



OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

**Middle East and North Africa Initiative–Arab Regional Office**

**Strategy Meeting:  
Migrant Workers' Rights in Lebanon and  
Jordan**

**Summary Report**

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Kempinski Hotel, Dead Sea, Jordan

Report prepared on behalf of the OSI MENA Initiative by Elizabeth Frantz

## Contents

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<b>About OSI MENA</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Panel Sessions</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Access to Justice, Legal Aid, and Strategic Litigation</i>	8
<i>Advocating for Policy Reform</i>	10
<i>Influencing the Women’s Rights Agenda</i>	12
<i>Effective Uses of Traditional Media</i>	13
<i>Innovative Uses of New Media</i>	15
<i>Success Stories and Benefits of Inter-Regional Cooperation</i>	16
<i>Creative Tactics for Effective and Sustainable Civil Society Action</i>	16
<b>Working Group Sessions</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>Working Group 1: Legal Aid and Access to Justice</i>	17
<i>Working Group 2: Developing Strategies for Advocacy</i>	18
<i>Working Group 3: Effective Uses of Media</i>	20
<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Recommendations for NGOs</b>	<b>23</b>

## About OSI MENA

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The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Initiative of the Open Society Institute is dedicated to the creation of vibrant, tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens.

### History and Structure

The Open Society Institute (OSI) has been engaged in the region since 2003. The MENA Initiative focuses primarily on the Arab world, with a representative office registered in Jordan and staff based in Amman. OSI has an annual grantmaking portfolio of \$6 million for the region.

### Program Priorities

The MENA Initiative supports innovative projects in four priority areas:

- Rights and Governance
- Women's Rights
- Media and Information Technology
- Youth and Knowledge
- Arts and Culture

In addition to traditional grantmaking, the initiative helps incubate new projects, providing seed funding and expert advice.

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## Executive Summary

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The Middle East and North Africa region hosts some of the highest concentrations of migrant workers in the world. As numerous reports by international bodies and human rights organizations attest, many of these migrants are highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The most widespread problems include withholding of wages, confiscation of passports, and restrictions on movement and communication. Other common problems include physical, verbal, and sexual abuse and arbitrary detention. When such abuses occur, most migrants lack avenues for legal redress. Positive steps have been taken by several governments in the region to improve the regulatory framework governing the treatment of migrant workers, but a large gap exists between legislative reform and efficient implementation. More concrete action is necessary to ensure that their rights are adequately protected in practice. In light of this, OSI's Middle East and North Africa Initiative (OSI MENA) has made migrant workers' rights part of its Rights and Governance priority area.

Building on activities initiated in 2006, OSI MENA's Arab Regional Office commissioned a mapping of relevant issues and actors and has undertaken meetings with representatives of local and international organizations in Jordan and Lebanon, where interest in the issue has been growing among nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). One of the issues that emerged in these discussions was that while an increasing number of NGOs were working on migrants' rights, coordination and communication among the various actors was lacking.

With this in mind, OSI MENA organized a regional meeting on May 20–21 at the Dead Sea that was attended by representatives from 20 civil society organizations primarily from Lebanon and Jordan as well as other countries in the region. The meeting enabled participants to share their experiences, discuss the main obstacles to their work, and explore ideas for new interventions to advance migrants' rights. The main themes addressed were:

1. Expanding migrants' access to justice through legal aid, and developing strategic litigation.
2. Enhancing the role of the media in raising awareness and providing information.
3. Improving advocacy campaigns to influence government policy and public opinion.

The meeting included a combination of informational presentations from individuals as well as working group sessions focused on generating practical remedies. In addition, participants were provided with a resource manual prepared by OSI MENA that contained background material, including a round-up of recent developments with respect to labor migration in Jordan and Lebanon and an annotated bibliography of research on migrant labor in the Arab region.

This was the first event of its kind in the region to devote particular attention to the ways legal professionals and the media could be included in the scope of NGO efforts to raise awareness and bring about change. It provided a rare opportunity for local and international organizations, lawyers, journalists, and activists to collectively strategize ways to protect migrants' rights. Particular attention was paid to the problems faced by migrant domestic workers given that they were the primary constituency for many of the meeting's participants. It was agreed, however, that more attention should be paid to migrants in other sectors. Moreover, many of the strategies discussed during the meeting are applicable to addressing issues related to other sectors of employment.

Participants engaged in a rich discussion, generating creative ideas for potential interventions. They emphasized the importance of tackling the problem on several fronts. *The first* is by promoting substantive legal reform and effective implementation of existing laws and policies

governing migrant workers. *The second* is by providing legal assistance and support, and by making better use of the media to engage public opinion and provide information. This would include finding ways of involving new partners, and including migrants themselves in outreach and advocacy efforts. The discussion also underscored the critical importance of coalition-building and how organizations working for the migrant cause can strengthen their impact by pooling information and working collaboratively.

This report provides a synopsis of the main points of discussion throughout the two-day meeting, beginning with a synthesis of the main panel sessions and plans for action put forth by participants. While there can be no single blueprint for future action, it is hoped that the ideas set forth in this document will assist organizations in designing and evaluating their options to advance the rights of migrant workers.

## Overview of Panel Sessions

### Legal Aid and Access to Justice

This session was dedicated to discussing ways of increasing the availability and effectiveness of legal assistance for migrant workers in order to guarantee their access to justice. At present, relatively few cases involving migrant workers' claims of abuse or exploitation reach a courtroom.

Najla Chahda of the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center and Roland Tawk, an independent lawyer, made presentations discussing the provision of legal aid to migrants in Lebanon, how it has evolved over the years, and the challenges faced by lawyers today. These include the problem of false counter-accusations made by employers against migrants who voice complaints, the high burden of proof required to establish that migrants' rights have been violated, and the length and high cost of legal proceedings. Atef Majali of the National Center for Human Rights and Haitham Azrai of Tamkeen gave presentations on efforts to document human rights violations and provide legal assistance for migrants in Jordan. Among other issues, they spoke about initiatives to provide training and expertise to enable lawyers to successfully argue cases on behalf of migrants.

Some of the main recommendations emerging from the discussions were as follows:

- Improve the terms and conditions of the employment contracts by which migrants are hired.
- Extend legal coverage to those employed on a freelance basis; at present such work, while common, is illegal.
- Improve coordination among legal aid providers, the media, and other stakeholders to promote awareness of existing services and to encourage referrals.
- Provide legal practitioners with professional development and capacity building opportunities.
- Advocate for creating special courts dedicated to hearing migrant workers' cases under expedited terms to avoid delays and possible deportation.
- Affirm and advocate for migrants' right to counsel at all stages of legal proceedings, including pretrial detention and investigations.

