

International  
Labour  
Organization



A study of

Working and Living Conditions of  
Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon

“Intertwined: the workers’ side”

Regional Office for Arab States

*A study of the Working and Living Conditions of MDWs  
in Lebanon*

***“Intertwined: the workers’ side“***

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International Labour Organization  
Regional Office for Arab States

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For ILO Regional Office for Arab States publications, contact:

ILO Regional Office for Arab States

P.O.Box 11-4088 Riad El Solh 1107-2150

Beirut – Lebanon

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## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....                           | 6  |
| PART 1 - BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY .....         | 9  |
| ■ QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN .....                      | 10 |
| ■ IMPLEMENTATION OF FIELDWORK .....               | 10 |
| ■ DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS .....              | 11 |
| PART 2 - RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY ..... | 12 |
| SECTION 1 – DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS .....     | 12 |
| SECTION 2 – RECRUITMENT AGENCY AND CONTRACT.....  | 18 |
| SECTION 3 – WORK CONDITIONS.....                  | 23 |
| SECTION 4 – EMPLOYER AND HOUSEHOLD .....          | 26 |
| SECTION 5 – FAMILY AT HOME .....                  | 34 |
| SECTION 6 – GENERAL SATISFACTION .....            | 37 |
| SECTION 7 – MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS .....         | 42 |
| CONCLUSION.....                                   | 43 |

### LIST OF TABLES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1 Expected and Actual distribution of the survey sample ..... | 11 |
| Table 2 Room furnishings by nationality .....                       | 28 |

### LIST OF FIGURES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1 Distribution of the sample per country of origin (percent) .....     | 12 |
| Figure 2 Age distribution of the sample (percent).....                        | 13 |
| Figure 3 Duration of residence in Lebanon (percent).....                      | 13 |
| Figure 4 Average age and duration of residence by nationality (percent) ..... | 14 |
| Figure 5 Educational achievement per nationality .....                        | 15 |
| Figure 6 Marital status per nationality .....                                 | 15 |
| Figure 7 Share of MDWs who have children per nationality .....                | 16 |
| Figure 8 Dependency ratio per nationality .....                               | 17 |
| Figure 9 Last occupation before leaving home country per nationality.....     | 17 |
| Figure 10 Person who chose Lebanon .....                                      | 18 |
| Figure 11 Ability to understand contract terms per nationality .....          | 19 |
| Figure 12 Ability to read the Lebanese contract per nationality .....         | 19 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 13 Distribution of MDWs by salary bracket and nationality.....   | 20 |
| Figure 14 Distribution of Filipina MDWs earning the mandated 400USD by duration of stay in Lebanon  | 20 |
| Figure 15 Commission paid to home country recruitment agency per nationality (USD).....   | 21 |
| Figure 16 Share who feel that their passports/residency papers are being held against their wishes per nationality .....                      | 22 |
| Figure 17 Comparison of promised, actual, and current salaries per nationality (USD) .....  | 23 |
| Figure 18 Amount deducted from salary by employer upon arrival per nationality (USD).....   | 24 |
| Figure 19 Leisure activities per nationality .....  | 25 |
| Figure 20 Distribution of employer households by size and nationality .....   | 26 |
| Figure 21 Tasks of a MDW by nationality .....   | 27 |
| Figure 22 Sleeping accommodations by nationality .....  | 28 |
| Figure 23 Ownership of a mobile phone by nationality .....  | 29 |
| Figure 24 Personal use of house phone by nationality.....   | 29 |
| Figure 25 Eating arrangements by nationality.....   | 30 |
| Figure 26 Frequency of disagreements with employer .....  | 31 |
| Figure 27 Repetitive abuse by perpetrator.....  | 32 |
| Figure 28 Interaction with household members per nationality.....   | 32 |
| Figure 29 Freedom of choice within the household per nationality .....  | 33 |
| Figure 30 Frequency of home visits per nationality .....  | 34 |
| Figure 31 Frequency of MDW family contacts per nationality.....   | 35 |
| Figure 32 Means of contact with MDW family members per nationality .....  | 35 |
| Figure 33 Comparison of amount transferred and salary per nationality.....  | 36 |
| Figure 34 Level of satisfaction with various aspects of living conditions (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied) .....           | 37 |
| Figure 35 Level of satisfaction with recruitment agency and employer per nationality (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied)..... | 38 |
| Figure 36 Level of satisfaction with work burden (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied) ....                                     | 38 |
| Figure 37 Level of satisfaction with quantity and quality (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied) .....                           | 39 |
| Figure 38 Level of satisfaction with health-related aspects (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied) .....                         | 39 |
| Figure 39 Degree of satisfaction with salary.....   | 40 |
| Figure 40 Level of satisfaction with privacy and security (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied) .....                           | 40 |
| Figure 41 Level of satisfaction with family contacts and visits (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied) .....                     | 41 |
| Figure 42 Receiving information on MDW rights per nationality.....  | 42 |
| Figure 43 Future plans per nationality.....   | 42 |

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Credit to Hani Abbass for the drawing used on the cover page of this report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon is currently host to more than 170,000 migrant domestic workers (MDW) distributed across a number of African and Asian nationalities. Their work conditions have recently been the subject of a number of case studies, documentaries, and newspaper articles. However, most discussions lack a solid factual basis, due to the dearth of data on the subject. This survey, commissioned by the International Labour Organization (ILO), aims to enrich the debate on the rights of migrant workers in Lebanon by shedding light on various facets of the living and work conditions of MDWs in Lebanon.

The survey targeted 1,541 MDWs in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The MDWs were interviewed outside households, in various gathering points (churches, money transfer outlets, markets, etc.) because of the perceived difficulty of obtaining the approval of the employers for such interviews and the low likelihood of obtaining accurate responses if the interviews were to be conducted in the employer's presence. Thus, the survey excludes MDWs who are never allowed out of the household, even to run simple errands and the results may portray a situation that may be slightly better than the reality. Following are the major results of the survey:

### Demographic Characteristics

- Domestic workers are relatively young (average age 29) and have lived in Lebanon for an average of 5 years.
- Around 80% of MDWs have worked for only one employer.
- More than 40% of MDWs have dependent children in their home countries.
- Around 60% of MDWs were unemployed before coming to Lebanon, while another 30% were unskilled workers.

### Agency and Contract

- Around three quarters of MDWs were recruited through an agency in their home countries and only 60% reported having been able to read and understand their contracts.
- MDWs earn an average salary of 180 USD with significant internationality discrepancies.
- Half of the MDWs complained that their papers were held against their wishes.

### Work Conditions

- MDWs reported working an average of 10.5 hours per day, with few internationality discrepancies. Only half reported receiving breaks as needed during the day.
- Most MDWs do not get sufficient time off, although their contracts provide for one day of rest per week. Indeed, only 36% get one day off per week, a share that may be significantly lower in view of the fact that the sample is skewed towards MDWs who are allowed outside the home at least occasionally.

## Employer and Household

- MDWs are employed by typical Lebanese households. Indeed, the average size of employer households is 4.17, which is more or less typical for Lebanon, and they reside in two-three bedroom apartments. However, female employers of MDWs are more likely to work: 53% work on a full-time or part-time basis, in comparison to 20% in Lebanon in general.
- Only half of the MDWs have their own sleeping quarters, a share that varies widely among nationalities (80% of Filipinas vs. 38% of Bangladeshis). Moreover, only half of those with their own sleeping rooms have air conditioning or a fan.
- Around 60% of MDWs own a mobile phone and only around one third is allowed to use the household's land line.
- Most MDWs eat regularly but most have their meals after the family has finished eating, and only one quarter are allowed to cook their own food.
- Around one third of MDWs are sometimes locked inside their employer's homes and a similar percentage is never given the house keys.
- Employment disagreements are rare, with only one quarter of the respondents reporting occasional disagreements with their employers. This may be related to the isolation of MDWs and their lack of support. Indeed, more than 60% of MDWs stated they had no one to resort to in case of employment conflict.
- Around 40% of MDWs are yelled at by their employers and 11% reported physical abuse. Female employers are the most frequent perpetrators of abuse.
- The relationship between the MDW and the members of the household is relatively distant and MDWs tend to have somewhat limited freedom of choice in terms of personal shopping, family outings, and inviting friends.

## Family in Home Country

- Around half of the interviewed MDWs have never returned home for a visit, possibly because their contract terms had not yet been fulfilled.
- Three quarters of MDWs get in touch with their families at least once a week and the ownership of a mobile phone is a determining factor. Around 60% contact their families from public phones, with Filipinas registering the highest rates of Skype and SMS use.
- MDWs send three quarters of their salaries to their home countries. Around 90% reported that the money was spent on daily living expenses, followed by children's education (36%).



## General Satisfaction

Levels of satisfaction were not as low as one would expect considering the living and work conditions of MDWs in Lebanon. Indeed, most MDWs were either fully or somewhat satisfied with the behaviour of their employer, their workload, the food they consumed, and their privacy and security. This is likely due to: 1) the low expectations of MDWs and the difficult baseline conditions in their home countries; 2) their lack of awareness regarding their right to dignified work conditions; and 3) the lack of legal and social protection offered by Lebanese law.

## Major Recommendations

- **Lebanese Households.** Awareness campaigns may be organized to sensitize Lebanese households regarding the entitlement of MDWs to equal rights and protection. This effort may begin in schools. Moreover, a syndicate of employers may be formed to represent their interests and express their views.
- **Migrant Domestic Workers.** Awareness raising efforts regarding what constitutes dignified work need to take place both in Lebanon and in MDW home countries, as is the case of the Philippines.
- **Legal Framework.** Urge the Ministry of Labour to regularize domestic work by including domestic workers in the Labour Law and eliminating the Kafala system. Moreover, MDWs may be given free legal support through pro-bono legal consultations or NGOs.

## PART 1 - BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

In August 2014, the International Labour Organization (ILO) commissioned (in August 2014) the Consultation and Research Institute (CRI) to conduct a survey on migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in Lebanon. Female migrant domestic workers in Lebanon are subject to a sponsorship system (often referred to as *kafala*) that legally ties them to their employer. They require permission from their employer/sponsor for all matters pertaining to their stay in Lebanon. As has been pointed out by academic scholars, UN institutions, international and local NGOs and other human rights activists, that the legally sanctioned control over these women makes them unusually vulnerable to physical, emotional and sexual abuse as well as exploitation, in terms of wages and hours of work. Their reliance upon the goodwill and decency of their employers is critical, because domestic work is explicitly excluded from the protection of Lebanese labour law (as in other Arab countries). It is commonplace that MDWs are not granted their right to freedom of movement. Their vulnerability is exacerbated when MDWs have been required to pay large sums of money to recruitment agents in the origin countries for which they have raised loans that have to be repaid. For this, they are obliged to work, even if the salary and conditions are not what was promised to them before departure. Thus, they may be victims of trafficking, forced labour and debt bondage.

Most of the research on MDWs in Lebanon has relied upon anecdotal evidence except for a statistical survey carried out in 2005 by the consultant to this survey. However, following the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon in July-August 2006, with tens of thousands being evacuated, and with bans and restrictions against Lebanon from the origin country governments such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines, the demographics of MDWs changed significantly. In addition, since 2006 there have been more human rights activity through grants to local NGOs for awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns. The aim of this survey was to draw a more contemporary picture of the conditions under which MDWs were recruited as well as the conditions of their employment, and their perceptions regarding those conditions.

### SAMPLING METHODS

The sample size of 1,500 questionnaires was determined in coordination with the ILO in a way that ensures validity of results over the expected level of disaggregation (e.g. per nationality), while respecting the time and budget constraints set for this project.

The statistical unit is the individual migrant domestic worker (MDW) who is by definition: 1) female, 2) engaged in live-in domestic work, and 3) permanently residing in Lebanon.

The foremost criterion for sample distribution was the nationality of the MDW. Thus, work permit data obtained from the Ministry of Labour (the only available source of information) allowed the design of the sample using the share of various nationalities out of the total number of work permits (over two years, 2012-2013) to set the sample distribution per nationality (table 1).

By common agreement with the ILO, and due to time constraints, the sample was limited to Beirut and suburbs. Moreover, recruitment of respondents was conducted through a combination of two main methods: i) multiple entry points and ii) chain-referral sampling.

**The multiple entry points (MEP):** The aim of this approach is to increase, as much as possible, the number of entry-points from which the chain-referral system is launched. The multiple entry points help in reducing the bias that may be generated by the chain-referral method.

**The chain-referral sampling (CR):** this is a well-known sampling approach that is useful when there is no sampling base and there is a difficulty in recruiting subjects.

The sampling approach needs to optimize the product of both the MEP and CR methods. On one hand, the objective is to increase as much as possible the number of entry points, on the other the chain-referral approach allows us to increase the number of respondents, per entry points, hence reducing time and cost of implementation.

Based on the above, recruitment of respondents relied on the following major entry points: churches, market places, embassies, NGOs, hairdressers, call centers, and money transfer outlets. These entry points were identified by the ILO and FENESOL.

Because these entry points are likely to significantly bias the sample towards MDWs who enjoy a relatively higher degree of freedom, it was important to supplement the sample with two additional sources of respondents, namely the field surveyors' own network and the network of activist MDWs.

## ■ QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

Based on discussions between CRI and ILO and a previous questionnaire developed by Dr. Ray Jureidini, CRI designed the questionnaire in close collaboration with ILO and Dr. Jureidini who validated and approved the final version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised **93 questions** and required 20 to 30 minutes in a face-to-face interview (Refer to Annex 1 for the full questionnaire).

The first section of the questionnaire focuses on the demographic profile of the MDW, including age, education, family composition, etc. The second section pertains to the employment agency and the employment contract. The third section relates to work conditions and the fourth to the employer's household. The remaining three sections pertain to the MDW's family at home, her general satisfaction regarding her work conditions, and a few final miscellaneous questions.

## ■ IMPLEMENTATION OF FIELDWORK

Upon the completion of the technical tools, CRI trained **17 field surveyors** to use this questionnaire properly in order to obtain the most accurate, relevant and complete responses from the interviewees and to reduce any misinterpretations of the questions. A pilot test was conducted in September 2014 to ensure that the questions are well understood and solicit the desired information. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of five weeks in September-October 2014.

A comparison of the expected and actual distribution of the survey sample shows that the quotas for the respective nationalities were met (table 1).

**Table 1 Expected and Actual distribution of the survey sample**

| Country of Origin              | Total permits 2012-2013 | Share per nationality | Expected sample distribution | Actual sample distribution |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Ethiopia                       | 119,640                 | 47%                   | 700                          | 709                        |
| Bangladesh                     | 56,508                  | 22%                   | 330                          | 350                        |
| Philippines                    | 42,056                  | 16%                   | 250                          | 254                        |
| Sri Lanka                      | 18,101                  | 7%                    | 110                          | 116                        |
| Nepal                          | 8,663                   | 3%                    | 50                           | 54                         |
| African countries <sup>1</sup> | 10,845                  | 4%                    | 60                           | 58                         |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>255,813</b>          | <b>100%</b>           | <b>1,500</b>                 | <b>1,541</b>               |

## ■ DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

CRI developed a data entry program and data entry forms on “Question” software, which includes built-in control procedures that minimize data entry errors. Experienced data entry clerks coded and entered the questionnaires as soon as the first waves of completed questionnaires arrived to CRI offices.

Upon the completion of data entry, the sets of data were cleaned through crosschecking of data for possible inconsistencies. At this point, the final database was ready for generating results and performing analysis. Primary statistical analysis was conducted through cross-tabulating the results with the nationality of the respondents, as this was the variable that explained many of the differences in the sample. Only the significant results are shared in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> African countries include: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Madagascar, Senegal, and Togo.

