on projects funded by a multitude of donors. Only the MCCs and the Al-Hassan Workers' Centre charge **membership fees** but this is not sufficient to cover all costs (particularly staff costs). In both centres, charging some fees was considered important not only to build self-sufficiency of the centre but also to promote a sense of ownership by the workers. Workers pay 1JD (US\$1.4) per year to become members of the Association of the Al-Hassan Workers' Centre, which allows them to attend general meetings and elect board members. Small charges are also required for use of the gym (0.5 JD per day, US\$0.70), computer and English classes (6JD, US\$8 per month; 2-3 hours class each week), computer lab use and food at the canteen. Similarly MCCs charge US\$20 per year for members, while classes are free.

**The membership fees are minimal and contribute to covering the centres' basic running costs. In case we have a funding problem, migrants can at least benefit from the space to meet and organize, even if services and classes might be compromised.**<sup>27</sup>

*Beirut Coordinator of MCC*

**The income generated by the centre's services (gym, language and computer classes, canteen space and games area, room rentals, computer lab etc.) can absorb almost entirely the running and maintenance costs (internet and electricity bills), but it is not sufficient for staff costs.**<sup>28</sup>

*Project Coordinator at Al-Hassan Workers' Centre*

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Mr. Ramy Shukr, Beirut coordinator, MCCs, on July 31, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Helene Bohyn, Workers Centre Project Coordinator, ILO, on August 7, 2017.

On the other hand, CLMC and Caritas Jordan do not rely on membership fees and instead use external funds for specific projects. They were also able to secure sustainable core funding through Caritas Internationalis, their sister organizations.

### 3.4 MRCs services and facilities

The capabilities of MRCs to provide services to migrants largely depend of their financial and human resources, as well as their partnerships and networks.

**Table 2:** MRCs services and facilities

	Amel	CLMC	MCCs	Domestic Workers Union	The Al-Hassan Workers' Center	Caritas Jordan
Legal counselling	Yes	Yes	Minimal (mainly referral and follow up)	No	Minimal (mainly referral and follow up)	No
Psychosocial counselling	Yes	Yes <sup>28</sup>	Yes	No	No	No
Medical counselling	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Shelter(s)	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Awareness sessions	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Language and computer courses	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Vocational trainings	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Recreational activities	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Advocacy Work	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Comparing the staff at each of the MRCs was challenging, given that while the MCCs and the Al-Hassan Workers' Centre have fewer staff, these staff focus solely on migrant workers, while CLMC and Amel have much larger staffing, but also cater to a broader population including refugees and nationals (not exclusively workers) in Lebanon.

<sup>29</sup> Nurses, psychologists, social workers, counsellors and doctors are available as needed and these services are offered to the most vulnerable cases and for survivors of trafficking in the shelters only (general consultations, forensic doctor, hospitalization for mentally ill, injured, and physically sick). Social counselling is provided by the social workers and psychosocial support and counselling is provided by the psychologist throughout individual and group sessions.

Organizations such as CLMC and Amel can provide a wide range of services including **medical, legal (including repatriation support and bringing cases to courts), social and psychosocial counselling**, through the lawyers, social workers, directly employed by these CSOs. CLMC provides these services in its four undisclosed shelters for abused migrants, as well as mobile services through visits to prisons and detention centres where migrants and refugees are incarcerated. Amel provides services in five centres around Lebanon (not specific to migrants) and has in the past offered free health consultations to the migrants and their children. However, the number of specialist staff in both Amel and CLMC is small relative to the need in the population (keeping in mind the needs of refugees and nationals, as well as migrant workers).

Caritas Jordan, the Al-Hassan Workers' Centre and the MCCs have limited capacity to provide direct **legal counselling** and thus refer legal cases mainly to Mizan Law Group for Human Rights and Adel – Justice Center for Legal Aid. Abuse migrants who need shelter are referred to the Jordanian Women's Union, Tamkeen – Legal Aid and Human Rights and KAFA (a Lebanese CSO) and the Lebanese Center for Human Rights respectively. However, in the case of the MCCs staff also investigate and advocate for many migrant workers unable to secure help from other CSOs by coordinating with media organizations and local allies.

