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**Reducing Vulnerability to Forced Labor and Trafficking of Short-Term,
Low-Skilled Women Migrant Workers in the South Asia to Middle East
Corridor**

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Abstract

Millions of female migrants experience various forms of exploitative and unsafe conditions when migrating for employment and income generation, both in countries of origin and in destination countries. Vulnerabilities increased further due to the Covid-19 pandemic, causing income and job losses, entrapment in countries of destination without financial or social support and stigmatization upon return. One of the key migration routes travelled by millions of migrants is from South Asia to the Middle East. We examine this migration route for low-skilled female migrant workers highlighting the impacts of interventions along the migration pathway to determine the effectiveness of alternative mechanisms for reducing forced labour and trafficking. We draw lessons from the literature as well as from interviews with key informants in the field, including academics, development partners, NGO workers, and policymakers, to identify promising interventions that successfully reduce the vulnerability of women migrants. We find that, while Covid-19 has increased migrant vulnerability, it has also exposed the current system's violations in facilitating trafficking and exacerbating poor working conditions.

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Introduction

The global scale of migration has grown in line with other globalization processes as well as with growing inequity. The World Migration Report 2020 estimates a total of 272 million international migrants in 2019, with two thirds migrating for employment; and the ILO (2021) estimated about 169 million migrant workers globally for 2019. Key migration reasons other than work include conflict and climate hazards (Castles 2013). Migrant workers generated recorded remittance flows of US\$ 689 billion in 2018, including US\$ 44 billion in the United Arab Emirates and US\$ 36 billion in Saudi Arabia (IOM, 2020). However, total actual remittance flows are likely much larger due to the high cost of formal channels (Ahmed et al., 2020). About 68-70 million of migrant workers were women (IOM, 2020; ILO, 2021).

Migrants include segments of highly educated people but also millions of low-skilled workers who obtain higher wages abroad than at home. Given that migration is an inherently risky and costly activity, at least for first-time migrants, early migrants more likely come from families that can put up the funds required to send people abroad, i.e., the cost of landing an employment and the cost of travel to the location of employment abroad. While the most tangible benefit to sending countries is remittances, the key benefit to receiving countries is a generally younger, highly productive workforce. According to Mobarak et al. (2020), remittances from workers abroad have been one of the key drivers of poverty reduction in Bangladesh; and they continue to be a large share of household income for poorer households (Hill and Endara, 2019). However, benefits of migrants in countries of origin are likely much larger and more complex than remittances and include increased investment in education, health, and in agricultural and non-agricultural activities and poverty alleviation through various multiplier effects (Taylor, 2006).

Some countries and some regions within countries send proportionally more migrants and others fewer; similarly, there are destination countries receiving many migrants and others that receive few. Similarly, some countries send more male migrants and others more female migrants; with the global share of female migrants growing over the last several decades. There is limited research on the social cost of women's versus men's migration to sending countries; but the cost might be higher when women leave households due to potentially adverse impacts on children's well-being and challenges for husbands to take on women's roles in the household (Siddiqui and Ansar, 2020).

The focus of this paper is on the Asia-Pacific to Middle East corridor of migration that sends approximately 10 million migrants a year, about half of which are women, mostly for work and usually in the younger and middle-age range (25-64 years old); and specifically on the South Asia to Middle East corridor. Key destination countries are the countries of the Arab States where migrant workers constituted 41 percent of all male and 40 percent of all female workers in 2017 (ILO, 2018). Timothy and Sasikumar (2012) estimate that nearly 9 million migrants from South Asia and the Pacific work in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, excluding Jordan and Lebanon (Table 1). Further, migrant workers comprise 30 percent of Lebanon's workforce and 24 percent of Jordan's workforce (Frantz, 2013). ILO (2021) calculates that in 2019 4.2 million female and 19.9 million male migrants worked in Arab countries (including Lebanon but excluding Jordan).

Table 1: Labor flows to GCC countries from South Asia/Pacific (2006)

Country	
India	3,370,000
Pakistan	1,670,000
Bangladesh	780,000
Philippines	765,000
Sri Lanka	745,000
Indonesia	259,000
Nepal	70,000

Source: Timothy and Sasikumar 2012.

The paper, moreover, focuses on low-skilled workers who account for the bulk of migrants from the South Asia to Middle East corridor. Key sectors for low-skilled male workers include construction and for women work in the domestic care and garment sectors. According to a study by Timothy and Sasikumar (2012), at least a million women migrant domestic workers are employed in homes in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Table 2), not including other Arab countries. Yet, these are considered underestimates, capturing only official migrants and excluding substantial numbers of informal migrants. The focus of this paper is particularly on female migrant workers who experience different challenges during the migration process than men do (see also Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford, 2006).

Table 2: Women migrant domestic workers in select GCC countries (2009-2011)

Country	
Bahrain	51,811
Kuwait	310,402
Oman	69,256
Qatar	48,147
Saudi Arabia	506,950

Source: Timothy and Sasikumar 2012.

There is evidence that women migrants in the South Asia to Middle East corridor are vulnerable to forced labour and trafficking; both processes that can last throughout the entire migration pathway and can improve or worsen over multiple migration cycles. Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 aims to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030 and monitoring efforts toward eradication are being put in place. The International Labour Organization (ILO) suggests three dimensions to forced labour (1) unfree recruitment; (2) work and life under duress; and (3) impossibility to leave employer. Forced labour exists if any one of these dimensions exists. Trafficking also includes debt bondage and involuntary child labour. Exploitation relates to one or all of these three elements: restricting freedom of movement, economic exploitation and violence or the threat of violence (Jureidini, 2010). Trafficking relates to migrants' interactions with a network of individuals who organize the migration process, including brokers in origin and employment agencies as well as employers in destination countries with elements of deception, coercion, debt bondage, and slavery like conditions (Tinti and Reitand, 2018; Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015; Bajracharya and Sijapati, 2012).

An in-depth study of 162 women migrants of South Asian origin who worked in Arab countries found that all interviewed women had their documents confiscated, 87 percent were confined in the employer's house, 76 percent reported withheld wages, 73 percent and 61 percent suffered psychological and physical abuses, respectively, while more than 50 percent reported excessive work (IOM, 2015). Another study conducted in 2009-2010 in Jordan found that around 70,000 women domestic workers from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the

Philippines experienced abuses (Tamkeen, 2015). The report estimates around 50,000 migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in Jordan have no freedom of movement and are confined to their employer's house. It remains unclear, however, how many people are affected by forced labour and trafficking (Feingold, 2005).

In addition to the vulnerabilities that female migrants in the South Asia to Middle East corridor are facing, the recent global health pandemic has led to often sudden and severe income and job losses; exposure to infection due to cramped living conditions, particularly for those sharing factory dormitories or other cramped sleeping spaces to safe funds; the inability to get access to health services in host countries; the lack of support by countries of origin for safe return; and the stigmatizing upon return as potential carriers of disease and signs of failure due to loss of remittances (f. ex. Kilby and Wu, 2020). This heightened vulnerability makes it yet more urgent to identify promising interventions that successfully reduce the vulnerability of women migrants in domestic and factory work conditions.

However, very little research has been implemented to assess what works and what does not in the field of preventing forced labour and trafficking in migration (i.e. Bryant and Landman, 2020; Davy, 2015, 2016). In particular, quantitative assessments of interventions are lacking. Bryant and Landman (2020) conducted a review of 90 anti-trafficking program evaluations (produced between 2000 and 2015) to assess lessons learned about what mechanisms work to combat various types of modern slavery, including forced labour and trafficking. They find that evaluations of anti-trafficking programming primarily focus on assessing to what extent project outputs were achieved rather than impacts and outcomes (i.e. the reduction of trafficking, for example). Only one out of the 90 evaluations was conducted in Arab countries, and only 17 focused on domestic work and 3 on the textile and garment sectors. Many evaluations were never published. The authors note among the few findings that awareness campaigns had mixed results, changes in legislation were generally not achieved during programs' lifetime and support to migrants who faced challenges was most effective if it was case specific.

Moreover, much of the literature on the vulnerability of migrants has been focused on working conditions in receiving countries, in addition to deceptive recruitment practices in countries of origin (Bajracharya and Sijapati, 2012; SWiFT, 2017). However, migrants' experiences of forced labour and trafficking transcend these two points in time and a more comprehensive assessment is needed to generate a more realistic portrait of migrant women's experiences as they prepare for migration, during the migration process, in the destination country, and following their return.

In this paper, we draw lessons from the literature as well as key informants in the field, inclusive of academics, development partners, NGO workers, and policymakers, to highlight what are considered the most important or effective (as well as least effective) mechanisms for reducing forced labour and trafficking. We find that women migrant workers face a plethora of risks from various directions, but evidence on promising interventions that successfully reduce the vulnerability of women migrants remains limited. It is also evident that Covid-19 has increased migrant vulnerability; yet has also exposed the current system's violations in facilitating trafficking and exacerbating poor working conditions.

Following an overview on the migration route from South Asia to the Middle East for work, we examine key best practices along this migration route with a focus on women migrants. We then assess these findings, considering a sample intervention program, specifically the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Work in Freedom (WiF) phase II Theory of Change as a case study to highlight project mechanisms and practical considerations visa-a-vis the theory of change. WiF provides a good illustration of women's vulnerabilities in migration pathways, as the program focuses on empowering women to make informed migration decisions and creating an enabling environment for their safe migration into decent work.

Background on the South Asia to the Middle East Migration Corridor

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2020), South Asia features large intra-regional migration, for example, from Bangladesh and Nepal to India, but also large migration to the GCC countries for higher wages and accessible employment opportunities. For the sending households in South Asia, remittances are an important source of income for children's education, to cover costs of housing, and to repay loans (Sapkota, 2013). High natural disaster risks in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are also contributing to mobility, displacement and migration (IDMC, 2019) as do pull factors from GCC countries and other Middle Eastern countries, often facilitated by bilateral agreements. As a result of substantial migration of men and women, South Asia is one of the regions receiving large remittance flows. As an example, in 2018/19, remittances accounted for an estimated 26 percent of national GDP in Nepal and averaged a similar 27 percent over the five prior years. In 2016, Nepal had the third highest share of remittances in GDP globally (World Bank, 2020). Approximately half of the remittances value is not factored into national accounts due to informal systems associated with migration pathways (Kilby and Wu, 2020). At the same time, the region is home to large irregular migration, smuggling or trafficking (IOM, 2020). According to UNODC (2018), in the South Asia region trafficking of women was of particular concern in Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan.

In terms of receiving countries, most male migrants from South Asia are employed in the construction sector and most female migrants in the care sectors of the Middle East, including the GCC countries. In some countries, women also work in the garment sector. Migration pathways for women working in the domestic or care sector in Middle Eastern countries are particularly concerning due to governments' limited support for such workers. A peculiarity of the migrant employment system in the Middle East and GCC countries is the Kafala sponsorship system. Sponsorship, otherwise known as Kafala in Arabic, is not a specific policy but a collection of normative practices that bind a migrant worker with one employer in the destination country. Sponsors, (often the employer) are legally responsible for the workers during their stay (Frantz, 2013). Under this system a worker cannot leave or change his/her employer once they arrive without permission from their employer. This system is implemented differently in various countries. For example, in Lebanon, employers can have up to three sponsored workers. The Kafala system often includes other practices, such as the sponsor keeping the migrants' passports, particularly for first time migrants (Mansour-Ille and Hendow, 2018). Migrants often work in other houses or have jobs such as tailoring or work in the small-scale garment sector under that sponsorship (Blanchett 2019; KI 12, 2020). Although hiring a migrant domestic worker does not necessarily require recruitment through an agency, the Kafala system has normalized channelling the process through recruitment agencies, leading to the proliferation of these agencies under limited if any monitoring by government institutions. Migrant workers who leave their employer but remain in the country are considered illegal aliens subject to detention and deportation. However, it is very common for returnee migrants in some countries to work as freelancers or with 'free visas' (Blanchet, 2019, KI 2, 2020, KI 5, 2020). Moreover, there are differences in women migrants' experiences in the Middle East between working in the more conservative societies in the GCC, including Saudi Arabia versus Jordan and Lebanon, regarding freedom of mobility and time agency (KIs 2 and 12, 2020).

