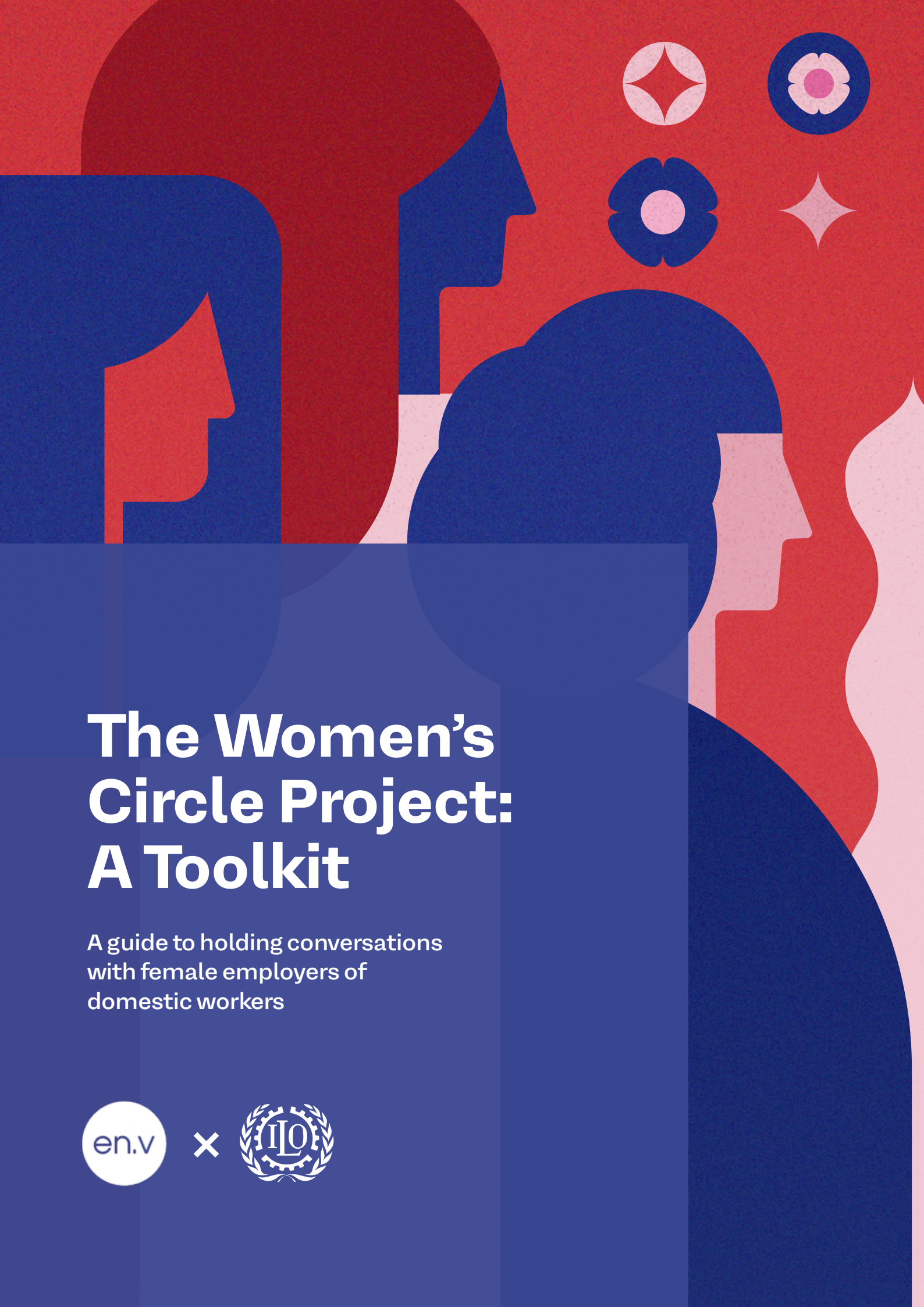




The Women's Circle Project: A Toolkit

A guide to holding conversations
with female employers of
domestic workers



Table of Contents

Introduction	01
Facilitation Notes	02
Values Discussion Prompt Cards	03
Values Clarification Worksheet	04
Values Exploration Worksheet	05
Model of Employer Relationships	06
Domestic Workers' Rights	07
Case Study: Khalida's Frustration	08
Case Study: Alia's Boundaries	09
Case Study: Jenna's Dilemma	10
Additional Resources	11

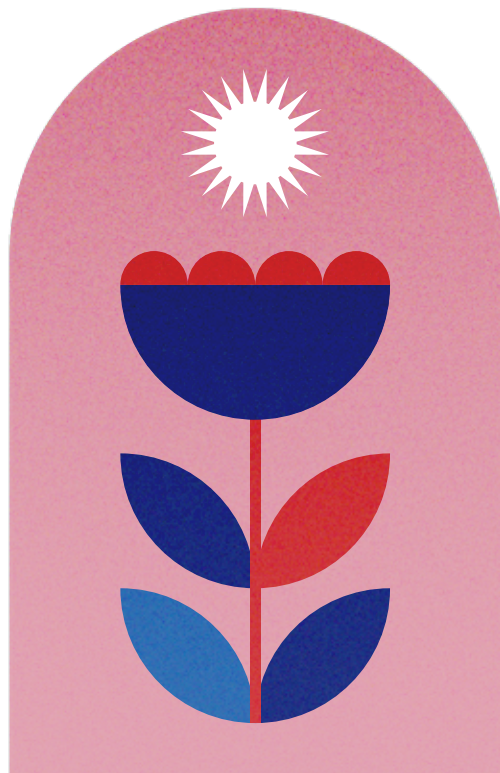
Project Overview

The Women's Circle project addresses the relationship between female employers of domestic workers and female migrant domestic workers through facilitated community dialogue. This project aims to shift employer mindsets, leading to improved relationships and increased fair treatment of workers.