Providing medical assistance can be a challenge — Caritas Jordan supports migrants with **medical assistance** through affiliated service providers, hospitals, laboratories, and pharmacies. This service is particularly important for migrants in an irregular situation, who are afraid of accessing mainstream health clinics or for female garment workers in the industrial zones, who are often hesitant to disclose health information that may threaten their work status, such as data related to their sexual and reproductive health. On the other hand, the MCCs give referrals to medical services through their partnership with medical students at the American University of Beirut Medical Centre.

A number of centres cannot provide psychosocial services due to the high cost and language constraints, but have tried to offer **recreational services** as a mechanism to address issues of stress. These include yoga and dance classes (MCCs and Al-Hassan Workers' Centre only) and drama therapy (MCCs and Amel).

Since the psychotherapy was too complicated due to language barriers between migrant workers (seven different languages), we adopted alternatives psychosocial tools and coping strategies such as meditation and yoga to reduce their high level of anxiety, fatigue, and stress.<sup>30</sup>

*Project Coordinator at Al-Hassan Workers' Centre*

In addition to providing services for protection, whether directly or through referral systems, all the surveyed centres offer **awareness sessions**. This includes legal awareness on workers' rights and duties according to the labour law and the unified contract, human and labour rights according to relevant conventions (such as the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)), as well as social and health awareness sessions on occupational health and safety (Al-Hassan Workers' Centre) and chronic diseases (Caritas Jordan).

Furthermore, all the surveyed centres offered **education/skills lessons** such as **language** classes. MCC has more than 60 volunteer teachers across the three centres, who were commonly recruited through Facebook. Amel, CLMC and Caritas Jordan also offer vocational trainings to ensure income generating opportunities for migrants in the future, such as cooking, sewing (Amel and CLMC), make-up, fashion design classes (Amel), baby sitting and housekeeping (Caritas Jordan). The Al-Hassan Workers' Centre facilitated a number of educational opportunities, including English classes, which are very popular.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Helene Bohyn, Project Coordinator, Al-Hassan Workers' Centre, on August 7, 2017.

If we can learn English here, then in every country we can easily communicate with people because it's a language that everyone speaks. On top of that, we can find decent jobs as well if we know the English language. If you're working a low wage job and can speak English then you're offered more opportunities to move on to a higher paying/better job. This way you can progress in life.

*Male Indian worker at the Al Hassan Centre: source ILO and Columbia University (2016)*

I come to the centre almost every day if I can! I participate in English, Arabic and computer classes, I learn about social therapy. I like everything about [the centre]. Here we are free. We are a community.

*Ethiopian female migrant worker, Lebanon*

Finally, although advocacy and lobbying work is not necessarily their primary focus, all the mapped MRCs undertake advocacy work through the organizations that run the MRCs. In some cases, the lobbying agenda is set by the migrants through the daily contact and discussions that take place in the MRCs. Some of the ways in which advocacy work is undertaken is through lobbying with the government (such as CLMC's role in the National Steering Committee for Migrant Domestic Workers), international lobbying through migration-related international conferences and meetings, and working jointly with UN organizations.

Caritas Jordan has been involved in legal advocacy work along with the ILO and UN Women. As a result of these lobbying efforts, Jordan enacted in October 2009 the Domestic Workers Regulation No. 90 which outlines legal provisions for domestic workers under the Labour Law.

Likewise, the stakeholders of Al-Hassan Workers' Centre played a major role in the enactment of the **collective bargaining agreement** on 27 May 2013 by two employer associations, the Jordan Garments, Accessories and Textiles Exporters' Association (J-GATE) and the Association of Owners of Factories, Workshops and Garments, and the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing Industries (Garment Union). The collective bargaining agreement includes provisions on regulating working hours, wages and bonuses; improving occupational safety and health in factories and dormitories; a commitment to treat all workers equally; a unified contract for migrant workers; recognition of the Garment Union and its right to access factories; settlement mechanisms to deal with contract disputes; and annual seniority bonuses for all workers regardless of their nationalities.<sup>31</sup>

Although the Centre was officially established in early 2014, the mobilization efforts with the garment workers that preceded its establishment has **contributed to shaping the labour agenda**, as well as the negotiations that ended up in improving the working conditions of approximately 55,000 workers in the sector. The problems and concerns raised by the garment workers during the initial meetings and sessions prior to the establishment of the centre largely shaped the agenda of the negotiations.

