



Issam Fares Institute for Public
Policy and International Affairs

معهد عصام فارس للسياسات
العامة والشؤون الدولية



International
Labour
Organization

Consultation on Policy Options for Domestic Work in the context of the care economy

Who cares?

19 September 2016, AUB, Issam Fares Institute, Beirut

Domestic worker is one category of work that is growing with larger numbers of women taking up this activity of paid employment, and often in countries other than their own. The sector is an inter-sectional social and economic trend linked to changes in the service economy affecting the delivery of care and household work. In Lebanon, there is an increased dependency¹ on migrant domestic workers to manage households and care for the elderly as the population ages. Yet this dependency is not reflected in further recognition of this sector, nor the adoption of policy measures that ensure protection for the workers.

Since the women domestic workers largely come from low income, and foreign backgrounds, the power equation between the employers and employees disfavours the latter. Workers' heightened need for income increases their vulnerability to forced labour. The need for regulating and protecting domestic workers, including migrants, has been debated and the ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers is one of the first ever International Labour Standard specifically focused on domestic workers.

The study that will be presented focuses on employers of migrant domestic workers. It was supported by the ILO and undertaken by the AUB funded by the EC and UK/DFID. It reveals that, the employer wields a great degree of power in determining the living and working conditions of a MDW. The inequities are created in part by a normative framework in Lebanon heavily dominated by a sponsorship system, known as kafala. Under kafala a worker's legal status is linked to one employer and the worker cannot unilaterally exit the employment relationship. The domestic workers' exclusion from labour legislation and social protection exacerbates the power imbalance. The study reveals why employers restrict workers' freedom of movement, the frequency of fulfilling their obligation in timely payment of wages, and their perception about the sponsorship system.

¹Increased number of work permits according to MOL data.

This initiative is part of the Work in Freedom (WIF) Programme, a technical cooperation project implemented in partnership with United Kingdom Department Aid aiming at reducing vulnerability to human trafficking and forced labour of women and girls from South Asia. The programme targets in particular domestic work and the garment sector in countries of origin and destination (Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Jordan and Lebanon). Key stakeholders include governments, trade unions, business and employers' associations, labour recruiters, NGOs, community-based organizations and women migrant workers and their organizations.

The growing demand for domestic workers among Lebanese employers and their approach to such work and their perception about workers' rights was examined through rigorous field surveys using quantitative and qualitative methods. On the other hand the living and working conditions of migrant domestic workers, and their own perspective on employers were also examined through another field survey. Both studies show that care and household work within the domestic spheres is largely the responsibility of women, whether as members of the households or as hired hands for carrying out these essential daily tasks.

In Lebanon, there is also a low presence of state provisioning of care services and social protection measures, amidst the diminishing fiscal spaces for public health, education and other social benefits. This has prompted demand for alternative cheaper avenues of private care provisioning and householder services. These policies of fiscal austerity combined with economic stagnation have also reduced the capacity of employers of domestic workers to pay decent wages.

More migrant women are supplying their labour for domestic work given the relatively ease of entry into this sector, and the active existing recruitment channels at origin and destination. This helps match up with the rising demands households especially with the additional specificities of need for elderly care which is not provided for by the State and hence shifts the employers' dependency on privately accessed domestic services. With limited mobility and space to enjoy their human rights, women migrant workers have to bargain and fight for their rights to the extent feasible. Some changes can be observed over time with Migrant Domestic Workers who voice their concerns about daily abuses, however Lebanon's law does not allow them to lead and organize collective bargaining efforts.

The main challenge hindering a more proactive approach from the Lebanese government in protecting migrant domestic workers, is that employers tend not to view such work as employment, nor do they give an importance to the care element of the job. On the other hand, skills are rarely compensated, and fees depend on nationality rather than years of experiences and skills acquired. The heart of the matter remains in the sponsorship system which makes the employer and the migrant worker tied together in a relationship which is often frustrating, without prospects of change.

The AUB Policy Institute (Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs) in collaboration with the ILO ROAS, within the framework of the Work in Freedom program are jointly organizing a consultation meeting on the 19th of September 2016 to bring attention to the issue of care economy and domestic work, engaging in a discussion around the findings of the above mentioned reports and come up with policy recommendations that recognizes skills of MDWs and enhance decent work conditions for migrant domestic workers in Lebanon.

The themes of this consultation meeting focus upon these dimensions in three sessions post the inaugural session. The first session after the inaugural session presents the main findings of the research study “Intertwined” which looks into the employers’ perspectives regarding migrant domestic work, women workers, wage returns, hiring mechanisms, preferences, and so on, encapsulating the demand-side scenario. It will be followed by comparative analysis on various studies that shed the light on the living and working conditions from the perspective of the workers, the recruitment practices, and the sponsorship system. The second panel focusses on the care economy in Lebanon linking it to trends and opportunities in the service economy affecting the delivery of care. The third session will be a group work to come up with policy suggestions informed by good practices from around the world around care economy and skilling.

Participants

Participants in the event will be representative of governments, employers, workers, recruitment agencies, NGOs, academia, international organizations, embassies, and donors.



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Agenda

Time	Session
9:00 A.M.- 9:30 A.M.	Registration and welcome coffee
9:30 A.M. – 10:00 A.M.	Inaugural Session <i>Nasser Yassine, Director of Research - IFI</i> <i>Hans Van De Glind, Senior Migration Specialist – ILO</i> <i>Nicola Di Luzio, Second Secretary & Human Rights Focal Point at British Embassy</i> Video: Voice of MDWs by Anti-Slavery International
10:00 A.M – 10:30 A.M	Tea/Coffee Break
10:30 A.M – 12:00 P.M	Session 1: studies on MDWs in Lebanon Keynote presentation of “Intertwined: Study of employers of MDWs” <i>Sawsan Abdulrahim - AUB</i> Discussants: <i>Nizar Sagiye, Legal Agenda</i> <i>Charlotte Karam, Associate Professor of Organizational Psychology -AUB</i> Comparative findings: literature review of studies on migrant domestic workers <i>Igor Bosc, Chief Technical Advisor WIF programme-ILO</i> <i>Zeina Mezher-National Programme Coordinator- ILO</i> Moderator: Rayan El-Amine, Assistant Director- IFI
12:00 P.M-1:00 P.M	Discussion
1:00 P.M-2:30 P.M	LUNCH Session 2: The context of care economy The Human face of Care <i>Lubna Izzidine, founding member- SANAD</i> The Care economy and the public sector <i>Joumana Haymour, Head of labour inspector department- Ministry of Labour</i> Moderator: <i>Emanuela Pozzan, Senior Gender Specialist- ILO</i>
	Discussion

2:30-P.M.-3:00 P.M
3:00 P.M-4:30 P.M

Tea/Coffee Break

Session 3: Policy Suggestions

Policy suggestions: Domestic work and Care economy
Igor Bosc, Chief Technical Advisor WIF programme-ILO

Group Work (three groups)

1. **Changing demographics, demand and skill sets:** this group will review demographic trends and recommend solutions
2. **Mustering capacity to pay for care:** this group will review public and private options to ensure capacity to pay wages and ensure decent work for migrant domestic workers including the role of remittances from Lebanese working abroad
3. **Tackling engendered expectations:** this groups will review a status quo scenario with increasing demand for elderly care, limited capacity ensure decent work, and what it means for migrant domestic workers and Lebanese households.

16:30-

Moderator: *Zeina Mezher, National Programme Coordinator- ILO*

Summing up and concluding session

Nasser Yassine, Director of Research, IFI

Hans Van De Glind, Senior Migration Specialist - ILO