### Advocacy

The objective of this panel was to explore ways organizations can broaden and deepen their advocacy work by reflecting on lessons learned from previous campaigns. A key point highlighted during the discussion was that most legislative reforms that have been instituted in relation to migrant labor thus far have been superficial. Increased efforts are essential to ensure that such policies are successfully implemented in practice. Presentations were made by Simel Esim of the International Labour Organization and by Nadim Houry of Human Rights Watch

about strategies that have been used to expose the problems and influence government policy and public opinion with respect to migrants in Lebanon. One example is the policy dialogue process of the past five years that resulted in the drafting of a unified contract for migrant domestic workers and a new decree for monitoring and regulating private recruitment agencies.

The speakers also discussed innovative ways organizations could attract greater attention to the issue by running low-budget awareness campaigns and expanding their bases of support by reaching out to new constituencies. University students, human rights groups, women's organizations, and trade unions could be encouraged to tackle the issue. An important long-term goal in the protection and promotion of migrants' rights relates to the benefits of encouraging migrant workers' own grassroots mobilization. This could include forming their own unions or participating in existing unions in sending or receiving countries. In connection with this point, this session suggested ideas for how migrants could be incorporated as actors in advocacy and outreach work as community leaders, trainers, and social workers.

Some of the main recommendations emerging from the discussions were as follows:

- Increase deployment of monitoring mechanisms to ensure that policies aimed at protecting migrants' rights are effectively implemented.
- Increase documentation of instances of abuse to demonstrate the scale of violations of migrants' rights and monitor the implementation of reforms.
- Integrate migrant concerns within other debates and social change agendas and incorporate new actors as strategic partners in order to widen support for migrants' rights.
- Take steps to ensure that migrants in host countries have substantial union representation and are granted voting rights and access to decision-making posts within unions.
- Support migrant workers' own involvement in advocacy and outreach work and empower migrant community leaders and informal networks. As part of this, migrants' right to freedom of association is a priority for action.

## **Media**

Two panels on the media were organized to examine ways to encourage better media coverage of migrants' rights issues and explore ways that media strategies could be incorporated into NGO campaign activities. Veteran journalists Omar Nashabe from the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhbar*, and Daoud Kuttab from the Community Media Network in Jordan, offered thoughts on how NGOs could expand links with the press and better engage local journalists to garner more media attention. They also discussed how journalists and editors can overcome impediments they might face when covering the issue.

A second panel discussed innovative uses of other types of media. Presentations were given by Narada Wijesuriya of Neth TV on satellite television programming for Sri Lankan migrants and Nicholas McGeehan of the website Mafiwasta on using the Internet to increase awareness and attract attention to the plight of the UAE's migrant workforce. Participants compared the effectiveness of various types of media at reaching employers, the general public, and migrant workers. They also discussed ways the media could be used to provide services to migrants and build migrant community activism.

Some of the main recommendations emerging from the discussions were as follows:

- Develop the communications strategies of NGOs to enable them to work better with journalists and make more effective use of the media.
- Employ creativity to attract more local and international media attention.

- Enhance use of new media and video to influence public opinion and expand awareness.
- Explore utilizing migrant media to promote activism, provide crucial information, and to mobilize community building.
- Increase coordination between NGOs working on migrant issues and existing media outlets for migrant communities.

These are just a few of the points underscored by participants during the strategy meeting. The full report, below, further elaborates on the recommendations and outlines the specific problems faced by organizations and individuals working on the issue. It also presents an overview of the various approaches that have been taken thus far to promote migrants' rights in the MENA region.

## Panel Sessions

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### Access to Justice, Legal Aid, and Strategic Litigation

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This panel allowed participants to discuss experiences providing legal aid to migrant workers in Lebanon and Jordan and the challenges faced in doing so. This included direct service provision, initiatives to train and create resources for lawyers, and efforts to conduct strategic litigation. Panelists discussed the main obstacles that have hindered legal aid provision thus far, including the lack of resources and funding, impediments in gaining access to and communicating with clients, collecting evidence in support of claims of abuse, mistreatment or non-payment, and challenges encountered at the level of the judiciary. Participants also discussed the shortcomings of existing services, the various alternatives used, and ideas for how to overcome these problems.

#### [Najla Chahda, Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center \(Lebanon\)](#)

Najla Chahda provided an overview of the services offered by the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center. These include running a shelter for victims of abuse, employing a team of social workers who refer cases to a legal aid unit, and operating a counseling hotline. Caritas conducts research on issues relating to migrant workers, including studies of employer attitudes and practices with regards to migrant domestic workers. These inform their awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy work. Caritas also participates in a steering committee comprised of government and NGO representatives that advocates for a policy framework to regulate the employment of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. In 2005, Caritas made a verbal agreement with the General Security Office (GSO) that allowed Caritas lawyers and social workers to be present at a retention center in Beirut for foreigners detained due to visa irregularities. This agreement was not formalized in writing but has allowed Caritas to provide counseling, assistance, and legal aid to detainees. Caritas lawyers have secured the right to be present during GSO investigations with migrants. A key obstacle in the provision of legal aid relates to the fact that when workers issue complaints of abuse or mistreatment, employers often make counter-accusations, leading to migrants being detained. Many judges are unsympathetic to migrants' claims of abuse and commonly assume that the migrant is guilty or deserving of mistreatment.

#### [Atef Majali, National Center for Human Rights \(Jordan\)](#)

Atef Majali introduced the work of the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR), an independent non-profit organization that monitors, documents, and receives complaints related to violations of human rights in Jordan. The NCHR provides legal assistance, conducts training programs on human rights standards, and publishes regular reports on the status of human rights in Jordan. Recent reports have focused on the issue of migrant workers. The NCHR also lobbies for policy and legislative reform. Some of the main factors hindering migrants from seeking legal assistance include fear of detention or deportation. There is an urgent need for additional sources of legal assistance for migrants in Jordan.

#### [Haitham Azrai, Tamkeen \(Jordan\)](#)

Haithem Azrai discussed the newly-established organization Tamkeen, which promotes human rights in all sectors of Jordanian society. Tamkeen has launched several projects relating to migrant workers. It created a procedural guide for representing migrants whose human rights have been violated. It also held a training course for lawyers, some of whom have been selected to work in a new legal aid unit. The unit has taken up a number of cases in which workers' passports were illegally confiscated by employers. It recently succeeded in obtaining 52 Egyptian migrants' passports that were being held by a single employer. Tamkeen also represents migrants whose wages were not paid by factories that closed under bankruptcy.