MCCs' advocacy work has been oriented towards organizing and building the capacity of migrants' networks to advocate for their own rights and draft their own demands in collaboration with the ARM/MCC team of staff and volunteers.

It takes time to build a movement of migrant workers. Being politically engaged doesn't mean just attending a workshop, or the number of campaigns initiated by [a MRC]. It is also about building the confidence of workers to advocate for their rights.<sup>32</sup>

*Beirut Coordinator of MCC*

<sup>31</sup> Summary Brief: Workers' Centre Project Background, an ILO internal document, unpublished.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mr. Ramy Shukr, Beirut coordinator, MCCs, on October 21, 2017.

## 3.5 Empowerment as workers

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The provision of services and facilities in a safe space appears to be a major motivation to attract migrant workers since they experience vulnerable working conditions and severe daily pressure. It helps to decrease language barriers and build relations of trust between migrants, and it encourages more cross-nationality meetings and events.

**Recreational activities, such as supporting cultural and religious celebrations, organizing weekend trips and dinner events, providing entertaining classes like dance and theatre, are crucial to integrate new members into our community and to help facilitate relations between them.**<sup>33</sup>

*Beirut Coordinator of MCC*

Where centres are seen as a place where the workers can ‘express and celebrate their cultural and personal identities’ this can be seen as an important element of **supporting the dignity of the workers, as well as an important coping strategy** (ILO 2016b: 4). For example, migrant workers accessing the Al-Hassan Workers’ Centre have noted that the Centre mitigates the social isolation caused by their living and working conditions, and – given the long hours and desensitizing nature of factory work – has helped them to feel more comfortable with their personal identities. Though dance lessons or celebration of cultural holidays might appear as purely recreational activities, they were instrumental in improving the mental health of workers and creating the environment for increasing their self-confidence, including potentially their ability to change and improve their working conditions (ILO 2016b). The centres have also allowed different types of workers (different nationalities, different sectors) to come together and learn about their shared experiences, in a way which could form a foundation for solidarity and future grassroots collective action.

**We come here to talk about ways to ensure our comfort and happiness, for example, the problems we face at our factory or a service we do not get from our employer.**

*Migrant worker at the Al Hassan Centre: source ILO and Columbia University (2016)*

**I feel that this is like my home. I have friends here. I can meet other migrants. I came to the centre to learn English and computer skills, but now I am also participating in a radio programme where I talk about my country – and tell the Lebanese more about what Sudan is like.**

*Sudanese male migrant worker, Lebanon*

The degree to which MRCs explicitly seek to empower migrants as change-agents depends on the approach or politics of the involved actors and the ways in which they consider migrants: victims and beneficiaries or collaborators and agents of change? The organizations which approach migrants as beneficiaries are likely to seek to protect this category of workers from forced labour and labour exploitation, while the ones that see them as collaborators may work to empower migrants to themselves more actively engage to change their status quo.

Within humanitarian organizations – including Amel, Caritas Jordan and CLMC – the focus is largely on the protection of workers and thus the involvement of migrants in decision-making may be more limited. As such, decisions from migrants are often sought on more practical matters, such as choosing the recreational activities, food (in shelters) and types of services offered to the migrants (including particular courses and training of interest to them), but few opportunities to impact on the lobbying and advocacy agenda.

On the other hand, the MCCs focus on building the capacity of large groups of migrant workers to lead **self-advocacy initiatives** and providing them with support and safe spaces, although not necessarily the overall strategic direction to bring the groups/ideas together. For

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Mr. Ramy Shukr, Beirut coordinator, MCCs, on July 31, 2017

instance, they offer advocacy and capacity building trainings for migrants to organize an online campaign, to shoot a video to design a poster; and to work with different community groups.

