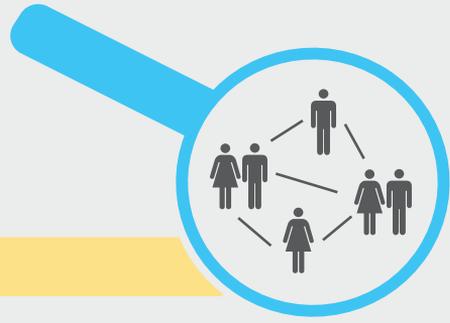


MIGRANTS IN COUNTRIES IN CRISIS

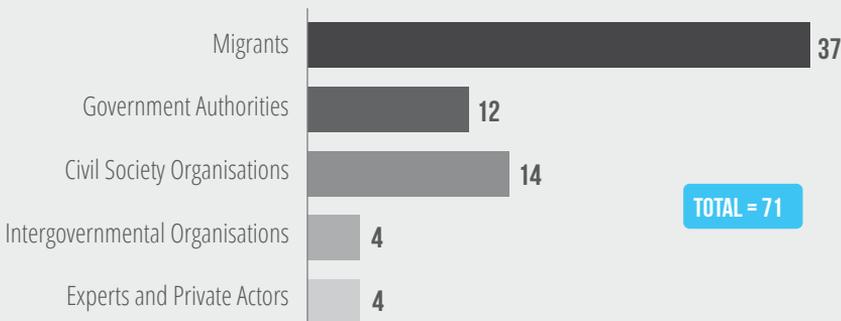
LEBANON FACT SHEET



FOCUS

The situation of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon and the impact of the 2006 crisis on this group

INTERVIEW DATA (FEBRUARY-JULY 2016)



CONTEXT

TIMELINE



MIGRANT RESPONSES

SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION OF MIGRANTS

- Poverty and unemployment in country of origin major push factor
- Wages differ by nationality – Filipinos highest level, Bangladeshis lowest
- Education and language skills impact socio-economic status and knowledge of rights
- Access to support varies based on living situation and employer

During the 2006 crisis, some migrant domestic workers became active in helping ‘trapped’ domestic workers from their own as well as from other countries. Some retell how they collaborated with their embassies and with Caritas to help locate and evacuate those who wished to leave or who were abandoned by their employers. Notably, migrant domestic workers do not express significant impacts on their own lives or those of their community due to the 2006 crisis, and do not view it as a crisis for themselves or the wider community of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. Nonetheless, the crisis was a turning point that directly or indirectly pushed migrant domestic workers to organise, coordinate and come together as a community. As a result they started to form associations and meet whenever and in whichever way possible, to discuss their daily problems, raise awareness on their common plight and educate each other on their rights.

Although crisis events can have significant impacts on migrant domestic workers, migrant domestic workers rather understand and experience ‘crises’ more broadly, and occurring more regularly for them in their lives (i.e. recurring or ‘everyday crises’). Many feel that they are in a precarious situation, due to their challenging legal situation, with limited labour protections, their feeling of absolute reliance on their individual employer, and their lower socio-economic status in the country. In response, they often count on others in their national communities, as well as CSOs, for financial or legal support when the situation requires it.



People would call me asking for help during the 2006 crisis, my phone became a hotline. It still exists as a hotline.

(Filipina migrant domestic worker in Lebanon, 50 years old)

2006:

- Inter-Ministerial Committee on domestic workers
- Deployment ban for emigration from Philippines

2010:

Task Force established for the National Response Framework for Disaster Management

2012:

Philippines lifts ban on labour emigration to Lebanon of skilled workers, after signature of MoU

2013:

Emigration ban of Ethiopian domestic workers

2014:

Judge ruling against an employer withholding domestic workers' passport

2015:

Domestic workers union established, under General National Federation of Trade Union of Workers and Employees (FENASOL) in Lebanon, not recognised by Ministry of Labor

POST-CRISIS



INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

During the 2006 crisis, Lebanese and the country of origin authorities were caught unawares with regard to responding to the migrant domestic worker population in the country, and most did not have a sufficient contingency plan yet in place. However, the General Directorate of General Security (GS) demonstrated flexibility and cooperation with Caritas in releasing and evacuating domestic workers from the country, especially irregular migrants held in the GS detention centre at the time. Caritas was also instrumental in assisting embassies in processing and evacuating their nationals.