The relationship between domestic workers and employers in Kuwait is more complex than that between an exploitative employer and an exploited employee. For generations, domestic workers have been an essential part of the Kuwaiti family, and for women, employing a domestic worker is a necessary part of fulfilling their social, familial, and professional roles. Previous research on employment practices in Kuwait has tended to focus more heavily on male employers or the experience of domestic workers. In reality, men are not usually involved in the management of female domestic workers, and domestic workers have little control over an employer's behavior.

According to migrant rights activists, the primary managers of female domestic workers are women, and most day-to-day abuse is perpetrated by female employers on female domestic workers. Although legal protections exist, employers and employees live together in the privacy of the home. This context makes enforcement of the law very challenging and is not enough to change employer behavior. To address the situation of domestic workers, it is essential to explore how female employers in Kuwait understand their relationships with the women that live and work in their homes and how they may be encouraged to shift their attitudes and behaviors.

Project Overview



¹ In the context of the Kafala system, the burden of change is on the employer because they hold more power in the relationship. Thus, takeaways from the employer interviews served as the primary resource for the development of this toolkit. Interviews with domestic workers were used to provide background for Training of Trainers participants on the worker experience.

In-depth interviews were conducted by Fulbright grantee, Meg Reamy, with Kuwaiti female employers and female domestic workers between September 2022 and January 2023.¹ This work served as a starting place to understanding this intimate relationship and the role of social and cultural norms in employer attitudes. The data indicates that many women who employ domestic workers do not necessarily identify as “employers”; therefore, campaigns promoting good employers and labor protections are unlikely to resonate with them.

Many are also not aware of the rights of workers. Those who are knowledgeable and try to enforce these rights may experience judgment from friends and family due to rejecting dominant cultural norms regarding the treatment of household workers. These findings underpinned the creation of the Women’s Circle project—an experimental, community-led project designed by en.v and funded by the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) FAIRWAY project.

Initially, 9 diverse female community leaders participated in a training of trainers workshop. This workshop equipped participants with data from the research and supplied them with the tools necessary to facilitate dialogue circles with women in their community. These women then took the toolkit and hosted their own circles with female employers. Their feedback, hard work, and dedication to improving relationships between employers and employees has been essential to the development of this toolkit.

¹ For more background on the Kafala system, please visit https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/WCMS_888441/lang-en/index.htm

Project Overview

Methodology

The Women's Circles project focuses on shifting mindsets through facilitated dialogue. All activities are learner-centered, values-based and experiential. Women in the circles are approached as allies with lived experiences that help us better understand the challenges facing the community in making these relationships better and safer for everyone. Women are asked to reflect on the values that define them, where those values originate, their ability to enact those values in their lives, and the barriers to enacting their personal values. This becomes then contextualized within an exploration of their enactment of values in their relationships with domestic workers. This methodology moves participants into a space of inquiry and cognitive dissonance, as they try to reconcile their personal values with how they operate as employers within the Kafala system.¹ This is a rich space for learning and growth. Participants are given the opportunity to see that everyone is to a greater or lesser degree struggling with these relationships. This conversation opens up a space to think about how those relationships can be improved, and legal protections become part of that discussion as well. Select pieces of data are brought into the discussion to highlight different ways that employers describe their relationships and to explore and deconstruct the dominant narratives about domestic workers. The toolkit includes case studies drawn from interviews with employers. Finally, the entire discussion is contextualized within the overarching framework of the Kafala system and dominant intergenerational norms around the treatment of workers.

Facilitating Your Own Women's Circle

The following toolkit is designed to help you hold a conversation with female employers of domestic workers within your own community, or chosen group. The toolkit includes facilitation notes, all of the activities and materials required, and an additional resource guide. The suggested time to hold a circle is 3 hours, and the recommended size of a circle is between 3 and 5 women. Due to the nature of the conversation, intimate groups can allow participants to engage vulnerably with themselves and one another. Ideally, prospective facilitators should attend a training on how to hold a Women's Circle or participate in a circle prior to facilitating this conversation. In the event that this is not possible, it is important to review all included materials and the provided background reading. These conversations can be challenging, so if you need additional support or have any questions, please contact en.v at env@envearth.com.

Project Overview

Outcomes

Through reflective work and intimate dialogue, women will begin to:

- Recognize that if they manage a domestic worker in their home, they are 'an employer'
- Question dominant narratives and norms about domestic workers
- Learn about the labour regulations they should follow
- Anticipate the challenges that they might face if they act outside of cultural norms
- Understand the limitations upon being a just employer in the Kafala system where there is a significant power imbalance with the worker
- Think about strategies, beyond adherence to the law, for being better managers or partners in their relationships with people they employ

Women's Circle Facilitation Notes

Total Time Needed
2.5-3 hours

Recommended Number of Participants
3-5

Ideally prospective facilitators should attend a training on how to hold a Women's Circle or participate in a circle prior to facilitating this conversation. In the event that this is not possible, it is important to review all included materials and the provided background reading. These conversations can be challenging, so if you need additional support or have any questions, please contact en.v at env@envearth.com.