Work conditions in the Textile, Garment, and Clothing Industries (TGCI) in the Middle East are also restrictive for migrants as factories are often situated in sparsely populated areas, tying them directly to the factory floor and reducing the possibility of migrants to lead private lives.

The body of literature on migrant workers in Middle Eastern countries is limited (e.g. Fernandez, 2020). Articles published on this group have primarily focused on the Kafala system in destination countries (Khattab et al., 2020; Pande, 2013; Fernandez, 2020) and women's experiences with abuse and exploitation (Pande, 2013). As an example, Oishi (2002) describes sexual harassment, rape, non-payment or underpayment of wages, and

verbal and physical abuse as abuses reported by migrant workers. Oishi (2002) links this behaviour to the devaluation of home-based care work which is seen as a low-skill occupation.

Although the focus on Kafala and the abuse experienced is vital for international (and local) organizations that advocate on behalf of migrant workers and strive to provide them with better protections, there is great need as well to expand knowledge on gender and migration through a global political economy framework (Briggs, 2014). Focusing on deriving insights for female migration along the entire migration pathway is particularly challenging as there are generally limited linkages between countries of origin and destination beyond bilateral interactions at the government level. One avenue of increased linkages is the network of ‘*dalals*’ or informal migration agents in both source and sending countries that can act as a valuable network that migrants can tap into (KI 12, 2020).

Reducing women’s forced labour and trafficking along migration pathways

Much of the literature focused on reducing vulnerabilities to trafficking and forced labour has focused on point events, often at the location of employment and sometimes on recruitment or pre-departure training in the country of origin of migrants. An expanded focus is needed to generate a more realistic portrait of migrant women’s experiences as they consider international migration as an option, as they prepare for migration, during the migration process, in the destination country, and following the return home. As noted by KI 1 (2021), trafficking can happen at the start of the migration process, upon arrival in destination country (ex. change of contracts, not finding the job women were recruited for) and at later stages (ex. losing a job due to an economic downturn). Following an overview of generic push and pull factors, the following sections describe key interventions that have worked and that are considered to have failed based on Key Informant Interviews and the literature with a focus on the women’s low-skilled, short-term migration from South Asia to the domestic care and garment sectors in the Middle East.

1. Push and pull factors increasing vulnerability to migration

Some countries send more migrants to work abroad than others and some countries send more women and others more men. Poverty, inequality, a multitude of shocks and disasters without appropriate support systems to aid recovery and a lack of appropriate employment options are characteristics of countries who send more migrants.

The large difference in incomes between countries in the Middle East and South Asia is the key factor stimulating the international migration of women and men in this corridor. Lack of income generation opportunities, natural disasters can push potential migrants toward taking the step to migrate internationally, but there are also pull factors provided by early migrants who returned after sending large remittances. KI 11 (2020) notes for India that “the most important issue is poverty. Not necessarily targeting trafficking but additional social reform in the country of origin (beyond trafficking)” [is needed]. A key investment to reduce all forms of vulnerabilities that women face is education. KI 11 (2020) notes for parts of India that the change in marriage age of young girls from 11-12 years in rural areas to 15-16 years nowadays has opened a time gap as many girls finish school after class 8 at the age of 13 without any clear socially prescribed path for the age group of 13-16 years. Work, socializing and marriage are socially not supported; this can lead to girls being seduced to move away from rural areas and entering into vulnerable work environments. KI 11 (2020) suggests that “more attention has to be paid for the education of girls this age, the state has to invest in that,” and suggests the need of free, quality-education for girls up to 18 years of age and “activities to bind them to communities that make them run away.”

Women might also migrate if job opportunities and income generation programmes leave women out, or are structured so that only men are qualified or eligible, or if local norms and traditions are not favourable for women's employment close to home. On the other hand, if there are viable jobs or income generation schemes which are attractive for women to work and stay within their home country, then the possibilities of migration for work due to lack of options will be reduced. While improving job opportunities for women in sending countries can reduce vulnerabilities to forced labour and trafficking of women, remittances are an important income source for many sending households and contribute to national GDPs. Moreover, some women migrants seek work abroad to escape a bad family situation, seek more personal freedom and because of an adventurous spirit.

In addition to push factors there are also pull factors. With the exceptions of Oman and Saudi Arabia, migrants make up the majority of the populations in GCC countries (IOM 2020). To ensure a steady supply of low-skilled female labour from Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia aimed to link male low-skilled migration from Bangladesh to a steady supply of female low-skilled workers, requesting that 10,000 women be sent every month and promising funds of US\$ 2000-2500 per woman. Negotiations between the Government of Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia ultimately failed (KI 16, 2021), but migration costs have remained lower for women migrants. Blanchet and Biswas (2020) reported based on a survey of migrants in five districts of Bangladesh that one third of female migrants to Saudi Arabia reported not paying any fees and 14 percent across all destination countries, while only 0.1 percent of men reported not paying any fees.

However, rich countries are not immune to income shocks. Instead, such shocks can directly increase vulnerability of migrants when employers lose their jobs or see their incomes reduced. This can translate into non-payment of wages and other forms of forced labour and abuse. The global health pandemic, as well as declines in oil prices in the Middle East, the multifaceted economic crisis in Lebanon and the Beirut harbour explosion of August 2020, have dramatically increased the vulnerabilities of all migrants and particularly of women migrants employed in the domestic care and garment sectors.

2. Countries of origin, pre-departure

Migration bans, age limits and restrictive regulations in countries of origin

As a protective measure against exploitation and trafficking, some South Asian governments such as Sri Lanka and Nepal have instituted well-intentioned migration bans for prospective women migrant domestic workers headed to some Middle Eastern countries. As an example, the Sri Lanka Family Background Report (FBR), introduced in 2013, restricted mothers of children under five years of age to work abroad in the domestic care sector. Moreover, a minimum age limit for women was imposed, specifically 25 years for Saudi Arabia, 23 years for other Middle Eastern countries, and 21 years for all other countries, while the maximum age was capped at 55. In 2015, the policy was extended to cover all female employment abroad. Moreover, in 2017, the 45–49 years age group was exempted from the ban. In November 2020, the policy was revised to enable faster processing of females without children by introducing separate forms for females with and without children (Weeraratne, 2021). Similarly, Bangladesh repeatedly banned or restricted migration of 'low-skilled' women workers from 1981 to 1998. Nepal has also used a series of migration bans directed at women. Before 2010, low-skilled women's migration to the GCC was restricted. In 2012, a ban on women migrating to Arab States for domestic work below 30 years was issued. And in 2014, all women were banned from migrating for low-skilled work regardless of the destination country. In 2015, women aged 24 or older were allowed to migrate again to certain destination countries (ILO, 2015). In 2017, Nepal issued a new ban for migration to the GCC for domestic work. As such, women who continue to migrate to the GCC countries, unlike men, were not entitled to repatriation or support if they became ill and consular services were similarly more restricted for illegal migrants. A recently proposed law would take things even further, banning women under the age of 40 from travelling for the first time to Africa and the Middle East without permission from their families and local government officials (Budhathoki, 2021). While well-intentioned, such policies often lead to women taking

more expensive and potentially more perilous routes to migrate, foregoing formal and registered migration in favour of undocumented and illegal migration that leaves them more vulnerable to exploitation (ILO 2015). Many other countries instituted age restrictions, consent requirements or outright bans on female migration (Napier-Moore, 2017).

Banning migration to protect citizens from abuse has not been effective. For example, many Nepali women prohibited from travelling under either the age or the full travel ban, still do so through India, which suggests that the bans increased irregular migration (KI 3, 2020; ILO, 2015). Migration bans can thus result in illegal migration, increased migration costs and vulnerability, and, at times, to trafficking (Napier-Moore, 2017). Given the choice, potential migrants expressed a preference for travelling as regular migrants for reasons of legitimacy and safety. Irregular migration was strongly associated with more dangerous and circuitous routes, lack of information, lack of choice regarding the destination country, and in some cases trafficking. Making migration illegal creates a black market that can fuel labour exploitation (KI 5, 2020). Migrants who travel through informal channels also face heightened challenges during repatriation, for example, during the recent health pandemic.

Pre-departure training and awareness

Pre-departure orientation training has been one of the important interventions for protecting migrant domestic workers abroad by supplying them with needed information regarding expectations and rights and to improve their transition (Asis and Agunias, 2012). Pre-departure training has become mandatory for formal migrants from South Asia to Middle Eastern countries, including Nepal and Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh, Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited (BOESEL) provides orientation sessions with information for migrant workers (Rashid and Watson, 2017). Government provided training in Bangladesh was initially 14 days, and was then increased to 21 days and most recently to 45 days (KI 13, 2020). However, the training takes the women away from other important activities, and are often in urban centres, far away from the women's homes, increasing costs, leading, at times, to pay offs to the *dalals* to ensure that attendance is ticked off or to the purchase of attendance certificates on the black market (KIs 2 and 14, 2020). In Sri Lanka, the mandatory training takes 21 days to complete (MFA, 2019). Despite this, in practice few migrants have any pre-departure training, and certainly not those who migrate through irregular channels. A survey of 522 migrant domestic workers in Jordan and Lebanon finds that only 38 percent of all survey respondents, and only 14 percent of Nepalese respondents, reported having completed a formal pre-departure training course (Frantz, 2014).

There is evidence of inconsistent or poor implementation of these trainings (Asis and Agunias 2012) and there are cases of abuse of female migrants at the training locations. Curricula have been criticized for being very general and not sector-, country- or gender-specific and for not providing enough information on support channels and migrants' legal rights (Frantz, 2014). Rashid and Watson (2017) also suggest interactive sessions as well as systematizing BOESEL's information sessions to better address experiences, concerns and rights of migrant workers. Improved curricula and accessibility will improve interest in and ability to participate. Language training, especially destination country dialect, was suggested by migrant domestic workers as an important topic to focus on in pre-departure training to improve communication with employers and reduce grievances. Regmi et al. (2019) also call for inclusion of mental health awareness as part of pre-departure training, particularly to aid with issues like isolation, work stress and potential employer abuse without support from the family.

Raising awareness amongst migrant women workers of their rights and conditions of their employment contracts in the destination country is key, ideally as part of pre-departure orientation programs as well as through other mechanisms or NGO interventions. For example, 68 percent of Nepalese domestic workers surveyed in Lebanon were not aware that they had a legal right to hold on to their passports. Only 26 percent of all respondents had their passports in their possession, and only 8 percent of Nepalese migrants held their passports (Frantz, 2014).

The Center for the Prevention of Trafficking of Women (CPTW) in Moldova provides an example of a comprehensive intervention to prevent trafficking. The CPTW distributes monthly bulletins including the type of information someone should verify before agreeing to work aboard, information about the dangers of emigrating, contact numbers for anyone who finds themselves in forced labour, and information on the rights of migrant workers (Beydoun, 2006). CPTW also offers support in obtaining documents a migrant worker may need as well as representation in court.

Barsbai (2018) reports on two randomized experiments by Beam et al. (2016) and Beam (2016) that find that reduction of information barriers, job search barriers and documentation barriers, such as passport application and payments of potential migrants in the Philippines, did not change likelihood to migrate.

Barsbai (2018) similarly reports on the Doi (2014) financial education randomized experiment that finds that training on financial planning and management, savings and remittances provided to Indonesian migrants and a family member prior to their departure had a substantial effect on household savings, beyond training of the migrant alone.

Shrestha and Yang (2020) in a randomized experiment of an information intervention among Filipino maids in Singapore found improvements in knowledge of legal rights related to changing jobs as well as to job conditions among those treated. Moreover, workers with poor job conditions became more likely to change employers in response to treatment.

Shrestha (2020) finds that potential work migrants from Nepal to Malaysia and the GCC overestimate their earnings potential, on average by 26 percent, but also the mortality risk while working abroad. The median inexperienced potential migrant expects the mortality rate to be 8 times the actual mortality rate. If migrants would have accurate information about these two key factors, they suggest that more effective migration decisions would be taken. Following a randomized field experiment on wage information and mortality incidence with potential migrants from this group, potential migrants provided with lower death information were 7 percentage points more likely to have migrated, while those provided with accurate wage information were 5-6 percentage points less likely to have migrated. Based on this, the author calculates elasticities of migration with respect to the mortality rate of 0.8, and with respect to earnings expectation of 1.1.

