

**The UN's Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8 in Lebanon:
Women migrant domestic workers sustaining Lebanese lives while
resisting the *kafala* system**

Lara Ramon Icart

NIA: 216493

Supervisor: Dr. Nassima Kerras

Bachelor's Degree in Global Studies

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

June 2021



Universitat
Pompeu Fabra
Barcelona

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work, is not copied from another person's published or unpublished work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration, except where specifically indicated. Neither the dissertation nor any part of it is substantially the same as any writing submitted for assessment at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, another university, or any similar institution.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am extremely grateful to my thesis supervisor Dr. Nassima Kerras for her attentivity, continuous advice and treasurable support along all the process. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Rasha for sharing her experiences and insightful thoughts as well as to the Eгна Legna organization for having hosted me. My special thanks to Bashar and Nadya for their patient helping with the translation during the interview. I would finally like to express my sincere gratitude to Sarketlu, for the stories and reflections that she also shared with me.

Abstract: Women migrant domestic workers of African and South-Asian origin are the main care providers for the Lebanese society. Nevertheless, the political and legal frameworks governing their living and working conditions in the country are not aimed at ensuring their wellbeing but rather the opposite: they facilitate their exploitation and discrimination. Exploring the complexity of care work and its relations to gender, class, race and colonial power relations within the current dynamics of global capitalism is the aim of this thesis. I particularly examine how gendered domestic work and global migratory dynamics come about in the specific legal, political, economic and social context of Lebanon in the form of the abusive and exploitative *kafala* system in order to assess the implementation of SDGs 5 and 8 in the country. I do so by engaging in a survey of academic literature conceptualizing global care chains (Hochschild, 2000; Pérez-Orozco, 2019), applying a sociological lens to processes of ‘othering’ within the Lebanese society from an intersectional feminist approach (Arsan, 2019) and defining the abuses suffered as human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery. Interviews with organized migrant domestic workers contribute to the discussion with an updated analysis of the new current scenario in Lebanon shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and the alarming economic crisis in which the country is entrenched. It also challenges the portrayal of migrant domestic workers as passive victims. I finally suggest specific recommendations to improve the worryingly deficient implementation of SDGs 5 and 8 in the country.

Keywords: *Kafala* System, Global Care Chains, Lebanon, Migrant Domestic Workers, Organized Resistances.

Wherever we live, it is difficult to isolate domestic work and get rid of its social and political content, as something different and far away from us. If we are able to listen to the analysis provided by domestic workers, we may learn a lot about the material constitution of class, gender, race, our own complicity in their reproduction, and recognise the hypocrisy of a system that demands reproductive labour but doesn't value or recognize it.

Giula Garofalo- and Sabrina Marchetti, 2017, in the book they authored, “Domestic workers speak: a global fight for rights and recognition”, collecting articles written by activist women migrant domestic workers from all over the globe.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8.....	1
1.2. Country of Analysis: Lebanon.....	2
2. Literature review.....	3
2.1. The <i>kafala</i> system.....	3
2.2. Global care chains.....	5
2.3. A sociological lens: ‘othering’ in Lebanon.....	7
3. Global and regional situation with regards to SDGs 5 and 8.....	10
3.1. Global Situation.....	10
3.2. Regional Situation.....	12
4. Position of Lebanon vis-à-vis SDGs 5 and 8.....	14
4.1. Historical background.....	14
4.2. Current situation.....	15
4.2.1. Main actors involved.....	15
4.2.1.1. Migrant domestic workers: resistances.....	15
4.2.1.2. Employers, sponsors or <i>kafeels</i>	17
4.2.1.3. Recruitment agencies in sending countries and Lebanon.....	18
4.2.1.4. Lebanese institutions.....	18
4.2.1.5. Civil society organizations and NGOs.....	19
4.2.1.6. Global coalitions: IDWF.....	19
4.2.2. Adopted measures.....	19
4.2.3. Results.....	21
4.3. Expectations for the coming 5-10 years.....	24
5. Evaluation and recommendations.....	25
6. Conclusions.....	29
7. References.....	31
8. Annexes.....	37
8.1. Interviews.....	37

1. Introduction

Care work is essential to sustain life. Care work is invisibilized and undervalued. This contradiction reflects the unfair and unreasonable place that the essential but invisibilized and undervalued care work occupies in many societal contexts all over the globe. Starting with this simple idea, exploring the complexity of care work and its relations to gender, class, race and colonial power-relations within the current dynamics of global capitalism is the aim of this thesis. In order to contextualize these general trends, the lived realities of women migrant domestic workers in Lebanon will be my focus of analysis. Particularly, I examine how gendered domestic work and global migratory dynamics (Pérez-Orozco, 2009) come about in the specific legal, political, economic and social context of Lebanon in the form of the abusive and exploitative *kafala* system in order to assess the implementation of SDGs 5 and 8 in the country.

In section 1, I introduce the specific targets of SDGs 5 and 8 that will be the focus of my analysis and offer an initial contextualization of the country's situation. Section 2 is a survey of, firstly, literature comprehensively defining the *kafala* system in relation to the human rights abuses linked to it, secondly, scholarly work conceptualizing domestic work in relation to global migratory dynamics and, thirdly, sociological analysis tackling processes of differentiation and 'othering' within the specific context of Lebanon, with a special focus on the subject of the migrant domestic worker and care relations from an intersectional feminist approach. In section 3, I assemble quantitative data describing the global situation of care work with regards to migratory trends and I focus on the Middle Eastern regional dynamics. Then, I analyse the Lebanese situation with regards to SDGs 5 and 8 in section 4: after a historical analysis of the sponsorship system and migratory flows related to care work in the country, I analyse the current situation. I do so by examining the measures adopted by the Lebanese state as well as the existent international legal mechanisms, introducing the main actors involved in the *kafala* system as well as analysing the insights provided by the interviews that I conducted in May 2021 in Beirut to organized migrant domestic workers. This contributes to the discussion with an up-to-date analysis of the current situation in Lebanon shaped by the covid19 pandemic and the alarming economic crisis in which the country is entrenched. I finally evaluate the country's situation with regards to SDGs 5 and 8 and come up with recommendations in section 5.

1.1. Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8

The thesis aims at assessing the implementation of the interconnected SDG Targets 5.4, 5.2 and 8.8 in Lebanon. Target 5.4. envisions the “recognition and value of unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate”. Target 8.8 focuses on “protecting labour rights and promoting safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants and those in precarious employment”. Target 5.2. consists of the elimination of “all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual or other types of exploitation”.

1.2. Country of analysis: Lebanon

Lebanon is a small Middle Eastern state on the Mediterranean coast. Bordered by Syria in the north and east, by Israel and Palestine in the south and by the Mediterranean sea in the east, it occupies an area of 10,500km². The current population is estimated at six million (Hochreuther, 2019, p.10). Because of the geopolitical developments in its neighbouring countries, 1 out of 4 persons living in its territory is a refugee, namely from Palestinian and Syrian origin (Abbas, 2016, p. 52).

The Lebanese Republic is officially a parliamentary democracy with a consociational power-sharing system between 18 confessional groups that reflects the sectarian social and political dynamics that govern the country (Abbas, 2016, p. 54). This sectarian regime nevertheless does not promote a fair and equal distribution of resources among the Lebanese population. Rather, it provides access and control of resources to the sectarian leaders and excludes it from the majority of the members of all sects (Halawi, 2020, p. 6). In fact, in Lebanon, 48 percent of the wealth is controlled by around 8,000 individuals, representing 0.3 percent of the total population (Arsan, 2018, p. 3). The existence of this sectarian and hierarchical political system fosters the concentration of economic wealth, state power and political participation in the hands of a small group of sectarian leaders and oligarchic elites (Majed, 2020, p. 3). At the same time, it hides the class struggle that conditions the material reality of the vast majority of its citizens (Majed, 2020) and hinders political change (Dixon, 2020). As Halawi argues (2020, p. 2, 3, 4 & 5), the ‘structural violence and coercion’ of these ‘elite-serving structures’ prevents the ‘emergence of revolutionary class politics’ since sectarian elites are able to passively contain or actively prevent revolutionary change.

The political and economic reforms that reinforced and perpetuated these class formation processes in Lebanon started in the 1950s, when the Lebanese political elite

promoted neoliberal policies of austerity fostering privatizations and cuts in public spending. These economic policies were later reinforced during the period after the Lebanese civil war between 1975 and 1989 and remain up to this day (Majed, 2017, p. 1). According to some scholars, the combination of this economic environment and the fact that Lebanese women started entering the productive sphere led to an increase in the demand for migrant domestic workers, namely because the patriarchal division of labour in Lebanese families remained unchallenged (Estim, Omeira & Seiko, 2009, p. 16). As Hochreuther (2019, p. 12) argues, “the reliance on cheap imported migrant domestic labour acts as a substitute for providing adequate public care and state funded social services for Lebanese families”.

Nowadays, women migrant domestic workers of African, South-Asian and South-East Asian origin are the main care providers for the Lebanese society (Hochreuther, 2019). These women come to the country to clean the dirt, prepare the food, take care of the old and raise the children of Lebanese families. They are essential to sustain life in Lebanon. Nevertheless, the political and legal frameworks governing their living and working conditions in the country are not aimed at ensuring their wellbeing but rather the opposite: they facilitate their exploitation and discrimination in the country (LAW, 2020). Particularly, both the legal residency and employment of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon are ruled under what is known as *kafala* or sponsorship system, a normative framework fostering human rights abuses and labour exploitation of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon with impunity (Amnesty International, 2019; Jureidini & Moukarbel, 2004), so the situation of SDGs 5 and 8 in the country is deplorable.

2. Literature review

2.1. The kafala system

The *kafala* system is not a clear and formal law but it consists of a set of rules, decrees, decisions made by the Ministry of Labour and customary practices that have historically to this day ruled domestic workers' migration in many Middle Eastern countries (LAW, 2020, p. 1; Rintakumpu, 2019, p. 1). As defined by the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWFED, 2020, p. 1), the *kafala* system is an “exploitative sponsorship relation that links the residency of migrant domestic workers to their employers”. This means that the legality of the domestic worker's residence in the country is tied to her employer as well as to the duration of her labour contract (IDWFED, 2020, p. 1). What is more, the employer has a second function: it becomes the worker's *kafeel* or sponsor (Kuzbari, 2018, p. 11). This

implies that the responsibility to ensure the protection of migrant domestic workers is delegated from the state to the private individuals employing them (LAW, 2020, p. 2). In fact, the sponsorship relation starts from the very beginning of the migrant's arrival in Lebanon because domestic workers must be sponsored by a Lebanese employer or recruitment agency prior to their arrival in the country (Kuzbari, 2018, p. 11). They are not allowed to leave the airport if the sponsor, or *kafeel* does not come to receive them there in person (Arsan, 2019, p. 295; LAW, 2020, p. 2), and the sponsor's name appears on the worker's entry visa (Jureidini, 2004; Longuenesse & Tabar, 2014).

Besides regulating their administrative situation in the country, the sponsorship relation of dependency between a *kafeel* and the migrant worker has many other implications. The *kafala* system designates most of the control to sponsors over the workers, namely with regards to their entrance in the country, residence permit renewal, end of their contract, and their ability to change job for another household (Kuzari, 2018, p. 11; Migration and Development Civil Society Network, 2017, p. 5) These remarkable power imbalance (LAW, 2020; see section 4.2.), control and dependency are conducive to the alarming human rights abuses and labour exploitation that these workers suffer when working in Lebanese households. These exploitative working conditions include long working hours without breaks, no weekly day off, the non-payment, late payments or salary deductions, restriction on movement and communication, food deprivation, inadequate accommodation and lack of privacy, verbal, physical and sexual abuse and restrictions on access to health care (Amnesty International, 2019), all of which go unpunished under the *kafala* normative environment (IDWFED, 2020, p. 1). In fact, if a domestic worker leaves the house fleeing from abuse, she will be considered as a 'runaway' having breached the conditions of her residency. She will therefore lose her legal status in the country, since it is attached to her sponsorship tie with the employer, and can be detained, imprisoned and deported (Arsan, 2018, p. 289).