Challenges facing Tamkeen include accessing migrants employed in the domestic sector and communicating with non-Arabic speaking clients.

#### [Roland Tawk, Attorney \(Lebanon\)](#)

Roland Tawk has extensive experience representing migrant workers in the Lebanese courts. He provided a historical overview of the provision of legal aid to migrant workers in Lebanon since the 1990s. He noted the many challenges facing lawyers, including the high burden of proof required of migrant complainants, difficulties obtaining evidence from forensic doctors to document abuse, and the fact that court cases are extremely lengthy. Migrants often find it difficult to support themselves during legal proceedings and are subject to detention. Given these obstacles, lawyers in Lebanon have been pursuing alternative strategies outside of the courts. Tawk mentioned that there is a need for intervention to sensitize the judiciary to the main problems faced by migrant workers. The penal code acts as a stronger deterrent to abuse than the civil code because it entails stiffer penalties, but judges tend to be unsympathetic to migrants, and it is often difficult to persuade them that an employer's actions constitute criminal offenses. There is also a need for greater coordination between embassies and legal aid providers.

#### [Main points](#)

After the presentations, participants made the following comments about key challenges and suggestions for the provision of legal aid:

#### **Legal Aid Services**

- Participants held a wide range of views about the pros and cons of existing legal aid services. The discussion indicated that there is a lack of regular communication between the various organizations providing legal aid, particularly in Jordan. NGOs and key stakeholders do not always have sufficient information about the existing services. The referral process among various organizations could be improved.
- Media outlets could be better utilized to advertise existing services. Community radio would be one way to do this. More coordination between lawyers and the media could also be pursued to publicize human rights violations and increase awareness.
- To date, cases in which migrants have allegedly committed crimes are more widely publicized than cases in which they have been the complainant or in which they have been proven innocent. More targeted dissemination of judgments that are favorable to migrants would help to establish legal precedent for migrants' rights.
- In Lebanon, Caritas lawyers are permitted to be present during GSO investigations, but there is no stipulation permitting other lawyers to be present. All lawyers should have the right to be present during investigations. In Jordan, lawyers are permitted to be present according to the penal code but are sometimes obstructed by public security officials.
- Cases involving migrants are costly and lengthy. A special court dedicated to dealing with cases involving migrants could expedite the process. Institutionalized legal aid funds would allow lawyers to provide services for free or at reduced rates.
- Among legal practitioners, there is a need for more information, resources, and communication about how existing legislation can be applied on the ground.
- Steps could be taken to sensitize the judiciary about the problems faced by migrant workers and their rights under the law.
- The laws and regulations governing recruitment agencies are not adequately enforced. Legal remedies to promote enforcement could be explored.

## Legal Reform

- It is important to enhance legal aid provision, not only as a *response* to abuse, but as a tool to improve the legal and contractual conditions under which migrants are employed and therefore to *prevent* abuse. Existing employment contracts fall short in many ways, failing to give migrant domestic workers the right to leave their place of employment and placing a high burden of proof on them in comparison to employers.
- A main obstacle to migrants' access to the justice system relates to the threat of deportation. Policy changes are important to address this shortcoming.
- There is a lack of legal coverage for those who abscond from their employers' homes. Legal coverage must be extended to migrant domestic workers employed on a freelance basis who reside independently.
- Nonpayment of salaries frequently occurs because employers do not have sufficient funds. This problem could be avoided if potential employers were required to show monthly income statements.

## Detention

- Current conditions in the General Security migrants' detention center in Beirut are unacceptable. There is severe overcrowding, bad air quality, and a lack of natural light. Efforts are underway to create a new facility.
- Communication gaps are a major problem between employers and migrants as well as migrants and NGO service providers. In an effort to address this, a booklet containing key Arabic phrases has been produced. Caritas has hired migrants as part of their support staff to assist with interpretation.
- The lack of interpreters is particularly problematic for migrants who have been detained or jailed for alleged crimes and in some cases has resulted in false confessions.

## Advocating for Policy Reform

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The aim of this panel was to discuss the advocacy campaigns that have been launched thus far in Jordan and Lebanon and to stimulate ideas for new ways to influence government policy and public opinion. This included ways actors could attract greater attention to the issue, run low-budget awareness campaigns, and broaden and deepen their bases of support by reaching out to new constituencies, for example by encouraging university students, human rights groups, and trade unions to tackle the issue. It also highlighted the crucial role of encouraging migrant workers' own involvement in advocacy and outreach work and suggested ways this could be done.

### Simel Esim, International Labour Organization, Regional Office for Arab States (Lebanon)

Simel Esim discussed two documentary films about migrant domestic workers and their Lebanese employers that have been produced and used for the purposes of awareness raising and advocacy. The most recent one, *Maid in Lebanon II: Voices from Home*, poses questions about the terms and conditions of migrant domestic workers' employment and points to the need to recognize their rights as workers. A 10-minute summary clip of the documentary was screened during the meeting. These summary clips have been made available on the Internet and have been accessed widely by migrant workers' organizations in sending countries.<sup>1</sup> Esim also made several points about priorities for advocacy work. She noted that the legal gains have to be closely monitored to ensure enforcement and to avoid backlashes that may occur among stakeholders (i.e. private employment agencies, employers of migrant workers, etc.) Some

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<sup>1</sup> *Maid in Lebanon II* can be watched on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94r0242G6dY>. The earlier film, *Maid in Lebanon I*, focuses on the trajectories of Sri Lankan women who leave their homes to work as domestic workers in Lebanon and can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rY91LCyY4s>

implementation tools that have been successfully used in other countries include monitoring committees, government report cards, and public opinion surveys. It is also vital to support participatory approaches that encourage migrant workers' own involvement in grassroots activities and advocacy work. Trade unions have a central role in this regard and can be brought into the fold. Malaysian trade unions, for example, have signed agreements with unions in Indonesia to extend membership to Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. Domestic workers have established their own separate unions in a number of other cases, both in sending and receiving countries. In Bahrain, Bahraini nationals have established an association that is staffed by migrant workers and works to protect migrant workers' rights. These are all models that could be considered and adapted for the purposes of Lebanon and Jordan. The recruitment of migrant domestic workers needs to be understood in light of a more general societal devaluation of domestic work and a growing crisis of social care provisions in the region. Demographic shifts and changing work patterns have resulted in growing social care needs that are not being met locally through affordable, accessible, good quality services. Much of the work done by paid domestic workers is otherwise performed by unpaid family members. Both groups require better social and legal protections. Esim also noted that governments have a duty to address the social care needs of children, the elderly, disabled, and ill instead of transferring these responsibilities to private households.