Government training sessions in Indonesia and the Philippines for migrant domestic workers pre-departure are clear on clarifying expectations regarding likelihood of long work hours, sexual abuse, violence, lack of rest, and denial of use of phones (Silvey and Parreñas, 2019). However, women determined to migrate to the Middle East for work often choose optimism rather than heading warnings, believing their experience will be different. Once they are decided to go, even “horror stories” of prevalent exploitation of domestic workers do little to change these migrants’ minds (KI 5, 2020).

To improve pre-departure training, Rashid and Watson (2017) argue that orientation materials need to include perspectives from ‘migrant-centered’ support networks, inclusive of trade unions and civil society organizations, and returnee migrant workers in both origin and destination countries.

While pre-departure training plays an important role in providing information for prospective first-time migrants and can help them develop networks that can transcend to the country of work, such training on its own is unlikely to prevent forced labour and trafficking for those who migrate out of compulsion and it will not reach women who travel informally or cannot attend the trainings.

Pre-departure networks

Frantz (2014) collected stories of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon and Jordan that illustrate the importance of communication among migrants, as well as the establishment of connections, and access to media, especially under the Kafala sponsorship system where the employer controls their legal presence. One

useful mechanism for reducing vulnerability would be for women migrant workers to establish their own networks, prearranged and pre-departure – among themselves without relying on the government and embassies. This is especially important for domestic workers who live in the premises of their employer with few outside contacts (Barsbai, 2018). Knowing detailed information of the employer, including address, telephone number, and GPS location and sharing this information with fellow migrant women before departure can help migrant women stay in touch with one another (KI 5, 2020). These pre-departure measures should take into consideration the controlled environment that domestic workers are placed into and that abuse might occur, including having their cell phones confiscated and belongings searched.

While restricted mobility outside the house, locking care workers in the house, and forbidding them from talking to any outsiders is not always the case, it is a widespread behaviour among employers in Lebanon, Jordan, and other Middle Eastern countries (Frantz, 2014). This reduces domestic workers' chance of building networks and linking to other entities that can provide support. Further, isolation and reduced opportunities to form friendships can make domestic care workers susceptible to psychological abuse. Frantz (2014) notes that domestic care workers tend to rely on their social networks for information rather than official channels (Frantz, 2014). Therefore, initiation of social networks pre-departure could be an excellent channel to utilize for conveying information to migrant women throughout the migration process.

Of note, Barsbai et al. (2020) find that information training of Philippine migrants prior to their departure to the United States reduced their social network interactions upon arrival. As such, information and social network links appear to be substitutes as better-informed immigrants invest less in expanding their social networks upon arrival.

Improving regulations on intermediation in countries of origin

Migration brokers and recruitment agencies fill a huge information and knowledge gap for migrants in South Asia, especially in rural areas. This suggests that governments are not involved in the early stages of the migration process, beyond requiring pre-departure training. Better regulation of these many private-sector actors as well as inspection of their practices may help reduce the exploitative costs incurred by migrant women (knowingly and unknowingly) as well as malpractice and fraud, while elevating agencies that are better managed (Kern and Böker, 2015; Tamkeen, 2015).

Deception is the basis of many recruitment agencies' work. Recruitment agencies in countries of origin have been found to replace contracts approved by the destination country with different contracts that state different terms and conditions, a practice that may also happen in destination countries (Bajracharya and Sijapati, 2012). A survey of migrant workers in Jordan found that 70% of domestic workers signed a contract but did not receive a copy, 42% received a lower salary than that stated in their contract, and many others did not have contracts (Tamkeen, 2015).

The proliferation of dummy agencies operating under other firms and the mobility of agents and informality of the practice in some cases make it difficult to regulate the system and indicates the intertwined nature that makes it possible to both support and exploit migrant workers on various fronts. Recruitment agencies can range from formal, highly professional and certified enterprises to informal or un-registered one-person agents, such as *dalals* in Bangladesh (Siddiqui and Abrar, 2019). However, Kern and Böker (2015) and KI 12 (2020) suggest that generalizing fraudulent behaviour of recruitment agencies and brokers is reductionist and inaccurate, as they perform a positive role for women from rural and remote areas who do not have access to the formal urban based agents.

In Bangladesh, BOESL is in charge of upholding fair recruitment in Bangladesh with a focus on poor people and women. Rashid and Watson (2017) in a study on the Government of Bangladesh involvement in the recruitment chain find that BOESL has contributed to reducing fraudulent recruitment practices through

billboards and social media, among others and has improved fair hiring of migrant workers for factory work in the Middle East. BOESL also disseminates information through social networks of migrant workers in Jordan. However, BOESL is dominated and driven by employer needs and not those of migrants; BOESL is not involved in the pre-selection phases of potential migrants and does not offer any services in the post-migration phase. As such, BOESL does not empower migrant workers and misses important learning opportunities by not engaging with returnee migrants. The authors suggest that BOESL considers collaboration with other sending countries from South Asia and to consider a broader set of destination countries.

Reducing pre-departure indebtedness

Migrant workers are often charged fees to apply for, getting accepted to, and travel to jobs before their departure. Migrant workers or their family members borrow money (either formally or informally) and become indebted in the process, forcing them to continue working even if there is abuse or contract violation when they get to the destination country. In most cases migrants have entered a vicious circle of indebtedness before they start to earn money for themselves and their families (KI 5, 2020).

Migrant workers may be indebted to a bank or an informal lender that might charge exorbitant interest, or to recruitment agents, relatives, or their employers or placement agencies in destination countries. It is a norm and cultural expectation in the country of origin that workers expect to pay. Some people falsely believe that the more they pay the better the job abroad. Although migrants generally should not bear the burden of recruitment or travel costs, they are still often charged substantial fees, regardless of what the employer pays. As an example, the employer may or may not pay all or part of the actual recruitment costs. If they do not, then the recruitment agents charge workers a fee. But even if the employer covers all costs, some agents in the country of origin still charge migrant workers, especially as the worker expects to pay (KI 5, 2020). Workers pay for part or all of actual recruitment costs plus commissions, plus fees required for any bribes.

The lack of information on fees and the non-transparency of charges puts migrant workers in a position of vulnerability and traps them into being unable to refuse a job pre-departure, ask for higher salaries or demand their rights and can subject them to coercion in jobs (Paoletti et al., 2014). Indebtedness coupled with the Kafala system leads to vulnerability and provides the perfect conditions for trafficking (KI 5, 2020). It also leads to debt bondage or labour indebtedness. For example, a domestic worker from Nepal can owe recruitment agents up to \$20,000 in placement, travel and accommodation costs (Kilby and Wu, 2020). Under these conditions, female migrants are restricted from leaving due to the Kafala system as well as due to debt bondage resulting in a captured labour force.

Although recruitment fees are a key challenge in countries of origin, there are linkages to destination countries. Fees paid by migrant workers also fund kick-back bribes to employment agencies in destination countries. The employment agency often links giving labour supply contracts to recruitment agencies in countries of origin to the receipt of “presents”. “It’s a very lucrative market these kick-back bribes, which I estimate just for the GCC at about US\$ 10 billion” (KI 5, 2020). On the macro level, through this recruitment process, millions of dollars are exiting labour sending countries to pay for these bribes.

The Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment implemented a ‘Zero Chargeable Recruitment Fees’ policy for female migrant domestic workers to protect them from agents charging arbitrary fees, by banning recruitment agents from charging any fees (MFA, 2019). Other governments such as Nepal have mandated a maximum cap on fees that migrant workers can get charged (in this case \$700). However, migrants continue to be charged higher fees (Paoletti et al., 2014). Similarly, increasingly, destination countries like Qatar and UAE have made it illegal to charge workers for any recruitment costs, including in the country of origin. Elimination of recruitment charges and providing information on this is essential for ensuring safe migration.

Departure

Obtaining papers to support departure and the departure itself can be precarious spaces for women. Public spaces of visa offices, training sites, borders, and even airport departure, can be sources of extortion and sexual exploitation. Female migrants have complained about sexual harassment by migration agents during pre-departure training, as well as financial extortion from airport staff during the security checks (Khadka, 2021).

No interventions have been considered to address these challenges beyond the importance of women to travel together, ideally in groups that have already formed bonds prior to departure to support each other at the airport and other locations.

3. In destination countries

Tackling economic exploitation in destination countries

Many workers face economic exploitation through delayed, docked, or entirely withheld wages. This “wage theft” has been named as such by the Migrant Forum in Asia to emphasize the criminal nature of docking, withholding or non-payment of wages (KI 5, 2020). Outstanding wages are often used against workers as coercion, to prevent workers from reporting abuse or leaving their employer (KI 7, 2020). Various strategies have been adopted by countries in an attempt to tackle the economic exploitation of workers. For example, some countries have recently increased the penalty of non-payment of wages. In Qatar non-payment of wages is punishable by one year in prison and 10,000 Qatari Rial (approximately US\$ 2,500). However, KI 5 observes that this fine remains too low and insufficient to effectively prevent this crime (KI 5, 2020).

Another approach recently taken by the UAE and Qatar was the introduction of a law whereby the employer must pay wages directly into a bank account (KI 1, 2020). The aim of this policy is to remove economic exploitation by monitoring wage payments and thereby improving enforcement (KIs 1 and 10, 2020). The policy also has the benefit of identifying wage theft without the need for it to be reported by the worker (KI 10, 2020).

Some countries, such as Jordan, have introduced standardized contracts. Standard contracts aid the setting of standards of work and wages, improve workers’ bargaining power, allow workers to bring complaints to a judicial authority, provide for fairer and more efficient judicial proceedings, and encourage domestic and international monitoring of the enforcement of judgments (KI 1, 2020; Manseau, 2007). The contract also allows migrant workers to terminate their contracts and change employers, two important elements in reducing the vulnerability of workers (KI 7, 2020). However, difficulty in monitoring working conditions and payment results in weak enforcement of contracts (KI 10, 2020). This highlights the need for inspections, including private interviews with migrant workers (KIs 1 and 10, 2020).

Sending countries can advocate against discrimination and exclusion from labour law through their embassies (Rashid and Watson, 2017). Moreover, migrant workers are also required to pay union dues in some countries, such as Jordan, even though the union does not represent migrant workers.

The consequences to the worker must be considered when convicting an employer of wage theft. Provisions should be made to allow the workers of those convicted of wage theft to remain in the destination country and seek alternative employment if they wish to do so.

Workers are subjected to not only gender violence and abuse but also racial violence and abuse (KI 5, 2020). Understanding how these different forms of discrimination compound to result in a unique pattern of discrimination is important to effectively tackle forced labour and trafficking.

In many contexts, salaries are nationality-based wages (KI 6, 2020). Migrant workers are paid different salaries from those of local workers and salaries can differ based on country of origin. To eliminate this discrimination,

and to allow for better access to support services, migrant workers should be recognized under labour law (KIs 1, 7 and 10, 2020).

Improving migrant workers' awareness of support services

Many efforts have been made to increase support services to workers but research shows that very few workers know how to access support services (Bajracharya and Sijapati, 2012). Frantz (2014) found that of their sample of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon 29 percent knew how to access a hotline while only 1 percent knew how to access any legal services. Knowledge of how to contact support services was found to be higher in Jordan with 42 percent of workers aware of how to access a hotline and 28 percent aware of how to access legal services (Frantz, 2014). A multipronged approach to make workers aware of support services and how to access them is important to the success of such services in aiding workers (KI 10, 2020). Information on accessing such services is likely correlated with the migrant workers having some mobility to leave the house and having established a network with other migrants. Thus, interventions focused on support services need to be linked with other interventions.