Many authors (Hamill, 2011; Jureidini & Moukarbel, 2004) and recognized international organizations (Amnesty International, 2019; LAW, 2020) have concluded that the *kafala* system entails forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking. Forced labour (ILO Convention No. 29) entails "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily". Slavery is defined by international law as "the exercise of powers attaching to the right of ownership over a person or persons" (LAW, 2020, p. 5). This, according to the International Criminal Court, includes "the use, enjoyment and disposal of dependence which entails his or her deprivation of any form of autonomy" (LAW, 2020, p. 5). The vulnerability that migrant

domestic workers face with the *kafala* system of sponsorship, in many cases entailing their forced isolation, restriction of their freedom of movement and communication as well as the use of threats of deportation, physical violence or false accusation of theft, are not conditions enabling the worker to freely consent her labour situation and have been considered as modern slavery and forced labour (LAW, 2020, p. 5; see section 4.2.2.). Certain common practices undertaken by recruitment agencies, both the workers' countries of origin and in Lebanon, have also been considered as human trafficking. These include lying about the contract, salaries and working conditions (LAW, 2020, p. 6; see section 4.2.1). The organization Legal Action Worldwide (2020) and Amnesty International (2019, p. 6) conclude that the *kafala* system contravenes Lebanese international obligations (see section 4.2.2.).

2.2.Global care chains

If the study of the experiences of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon and the political and legal arrangements ruling their hiring and legal situation is framed under the analytical framework examining the impact of global capitalism on care and migratory flows, we are able to contextualize the Lebanese situation within a broader global picture. This provides more detail to reflect on the aspects in which the situation of our country of analysis does fit these global dynamics. In this section, I review the literature addressing the general drivers and consequences of the global mobility of women migrant domestic workers in order to analyse how people below the 'class/race/nation chain' are the least benefited from the phenomenon of global care chains while being essential to sustain life in care-deficient Neoliberal countries from the core or semi-periphery.

Caregiving is, according to Amaia Pérez-Orozco (2009, p. 6), "the management and the daily maintenance of life and health and the daily provision of physical and emotional well-being". At the global level, many authors have observed that there is a transfer of care from countries from the periphery to the ones at the semi-periphery or core of the world-system (Pande, 2012). Arlie Russel Hochschild (2000) was the first to frame the analytical background of 'global care chains' in 2000 referring to the "series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring' creating interdependent chains at the local, national and global levels and an 'invisible ecology of care". Amaia Pérez-Orozco (2009, p. 4) describes global care chains as the transnational networks that are created in order to maintain daily life whereby care tasks are transferred between households at the local, national and global level. These chains are driven by power dynamics related to

gender, ethnicity, class and place of origin (Pérez-Orozco, 2009, p. 4). Including this remarkable global mobility of women migrant domestic workers in the analysis of the transnational division of labour allows us to address how the latter is shaped simultaneously by the system of global capitalism and the patriarchal system of both the sending and receiving countries of these workers (Hochschild, 2000). As Hochschild (2000) examines, this has led to a new trend whereby a clear supply of domestic workers from the peripheral countries is being transferred to the core or semi-periphery in order to satisfy the care demands of these high and middle-income countries.

These transnational dynamics of care transfers need to be firstly analysed vis-à-vis the renegotiation of gender roles, labour developments and care provision within the Neoliberal economic contexts of countries from the core or the semi-periphery. On the one hand, there has been an evolution of the traditional sexual division of labour between the productive and reproductive work sectors. Particularly, as Pérez-Orozco (2009, p.5) notices, there has been a gradual shift in ‘the social roles and aspirations of women’ that has challenged the long-established gendered frameworks whereby the social responsibility of care provision or reproductive work falls on women in private spaces (Pérez-Orozco, 2009, p. 5). In this regard, when the number of women engaging in paid work in these countries increased while their non-care working hours’ availability decreased, the care provision model sustained by patriarchal relations in private households collapsed. Pérez-Orozco (2009, p. 5) describes these developments as a ‘care crisis’ in high and middle-income countries that has resulted in the need to externalize care work to outside the household members.

Apart from focusing on the distribution of care between male and female household members, the existence of public services related to care, the influence of the private sector as well as the legal arrangements ruling domestic work and migrant workers (Pérez-Orozco, 2009, p. 4) also need to be included in the analysis. In this regard, Verity Burgmann (2016) explored how the neoliberal economic processes that began in the 1970s contributed to an increased global competition between nation-states in order to attract foreign capital. Consequently, the trend was to further adopt neoliberal reforms, including the privatization of public services, cuttings in social spending and the reduction of labour protection and salaries (Burgmann, 2016). According to Burgmann (2016), this forced patriarchal households to rely on a minimum of two incomes through paid work while there was not a sufficient provision of state sponsored care work and family tasks remained a woman’s duty. Within this context, the hiring of migrant women has indeed taken on a central role in care work, which, despite being central to sustain life, is ‘precarious and poorly remunerated’ as well as invisibilized

(Pérez-Orozco, 2009, p. 5). Eva-Maria Hochreuther (2019) also connects domestic work with migratory dynamics and policies. Indeed, Hochreuther (2019: 16) points out the fact that “domestic workers’ employers require their workers to be cheap, flexible and female”. In this regard, “nation-states adhere to their citizens’ demands by imposing strict immigration rules, restricting access to their labour markets and labour laws” (Hochreuther, 2019: 16).

The economic contexts of countries from the periphery, which are the main senders of domestic workers, are also interesting for our analysis. The impact of the neoliberal reforms, such as the Structural Adjustment Programs in peripheral countries has led to the new trend of the “feminization of global survival circuits” (Pérez-Orozco, 2009, p. 4) whereby one of the main strategies adopted by households from peripheral countries in order to survive in contexts of crisis and economic insecurity driven by the neoliberal reforms has been the decision of women from peripheral households to migrate in order to find work as domestic workers (Pérez-Orozco, 2009, p. 4). These decisions usually imply the devaluation of their qualifications and professional skills (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003, p. 17). Pérez-Orozco talks in this regard about a ‘new international division of labour’ in which ‘gender is strongly marked by factors such as ethnicity, class or place of origin’ (Pérez-Orozco, 2009, p. 6). Encarnación Rodríguez (2007) describes it as a colonial legacy and a new form of imperialism that further devalues both socially and financially the skills of women from the Global South that migrate to the Global North, creating a division between care-sending and care-receiving countries and a ‘care drain’ from sending countries (Hochschild, 2003, p. 17).

2.3. A sociological lens: ‘othering’ in Lebanon

Apart from the insights provided by the literature dealing with the political economy of care in relation to global migration flows and national migratory legal regimes, it is relevant to also include a sociological approach in my analysis. I will first focus on processes of ‘othering’, differentiation and inferiorization in Lebanon and then link them to the power-relations constituting care relations in the country from a feminist intersectional perspective.

To begin with, in Lebanon, ‘othering’ processes are not limited to the creation of the social image of the migrant domestic worker as an inferior subject, but these dynamics determine to a very large extent the highly polarised structure of the Lebanese society. Indeed, ‘othering’ does take place not only in relation to other non-national communities, namely Palestinian and Syrian refugees, but also between sects among Lebanese nationals (Arsan, 2018). Sectarianism is indeed a process of ‘othering’ (Majed, 2020). In Lebanon, the dominant social imagination is built upon prejudices and discriminations against others based

on their perceived sectarian belonging (Majed, 2020, p. 9). Those are produced in every-day processes of differentiation that affect identity perceptions in the Lebanese society, polarise it (Majed, 2020, p. 12), and hinder the creation of cross-sectarian class identities (Cammett & Issar, 2010). These social perceptions are intentionally discursively perpetuated by political sectarian elites because of their class interest in maintaining the consociational power-sharing political regime that allows them to continue with their cartel-like politics and to monopolize state and economic privileges (Halawi, 2020, p. 5). Xenophobia and differentiation between sects is fostered while any kind of social transformation with the potential to alter the status-quo is hindered.

Arsan's (2018) study on '*al-akharin*', 'the others', in the country focuses on the processes of 'othering' that govern the experiences of the three main non-national social groups living in the territory of the Lebanese state: Palestinian and Syrian refugees as well as migrant domestic workers (Arsan, 2018). 'Othering' processes nurturing the Lebanese social imagination with regards to the migrant domestic worker can be observed in the attempts by their employers to control the women's physical appearance. As Arsan (2018, p. 295) remarks, the workers are many times obliged to wear uniforms that infantilize them and 'mark out their inferior status, robbing them of their sexuality and their womanhood'. Through their 'pastel uniforms and flip-flops' and 'loose tunics and shapeless trousers' they are 'reminded of their subordinate and dependent status' (Arsan, 2018, p. 295). This control is often extended to the workers' romantic relationships and sexuality (LAW, 2019, p. 5). There is in fact a legal arrangement whereby the worker can be repatriated if she marries inside Lebanon since she would be breaching the *kafala* agreement (Arsan, 2018, p. 297).

These processes of differentiation and inferiorization do also have a spatialization aspect that is quite revealing. In the streets and supermarkets, domestic workers are commonly forced to walk behind their employers, keeping an eye to their children or carrying their shopping bags (Arsan, 2018, p. 296). Another common practice reinforcing the hierarchical relationship between the workers and their employers can be seen in restaurants. There, domestic workers' won't be seated at the table as equals. In many beach clubs or resorts, they are excluded from the adults' pool and cannot even swim in the sea water, being only allowed to stay in the children's area taking care of them. Moreover, they usually cannot wear a swimming suit (Arsan, 2018, p. 299) and must keep all their clothes on. Other racist attitudes have to do with considering them as having a bad smell because of their black skin; they are "racial others, disruptive presences whose bodies are inherently unclean" (Arsan, 2018, P. 297). Other common behaviours by the part of migrant domestic workers' employers

have to do with food. Sometimes, the workers can only eat the family's leftovers and must ask for permission before eating. They might also not be allowed to cook their own traditional food from their countries of origin since sponsors may not like their aromas (Arsan, 2018, p. 296), conceiving it as low-status food. The domestic workers must adapt to the Lebanese culture and language, conceived as superior, this cultural exchange never being reciprocal: the Lebanese family will not be interested in knowing about their *srylankiyyeh*'s culture and will consider it as exotic, less civilized and inferior (Arsan, 2018, p. 301). There are also linguistic manifestations revealing the unequal and paternalistic relationship between employers and workers: employers are called *rabb al'*-*aml* (lord or 'master of their charges' work) while domestic workers are named *banat* (girls) (Arsan, 2018, p. 289). In addition, all migrant domestic workers, irrespective of their nationality, are usually referred as "*srylankiyyeh*" (Arsan, 2018, p. 288) instead of by their first names (Kuzbari, 2018), further dehumanizing them. "This objectification is what enables employers to treat their domestic workers as slaves" (Kuzari, 2018, p. 18).

In Lebanon, Arsan (2018, p. 192) argues that through domestic workers' migration into the country, "a bourgeois ideal of the gendered division of labour" exists. The author refers to the fact that the Lebanese woman employing a migrant domestic worker is "largely emancipated from the demands of work, whether in or out of the home, and free to focus on caring for herself and her family—shopping, exercising, socialising, engaging in charity work, and cooking and tending to her children as and when she sees fit" (Arsan, 2018, p. 290). At the same time, consequently, the domestic worker's time for self-care is nearly nonexistent. Despite being freed from the physically exhausting and time-demanding care work, the "*madame*" continues to be the one in the household in charge of it, the gender division of labour remaining unchallenged. How? The Lebanese female employer will then handle commanding functions related to managing care work inside the house, such as the supervision of her worker's work or training her so that she cleans and cooks properly to fit the family's tastes and habits. "Their subordinates, meanwhile, are not just women, but foreign women whose nationality, race, and putative lack of linguistic fluency and familiarity with their Lebanese surroundings mark them as different and inferior. They are envisioned as beneath their employers in cultural as well as in socio-economic terms." This intersectional feminist approach bearing on mind the interlock of gender, race and class power-relations enable us not only to get closer to the experiences of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon but also shed light on the racist social imagination that legitimizes, and therefore perpetuates, the array of legal arrangements and common practices conforming the *kafala* system.

3. Global and regional situation with regards to SDGs 5 and 8

3.1. Global Situation

In this section, quantitative data from recent reports will be analysed so as to have a broader picture of how gender and global migratory dynamics shape labour relations in the domestic work sector. The statistical evidence examined will also be relevant to reinforce with up-to-date data the qualitative insights provided by the global care chains theoretical framework in section 2.2.

A recent IOM report (2020) reveals that the number of migrants globally has increased over the past fifty years but that this general migratory trend goes hand in hand with the increase in the world's population (IOM, 2020, p. 21). Drivers of migration are diverse and include economic, political, security and cultural factors. Nevertheless, the norm within the global population is not to migrate and, indeed, only 1 out of 30 persons leave their country of origin and engage in the migratory journey (IOM, 2020, p. 25). High-income or core countries are the main final destination of a significant share of the global migrant population (IOM, 2020, p. 27). Around two thirds of migrants worldwide live in core countries (176 million), about one third in middle-income countries (82 million) and the remaining 13 million are hosted in low-income or peripheral countries (IOM, 2020, p. 26).