## PART 2 - RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

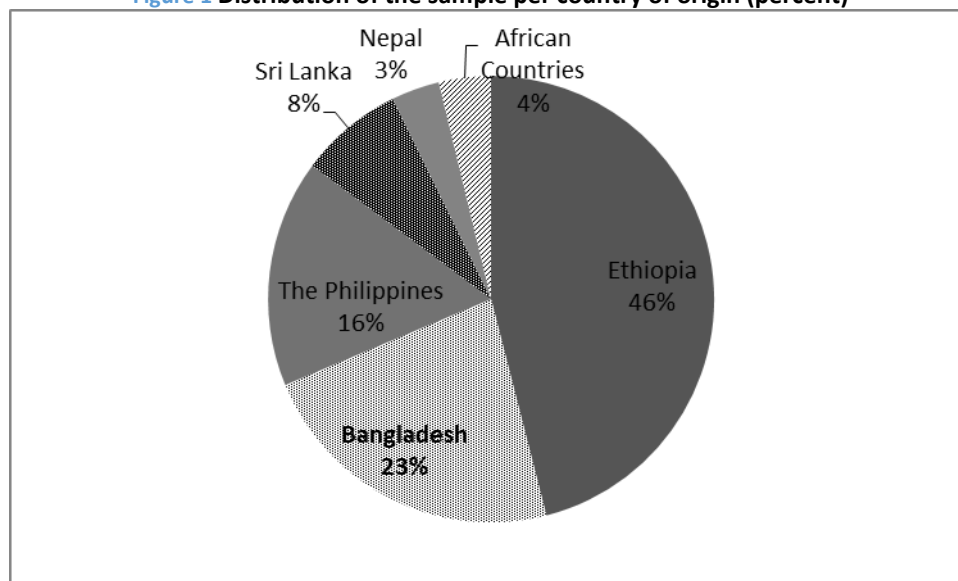
The following section describes the characteristics of all the domestic workers who were interviewed during the process.

It is worth repeating that because of the sampling methodology which excludes interviews within households, due to accessibility issues, the sample is probably slightly skewed towards MDWs who enjoy at least some degree of freedom. Therefore, it is likely that the living and working conditions of MDWs are in reality worse than the situation portrayed by the below results.

### SECTION 1 - DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

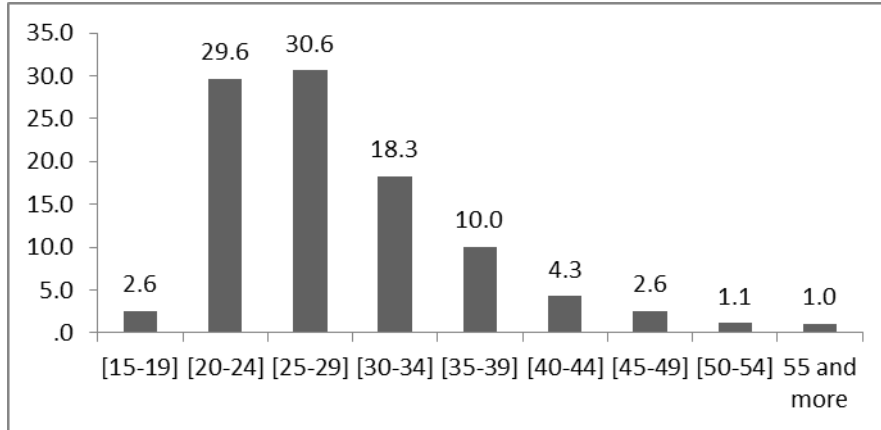
The final sample consisted of 1541 individuals distributed among 6 groups (5 nationalities and one combined African nationality group), based on the weight of each nationality in the work permit data of the Ministry of Labour (figure 1).

**Figure 1 Distribution of the sample per country of origin (percent)**



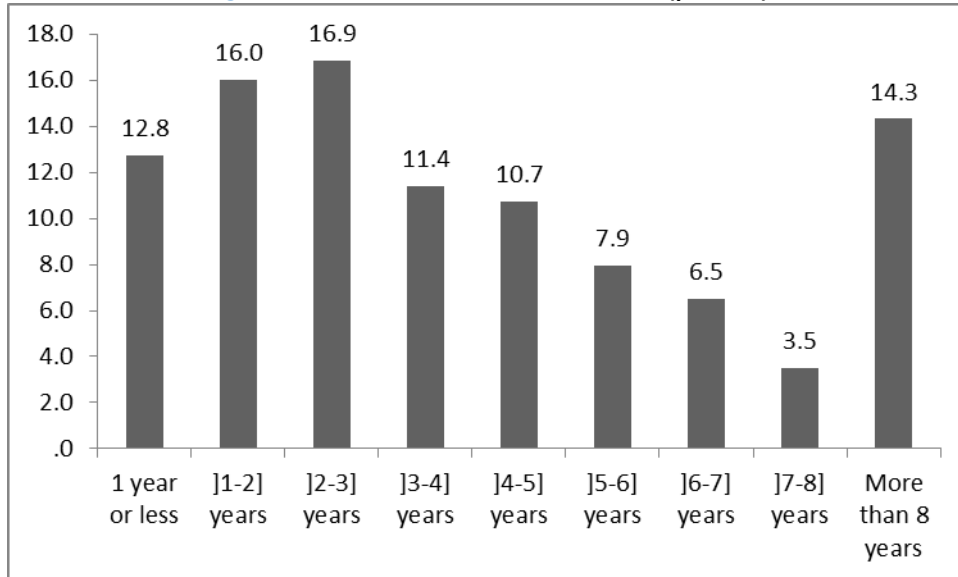
**Domestic workers are relatively young and have lived in the country for an average of 5 years.** Around 90% of the interviewed domestic workers are between 20 and 40 years of age, with 63% younger than 30. They have an average age of 29, as expected for people engaging in demanding physical work.

**Figure 2 Age distribution of the sample (percent)**



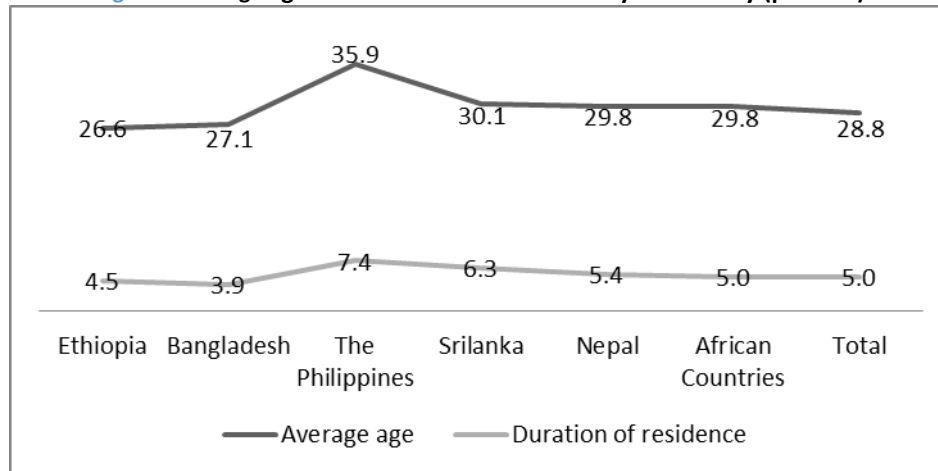
Moreover, 46% have lived in Lebanon for less than three years, the duration of the initial contract with an employer before which a MDW may not leave that employer. The average duration of residence in Lebanon is 5 years, probably as a result of the relatively high share of MDWs who have settled in the country for 9 years or more. Indeed, the distribution of the duration of residence shows a steady decline in the share of MDWs who remain in the country following the expiry of the initial contract. However, the share picks up drastically beyond 9 years.

**Figure 3 Duration of residence in Lebanon (percent)**



The age and duration distributions are relatively uniform across the various nationalities, with the exception of Filipino MDWs whose age averages 36, compared to a sample average of 29 and who have resided in Lebanon for around 7.5 years compared to a 5-year average. This suggests that they may also arrive to Lebanon at a higher age than other nationalities.

Figure 4 Average age and duration of residence by nationality (percent)

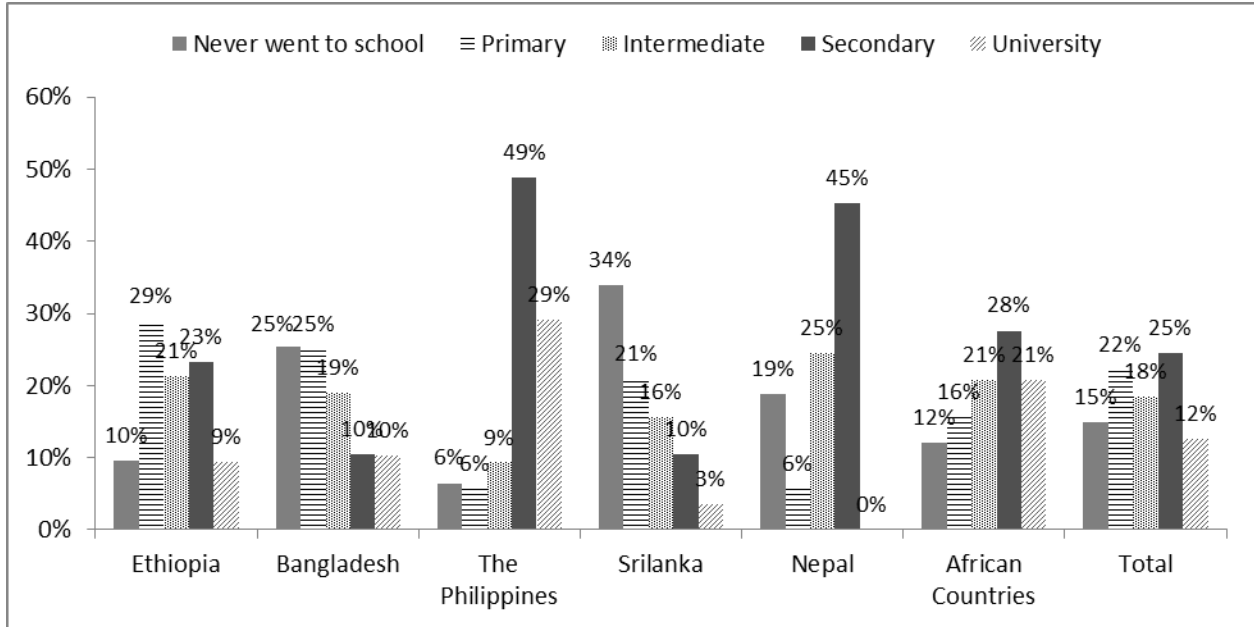


**Most MDWs have had only one employer in Lebanon.** Indeed, 77% have worked for only one employer, while 18% have had two employers. This clearly indicates that the vast majority of MDWs prefer to leave Lebanon for good after their contract with their first employer expires. When those who have switched employers were asked whether the new employer paid any money to the previous employer, 42% said that no money exchanged hands, while 22% reported that money was paid, and the remaining 36% did not know. The average amount paid to transfer the employment contract averaged around 930 USD, with significant variations ( $SD^2=845$  USD). Finally, almost all of the interviewed MDWs (92%) have either never worked in countries other than Lebanon (88%) or have only done so with their current employer (4%).

**Educational achievement varies widely among nationalities.** Filipino MDWs display the highest share of university degree holders (29% compared to 12% in the overall sample) and secondary degree holders (49% vs. 25% in the overall sample). This points to an obvious imbalance in the Filipino labor market, causing its nationals to seek jobs for which they are clearly overqualified. In contrast, the share of those who never went to school is highest among Sri Lankan MDWs (34%), followed by Bangladeshis at 25%. The highest share of MDWs with primary education is to be found among Ethiopians.

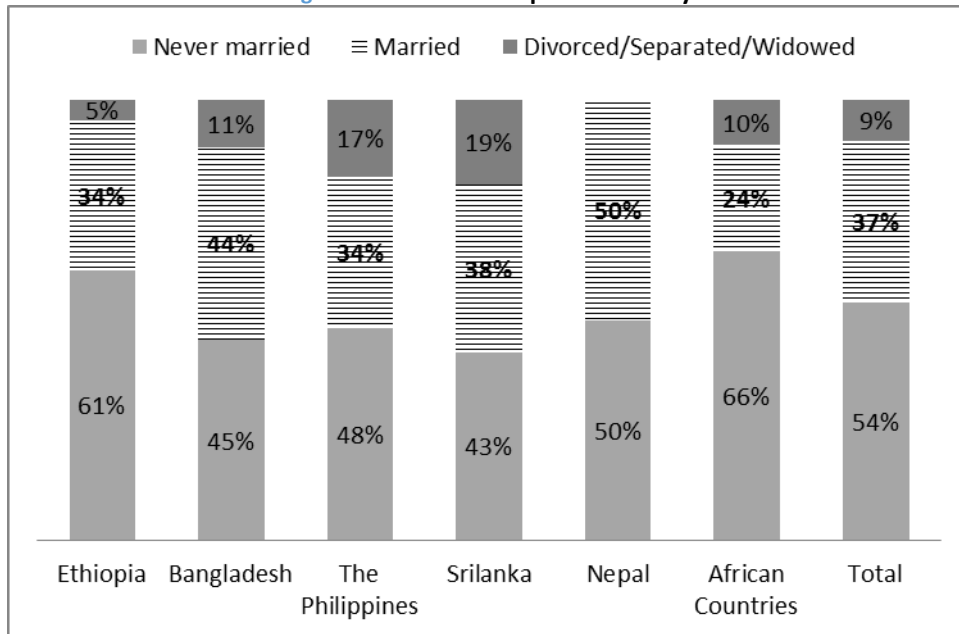
<sup>2</sup> The standard deviation (SD) is large because of the small number of respondents who changed employers with money being exchanged (around 60).

**Figure 5 Educational achievement per nationality**



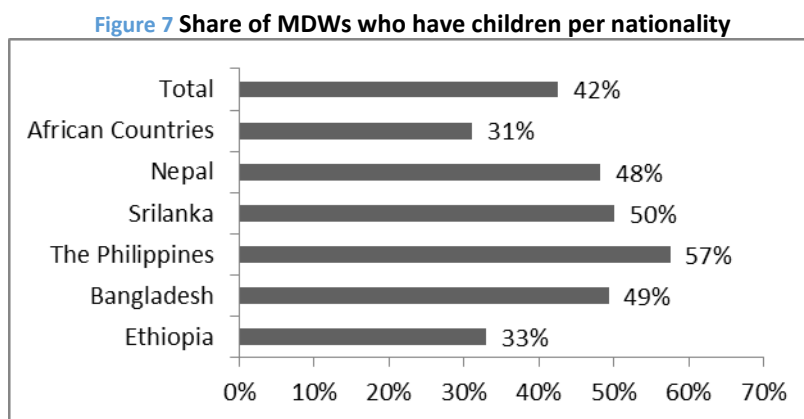
**A significant share of MDWs have children who depend on them in their home countries.** The highest share of married MDWs is to be found among the Nepalese (50%). On the other hand, the share of MDWs who had never married is highest among African nationalities (Ethiopia and other African countries), indicating a higher age of marriage in these countries.

**Figure 6 Marital status per nationality**



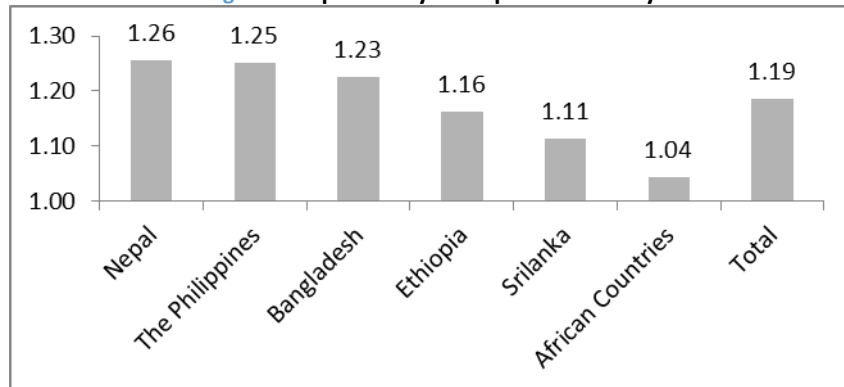


However, more important than marital status is whether MDWs have any children. Indeed, one cannot dismiss the social and emotional consequences of leaving one’s own children behind in order to support them financially by taking care of someone else’s children. More than 40% of MDWs have dependent children in their home countries. In harmony with the share of “never married” MDWs, the share of those who have children is lowest among African nationalities. In contrast, Filipino MDWs are the most likely to have children, a fact that is likely correlated with the higher average age of this group (36 compared to 29 for the general average). Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, and Nepalese come next with a 50/50 chance of having children. Finally, the overwhelming majority of MDW mothers reported leaving their children in their home country (95%) and only 3% have their children with them. In these rare cases, it is likely that the entire family is established in Lebanon for the long term.