Supporting existing safe spaces

While many projects aim to create safe spaces in strategic locations in most contexts there are existing places where migrants meet or make short visits to buy goods from home, remit money, or make phone calls. Also, individuals, migrant associations and embassies organize concerts and cultural activities (Frantz, 2014). Programs should aim to support already existing safe spaces and cultural events rather than creating new spaces. These spaces could also be used for the dissemination of information. Projects should work closely with migrants, migrant associations, and shop and café owners to identify appropriate channels to provide support.

Some examples of the kind of support that could be offered include indoor communal spaces where migrants can meet, subsidized phone calls, providing radios or TVs along with audio or video information on support services and rights, providing pamphlets on support services and rights, practical assistance for passport and other applications and financial support for existing cultural events (Rashid and Watson, 2017). Government agencies such as BOESL could also play a role in supporting existing safe spaces and providing information services and practical assistance to migrants through them.

Virtual safe spaces

Physical safe spaces are only accessible to women who are not imprisoned by their employers (Bajracharya and Sijapati, 2012; KIs 5 and 6, 2020). Even the standardized contracts introduced in Jordan allow employers to determine whether live-in domestic workers can leave the household during their time off (KI 5, 2020). In Jordan, 28 percent of live-in domestic workers reported they did not have a set day off from work. The rate was similar Lebanon at 29 percent. In addition, 24 percent of live-in domestic workers said that they were not allowed to leave their employers' homes even if they had a set day off (Frantz, 2014). Freelancers who are loosely tied to an employer might have more freedom and account for 70-80 percent of migrants in Lebanon (KIs 2 and 12, 2020).

Studies have found that mobile phones serve as the most important communication channel for migrant domestic workers (Frantz, 2014). Eighty-two percent of migrant domestic workers in Jordan and Lebanon reported owning a mobile phone. Radio access was lower; in Jordan 62 percent of women reported owning or having access to a radio, and 85 percent listened regularly. In Lebanon 45 percent of women reported owning or having access to a radio, and 83 percent listened regularly. Interest in radio shows in native language is large; 85 percent and 98 percent of migrant domestic workers in Jordan and Lebanon, respectively, expressed interest in radio in their native language (Frantz, 2014).

To reach women with almost no freedom of movement, arguably the most vulnerable women, programs need to incorporate strategies that reach women within their employers' homes and create spaces accessible to

migrants without leaving their place of work. The existing access to radio and mobile phones presents an opportunity to reach these women. For example, radio programs by migrant workers telling their stories could help create support networks. Other possible activities could include information dissemination over the radio, access to legal advice, and mental health services over the phone. Programs could also create means for workers with limited mobility to organize (KI 10, 2020), such as introducing women to group messaging services or organizing group calls with other migrants. Even workers who have a regular day off and substantial mobility can benefit from accessing support services via mobile phone. Instead of waiting for their day off to access services or support from their networks, mobile phones allow workers to reach support daily and in a timely manner.

One risk a program must be aware of is that there have been reported cases of domestic workers who are allowed to own mobile phones but whose employers closely monitor their usage (Esim and Smith, 2004). There is no recent study that has quantified how prevalent this behaviour is. Programs should get insights from migrant workers in their focus area before planning a mobile phone-based intervention. Consideration must also be given to ensuring resources accessed through mobile phones are accessible to migrants who are not literate.

Employment agencies

In addition to bribery systems that operate between some sending and receiving countries, employment agencies have a vested interest in having both employers and migrants depending on them and extracting fees from both as feasible. According to KI 5 (2020), “trafficking starts with deception when the work conditions and wages a domestic worker receives are not what she was promised. She has to consent. If she refuses, she is sent back to the recruitment agency...Even if the employer refuses to continue employment, the recruitment agent will send a migrant domestic worker to another employer. The employer may not have the intent but ends up a participant in trafficking.”

According to KI 9 (2020), there are approximately 500 licensed recruitment agencies in Lebanon that are working outside the governmental office for recruitment. Rather than focusing on legalizing the paperwork of women migrants who are already in Lebanon, their financial interest is in bringing in new migrants from abroad.

If sending countries were to maintain a database of all applications and their status, pre-departure, in-destination, returned or repeat, then resources could be targeted better to more vulnerable migrants. Increased information, transparency and accountability could help crowd out labour brokers at lower levels of the chain (Rashid and Watson, 2017). However, such a system would need to respect the privacy of workers, prevent any surveillance of workers and other misuse of their data.

Rashid and Watson (2017) also suggest that sending countries, through their embassies, should monitor recruitment practices in companies in receiving countries, particularly if recruitment agencies are not on approved lists, such as the “Golden List” list in Jordan or are not monitored by the Better Work Programme.”

Changing employer attitudes

Many projects include educational campaigns to change the attitudes of employers (and the public) as part of their intervention. In their review of anti-trafficking program evaluations, Bryant and Landman (2020) find that many projects with public campaigns on human trafficking reported mixed results. Evaluation findings conclude that campaigns need to be targeted, adapted to local contexts and contain clear messages to be effective in achieving behavioural change.

Given the importance of having rest days and freedom of movement as well as access to mobile phones for well-being and to enable women to access support networks and services, these are also key topics that should be included in behavioural change communication with employers. Accessing support services via a mobile phone allows workers to reach support consistently and on time. Interventions that encourage employers to

allow workers to own a mobile phone and to give workers complete privacy in their usage of their phone would be valuable. Better access to mobile phones, rest days, and mobility to access networks can substantially improve women's wellbeing as well as their ability to access support.

Projects should aim to get at the heart of what it means to be in forced labour. This would include addressing wage theft, passport confiscation, dehumanization and racism, with employers. The means by which these issues are addressed with employers is very important as some strategies could cause backlash, worsening the situation for migrant workers (KI 5, 2020). Key informant interviews described an unsuccessful sensitization campaign in Lebanon. The campaign depicted Lebanese women dressed in domestic worker uniforms. Instead of identifying with migrant women Lebanese women felt dehumanized themselves by these depictions. This campaign was unsuccessful and caused backlash from Lebanese people (KI 5, 2020).

Carefully considered campaigns have shown to be effective. In one such intervention, randomly selected Filipino domestic workers were given a pack of dried mangoes and were encouraged to give it as a gift to their employer upon their arrival. They were also encouraged to show their employer a photograph of themselves with their family. The aim was to humanize the domestic worker in the eyes of their employer and create goodwill through the gift. This intervention was successful in decreasing verbal, physical and sexual violence by the employer. Workers who participated in the intervention were also more likely to renew their contracts and their family members had a more positive view of the migration experience (Barsbai, 2018). This simple but well thought out intervention proved to have a lasting effect in humanizing migrant domestic workers in the eyes of their employers.

Strengthen embassy support

Outflow countries do not always have embassies and accessible safe houses in inflow countries (Bajracharya and Sijapati, 2012). For example, Nepal only has embassies in four of the six GCC countries while many women have expressed that strengthened government presence through embassies would offer more protection to migrants (ILO, 2015). During the Covid-19 pandemic the need for embassy presence has become even more important. Governments can also better advocate for eliminating wage theft, abuse and discriminatory practices through greater in-country presence (Rashid and Watson, 2017).

Through their embassy countries can monitor recruitment practices, for example through its embassy in Jordan the Government of Bangladesh can improve its monitoring of recruitment practices into companies that are not monitored by the Better Work Programme and are not on Jordan's Golden List (Rashid and Watson, 2017). As KI 15 (2020) notes, the Embassy of the Philippines is very responsive to concerns raised by their citizens abroad with reports and responses published on Facebook for transparent monitoring. Other embassies, on the other hand, are considered to value existing bilateral trade relationships over the welfare of low-skilled migrant citizens in domestic and garment sectors.

Redress mechanisms

Migrants tend to have limited means to report abuse, such as forced labour, in host countries. This is mainly a result of the exclusion of domestic work from national labour laws. In addition, constraints that prevent migrant domestic workers from seeking legal recourse include limited mobility, language challenges and lack of knowledge of host country legal and redress mechanisms. For lack of other options, the police are often the only redress mechanism that migrants can resort to. Migrants are, however, unlikely to use this mechanism because they might be illegally in the country, they might fear that the police will side with the employer, and trust between migrants and police is often limited. In some countries, formal redress mechanisms do exist, but often require the filing of lengthy reports, and might require proof of the abuse, which can be difficult to produce (KI 14, 2020). The government of Bangladesh's Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMEIT) has a formal complaints' mechanism with a separate complaints' cell for women and complaints to be submitted online as well as a call center.

To ensure that situations of abuse are reported and addressed, government-sponsored redress mechanisms through NGOs or other institutions trusted by migrant women are needed. These should be confidential, readily accessible, not require extensive literacy skills and include mechanisms that ensure that complaints are acted upon without adverse impacts for the complainant (KI 17, 2020).

Embassy/consular support is, moreover, needed in the event of violence, and should include the provision of shelter. NGOs and other providers could be contracted to provide this work with appropriate consular oversight and reporting mechanisms (KI 3 2020; KI17 2020; KI 18 2020).

Unionization

The balance of power between a migrant domestic worker and her employer is extremely skewed in favour of the employer. Unions are an important tool for increasing the power that workers hold to improve the balance of power (KIs 1 and 5, 2020). Historically unions for migrant domestic workers have been illegal and for this reason, among others, have had low membership (KIs 1 and 5, 2020). Given this history, considerable effort must be made to develop widespread unionization of migrant domestic workers. In Lebanon the unionization of migrant workers is now legal and unions for workers exist (KI 1, 2020). Jordan has not ratified the ILO Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise; while migrants can join existing unions, they cannot be elected to union positions and unions generally only represent national workers. Moreover, organizing workers is still very restrictive and some unions struggle to get the legal status (KI 6, 2020). Unions have difficulties reaching workers, especially live-in domestic workers whose ability to organize remains largely dependent on their freedom of movement (KI 10, 2020). The ILO is beginning to develop a system whereby the paperwork for migrants is centrally stored, helping to prevent contract substitution. This system presents an opportunity for unions to easily access the information needed to aid their members (KI 5, 2020).

Projects could make workers aware of unions and associated rights after signing up to unions and paying dues. This is important as unions are generally not migrant run or migrant centred and some lack democratic practices (KI 9, 2020). In addition, unions, such as those in Jordan, have discriminatory practices whereby only Jordanians can vote on matters and be considered for president (KI 6, 2020).

4. Reintegration

Reintegration assistance

Return migration includes, (i) voluntary return or those who choose to return home out of free will and where forced labour or trafficking was not a reason for return, and (ii) forced return which includes those coerced to return to the country of origin against their will. Cycles of migration have also been classified into complete, incomplete and interrupted migration cycles. Better return preparedness is more likely for those who return out of free will and who have a complete migration cycle (Wickramasekara, 2019). Complete cycles are those where workers have been well informed, migrated under regular migration channels with low-cost and fair recruitment, completed and terminated their job contracts, achieved their migration objectives such as accumulated savings and return to an improved situation in countries of origin. Incomplete cycles are those where migrants incurred high debts, faced racism and low wages abroad and did not achieve migration objectives. Interrupted migration cycles are situations where a crisis, loss of a job, health issues or deportation leads to migrant returns.

Economic, social and cultural reintegration into countries of origin is one of the least researched phases of the migration pathway. One reason for this is the lack of data on returning workers and their reintegration patterns (Wickramasekara, 2019). Several reintegration challenges have been reported, including inadequate employment services, and lack of skill certification and recognition especially for unskilled migrant workers, lack of social protection and pension coverage for returning migrants, resource constraints and stigmatization --especially of

women migrants--by families and society. Beydoun (2006) argues that a key element of preventing forced labour and trafficking is through supporting returning workers. Workers returning to their home country are at a high risk of emigrating through unofficial channels or being trafficked if they are unable to find work and integrate back into society. Further, longer-term support for reintegration, such as assisting returnees with finding education and employment, and long-term assistance with trauma, in particular in cases of victims of trafficking are needed (Bryant and Landman, 2020).