#### [Nadim Houry, Human Rights Watch \(Lebanon\)](#)

Nadim Houry provided an overview of Human Rights Watch's (HRW) work on migrant domestic workers. This has entailed research to expose the problems as well as efforts to develop recommendations and advocate for change. Houry mentioned the importance of enhanced coalition building among various civil society actors and for a focus not only on legislation but also implementation. Documenting and publicizing cases of abuse is important to demonstrate the scale of violations of migrants' rights, to counter arguments that abuse is isolated, and to monitor the effectiveness of reforms. There are research gaps to be filled in particular on the children of migrants, migrants' access to justice, the incidence of physical and sexual violence, and migrants' health. Advocacy targets should include the Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Interior, recruiting agencies in host and sending countries, embassies, other NGOs, and bar associations. New actors could be incorporated as strategic partners in advocacy work. These include: women's rights groups, faith-based groups, antiracism groups, groups that work with detainees and in prisons, university students, sending country embassies, recruitment agencies that might be concerned about their own reputations, UN agencies, Western embassies, donors, and migrant groups in sending countries. Public awareness campaigns can be run on small budgets by negotiating with the media for free ads, leveraging information to gain TV access, and utilizing key events, as HRW did with the Beirut Marathon.<sup>2</sup> New tools such as Facebook can also be used to coordinate activities and promote awareness. It is vital to include migrants themselves in advocacy and outreach work. Local leaders and informal networks should be identified and empowered to organize themselves and speak out. Toward this end, HRW has identified approximately 20 migrant community leaders in Lebanon and is exploring ways to support them. Many of these migrants have overstayed their visas or lack proper legal status; if they were to appear in the media, they could be deported. Their vulnerable legal status is one factor to consider when exploring ways of empowering them.

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<sup>2</sup> A number of NGOs used the 2008 Beirut Marathon to advertise various social causes. A group affiliated with Human Rights Watch used the race to draw attention to the rights of migrant domestic workers.

## Main points

During the open discussion, the following key points were raised:

- To date, many legislative reforms have been merely cosmetic. More attention to implementation is required. Better monitoring mechanisms could enable NGOs to be outspoken about failures in policy implementation. One method would be to establish an NGO monitoring committee to maintain a government report card evaluating policy. Another would be increased NGO shadow reporting to the UN to highlight unreported violations or problems.
- Further research and documentation could be used to highlight the scale of rights violations and propose adequate policy changes.
- Migrant workers' own participation in advocacy work should be enhanced. Grassroots migrant community leaders could be identified and empowered to liaise with NGOs, spread information about new services, and be involved in advocacy and campaign activities. However, the precarious legal status of some migrants needs to be taken into consideration, as advocacy activities could lead to detention or deportation.
- Legal restrictions on freedom of association and the fear of detention and deportation impede migrants' efforts to organize. More advocacy efforts are required to secure the right to freedom of association.
- The potential for negative externalities should be taken into account. For example, when Filipino migrants rallied their government for better rights and the Philippines raised the minimum wage and banned new recruitment to some countries, this triggered a "race to the bottom," as the Lebanese labor market opened to new countries with more easily exploitable workforces, and increasing numbers of Filipinos migrated illegally to circumvent the ban, resulting in decreased protection.
- There is growing recognition of the need to mainstream the issue of migrant rights into a broader human rights context. Concerns about low-paid workers and domestic violence, for example, should also consider migrants. New groups, including youth, could also be integrated as advocates for migrant rights. Innovative strategies can be devised to encourage young people, university, and secondary students to become involved on the issue.
- Thus far, trade unions have had little meaningful involvement with migrants, but there are signs they may take a more active role. Migrants in host countries should have union representation, voting rights, and access to decision-making posts within unions.

## Influencing the Women's Rights Agenda

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Migrant women's concerns are often viewed separately from the concerns of local women's movements despite the fact that there are many common issues and points for potential collaboration. The aim of this session was to discuss how organizations working on the issue of women's rights could broaden their agendas to include migrant women. It drew in particular on the experience of a Lebanese organization dedicated to combating violence against women and its attention to the issue of prostitution.

### Ghada Jabbour, KAFA (Lebanon)

Ghada Jabbour described the work of KAFA, which combats all forms of violence against women, including sexual exploitation. KAFA is currently mainstreaming migrant issues into its permanent areas of focus. Jabbour noted that while much of the meeting's discussion centered on domestic workers, far less attention has been paid to migrant women involved in sex work. She provided an overview of the situation and priorities for action. Although prostitution is

prohibited in Lebanon, between five and six thousand migrant women enter the country each year on “artists’ visas.” The threat of violence often compels them to become involved in prostitution. Many are also bound by debt. Like migrant domestic workers, they lack labor law coverage, are tied to particular workplaces, cannot change employers without permission, and face restrictions on movement. Although their work is not officially acknowledged, they are required to take HIV tests every three months, which indicates tacit government regulation of their work. Criminalization of prostitution and women involved in it, has driven the issue from public view, making women even more vulnerable. It is a lucrative industry, and the current status quo is convenient for those who profit from the industry. Priority areas for Kafa’s action include rallying public opinion against sexual exploitation, mapping the experiences of victims and potential victims, tackling the demand fuelling recruitment, and calling for the abolition of “artists’ visas.”

### Main points

- Gender inequalities perpetuate many of the problems faced by migrant and local women alike. Gains for local Arab women can be gains for migrant women and vice versa. These connections could be highlighted to incorporate migrants’ concerns into local women’s rights movements. More efforts are required to mainstream migrant issues within the broader women’s agenda.
- Participants held a wide range of opinions on the issue of prostitution and whether it should be banned outright as a form of gender-based violence or professionalized as a form of work. It was agreed that the experiences of those who have been involved can be taken into account when generating practical strategies to improve the situation. Moreover, new groups, such as faith-based actors, who may not endorse a rights-based approach but do condemn the practice could be recruited.
- Social stigma surrounding certain types of work, particularly prostitution, can frustrate efforts at public awareness campaigns. It also contributes to under-reporting of the scale of the phenomenon and abuses against sex workers.
- Those with vested interests in the sex industry may impede efforts at monitoring or reform. Threats of violence used to compel women to participate in prostitution are also leveled at journalists attempting to report on the issue and can silence press coverage.