01/ INTRODUCTION

Objective

Participants are oriented to the project background, objectives, and ground rules.
Time Needed: 5 minutes

Materials

None

Instructions

- a. Introduce the Women's Circles project and the ILO and how you came to be familiar with this work.
- b. Introduce yourself, touching on the fact that you are also a local resident who employs a domestic worker or has some kind of lived experience with this kind of relationship.
- c. Introduce why we're here and what we're going to be doing. Tonight we will be exploring our values and how we relate to the people who are employed in our homes. The discussion we have tonight will be to explore the experience of the employer and allow us to learn how to be better employers together.
- d. Discuss the ground rules for the session:
 - > The things that are said in the room stay in the room, but what is learned in the room is free to leave.
 - > There is no good or bad in this work, it is an acknowledgement of the complexity of these relationships and an exploration of how we can all do better.
 - > How do you want this session to run? What are some things that would make you more comfortable?

Women's Circle Facilitation Notes

02/ ACTIVITY 1: ICEBREAKER

Objective

Participants are introduced and start to share something intimate to get comfortable with one another.

Time Needed

10 minutes

Materials

None

Instructions

Ask the participants to introduce themselves and then share one strange or interesting thing about themselves that most people would not know.

03/ ACTIVITY 2: CARD GAME - VALUES DISCUSSION

Objective

Participants will start to become more comfortable with one another. Participants will reflect on the self and show up for one another in the context of our values orientation.

Time Needed: 30 minutes

Materials

Value Discussion Cards

Instructions

- a. Tell the group we will be having a discussion and show discussion cards.
- b. Ask one participant at a time to take a card from the pile. Whoever has a card will read it out and then each person will answer. The person with the card will also ask a follow-up question.
- c. Go in a circle until all the participants have had an opportunity to read a card.

Debrief

How did it feel to do this exercise? Do you have a lot of time in your daily life to pause to think about these things and reflect? How did you experience one another in sharing the answers to these questions? What was it like to have these conversations with people you are just meeting?

Women's Circle Facilitation Notes

04/ ACTIVITY 3: VALUES CLARIFICATION & ALIGNMENT

Objective

Participants gain clarity about what values they believe to be most important to them through a reflective and then forced choice exercise. Participants identify the cognitive dissonance between their values and how they enact them in their relationships with the people doing domestic work in their houses.

Time Needed

30 minutes

Materials

Values Clarification Worksheet

****Facilitation Note:** It is important to keep the conversation moving towards how participants' values do or do not align with the way they employ someone. Try not to get stuck in a self-help session.

Instructions

- a. Give each participant a handout and pen. This is individual work.
- b. Explain that they will look at this list and choose the 10 most important values to them on this list and to put an X by each one.
- c. Once they have finished, ask them to choose the 3 values that they feel are most important to them, and then rank those in order of importance from 1 to 3.

Debrief

What did this exercise feel like? Was it easy to choose the first 10? Was it easy or difficult to land on the final 3? And how did you prioritize those? What did it feel like to have to choose between things you valued? Was it comfortable in your body, did you feel good choosing less and less from your list? Does this remind you of anything in life? What was going on in your mind when you were sifting through the values and deciding which ones to keep? Did you just think of the value statement or did you imagine what it would be like in certain scenarios/contexts if you prioritized one over the other?

Follow-Up Discussion

What are your key values? How do you feel they align with how you act in the world? Your relationship to family, work, friendship, etc? If your values do align with your relationships, when has it been difficult to make them align? How does it feel when you see someone's actions or behaviors not align with your values? Do you feel like you are able to enact/embody these values in your relationship with the people you employ in your household? – In what ways does it not feel possible, and what might the reasons for that be?

Women's Circle Facilitation Notes

05/ ACTIVITY 4: VALUES EXPLORATION (OPTIONAL CAN BE GIVEN AS HOMEWORK)

Objective

Participants will start to be aware of influences upon their behaviors, attitudes, practices, and values related to being an employer of a domestic worker.

Time Needed

30 minutes

Materials

Materials: Values Exploration Worksheet

Instructions

- a. Give each of the participants a handout. Explain that we want them to reflect upon where their values about domestic workers and the role of an employer stem from. What are the roots to their own relationship to this role?
- b. Let participants know this exercise is private, but they are welcome to share anything that stood out to them.

****Facilitation Note:** If time is short, this activity can be skipped and given as homework or it can be replaced by a verbal exercise, using only the debrief questions to explore where participants' values come from. Please note that this conversation can be emotionally challenging for some individuals.

Debrief

Have your values and perspectives changed over time? Do your values differ from your family or society? Think of people whose behaviors you dislike or which make you uncomfortable, especially in relationship to treatment of workers. What does that tell you about your own values? How would you, or do you behave differently? If your values have changed over time, can you think of a life experience that has changed your values? How are you affected by that change now? We are not always able to align the values we hold with our actions. Some values may be difficult to live up to, or priorities may get in the way, or societal/family pressures may be strong. What would you need to change or focus to bring your values more in alignment in the future and what would you need to accomplish this?

06/ BREAK

Women's Circle Facilitation Notes

07/ ACTIVITY 5: EXPLORING MODELS OF EMPLOYER RELATIONSHIPS

Objective

Participants will encounter data that supports their experience, and begin to see their experience within a bigger context. Participants will become more knowledgeable and aware of common models of employer relationships. Participants will begin to encounter and question the oppression of the system they are inside of.