**Our theory of change shifts the positionality of migrant workers from beneficiaries and recipients of services to leaders and agents of social change in Lebanon. The MCCs provide the space, tools, resources, and capacity for migrant workers to self-organize and lead awareness and rights-based campaigns in order to help end discrimination and exploitation, and guarantee protection, rights, and access to justice.**

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The Al-Hassan Workers' Centre has furthermore worked to strengthen **workers' own negotiation power with employers**, by supporting and guiding workers in their discussions with the factory owners and employs an Advocacy Officer to provide support to workers. While the Centre does not actively promote collective action (this is the role of the union)<sup>34</sup> the Centre can assist workers with advice about their rights, and the legal way to engage in industrial action, if this was the decision the workers agreed on. The Centre can also assist workers with translation support to better organize themselves, unify their demands and collectively bargain.

Due to the Centre's unique structure (with tripartite representation at the Board level), the Centre can promote harmonious exchange between the workers, employers and government, and raise key issues, such as workers' demands – to decision makers.

**Their main problems and complaints are related to their legal status (if their employer did not issue their work permit on time, this could affect their freedom of movement and expose them to arrests); to their living conditions (such as water shortages); and their working conditions (delay in salaries, verbal, physical assault and sexual harassment). When all these problems coincide and the employer did not respond to their complaints, they spontaneously decide to strike the day after.**<sup>35</sup>

*Advocacy Officer at Al-Hassan Workers' Centre*

When the workers strike, the factory owners often punish particular workers they suspect are responsible even if this is not the case (targeting workers who are most outspoken or those who are multi-lingual), including through non-payment of salaries, or even firing and deporting the workers. In such cases, the Centre may intervene to protect the strikers, or the ones who are accused of organising the strike, from any kind of illegal punishment.

Members of the Al-Hassan Workers' Centre are further involved in running the centre on a daily basis and contributing to the design of the projects and activities.

Similarly, MCCs allocate a budget for members' initiatives and projects. MCCs' approach is not restrained to responding to migrants' needs, but also to maintain the sustainability of migrant networks and connect them together. In this way, the MCCs encourage migrant workers to establish their own associations, hold weekly members' meetings and make their own decisions about future activities.

**They don't only tell us their priorities and we work on implementing them. They were already discussing and organizing and we support their own initiatives. We didn't create MCCs from nothing. There were already existing informal community networks. Full-time staff at MCCs do the work that migrant workers cannot do because of structural factors, such as managing different projects, applying for grants, coordinating between different networks and organizations, but members are the people who are actually running the space on a daily basis.**<sup>36</sup>

*Beirut Coordinator of MCC*

<sup>34</sup> Participating workers will generally have their meetings in dormitories rather than in the Centre, possibly because of workers' fear of their supervisors who might be present at the Centre.

<sup>35</sup> Mervat Jemhawi, Advocacy Officer, Al-Hassan Workers' Centre, on August 12, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Mr. Ramy Shukr, Beirut coordinator, MCCs, on July 31, 2017.

## 4. CONCLUSION

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As a result of this mapping exercise, this study identified six MRCs in the Arab States and examined the centres' institutional arrangements, their organizational structures with regard to human resources, service provision approaches, outreach strategies, and to a limited degree, funding strategies.

The institutional set-up of the mapped MRCs varied between a newly-created Association based on tripartite support (Al-Hassan Workers' Centre) to a department or program within an international organization (CLMC and Caritas Jordan) and the result of a grassroots activists' campaign (MCCs). The ability of these MRCs to provide a wide range of services and facilities for migrants varies significantly, depending on human and financial resources of each MRC, but the creation of a strong referral network was an important mechanism for ensuring services to migrants even when they could not be covered by the MRC staff.