### Effective Uses of Traditional Media

Media coverage of migrant workers has been marginal and often involves derogatory portrayals. The aim of this panel was to strategize about ways to encourage better media coverage of migrants’ rights issues and explore how media strategies could be incorporated into NGO campaign activities. Various forms of media were discussed, including newspapers and other print media, community radio broadcasting, TV, and new media such as the Internet and blogs. Veteran journalists offered thoughts on how NGOs might expand links with the press and better engage local media on the issue to garner more media attention. They also discussed the impediments journalists and editors faced in covering the issue and how they might be overcome.

#### Omar Nashabe, Journalist at *Al-Akhbar* and Expert on Criminal Justice (Lebanon)

Omar Nashabe discussed various ways existing migrant issues media coverage falls short. This includes the fact that it is often inflected with racial prejudice and characterized by the use of terminology that vilifies migrants. There is also a lack of adequate investigation of migrants’ deaths and suicides and a lack of inquiry into conditions in detention facilities and prisons. When a migrant dies in unusual circumstances, journalists rarely request forensic reports. There are a number of obstacles to good reporting on the issue. In general, there are low readership rates in the region and there is a lack of interest in justice and human rights. Popular perceptions of migrants are predominantly negative. A partial result of this is that editors are

often reluctant to devote resources and space to the issue. Journalists also face difficulties due to financial limitations and restrictions on information. Although more than 200,000 of the four million people in Lebanon are migrant domestic workers, the scale of the migrant population is often ignored. Given its size, more comprehensive coverage is warranted. There are several potential solutions to the problems. Basic human rights training for editors could encourage them to provide more space for human rights coverage. In-depth investigative, balanced stories considering perspectives from all angles are lacking. Human rights issues could be approached from other angles, e.g. political or economic, to increase reader interest. Developing new media strategies that combat racial prejudice and promote the rule of law is important. There is also the potential to develop weekly or monthly newspaper supplements for migrants. Omar Nashabe noted that this is something that could be looked into at *Al-Akhbar*, which is open to suggestions that NGOs and others might propose.

#### [Daoud Kuttab, Community Media Network, Amman Net Radio \(Jordan\)](#)

Daoud Kuttab made a presentation about how NGOs could more effectively engage with the media. The media industry has its own priorities and constraints, he noted. In order for fruitful alliances between civil society and the media to develop, NGO staff can be trained to better understand how the media works. Increasing the awareness of journalists and sensitizing them to the importance of the issue are additional priorities. One strategy is for NGOs to hire dedicated communications staff to maintain media contacts and provide information and story ideas to journalists. For example, Tikeyet Um Ali, a charitable organization in Jordan, has been successful at getting free or low-cost placements for their advertisements for food donations through the media and public billboards. NGO staff can seek and welcome opportunities to give interviews to journalists to better publicize their work. Several types of media could be more widely used by NGOs. Mobile technology could be used, for example, to rapidly disseminate information to journalists. Short public service announcements on the radio and TV would also be useful campaign tools. Citizen journalism is also an important way to give migrants or members of the public a chance to convey their experiences and help monitor human rights violations. The radio and the Internet can both be vehicles for this. In another vein, efforts can target developing media content for migrants. Amman Net (Radio Al-Balad) recently launched *Iraqi Hour*, a weekly news and public affairs program that provides a platform for issues of concern for Iraqi refugees living in Jordan. The station also broadcasts a special show for Egyptians living in Jordan. These two programs include community news and content that deals with access to education, the availability of public services, and other social and cultural issues relevant to the Iraqis and Egyptians. Programs such as these could be expanded for other migrant communities.

#### [Main points](#)

##### **Challenges and strategies for the media**

- Efforts are needed to target both journalists and editors to encourage continuous coverage of human rights issues and ensure that adequate space and resources are allocated in print media.
- Journalists face a lack of access to information and a lack of sources. Conflicts of interest, concerns about confidentiality and anonymity, fear of retribution, and a lack of trust between NGOs, lawyers, and journalists all play a role. Increased contact and coalition-building among these actors could foster greater confidence and trust, facilitating the exchange of information.

##### **Recommendations for civil society**

- The capacity of NGOs to work with the media to develop nuanced analyses and feature stories about migrants could be strengthened. Such coverage could serve to humanize migrants rather than focus solely on abuse. Media attention can be attracted in

innovative and pro-active ways through creative slogans, making use of action events (e.g. organizing sit-ins) and using key dates (Dec 18, International Migrants' Day).

- Photos and video footage make issues more attractive for journalists to cover, but concerns about individuals' safety and privacy are important to take into account. Steps should be taken to ensure that sources are adequately protected.
- It is important to consider tactics to attract international media attention. Many states are more concerned about their reputations outside of the country. A French documentary may garner a faster policy response than, for example, a Lebanese one.
- In terms of using the media for campaigning, civil society can craft and adapt its messages for different audiences (e.g. policymakers, employers, the public at large, and migrants). For some, a rights-based approach may work less well than a political approach emphasizing relevance to particular parties (i.e. "How does it affect me?").

## Innovative Uses of New Media

This panel explored innovative uses of the media and their potential for activism, mobilizing support and generating awareness. Two presentations were given—one on satellite television programming for Sri Lankan migrants, and the other on the use of the Internet to increase awareness and attract attention to the plight of the UAE's migrant workforce. Participants compared the effectiveness of various types of media at reaching employers, the general public, and migrant workers. Participants also discussed ways in which the media could be used to provide services to migrants and help build grassroots community action.

### Narada Wijesuriya, Neth TV (Italy)

Narada Wijesuriya runs the Naples-based satellite television station Neth Sri Lanka, which is extremely popular among Sri Lankan expatriates in the Middle East. Neth TV takes an activist role in trying to pressure governments for better treatment of Sri Lankan migrants. The station's programming publicizes abuses and provides important information for migrants. It features a call-in show on Fridays that tackles work-related problems. As Wijesuriya explained, in one such show, a domestic worker who feared sexual abuse called for assistance but did not know the location of the house in which she worked. She was advised to check the water meter, on which home addresses are printed, and in this way was able to identify her whereabouts and seek help. This example and others illustrated the fact that television programming for migrant communities can be an important way to disseminate information and mobilize action at the grassroots level.

### Nicholas McGeehan, Mafiwasta (UAE)

Nicholas McGeehan discussed the development of the website Mafiwasta ([www.mafiwasta.com](http://www.mafiwasta.com)) to promote awareness of the problems facing migrant workers in the UAE. McGeehan noted that in comparison with other countries in the region, there has been relatively little advocacy on the part of civil society concerning migrant labor in the UAE. Mafiwasta was set up to inform the general public about the legal and human rights issues pertaining to migrant workers and provides an example of how the Internet can be used to complement other forms of activism. Mafiwasta contains links to a selection of research reports and official documents, news stories, and videos concerning the abuse of migrant workers in the UAE. It has also created a Facebook group to put volunteers in touch with one another.