If we zoom in and focus on the specific situation of migrant workers, the latest available data from 2017 indicates that they make up to 164 million and constitute 64% of the total number of international migrants and 70% of the overall international migrants of working age (IOM, 2020, p. 33). They are also concentrated in core and middle-income countries, their distribution among them accounting for 68% and 29% respectively while peripheral countries are only home to 3.4% of them (IOM, 2020, p. 33). Migrant workers are indeed concentrated in North America, the Arab states and Europe (IOM, 2020, p. 34). Not surprisingly, countries from these core regions are the main suppliers of money transfers, headed in 2017 by the United States, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia (IOM, 2020, p. 36). If we take a closer look at gender dynamics, there are more male migrant workers than women, accounting for 54% and 46% respectively (IOM, 2020, p. 34). Global trends of women's employment are characterized by a clear lower women's participation rates in paid work than men, which is explained by the persistence of traditional and patriarchal gender roles (ILO, 2018). The highest gender gaps with regards to participation in paid employment are found in the Arab states, North Africa and South Asia, while the lowest exists in developing countries (ILO, 2018). As for the women that are part of the labour force

in paid employment, they tend to be unemployed and/or more likely to be employed in jobs without proper labour and social security legislations (ILO, 2018).

Domestic work is one of the most precarious sectors and needs to be examined in relation to gendered and migratory global dynamics. As Garofalo and Marchetti indicate (2017), it is a common reality at the global level that domestic workers and, in particular, migrant domestic workers, suffer from labor and human rights abuses. The political, economic, legal and social settings that govern the living and working conditions of migrant domestic workers certainly vary from country to country. Nevertheless, the global trend is that the hiring of migrant workers for domestic work is controlled under unregulated legal and political frameworks (Garofalo & Marchinetti, 2017). In its turn, these unprotective legal arrangements foster the creation of environments conducive to labour exploitation, violence, debt bondage, invisibility, discrimination, starvation and numerous crimes related to trafficking (Garofalo & Marchinetti, 2017), which unfortunately characterize the global situation of migrant women undertaking care work.

If we look at global estimates, the number of domestic workers worldwide goes up to 67 million. On the one hand, 80% of them are women (IDWF, 2019) and domestic work constitutes 7.5% of women's paid employment at the global level (ILO, 2016). On the other hand, 17% of all domestic workers are migrants. Particularly, there are 11.5 million migrant domestic workers (IDWF, 2019), who represent 7.7% of the total migrant workers globally, 150.3 million, and 12.7% of the 66.6 million women migrant workers (ILO, 2016). Another ILO report (2018) focused on gender dynamics within the international migrant labour force observed that there is a majority of male migrant workers at the global level; there are 95.7 million men and 68.1 million women accounting respectively for the 58.4% and 41.6% of the total migrant workers (ILO, 2018, p. 20).

An IOM report (2016) sheds light to relevant regional dynamics regarding domestic work and migratory dynamics. To begin with, core countries host the largest share of domestic workers worldwide, up to 80%. In those countries, migrant domestic workers account for almost 66% of the total domestic workers, so there is a high dependency on migrants to fill the gap in demand for care work (ILO, 2016, p. 2). Particularly, the regions hosting more migrant domestic workers are the Arab states, North America and Europe, where most of the core countries are indeed found. The share of migrant domestic workers over the total domestic workers is 83% in the Arab states, 71% in North America and 55% in Europe. An interesting insight is that there is a common trend in these three regions with

regards to a rapid demographic aging of societies, which partly explains that the increasing demand for care work is met by women and migrants (ILO, 2016, p. 2).

In North America and Europe, national women are increasingly entering the productive labour sector, shaping family dynamics related to the distribution of care work, while there has been a general decrease in the social spending in public sectors linked to care work (IOM, 2016). Therefore, there has been a growing demand, namely during the past thirty years, of migrant women to engage in the poorly valued occupation of domestic work. In Europe, over the 4 million domestic workers of the region, more than 2 million are migrant women (IOM, 2016, p. 5). As for South-East Asia and the Pacific, despite hosting 14% of the global domestic workers, up to 9.1 million, they only account for 3% of their total working force. In Southern Asia, the percentage is as low as 1%, with less than 7% being migrants (IOM, 2016, p. 6). In this way, most of the domestic workers in these two regions are nationals. The domestic sector in these regions does certainly also follow the gendered global trend, with women accounting for 83% of the domestic workers. As a matter of fact, those two regions from the world periphery are the main sending countries of women domestic workers (IOM, 2016, p. 6), which meet the increasing demands from core countries from the Middle East, Europe and 'new industrialized' - as termed by the report - in Asia (IOM, 2016, p. 6). Those dynamics form the main migratory corridors (IOM, 2018) related to domestic work and coincide with the global care chains analysis.

3.2. Regional Situation

The Arab States host 1.5% of the global labour force, they are home to 1.7% of the total migrant workers worldwide (IOM, 2016). Migrant workers in the Middle East represent up to 35.6% of all workers in the region (IOM, 2016, p. 5). The Middle East and, most precisely, the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, GCC, (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), host the world's largest share of migrant workers (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005; Laiboni, 2020). Particularly, GCC countries are home to 28.1 million migrant workers (Atong, Maya & Odigie, 2018), 90% of which are concentrated in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, the largest economies in the region (Laiboni, 2020). These three countries are in fact in the top ten remittance-sending countries worldwide, occupying the 2nd, 3rd and 8th position respectively (IOM, 2020, p. 36).

The high share of migrants in GCC countries in relation to the national population, with some variations from country to country, is a recent phenomenon that started with the mid-1970s oil boom. This led to a sudden increase in inter-Arab and Asian-Gulf migrations

(Jureidini, 2009), namely from South Asia and Southeast Asia (IOM, 2015; Laiboni, 2020) and the emergence of new migratory flows from sub-Saharan Africa since the last decade (Atong, Maya & Odigie, 2017; ILO, 2019). There are two important aspects that need to be considered when analysing the current general landscape of migrants in the GCC countries. Firstly, the high demand for migrant workers is related to their recent interest in hosting global events such as the World Cup in Qatar (Laiboni, 2020). Secondly, because of the unprotective labour regulations for migrant workers, or the lack of them, as well as certain common practices by employers and recruiters from both sending and receiving countries, such as the withholding of passports of domestic and agricultural workers, many migrant workers are victims of trafficking and exploitation in the region (IOM, 2015; Atong, Maya & Odigie, 2018).

If we focus on domestic work, in the Arab states domestic workers constitute 7.7% of the total labour force and 17.3% of the total migrant labour force (IOM, 2016, p. 5). In fact, 82% of all domestic workers in the region are migrants, most notably women (IOM, 2016, p. 6). It should be noted that the percentage of migrants employed in the domestic work sector in the Arab states is the highest globally and is noteworthy when compared with other regions. For instance, in North America, although the share of migrant domestic workers with regards to the total domestic workforce is also high, up to 70.8%, domestic workers only account for 0.5% of the total labour force in the region while, as observed before, in the Arab states they make up to 7.7.% (IOM, 2016, p. 5).

From this quantitative analysis we recognize that there is a clear reliance on foreign workers to satisfy care work necessities in the region. This needs to be understood vis-à-vis the common features in the Arab states with regards to not including domestic workers in their labour legislations and ascribing low value to care work (IOM, 2015). Consequently, the hiring of domestic workers comes at a remarkably lower cost when compared to other regions, such as North America, and many more households can therefore afford this service (IOM, 2016, p. 5). In addition, a common pattern in the region that needs to be highlighted is the fact that the employment and legal status of domestic and other migrant workers in the GCC countries and some other countries in the Middle East, such as Jordan and Lebanon, is ruled by the *kafala* or sponsorship system (Jureidini, 2010; Laiboni, 2020). This legal environment fosters impunity over labour exploitation and human trafficking (IOM, 2015).

As a matter of fact, no GCC country has ratified any of the international conventions aimed at preventing human rights and working abuses to migrant workers, such as the following ILO Conventions: C 97 - Migration for Employment, C143 - Migrant Workers

Convention, C 189 – Domestic Workers Convention, C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention and C181 – Private Employment Agencies Convention (Atong, Maya & Odigie, 2018). This showcases the general trend by the states in the region to refuse to comply with SDGs 5 and 8 and with Targets 5.2, 5.4 and 8.8 in particular.

4. Position of Lebanon vis-à-vis SDGs 5 and 8

4.1. Historical background

Jureidini (2009) and Jureidini and Moukarbel (2004) explored the evolution of migrant domestic workers in the specific Lebanese context in relation to their place of origin. Changes with regards to the social perceptions and value of paid domestic work by the Lebanese society were also explored by these authors and are noteworthy to understand the current social dynamics as well as the political context sustaining the *kafala* system. Before the Lebanese civil war from 1975 to 1990, the feminized domestic labour force in the country consisted of Lebanese girls and women coming usually from rural areas. Most of them were unmarried since it was common for daughters from Lebanese poor families to be sent to wealthier families until they get married not only because they would be able to earn a salary but also because they were usually treated as an adopted child and therefore receive education. This would also imply prestige for her and her family (Jureidini, 2009). Women migrating from neighbouring countries were also hired as maids. Those were, namely, Syrians, Alawites and Kurdish refugees since the 1920s, Palestinians from refugee camps in Lebanon since the 1950s and Egyptians since the 1960s (Jureidini & Moukarbel, 2004).

Nevertheless, the sectarian tensions that led to and perpetuated the fifteen-year Lebanese civil war continued to characterize the post-war political and social environment. Consequently, Lebanese households' preferences shifted with regards to maids hiring practices. During the war, hiring Arab maids was considered an unnecessary risk bearing in mind the political and sectarian hostilities (Pande, 2013), so they were gradually replaced by women of African and Asian origin (Jureidini, 2009). The latter were cheaper and 'considered more submissive' (Moukarbel, 2009) and represented 'a cheap and desirable alternative' (Arsan, 2018, p. 29). In the post-war context, there was an even more rapid internationalization of the domestic labour force coming from outside the Middle East to Lebanon in line with the labour migration trends to the Gulf driven by the oil boom in the 1970s (Arsan, 2018, p. 287; Kuzbari, 2018). According to Jureidini and Moukarbel (2004), what fostered the hiring of migrant domestic workers from outside the Middle East in

Lebanon was the combination of the Lebanese civil war and the Gulf oil boom. These new feminized migratory trends were gradual during the war but increased dramatically as of 1990 when the armed conflict came to an end.

This shift led to the racialization of the already blatantly gendered domestic work and resulted in the lowering of the social status of domestic workers and a further devaluing of care work. This could be noted in the decrease of salaries of those increasingly racialized domestic workers. Indeed, as Jureidini (2001) explores, foreign maids were conceived as cheaper, as being able to work harder and for longer hours, as more obedient or less complaining and even as less attractive to the male members of the family when compared to Arab maids. These changes in the Lebanese social imaginary with regards to the domestic worker is evident since, eventually, being a maid became a shame for Lebanese and Arab women even for the ones from the poorer sectors of society (Jureidini, 2009). The figure and occupation of the domestic worker was linked to low status and came along with a huge social stigma. In this way, Lebanese poor households stopped forcing their daughters to work as maids for richer families and sent them to factories instead (Jureidini, 2009).

As a curious fact, the origins of the *kafala* system are related to the Bedouin tradition of hospitality towards foreign guests whereby they must be protected, fed and hosted by anyone who finds them. Migrant domestic workers have traditionally fallen into this category (Kuzbary, 2018, p. 11; Khan & Harroff-Travel, 2011). It is ironic how nowadays the *kafala* system, contrary to its origins, fosters the exploitation of the workers,

4.2. Current situation

Migrant workers in Lebanon amount to 1,883,000 while the total labour force in Lebanon is around 3,677,000 workers (Central Administration of Statistics, 2019). Therefore, half of the Lebanese labour force is comprised of migrant workers. The current number of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon is estimated between 250, 000 and 300,000 (LAW, 2020, p. 1). There are five countries sending 72% of migrant labour in Lebanon (LAW, 2020, p. 1), the major senders being Ethiopia, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Sri Lanka (ILO, 2016).

4.2.1. Main actors involved

4.2.1.1. Migrant domestic workers: resistances

Migrant domestic workers are the ones daily experiencing what I am here continuously conceptualizing as the *kafala* system. These women are the ones bearing the consequences of the system discussed in the literature review have explored as the materialization in the

Lebanese context of the intersection of the patriarchy with global capitalism as well as racist processes of ‘othering’. The impact of the daily suffering of these workers on their mental health is huge. Suicidal thoughts, attempts and deaths unfortunately are a common part of their realities (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Amnesty International, 2020), which a huge part of the Lebanese society does not want to confront.