Strong engagement with employers and unions (in the case of the Al-Hassan Workers Centre) provided a number of advantages as stakeholders contributed to the initial costs for setting up and running the Centre, covering substantial costs of construction of the building, donating furniture and computers in-kind, landscaping and internet and communications services, computers and training. However, where employers (and sometimes unions) are viewed with apprehension by migrant workers, there may be difficulties in building the trust of workers – an observation that has also been made in the context of Singapore's MRC (see box 1).

The MRCs also varied in terms of whether they focussed only on service provision, or whether they also supported migrants to develop their own collective initiatives and campaigns. Those MRCs that focussed on building the self-capacity of migrant workers were also the ones to introduce membership-based systems, which could be seen to have key advantages – in that they bring a small amount of funds to support MRC activities, but more importantly create a sense of ownership and commitment. However, they can equally be a disincentive to migrants, if set too high. Other sources of funding would ultimately need to be found to ensure financial sustainability.

Outreach to migrant communities was considered a key priority, with MRCs applying a number of strategies including visiting churches, hosting cultural events, implementing radio programmes, introducing hotlines and social media platforms, and identifying 'community leaders'. These outreach strategies were crucial in getting core information to migrants regarding their rights, as well as attracting workers to the centres, but needed to be complemented with a sustainable provision of services and facilities. Given language barriers such outreach was often not easy but could be achieved by volunteers from the migrant communities.

In the absence of migrant worker unions (and limited representation of migrants by existing union federations), MRCs have provided an opportunity for migrant workers to share their challenges and experiences and perhaps find common ground with other migrants. However, to actually translate this grassroots solidarity into a change in living and working conditions, there needs to be a powerful collective voice – amplified through the trade union movement, with support from united civil society coalition.

It is clear that MRCs fill much needed gap in Arab States countries to provide accessible services to migrant workers and a safe meeting space, for both regular and irregular workers. Many more migrant workers could benefit if future MRCs were created, particularly in Gulf countries where no such facilities exist. Unions, CSOs, associations and religious organizations should consider whether they currently could support the establishment of such a centre – using the findings of this mapping as a guidance tool. The ILO is ready to support such initiatives where possible, with technical advice and other support.

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## Annex 1: List of interviews

Mr. Ramy Shukr, Beirut coordinator, MCCs (Lebanon), on July 31, 2017.

Ms. Zeina Mohanna and Ms. Maddi Maxwell Hart, Project Coordinators, Amel Association International (Lebanon), on August 4, 2017

Ms. Louloua Al-Rodaini, Human Line Organization (Kuwait), on August 6, 2017

Ms. Helene Bohyn, Project Coordinator, and Ms. Mervat Jemhawi, Advocacy Officer Al-Hassan Workers' Centre (Jordan), on August 7, and August 12, 2017 respectively.

Ms. Hessen Sayah, Head of the Migrant Department, CLMC (Lebanon), on August 9, 2017

Mr. Abdulrahman Al-Ghanim, Kuwait Trade Union Federation (Kuwait), on 23 August 2017.

Ms. Marie Constant, Secretary General of the Lebanon Domestic Workers' Union (Lebanon), on 24 August 2017

Mr. Omar Abawi, Programme Manager, Caritas Jordan, on August 25, 2017.

## SUMMARY

Migrant workers in the Arab states are commonly isolated by language barriers, by the remote nature of their workplaces and accommodation (whether private homes, construction sites or rural farms) and their long hours of work.

Having a welcoming, common space for them to meet and interact during their (limited) free time is an important basic right which can support their mental and physical health. Moreover, such a space can be particularly beneficial where it also functions as a 'one stop shop' allowing migrants to access needed services, and be educated and empowered as workers.

While the primary focus of such a centre may be providing information, advice, training, psycho-social and legal support services, by creating an opportunity for workers to meet and interact, MRCs may also offer a foundation for workers to organize, and strengthen their solidarity with unions (where they exist) to improve their labour and living conditions.

This brief mapping exercise identifies six such MRCs in the Arab States and examines how the centres were established, their objectives and activities, and how they are run and funded and collects information on what the centres themselves see as the achievements and challenges of their work.

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