



ARRIVAL / LEBANESE 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.



WHAT MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS SAID

“The first night that I arrived I had to stay in a small room at the airport. I slept on the bench. There was no food, nothing. All the domestics waiting for the employer are placed in this one room as soon as they arrive. (...) I was lucky, I didn't have too bad an experience at the airport. I was just without food for a whole day. But another girl waiting with me - her employer was coming from Baalbek - got assaulted by someone at the airport. You know it is very unsafe there at night.”

Filipina woman on her experience at the airport upon arrival

“But here with the lady of the second house, they made me sign a contract here in Lebanon in Arabic. Well, I didn't know the content. (...) I told them, 'Why is there no translation? I sign what I don't know?' They told me, 'That's how it is'. Well, no translation and everything. That means they have the right to do what they want.”

Cameroonian woman about not knowing the content of her contract

“And when you will tell the madam that, when you will complain, what she will do? She will take you to the agency here. And what will the agency do for you? Will beat you. 'Why you are no good in the house? Why you do this, do this? You have to do everything that the madam tell you!' You see, big problem. They will beat you, you will go again to that house.”

Congolese woman about the lack of support and abuse by the agency

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.

Arriving at the airport - Most MDWs arrive in Lebanon without any information about the immigration process, the country and their employers or work conditions. They have to hand over their passports to General Security and are forced to wait for hours or even days in a waiting room until they are picked up by their employer. There are no telephones and toilets in the airport room and most MDWs do not have the relevant contact details to contact the agency or the employer. Arriving at the workplace employers very often ask the worker to start work immediately without giving them time to rest or any kind of introduction.

Recruitment Agency - The Lebanese recruitment agency does not check the employer's suitability to hire a MDW. The employer receives no training or information on his/her responsibilities as an employer. MDWs themselves do not receive any training, orientation and support from the agency after their arrival and are unaware of their rights as workers in Lebanon. Workers often only meet the agency after a problem arises. Problems are rarely solved by the agency. They just send them to another family or force them to stay in the house where they face abuse. Accounts of abuse by the agency are many. Some workers are sent to employers that are known to have abused their worker in the past.

No standard contract - Most MDWs do not sign a contract or do not know the content because the contract is in Arabic. None of the MDWs that participated knew of the Unified Contract drawn up by the Ministry of Labour. VI also learned that in almost all cases, Lebanese agencies take an illegal deduction of the first three months' salary without most workers knowing about this deduction in advance.

WHAT MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS CALLED FOR

Sending country representatives in Lebanon should:

- Witness the contract of their nationals being signed to ensure that the worker understands
- Regularly monitor employment conditions

Lebanese Government should:

- Airport authorities should call the employer to ensure a prompt pick up
- Improve facilities at the airport including providing telephones, clean waiting areas/toilets and protect workers from sexual/ physical/verbal abuse
- Ensure the use of the Unified Contract translated in the worker's own language
- Enforce the use of the Unified Contract including witnessing all contracts signed
- Monitor recruitment agents

Lebanese recruitment agents should:

- Provide and use the Unified Contract in the worker's own language
- Perform background checks on all potential employers and give training on good employment practices
- Provide a place to rest after arrival and orientation to give information about workers' rights in Lebanon
- At a minimum perform a home check after one week in country and speak directly to MDW to check on welfare

“eVeryone deserves to be heard”

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