The experiences of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon depend on their legal situation in the country. On the one hand, ‘live-ins’ are the ones that just entered the country through a recruitment agency and live in the sponsors’ house. On the other hand, ‘runaways’ are the ones that escape their sponsors and stay therefore illegally in Lebanon by working for different households. The latter have more freedom of movement and higher salaries, but their expenses are also increased (Kuzbari, 2018, p. 16) and they tend to have housing affordability problems, many ending up living together in small, shared apartments in poor neighbourhoods (Longuenesse & Tabar, 2014).

The recent literature about migrant domestic workers in Lebanon challenges their traditional portrayal as mere passive victims by focusing on the different forms of survival resistances used by these women (Moukarbel, 2009; Pande, 2012; Tayah, 2014; Garofalo & Marchetti, 2017; Mahi, 2017; Hochreuther, 2019). Moukarbel (2009) used the concept of “every-day forms of resistance” of migrant domestic workers to talk about the ways in which they individually daily react to their employers’ abusive practices inside the house. Pande (2012) shed light on three main spaces where migrant domestic workers in Lebanon are able to build solidarity networks and community ties, which is not an easy endeavor if we bear in mind that many of them are locked in the houses. The main spaces and strategies used depend on the specific situation of the workers and consist of their balconies, churches, and the private homes of the ones that decided to run away from their sponsors and live independently (Pande, 2012).

The ones that are permanently locked in talk with other workers from balcony to balcony and are able to exchange information, compare their job and living conditions and share resistance strategies (Pande, 2012, p. 390). Rose Mahi (2017), a migrant domestic worker from Cameroon and a community leader and human rights activist reflects upon her resistance strategies. Mahi talks about her ‘creative resistance’ referring to the different ways she and her neighbour migrant domestic workers created a support network that began by their non-verbal communication from their balconies and that consisted, among others, on sharing food with one that was not fed properly by their sponsors by sending her meals by rope from balcony to balcony or through the elevator (Mahi, 2017, p. 168). This exchange of

information, experiences and strategies does also take place among the Christian ones that have a day off on Sundays and go to their own churches (Pande, 2012, p. 394) and among the ones that decide to escape their employers and collectively resist through their daily lives together (Pande, 2012, p. 396). Their illegal situation in the country and the forced informality of these communal forms of resistances makes them however rely on other organized groups to formulate their demands (Pande, 2012, p. 400).

The workers have recently formally organized themselves, namely in diverse groups (Hochreuther, 2019, p. 14). Between 2011 and 2014 the ILO organized the Action Programme for Protecting the Rights of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon (PROWD-project) and one of its achievements was the creation in 2015 of the Domestic Workers' Union (DWU) and its inclusion within the Lebanese trade union FENASOL. The union hosted up to 350 domestic workers from different nationalities and was the first domestic workers' union in the MENA region (Tayah, 2014, p. 14). Nevertheless, in 2016, the Ministry of Labour banned it, arguing that they are excluded from the national labour law (Rintakumpu, 2019, p. 3). Nevertheless, the organization of campaigns by other groups have increased social awareness and politicized the experiences of domestic workers in Lebanon because of the *kafala* system (Rintakumpu, 2019, p. 4). In 2010, only a small part of the Lebanese society was aware of the existence of the *kafala* system while nowadays the issue is widely known and there is much more information available about it (Rintakumpu, 2019, p. 4).

4.2.1.2. Employers, sponsors or *kafeels*

There are many practices whereby employers can have control and power over the migrant domestic workers they employ or sponsor. These include taking their passports away from them, increasing the work burden or menacing them with not paying their salaries (ILO, 2017). Some of the workers are never allowed to leave the house, their workplace, and are permanently locked in: they are enclosed in the private sphere deprived from their public life (Pande, 2012). For instance, during the 2006 war, some were even forced to stay enclosed in their houses while their employers fled to safer regions for shelter (Arsan, 2018, p. 291). This, as well as the passport confiscation, violates the right to free movement included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As it has been observed, the practices of the Ministry of Labour and the Standard Unified Contract (see section 4.3.2), lead to this lack of freedom for domestic workers and impunity and control for their *kafeels*. What is more, employers pay high fees to recruitment agencies. Consequently, it is a common practice that they do not pay the first three months of their domestic workers' salaries in order to offset the

agency's costs (Jureidini & Moukarbel, 2004). Apart from the initial fees to the recruitment agency and the monthly salary, employers or sponsors supposedly need to pay for medical insurance, food, return ticket and other related expenses (Jureidini & Moukarbel, 2004; Mansour, 2008). Nevertheless, it is also very common for sponsors to subtract these costs from the monthly salaries (Longuenesse & Tabar, 2014).

4.2.1.3. Recruitment agencies in sending countries and in Lebanon

The lack of regulations or monitoring of the practices of recruitment agencies both in sending countries of migrant domestic workers and in Lebanon within the *kafala* system is conducive to human trafficking (Amnesty International, 2019; LAW, 2020). In sending countries, recruitment agencies are the main channel whereby migrant domestic workers find job opportunities and arrange their travels (Laiboni, 2020, p. 19). Only in some countries domestic workers recruitment agencies are required to be registered and are controlled by governmental authorities (Laiboni, 2020, p. 10). However, most of them are unofficial and conduct several practices that expose workers to risk and violence (Laiboni, 2020, p. 11), so exploitation indeed starts in the country of origin (IOM, 2015, p. 12). These include misinforming prospective workers about the nature of the work, monthly salary, substitution of contracts, namely when they are signed again in Arabic in Lebanon, and even lying about the destination country (Laiboni, 2020, p. 11). In addition, migrant domestic workers are forced to pay extremely high fees to them (IOM, 2015, p. 12). In Lebanon, the Ministry of Labour counted 569 official recruitment agencies in 2019 (Amnesty International, 2020, p. 9; LAW, 2020, p. 2). Recruitment agencies make profit from the difference between the fees and the costs they should assume related to travel, medical tests and residency permits. They therefore tend to avoid paying for them and, in practice, these expenses are charged to the domestic worker herself (LAW, 2020, p. 2).

4.2.1.4 Lebanese institutions: Ministry of Labour

Despite the fact that the sponsorship contract states that the Ministry of Labor is the one in charge to manage complaints, in practice it does not enforce this norm and relies on recruitment agencies to solve problems between workers and employers, which do favour the latter (Rintakumpu, 2019, p. 4). When migrant domestic workers denounce their employers for criminal practices, the police and judicial system do favor the interest of sponsors by ignoring or not considering them crimes (LAW, 2020, p.4). For instance, in 2010 Human Rights Watch noticed that none of the 114 criminal complaints issued by migrant domestic workers were brought to trial (LAW, 2020, p. 4). Because of the existence of social organizations working to improve the living conditions of migrant domestic workers in the

country, it is even easier for the Lebanese government not to comply with their responsibility in ensuring the protection of domestic workers (Rintakumpu, 2019, p. 4) and ignoring the urgency to end with the *kafala* system.

4.2.1.5. Civil society organizations and NGOs

The Lebanese civil society has shown solidarity with migrant domestic workers groups since the 1980s. At the beginning, Lebanese NGOs supported migrant domestic workers through assistive charity aid but this has evolved into an increased recognition during the past two decades of the political agency of migrant domestic workers and, consequently, current projects aim at backing workers' self-organized collectives (Rintakumpu, 2019, p. 3), namely through funding, advising and physical support, such as sharing offices (Hochreuther, 2019, p. 58). The civil society groups are the Anti-Racism Movement and its Migrant Community Center (ARM/MCC), KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation, the INSAN Association, This is Lebanon, and Caritas (Hochreuther, 2019, p. 13). At the international level, HRW, the ILO, Amnesty International (2018) and Legal Action Worldwide (2020) are the main organizations fighting for migrant domestic workers' rights in Lebanon (Hochreuther, 2019).

4.2.1.6 Transnational coalitions: IDWF

The past decade has been shaped by the transnational organization of migrant domestic workers through the creation of solidarity ties between groups around the globe (Garofalo-Geymonat & Marchetti, 2017, p. 14). The role of the International Domestic Workers Federation, IDWF, has been key in this regard. IDWF is a transnational organization of domestic workers comprising non-state actors, namely trade unions and workers' cooperatives, associations and networks (IDWF, 2019, p. 15). The federation was created in 2012 and, as of June 2021, has 80 affiliates from 63 countries representing around 590,000 domestic workers (IDWF, 2021). It reflects the diversity of the organizational structure of domestic workers in different political settings and the gradual tendency of initially self-help groups evolving into more organized collectives, some being included in trade unions (IDWF, 2018, p. 15).

4.2.2. Adopted measures

Migrant domestic workers' growing mobilization, activism and unionization during the past two decades has led to the increased awareness of their experiences and demands at the international level (Garofalo & Marchetti, 2017). Pressures to recognize the problem of the gendered and racialized subjects that carry the burden of care work and its consequences have pushed international discussions and agenda regarding this issue (Garofalo & Marchetti,

2017). Care work was recognized for the first time in the history of supra-national arrangements in 2007 during the 10th session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (Garofalo & Marchetti, 2017). The Conference resulted in the Quito Consensus of 2007, which acknowledged “the social and economic value of the unremunerated domestic work of women; care as a public affair that is incumbent on states, local governments, organizations, companies and families; and the necessity to promote the shared responsibility of women and men in the family arena” (Quito Consensus, 2007). Discussions regarding care work and its relation to migratory trends have since then continued to shape the international agenda and three main international agreements came into force during the past decade by ILO and IMO that directly tackle or include the issue of migrant domestic workers: the ILO Convention 189 or the ‘Domestic Workers Convention’ (ILO Convention 189, 2011), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration of 2018 and the ILO Convention 190 regarding Violence and Harassment identifying women domestic workers as key a vulnerable groups to abuses and human rights violations (ILO Convention 190, 2019). Nevertheless, Lebanon has not ratified any of those legal arrangements.

At the national level, there have been some governmental initiatives aimed at regulating the *kafala* system. In 2009, the Standard Unified Contract (SUC) was enforced by the Ministry of Labour, outlining the rights and obligations of sponsors and migrant domestic workers, such as the obligation to pay a monthly salary, a 24-hour free day weekly, and limited the daily working hours to ten (Amnesty International, 2020). Nevertheless, workers can only change sponsors, resign or terminate the contract when violence or the non-payment of the salary during three consecutive months can be proven. Other than that, sponsor’s approval is required, even in other cases when the employer can breach the contract (LAW, 2020, p. 3). As Jureidini (2011) indicates, “the existence of contracts does not guarantee rights” signaling the fact that contracts are very often ignored because the Lebanese law does not include sanctions for the sponsor’s breach of the contracts.

In 2015, the Ministry of Labour provided a hotline for migrant domestic workers so that they can call when they suffer abuses, but it does not operate and was not known by the workers (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 27). In 2018, the Ministry translated the SUC into different languages but, in practice, contracts remain signed in Arabic, many newly arrived workers not understanding it, and no monitoring has been taking place (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 13). In March 2020, the Ministry of Labour and ILO jointly presented a new updated SUC (LAW, 2020, p. 4). Among the new clauses, the working hours were

reduced, and the workers' rights to travel documents, freedom of movement and communication and the ability to end their contract unconditionally were included in the law's draft (LAW, 2020, p. 4). The Ministry of Labour also publicly showed its willingness to come up with work permits delinked from their employers. (LAW, 2020, p.4) However, the total lockdown since March 2020, the economic crisis and the unstable political environment after the resignation of two prime ministers after the August 4th explosion in Beirut's port and the inability to form a government has left the process deadlocked (LAW, 2020, p.4). In addition, social movements organizations, such as ARM (2020) argued that "the contract is only one piece of the *kafala* system and, due to lack of any enforcement mechanism, it is arguably the least important piece".

With the *kafala* system in place, Lebanon is not complying with its international obligations, worryingly violating several international agreements it has ratified (Amnesty International, 2019, p.12), including the following ones: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ILO's Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 12).