Time Needed

20 minutes

Materials

Model of Employer Relationships Handout

Instructions

- a. Give each participant a handout. Explain that we're going to be looking at some common relationship structures that exist between employers and domestic workers.
- b. Read the explanation for each relationship type listed on the handout.
- c. Allow participants to reflect on how these relationship models appear in Kuwait or their personal lives.

Debrief

Do you see yourself, your family members, or your friends on this chart? Is there an "ideal" relationship model? Are any of these models impossible in Kuwait? Why might that be?

08/ ACTIVITY 6: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE KAFALA SYSTEM AND LEGAL PROTECTION

Objective

Facilitator knows the participants' level of awareness about the Kafala system, legal rights, and limits to protection. Participants compare their perceptions with the law/labor rights and learn about the limits to the enforcement of legal protections as well as understanding some of the key systemic problems of Kafala that make it difficult to create an equitable employment model. Participants will recognize the systemic and normative injustices.

Time Needed

15 minutes

Materials

Domestic Workers' Rights & The Kafala System Handout and Prompts

Women's Circle Facilitation Notes

Instructions

- a. **Facilitator Background:** Facilitator will need this background to contextualize the impact of the Kafala system and legal protections.
 - > There are laws to protect domestic workers; however, there are also laws that protect the privacy of the home. A domestic worker must complain to the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) if they have a violation of their labor rights. It is not possible for PAM to do house visits or inspections. They must have enough evidence to get permission from authorities to enter the house. As this is difficult to do, it is unusual for complaints to be addressed.
 - > There are only approximately a dozen PAM inspectors to serve around 700,000 domestic workers. These PAM inspectors are also responsible for resolving all complaints between employers and recruitment agencies.
 - > Under Kafala, it is difficult for a worker to transfer employers or designation. While it is possible in theory, particularly in cases of abuse, the burden of proof still lies with the worker.
 - > While workers can report abuse, many workers who are in the worst situations have their phones taken from them the day they arrive, are never allowed out of their house, are not allowed to interact with other people in public, may not know where their house is located in the city, much less have access to money, time, freedom of movement and the knowledge or shared language to go to PAM to report abuse during the limited working hours of PAM.
 - > Under Kuwaiti law, a migrant domestic worker can be apprehended, convicted and deported if she 'absconds' from her employer (meaning that she leaves the house without the employer's permission). In some limited cases (where a domestic worker filed a complaint to PAM against her employer, and is staying at the 'migrant workers accommodation centre'), the employer may be blocked from filing an accusation of absconding. However, it is unclear how this protection operates in practice.
 - > Under the Kafala system, domestic workers do not have the right to live alone or with their families - they are required to live with their employer. Their right to change employers is very restricted. PAM has the authority to transfer the worker only in very specific and limited scenarios. Their ability to exercise their right to a day off, to a 12-hour working day and to their vacation leave is largely in the hands of their employer.
 - > Under Kafala, the employer does not hire the domestic worker directly, but must go through recruitment agencies, which are difficult to regulate and often engage directly in human trafficking. The employer is usually denied the right to interview prospective employees.
 - > According to the law, workers should be able to sign a contract in both English and Arabic. But in many cases, only an Arabic version may be given, or the worker does not read English and a copy is not provided in her language. Moreover, the terms of the contract may be different to those promised by the recruitment agency in the worker's country of origin.
 - > The balance of power between an employer and a worker under Kafala is very much skewed in favor of the former. No matter how good an employer might be, the employee depends on the employer's knowledge of and willingness to follow the law, respect their rights and learn about what they need for their well-being in the household. This project is about finding the best way to address the gaps in the system, with women employers as allies.

Women's Circle Facilitation Notes

- b. Facilitator can ask the following—these are general guides, but facilitator should listen carefully to the responses of the women in the circle and let them lead, because often they will ask some of these questions to each other in the discussion:
- > Are there legal protections for domestic workers in Kuwait?
 - > What do you think might be included in these regulations?
 - > How many hours do you think a domestic worker should work legally per day?
 - > What does a “day off” mean? How often are days off and how many hours?
 - > Do you have to pay end of service indemnity? What if someone worked for you for 30 years? Do they get indemnity for that whole time?
 - > If a domestic worker goes with the family to the chalet or for a family gathering on their day off, is that still a day off?
 - > Do you need to pay overtime or time and a half if you require a domestic worker to perform additional duties late into the evening or on a day off?
 - > Should an employer keep their employee's passport? Their Civil ID? Their phone?
 - > If you employ a domestic worker but a member of your family needs someone to work for them, can you just send them to work in another house? Can you charge a fee to switch their visa to another employer and move them to another house?
 - > What should a domestic worker do if she is being abused in her house?
- c. Hand out the Domestic Workers' Rights & The Kafala System Handout to participants.

Debrief

(Again, these are guidelines, but shape your debrief questions to be responsive to what has emerged in the preceding dialogue). How did it feel to think about these questions? Was it comfortable? Uncomfortable? Did you learn anything that surprised you in this discussion? Are there practices in your community or in your home that you just realized are illegal? Does it matter? If people in your community thought about these things or were aware of workers rights, do you think they would have any incentive to change their practices? Why or why not? Going back to the values exercise, do you imagine that people you know would prioritize their core values in their relationship to a woman living and working in their home over the power and privilege that having a domestic worker on call 24/7 affords them?

Women's Circle Facilitation Notes

09/ ACTIVITY 7: CASE STUDIES

Objective

Participants will work with case studies drawn from interviews with employers to identify power dynamics and possible strategies for different outcomes.