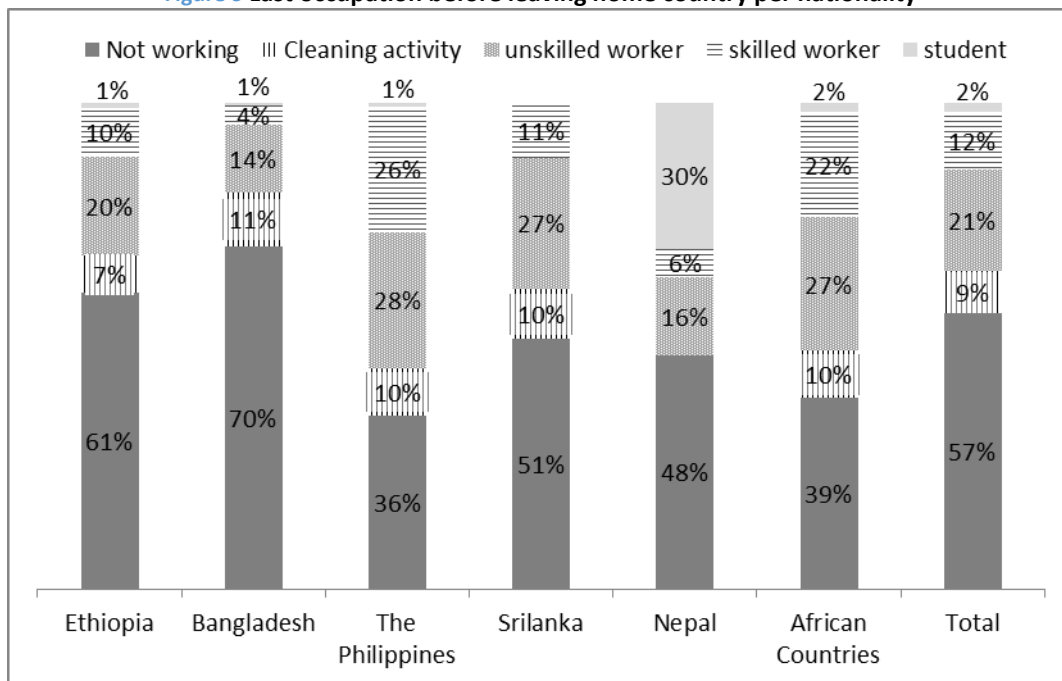
**Economic dependency is highest in Nepal and the Philippines.** In order to assess the economic need in each MDW household, regardless of the presence of children, the dependency ratio was calculated by dividing the total number of inactive household members by the number of active household members (including the MDW). The higher this ratio, the higher the need for the income brought in by the MDW in question. The results revealed significant discrepancies, with Nepali and Filipino households displaying the highest degrees of dependency. Indeed, every working member supports 1.26 members in Nepali MDW households, compared to only 1.04 in miscellaneous African countries.

Figure 8 Dependency ratio per nationality



A large majority of MDWs were either unemployed or unskilled workers before reaching Lebanon. The highest share of MDWs who were unemployed before coming to Lebanon may be found among Bangladeshis (70%), followed by Ethiopians (61%), which means that these women had no choice but to leave their home country in order to find work. A different profile is visible among Philippines and African country natives. Thus, only 36% of Filipino MDWs were out of work in their home country; indeed, 26% of them were employed in skilled occupations before moving to Lebanon. This indicates a different type of labour market deficiency, namely that unskilled work in Lebanon (domestic work) turned out to be more lucrative than skilled work in the Philippines. Interestingly, 30% of Nepalese MDWs were students before moving to Lebanon.

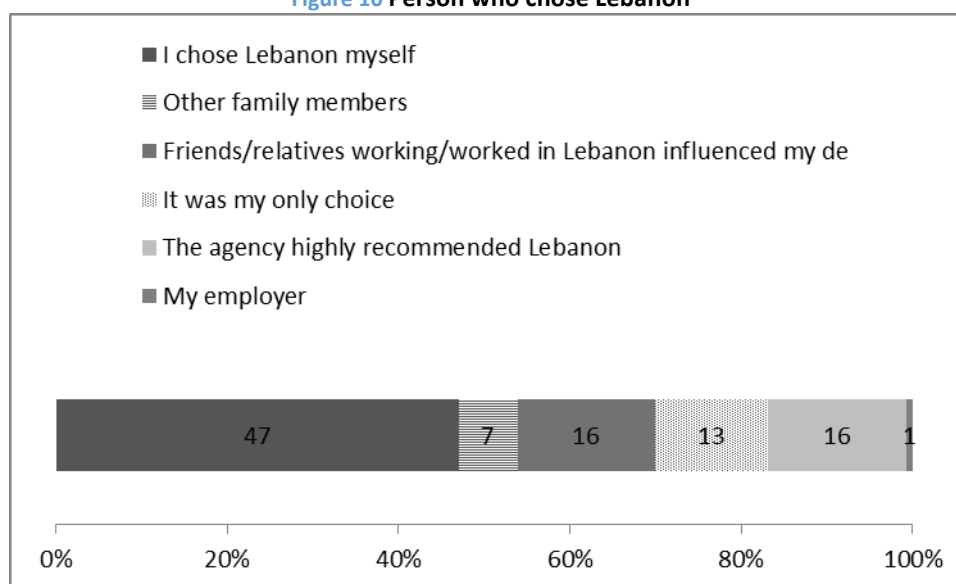
Figure 9 Last occupation before leaving home country per nationality



## SECTION 2 – RECRUITMENT AGENCY AND CONTRACT

**Around three quarters of MDWs were recruited through an agency in their home countries.** However, almost half contacted a Lebanese agency (45%)<sup>3</sup>. Inter-nationality discrepancies may be noted: for instance, only 7% of Nepalese MDWs being recruited through a Lebanese agency. When asked about the way in which they first heard about the agency, almost half of the respondents mentioned word of mouth (48%), while another 30% referred to a sub-agent in their hometown. Few inter-nationality discrepancies were noted in that regard. Most MDWs who were not recruited through an agency came to Lebanon through MDW relatives or friends who worked in Lebanon (38%). When asked how they chose Lebanon instead of some other country, around half of the respondents declared choosing Lebanon themselves, 16% were advised by the agency, another 16% were advised by friends or relatives who had worked in Lebanon, and 13% reported that it was their only choice. Finally, 90% of the MDWs knew both their destination and the type of work they would engage in.

Figure 10 Person who chose Lebanon



**Most MDWs signed employment contracts in their home countries with varying ability to understand their terms.** Around 70% signed a contract before leaving their home country, a share that increases to 87% in the case of Nepali MDWs. Moreover, around 60% were able to read and understand the contract terms, with significant inter-nationality discrepancies. Thus, while 80% of Filipino MDWs were able to read the contract themselves, only 42% of Sri Lankans were able to do so, and almost no Nepalis (2%). Indeed, it seems that 90% of Nepali MDWs were unaware of the terms of their contracts.

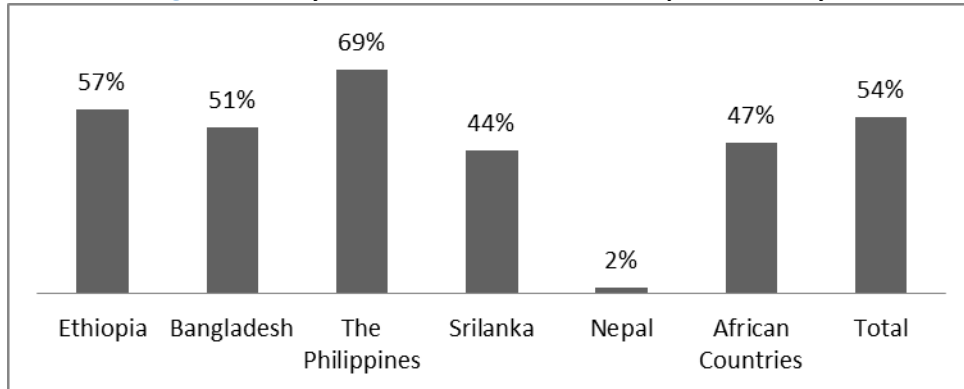
<sup>3</sup> This is a multiple response question. The shares add up to more than 100% because respondents may choose more than one modality at once.

**Figure 11 Ability to understand contract terms per nationality**



**A large majority of MDWs signed employment contracts upon their arrival to Lebanon but only half were able to read them.** Indeed, 88% of MDWs signed a contract in Lebanon with few inter-nationality discrepancies. However, only around half of them read the contract, with the Philippines registering a higher than average rate of 69% and the Nepal recording a dismal rate of only 2%.

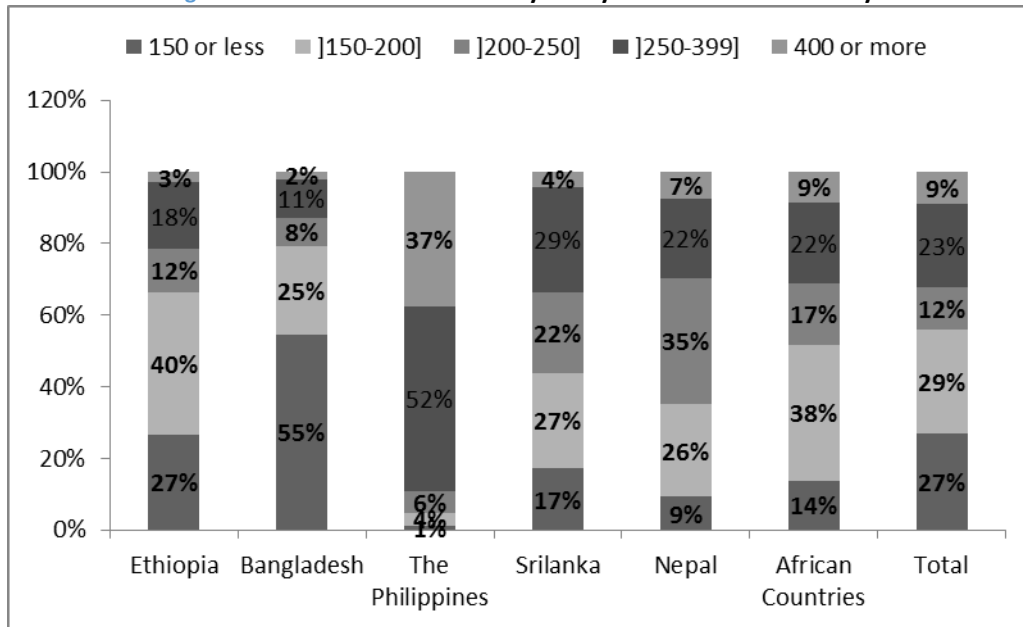
**Figure 12 Ability to read the Lebanese contract per nationality**



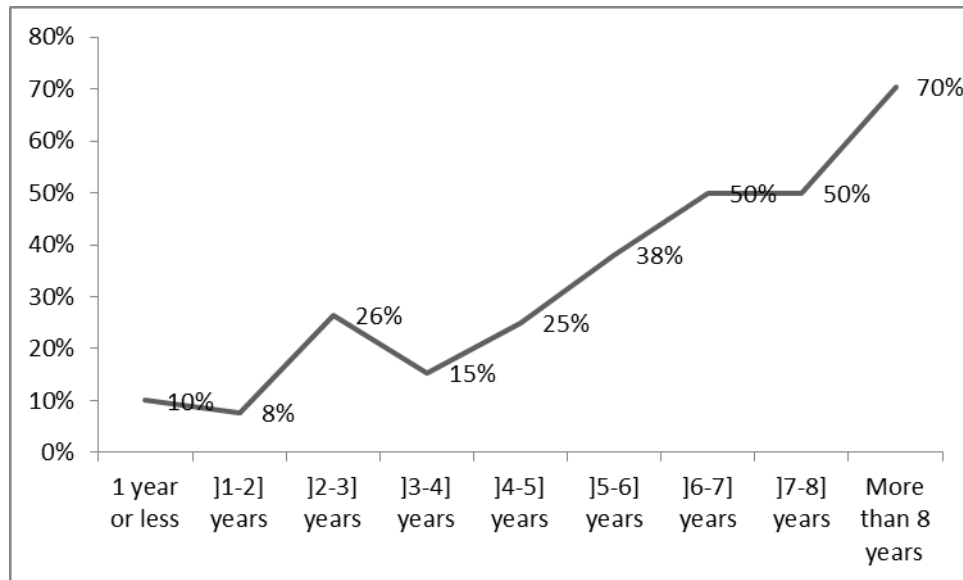
**MDWs earn an average monthly salary of around 180 USD with significant inter-nationality discrepancies.** Thus, 80% of Bangladeshi MDWs earn 200 USD or less compared to 56% for the entire sample. Meanwhile, Filipinas fare significantly better than the general sample, with 40% of them earning 400 USD or more (figure 13). However, the Filipino government had mandated a 400 USD minimum wage in 2006. Indeed, most Filipina MDWs are not earning this mandated amount, but may be signing some form of substitute contract. Interestingly, the share of MDWs earning 400 USD or more increases the longer an MDW has been in Lebanon (figure 14), meaning either that many years need to elapse before they feel entitled to demand that salary or that they reach the amount through regular salary increases that have nothing to do with the governmental decision.

No significant discrepancies were found between declared salaries on home country and Lebanese contracts.