4.2.3. Results: listening to organized migrant domestic workers in Beirut

In May 2021, I conducted three interviews: an in-person interview with two social organizers from Egna Legna, Rasha, an activist migrant domestic worker from Ethiopia and founder of the organization, and Bashar, a Syrian refugee volunteering with the organization in solidarity with the workers. I also conducted two other face-to-face interviews with Sarketlu, an ex-live-in domestic worker from Ethiopia and an activist that has worked for Anti Racist Movement (ARM), its MCC, and is currently leading the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) program for migrant domestic workers in Lebanon.¹

The lockdown did directly affect the 'runaways' since their source of income disappeared (Amnesty International, 2020). Overall, even if paid in Lebanese lira or dollars, the value of their salaries has decreased while prices in Lebanon are increasing at an alarming and unstable rate. Among the new necessities and demands, Egna Legna has since last year

¹ The transcription of the full interviews translated from Arabic to English as well as a detailed background on the interviewed and their organizations can be found in the Annexes (section 8).

been centered in financially supporting the workers that want to go back to their country for their PCR and plane tickets. The reasons for their willingness to return are the fact that they were abandoned by their employers in front of their embassies because they could no longer afford them or because they were ‘runaways’ that do not see any opportunity for their future in Lebanon. Rasha manifested that the decrease in job opportunities is evident and migrant women in Lebanon have housing and food affordability problems. Eгна Legna even found an apartment with forty-one women living together. Eгна Legna is helping them with food boxes and by paying their rent. Community-based support networks are therefore key to ensure the material conditions for the daily survival of these women in Lebanon. Sarketlu exposed the same views regarding the new demands triggered by the new context in Lebanon shared by Rasha and pointed out to the increased vulnerability to which ‘lives-ins’ were exposed during the lockdown in 2020.

Sartkelu made an interesting contribution when asked about the framework of global care chains (Hochschild, 2000; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Rodríguez, 2007; Pérez-Orozco, 2009; Burgmann, 2016) in relation to the Lebanese situation. She reflected upon the fact that the “madame” is often at home rather than working outside in paid work, and argued that the popularity to hire migrant domestic workers in the country is related to the “prestige” attributed to it, Lebanese families thus being able to show that can afford a maid and that the female heads of the family won’t clean or do “indecent work”. This challenges the arguments of some scholars (Estim, Omeira & Seiko, 2009, p. 16) arguing that the increase in the demand for migrant domestic workers was mainly explained by the necessity driven by shifts in Lebanese women labour roles when they started engaging in paid work outside the house. Although this is one of the factors, the insights provided by Arsan’s (2018) sociological approach related to processes ‘othering’ in Lebanon from an intersectional approach seem to better grasp the reasons behind the great number of households hiring migrant domestic workers in Lebanon: “madames” are freed from the physically exhausting and time-demanding reproductive work not necessarily to engage in paid productive labour, but to be able to focus on her self-care. Rather, she continues managing domestic work in the private sphere by controlling her subordinates conceived as culturally different and racially inferior (Arsan, 2018). The author (Arsan, 2018) describes it as “a bourgeois ideal of the gendered division of labour”, The “prestige” that Sarketlu was pointing to concurs with the mentioned self-care privileges and managing position that the Lebanese female head of the family that remains at home desires to have.

“I felt like an animal” and “their racism is beyond imagination”. This is what Rasha said to me while describing how the sponsors locked her in the balcony at night to sleep the scarce hours of sleep she had. Both Sarketlu and Rasha are aware of the racism and dehumanization (Arsan, 2019) they suffered not only in their initial household but also after escaping in Lebanese public spaces and shared with me many experiences during the interview.

Both Rasha and Sarketlu were misinformed by recruitment agencies in Ethiopia before coming to Lebanon about the working and living conditions they would encounter in the country. As for Rasha, she was even told that she would be able to continue with her studies in Lebanon with the work. Sarketlu explained that Lebanon was described as an extremely beautiful and religious place to attract the Christian Ethiopian community. These lies, combined with the high fees that women need to pay to the agencies in their countries when they decide to take the decision to undertake the migratory journey (Amnesty International, 2019), support the arguments conceiving the practices of the agencies as human trafficking (LAW, 2020). Rasha explained that Eгна Legna also has a center in Ethiopia where they do workshops conducted by ex-domestic workers in order to raise awareness about the *kafala* system. This has to do with the realisation that the *kafala* starts in the country of origin by recruitment agencies (IOM, 2016; Laiboni, 2020). Rasha was, as the vast majority of workers (Amnesty International, 2019; LAW, 2020), forced to sign her contract in Arabic without being able to understand its contents. Sarketlu exposed that, at the recruitment agency in Lebanon, the women are often obliged to sign the contracts. This violence and coercion could also be considered as forced labour or human trafficking (Jureidini & Moukarbel, 2004; Hamill, 2011; Amnesty International, 2019 & LAW, 2020).

In her household, Rasha’s employers kept both their passport and phone from her. This deprivation of autonomy, isolation and restriction of freedom of movement and communication has also been considered as modern slavery and forced labour (Amnesty International, 2019; LAW, 2020). Related to this, Rasha stated that some workers are not paid at all and Bashar added that he had never met any women at MCC or Eгна Legna that had got fully paid by their employers. This goes in hand with the revised reports and articles relating the *kafala* system with forced labour (Amnesty International, 2019; LAW, 2020).

The issue of mental health was very present in both interviews. Rasha shared with me that she suffered mental health problems because of the living and working conditions in her first household. Rasha also directly linked mental health problems with the *kafala* system: “Last year, many domestic workers committed suicide. These women are not crazy. They

committed suicide because of the kafala system and its unfairness”. Currently, Sarketlu is coordinating a specific project for migrant domestic workers by Médecins Sans Frontières that offers a clinic service and mental health treatment to women from several community-based organizations, Eгна Legna and MCC included, showcasing the severity of the psychological suffering of the women from these communities in the country (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Amnesty International, 2020).

Sarketlu described that, when she first arrived, she was a 15-year-old teenager acting instinctively out of survival. She once refused to clean a window climbing from outside the building and was sent by the “madame” to the agency as a complaint. But she didn’t clean it. She also refused to wear a uniform. This is an example of individual “everyday forms of resistance” and coping mechanisms to try to challenge the oppressions faced when isolated at the private space (Moukarbel, 2009). However, she acknowledges the fears to speak up or protest because “sometimes we know what the consequences are”, and they can be “really hurtful”. Sarketlu mentioned the inability of ‘lives-ins’ to fight for their situation because of the particular situations of isolation and lack of freedom of movement and communication (LAW, 2020). She explained how, for example, some live-ins manage to get in contact with MCC when they are walking their dogs because they do not have a day off and cannot communicate by phone. Sarah explained that several women at MCC were victims of sexual abuse.

Sarketlu stressed the importance of the community she has been able to build at MCC and how it became a family to her, the family she had never had in Lebanon. There, she was able to exchange experiences, be felt as an equal, be “seen”, and know more about her rights. All this had a clear positive impact towards her mental health: “MCC is a shelter, a safe place and second home for migrant domestic workers. We are a family and a place to build and take care of our community”.

4.3. Expectations for the coming 5-10 years

The current situation in Lebanon is marked by political instability (Kuzbari, 2018), an alarming economic crisis and social uprisings since the October 2019 revolution, exacerbated by the covid19 pandemic and the August 2020 Beirut explosion (LAW, 2020, p.6). The economic situation has led to a new scénario where many migrant domestic workers have been abandoned by their sponsors because many Lebanese households can no longer afford to hire a maid. Most of the abandoned workers have not even received any salary and are not able to be repatriated to their home countries (Amnesty International, 2020), so the current

fighters by domestic workers organizations and Lebanese NGOs are also centered on these new demands. If the sectarian, clientelist, corrupt and dysfunctional (Kuzbari, 2018) Lebanese regime is not changed, it will continue having an interest in maintaining the status quo and defending the interest of the elites (Dixon, 2020; Halawi, 2020; Majed, 2020). In this regard, any social change, including the abolition of the *kafala* system, does not seem to be possible in the near future without a structural change in the political regime.

5. Evaluation and recommendations

The situation of Target 5.2. aiming at eradicating violence against all women in the public and private spheres, including trafficking, Target 8.8. focusing on the protection of labour rights and the promotion of safe and secure working environments, in particular to women migrant workers, and Target 5.4 directed at the recognition and valuing of unpaid care and domestic work through “the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family” is deplorable in Lebanon. The huge amount of scholarly work, official reports by recognized international organizations (HRW, 2008; ILO, 2016; Amnesty International, 2019; LAW, 2020) and endless campaigns organized by different local groups (Tayah, 2014; Mahi, 2017; Hochreuther, 2018; Rintakumpu, 2019) have since long exposed the undeniable causes of the suffering that these women from Asian and African origin working in Lebanese households go through. The analysis of the *kafala* system in relation to the phenomenon of global care chains as well as to the racism objectifying the women employed in this essential work in Lebanon sheds light to the continuously nurtured social imaginary perpetuating the political arrangements inhumanly ruling the unfair living and working conditions of migrant domestic workers in the country.

With all the available knowledge, the fact that the power imbalance and dependency between the employer and the worker encourages physical and mental violence both in the private and public spheres, labour abuses and unsafe working environments through the non-recognition of the vital job she is undertaking is unquestionable. Care work is invisibilised and devalued when it is ascribed to these women from the racist lens that fabricate their image as the black and uncivilized other. The *kafala* has been conceived as forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking (Amnesty International, 2019; LAW, 2020). All this heads in the opposite direction if the goal is to achieve the implementation of Targets 5.2, 8.8., and 5.4. in Lebanon aimed at the protection and wellbeing of all women and, in

particular, the ones employed in care work. To improve the alarmingly negative situation of Targets 5.2., 5.4., and 8.8. in Lebanon, I propose the following recommendations.

Recommendations directed at the community-based organizations led by migrant domestic workers:

- Collaborate between all the existing organized groups in Lebanon fighting for the rights of migrant domestic workers in order to collectively devise common goals and strategies. In this regard, effective communication channels should be firstly created in order to achieve a proper coordination between the groups. It is very important to periodically organize assemblies where all groups can meet, keep updated with the novelties of the other groups, interchange knowledge, experiences, contacts and strategies as well as have a safe space for debate. This would gradually develop ties of trust and an increasingly bigger unified organizational network with a common discourse, demands and strategies. This would be more easily recognized by other statal and non-statal, local and international, actors and facilitate the communication with them.
- Weave solidary networks and mutual support between this new unified and coordinated organization and other Lebanese civil society groups. This would help amplify the audiences receiving the organization's discourse regarding its demands, increase the social awareness and recognize the legitimacy and urgency of migrant domestic workers' fight. Sharing experiences, knowledge and strategies with this groups would also be enriching for both parts. The broader the educated network of solidarity, the higher the social pressure that can be exercised to influence the political agenda. An intersectional feminist approach should be part of the values of Lebanese civil society groups that want to transform the social, political and economic realities of the country. Social change should not exclude any sectors of the society and need be directed towards the inclusion of the marginalised in the revolutionary project and process.
- Create a commission by the part of the organized commission able to represent the group and establish dialogue to formulate the group's demands to the Ministry of Labour and the Lebanese General Security in charge of immigration. This is the first step so that Lebanese institutions are interpellated and directly pointed at as the main responsible actors for the deficient situation of Targets 5.4., 5.2 and 8.8. in Lebanon. The commission's campaign should be properly communicated with the help of journalists, renowned personalities and academics in order to increase social pressure through media outlets and social media.

- Continue working closely with international organization that are already massively supporting migrant domestic fights in the country, namely ILO, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Their support is key to criminalize the Lebanese government since they must be preoccupied by their international reputation.
- Engage with Lebanese feminist groups and encourage them to adopt a transversal intersectional feminist view to the struggle against the patriarchy that does not ignore the oppressions suffered by migrant domestic workers in the country but rather prioritizes these women's urgent fights. This should entail focusing on the value of care work and the essentiality of migrant domestic workers to sustain lives in Lebanon to challenge the racist, patriarchal and capitalist dynamics devaluing it, migrant domestic workers being the main victims of it. Public actions and education bearing this framework in mind are encouraged since they would challenge racist attitudes as well as the devaluation of care work that legitimize and perpetuate the *kafala* system. The campaign could also denounce the lack of public services and infrastructures designed for care work in the country, such as kindergartens or nursing homes for the elderly from an anti-capitalist point of view.
- Design an educational project addressed at different age sectors of the society in order to gradually deconstruct the racist social imagination in Lebanon, starting at the school level with little children. This campaign should be aimed at bringing the Lebanese society closer to other cultures and could be done through music, art or theatre. This awareness raising project should not require a huge budget nor financial dependency from the private sector but rather could be organized by really compromised migrant domestic workers and Lebanese voluntarily working on it. These activities are essential since, in the event that the *kafala* system was abolished, racist stigmas around the workers would still be part of the Lebanese imagination and therefore influencing these women's experiences in the country.
- Prioritize the organization of awareness raising campaigns in the countries of origin so that potential women thinking about the decision to migrate to Lebanon are able to undertake an informed choice. Informing the women not only about the *kafala* system, racism and lack of guarantees they will face in Lebanon but also with regards to the current economic crisis, since their eventual salaries will most probably be less than desired because of the devaluation of the Lebanese lira is key. This will challenge recruitment agencies' lies and poor practices having been considered as human trafficking.