Time Needed

30 minutes

Materials

Case Study Handouts (1-3 depending on the size of the group)

Instructions

- a. Divide the participants into small groups and hand out the case studies.
- b. The groups will read the case studies and answer the questions provided at the bottom of the page amongst themselves.
- c. Ask the participants to share their insights and ideas with the group.

Debrief

What can we do to build trust with our employees and help domestic workers feel more safe and willing to stay in the household?

10/ ACTIVITY 7: CASE STUDIES

Objective

Participants will have a final reflection on the session and discuss any changes they'd like to make moving forward. Facilitator will have the opportunity to share additional resources with participants.

Time Needed

10 minutes

Materials

Additional Resources (labor law, background reading, alternate exercises, etc.)

Instructions

- a. Allow participants to share takeaways from the session.
 - > What are some of the things you learned?
 - > Is there anything you found challenging or hard to hear?
 - > What is something you would like to do differently moving forward?
 - > Would you be comfortable taking this conversation to other people in your circle?
- b. Share any desired additional resources with participants.



We'd love to hear about your experience using this guide to host a Women's Circle. Reach out to env at env@envearth.com to share your story.

Values Clarification

Your values are the beliefs that define what is most important to you. They guide each of your choices in life. For example, someone who values family might try to spend extra time at home while someone who values success in their career may do just the opposite.

Understanding your values will help you recognize areas of your life that need more attention and what to prioritize in the future.

Select the 10 most important items from the following list. Rank them from 1-10 with "1" being the most important item.

LOVE	NATURE	CREATIVITY	BALANCE
POPULARITY	HUMOR	RELAXATION	DIGNITY
WEALTH	JUSTICE	SAFETY	DIPLOMACY
FAMILY	LOYALTY	LUXOURY	HYGIENE
MORALS	INDEPENDENCE	CONNECTION	HYGIENE
SUCCESS	REASON	CONTROL	EXPERIENCE
KNOWLEDGE	HONOR	COOPERATION	INTUITION
POWER	BEAUTY	BRAVERY	IMPARTIALITY
FRIENDS	ACHIEVEMENT	AWARENESS	HOPEFULNESS
FREETIME	SPIRITUALITY	AVAILABILITY	DIRECTNESS
ADVENTURE	RESPECT	COMFORT	HELPFULNESS
VARIETY	PEACE	IMAGINATION	SELF-CONTROL
CALMNESS	STABILITY	FLEXIBILITY	ORGANIZATION
FREEDOM	WISDOM	PRIVACY	TRUST
FUN	FAIRNESS	RESOURCEFULNESS	SACRIFICE

Values Exploration

Your values are the things you believe are most important. Values help to determine your priorities in life and heavily influence decision-making. For example, a person who values wealth might prioritize their career while a person who values family might try to spend more time at home. When a person's actions do not match their values (e.g. valuing family, but working a lot), they may become discontent.

Today we would like you to consider your values through a specific lens which is the values you learned or observed growing up or those you notice in the present about being an employer, the values that people hold about the relationship between themselves and those they employ in the domestic setting.

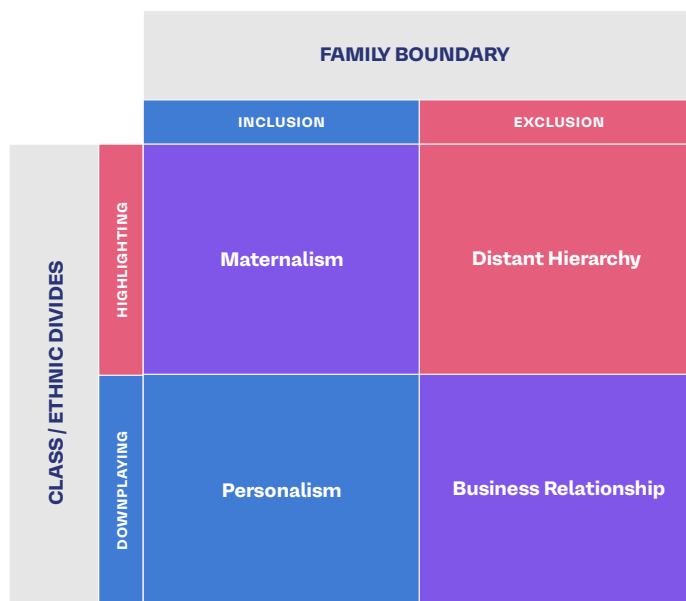
Values are often passed down by family, and the society you live in. To begin exploring your own values, think about the values of the people who surround you.

Your mother's values	Your father's values
01	01
02	02
03	03

The values of a person I respect	Society's values
01	01
02	02
03	03

The values I would like to live by	The values I actually live by
01	01
02	02
03	03
04	04

Model of Employer Relationships



The diagram is provided by Lan, Pei-Chia. (2003). Negotiating Social Boundaries and Private Zones: The Micropolitics of Employing Migrant Domestic Workers. *Social Problems*, 50(4), 525-549. The explanations have been adapted to fit the Kuwaiti context.