## Main points

- New media and video have great potential to influence public opinion and should be better utilized to increase awareness.
- It would be useful to have more information about consumption patterns of various media (e.g. satellite television versus print media versus radio) among migrants. Many migrant domestic workers' phones are confiscated by their employers, so push

technologies using the telephone may not reach those most vulnerable. Caritas Lebanon has been broadcasting radio programs in migrants' native languages and has statistics on radio listenership.

- It is important to consider not only how to package messages for various audiences but also which messengers would be most effective. Employers, for example, may be more receptive to messages coming from other employers.

## **Success Stories and Benefits of Inter-Regional Cooperation**

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There are today numerous regional and inter-regional networks of organizations in different parts of the world cooperating on the issue of migrant rights. Many connect actors in receiving countries with those in sending countries. Valuable lessons can be drawn from their experiences of coalition building. Drawing on the example of one such group, CARAM Asia, this session illustrated ideas for cooperation and underlined the importance of the use of international human rights instruments as a common framework for action.

### **Cynthia Gabriel, CARAM Asia (Malaysia)**

Cynthia Gabriel provided an overview of the work of CARAM Asia and suggested ideas for international standard setting and alliance building that could be realized in the Middle East and North Africa. CARAM Asia is a regional network working on migration and health issues with members in South and North East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. With reference to the Arab region, Cynthia Gabriel noted that the short-term, contractual, and circular nature of migration contributes to migrants' vulnerability. The current financial crisis has hit migrants particularly hard, resulting in decreased remittance rates and job losses. She also noted that countries of origin tend to promote migration for economic reasons despite the absence of safeguards. Given that a range of stakeholders in sending and receiving countries are responsible for abuses against migrants, there is a need for inter-regional collaboration. Several initiatives have begun to tackle the problem at the regional, inter-regional, and governmental levels; one example is the ASEAN Declaration on Migrant Workers, which spells out responsibilities of origin and destination countries. Another is the Global Forum in Migration and Development, which has tended to emphasize the economic benefits with less attention to the rights of migrant workers. A number of new advocacy targets have emerged to establish global standards. These include General Recommendation 26 of CEDAW, which aims at protecting the rights of women migrant workers and which has been a rallying point for many women's rights groups. Another initiative relates to advocacy for an ILO Domestic Worker Convention. ILO experts are currently collecting information pertaining to law and practices relating to domestic workers around the world; this is an important opportunity to provide information on the situation in the Arab region and participate in setting international benchmarks. Key challenges remain in forming alliances between various actors, motivating all stakeholders to get involved, and incorporating migrants themselves in advocacy.

## **Creative Tactics for Effective and Sustainable Civil Society Action**

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This session engaged in a broader discussion of the ways the work of NGOs could be fortified. It featured an expert presentation with tactical ideas for mobilizing resources, building capacity, recruiting and using volunteers, and reaping the benefits of information sharing among organizations.

### **Nancy Pearson, New Tactics in Human Rights (USA)**

New Tactics is a Project of the Center for Victims of Torture that creates resources enabling human rights activists to strengthen their work and develop strategic and tactical thinking. It encourages groups to know themselves (strengths and weaknesses, potential allies), know the



terrain (limits and possibilities), and know their opponents (and appropriate goals and strategies). Nancy Pearson gave a presentation that illustrated how tactical mapping exercises can help organizations identify key relationships surrounding a particular issue. As an illustration, Nancy Pearson created a tactical mapping of the relationships among an array of actors. Such exercises can be useful to help diverse groups agree on common goals. The mapping also shows that no single tactic would be effective with all actors. Specific strategies must be targeted for various groups; a “one-size-fits-all” approach will not work. Tactics should also be flexible and innovative. One example is a tactic used by a group of Korean workers in which they capitalized on a heat wave: the group froze a cleaner’s wages in an ice cube and had her walk around on a sweltering day trying to hold onto her wages as they melted in the economic crisis. Another important issue pertains to widening the tactical constituency. University students, for example, tend to have a higher tolerance for taking risks and can be motivated to advocate for change.

### Main points

- Tactical mapping exercises highlight important linkages between various actors in relation to an issue. Each relationship offers the potential for engaging new actors. Tactical constituencies can be broadened to include new groups, such as university students, women’s groups, and others.
- A wide array of targeted, innovative, and flexible tactics is central to affecting change.
- Governments will be more inclined to respond favorably to the demands of civil society if various NGOs and other actors form a united front and speak with a collective voice, setting forth clear propositions for ways to overcome existing problems.
- It must not be assumed that governments will be hostile to NGOs or unresponsive to their concerns. It is possible that some government bodies would support the work of NGOs and could be recruited as strategic partners for change.

## Working Group Sessions

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Participants formed three parallel working group sessions to discuss key challenges and devise strategies for action in relation to the main themes of the meeting. The outcome of their discussions is presented below.

### Working Group 1: Legal Aid and Access to Justice

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The following questions were proposed to guide the discussion. The main points emphasized in the discussion are listed after each question.

#### **1) What is needed to develop legal aid mechanisms for migrants?**

##### A) Knowledge and education

- Curriculum and course development
- Setting up legal clinics
- Training law students and practicing lawyers on the provision of legal aid to migrant workers
- Encourage law schools to include more coursework on human rights and the application of national legislation and international treaties
- Organizing a network of lawyers that could include established lawyers who take on pro bono cases (e.g. two to four cases per year per lawyer) and/or those who might require external funding

#### B) Cross-border cooperation

- MOUs and bilateral treaties between countries to organize recruitment agencies, define the role of embassies, and stipulate country responsibilities in reducing rights violations
- Strengthening legal penalties for trafficking
- Creating networks of NGOs and trade unions in sending and receiving countries and organizing joint capacity-building exercises
- Forging cooperation between local NGOs and foreign embassies to facilitate the exchange of information
- Enabling embassies to work more closely with national security agencies to expedite procedures for processing cases involving migrants in administrative detention

#### C) Financial support and future sustainability

- Developing government-subsidized legal aid
- Fundraising among foreign donors
- Seeking support from bar associations
- Approaching private businesses for support and encouraging corporate social responsibility
- Establishing an independent legal defense fund supported by donors along with contributions from employers and/or recruitment agencies

#### D) Outreach and communication with clients

- Raising awareness amongst migrant workers about the services available to them in host countries. This could be done through the distribution of brochures prior to arrival or by disseminating flyers and putting up posters in places where migrants congregate.
- Liaising with embassies
- Developing lists of interpreters and providing training as needed