Recommendations directed at the Lebanese Ministry of Labour:

- Ensure the functioning of the ministry's hot line for migrant domestic workers so that they can call in cases of emergency and abuse. It is key that the information regarding this communication mechanism is known among the workers, specially among the newly arrived. The distribution of official informational brochures to the workers at their arrival at the Rafik Hariri International Airport is recommended. It should be available in the languages spoken in the workers' main countries of origin and ought to contain information about the workers' rights, existing organized groups in the country, as well as the ministerial hot line phone number.
- Adopt the new SUC proposed by ILO in 2020. The new contract should include migrant domestic worker's ability to end the contract at any time and freely change employers, illegalize the lock-in of live-ins and ensuring their weekly day off and enough daily rest hours as well as illegalize employers' action to keep their workers' passports away from them. The availability of the contract translated to different language in all recruitment agencies in Lebanon must be ensured.
- Create guarantor legal mechanisms to address complaints and ensure the proper operation of monitoring mechanisms. Proper investigations need to be able to be conducted when indices of abuse are detected. All this, as well as holding employers and recruitment agencies accountable for their actions are a must and need to go hand in hand with the adoption of the new SUC, because a contract alone without a functioning and trustful monitoring or accountability system does not lead anywhere.
- Abolish the *kafala* system or sponsorship relation of dependency between employers and workers with regards to the latter's legal residency in the country. This will not be implemented if there is not a clear commitment and political will by the Lebanese government.
- Include migrant domestic workers in the Lebanese Labour Law through the elimination Article 7 currently excluding them.
- Ratify ILO Conventions C189 and C190 and comply with its international obligations of the agreements it has ratified: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ILO's Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or

Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

6. Conclusions

The situation of Targets 5.2, 5.4. and 8.8. in Lebanon is deplorable and the main cause is the *kafala* system. This set of rules, decrees, decisions and customary practices creates relationships of dependency and power imbalances conducive to an environment of impunity over the many human rights abuses that it does also foster. Particularly, practices of recruitment agencies both in sending countries and in Lebanon are considered as human trafficking and the living and working conditions imposed by sponsors, employers or *kafeels* leading to labour abuse and human rights violations are conceived as forced labour or modern slavery (Amnesty International, 2019; LAW, 2020). All this occurs with a lack of actions taken by the Lebanese authorities, having inefficient monitoring mechanisms to hold human rights abusers accountable, clearly aimed as favouring the interest of the latter.

The legitimation and perpetuation of the array of legal and political arrangements unfairly ruling the living and working conditions of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon needs to be understood from a sociological lens in relation to daily processes of ‘othering’ dehumanizing and fabricating racist misconceptions constantly nurturing the Lebanese social imagination (Arsan, 2018). The intersection of gender, race and class of migrant domestic workers influences the social perceptions of these women as less civilized *akharin* or others and will determine their lived realities in the private and public spaces in Lebanon.

The *kafala* system should nevertheless not be addressed as a Lebanese exceptionality but has been to be related to the transnational global migratory dynamics driven by the global capitalist, colonial and patriarchal economic system promoting neoliberal reforms, thus allocating the care work it devalues to women from the Global South. In Lebanon, the sponsorship system is the form that the patriarchal division of labour and global migratory trends driven by the global economic system take.

After the literature review and the interviews conducted to activist migrant domestic workers, I have been able reassess the applicability of the global care chains framework in the specific context of Lebanon. Particularly, the hiring of a migrant domestic worker by a Lebanese society is not usually driven by the care void that arises when women head of the household start does not have the time and energy to undertake reproductive work because she engages in paid work while where there is not a renegotiation of the gendered care work among the household members across genders. In contrast, in Lebanon, “a bourgeois ideal of

the gendered division of labour” (Arsan, 2018) takes place whereby “madames” that are not working outside the house still employ a migrant domestic worker have out of the desire to be freed from care work and spend her time and energy in self-care and light care work related to childbearing whenever it pleases her. She will be in charge of managing and supervise the work of the racialized women so that she adapts to the family’s favourite food flavours, cleaning exigences and preferences of any kind. The hiring of the maid is socially conceived as a “prestige”, as Sarketlu accurately pointed out in her interview.

Migrant domestic workers in Lebanon are not passive victims. The “live-ins” daily try to improve their experiences inside the house through individual “everyday forms of resistances” (Moukarbel, 2004). The “runaways” have developed a whole set of community-based organizations that are key to support these women with the basic necessities, namely food, housing and health services, as well as with economic expenses related to travelling for the ones that do not longer want to live and work in Lebanon because of the alarming economic crisis the country is facing. Nevertheless, these organizations are more than that: they become a family, a space where these women can share their experiences and ideas and make sense of the unfairness and violence characterizing their lived realities in Lebanon and mutually support each other. This organizations are not only key to ensure their daily survival in the country but enable them to build more dignified lives.

The current situation in Lebanon marked by the economic crisis, political instability and huge social inequalities is unsustainable. The elite-defending structures inherent in the current sectarian political regime aim at preserving the neoliberal and corrupt status quo. The Lebanese civil society is organizing in the aim to structurally change their political system and build a new regime without the sectarian relations protecting the interests of economic elites and hindering social justice and change. Does the organized Lebanese civil society include the rights of women migrant domestic workers while imagining the alternative to the current regime?

Invisibilized and undervalued care work is essential to sustain life in Lebanon. I encourage the Lebanese to urgently acknowledge this reality and take care of the ones that are taking care of them.

7. References

- Abbas, A. (2016). *Democracy in Lebanon. Political parties and the struggle for power since Syrian withdrawal*. London, New York: Tauris (Library of modern Middle East studies).
- Abdo, N. & Shaddin A. (2020). *For a Decade of Hope Not Austerity in the MENA*. OXFAM. Retrieved May 31st, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/GnU0Ka7>
- Amnesty International. (2019). *'Their house is my prison' : exploitation of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon*. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde18/0022/2019/en/>
- Amnesty International. (2020, June 3rd). *Lebanon: abandoned migrant domestic workers must be protected*. Retrieved My 30th, 2021 from: <https://cutt.ly/hnnQxev>
- Anti Racist Movement. (2020). *No ethical contract under kafala*. Retrieved June 5th, 2021 from <https://armlebanon.org/content/no-ethical-contract-under-kafala>
- Anti Racist Movement. (2020). *Statement of "My work, my rights" network on the Standard Unified Contract*. Retrieved June 5th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/knU0Ghs>
- Arsan, A. (2018). "Al-Akharin, or the Others". In *Lebanon: A Country in Fragments* (pp. 259-308). Hurst & Company.
- Atong, K., Maya, E. & Odigie, A. (2018). *Africa labour migration to the GCC states: the case of Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda*. Togo: ITUC-Africa
- Baldwin-Edwards, M. (2005). *Migration in the Middle East and Mediterranean*. Regional Study prepared for the Global Commission on International Migration. Geneva: GCIM.
- Burgmann, V. (2016). *Globalization and labour in the twenty-first century*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Cammett, M. & Issar, S. (2010). *Bricks and Mortar Clientelism: Sectarianism and the Logics of Welfare Allocation in Lebanon*. In *World Politics* 62 (3): 381–421.
- Dixon, P. (2020). *Power-Sharing in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism and Sectarian Authoritarianism*. In *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 20 (2): 117–127

Estim, S., Omeira, M & Seiko, S. (2009). *Caring is work: meeting social care needs in Lebanon*. Florence: ILO

Garofalo-Geymonat, G. & Marchetti, S. (2017). A global landscape of voices for labour rights and social recognition. In Garofalo-Geymonat, G., Marchetti, S. & Kyritsis, P. (eds), *Domestic workers speak: a global fight for rights and recognition* (pp. 12-19). UK: Beyond Trafficking and Slavery.

Halawi, I. (2020). *Consociational Power-Sharing in the Arab World as Counter-Revolution*. In *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 20(2), 128-136.

Hamill, K. (2011). *Trafficking of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon: A legal analysis*. Kafa (Enough) Violence and Exploitation. Retrieved May 21st, 2021 from <https://kafa.org.lb/sites/default/files/2018-12/PRpdf37.pdf>

Hanieh, A. (2013). Framing the Region: Imperialism and the Middle East. In *Lineages of revolt: Issues of contemporary capitalism in the Middle East*. (pp. 19- 46). Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Hochreuther, E. (2019). *Resistance under repression: the political mobilisation of female migrant domestic workers in Lebanon*. Malmö: Kultur och samhälle.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell (2000), Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value. In Hutton, W. and Giddens, A. (eds), *On The Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Human Rights Watch. (2008). *Annex: Deaths of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon*. Retrieved June 10th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/XnU0VPc>

Human Rights Watch. (2008). *Lebanon: Migrant domestic workers dying every week*. Retrieved June 10th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/7nU0Z58>

IDWF. (2021). *IDWF Affiliates*. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from <https://idwfed.org/en/affiliates/middle-east-and-north-africa>

IDWF. (2020). *The impacts of covid-19 on domestic workers and policy responses*. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/Pni6vPQ>

IDWFED. (2020). *In the Middle East and Gulf Countries: “Corona is not the Virus, Kafala is”*. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/ani68pq>

ILO. (2013). *Action Programme for Protecting the Rights of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon: Midterm Evaluation Report*. Retrieved May 5th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/dni618J>

ILO. (2013) *Tricked and trapped: human trafficking in the Middle East*. Beirut: ILO Regional Office for the Arab States.

ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour, 1930. Retrieved June 9th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/mnU0NNB>

ILO Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers, 2011. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/uni6Bwp>

ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment, 2019. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/Nni6Cy6>

ILO. (2016). *Intertwined - An study of employers of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon*. Geneva: ILO. Retrieved March, 24th 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/Dni6ZgS>

ILO. (2016). *Migrant Domestic Workers Across the World: global and regional estimates*. Geneva: ILO. Retrieved March, 24th 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/Ani6J66>

ILO. (2016). *Women at work: trends 2016*. Geneva: ILO Retrieved March, 24th 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/3ni6HUB>

ILO. (2017). *Employer-migrant worker relationships in the Middle East: Exploring scope for internal labour market mobility and fair migration*. Beirut: ILO Regional Office for Arab States

ILO. (2018). *World employment and social outlook: Trends for women 2018 - Global snapshot*. Geneva: ILO. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/Nni6Giw>

ILO. (2018). *ILO Global estimates on international migrant workers - Results and Methodology*. Geneva: ILO. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_652001/lang--en/index.htm

IOM. (2015). *The other migrant crisis: protecting migrant workers against exploitation in the Middle East and North Africa*. Geneva: IOM

IOM (2016). The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, 2019. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from <https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>

IOM. (2020). *World Migration Report 2020*. Geneva: IOM

Jureidini, R. (2009). *In the shadows of family life: toward a history of domestic service in Lebanon*. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 5(3), 74-101

Jureidini, R. (2010), *Trafficking and Contract Migrant Workers in the Middle East*.

Jureidini, R. & Moukarbel, N. (2004). *Female Sri Lankan domestic workers in Lebanon: A case of 'contract slavery'?* *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30 (4), 581-607

Kafa. (2021). *Kafa (Enough) Violence and exploitation*. Retrieved May 30th, 2021 from <https://www.end-violence.org/members/kafa-enough-violence-exploitation>

Kaldbey, D. (2014). *Building theory across struggles: queer feminist thought from Lebanon*.

Khan, A. & Harroff-Travel, H. (2011). *Reforming the Kafala: Challenges and opportunities in moving forwards*. ILO Regional Office for the Arab States. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 20 (3), 293-313.

Khatib, L. (2008). Gender, citizenship and political agency in Lebanon. In: *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35 (3), 437-451

Kuzbari, N. (2018). *Domestic work in Lebanon: what are some of the main factors that contribute to the continued exploitation of women migrant domestic workers in Lebanon?*. Beirut: IWSAW - Lebanese American University.