- Maternalism**

In this relationship, an employer attempts to include a domestic worker as a member of her family but positions herself as more powerful. Women in this relationship may see themselves as generous and caring, like a mother; however, this model defines workers as children who are unable to care for themselves. Example: "My domestic worker can't go outside of the house because it's dangerous. If I keep her inside, I can protect her."
- Distant Hierarchy**

In this relationship, an employer highlights her power and does not view her domestic worker as a member of the family. Women in this relationship often maintain strict boundaries and distance themselves from interacting with their domestic worker outside of necessary communication. Example: "This is my house. My domestic worker is a worker, not my friend. They need to follow my rules and not ask any questions."
- Personalism**

In this relationship, an employer tries to downplay her power and include her domestic worker as a member of the family. Women in this relationship are often uncomfortable with hierarchy and try to get to know their domestic worker as an individual with interests and goals outside of their job. Example: "My domestic worker is part of our family team. She's taking classes online right now, so I have to understand that sometimes she's going to need to reschedule her work so she can do her homework."
- Business Relationship**

In this relationship, an employer tries to downplay power structures but prefers to keep a professional rather than a familial relationship. Women in this relationship understand domestic work as a job with working hours, rest periods, and clearly defined tasks, often applying their own professional experiences as a guide. This relationship becomes difficult to maintain when a domestic worker lives with their employer. Example: "Domestic work is a job like any other job. I am her boss, but she has rights as a worker."

Domestic Workers Rights

Domestic Workers' Rights

- > One Day Off Per Week
- > Contract
- > Annual Paid Leave
- > A 12 Hour Work Day with Breaks
- > Monthly Salary, Paid on Time
- > Overtime Pay
- > Payment at End of Service
- > Food/Clothing/Housing
- > Medical Treatment
- > Passport/Civil ID
- > Mobile Phone
- > Decent Treatment (free from mental, physical and verbal abuse or exploitation)

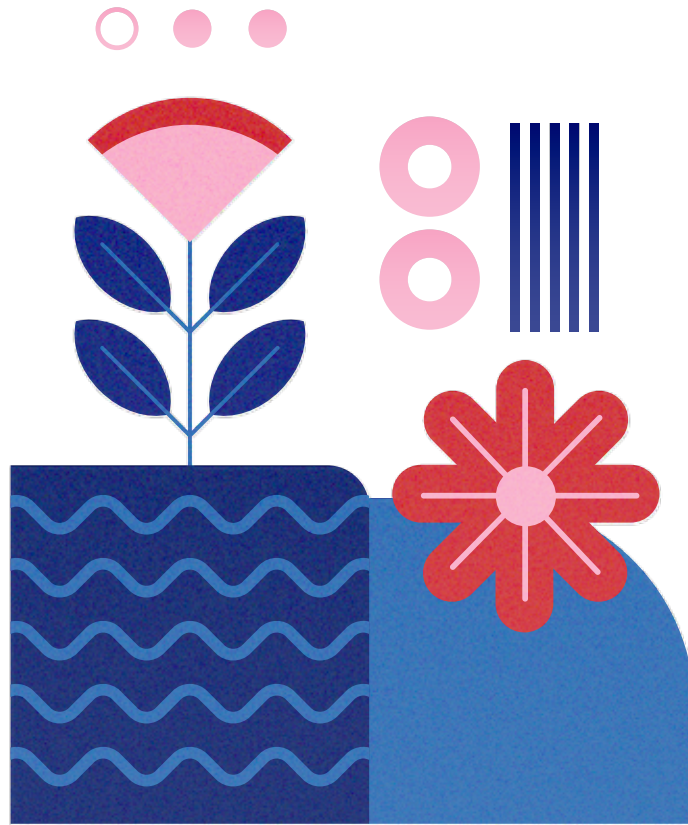
The Kafala System

The Kafala system is the labor sponsorship system used in Kuwait. Migrant workers need a Kuwaiti sponsor colloquially called a 'kafeel' in order to enter the country. In the Kafala System, without their employer's written permission, an employee cannot:

- > Change Employers
- > Enter/Leave the Country

Moreover, domestic workers are legally obligated to live with their employers. There IS a domestic worker law in Kuwait. However, it becomes very difficult to implement the law and monitor relationships that happen behind closed doors. The Kafala system effectively gives employers relatively unchecked power. Because of this, abuse is very common. Some of the reported abuses include:

- > Underpayment/Non-payment
- > Excessive Workload
- > Forced Confinement
- > Passport Confiscation
- > Verbal Abuse
- > Psychological Abuse
- > Physical Abuse
- > Sexual Abuse



There are more than

700,000

domestic workers in Kuwait.

There are very few resources available for following up on domestic worker complaints. Once someone employs a domestic worker under the Kafala system as it exists, the employer holds significant power over another person.

No matter how good an employer might be, the employee must trust their entire well-being to the employer's knowledge of and willingness to follow the law, respect their rights and learn about what they need for their well-being in the household. In such a system, where inequity is baked in, even the best of employers will fail. This project is about finding the best way to address the gaps in the system, with women employers as allies.

Case Study 01

Khalida's Frustration: A Case Study on Employer-Domestic Worker Relationships

Listen to Khalida's Story

Khalida works hard in the private sector and is proud of her position and her independence. In her home, she employs different domestic workers who help her manage her household's needs because she is busy. Khalida makes sure that her domestic worker has a comfortable room and three meals a day.

However, when Khalida is asked about the domestic workers' days off, she becomes vague and uncertain, not clear on the exact details of their arrangement. When asked, Khalida will point out that she doesn't hit, physically abuse, or curse at the people who work in her house. She thinks it is important to give them their rights and respect them so that you ensure a good relationship and not create any unintended consequences for your household. Khalida feels she manages to treat her staff in a very professional and business-like manner.