### **2) How can we better use the formal justice system to advocate policy changes and long-term impact?**

- Working to end the sponsorship system by which migrants are employed
- Allowing testimonies by video conference for workers who return home
- Lobbying against prolonged detention and working with embassies to provide bail or facilitate migrants' return to their home countries when required
- Using arbitration and mediation through private lawyers and government representatives
- Lobbying the justice system to allocate more resources to resolving cases involving migrant workers in a timely manner

### **3) How can legal action be used for advocacy, raising awareness and documentation?**

#### **What linkages are possible with other civil society actors?**

- Formation of a team to monitor legal action, types and results of cases and determine the major obstacles faced by migrant workers and those litigating on their behalf
- Conducting a comparative study to better understand lawyers' roles and the use of certain legislation in processing migrants' cases
- Using the media to publicize cases and raise public awareness
- Raising awareness among civil society about legal procedures and court decisions
- Raising awareness of cases and court decisions among lawyers through bar associations

## Working Group 2: Developing Strategies for Advocacy

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The group's discussion centered on the following questions and answers:

### **1) What are the specific priorities for advocacy work promoting migrant rights?**

This group comprised participants from Jordan, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. Participants agreed to focus on migrant domestic workers because this category of workers was most relevant to the work of those present and because problems in this sector are common throughout all of the countries represented, whereas there are significant differences in other sectors.

Reform of the sponsorship system was singled out as the core goal for which to strive. Bahrain was discussed as an example of a country in which reforms are now occurring on this issue. In 2009, the Bahraini government announced plans to revise the *kafala* (sponsorship) system by which migrants are employed. Participants discussed the factors that may have prompted this decision on the part of the government. They noted that while it is possible for NGOs to arrange meetings with government officials, the process by which important policy decisions are made is not transparent. So, from the perspective of NGO staff, it is difficult to know what impact they may have had or what would work best in terms of advocacy.

Participants agreed on the need to develop workable alternatives to the existing recruitment schemes for migrants but noted that doing so at this stage may be premature. In light of this, the following main points were identified as issues that could be addressed more readily:

- Better data on the incidence of abuse and means of redress or lack thereof could be used to bolster advocacy campaigns
- More easily accessible, expedited complaints mechanisms could be established to enable migrants to report exploitation
- The wide gap between legislation and practice and the need for better monitoring mechanisms should be addressed
- There is a lack of effective regulation of employment agencies, and
- Steps can be taken to expand legal protections for migrant workers, including the right to freedom of association

### **2) What are the lessons learned from previous advocacy campaigns? What have been the shortcomings, and what new tactics could be developed to better address the issues?**

The following main points were identified as areas on which action could be taken:

- Conduct more participatory policy dialogue with key stakeholders
- Raise awareness among employers and the general public about the unified contracts that have been created for migrant domestic workers
- Craft mechanisms for better data collection (e.g. through the use of surveys and creating administrative databases with client information)
- Conduct qualitative and quantitative research to inform action
- Include migrant workers in advocacy and campaign work
- Utilize migrant community leaders to raise awareness of labor rights among migrants
- Support the formation of migrant domestic worker organizations, and
- Campaign for the meaningful inclusion of migrant domestic workers in trade unions

### **3) How can efforts be better coordinated within countries and at the regional and international levels to maximize impact?**

Three main strategies were identified:

- Create NGO coalitions to monitor government actions

- Engage with national statistics agencies to obtain better data on the migrant population and labor force participation
- Involve more institutions and organizations at the country level to expand the network of actors promoting migrant workers' rights

### Working Group 3: Effective Uses of Media

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The following questions were posed to stimulate discussion:

- 1) How can reporting on migrant workers be enhanced? What obstacles or challenges do journalists face in covering the issue? What role could civil society play with respect to this?**
- 2) What roles do various media play in reporting on the issue, communicating information to migrants, and in advocacy? How can these roles be enhanced?**
- 3) How can the Internet and new media be used for campaigning and advocacy?**

The group began its discussion with the premise that media in the Middle East and North Africa is vastly underreporting on migrants' rights issues and that NGOs are not effectively communicating their issues to media. This requires improved coverage targeting migrants, employers, and the general public with messaging modified for each target group separately.

There are several obstacles to quality media coverage about the issues, the participants noted. These include the fact that newspapers/media outlets are driven by profits and human rights stories can sometimes be a tough sell. On the contrary, newspapers may be more inclined to run sensational or titillating stories of migrants involved in crime or sex scandals because it sells, thus reinforcing negative perceptions of migrants in the media. NGOs can take a proactive approach through developing communications strategies, and using the media as an effective tool for advocacy and raising public awareness.

In addition, media can be developed to better serve migrant communities and provide needed informational services. A better understanding is needed of consumption patterns (satellite TV versus print media versus radio) among migrant communities. Greater coordination is required between NGOs working on migrant rights and migrant media.

#### **Main points and recommendations:**

##### Observations and strategies for media advocacy to promote migrant issues

###### Strategies for NGOs

- NGOs can help media get good information about migrant rights issues.
- NGOs can benefit from training in strategic communication and setting up communications offices.
- Donors receive many proposals from NGOs for training, but such proposals rarely involve building communications strategies.
- NGOs could invest in developing contacts in each news outlet and meet and lobby editors.
- NGOs can better package stories with good hooks for the media.
- NGOs can benefit from regularly sharing photos and other information with the press.
- Increased coordination between NGOs and migrant media could enable the provision of information about vital services to migrants.

## Media Strategies

- Publish media critiques of negative coverage of migrants and organize newspaper boycotts to deter bigoted coverage (such as in Lebanon)
- Explore other media strategies: PSAs, powerful individual stories, messaging, movies, scripts, film competitions, and exclusive stories
- NGOs can design activities around December 18 (International Migrants' Day) as a date for concerted media outreach/campaigning.
- New media is an important tool for campaigning and a channel to encourage citizen journalism, particularly because images and film can have high impact. Also, ways to use cell phone interviews with abuse victims should be explored.
- There is a need for more in-depth, investigative reporting on the issue.
- Forums can be organized to bring together NGOs and journalists to discuss the issue.
- Groups could explore the targeted use of video to broadcast through mass media such as the Lebanese TV station Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation.
- Promoting the issue through pop media and screenwriting can be explored.

