



## PRE-DEPARTURE / SENDING COUNTRY RECRUITMENT AGENTS

The international NGO Voices International (VI) produced a set of five Info Notes together with migrant domestic workers (MDWs) and their community leaders over the course of a six-month research project in 2010/2011 funded by the Government of Ireland. The Info Notes highlight obstacles faced by foreign domestic workers during their travel to and employment in Lebanon.

VI is working closely with the MDW community to have their rights as workers recognised and their recommendations for changes to immigration and employment systems implemented. The five Info Notes have been developed for the migrant domestic community to assist in highlighting needs and asking for change.



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### WHAT MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS SAID

“I want more than the food. It is not a life - that we strive all the time just to get some food on our table. So I wanted more money, just for the education of the kids. Because I know well that if they are educated, they will get jobs in the future.”

Sri Lankan woman on why she decided to work in Lebanon

“All Arabic. They speak Arabic. Nothing Bangladesh. Everybody have problem when come from Bangladesh. They don't know English or Arabic; this is a big problem.”

Bangladeshi man describing the lack of preparation in the home country

“Well, they will tell you, arriving here (...) you won't work in houses. There are many sisters, they arrived with diplomas. But they came, they arrived and they found themselves in houses. And she says, 'But what is this, he hasn't told me that'.”

Beninese woman on being misled about her work in Lebanon

### WHAT MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS HIGHLIGHTED

#### Background: Lack of protection under Lebanese labour law

Domestic workers are excluded from the 1946 Lebanese Labour Law. The general Lebanese law relating to contract (the General Contractual Obligations Law of 1932) currently provides the only legal framework on employment for MDWs.

In 2009 the Lebanese Ministry of Labour introduced a much needed Unified Contract for MDWs that outlines employers' and workers' rights and obligations. While the contract guarantees certain basic rights, it provides inadequate protection against a number of common workers' rights violations.

To date there is also no effective mechanism in place to monitor use and compliance with the contract and none of the MDWs that participated in this research knew of the contract more than one year after its introduction.

**Recruitment in Home Country** - MDWs come to Lebanon through recruitment agencies based in the countries of origin, through friends and family already working in Lebanon or Lebanese business people. Because there are so many recruitment processes, it is hard to regulate the contracts and working conditions of the workers before they arrive in Lebanon. Workers recruited through agencies often have to sign away their first three months' salary and the contract they sign in general does not follow the 2009 Lebanese Unified Contract. Workers arrive in Lebanon with little knowledge about the legal system, their rights or, in some cases, their job.

**Training** - The agencies do not sufficiently prepare MDWs for their employment and the Lebanese culture before their departure, nor do they adequately expose them to the Arabic language. For many workers communication problems upon arrival are a major obstacle. In countries like Sri Lanka, there are mandatory training programs that teach basic Arabic language and how to operate Lebanese household items such as cookers or irons. However, participants mention that this training is not enough to prepare a worker.

**Travel Bans** - Some countries ban workers from travelling to Lebanon due to poor working conditions or the security situation. This however does not stop MDWs from entering Lebanon, but instead makes them more vulnerable. The bans make it harder to regulate agencies and can force migrants to make longer journeys through third countries exposed to illegal traffickers or agencies. Upon arrival in Lebanon they end up having fewer support networks. The bans also severely restrict MDWs already in Lebanon, who cannot return home for fear of not being able to return for work.

## WHAT MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS CALLED FOR

### **Sending country governments should:**

- Monitor recruiters and agencies in their own countries so MDWs can avoid “illegal” agencies
- Ensure the cooperation of the Lebanese Embassy/ Consulate in the region to enforce own travel bans
- Provide information about contacts/places to go if there is problem after arrival

### **Lebanese Embassy/Consulates should:**

- Provide honest and detailed information about the situation and employment in Lebanon
- Promote the use of the Unified Contract in the sending country
- Cooperate with the sending country to enforce travel bans

### **Recruitment agents in sending country should:**

- Provide honest and detailed information about the situation and employment in Lebanon
- Interview workers to make sure that they are qualified for the work
- Give workers a chance to introduce themselves to their employer through a cover letter with the application
- Provide orientation training about culture, language and work in Lebanon
- Sign a contract with the MDW in the local language which reflects the actual work to be performed
- Conduct medical and psychological tests after return to the home country

### **Lebanese and home-country civil society should:**

- Connect to raise awareness and support for MDWs

**“eVeryone deserves to be heard”**

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