Khalida says, of course, there are things that make her really furious, like when the housekeeper doesn't remember the list of things they need to replace in the kitchen or when she breaks her crystal glasses or maybe forgets to lock one of the doors at night. Khalida says she does not have the time to check what is needed in the kitchen or get up and check the house's door at night---and as for the clumsiness of breaking the glasses!! This is the housekeeper's job, and when she doesn't pay attention, it makes Khalida feel really upset. What if it happens a few times? Is it Khalida's fault that she gets mad and might yell at the housekeeper for her mistakes? In an office what would happen if you messed up your job tasks? Khalida says it is not her fault if she loses her temper about this kind of thing and sometimes her domestic worker might think they don't have a good relationship.

This is not fair! Her domestic worker made her get upset! Khalida said the worker should look at how she acts, not how she reacts, and understand that when Khalida gets upset it is just because the worker has caused the situation by repeatedly messing up her job. She believes that it is essential to have a system of rewards and punishments in order for the relationship to work so that the workers in her house understand there are consequences for their actions. She should not have to take all the responsibility for the things they do wrong. That is not fair. She thinks it is important to make sure the employee's rights are respected, that they are paid on time, and that they get their rest time, but she tries to treat repeated mistakes professionally by deducting money from the salary of the employee. This way the employee must acknowledge their responsibility in making a mistake. But she also rewards them, giving them taxi fare on their day off, picking up special food for them, and giving them gifts. It's important to show appreciation as well as to have a way to punish poor work. Khalida thinks it is not good to take money from them because that is the only reason they are in Kuwait, but she cannot think of another way to handle big mistakes by her staff.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the key issues that stand out for you in this case?
2. Can you identify any cognitive dissonance or lack of alignment between values and actions?
3. Can you identify where there is an imbalance of power in the relationship?
4. Is there anything you would change in this relationship?



Case Study 02

Alia's Boundaries: A Case Study on Employer-Domestic Worker Relationships

Listen to Alia's Story

Alia has hired a housekeeper who she really likes. In her mother's house, the relationship with their household staff was formal. She was not encouraged to be friendly with the people who lived in her house. She was supposed to be polite and not share anything personal.

However, she finds herself alone a lot with Bastia, the woman who is working for her. At first, they rarely spoke, but then one day, Alia wanted to talk to someone when she was struggling with something personal, and she just naturally ended up talking to Bastia about her issue. This happened three or four times, and then Alia asked one of her close friends about it—was it weird that she was having these conversations with Bastia? Alia's friend laughed and said, "No no, you should take advantage of it! I have my khadama put oil in my hair or give me a massage whenever I feel like it!!".

Since that conversation, Alia has felt like she could talk to Bastia about anything, and Bastia always listens to her carefully and is very kind and patient when she has an issue to discuss, even pausing in her tasks when Alia needs a shoulder to cry on. She is so lucky to have Bastia working in her house—just yesterday, she was laughing and telling her friend that Bastia is like having a live-in therapist! Bastia must feel lucky to have Alia as an employer especially because she seems to have her own problems—Alia saw her crying the other day, but was too busy to chat, but at least Bastia works for someone who cares for her, even if Bastia might have her own problems in her life. Bastia never lets whatever is bothering her interfere with taking the time to support Alia—she is amazing!

The one little thing that bothers Alia is that sometimes Bastia doesn't really respect her personal space or her privacy. She has made it clear that she doesn't like anyone to clean her closet for her, but a couple of days ago, Bastia went and cleaned her closet top to bottom. Alia has always been clear that the closet is off limits, and she felt uncomfortable having to remind Bastia. It's important that while Bastia feels close to her and knows that Alia is kind, Bastia should not misunderstand and feel free to do things that Alia has expressly asked her to refrain from. Alia felt very uncomfortable when she had to talk to Bastia about the closet and the energy between them has felt a little bit different over the past few days. Alia is sure that Bastia will get over it, but she worries maybe Bastia is judging her for the things in her closet, and that is just not right. After all, Bastia works for her and should understand that there are limits.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the key issues that stand out for you in this case?
2. Can you identify any cognitive dissonance or lack of alignment between values and actions?
3. Can you identify where there is an imbalance of power in the relationship?
4. Is there anything you would change in this relationship?



Case Study 03

Jenna's Dilemma: A Case Study on Employer-Domestic Worker Relationships

Listen to Jenna's Story

Jenna and her husband have hired the cousin of the woman who works in her mother-in-law's house. Jenna is newly married and has never had a live-in domestic worker before. Rosie seems hardworking and mature. Jenna pays a good salary and makes sure that Rosie works reasonable hours and gets her day off once a week. She gives Rosie an additional allowance to pick up the food or other personal things she might want because Jenna really doesn't know what she would prefer to prepare herself as meals. Of course, Rosie is welcome to eat the same food as the family, but Jenna has asked directly what Rosie prefers to eat and it is not what they usually serve.

Once a week they all go to Jenna's in-laws' house for a meal and evening with the whole family. Ever since Jenna hired Rosie, she is having problems with her in-laws. They want her to come to the family meal with Rosie to help with dinner service and clean-up. The message is clear—if you are part of the evening meal, then your helper should be there as part of the clean up. Jenna reluctantly agrees, but usually Rosie is in bed by 8:30pm, and at the family house, the evening ends at midnight. Jenna tried to talk to her sisters-in-law about this after dinner but was surprised when they told her that she should not pay Rosie as much or give her a day off. They told Jenna that she needed to understand that most of the maids are thieves and that they cannot help it, they are miskeen.