Key mechanisms for effective reintegration include registering migrant workers upon their return and facilitating access to services and employment at home, and collaboration of origin and destination countries in ensuring the migrant's safe return. Some South Asian countries such as Indonesia and Philippines have established reintegration programs for returning migrant workers that include enhancing their skills, providing social services such as information, counselling and employment assistance (Wickramasekara, 2019). The Nepalese government started thinking of ways to support and integrate returning migrants through grants to start small enterprises (Kilby and Wu, 2020). However, informal or illegal migrants such as migrant women travelling indirectly through India are likely to be ineligible for the proposed reintegration program. Wickramasekara (2019) recommends that countries of origin develop comprehensive reintegration programs and policies, and that designing these reintegration programs should be inclusive of all migrants regardless of age, gender, skills or migratory status (regular or irregular channels).

Reintegration of female migrants seems particularly challenge in South Asia. As an example, female returnee migrants in India often had to move to shelters or government houses instead of their homes, as they would not be accepted back into the family due to strong societal norms against independent living. Norms for women's families have changed, however, because of the large demand for garment workers. A further complication is that rural landholdings are very small, making claimants by returnees on rural assets unwelcome. Due to this rehabilitation family dynamic, returning women and girls often want to marry to gain a place in the family as a wife rather than as a sister. However, there is a need to create jobs for women and girls, such as through vocational schooling for returnees, to provide them with good livelihood and reintegration options especially if they do not wish to marry (KI 11).

5. Interventions in the institutional and policy framework

Policies and laws governing migration operate at various levels. First, there are national laws in the countries of origin and destination that determine migration destination, pathways, and resources available to migrants and employers. Second, there are bilateral agreements that determine the rules and conventions governing the flow of migrants from one country to another. There are also limited regional agreements. Finally, there are international agreements related to migration, signed and agreed upon by multiple countries, that function predominantly as non-binding regulations that countries sign up to (or not) agreeing to uphold with no real penalty for non-implementation. This includes international agreements by organizations such as the United Nations, its specialized organizations, like the ILO, and other regional bodies. National laws likely have the most power to influence the migration and employment experiences of migrants.

While in principle most laws and policies aim to make the migration experience fair and equitable, and free from discrimination, guarantee safe working conditions, and recourse to redressal, policies need to be especially cognizant of the special needs of women migrants. This is because female migrants face systemic and structural disadvantages in both origin and destination countries, especially due to segregated labour markets that leave women in low-paying female-dominated jobs and sectors. Low pay can potentially trap women in a cycle of perpetual disadvantage, as women continue to remain in such jobs, often to pay off the expensive process of migration that often indebts women and their families back home. Migrant women are also more likely to experience physical and sexual violence and exploitation. Migrant women from certain regions, like South Asia, are also much less likely to have access to a circle or network of fellow migrants because women still make up

a relatively small proportion of total migrants from such regions. Migration related policies and legislation thus need to be responsive to the particular vulnerabilities of women.

Laws in the country of origin

Over the years many countries have instituted laws governing or controlling the flow of migration out of their countries more broadly, or to certain areas or countries, often as a way of rationing and monitoring the movement of human resources out of the country. In case of female migrants, such laws often take the form of banning migration totally or restricting migration to certain regions or countries where the threat of unsafe migration or work-conditions is considered high. The key national legislation in this area in South Asia are frequent bans of female migration, as described above.

Other laws aim to regulate the actors involved in the migration process. For example, countries may require all migrants to register pre-departure as a condition to migrate. The government may also require recruitment firms and agents to be licenced by the government to ensure compliance with existing policies and laws. In most countries, recruitment agents in countries of origin are banned from charging migrants for any part of the recruitment and migration process. However, this rule is rarely followed, and migrants often pay large amounts as a “commission” to agents in the home country and sometimes even on arrival in destination. A survey of 582 migrant domestic workers in Lebanon showed that 37 percent of the women paid placement agents after arrival (Jureidini, 2010). Perhaps one of the reasons migrant workers are considered cheap abroad is because the cost of migration is borne by the worker (KI 11, 2021). This practice has been normalized over the years, even becoming a cultural expectation in countries of origin where those who wish to migrate expect to pay and sometimes believe that the more they pay the better the job they can get.

Thus, apart from laws, there is a need for sending countries to put in place institutional structures that aim to improve migrant women’s access to information, legal assistance, and that provide pre-departure training that is gender-sensitive. This will require, first and foremost, provisions for sanctions against agents and recruiters who do not follow the rules and stricter prosecution of traffickers. Programming efforts often focus on the protection of the victims of trafficking rather than the prosecution of traffickers. Relatively few traffickers get prosecuted, and penalties are not drastic or serious. For example, recruitment agencies might be stopped from operating, but because they know the business and individuals are not prosecuted, they are able to change their name, address and set up a new company “within weeks” (KI 5, 2021).

One of the significant challenges in the countries of origin is that while they may have laws and excellent legal frameworks, they are seldom implemented. Bangladesh is a case in point, where the Overseas Employment and Migration Act of 2013 entails rigorous monetary and confinement punishments for brokers or recruitment agencies malpractices and gives migrants and their families the right to file criminal cases against deception (RMMRU 2016). Yet, this has not been sufficiently implemented, with families waiting for years in court procedures without receiving any compensation.

Finally, there is a need to invest in institutions that can support women in the process of reintegration upon their return to home countries, including improving access to training and education, institutional credit and where necessary legal and health assistance. This remains an area with the least amount of direct policies and interventions and is perhaps the reason why many women choose to re-migrate, often to the same exploitative conditions they returned from, rather than remain in their country upon their return.

Laws in receiving countries

Almost all countries have rules governing migrants or guest workers in their countries- rules that dictate who will be allowed to enter as a worker, the duration of their stay, the public assistance and services they can and cannot access while in the country, as well as the documentation needed to sustain their stay in country. Such

regulatory frameworks often contribute to migrant workers' vulnerability by giving employers disproportionate control over workers (Abimourched, 2011).

This is reflected in the Kafala system, a series of regulations that tie the worker with the employer in an unequal relationship, that is active in most Arab countries. Kafala requires migrants to not only have sponsorship from an employer for permission to work in the country but also approval from the employer before leaving or switching jobs (KI 10, 2020). The system has thus become a potential tool for exploitation and harassment of migrant workers by their employers, that not only binds migrants in unequal contracts but also criminalizes non-compliance by workers. There is an urgent need to overhaul the current system, including decriminalizing migrants that leave their employers. The elimination of the Kafala system, some argue, would reduce migrant domestic women's vulnerability as well as create competition between employers, establishing a local market for migrant labour that is not yet present (KI 5, 2020). Increased competition might, furthermore, compel employers to improve work conditions to attract and keep workers.

Abimourched (2011) recommends that workers who file complaints against their employers should be granted temporary residence to enable them to find other work instead of being obligated to return to their home country. Laws that limit access to social protection and benefits of migrants further enhance their vulnerability. To address this, migrant workers, especially domestic workers, should be included in the receiving country's labour law (Abimourched, 2011).

Like in sending countries, there is also a need for increased oversight of recruitment agencies in receiving countries; including the need for training of labour inspectors. Jureidini (2010) suggests that because there is business collaboration between the recruitment agencies in the sending and receiving country placement agencies, both agencies should be held liable when violations are perpetrated against the migrant worker by their employer or by either agency. There is also a need for stringent licensing and vetting of recruitment and placement agencies and the introduction of a blacklist for exploitative employers.

Finally, there is a need for the justice system to address migrant worker issues. Migrants should be able to access the justice system in the receiving countries, with reasonable confidence of receiving a fair and unbiased hearing. Currently, migrants are unable to access legal resources, both due to mistrust in the system and due to language barriers, physical confinement, and lack of information about legal recourse.

Many Arab countries have begun reforming their local labour laws and Kafala systems, in part due to international pressure. For example, in the past decade Jordan and Lebanon have made efforts to include domestic workers in labour laws; however much of this is not yet in effect (Bajracharya and Sijapati, 2012; Tal, 2015). Qatar may be passing a law to abolish Kafala (KIs 1 and 5, 2020) and Lebanon had plans to implement a unified contract that would codify the rights available to the worker. However, like many well-intentioned policies, proper implementation and oversight would be essential in determining its success in materially improving the condition and rights of migrants in these countries.

Ultimately, interventions will be flawed if migrant workers themselves are not involved in the design and implementation of interventions. It is recommended that migrants are directly involved in anti-trafficking programming as well as evaluations, giving them a voice regarding what is most effective and what should be counted (Bryant and Landman 2020). When new challenges for migrant workers arise, it takes time for NGOs and researchers to take note; involving migrant workers helps to shorten this. However, currently migrant workers themselves have limited "voice" to advocate for their needs. Regulations that prohibit migrant workers from joining a trade union as well as a lack of recognition of informal migrant associations contribute to this problem. Abimourched (2011) finds that while NGOs have started to advocate on behalf of migrant workers their poor representation in such NGOs has resulted in reforms not adequately addressing their needs. Beydoun (2006, p 1036) argues that in an environment where the political will to change the circumstances of migrant

workers is absent “grassroots and civil society campaigns must be the catalyst for building a truly full-scale, multi-sector movement”.

Bilateral Agreements

Bilateral agreements are another important source of legislation and policy that govern the flow and condition of migrants from one signatory country to another. These could take the form of general trade agreements that include clauses about migrant labour rights or could be specific agreements focussed exclusively on migration. Bajracharya and Sijapati (2012) and ILO (2015) propose to directly support and strengthen bilateral agreements and their implementation to protect migrants’ rights.

For example, since 2010, the recruitment of Bangladeshis to Jordan’s ready-made garment sector has been facilitated by Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL), which has not only enabled Bangladesh to maintain the flow of workers but also helped improve factory compliance with Jordanian and international labour standards. Bilateral agreements can be effective bargaining tools for sending countries to negotiate better working conditions for their citizens in other countries, and to ensure that systems that are set up to address the needs of migrants in receiving countries function as intended (Bajracharya and Sijapati, 2012).

For such changes to take effect, destination countries need to cooperate with sending countries and vice versa. For example, Nepal’s Women Domestic Workers Guideline endorsed in 2015 aims to hold employers and local recruitment agencies in the destination country accountable for the welfare of migrant domestic workers. This can only work, however, if the bilateral agreement is respected between the countries and when migration follows official channels (MFA, 2019). Once the migrant leaves the home country, they are under the destination country’s policy realm, which might not provide them rights equal to those of citizens, making it difficult for countries of origin to prevent exploitation (Barsbai, 2018). As long as practices in destination countries, such as the kafala system clash with bilateral agreements, they will remain ineffective (KC and Hennebray, 2019).

Regional agreements

According to Henderson et al. (2020), regional processes, such as the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue strengthen collaboration across countries of origin and destination, harmonizing positions, and generally working together toward upholding the rights of migrant workers and preventing harmful recruitment practices. The Colombo Process, for example, an informal, non-binding forum to facilitate dialogue and cooperation relating to labour mobility was started in 2003. It focuses on overseas employment of an estimated 2.5 million migrants from Asia who work in the GCC, North America, Europe and elsewhere in Asia. The Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) is a similar informal, non-binding process that was established in 2008 focuses on Asian migration with active participation of six destination countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Malaysia.

Limitations of laws and policies

Ultimately, laws and policies are only effective if they are implemented, enforced and penalties for non-compliance are issued and followed through. Laws and legal frameworks are not a solution on their own, unless they are implemented and enforced (KI 1, 2020). Even large international organizations are sometimes unable to affect change in the face of political resistance. For example, ILO efforts to work on changing policies in Lebanon have not been successful. As such, ILO has shifted its focus to support and promote self-organizing efforts among the migrating domestic workers rather than grand policy change (KI 8, 2020).

Similarly, laws are likely to function better in some countries than others, and for migrants in some sectors more than others. KI 10 (2020) notes that there is a difference between Lebanon and Jordan in terms of implementation of policies for migrants with Jordan exerting more control. Moreover, KI 10 (2020) notes that for migrant domestic workers and migrant workers in general, the system is co-opted by vested interests and regulations are irrelevant because they are not enforced. Enforcement and compliance is particularly challenging

for migrant domestic workers. An example of lack of enforcement of legislation for domestic workers can be seen in their continued payment of fees both to recruitment agents at home and sometimes also to placement agents once they arrive to destination countries as discussed above (K 11, 2020).