Laiboni, N. (2020). *A Job at any cost: Experiences of African Women Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East*. GAATW. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from https://gaatw.org/publications/Africa_Domestic_Work_Consolidated_regional_report.pdf

LAW. (2020). *Policy Brief - The Kafala system in Lebanon: how can we obtain dignity and rights for migrant domestic workers?* Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from

<http://www.legalactionworldwide.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/MDWs-Policy-Brief-1.pdf>

Longuenesse, E. & Tabar P. (2014). *Migrant workers and class struggle in Lebanon: class, race, nationality and gender*. Retrieved May 21st, 2021 from <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01305367/document>

Mahi, R. (2017). The difference self-organizing makes; the creative resistance of domestic workers. In Garofalo-Geymonat, G., Marchetti, S. & Kyritsis, P. (eds), *Domestic workers speak: a global fight for rights and recognition* (pp. 165-169). UK: Beyond Trafficking and Slavery.

Majed, R. (2019). "Born to be exported"?: *The post-civil war Lebanese youth (s) 1 and the rupture between education and employment*. In *Youth at the Margins* (pp. 83-103). Routledge.

Majed, R. (2020). *For a Sociology of Sectarianism: Bridging the Disciplinary Gaps beyond the "Deeply Divided Societies" Paradigm*. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of the Middle East*.

Majed, R. (2020). *For a Sociology of Sectarianism: Bridging the Disciplinary Gaps beyond the "Deeply Divided Societies" Paradigm*. In Hanafi, S., Obuse, K. & Salvatore, A. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of the Middle East*. UK: Oxford University Press

Mansour, C. (2008). *Maid in Lebanon 2: voices from home*.

Moukarbel, N. (2009). *Sri Lankan housemaids in Lebanon: a case of 'symbolic violence' and 'everyday forms of resistance'*. Amsterdam: IMISCOE Dissertations - Amsterdam University Press

Nasri, A. & Wissam, T. (2014). *Access to justice for migrant domestic workers in Lebanon*. Geneva: ILO

Pande, A. (2012). *From balcony talk and practical prayers to illegal collectives*. *Gender and Society*, 26 (3), 382-405

Pande, A. (2013). *The paper that you have in your hand in my freedom: migrant domestic work and the sponsorship (Kafala) system in Lebanon*. *International Migration Review*, 47 (2), 414-441

Pérez-Orozco, A. (2009). *Global care chains*. Gender, Migration and Development Series. Santo Domingo: UN-INSTRAW.

Quito Consensus, 2007. Retrieved March 24th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/XnU034c>

Rintakumpu, F. (2019). *Lebanese civil society organizations and the case of female migrant domestic workers*. In: Arab civil society actors and their quest to influence policy-making. Beirut: AUB - Issam Fares Institute for Public Policies and International Affairs

Tayah, M. (2014) *Organizing Domestic Workers through Research: The Story of a Participatory Action Research with Women Migrant Domestic Workers, NGOs, and Union members in Lebanon*. ILO. Retrieved May 5th, 2021 from <https://cutt.ly/4ni6SQA>

8. Annex

8.1. Interviews

Interview 1: Egna Legna activists and social organizers

In May 2021 I conducted a face-to-face interview with two social organizers from Egna Legna, a 3-year-old community-based organization funded by Ethiopian workers working to support migrant domestic workers in the country from all nationalities. Rasha is an ex-live-in migrant from Ethiopia and has lived in Lebanon for thirteen years. After escaping her employers, she became an activist and one of the six main social organizers of Egna Legna, a 3-year-old community-based organization fighting for the rights of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. Bashar is a Syrian refugee who was hosted by the Migrant Community Center in 2016 when he first arrived in Lebanon and then started volunteering with it as well as with Egna Legna in solidarity with migrant domestic workers in Lebanon.

How old are you? Where do you come from? How long have you been living and working in Lebanon?

My name is Masrasha but here everyone calls me Rasha. I'm from Ethiopia and I have lived in Lebanon for thirteen years.

Did you know about the *kafala* system before coming to Lebanon? What was the information that you had about the country before entering it?

In Ethiopia, my friends, cousins or even work colleagues in my office talked so good about Lebanon. For instance, they said that I would have a phone, since at that time we didn't have mobile phones in Ethiopia. Yeah, overall Lebanon was an extremely good country.

They did not give me details about the country. They told me that I would just stay there and directly work. In the recruitment office they told me about everything I needed to know. They told me that I would have a daily work schedule and then I would be done and have free time.

I was studying in Ethiopia and they told me that, if I went there to work, then I would be able to continue my studies there [in Lebanon]. They promised me that I would be able to work and continue my studies at the same time. Then, they told me that I would depend on what my employers would agree upon.

In this way, I decided to come to Lebanon. However, when I arrived in Lebanon, I didn't speak Arabic. They took my passport away from me and I had to sign a contract that I didn't understand because it was written in Arabic and there was no English or Ethiopian language translation. Then, at the house I was working at, I didn't have any day off, I didn't have a phone, they continued keeping my passport away from me.

Which were your main tactics to resist or try to change your job conditions?

I arrived at the office and I didn't know how to speak Arabic. The first thing that I lost was my name: my actual name is Mashrasha, but I was named Rashab by my employers. Not only I lost my status as a human being but even my name, which is part of my identity. The room where I stayed in the home was the balcony with a couch that opens up and becomes a bed near to a garbage can and a gas tank, so it wasn't exactly safe. When I went to sleep the doors were closed and locked. The balcony doors did only open between 5.30 to 6.00 am in the morning when the employers woke me up to work. I felt like an animal. I needed to get permission even to eat or drink. I worked about three to four years and I felt like I needed to be patient to get paid and, yeah, I kept telling myself to be patient. I got to a point where I couldn't communicate with my family for eight months because they [the employers] would not allow me to do so. And then the family would go out and I was not able to stay at home. I would stay in between, on the stairs. Because they had two floors, the first floor and the second floor, and I worked in both apartments, one in the morning and the other one in the afternoon. In the morning I worked in their parents' place and then, in the afternoon, I took care of the children, washed, cleaned, etc. You can't even imagine how racist they are, their racism is beyond imagination.

When did you join Egna Legna and why? How did you know about it?

Rasha: I left madame's house when I realized that I could not take it anymore. In this country, to live you have to be strong. It is so common to walk in the streets and get harassed. You know, when you're black, young people and old people harass you. I used to take the bus and vans to work, at first. I didn't have the strength, so I used to leave the bus and walk. Even in taxis, I would leave and walk.

And then, one day, my neighbour told me that there was a school where I could go and study. That was MCC [Migrant Community Center]. I went there and I learnt Arabic. I learnt the letters and conversations. There I met a group of people who were establishing Egna Legna. It was only three months old at that time. So I met them and I realized that I was helping people

who were in my position, who had left their madame's homes at the time and they were doing the same, so we thought: why don't we help each other out and work together. And this is how I founded Egna Legna.

Was Egna Legna just formed by Ethiopian domestic workers or were other Lebanese people part of the organization too?

Rasha: Egna Legna is an Ethiopian organization and we used to help women who were abused or harassed, who were not paid, who were kicked out of the houses. That's what we did three years ago. Now we've been here for three years and, especially after the explosion we grew stronger and also a lot of women came to us. We're helping everyone, not just Ethiopian women: we're also helping migrant women from other nationalities as well as Lebanese people.

Can you talk about Egna Legna, its members, its goals, as well as describe a bit how you organize in terms of decision-making and the implementation of projects?

Rasha: All the members of Egna Legna have the same position as far as decision-making is concerned. We are seven main leaders. Bonchi is in Canada and Nargis, Tariqwa, Rasha and Makdis, Enno and Massi are in Lebanon. One is in Canada and the rest we are in Lebanon. We also have a center in Ethiopia where we do different trainings, such as cooking, hairdressing and soap making workshops. We also raise awareness with domestic workers that have come back from Lebanon about the kafala system.

What are the main achievements of Egna Legna?

Rasha: Before, the organization was small and now it has grown bigger and bigger. They were women that before lived in the center but now they can live in a hotel or have their own apartment.

Bashar: Now the organization is known by the Ethiopian embassy in Lebanon and the embassy works together with us.

Rasha: Now Egna Legna also works with single moms. We provide them with a lawyer that helps them with their rights in the cases where the father of their children stops paying. We also help them get a fixed salary so that they are able to get an income when they are on holidays or when they travel to Ethiopia. We also provide them with a PCR test for the flight to come back to their countries of origin.

Bashar: Some womens' employers keep their passports away from them or do not pay them their monthly salary. In this regard, in Egna Legna we work with lawyers that help them recover their passports and the non-paid salaries. There are also women that have psychological traumas and in Egna Legna we help them with their psychological treatment.

There has been a long history of organization within the migrant domestic workers community with solidarity from sectors of the Lebanese society but the *kafala* system remains in place. What are the main obstacles to abolish the *kafala* system?

Rasha: The kafala system is paper based. When you enter the house of the 'madam', you forget about the paper that you sign, you don't take your right. Last year, many domestic workers committed suicide. These women are not crazy. They committed suicide because of the kafala system and its unfairness. For example, I used to sleep in the balcony, the madam used to take me to the balcony at night and take me out in the morning. I couldn't even breathe. What's more, you don't have vacation and you are very bothered. When I came to this country, I was tested and everything was fine, but because of my employers' behavior, I became sick and my mental health deteriorated. If I wanted to eat or take my bath, I should ask for permission.

For this reason, everyone has to work to end the Kafala system. Even the madame doesn't know what is written on the paper that we sign. The contract is usually for one year but the recruitment agency [in Lebanon], in order to win more, says 2 years. Madame, to benefit more, says 3 years. Sometimes, madame says that she will give us the money when we go out [finish working for them]. This is my salary, so madame should just give it to me. I should be free to do whatever with it. You are supposed to do whatever they want like they had a remote control, because with the *kafala* system you do not have freedom.

Which are your current needs and demands? Have they changed because of the covid19 pandemic and the economic crisis that Lebanon is currently facing?

Rasha: With the dollar crisis work stops and people need help with friends. And a lot of what we were helping out with. Fourteen or fifteen women were living together and we even found forty-one women living in the same house. And they were not able to afford food or anything. With the dollar crisis we were helping with food boxes: we were distributing flour, pasta, milk, rice, sugar... We're doing the best we can, and even with Covid and with the lockdown... yeah, we're still trying to work as much as we can, because we were forced to close our offices. But we still persevered. We went to check for people who were sick and gave them masks,

sanitizers, medicine and paid their rent because during the lockdown we weren't able to leave their house to work, so they needed economic help with the rent as well. We followed up with a doctor that was helping out. Yes, everything was more difficult with Covid.

It was even more difficult with the explosion... but thank God the explosion is over now. We're still working and helping out now. Sometimes it makes me laugh because I'll go to the supermarket and the increase in price hikes are ridiculous. And I'll laugh at shop owners because they'll ask me to pay in dollars and I'll ask them: do you think I have dollars? And they answer that I should have dollars because I'm a foreigner and that I am hiding them. But, if there are no more dollars in the country how is it possible that I have dollars myself? It just doesn't make sense.

So, I assume that nowadays all the domestic workers' salaries are paid in dollars...

Rasha: Yes, there are three main different payment methods, if the workers are paid at all... Those are with the previous 1,500LL/\$ rate, others with the 3,900LL/\$ rate and also with the black-market rates [around 13,000LL/\$].

Bashar: In my two and a half experience working at MCC and Eгна Legna as well I have realised that there isn't any woman that gets fully paid. Also, nowadays it is very rare for women to be paid at the market exchange rate.

Rasha: If I was being paid between \$450 before the crisis, now I will get paid \$100 under the assumption that I am being paid more because at the black-market rate \$100 is 1,300,000 LL. Before, if you think about it, with the 1,500LL/\$ rate it was much less. So, this is how people are thinking about it. They're thinking that they're doing us a favour by paying us in dollars, but less.

I see... because you're working now, aren't you?

Rasha: Yes, I'm working in a company that has to do with auditing and banks, but I prefer not giving more information about it. The work that I do encompasses cleaning the office, serving coffees when there are meetings as well as delivering things. I'm doing several different things; I can't give you an exact name of my job position since I am actually also doing all the secretary work. Yes, I'm doing several jobs at the same time.

Bashar: This reminds me of when I first came to Lebanon, they were also taking advantage of me at my workplace.

In which ways would you say that being a member of Eгна Legna has changed your experiences in Lebanon? Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

Rasha: If we want to come back, for example, for sure there won't be any racism, they won't ask where are you from, and they will ask if you want any help we can help from our hearts, they would do this because people there could speak more than one language, you could have a different religion, so we don't discriminate.