They come from the village and maybe they didn't get to finish school, so they don't know better. If Jenna lets Rosie go out on Fridays, she could get in trouble—either put in danger by men or knowingly find a boyfriend. She might get pregnant and then what will Jenna do? Jenna needs to take care of Rosie so she doesn't get herself into trouble—remember, they say, these women are like children. You should treat Rosie as your daughter and protect her because she is from the village. Also, Rosie will be spoiled by her salary and days off and all the things Jenna is doing for her. It is causing problems for the in-laws already because Rosie's cousin has told all the other maids from all the in-laws' houses about Rosie's day off and salary. Now everyone else is going to get these demands from their staff and before Jenna came along, everyone was happy. They tell her she just doesn't get it—these workers live in horrible situations in their home countries and are so lucky to work for families that don't abuse them—she is just paying too much. Rosie is lucky to work in a nice house with a nice family—no need for the day off or the higher salary. Her in-laws insist that Rosie will take advantage of Jenna if she is nice because the staff think Kuwaitis are made of money.

Jenna leaves her in-laws house, wondering how to answer them the next time she has this conversation with them because she knows she hasn't heard the end of it. Maybe it isn't worth the trouble of arguing with her husband's family and she should just change what she is doing, but this doesn't feel right to her. On the other hand, she doesn't want to escalate conflict with the family.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the key issues that stand out for you in this case?
2. Can you identify any cognitive dissonance or lack of alignment between values and actions?
3. What do you think are the elements at play in the way that Jenna's relationships are playing out in her household? What about in relation to her larger family structure?
4. What would you do if you were in Jenna's shoes?

Additional Resources

If you are looking for additional information not provided in the Women's Circle Toolkit, we invite you to visit the resources listed below.

Labor Rights & The Kafala System

Legal

- [Law No. 68 of 2015 on Employment of Domestic Workers](#)
- [The Ministerial Decision No. 22 of 2022 of Executive Regulations of the Law No. 68 of 2015 Concerning Domestic Workers](#)
- [The Domestic Worker Law \(Kuwait Society for Human Rights & Department of Domestic Labor\)](#)
The domestic worker law in Kuwait. Available in English and Arabic.
- [Kuwait: Regulatory Framework Governing Migrant Workers \(International Labour Organization\)](#)
A succinct chart summarizing the legal rules for domestic workers and private sector workers. Available in English only as of May 2023.
- [Domestic Workers' Legal Guide \(One Roof\)](#)
A legal guide for domestic workers detailing laws that directly pertain to domestic work and information about where individuals may raise a complaint, report an incident, or ask for help. This guide was created when domestic workers still fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior (prior to 2018). Some sections are no longer accurate. Available in English, Arabic, Tagalog, and Amharic.
- [Your Guide to Employing a Migrant Domestic Worker in Kuwait \(MigrantRights.org\)](#)
A guide for employers to use throughout the recruitment and employment process to help facilitate a healthy and mutually beneficial working relationship. Available in English only.

The Kafala System

- [Making Decent Work a Reality for Domestic Workers in the Middle East: Progress and prospects ten years after the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 \(No. 189\) \(International Labour Organization\)](#)
Examines the situation of domestic workers regionally and outlines areas for future reform. Available in English and Arabic.
- [Employer-Migrant Worker Relationships in the Middle East: Exploring scope for internal labour market mobility and fair migration \(International Labour Organization\)](#)
An overview of the Kafala system and policy recommendations. Available in English and Arabic.

Human Trafficking & Fair Recruitment

- [ILO Indicators of Forced Labour \(International Labour Organization\)](#)
Definitions and examples of forced labor. These indicators help readers understand how forced labor occurs and how it affects its victims. Available in English and Arabic.
- [Recruitment to the Gulf: Challenges and Solutions \(MigrantRights.org\)](#)
An interactive tool that walks users through the differences between ethical recruitment and human trafficking. Available in English and Arabic.

Additional Activities and Exercises

Identity, Power, Privilege

- [Social Group Membership Profile Handout](#)
- [Privilege Mapping Handout](#)
- [Adapted from Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack \(Peggy McIntosh\)](#)
Tools to help individuals reflect on their identity and where they hold unearned privilege. Available in English only.
- [The Wheel of Social Identity \(Recipes for Wellbeing\)](#)
A tool to help map visible and invisible social identities. Available in English only.
- [The Wheel of Privilege and Power \(Recipes for Wellbeing adapted from Sylvia Duckworth\)](#)
A tool to help map marginalization in an intersectional way. Available in English only.

Conflict Resolution & Communication

- [The Ladder of Inference \(Recipes for Wellbeing\)](#)
An activity that helps minimize misunderstanding. Available in English only.
- [Active Listening \(Recipes for Wellbeing\)](#)
An activity that promotes understanding and helps improve communication through listening. Available in English only.
- [Compassion Meditation \(University of California Berkeley\)](#)
A meditation designed to strengthen compassion for someone who is different from you. Available in English only.

Facilitation Resources & Additional Support

- [Holding Space: Notes for Facilitators \(Dr. Ayesha M. Kamal 2023\)](#)
A guide for facilitators about how to hold space for participants during difficult conversations.

Contact Us

For questions regarding facilitation or holding your own Women's Circle, please contact: en.v en.v@envearth.com

To report an incident or file a complaint as a domestic worker, please contact: Electronic Protection Services
domestic.workers@manpower.gov.kw