**Figure 13** Distribution of MDWs by salary bracket and nationality

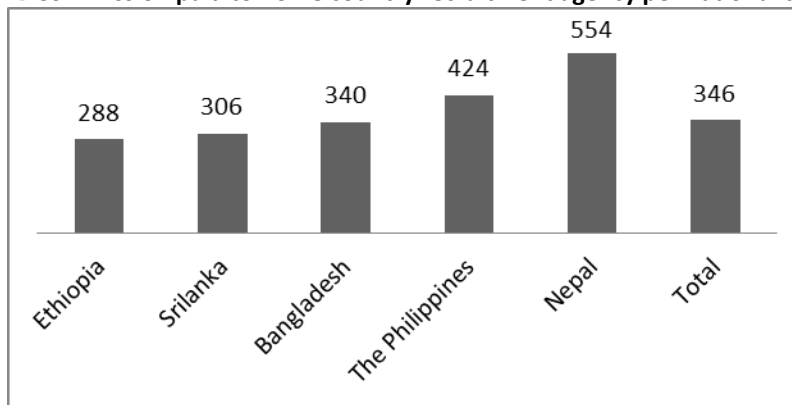


**Figure 14** Distribution of Filipina MDWs earning the mandated 400USD by duration of stay in Lebanon



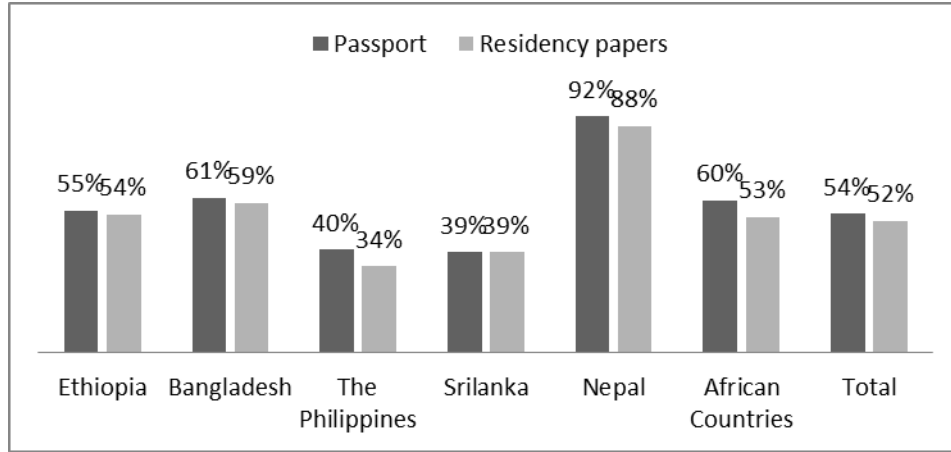
**Nepalese MDWs pay exorbitant amounts to home country recruitment agencies.** Around 60% of all MDWs paid the agency in their home country with no notable inter-nationality discrepancies except for Nepalese MDWs 90% of whom reported paying the recruitment agency. Moreover, whereas the average payment is around 346 USD (i.e. the equivalent of a two-month salary), Nepalese MDWs reported paying 554 USD on average, or 3.7 times the monthly salary on their employment contract (figure 14). The most cited justification for these payments are: recruitment fees for the home country agency (25%), airfare to Lebanon (17%), and fees for the Lebanese recruitment agency (14%). It is noteworthy that around 30% of the MDWs did not know the purpose of the payment, a share that increases to more than 80% among the Nepalese. Finally, one third (33%) of the respondents declared using personal savings to pay these costs while another third (32%) borrowed money from a friend or a relative.

**Figure 15 Commission paid to home country recruitment agency per nationality (USD)**



**Half of the MDWs feel that their papers are withheld against their wishes.** Almost all MDWs (90%) said that their papers were in order, with few inter-group discrepancies. However, when asked whether their passports and/or residency papers were being held against their wishes, significant differences appeared with only around 40% of Sri Lankan and Filipino MDWs seeming upset by the practice, in contrast to around 90% of Nepalese MDWs. This may be related to the fact that while Nepalese nationals have only recently begun to engage in migrant domestic work in Lebanon, Filipino and Sri Lankan MDWs expect to have their passports and papers withheld (through the experiences of friends and relatives) and are therefore no longer shocked by the practice (figure 15).

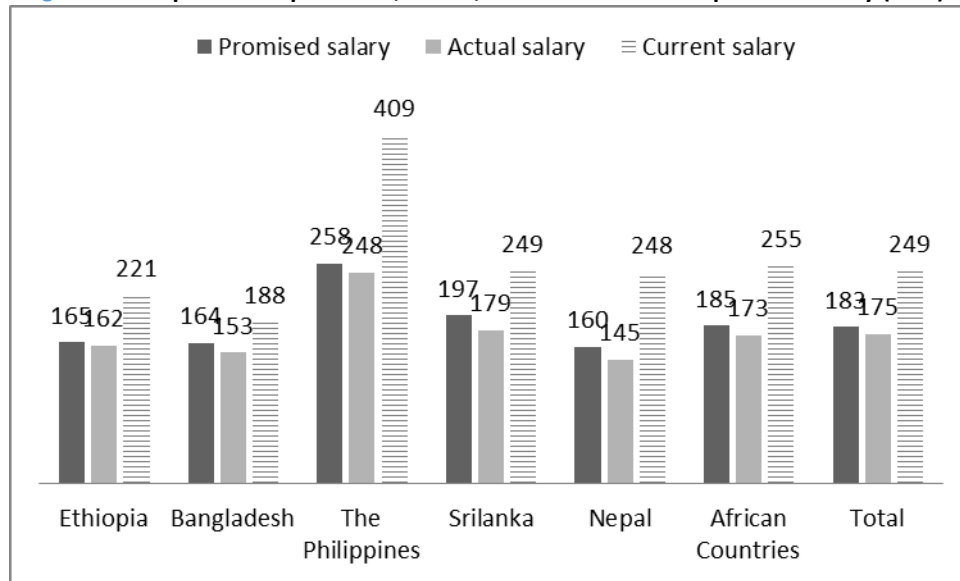
Figure 16 Share who feel that their passports/residency papers are being held against their wishes per nationality



### SECTION 3 – WORK CONDITIONS

Slight differences are noted between promised and actual salaries. Moreover, salary increases are noted for all MDWs, averaging 40%. It may be safely assumed that these increases occur following the expiry of the initial three-year contract, as an incentive for the MDW to remain in the household’s employ. The increase was most significant for Filipinos who reported a 65% average salary increase. In view of the higher average age of Filipino MDWs, it is highly likely that their average length of stay is significantly longer than that of other MDW nationalities. Moreover, these discrepancies may be related to other factors such as having a foreign language or the fact that they receive training in their home countries.

Figure 17 Comparison of promised, actual, and current salaries per nationality (USD)<sup>4</sup>

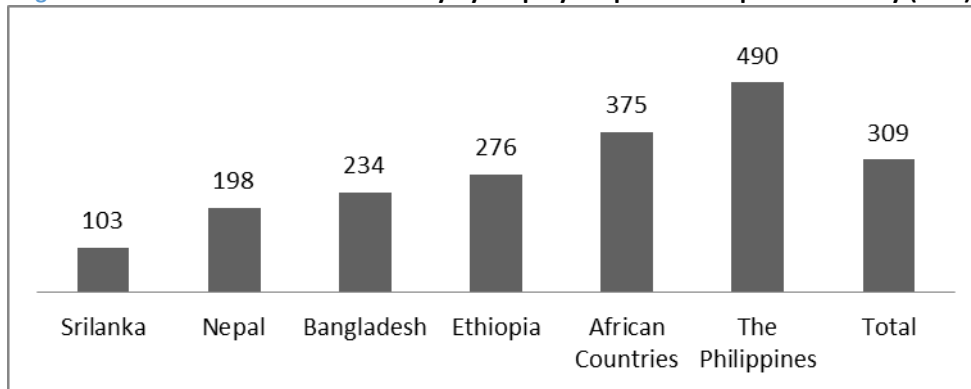


Around one quarter of MDWs (23%) reported that money was deducted by their employer. No notable inter-nationality differences were noted in this regard. When money was deducted, wide variations were noted both within and among the various groups, with the amount ranging between around 100 USD for Sri Lankan MDWs to around 490 USD in the case of Filipino MDWs. The most prominent justification for the salary deduction was payment to the Lebanese recruitment agency (63%), a cost that ought to fall squarely on the Lebanese employer. This implies that in certain cases, MDWs ended up paying recruitment fees both in Lebanon and in their home countries.

<sup>4</sup> Note that promised and actual salaries refer to the first contract signed upon arrival to Lebanon.



Figure 18 Amount deducted from salary by employer upon arrival per nationality (USD)



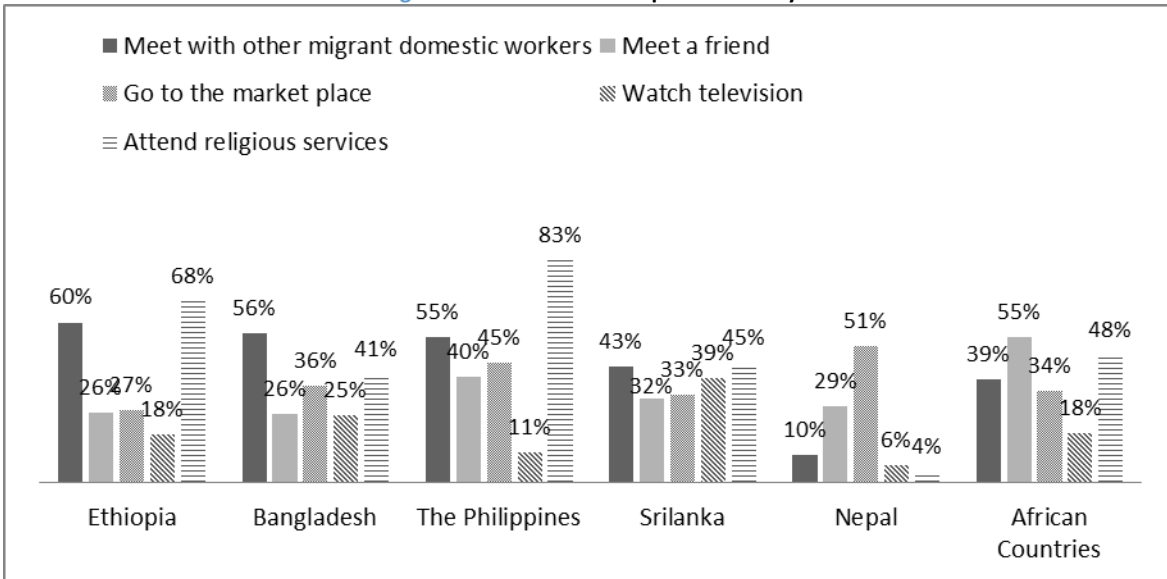
**A minority of MDWs reported payment delays.** Indeed, around 80% of MDWs reported always getting paid on time. This share does not vary widely across nationalities, ranging between 72% for Sri Lankans and Bangladeshis and 88% for Filipinos. Moreover, around 8% reported that their salaries were sometimes withheld, either partially (6.6%) or in full (1.3%). The average amount owed to MDWs was around 265 USD. Finally, a quarter of MDWs reported that they and their employers keep a record of their salary payments each month, a share that drops to 8% in the case of Nepalese MDWs and increases to 40% among Sri Lankan MDWs.

**Respondents reported working around 10.5 hours per day,** an average that remains consistent across the various nationalities, with the exception of Nepalese MDWs which average 13.5 hours per week. Only half of the MDWs (47%) reported receiving breaks as needed during their working hours, a share that increases to 65% and 70% for Filipino and Nepalese MDWs respectively.

**Most MDWs do not get sufficient time off.** Although their contract provides for one day of rest per week, most MDWs get significantly less time off if they get any. Thus, 16% get no time off at all, a share that rises to more than a quarter among Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, and African MDWs. Meanwhile, a third of all MDWs (36%) get one day per week, a share that increases to 65% among Filipino MDWs. It must be noted however, that because respondents were recruited in gathering places (churches, markets, etc.) and not in their place of employment, the sample is skewed towards MDWs who are allowed outside at least occasionally. It is expected therefore that the share of MDWs who do not get any time off is significantly higher than the 16% observed in the sample.

As for leisure activities, the two highest ranking ones were attending religious services (83% of Filipinos and 68% of Ethiopians) and meeting with other MDWs (60% of Ethiopians and 55% of Bangladeshis).

Figure 19 Leisure activities per nationality

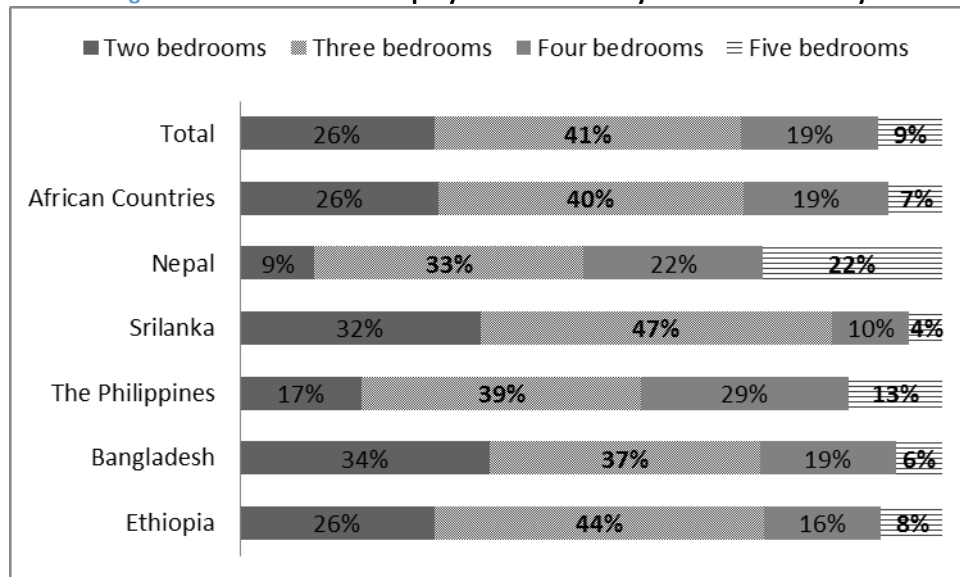


## SECTION 4 – EMPLOYER AND HOUSEHOLD

It is important to note that the analysis would have been much richer in the presence of variables that denote the socio-economic status of the household, such as the education levels and occupations of the employers. However, MDWs would have been unable to accurately answer these questions and so they were left out of the questionnaire.

**MDWs are employed by typical Lebanese households.** MDWs reported an average household size of 4.17, which is more or less the typical size of a Lebanese household<sup>5</sup>. A clear majority (67%) reside in two-three bedroom apartments which are the most common apartment sizes. Moreover, because apartment size is somewhat related to financial means, it is not surprising that the share of Filipino MDWs, who earn the highest monthly salaries, is highest in four- and five-bedroom apartments (42% compared to 28% in the overall sample). This finding is further corroborated by the higher average number of domestic workers in a household employing a Filipino MDW (1.4 compared to a 1.1 overall average). Surprisingly, Nepali MDWs are also highly present in larger apartments; however, this finding may be a coincidence in view of their relatively small number in the sample.

Figure 20 Distribution of employer households by size and nationality

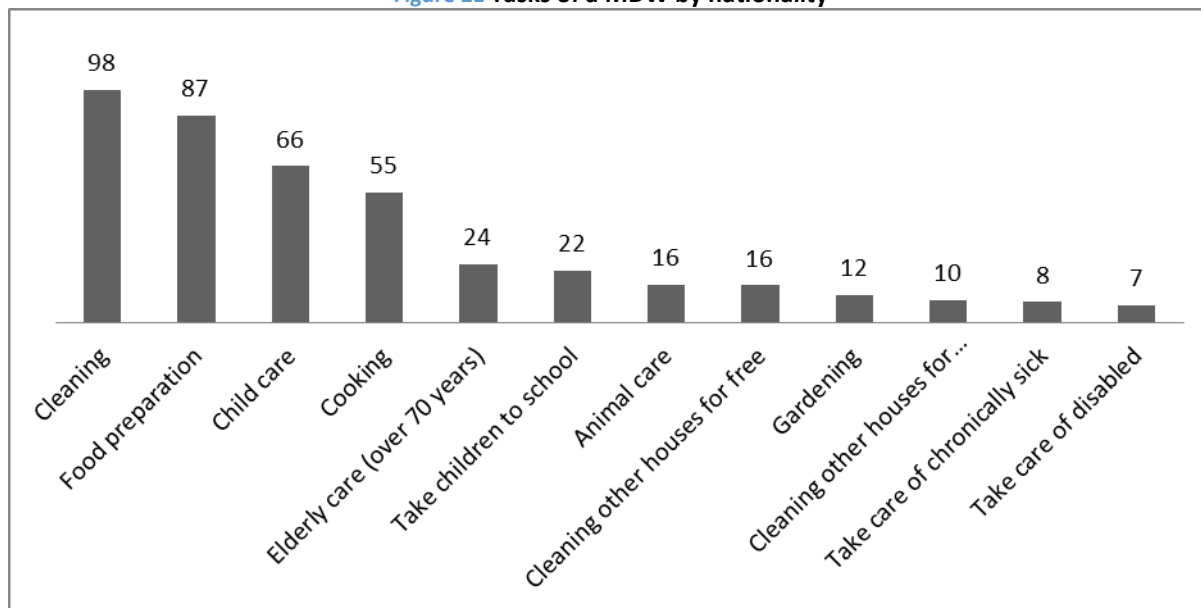


<sup>5</sup> The average household size according to the Central Administration for Statistics' 2004 Living Conditions survey was 4.27.