In part as a response to the 2006 war, and reports of abuse of migrant domestic workers in the country, several countries of origin of migrant domestic workers have implemented emigration bans on their nationals migrating to Lebanon. Although the intention of such bans was to protect their nationals from potential abuse or risky situations, in practice they have often led to increases in irregular migration (including trafficking) to Lebanon. Thus several countries have re-evaluated the use of such bans, as well as how best to respond to their irregular population in the country.

Civil society has emphasised the need for more efforts of Lebanese and country of origin authorities in protecting domestic workers' rights and improving their situation in the country in general, including changes to how the system is organised through sponsors and recruitment agencies, which can lead to abuse. From the Lebanese government side, although there have been several initiatives aiming at improving responses to and protections of migrant domestic workers in the country, a political stalemate over the presidency in recent years has reportedly in part stalled movement on this issue.

LEGAL SITUATION OF MIGRANTS

- Legal status tied to individual sponsor through *kafala* system
- Sponsors often retain migrants' identity documents
- Domestic work excluded from Lebanese Labour Law protections
- Irregular migrants face incarceration and deportation



It's not beyond the capacity of both governments to address the needs of migrant domestic workers – what matters is the willingness to regulate it.

(Ethiopian Consulate General, Lebanon)



POLICY LEARNING



We don't forget [about issues related to migrant domestic workers], but donors forget."

(Ministry of Social Affairs, Lebanon)

The majority of stakeholders lacked awareness of any specific policy changes based on the 2006 crisis. There have been a limited number of relevant changes in Lebanon in the period since that highlight the higher priority migrant domestic worker issues have taken: the development of a national contingency plan for cases of acute humanitarian crises (although not including responses to migrants), the work of the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee on domestic workers, and the prioritisation of domestic worker issues by the Human Rights Committee of Parliament. The primary development has been framed rather as a reflection on societal changes in mind set and approach to domestic workers, as well as economic necessity.

For country of origin authorities, with the exception of the Philippines which has a well-developed contingency plan, there is similarly a limited amount of learning on crisis response, in part due to diplomatic staff turnover. However, following the 2006 crisis, both the Philippines and Ethiopia instituted emigration bans of their nationals to the country, due to the security situation. While these bans were meant to protect their citizens, it has led to irregular migration of their nationals, including increases in issues such as illegal recruitment, trafficking in persons and insufficient pre-departure preparation. In line with this, Ethiopia is reassessing its labour migration legislation in view of potentially lifting this ban. The Philippines lifted its ban for skilled workers in 2012, upon negotiation of a Memorandum of Understanding with Lebanon on labour cooperation.

The past 10 years have also been important in terms of strengthening of migrant associations – through meetings, events, and social networking activities – and local non-governmental organisations recently established or engaging with migrant domestic worker issues. Together they have taken the plight of migrant domestic workers to Lebanese society through awareness raising campaigns, as well as to government officials and institutions through legal and political advocacy. The recent focus of intergovernmental organisations, particular the International Labour Organization's work on domestic work in preparation for the Domestic Workers Convention (C189), have also placed this issue on the international and national stage.

Finally, the research has also noted the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis in the country. Its primary impact has been a diversion of the attention of the Lebanese government, civil society and international actors, from the plight of migrant domestic workers to focus on the urgent humanitarian issues. Even before the development of a national contingency plan for crises in general, the Lebanese government developed a crisis response strategy to the Syrian refugee crisis involving all relevant stakeholders and establishing management and coordination structures. This crisis has not, however, had a significant impact on migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. Although some Syrians have entered the domestic work sector, they primarily work in the informal sector and for families who could previously not afford recruitment costs for hiring a migrant domestic worker.



The situation improved after the 2006 war due to open channels and communications. People started to think of connecting with each other and communicating, the war alarmed them – they could have died and no one would ever know it.

(Cameroonian migrant domestic worker in Lebanon, 46 years old)

Project funded by the European Union



Project implemented by ICMPD



In partnership with IMI