Key legal options

While laws and regulations that are not implemented have little benefits for women migrants, the recognition of domestic work under labour law is important according to KI 7 (2020). This would help normalize the employment situation of migrant domestic workers, providing a platform to terminate contracts without having to leave the country, as well as to change employers.

Another key legal option is the integration of migrant domestic workers in the minimum wage policy, as has been proposed for Jordan (KI 6, 2020) as well as reforming the Kafala system, through increasing its flexibility of application, such as through more flexible work permits.

Anti-trafficking laws are a further tool that can reduce exploitation of female migrants in the Middle East. Jordan, for example, has been spending years on a draft law focused on anti-trafficking while Lebanon's anti-trafficking law is considered to be of little use (KI 4, 2020). Anti-trafficking legislation needs to be linked to penalties for trafficking with credible enforcement (KIs 1 and 5, 2020). When laws have been developed, their interpretation by the judicial system is key. As KI 6 (2020) noted, several ministries are linked to trafficking of migrants, including the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labour; if these two agencies do not cooperate well or use different terminology (such as labour rights violation instead of trafficking), real enforcement cannot be achieved. As such awareness raising and capacity building on rights violations remain important.

The role of NGOs and civil society

As legal efforts have not led to substantial improvement of migrant workers outcomes, many organizations are instead supporting NGOs and other organizations and institutions. As KI 4 (2020) notes, Kafa, an NGO in Lebanon, invested efforts to join migrant women from Bangladesh and elsewhere to share experiences and mobilize them. But the NGO did not include sufficient experience of migrants in its group. Other links with civil society include trade unions and the engagement of returnee migrants in supporting potential migrants (Rashid and Watson, 2017). Beydoun (2006) notes that grass roots and indigenous civil society organizations have led the movement against the trafficking of women to Lebanon in Ethiopia, while the government and transnational NGO's have had a limited role.

6. Additional considerations due to the COVID-19 global health pandemic

The outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic has in many ways exacerbated vulnerabilities of migrant domestic workers. This includes domestic workers losing employment and networks, working even more hours and being on call 24 hours a day without extra pay, racist attitudes against migrant workers, health vulnerabilities, repatriation issues for those wishing to return home, wage payment delays and cuts and stigmatization upon return. Many of these issues are expected to last for years. COVID-19 impacts thus need to feature in any programming targeting migrant workers and aiming to reduce forced labour and trafficking going forward.

Important mechanisms to consider include providing migrants with social protection both at origin and destination countries, as well as local support systems that will enable migrants to reintegrate into the economy and find work (KI 11, 2020; Kilby and Wu, 2020). Alahmad et al. (2020) notes for Kuwait that COVID-19 risk management requires migrant-specific disease containment, mitigation and prevention; improved healthcare access; better temporary housing; access to information in native languages; worker protection; community support; and continuous monitoring and adjustment as conditions change.

Increased challenges and support needs around migration as a result of the pandemic could lead to increased recruitment costs for future migrants (KI 1, 2020). Such costs would fall on recruitment agencies and employers

to address additional migrant-related restrictions. The likely increase in cost of migration, some of which will need to be borne by migrant workers themselves, might lead to increased trafficking and smuggling. This needs to be assessed in future studies.

Exclusion from support programs and information

Woertz (2020) notes that migrant workers in the GCC states had challenges accessing nutritious food. COVID-19 relief programs were almost exclusively geared toward citizens. Saudi Arabia, for example, offered to pay 60% of private sector wages of Saudi nationals for up to three months as part of its Unemployment Insurance scheme. But exclusion from COVID-19 relief was also common in sending countries. This again affected poorer returnee migrants who did not always have the needed paperwork, like up-to-date registration cards, to access relief in countries of origin. Moreover, in garment factories, all information on COVID-19 was provided in Arabic only, even information targeting migrant workers.

Loss of employment, shelter and networks

Loss of wages, employment, networks and in many cases shelter or a place to live has affected millions of migrant workers, particularly domestic workers, during the pandemic. COVID-19's impact was considered to be somewhat lower for live-in migrant domestic workers, many of whom live with wealthy families, compared to those who live separately (KI 10, 2020). While live-in domestic workers might have lost wages, they still generally have housing, while freelancers face homelessness (KI 1, 2020). Nevertheless, some live-in domestic workers in Lebanon have been abandoned by employers (Kilby and Wu, 2020). Live-out migrant domestic workers have expanded in Jordan in recent years and suffered more because of the extreme lockdown in Jordan, which prevented them from going to work, get paid and pay for their living expenses (KI 10, 2020). There was an effort by the Jordanian government to help repatriate some migrants (mostly from Egypt) particularly in light of nationalizing jobs that they held. No similar effort was attempted for migrant domestic workers. Moreover, loss of the already limited support networks due to the lockdown have made migrant workers more vulnerable (Kilby and Wu, 2020).

Repatriation and financial assistance

Many migrants who lost employment remained stranded in countries of destination, often without income or shelter, and without a chance to return home due to travel restrictions, poverty and the lockdown. Challenges are heightened for illegal migrants. As an example, many Nepalese women arrived in the Middle East through India, by crossing the open India-Nepal boarder, as women's migration to these countries is considered illegal in Nepal. These migrants are not recognized by the Nepalese government and lack supporting documents (Kilby and Wu, 2020). This complicates and hinders their repatriation process in general and more so during the pandemic, because they never technically left according to the government. They are also ineligible for the pension fund provided by the Nepali government.

The pandemic has led to economic crises in many countries, leading to job losses among migrant employees (KI 5, 2020). Many workers opted to return to their home countries without getting paid for past work. Governments in both sending and receiving countries also neglected their responsibility to support migrants in getting paid prior to returning home (KI 1, 2020). Moreover, in some cases, consulates did not support migrants to return, and some returnee migrants were prevented from entering their own countries (KI 4 and KI 5, 2020). Some governments feared that migrant returnees may carry the virus, and were already overwhelmed with the situation in their own countries, and did not want migrants to not return.

Among Arab countries, the pandemic effects were particularly severe for migrant workers in Lebanon, since the country has been in economic and political turmoil before the pandemic hit; the situation worsened further after the Beirut port explosion of August of 2020 (KI 5, 2020; Kilby and Wu, 2020). In Lebanon, stranded migrants have camped on streets and in front of embassies. In the context of the pandemic, it is not a matter of only fixing laws, but it is necessary to provide immediate protection for migrants, such as providing housing

or hosting centers until the situation improves or migrants can be repatriated back to origin countries (KI 1, 2020). The Migrant Forum in Asia started a campaign to recoup workers' wages particularly for those migrants who went back home without pay that they were supposed to receive (KI 5, 2020).

There is an urgent need for financial assistance for stranded migrant women who wish to leave but the system does not allow them to leave easily (KI 4, 2020). Some NGOs have tried to pressure IOM, whose mandate is to repatriate, to work faster. For example, Kafa requested the IOM to speed up the repatriation process for Kenyan migrants. Donor organizations could support safe repatriation through the purchase of tickets for vulnerable migrants via local NGOs (KI 4, 2020).

Yet, migrant challenges keep changing as the pandemic evolves. While the initial challenge of the migrants was to return and get reintegrated into their families\communities, more recently they face the challenge of returning to their workplaces in the Middle East on time. In Bangladesh, Middle East-bound migrants have protested the government's lack of preparation to meet the vaccination requirements for them to be able to return to work and be accepted back into destination countries (Dhaka Tribune, 2021).

Racist attitudes in the pandemic

Key Informants noted that racist attitudes were prominent during the pandemic and that measures were needed to change racist attitudes towards migrant workers during the pandemic. A combination of racist and xenophobic attitudes and fears have resulted in nationals and employers thinking that migrant workers are the carriers of the virus and that they represent a danger to them, their children and society (KI 5, 2020). This situation was not helped by the precarious housing and hygiene situation that many migrants find themselves in the garment sector, but is also reflected in the cramped housing in the

Healthcare

Experts predict that as a result of the pandemic migrants might require access to additional services for migration to function in the future (KI 11, 2020). When the pandemic started, many migrants in Middle Eastern countries, especially low-skilled labour such as domestic workers were not covered by healthcare. Providing migrant workers with health services that they lack is a crucial issue that has surfaced during the pandemic. Creating health systems that can be extended to migrants, rather than integrating migrants into health services is key to reduce their vulnerability and provide them with a more decent and safer experience. According to Woertz (2020), the Saudi government decided to open its healthcare system to everybody for COVID-19 treatment, regardless of their legal residency status, acknowledging indirectly that the public health risk the pandemic poses could otherwise not be addressed.

Program activity disruption

COVID-19 and the associated lockdown also disrupted activities of programs that aimed to reduce trafficking and forced labour in various ways. This includes the cancellation of awareness raising and training activities and the limitations to share information. Moreover, the closure of workers' centers hindered meetings with migrant women and civil society groups to discuss collective action and needed advocacy. Some activities were moved to digital platforms, but participation was limited to those migrants who had better digital access. Face-to-face interactions to understand impacts on migrants were limited or non-existent.

On a more general level, the pandemic has affected the capacity of workers to associate as a result of social distancing affecting their ability to discuss common grievances and remedial action. Thus, there is a risk that the "new normal" results in more lasting restrictions on freedom of association and collective bargaining. The capacity of regulators, project staff and social workers to understand daily realities of migrant women and develop responsive strategies has also been affected. This is embedded in an environment of limited empathy and discrimination on the part of regulators, where in some countries (e.g. Jordan, Lebanon) authorities are arguing that the welfare of their own citizens comes before that of migrants; e.g. welfare measures being

reserved for nationals. For example, garment workers in Jordan are excluded from 3 out of 5 social protection programs (KI 6, 2020). Further, there is currently a lack of reliable qualitative data about how the pandemic is specifically affecting migrant women workers, in order to inform program interventions.

Exposure of violations in the sponsorship system

COVID has brought the weaknesses of Kafala to the forefront, exposing violations in facilitating trafficking, in trapping domestic workers and in exacerbating poor working conditions (KIs 6 and 7, 2020). For example, in Jordan, worker centers have revealed 16 cases in the garment sector, where workers were denied wages and forced to work. Trust between the worker centers and migrant workers played a role in highlighting these violations. Further, workers were more willing to speak out because of lockdown and travel restrictions. Some were forced to pay for their plane tickets to be able to leave. Fewer information has become available on domestic workers as they are located in private homes without inspection and lockdowns reduced their mobility further (KI 7, 2020).

7. Effective mechanisms and implementation through a sample project: The Work In Freedom phase II program

ILO's Work in Freedom¹ program focuses on reducing migrant women's vulnerability to trafficking and forced labor by focusing on creating a safe migration environment, providing women with information that empowers them to make informed choices. The program aims to achieve three main outcomes according to its Theory of Change (ToC):

1. Women have greater ability to make their own choices during the entire migration process in an enabling environment for safe migration into decent work.
2. Increased levels of collaboration, accountability and respect between key actors.
3. Strengthened laws, policies, practices and systems for social protection, safe labor migration and decent work for women.

The program has developed several mechanisms and activities to achieve these outcomes (see Appendix). The ToC also describes assumptions and possible counter trends related to the proposed program mechanisms and activities that could reduce the effectiveness of the interventions. They include the project context, political environment and socioeconomic situation and stakeholder attitudes. We find that many of the mechanisms in the ToC are well supported by the recent literature and Key Informant Interviews, while others seem less effective or may require additional mechanisms in place. Some of the least effective mechanisms (such as advocating for migration bans to protect women) are excluded from WIF ToC and ILO's mandate in general.

Outflow countries

In origin countries with high outflows of migrants (in this case Nepal and Bangladesh), WIF's program interventions focus on various mechanisms to develop migrant women's capacities and provide them with information through various means (including utilizing social workers and improving their capacity for knowledge sharing) to enable women to know about their rights, negotiate better access to local entitlements and local or outbound jobs and take decisions that affect their lives.