**Female employers of a MDW are more likely to work.** Thus, 53% of female employers work either full time (36%), part time (13%), or from home (5%), a rate that is more than double the national rate (20%)<sup>6</sup>. However, the fact remains that in 47% of the households which employ a MDW, the female employer is a homemaker. In other words, around half of the Lebanese household in the sample can afford to employ a domestic worker without the added income of a working spouse. Moreover, the rate of non-working female employers increases from 46% for the overall sample to 53% and 57% in households employing Filipinos and Sri Lankans respectively. This may be related to the higher affluence of these households.

**MDWs are expected to perform household chores and child care tasks.** Almost all MDWs reported performing cleaning and food preparation tasks (figure 19). Two thirds were also required to take care of the household's children<sup>7</sup>. Additional tasks were performed to a lesser degree, reflecting the fact that the majority of households have no need of them (e.g. animal care, gardening, etc.).

Figure 21 Tasks of a MDW by nationality

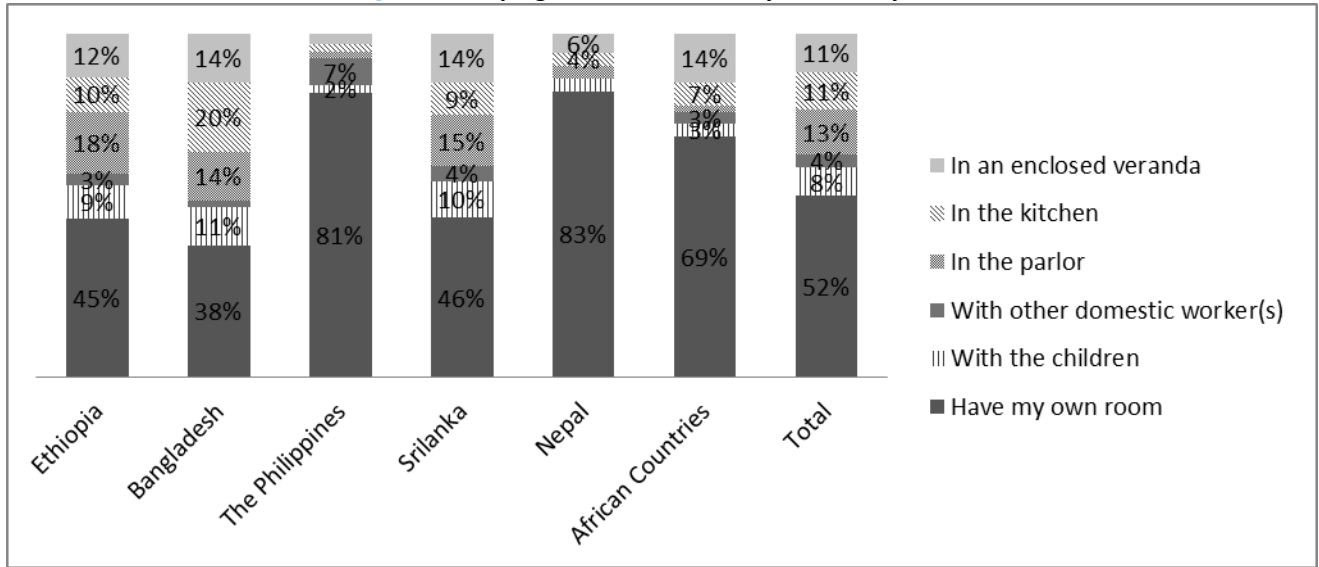


**Only half of the MDWs have their own sleeping quarters.** In other words, around half of the interviewed MDWs suffer from a complete lack of privacy at any time of the day. This share varies significantly among the various nationalities, reaching 80% among Filipinos and Nepalese and dropping to 38% among Bangladeshis. Those who do not have their own rooms, sleep in the parlor (13%), in the kitchen (11%), or in a glass-enclosed veranda (11%) (figure 21).

<sup>6</sup> Central Administration for Statistics. 2010. Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey-2009. Beirut: CAS. The higher female employment rate could also be explained by the fact that the sample was limited to Beirut and Mount Lebanon which are characterized by a female activity rate of 36% compared to 20% nationwide.

<sup>7</sup> For child-related tasks (child care and taking children to school), the denominator was adjusted to exclude NA households, i.e. those with no children to take care of.

**Figure 22 Sleeping accommodations by nationality**



When MDWs have their own sleeping quarters, they are likely to be furnished with a bed (90%), a closet (80%), and a TV (50%). Inter-nationality variations are significant, with the odds of having their own TV dropping to 28% among Ethiopians for instance. Moreover, only 22% of MDWs have a heater which may be a significant source of discomfort if the dwelling is not centrally heated, and only 55% having either an air conditioning unit or a fan. It is noteworthy that the situation of Filipinos seems to be significantly better than that of the other MDW nationalities, probably due to the better financial means of their employers. Thus, a higher share of them are equipped with the necessities and some own additional equipment such as a DVD player (23%), a radio/stereo unit (21%), or a computer (16%).

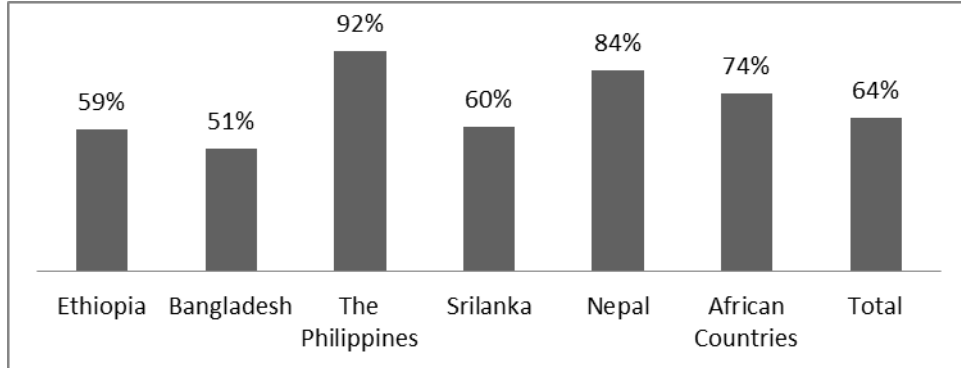
**Table 2 Room furnishings by nationality**

|                        | Ethiopia | Bangladesh | The Philippines | Srilanka | Nepal | African Countries |
|------------------------|----------|------------|-----------------|----------|-------|-------------------|
| <b>Bed</b>             | 93%      | 91%        | 99%             | 90%      | 96%   | 89%               |
| <b>Chair</b>           | 18%      | 20%        | 34%             | 30%      | 2%    | 20%               |
| <b>Table</b>           | 22%      | 15%        | 32%             | 31%      | 4%    | 26%               |
| <b>Closet</b>          | 74%      | 81%        | 86%             | 84%      | 73%   | 74%               |
| <b>Dresser</b>         | 20%      | 21%        | 37%             | 28%      | 2%    | 28%               |
| <b>Mirror</b>          | 32%      | 29%        | 58%             | 52%      | 13%   | 57%               |
| <b>Air Conditioner</b> | 20%      | 25%        | 52%             | 21%      | 4%    | 26%               |
| <b>Heater</b>          | 16%      | 17%        | 40%             | 25%      | 4%    | 30%               |
| <b>Ventilator</b>      | 27%      | 43%        | 32%             | 34%      | 4%    | 43%               |
| <b>TV</b>              | 28%      | 61%        | 64%             | 63%      | 40%   | 46%               |
| <b>Computer</b>        | 2%       | 4%         | 16%             | 3%       | 0%    | 9%                |

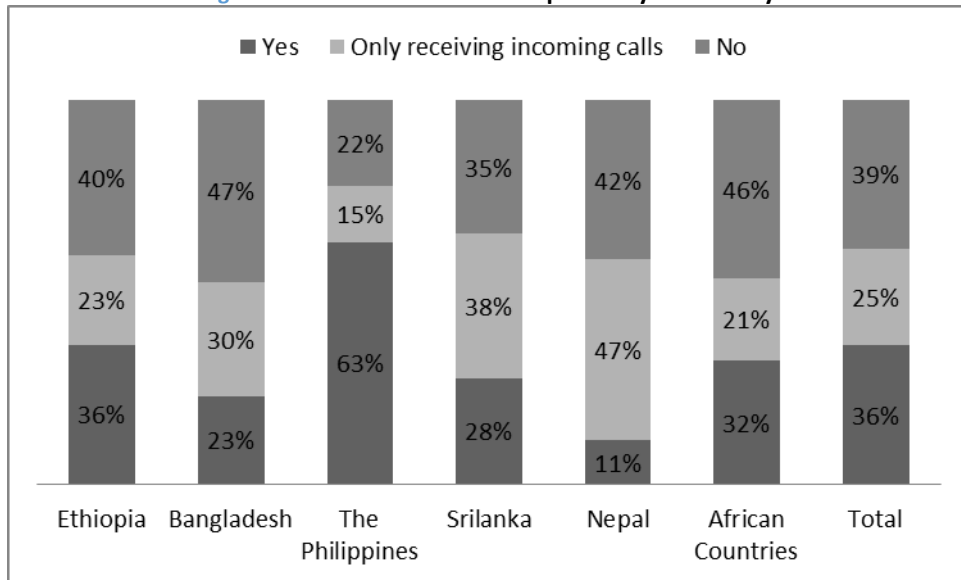
Finally, around 60% of MDWs are allowed to lock their rooms, a share that increases to 80% among Filipino MDWs.

**A majority of MDWs owns a mobile phone and a minority is allowed to use the household line.** More than 60% of respondents reported owning a mobile phone, a share that drops to around 50% among Bangladeshi MDWs and increases to semi-unanimity (92%) among Filipinos (figure 22). As for the use of the household phone for personal calls, 36% of MDWs were allowed to do so, while 25% were only allowed to receive personal phone calls. These results fluctuate significantly among the various nationalities. Thus, around half of the Bangladeshi and African respondents were not allowed to use the house phone in any way, a share that drops to 22% among Filipino MDWs (figure 23).

**Figure 23 Ownership of a mobile phone by nationality**

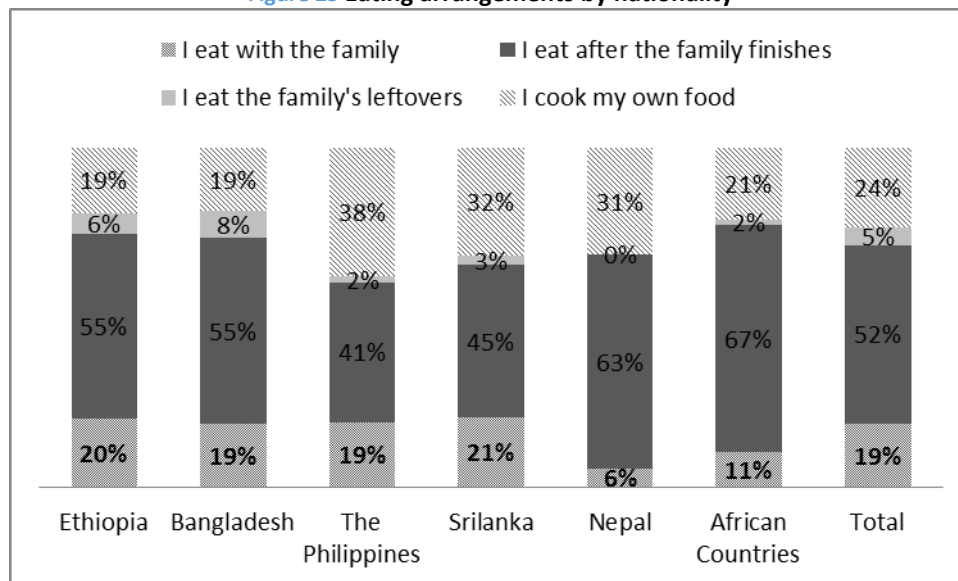


**Figure 24 Personal use of house phone by nationality**



**Most MDWs eat regularly but most have their meals after the family has finished eating.** Almost all MDWs are allowed to eat at least three meals a day. Indeed, 94% may eat either whenever they want to (58%) or three times per day (36%), with few inter-nationality discrepancies. As for the choice of food, around three quarters of the respondents reported being able to eat whatever they wanted; however, only one quarter were allowed to cook their own food, a share that increases to 31% and 38% among Sri Lankans and Filipinos respectively. Finally, more than half of the interviewed MDWs reported eating after the family finishes, while only 24% were able to eat with the family (38% among Filipino MDWs) (figure 24).

**Figure 25 Eating arrangements by nationality**



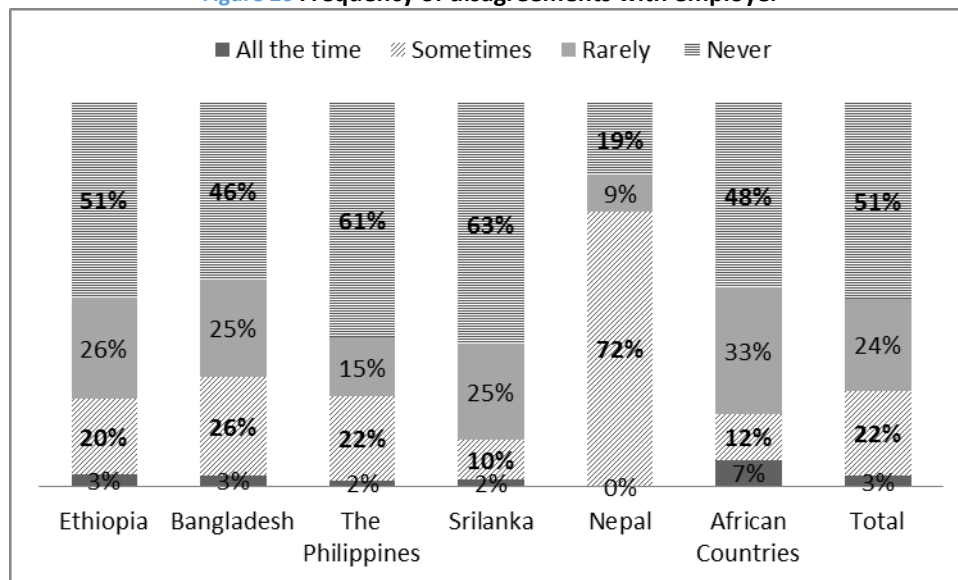
**In the event of sickness, MDWs received various levels of medical treatment.** Around 40% of respondents reported requiring medical attention at one point or another. In those cases, more than half were taken to a doctor, around half were taken to a pharmacy, and 17% were taken to a hospital. There is no way to judge the appropriateness of the household's reaction without any indication on the severity of the MDWs conditions on these occasions.

**MDWs are sometimes locked inside their employers' homes.** Indeed, around a quarter of the respondents reported that they were either always or sometimes locked inside the house, a finding that is homogeneous across nationality groups, with the exception of Bangladeshi MDWs 32% of whom reported being locked inside the house either always (15%) or sometimes (17%). Moreover, 45% stated that they always had access to the house keys (73% in the case of Filipino MDWs), while 23% are given the keys on an as needed basis, and 32% are never given the house keys.

**Employment disagreements are rare and MDWs lack support.** Around one quarter of the respondents declared disagreeing with their employers on occasion. However, the clear majority (75%) either never has any disagreements (51%) or has only rare disagreements (24%). This share increases to 88% among Ethiopian MDWs. The fact that disagreements are so rare is partially explained by the isolation of MDWs who have no legal recourse or social support and can therefore hardly afford to disagree with their

employers. Indeed, when they were asked about whom they contacted for help in case of employment conflict, only 17% reported contacting friends or relatives in Lebanon, 11% contacted the recruiting agency, while the large majority (62%) could resort to no one.