## Observations and strategies to develop migrant media and informational services for migrants

- Media should be encouraged to focus on the most urgent needs, for example those of migrants in distress. Migrants need access to contact numbers for social and legal services. Media outlets such as TV, print publications, and posters are useful for this.
- Provide migrants with a list of available media so that they are aware of what is being offered.
- Migrant media can also be used for community building, providing migrants with a sense of belonging, and also to expose abuses.
- Greater cooperation between NGOs and television stations such as Neth TV can be fostered to better cater to migrants. This could facilitate the dissemination of information about services and be a means by which information could be collected for advocacy purposes (e.g. stories of abuse, potential stories for hard news or investigations).
- NGOs and journalists should explore ideas of producing radio programming in Jordan for migrants in their own languages.
- Internet has the advantage of always being on but may not reach migrants. On the other hand, the Internet can have a multiplier effect for advocacy.
- Citizen journalism (e.g. migrants as journalists) could be developed to disseminate news.

## Concluding Remarks

In the closing session, participants reconvened to discuss the outcome of the working group sessions and make final remarks. One participant noted that several proposals in particular deserved further follow-up. These included the goal of advocating reform of the sponsorship system, establishing special courts to expedite cases involving migrants, and the idea of establishing legal insurance for migrants. Similar to health insurance, migrant workers could obtain legal insurance, the fees for which could fund legal representation for those in need. Participants also noted the utility of forming country-level and regional networks to facilitate future coordination. It was decided that as a form of follow-up to the event, participants from Lebanon would reconvene for further discussion and strategizing. Julien Courson of the Association Libanaise pour l'Education et la Formation offered to host the first meeting. The idea of creating regular supplements in the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhbar* for migrant communities in their own languages was proposed by Omar Nashabe. This idea will be explored in further discussions. NGOs were encouraged to develop ideas that built on their strengths and

experiences but also to develop new and creative ways to implement the recommendations that emerged during the meeting. A plan of action has been laid and the challenge now rests in determining institutional commitments to put the ideas into practice.

## Recommendations for NGOs

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In addition to the ideas put forth during the working group and plenary sessions, the following recommendations are steps civil society organizations in the Middle East and North Africa can take to maximize the scope and impact of their work with regard to protecting the rights of migrant workers.

### Legal Aid and Access to Justice

- **Establish legal aid working groups.** Legal professionals should form networks to share resources and information about legal strategies and case law. Such networks could organize legal clinics and training courses on human rights law and the application of international and national legislation in cases concerning migrants. Members could also institute legal referral systems and strengthen connections with NGOs, embassies representing migrant workers, and other actors in order to promote awareness of the services they provide.
- **Create professional exchanges for lawyers.** Formal or informal exchange programs could be set up to enable legal practitioners with substantial experience representing migrant workers to share information with those new to the field. Such exchanges could be coordinated with practitioners operating in the same country or among legal professionals in different countries, including Lebanon and Jordan.

### Media

- **Develop communications strategies to make better use of the media.** NGOs can enhance efforts to reach out to the press to garner increased news coverage of migrant issues. This could include, for example, hiring communications staff to pitch stories to the press, organize public awareness campaigns using the mainstream media, and hold forums for editors and journalists to sensitize them to the issue.
- **Coordinate with existing media outlets for migrants.** NGOs could reach out to print, television, and radio outlets currently serving migrant workers in the region in order to publicize their activities, generate greater awareness of the legal aid and humanitarian services available to migrants, and provide other important information. New media and video could also be used more widely to influence public opinion and expand awareness.
- **Evaluate the potential for and create new forms of media for migrant workers.** Research is needed to better understand the use of existing media outlets for migrants in the Middle East and North Africa and determine which new forms of media (print versus radio or television) are most easily accessible and popular among migrants. Based on this research, new programming and/or supplements could be created in migrants' own languages to provide public service announcements, news from migrants' home countries, and other important information. Migrants or members of the host community also could be encouraged to act as citizen journalists, providing first-hand accounts and personal narratives that could be published on the Internet or via existing or new media outlets.

### Advocacy and Outreach

- **Increase efforts to evaluate and monitor policies aimed at protecting migrants' rights.** This can include increased documentation and reporting of human rights abuses. NGOs providing direct services to migrants could maintain and disseminate annual

statistics on the clients they serve, the problems encountered, the type of service provided, and the outcome of the case. Such information could be used to highlight problems in policy implementation and lobby for reform. Monitoring committees, government report cards, and public opinion surveys could also be used to evaluate the impact of government policies and generate suggestions for improvement.

- **Broaden the support base for the migrant rights movement.** Migrants' concerns can be integrated within broader social justice agendas. One way to achieve this is by reaching out to new groups to inspire them to take part in advocacy on behalf of migrant workers. Women's rights organizations, human rights groups, antiracism and antidiscrimination groups, university students and youth groups, trade unions, and faith-based networks can be incorporated as strategic partners in campaigns for migrants' rights.
- **Devote greater attention to the problems faced by migrants in all sectors of employment.** The focus of much of the NGO work in Lebanon and Jordan thus far has been on domestic workers due to the specific vulnerabilities of those employed in private households. Relatively few attempts have been made to reach out to migrant workers in other sectors. The following sectors also deserve attention: construction, manufacturing, agriculture, sex work, health care, and the service industry (including hotels, salons, and restaurants).

### **Empowering Migrant Workers**

- **Encourage the active participation of migrants in advocacy, outreach, and awareness-raising activities.** It is vital to support the involvement of migrant workers in grassroots activities and advocacy work. In addition to providing direct services NGOs can also identify and empower migrants who could themselves advocate for their rights and take part in outreach activities. Several NGOs already recruit migrant workers as staff members and interpreters; but more incorporation of migrants as actors in civil society would be useful to promoting the cause.
- **Expand IT and language access among migrants by creating migrant resource centers.** Many migrants are eager to acquire IT and English language skills to improve their livelihood opportunities. Internet cafes in Amman and Beirut are already popular among migrants with higher levels of formal education. Additional resource centers with free or low-cost IT and language classes could provide migrants with opportunities to share information and develop useful skills. NGOs and other actors could use these centers to disseminate information to the migrant community. Such centers could be independent or attached to existing NGOs. Instructors could include paid staff (locals and bilingual migrants) and volunteers (university students and international volunteers).
- **Support migrant cultural and social activities.** A number of NGOs already provide space and support for migrant cultural celebrations and activities, such as talent shows and holiday parties. More multicultural events could be promoted by NGOs to facilitate cultural exchange and social inclusion by bringing various migrant communities together with locals. Festivities could be organized yearly on December 18, International Migrants' Day, for example. Such events could serve to raise awareness about migrant issues, promote positive cultural exchange, and provide an opportunity for various groups of migrants to meet and work together.