Another mechanism is to review pre-departure policies and amend pre-departure training curriculums, to create a better enabling space for migrant women's learning. Networks are also considered important for a more

¹ Fair Recruitment and Decent Work for Women Migrant Workers in South Asia and the Middle East (Work in Freedom) is an inter-regional technical cooperation programme implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) with its partners and financed by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of Government of the United Kingdom. The program is currently in Phase II. We refer to the Theory of Change of the latter phase of the program.

empowered migration process. A further intervention is to strengthen potential migrant women's collective voice and mutual support for one another in addressing common challenges related to gender, mobility and work through networking.

To aid policy and policy makers in outflow countries to better protect and uphold migrant women's rights, WIF activities include advocacy mechanisms among groups advocating for women migrant workers (with the secondary aim of influencing other programs that benefit from the program's lessons learned), improving migration policies so that they are more enabling of mobility as a choice, rather than a compulsion or a restriction, and efforts to make state policies more responsive to needs of vulnerable women and girls. This includes improvements of services at local level to reduce the need to migrate in distress, and improvements in migration policies so that they are more enabling mobility as a choice, rather than a compulsion or a restriction.

Inflow countries

In inflow countries, particularly Jordan and Lebanon, the program interventions focus on raising the capacity of migrant women workers to connect (with each other and with support groups and organizations), access services and organize collectively to address their grievances, in order for them to enjoy better collective representation, support services, and recognition of their rights.

The mechanisms for this include creating safe spaces in strategic locations to enable women to associate and establish support mechanisms for themselves, provide demand-driven support services to migrant women workers through unions, worker centers, NGOs, other service providers, as well as organize them in worker collectives to increase their voice and solidarity to address their individual and collective demands.

The program also attempts to develop the capacity of employers to address rights of migrant women domestic workers through campaigns to change employer attitudes, dialogues with employers to address migrant right issues and trainings for employers of garment workers.

Another area of focus in migrant receiving countries is encouraging policy makers to uphold rights of migrant workers through increasing advocacy and coordination among civil groups dedicated to rights of women, workers and migrants, as well as presenting evidence and preparing knowledge products and policy briefs to inform regulators.

Labour intermediation

Holding recruitment intermediaries and employers accountable to recruitment outcomes across recruitment pathways is another focus in the WIF program in both origin and destination countries. This is an important pathway yet difficult to achieve, as deception is often the basis of many recruitment agencies' work. For example, Tamkeen (2015) noted that 70 percent of domestic workers in Jordan understood and signed the contract but did not receive a copy. Many work without contracts. Forty-two percent of migrants received a lower salary than that stated in their contract. Further, Bajracharya and Sijapati (2012) find that recruitment agencies at home (and at times destination) countries are involved in malpractices such as substituting contracts drawn at the countries of origin with others that have different terms and conditions.

WIF interventions include gathering evidence through mapping and following labour intermediation trends, as well as through assessment of the main recruitment pathways and specific recruitment practices to understand recruitment trends and disseminate findings among stakeholders. Mechanisms further include piloting and implementation of better recruitment practices and holding dialogues on the need for joint accountability in recruitment chains among stakeholders. This is also supported by strengthening advocacy for better recruitment laws and policies.

Tables 3, 4, and 5 synthesize the above evidence from the literature and KIIs regarding which mechanisms present in the WIF theory of change are supported (or seen as ineffective) in reducing migrant women's vulnerability to trafficking and forced labor.

Table 3: Mechanisms for outflow countries (countries of origin)

<i>WIF II ToC mechanisms</i>	<i>Evidence from the literature and KIs</i>
<p>Social workers engage women and girls and other community members — leading to women understanding better how to negotiate and take decisions that affect their lives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach to vulnerable women and girls. • Information provision enables women to know about their rights and negotiate better access to local entitlements and jobs. • Collective voice and networking strengthens women’s mutual support for one another in addressing common challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUPPORTED: Providing migrant workers with information on their labor rights and the job market in destination countries significantly improved their knowledge and working conditions (Barsbai 2018). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: A focus on women’s empowerment alone regardless of women’s plans to migrate or not might not be cost-effective if the focus is to prevent trafficking and forced labor ○ CAVEAT: Positive impacts from information provision are only reported for migrants prior to departure and not for potential migrants. ○ CAVEAT: Training on negotiation is insufficient to fully address deception practices and non-honoring of contracts. Without having the legal papers, even with knowledge of their rights, migrant workers cannot negotiate. • SUPPORTED: Initiation of social networks pre-departure is an important channel to utilize for conveying information to migrant women throughout the migration process. (Frantz, 2014; KI 5, 2020). Domestic care workers tend to rely on their social networks for information rather than official channels. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: These pre-departure measures should take into consideration the controlled environment that domestic workers are placed into and that abuse might occur, including having their cell phones confiscated and belongings searched.
<p>Capacity development of social workers and government scheme workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and knowledge sharing enables social workers to mediate information more effectively to and from women and girls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNCLEAR: Developing of capacity of migrants is widely seen as important; supporting social workers interacting with migrants can also be helpful, but it is not clear how these social workers liaise with the migration process; Key Informants and other references strongly suggest to involve former migrants in any capacity building of migrants.
<p>Technical guidance for institutional pre-departure programmes — leads to pre-departure programmes that do not undermine the rights of migrants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of pre-departure policies, curricular amendments, and capacity development creates more enabling space for migrant women’s learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUPPORTED: Many curricula have been criticized for being very general and not sector-, country- or gender-specific and for not providing enough information on support channels and migrants’ legal rights, or sufficiently equipping women with what they need to know predeparture; language skill development is lacking (Frantz 2014; Rashid and Watson 2017; Regmi et al. 2019). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: Provide mechanisms to ensure those who travel irregularly are also provided with training. Need to add extra mechanisms in place to encourage and incentivize migrant women to attend trainings; including providing trainings in local villages where they are more accessible to migrant women; and paying for attendance.

<i>WIF II ToC mechanisms</i>	<i>Evidence from the literature and KIs</i>
<p>Advocacy among groups advocating for women migrant workers — encourages policy makers to uphold migrant worker’s rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in types of services at local level reduce the need to migrate in distress. • Improvements in migration policies so that they are more enabling of mobility as a choice, rather than a compulsion or a restriction. State policies more responsive to needs of vulnerable women and girls. Advocacy influences other programmes to benefit from lessons learned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUPPORTED: Migration bans increase irregular migration, which is strongly associated with more dangerous and circuitous routes, lack of information, lack of choices, and in some cases trafficking in persons (ILO, 2015; Napier-Moore, 2017; KI 5, 2020). Potential migrants expressed a preference for travelling as regular migrants for reasons of legitimacy and safety. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: It is not clear how advocacy for women migrant workers would improve services at local level that would in turn reduce the need to migrate in distress
<p>Learning and research leading to better evidence base for better policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research on migrant trajectories, recruitment practices, women’s work trends, documentation of lessons learned and dissemination enables better advocacy. • Knowledge sharing forums among women workers supports better decision making and more focused and coordinated advocacy agenda among civil groups. • Lessons learned enable adaptive programming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUPPORTED: Very little research has been implemented to assess what works and what does not in the field of preventing forced labour and trafficking in migration (i.e. Bryant and Landman, 2020; Davy, 2015, 2016). In particular, quantitative assessments of interventions are lacking. Moreover, learning from returnee migrants was suggested by various sources. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAVEAT: It is important to learn from disseminating research results and learnings. A Knowledge, Attitude and Practices assessment could be implemented with intended audiences that received and those who did not receive the information.

Table 4: Mechanisms for inflow countries (countries of destination)

<i>WIF II ToC mechanisms</i>	<i>Evidence from the literature and KIs</i>
<p>Developing capacity of migrant women workers to connect, access services and organize collectively to address their grievances — enables them to enjoy better collective representation, support services, and recognition of their rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unions, worker centres, NGOs, other service providers provide demand-driven support services to migrant women workers. • Safe spaces in strategic locations enable women to associate and establish support mechanisms for themselves. • Worker collectives enable better voice and solidarity to address their individual and collective demands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUPPORTED: Unions are important tool for increasing workers' power (KIs 1 and 5, 2020). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: As unionization for migrant workers in the Middle East has been illegal previously, considerable effort must be made to develop widespread unionization of migrant domestic workers, especially domestic workers who are unable to leave the house (KIs 1 and 5, 2020). • SUPPORTED. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: very few workers know how to access support services (Frantz, 2014). Mechanisms to make workers aware of support services and how to access them is important to the success of such services (K 12, 2020). • SUPPORTED: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: Physical safe spaces are only accessible to women who are not imprisoned by their employers and are very limited in mobility (Esim and Smith, 2004; Frantz, 2014). A need to create spaces accessible from within their employers' home in order to reach the most vulnerable women (ex. radio, group messaging services, NGO organized group calls with migrants).
<p>Developing capacity of employers to address rights of migrant women workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaigns to change attitudes of employers of domestic workers. • Training programmes for employers of garment workers. • Dialogue with employers of domestic and garment workers to address migrant right issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUPPORTED: Employer awareness campaigns and strategies have been utilized by some projects with some success. Target topics for changing employers' attitudes could include: Rest days, Freedom of movement, Mobile phone access, Minimum wages, Passport confiscation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: The means by which these issues are addressed with employers is very sensitive, some strategies were found to cause backlash, worsening the situation for migrant workers (KI 5, 2020). Further, campaigns need to be targeted, adapted to local contexts and contain clear messages to be effective in achieving behavioral change (Bryant and Landman, 2020).
<p>Advocacy among groups advocating for women migrant workers — encourages policy makers to uphold migrant worker rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination among civil groups dedicated to rights of women, workers and migrants) enables better focus and effectiveness of advocacy. • Preparation of policy briefs and knowledge products informs regulators. • Presentation of evidence, review of policies and advocacy enables better policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: Advocacy among groups/NGOs is needed, but in addition to direct lobbying for policy makers to uphold migrant workers' rights; directly support and strengthen bilateral agreements and their implementation (Bajracharya and Sijapati, 2012). ○ CAVEAT: Some outflow countries do not have embassies in countries of destination. Strengthened government presence through embassies would offer more protection to migrants to better advocate for eliminating abuse and discriminatory practices (ILO, 2015; Rashid and Watson, 2017).

<i>WIF II ToC mechanisms</i>	<i>Evidence from the literature and KIs</i>
<p>Learning and research — enables more effective advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies on working and living conditions, studies to enable better negotiation (wages, harassment, other). • Studies on demand for care work and supply-chain trends generate better evidence to support policy changes. • Knowledge sharing among constituents enables better mutual cooperation. • Documentation of lessons learned enables adaptive programming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUPPORTED: This is important as some Arab countries embark on reforming their labor laws, introducing standard contracts and reassessing the application of the Kafala system in practice. Advocacy for proper implementation will be key (KIs 1, 7 and 10, 2020; Manseau, 2007).

Table 5: Mechanisms for labor intermediation

<i>WIF II ToC mechanisms</i>	<i>Evidence from the literature and KIs</i>
<p>Mapping and learning labor intermediation trends — creates evidence for better policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments of main recruitment pathways enable better understanding of recruitment trends. • Assessment of specific recruitment practices enables understanding of better practices. • Dissemination of findings and learning raises capacity of stakeholders to understand each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUPPORTED
<p>Holding recruitment intermediaries and employers accountable to recruitment outcomes across recruitment pathways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue on the need for joint accountability in recruitment chains enables greater attention to migrant worker’s rights among stakeholders. Piloting and implementation of better recruitment practices enables policy makers to consider replicability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUPPORTED: Recruitment intermediaries fill an important role for potential migrants, but can use deceptive measures that trap the migrant into forced labor and in some cases debt bondage (Paoletti et al., 2014; Kilby and Wu, 2020; KI 5, 2020). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: Despite policies to cap fees and curb exploitation, migrants continue to pay high fees in many cases due to lack of information and manipulation. Stronger monitoring of recruitment networks is needed, along with awareness raising among potential migrants to break the misconception of the need to pay higher fees for better job opportunities.
<p>Advocacy among groups advocating for women migrant workers — encourages policy makers to uphold migrant worker rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of recruitment legislation and policies enables policies that up-hold rights of migrant workers better. • Strengthen advocacy for better recruitment laws and policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CAVEAT: In order to uphold migrants' rights, there is a clear need to lobby for implementation of policies that are recently starting to recognize migrant workers under destination countries' labor laws (Bajracharya and Sijapati, 2012; Tal, 2015).