**Figure 26 Frequency of disagreements with employer**



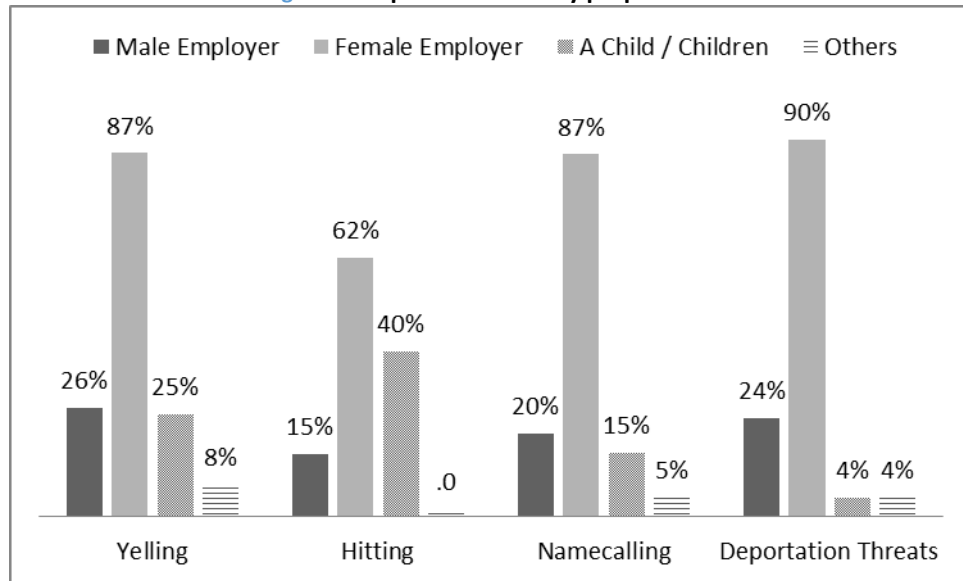
**Yelling and deportation threats are the most common forms of abuse and female employers are the most frequent perpetrators.** Around 40% of MDWs are yelled at by their employers, with no significant inter-nationality discrepancies. Moreover, 11% reported physical abuse (striking) by their employers, a share that rises to 16% in the case of Bangladeshis. Around 2% (29 cases) reported being sexually abused and 1% (12 cases) reported being forced to provide sexual favors. It is likely that the shares are much higher in reality because such abuses tend to be underreported. Finally, 20% stated that they were threatened with deportation, a share that reaches 32% among Bangladeshi MDWs. This abuse may be somewhat related to the household dynamics regardless of the presence of the MDW. Thus, based on the accounts of the MDWs, in 25% of Lebanese households, the male employer is aggressive toward his wife. These dynamics are reflected into the way the various family members treat the MDW, who becomes a temporary member of their household.

When repetitive<sup>8</sup> abusive behavior was reported, a question was asked regarding the members of the family who practiced this type of behavior. The results show that female employers are the most frequent perpetrators, which is not surprising considering that they are the ones who are most in contact with the MDW. It is however somewhat striking to find that the children of the household are active participants in abusive behavior, although there is no way to ascertain the age of these children. In any case, the sociological consequences of involving children as active and passive participants in abusive behavior merit further study.

<sup>8</sup> Repetitive abuse refers to cases when MDWs reported that the abusive behavior happened either “sometimes” or “frequently”.

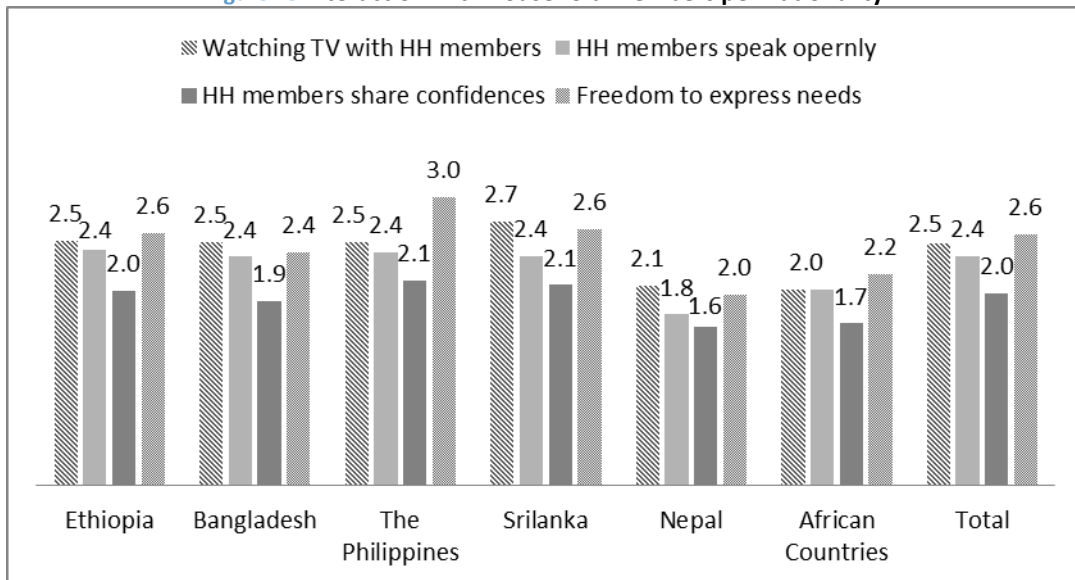


Figure 27 Repetitive abuse by perpetrator



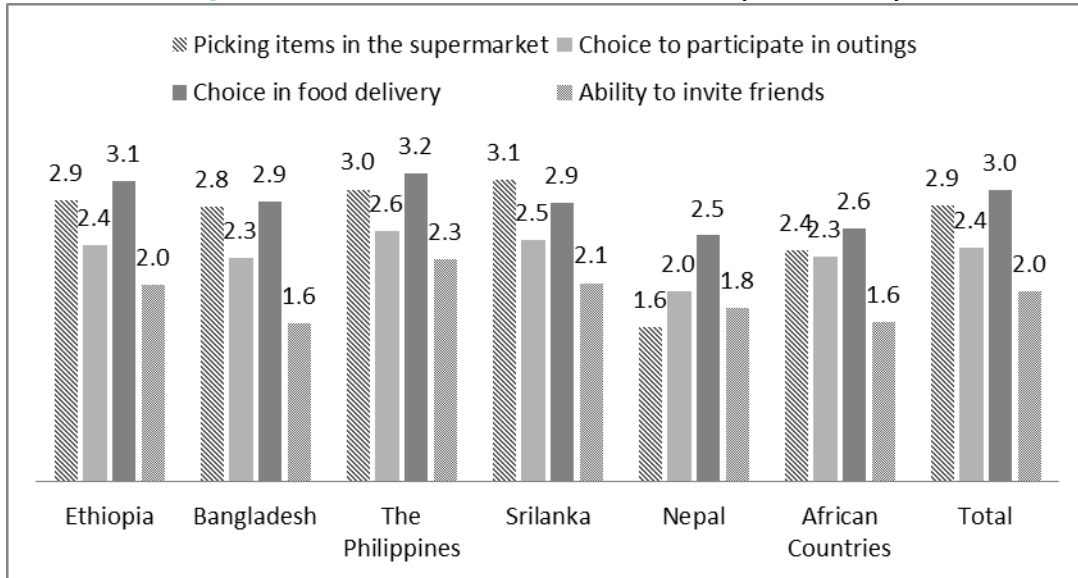
**The relationship between the MDW and the household is somewhat distant.** Four questions were asked to gauge the level of interaction between the MDW and various household members, namely: whether she watches TV with them, whether they speak of private family matters in front of her, whether they confide in her, and whether she feels free to express her needs to them. These items were rated on a frequency scale that ranges from 1 (never) to 4 (frequently). The first observation is that none of the interaction items rate above 3 (sometimes). Indeed, most rate below 2.5, indicating a relatively aloof relationship between MDWs and their employers. Moreover, Nepali and African MDWs rate all items consistently lower than the general average, while Filipino MDWs give somewhat higher ratings than the other nationalities (figure 27).

Figure 28 Interaction with household members per nationality



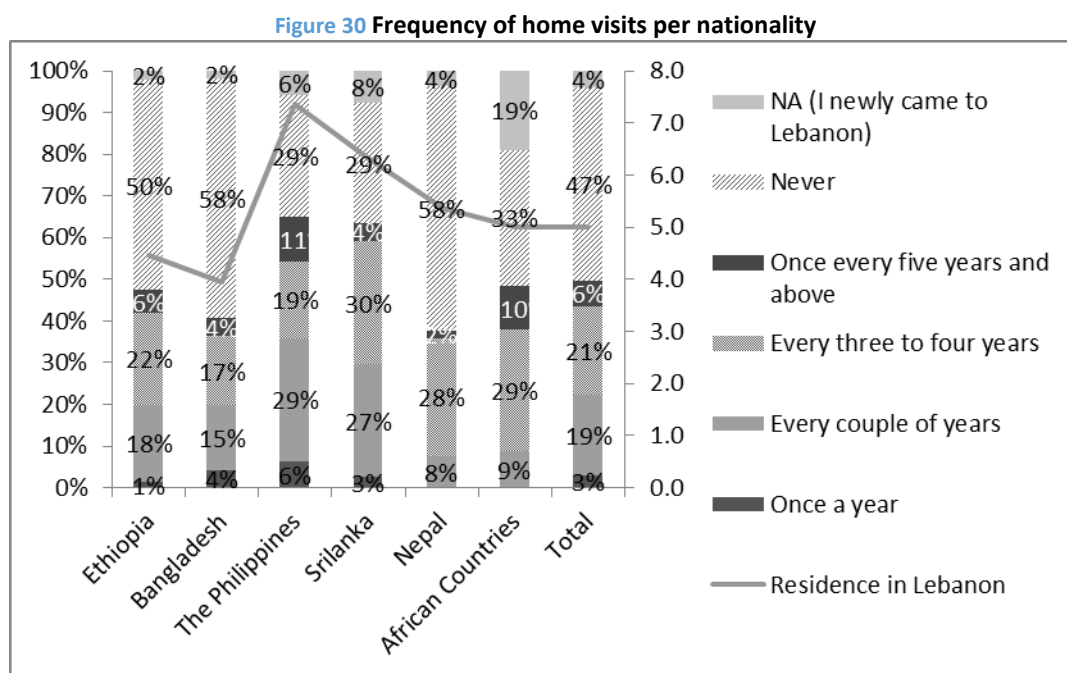
Freedom of choice was gauged through four statements concerning: an MDW’s ability to pick personal items during grocery shopping, choose her own delivery food, decide whether to participate in family outings, and invite friends to visit. As was the case for the interaction statements, freedom of choice and behavior also seems somewhat restricted with no items rating above 3 (sometimes). Finally, choice of food and supermarket items seems to be more permissible than decisions to go on family outings or invite friends to the house (figure 28).

**Figure 29 Freedom of choice within the household per nationality**



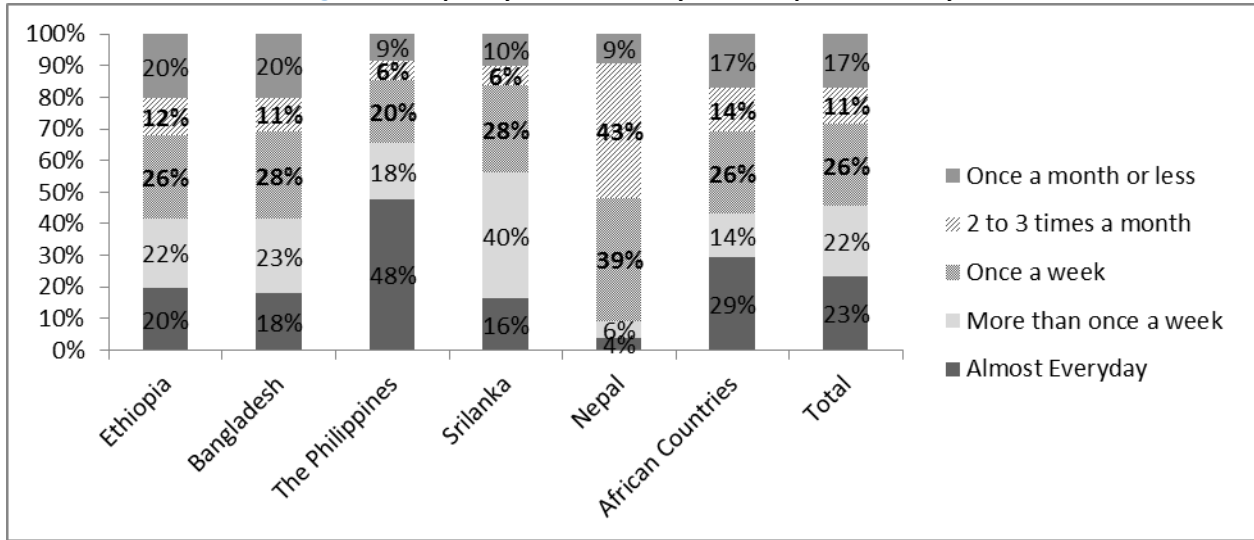
## SECTION 5 – FAMILY AT HOME

**Around half of the interviewed MDWs have never returned home for a visit.** This may in part be due to the fact that it is expected of them to complete their three-year contract before they are allowed to visit their home country. This is further confirmed by the observation that a significant share (21%) report going home every three to four years. Moreover, the highest share of those who have never gone home may be found among Ethiopians, Bangladeshis, and Nepalese, i.e. the relatively “recent” MDW nationalities. Finally, when asked whether they ever asked to go home for a visit and been turned down by their employer, around 80% of the respondents said no, with minimal inter-nationality discrepancies.

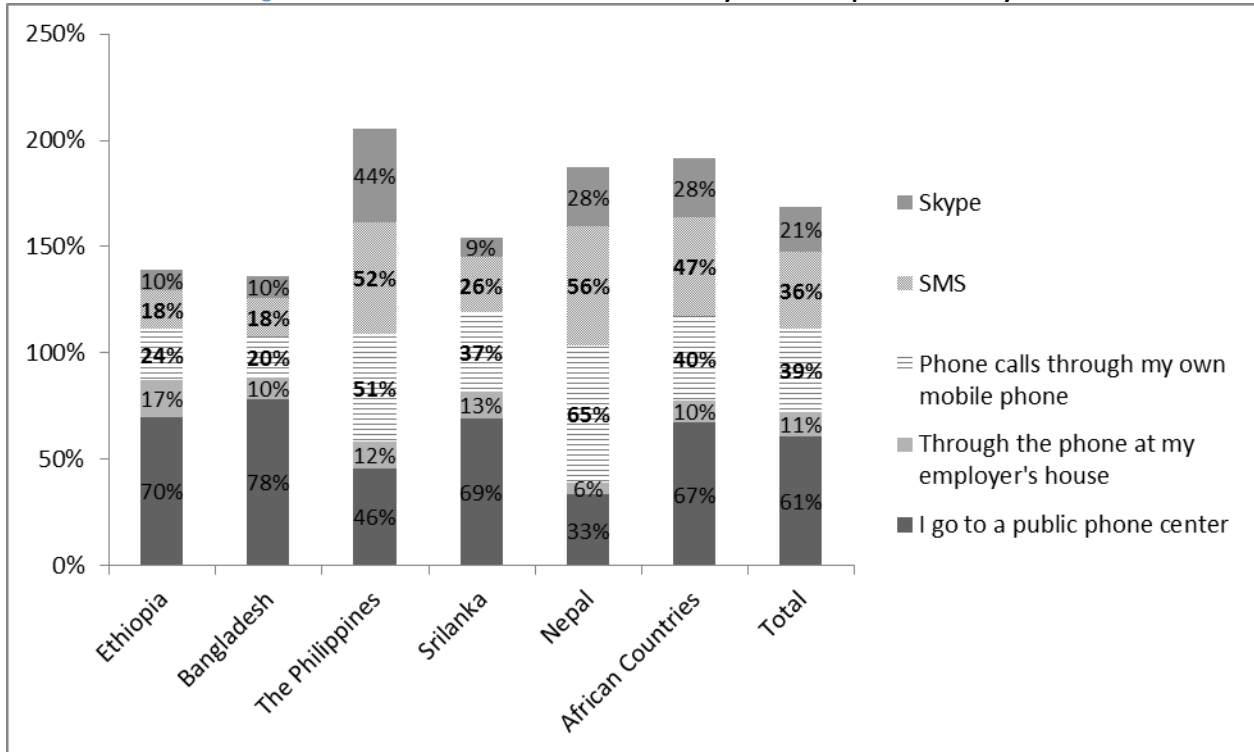


**Three quarters of the MDWs get in touch with their families at least once a week and the ownership of a mobile phone is a determining factor.** This share increases to around 85% in the case of Filipino and Sri Lankan MDWs. Moreover, around one quarter of the respondents (23%) are able to contact their families on a daily basis, possibly because they own cellphones and use Skype or other voice over internet software. This share increases to 48% among Filipino MDWs (figure 30). As for the means of contact, around 60% of MDWs call their families from public phones, a share that increases to around 80% in the case of Bangladeshis for whom this seems to be the primary way of contacting their families (figure 31). In contrast, around half of the Filipino MDWs use their own mobile phones. Filipinos also have the highest rates of Skype and SMS use. It is highly likely that the possession of a mobile phone and an internet connection is a determining factor in an MDW’s ability to contact her family and in the frequency with which she can do so. Thus, Bangladeshis who are heavily reliant on public phones are less likely to own a mobile phone (51% vs. 92% for Filipinos) and have a lower frequency of contact with their families.

