

Domestic Workers

Protection and support for migrant workers. The IFRC perspective



Nigel Dickinson/Red Cross

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and its 189 member National Societies have a long history of providing assistance to migrants throughout the world. The migration work of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is guided by the *individual needs and vulnerabilities of migrants, irrespective of their legal status*. National Societies work with and for migrants *along the migratory trail*, in countries of origin, transit and destination.

At a practical level, the IFRC and its member National Societies, in their unique auxiliary relationship with government, provide assistance to vulnerable people on the move, including labour migrants. The IFRC and its member National Societies strive to provide assistance and protection to all migrants, uphold their rights and dignity, empower them in their search for opportunities and sustainable solutions, as well as promote social inclusion and interaction between migrants and host communities. National Societies assist and protect vulnerable labour migrants, including domestic workers and their families

both in their countries of origin and destination.

Migrant Domestic Workers

The high level of vulnerability in this sector is well recognized. According to the International Labour Organisation, domestic workers can experience poor working conditions, may be excluded from legal protection and are, as a result of this, unable to realize their human rights and to live in freedom. Women represent the majority of domestic workers.

The situation deteriorates when the domestic worker is a migrant, he/she faces several barriers in host societies such as language, religion, culture differences, amplifying the potential for negative experience even more. "Studies also reveal that migrants have less access to local health care systems due to their lack of knowledge, problems of insurance, legal status and poor education"¹. In terms of labour conditions, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights states that abuses suffered by migrant domestic workers commonly start at recruitment with many hiring agencies charging high fees for their services and delivering fraudulent recruitment and employment contracts. Wages are often low or they are paid in kind and hours of work can be long. Arrangements with employers often place domestic migrant workers in illegal and abusive situations where they are exploited and have no recourse of any kind. On occasions, these domestic migrant workers, in addition to labour exploitation and abuse, suffer discrimination, xenophobia and violence, social exclusion and public negative perceptions. As an often invisible group living behind closed doors, migrant

¹ International Centre for Migration, Health and Development (2012) Providing psychosocial assessment and support for migrants: A critical urge. <http://icmhd.wordpress.com/2012/04/16/providing-psychosocialassessment-and-support-for-migrants-a-critical-urge/>

domestic workers are particularly vulnerable and in need of international protection.

RCRC activities with and for labour migrants (including migrant domestic workers)

RCRC activities focus on pre-departure stage, *awareness raising campaigns, pre-departure trainings and counselling for family left behind*, arrival stage, *information centres, restoring family links service, psychosocial support, legal aid and medical assistance* and return stage, *reintegration into origin society*.

Awareness Raising on Consequences of Migration – The Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Belgium Red Cross.

These Red Cross Societies have along with Congolese artists produced comic books on the realities of migration to Europe. An innovative aspect of the project is the fact that the comics have been produced as educational resources for teachers and young people in both countries, with a unified aim of stimulating debate on migration and raising awareness about the difficulties that migrants can encounter along their journey. The “La-bas... Na poto” comic book illustrates the gap that often exists between the migrant dream of working overseas in domestic and other similar positions and the realities of the migrant journey and life in a new country. Its aim is to ensure that young people in DRC are better informed and prepared when they make choices about whether to migrate. Meanwhile in Belgium, a comic book has been produced as a teaching tool to raise awareness amongst school children about the realities of migration and to challenge negative stereotypes of migrants. This project aims to create awareness on risks of migration and labour exploitation (including domestic labour) and human trafficking, among young people.



Image from the “La-bas... Na poto” comic book.

Awareness raising campaigns – The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

Pre-departure briefing and information leaflets for domestic migrant workers are prepared in coordination with governments and recruitment agencies.

Pre-Departure Orientation Seminars – The Philippines Red Cross Society

Pre-Departure Orientation Seminars (PDOS) are organised prior to departure for both Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) and their families. The seminar provides information on labour rights and social and psychological preparation for migrant workers, including migrant domestic workers and families left behind. The programme is carried out in cooperation with governments and recruitment agencies.

In addition to seminars, professional counselling is provided to OFW family members with sessions on how to cope with the changes brought about by family disintegration as a consequence of overseas employment.

Welfare services to Overseas Filipino Workers– The Philippines Red Cross and Macau Red Cross Societies

The Macau pilot project “Pamilya Mo Lingap Ko Program”. Philippine and Macau Red Cross Societies established a partnership to provide welfare services to OFWs, including migrant domestic workers in Macau. The project was coordinated with government agencies in both countries, and included activities such as counselling, psychosocial evaluation, crisis intervention, child assistance, ambulance services, tracing and family reunification, health services and referral to other institutions.

Central Asia Red Crescent Labour Migration Network – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan Red Crescent societies

The programme focus is to improve the situation of labour migrants in Central Asia, regardless of their legal status, by providing needs-based services and assistance to regular and irregular labour migrants, including migrant domestic workers. Information and education centres have been established which provide information on the rights of migrants. The project also aims to prevent discrimination, xenophobia and social exclusion. and also by strengthening cooperation between National Societies.

The National Societies provide services through 12 Red Crescent information and education centres for migrants in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In addition, mobile teams that are composed of the project staff, volunteers and community members making access to beneficiaries easier even in the most remote areas.

Labour migrants, are provided with services such as: legal consultancy, psychological support, TB, HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and other diseases prevention and first aid, basic computer literacy skills and Russian language, tracing and tailored humanitarian support for the most vulnerable migrants.

The Support for Trafficked People Programme – The Australian Red Cross Society

The Australia Red Cross through its STPP has recognised the particular vulnerability of domestic workers. Where domestic workers are identified as having been trafficked, they are provided with a range of social, psychological and legal services. The programme support victims to meet their basic needs for safety, food, accommodation, mental and physical health and well-being. It provides opportunities for victims to learn new skills and supports them to develop options to facilitate their reintegration upon returning to their country of origin, or if staying in Australia, after they leave the programme. The programme is carried out in cooperation with government agencies and the Australian Federal Police.

Similar initiatives have been implemented by the Cambodian, Denmark Red Cross and the Red Cross of the Netherlands.



Serbian Red Cross' Human Trafficking prevention kit.

Strengthening of National Mechanisms for Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Victims of Human Trafficking in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine – Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine Red Cross societies

The project is designed to strengthen national mechanisms for the reintegration and rehabilitation of victims in the region by increasing the involvement of the National Red Cross Societies in victims identification, referral and assistance to ensure sustainable access to services for victims of trafficking. Migrant domestic workers who have been exploited in the cause of their work overseas are provided with targeted support.

Key points on protection of migrant domestic workers:

In order to enhance migrant domestic workers' development outcomes some key issues should be tackled:

- “Low value” general perception given to domestic work.
- The importance of legal and social protection for domestic workers.
- Economic contribution to productivity, economic growth and human development in host countries and remittances to countries of origin.
- Different risks that domestic workers face such as violence, discrimination, exploitation and abuse.
- Domestic migrants when undocumented risk higher vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.
- Domestic workers, can face three level of discrimination; as women, as migrant and as domestic workers.
- ILO C189 Domestic Workers Convention needs to be ratified.
- Migrants need to be informed as to their labour rights, i.e. Salary, housing, hours of work, insurance, etc. salary,
- Integration is essential for migrants to acquire competencies, skills and values necessary for an active role in the life of their host societies and on return.
- Isolation in the private “workplace” can restrict domestic migrant workers connection with other people and ability to fully participate, contribute and benefit to a society.