Assessment of the WIF II Theory of Change

The WIF program focuses on improving overall capacities and livelihoods of rural women, through provision of information and other support regardless if women plan to migrate. Provision of accurate information is an important mechanism with documented benefits, but only if directed at women who already decided to migrate (Beam, 2016; Beam et al. 2016). Generic programs directed at women who had not already decided to migrate do not find appreciable impacts, however.

As discussed above, many of the issues that put migrant workers at risk are structural or require binding agreements and national laws to be more strictly monitored and implemented. Beyond advocacy, which is in itself crucial, other measures to realize the ratification of agreements and changes in laws and regulations are often outside the scope of WIF and other similar programs. While advocacy among pressure groups and NGOs is needed, core ILO activities of direct lobbying with policymakers in origin and destination countries to pass and implement bilateral agreements and legislations for upholding migrant workers' rights are needed.

Bryan and Landman (2020) find that many programs highlight the importance of embedding anti-trafficking interventions and stronger legislation in national laws and structures and include them in their Theory of Change. But while some of these programs were indeed effective in helping countries draft legislations, no legislations passed during the time of the evaluated programs. The lengthy timeframe needed for such work to see completion is one factor for why this is not very feasible. Another factor is the lack of national ownership to see such policy changes to completion and implementation.

The WIF-2 program could strengthen focus on improving linkages between migrant women in their home countries (predeparture) with advocacy groups in destination countries given that it operates in a unique migration channel (South Asia to the Middle East) with specific sub-channels, such as the migration of women migrants from Bangladesh to the garment sector in Jordan, for example. Having such contact information and open channels at the beginning of the journey can increase the sense of safety for migrant women before they are put in precarious situations.

Involvement of migrant workers in the design and implementation of interventions can ensure that challenges migrants face, whether reflected or not reflected in the literature, are addressed. When new challenge to migrant workers arise, it takes time for NGOs and researchers to become aware of them – involving migrant workers helps to shorten this process as they are given a voice to bring new developments to light immediately. Further, while the WIF-2 ToC is fairly comprehensive in several areas of the migration pathway for women migrant workers, reintegration-specific mechanisms are lacking. Several Key Informants point to the fact that the lack of reintegration programs can lead to a cycle of continued distress migration.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to new pressing challenges, which is both a threat and an opportunity for adaptive programming to support migrant workers in different ways. Key areas for WIF-2 based on the literature and Key Informants include advocacy for information provision on COVID-19 in local languages, particularly in the garment sector; stronger support to advocacy on access to health services to support public health in sending and destination countries in addition to migrants' health; advocacy with sending countries on treatment of migrants who want to return, including illegal migrants; and direct support to homeless and income-less migrants abroad.

8. Conclusions

Migration is on the rise, as people seek higher incomes abroad. The trend is important for national incomes of many countries, and for both sending and receiving countries. However, many migrants, and particularly migrant women migrating along the South-Asia to Middle East corridor, face increasingly precarious situations that put them at risk of forced labour and trafficking at various moments along the migration pathway. This

includes first interactions with recruiters in the country of origin, incurring debt to pay questionable fees, pre-departure formalities, including training, the departure itself, as well as the risk of deception in Middle Eastern countries, together with forced labour conditions, such as low wages, mobility restrictions, and passport removal.

The Kafala system prevailing in the Middle East, an institution or set of processes that effectively makes employers responsible for migrants, contributes to the abuse experienced by female migrants, and particularly those working in the domestic care sector.

COVID-19 has heightened vulnerabilities of female migrants in the South Asia to Middle East corridor, reflecting some of the weaknesses of the Kafala system. Shocks like the combined economic and health shock of COVID-19 required flexible and adaptable solutions for employers and migrant workers alike. The employer responsibility system instead left many migrants stranded, without wages and sometimes homeless. Further vulnerabilities related to migrants' lack of access to information on COVID-19 policies, as well as to healthcare services, and other protection measures, such as improved housing that would support social distancing in the garment sector. Neither sending nor receiving countries acted quickly or adequately with some sending countries requesting that migrants do not return home to already over-burdened health systems, even if they lost their employment; while receiving countries largely failed to integrate migrants in key protective measures and services, sometimes with adverse impacts for their own citizens.

Many programs have been working on reducing the risk of trafficking and forced labour migrant women are exposed to through various mechanisms, with varying degrees of success. Importantly, the impact of interventions is seldom evaluated due to the complexity of the migration process and due to challenges to reach migrants in Middle Eastern countries. One such program is the Work-in-Freedom phase 2 project that aims to strengthen women's empowerment in home countries to reduce distress migration, improve pre-departure programs as well as develop safe spaces and collective agency of migrants in countries of work. Finally, the program also aims to improve recruitment practices through dialogue and dialogues and to generate awareness and enhanced capacity of employers.

Based on a comparison of the literature and Key Informant Interviews with the WIF Theory of Change we find that many of the programmatic areas are supported by the literature, such as advocacy to uphold migrant worker's rights, as migrant bans are strongly associated with more dangerous migration experiences. Another important intervention are freedom of association spaces in countries of work; but they can only reach those migrants with adequate mobility; further options to reaching migrants, for example, through mobile phones, should be considered. Moreover, selected activities are unlikely to be cost-effective in reducing vulnerability to forced labour and trafficking, such as providing capacities and information to women regardless of their plans to migrate. Yet others would need to be very carefully developed and targeted, such as campaigns to change employer attitudes. These have been shown to rarely work. Instead WIF should consider supporting interventions that have been shown to make a difference with employers, specifically humanizing migrants in the eyes of their employers through bringing a photo of their family and a small souvenir from the country of origin (Barsbai, 2018). There are yet other measures that WIF has not yet focused on, such as a focus on support to reintegration program of returnee migrants, which also break cycles of negative migration experiences. The latter is particularly important as a result of the pandemic that exponentially increased the precarity of migration in the South Asia to the Middle East corridor.

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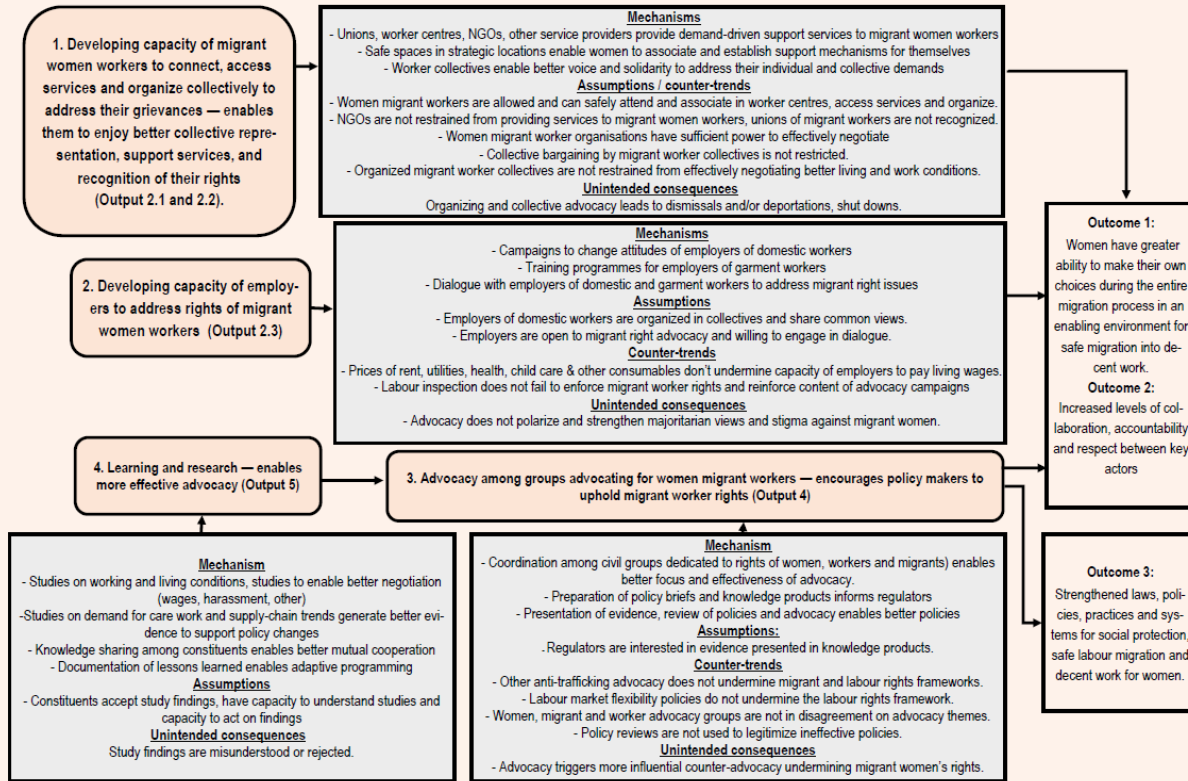
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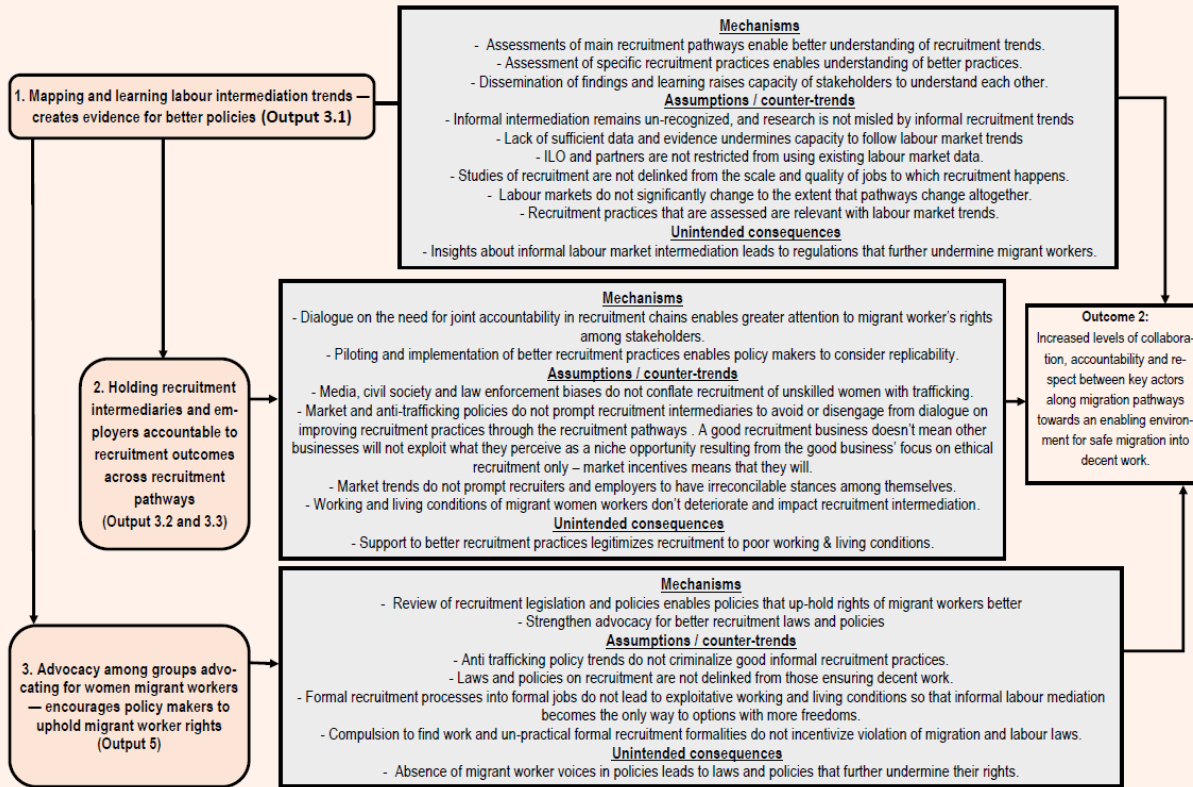
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