**Figure 31 Frequency of MDW family contacts per nationality**

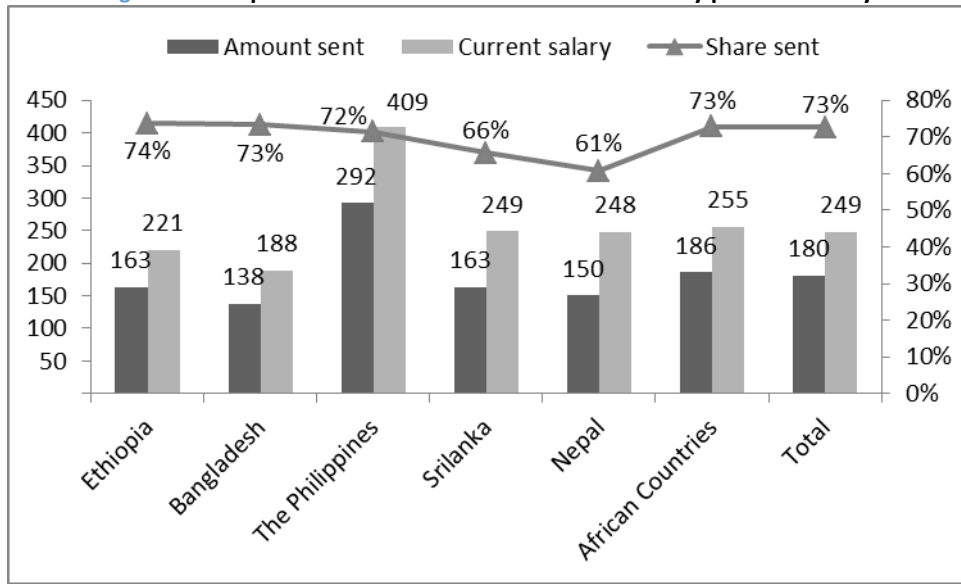


**Figure 32 Means of contact with MDW family members per nationality**



**MDWs send three quarters of their salaries home.** This average hides almost no variation among the nationalities with the exception of Sri Lankans and Nepalis who transfer a slightly lower share of their salaries (66% and 61% respectively). Moreover, almost all MDWs (91%) transfer the money via cash transfer agencies, while only 8% sometimes rely on friends or bank transfers. Finally, around 90% reported that the money was spent on daily living expenses, followed by children’s education (36%). A small minority declared that the money was used for home improvement (14%) and building a house (13%).

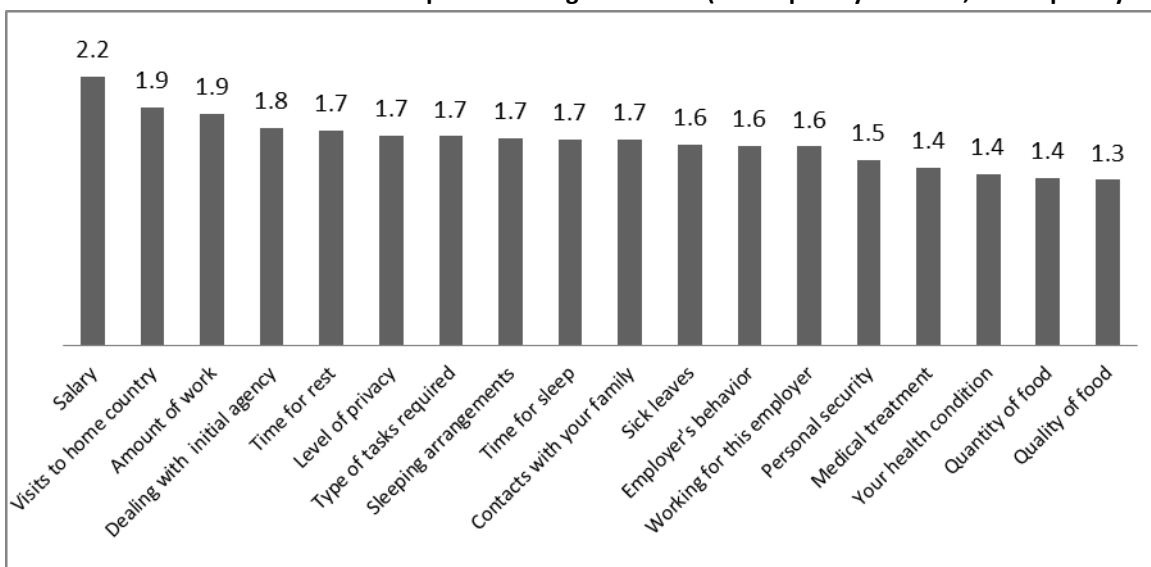
Figure 33 Comparison of amount transferred and salary per nationality



## SECTION 6 – GENERAL SATISFACTION

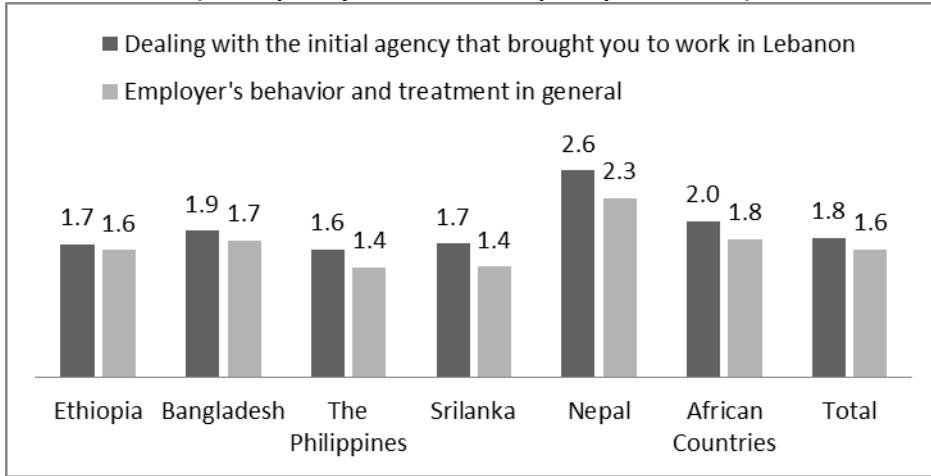
MDWs were asked to rate a number of statements regarding their living conditions in Lebanon on a scale in which 1 reflects complete satisfaction and 4 complete dissatisfaction. The first observation is that most ratings fall between 1 (completely satisfied) and 2 (somewhat satisfied), indicating low expectations among MDWs as to their rights and how they should be treated by their employers. The second observation is that Sri Lankan and Filipino MDWs systematically expressed higher levels of satisfaction with all aspects of their work conditions while Nepali MDWs expressed general dissatisfaction regarding those same aspects.

**Figure 34** Level of satisfaction with various aspects of living conditions (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied)



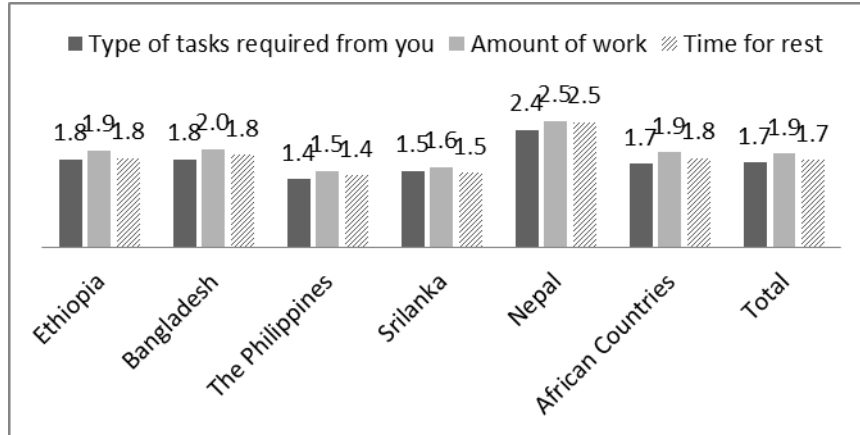
**Most MDWs expressed their satisfaction with their recruitment agency and the general behavior of their employer.** Indeed more than half were completely satisfied and another quarter were somewhat satisfied (figure 34). Few inter-nationality discrepancies were noted, with the exception of Nepali MDWs who expressed a significantly higher level of dissatisfaction. Filipinos and Sri Lankans were slightly more satisfied when it came to their employers' treatment.

**Figure 35 Level of satisfaction with recruitment agency and employer per nationality (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied)**



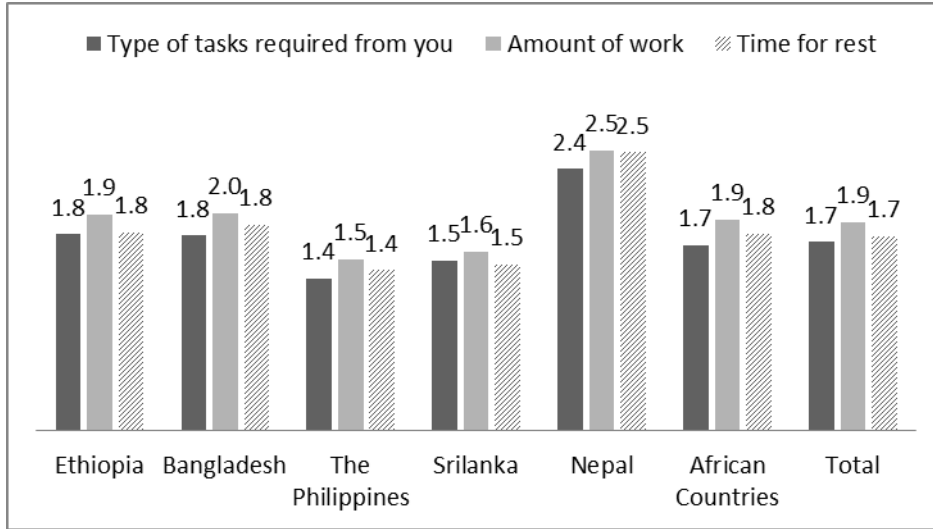
**Most MDWs are somewhat satisfied with the type and amount of work.** Indeed less than 10% of the sample expressed complete dissatisfaction with these aspects (figure 35). These ratings increase significantly in the case of Filipinos, 70% of whom are completely satisfied with the tasks they are assigned. Moreover, a significant majority (more than 60%) of Sri Lankans and Filipinos are completely satisfied with the amount of work and the amount of rest they are given. The same results apply for the time allowed for sleep and the quality of sleeping arrangements, with 60% being completely satisfied and another quarter somewhat satisfied.

**Figure 36 Level of satisfaction with work burden (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied)**



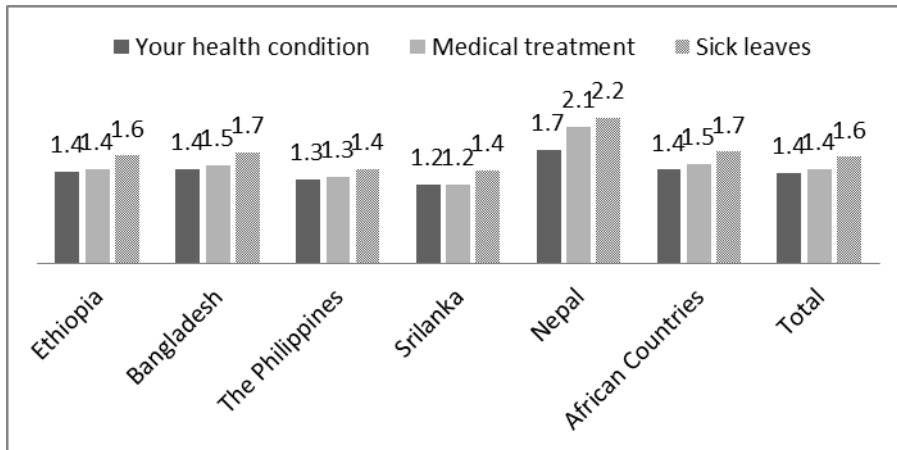
**MDWs are almost unanimously satisfied with the quantity and quality of their food.** Indeed, the satisfaction ratings were higher than those given to work burden items: more than 90% of MDWs were either completely satisfied (77%) or somewhat satisfied (14%). No rating discrepancies were noted among the nationalities (figure 36), with the exception of Nepali MDWs, 36% of whom were somewhat dissatisfied (compared to 5% in the overall sample).

**Figure 37 Level of satisfaction with quantity and quality (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied)**



**MDWs expressed general satisfaction with the health-related aspects of their jobs.** Once again, around 7% were fully satisfied and an additional 20% were somewhat satisfied. Satisfaction with sick leaves was slightly lower, with 60% expressing full satisfaction. Still, only 8% were fully dissatisfied. As usual, the Nepalese were systematically more dissatisfied than the other nationality groups.

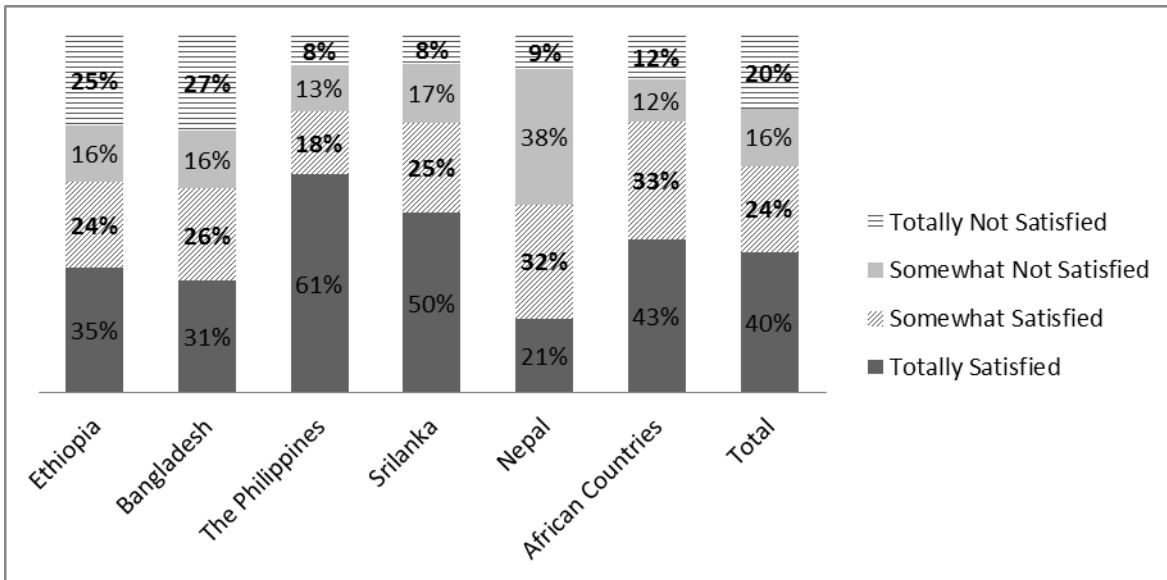
**Figure 38 Level of satisfaction with health-related aspects (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied)**



**Levels of satisfaction drop significantly with regards to salaries.** Indeed the average rating of the overall sample is 2.2 when all the other ratings fell clearly below 2. Moreover, only 40% were fully satisfied with their salaries, a share that increases to 61% among Filipinos and drops to 21% among the Nepalese (figure 38). Finally, Ethiopian and Bangladeshi MDWs expressed the highest dissatisfaction, with more than a quarter of them being completely dissatisfied with their salaries, while only 8% of Filipino and Sri Lankan MDWs felt the same.

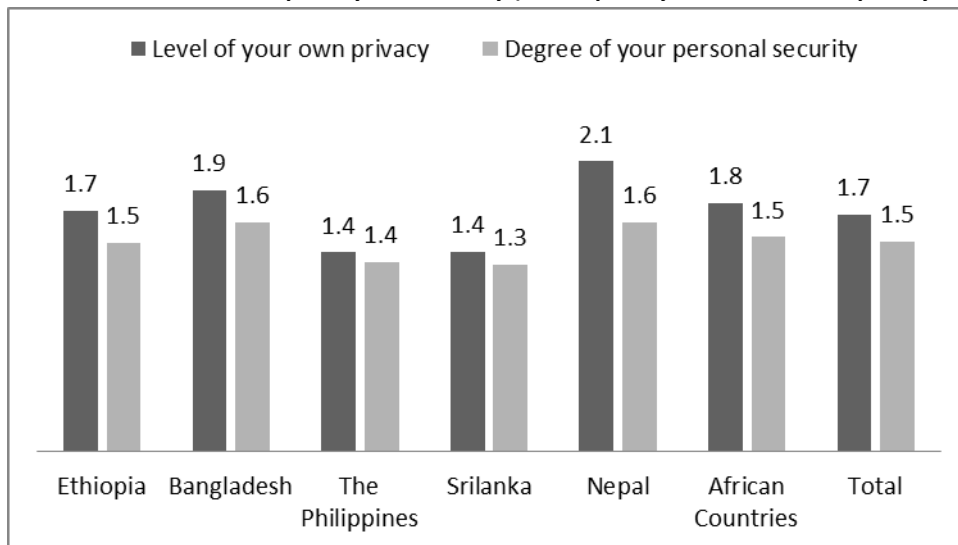


Figure 39 Degree of satisfaction with salary



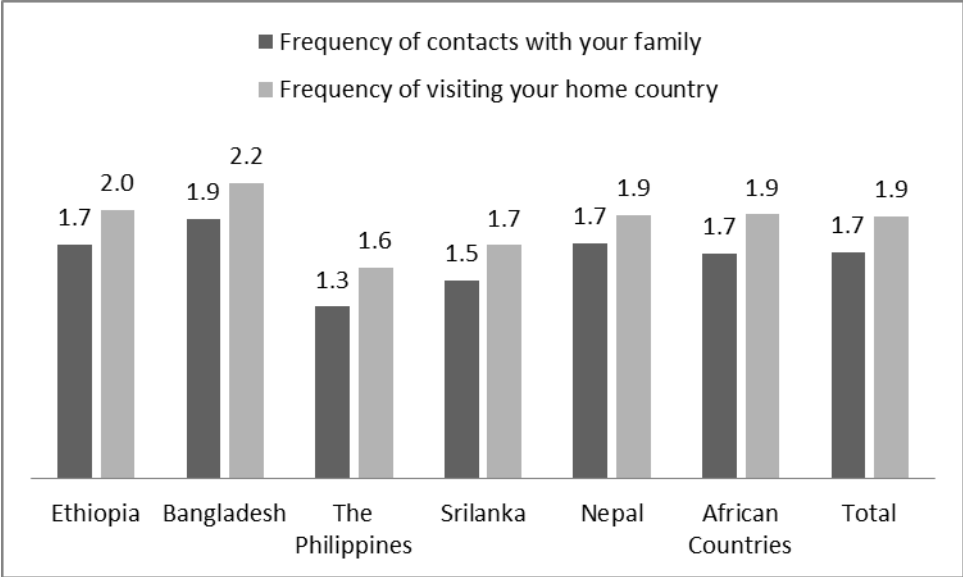
The vast majority of MDWs were satisfied with the levels of privacy and security they enjoyed. Indeed, around 80% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the level of privacy they were granted and around 90% felt safe and secure. Once again, Nepalese MDWs were more dissatisfied than the general sample with regards to their privacy and so were Bangladeshis to a certain degree.

Figure 40 Level of satisfaction with privacy and security (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied)



Most MDWs are satisfied with the frequency of contacts and visits to their home countries. Few internationality discrepancies were noted in this regard, except for the notably higher level of satisfaction among Filipino MDWs, half of whom were in daily contact with their families (compared to a 23% sample average).

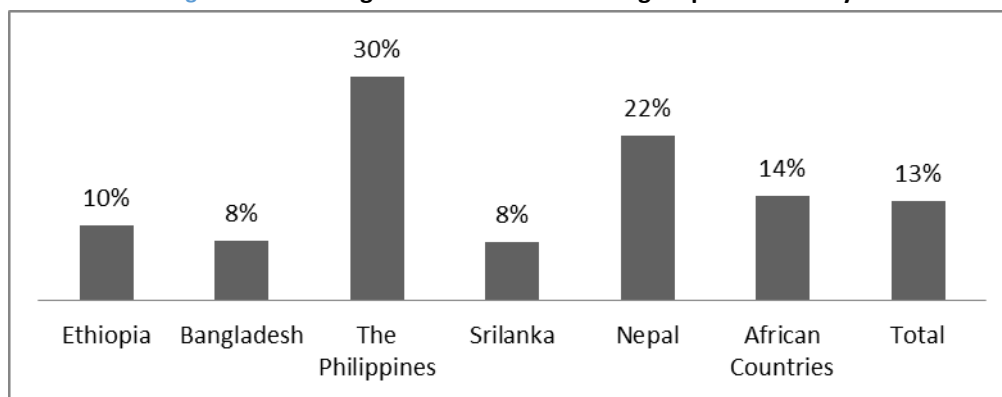
Figure 41 Level of satisfaction with family contacts and visits (1=completely satisfied, 4=completely dissatisfied)



## SECTION 7 – MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS

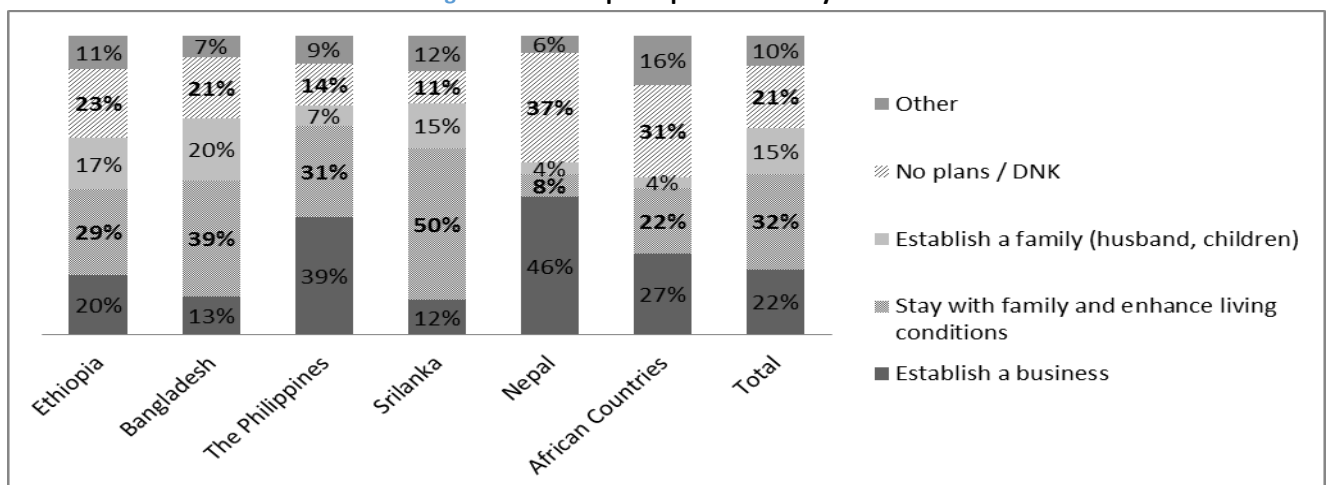
**The awareness and mobilization effort has limited penetration so far.** A few questions were asked to gauge the penetration of the outreach and mobilization effort. Only around 2% (27 respondents) declared having received help from a local or international NGO. Nine of them were assisted by CARITAS and five by the Migrant Workers Center. Around 13% stated that they were given information pamphlets about their rights, a share that is significantly higher for Nepali (22%) and Filipino (30%) MDWs (figure 41). Finally, around 40% of the respondents had no idea as to when they would be going back home, with the remainder of the answers being clearly related to the time remaining on their employment contracts.

**Figure 42 Receiving information on MDW rights per nationality**



**MDWs have diverse future plans.** Around one third of the respondents (32%) planned to retire to their families and live a better life thanks to the money saved, a share that increases to 50% in the case of Sri Lankans (figure 42). Another 22% plan to establish a business in their home country, especially Nepali and Filipino MDWs among whom this share increases to 46% and 39% respectively. In contrast, slightly more than 10% of Sri Lankans and Bangladeshis have such plans. Finally, around 20% have no future plans, which makes them more likely to stay with their families and use the money for living expenses.

**Figure 43 Future plans per nationality**



## CONCLUSION

This report provides a general picture of the living and work conditions of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. Because the study team was unable to reach migrant workers inside households, the sample excludes workers who are not allowed to leave their place of work/residence. Consequently, the report paints a picture that is probably somewhat better than the reality. Having said that, the results lead to a number of important conclusions:

1. A sizeable share of MDWs (40%) are verbally abused by their employers and 11% report being struck by their employers.
2. In households where abuse takes place, the abuser is most often the female employer. More importantly, children were found to be active participants in abusive behavior.
3. Half of the MDWs feel that their papers are withheld against their wishes, with the other half probably not complaining because of the perceived uselessness of any objections.
4. A large segment of MDWs suffers from a drastic lack of privacy. Thus, around half do not have separate sleeping quarters.
5. A large segment of MDWs suffers from a significant lack of freedom. Thus, one third of the sample reported sometimes being locked inside the dwelling; one third are not allowed to pick grocery items for themselves; and half are rarely if ever given the choice to go on family outings or not.
6. There are significant discrepancies in the work conditions of various immigrant groups with Filipina MDWs reporting notably better circumstances and Bangladeshi MDWs reporting the worst employment circumstances.
7. Despite the daily infringement on their basic human rights, the satisfaction levels of interviewed MDWs are higher than what one would expect. Indeed, the vast majority described themselves as somewhat satisfied with their work conditions.

The above conclusions portray a situation in which the majority of the Lebanese population and MDWs as a group are complicit in a dysfunctional employer-employee relationship that has short-term severe implications for MDWs and long-term consequences for Lebanese household dynamics and social norms. This report can only speculate about the reasons for the behavior of each of the involved parties, as behavioral motivations were not part of the survey questionnaire. However, such hypotheses were important in order to launch a national dialogue about these issues on the one hand and in order to formulate recommendations for future action on the other.

## Employers

The results show that, even in the absence of physical and verbal abuse, MDWs are not treated as adult employees with full responsibility over their own wellbeing. Rather, they are viewed as individuals with limited capacity to function independently and responsibly and the household's attitude toward them ranges between paternalistic protection and downright mistrust and contempt.

This attitude is likely to be rooted in a combination of racism and classism that prevents members of the household from identifying and empathizing with the MDW, i.e. of regarding them as equal human beings that deserve the same rights as Lebanese immigrants to destination countries.

## Migrant Domestic Workers

From the side of the MDWs, the expressed satisfaction with their work conditions despite the severe limitations on the freedom of movement and decision making is probably related to three major factors:

- 1) Their difficult living conditions in their home countries. Most MDWs come from poor countries in which employment is scarce, wages are low, and living conditions are difficult, hence their need to immigrate to Lebanon. This leads to low expectations regarding their work conditions.
- 2) Their lack of awareness of their right to dignified work conditions. Indeed, the nationals of countries such as the Philippines where a government employment office trains future MDWs and raises their awareness as to employer expectations and acceptable work conditions seem to expect and receive better treatment from Lebanese employers.
- 3) The lack of any legal recourse should they decide to complain. The Lebanese labour law does not apply to MDWs leaving them without legal protection in case of employment disputes. The reason for their exclusion is a subject that bears further investigation and is likely related to the fact that domestic work is feminized and undervalued. This means that it is not viewed as "work" and is therefore excluded from the labour law.

Based on the above, it is recommended that ILO's efforts should focus on three major axes:

### 1. Lebanese households

Significant effort needs to be expended in order to sensitize Lebanese households to the status of MDWs as capable adults entitled to the same rights they themselves are entitled to. This effort may begin with school children who are in continuous contact with MDWs and may be a conduit toward changing the mentalities of their parents. They are also potential future employers of MDWs. Awareness campaigns dealing with respect and non-discrimination may be conducted in schools and relevant material may be included in school curricula. On the other hand, employer households need to be officially represented in the national debate. Thus, the formation of a syndicate of MDW employers may give a voice to employer insecurities and contractual concerns, thereby placing the debate on a surer footing.

## 2. Migrant Domestic Workers

MDWs currently lack awareness of what should constitute decent work conditions in a country such as Lebanon. Therefore, awareness raising efforts need to take place in Lebanon, but also in their home countries. Evidence has shown that countries which prepare migrant workers before they leave to their destinations (e.g. the Philippines) give them an aura of protection that leads to better conditions in the country of employment. Awareness and support efforts in Lebanon may be implemented through the newly formed union of MDWs.

## 3. Legal framework

Domestic work is not currently recognized as normal “work” with rights and obligations guaranteed to the employer and the employee. This is evidenced by the exclusion of domestic work from the Lebanese labour law and by the presence of the controversial kafala system. It is therefore imperative that efforts be expended with the Ministry of Labour to afford domestic workers with the same rights as all other workers, i.e. their inclusion in the same labour law as all other workers, the abolishment of the kafala system, and their inclusion in social protection schemes. Moreover, MDWs need access to legal support, which may be obtained by convincing a certain number of lawyers to give pro-bono consultations and services. Finally, the sponsorship (kafala) system needs to be abolished.

Using the results of this survey as a foundation for advocacy on behalf of MDWs who are one of the most vulnerable groups of workers and implementing interventions on the three proposed major axes will hopefully change the perceptions of Lebanese employers, the law, and MDWs themselves. Changed perceptions will naturally lead to concrete changes in the recruitment, contracts, and work conditions of MDWs in Lebanon.

International Labour Organization  
Regional Office for the Arab States  
Aresco Centre - Justinien Street - Kantari  
P.O.Box 11-4088 Riad Solh 1107-2150  
Beirut – Lebanon

Tel: 00961-1-752400

Fax: 00961-1-752405

Email: [beirut@ilo.org](mailto:beirut@ilo.org)

Website: [www.ilo.org/roasmigration](http://www.ilo.org/roasmigration)

Follow ILO in Arab States on Twitter: @iloarabstates



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