There are around seventy-seven languages and eighty-one religions in Ethiopia. So there are for example a lot of Christians, Muslims, Hindus, etc. but no one will ever discriminate against you from where you come from. There is also a lot of love, and maybe I won't have the words to describe that but if you sit with us there, you'd feel as if you were sitting with your own parents. So it is like we see and treat people as humans, not looking at their race or ethnicity. In religion there is no politics. So they do not interfere in politics and they do not interfere in religion and they do not also interfere in what you're wearing. You have your own freedom, so basically they do not interfere in your life or let's say your personal life, too.

In this country most of us don't have a passport or anything to show who we are. So for example I don't have a passport, nor residency... so when you open my phone the first thing you will see is the number of Engalenga.

Something interesting is that most of us who are in Engalenga are close to each other. If a girl from Engalenga escaped or left the house, they would contact the police and take back the passport. If you go there and then say "I want to leave", they would put you in prison. Like, she would go to prison because her boss might have raised a complaint against her saying that she wants to leave. If your boss raises a complaint about you, they will take his voice and not yours in court, they won't listen to what you have to say.

When someone says she wants to travel, you have [... a French word maybe?] and now the country allowed the people who have no documents and then they registered them for the whole six months [I don't know which months tho], like they would give us new papers for other six months so like the country can gain profit, so that we can be in their system. When we are in

the system, only then we can travel for six more months. And yes, the documents also get renewed every six months, and that is how the country works.

Interview 2: Sarketlu, ex-domestic worker from Ethiopia and activist working for MSF

I conducted two face-to-face interviews with Sarketlu on May 24th, 2021 and on May 30th, an ex-domestic worker from Ethiopia and an activist that has worked for ARM (Anti Racist Movement) and its MCC (Migrant Community Center) and is currently working for MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières).

How old are you? Where do you come from? How long have you been living and working in Lebanon?

I'm 25 years old, I came to Lebanon from Ethiopia in 2011, so when I was 15 years old. I've been living here for ten years and I don't have the privilege of going back to my country and then being able to go back here.

What was the information that you had about Lebanon before coming? Did you know about the *kafala* system?

I didn't know anything. I just came to visit my sister, this is what I knew. And then I went to my sister's house which was the mother of my employer's house and I became a domestic worker. Yes, I stayed with my sister for fifteen days and then I started working for the other family.

The sad thing is that this continues happening nowadays... girls come without having any knowledge about the situation in Lebanon...

Yes, exactly. They don't present Lebanon as a bad country. I mean, it is not a bad country, but some of its people are, as I have been able to discover. In the news we don't see Lebanon as a bad country, so this is why you don't have an idea about how life is in Lebanon and how racist people are.

When was the first time that you were part of an organization fighting for the rights of domestic workers? How did you know about it?

I was introduced to MCC in order to study. I actually saw it on Facebook when I was searching for places to study, not anything in particular. Then I started working for them.

Were you working for a Lebanese family and living in their house when you were doing this research for study options?

No, no. I escaped my first family after eight months and I became a freelancer, which means that I was not living inside the family's house.

Can you describe the main achievements of MCC?

We have achieved many things. MCC is a shelter, a safe place and a second home for migrant domestic workers. We are a family and a place to build and take care of our community. We can pray and even cook since there is a kitchen. The language classes and training workshops are a success but, for me, the major achievement is the family that is created there.

We also have medical services, including mental health programs for our members and our community.

Can you talk about MCC's organization in terms of decision-making and the implementation of projects?

ARM decision-making, not MCC, is hierarchical. I have been pointing out several times the fact that some leadership positions are relegated to people working abroad, such as Paris, and not to affected people such as migrant domestic workers.

Can you tell me about your position in MSF and for how long you have been working there?

I have worked at MSF for a year. I am the coordinator secretary of a program that started last year that works specifically with migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. We are working together with MCC and Eгна Legna to offer them medical services and medical health treatment. For example, we go to Eгна Legna every Sunday and they have our clinic's service. It is also an exchange of services because Eгна Legna has also helped us out with food provision for other people benefiting from MSF services. They share their food packages with us and we offer them medical support.

When did you decide to become an activist and why?

I don't remember exactly when but around the end of 2018. There was several women dying at that point and they were saying that they had committed suicide. And I was pissed off. And

I started investigating about it but I was short of information and I didn't know how to do it. I was also afraid that they would kill me if they knew that I was doing research. That's when I tried to become an activist and I became that day by day.

Were you doing activism alone or with other people from your community?

There were groups from my community, but I began alone. I think I might have a different view on some things.

In which sense?

As a migrant domestic worker, I don't think that someone will decide to come to another country to commit suicide. I have a different view on how they died and how their deaths were covered by the Lebanese society. I need to prove why and how a women might have committed suicide.

I see... and, in which ways were you an activist?

I try to fight for the ones who can't fight, because they don't know how or, if they know how, they don't have the ability to go out or they don't have a phone to talk about their pain.

I see... because the *kafala* system makes it all very difficult right? For example, how do you know and find the migrant domestic workers that need help?

Well, I don't go and put their life in danger. Yes, I have to hear it from themselves. Some of them used to come to MCC. Sometimes, they would come by walking their dog because some don't even have a day off. So, knowing how they struggled and... I used to struggle as well... but some struggle more than I did when I was living at my employer's house. Yes... Some are being abused sexually and physically. So, knowing about all these experiences gave me more and more reasons to be an activist.

How I see it... with the *kafala* system, all these abuses that happen to domestic workers take place in the private sphere, in a closed space... and I imagine that it is very difficult to resist it. Could you tell me what are the main strategies to resist the living and working conditions inside the house?

You have to be strong and try to fight for your rights. That's all. They will of course try to stop you but, if you are strong, you can make it, I guess.

But, in which ways exactly? By having a conversation with your employers, for example?

Yes, communicating and deciding not to do something if you don't feel like it. And I believe that you should be really strong to really decide not to do something that they order you to do. It's a slavery going on here. And you don't know the consequences of your actions, that's the scariest part, you know? Sometimes we know what the consequences are so that's why we keep silent and don't refuse to do certain things. Even if we know that it is our right to say no, if we know that the consequences can lead to death or that might have an influence to someone that we love, for instance, by losing our salaries, we would go backwards instead of going forwards with our rights, so this is why sometimes we won't protest. Yes, I can't fight for my rights because I know that the consequences will be really hurtful.

Do you know about someone or, maybe with your experience, that has been able to change their working conditions by communicating with their employers?

Well, when I was at the employer's house, she told me to clean the house's windows standing from outside the building and I said no and then she took me to the agency. And, as well, when she told me to wear a uniform, I told her no. At that time, I wasn't an activist, I was just a teenager that didn't know what to do. I had never worked under any command before or under any *kafala* or anything like this in someone's house actually. So, I was just a teenager who has, you know, like a, how to say it, no thinking. But still, in my case it was better if I spoke out for those things in those situations. It comes out of survival, I think. Let's say, my father taught me to stand for my rights, so that's what I tried.

The experiences of the migrant domestic workers that are outside the house, the freelancers, might be different from the ones that live in their employers' house because there you find yourself alone, while if you are outside you can find organizations, such as Egna Legna or MCC whereby you can work collectively... What do you think about this?

Yes, exactly, this is totally true. But I didn't find any organizations when I went out, when I escaped. I was trying to figure out everything by myself and little by little meeting people and trying to figure out what was happening. I didn't have any organization.

Did the current organizations exist at that time, around 2011 – 2012?

There are a lot of organizations nowadays. At that time, I only knew about the UN.

In which ways do you think that the experiences of migrant domestic workers are improved by the current existence of these organizations?

Well, I feel that most of us, as freelancers, we find those organizations who can fight for us and / or even they can just support us by words, not even with anything material. It helps us a lot and makes us improve. Knowing that someone has been fighting for us in the organization gives us strength and meaning to continue fighting for others in our same situation. Because, yeah, it makes us realize that there are many more people who are struggling and that we need to change that. So, I think that it improves a lot. The situation now is really better than before.

I liked what you said about words and the fact that through the organization and knowing more women affected by the *kafala* helped you put into words and make more sense of what you were struggling with.

Yes, I believe that putting this into words and being able to describe it by sharing your experiences with others is very important.

Has there been any attempt or positive response by the Lebanese institutions to work with these organizations?

She laughs. Of course not. No.

There are a lot of different organizations working for migrant domestic workers rights in Lebanon, such as MCC, Eгна Legna, This is Lebanon, ARM, etc. But, still, it seems that it is not possible to abolish the *kafala* system. What do you think about this? Why is the *kafala* still in place?

Sure. The other day we were talking about abolishing the *kafala* system, but I don't think it will happen. There are many people who fought to abolish it a long time ago and they didn't achieve it. Maybe, the new generation can change it. For instance, if there were mechanisms whereby the employee and the employer could agree on the working terms, where everything is written in a language that the women can understand so that they can know what they are signing on. At list, the contract we can translate it and fix or change the terms of the contracts. We are still humans even if we are migrant workers, we are still humans, we cannot work 24 hours per day or in many houses at the same time. So, even if we can't abolish it, changing it might help. There is a long journey to achieve its abolishment.

The *kafala* starts in Lebanon or in home countries?

Yes, there are agencies there, in our countries, that lie a lot and they don't show them what they are going to be going through. You need to understand that we arrive at the airport in Lebanon, then we go to the agency here and they start yelling at you and you don't understand any of the words that are coming out of his mouth. That's when you realize that there is something going on. And they should stop there, but they can't anymore. They will tell you that 'we paid a lot for you to come, so you can't go back or refuse anything', you know? You just have to sign because if not.. Well, the employers and the agencies here are like twins, they are on the same side.

Information is key, right?

Yes, it is. It is key. We are trying to work on that, actually. As I said, we just know that Lebanon is a very beautiful country. In Ethiopia, they mention the religiosity of Lebanon: Lebanon, the holy "Lebanus". In my country there is a big Christian community. So yes, that's the idea that we have. It is a powerful name for the Christian believers. We don't expect those things when you come. Now we are working on preparing videos to show what's going on.

Have you experienced racism in Lebanon?

Of course. Many people are racist. They are ignorant. It happened to me two times with the same friend. We were in the taxi together and I said to the taxi driver to leave me in Geitawi and to leave my friend, who is Lebanese in Bourj Hammoud. First, in the taxi, they would not look at me, they would always look at her. Also, they would assume that I was going to Bouj Hammoud, which is a poor neighbourhood, and her to Geitawi.

Another example was during the October 2019 Lebanese uprisings. I had hope for the youths. I went there and many would ask me: what are you doing here? They did not consider me as equal to them. They live in their bubbles. They don't want to see. They are used to just ignoring the problems and keeping on.

In which ways do you think that your experience has improved?

We shared our experiences. It was important for me to be with someone that saw me. I see them and they see me. I became myself. I had a sense of sense. They were like a family to me.

The family that I didn't have before. This really helped me psychologically. It was also important because we had knowledge about our rights.

Which are your current needs and demands? Have they changed because of the covid19 pandemic and the economic crisis that Lebanon is currently facing?

Of course, the current demands have changed. If Covid and the economic crisis in Lebanon have had consequences for local people, these are three times higher for migrant domestic workers. After the lockdown and because of the increased effects of the economic crisis, many Lebanese families can no longer afford their maids. This is why last year many migrant domestic workers were abandoned by their employers in front of their embassies. They were thrown in the streets and they remained there for weeks demanding to their embassies to be sent back to their countries. Racism is huge in Lebanon and migrant domestic workers are not treated as human beings. Their vulnerability has been increased because of the lockdown and their mental health has been affected. There have been several suicides. The situation of migrant domestic workers was also very affected by the 2020 Beirut explosion, since many lived in the Karantina neighbourhood next to the port. In fact, I experienced racism from the army after the explosion. My house was very damaged, thank God I was at my workplace when the explosion happened. The thing is that the army was distributing food and they would knock at our doors. It happened to me two times that they would refuse to deliver food to me because I am black and a migrant.

Are you familiar with the concept of 'global care chains'? The concept analyses how countries from the Global North rely on women domestic workers from the Global South. In the Global North women start entering the productive sphere while gender roles are not renegotiated, and care work is still attributed to women that no longer have the time and energy to invest in reproductive tasks. Do you think that Lebanon fits within this analysis and these dynamics of renegotiation of gender roles, the increasing entrance of women in the productive sectors in the migrant domestic workers receiving countries?

I hadn't heard about global care chains before. I believe that the situation of Lebanon is quite special since in most of the households the madame is always at home. Here it is more about prestige. The madams are at home but they don't want to do the care tasks. It is true that in some cases women are not at home, such as when the workers are in charge of old people. But

in Lebanon it has most to do, as I said, about the prestige, about showing other people that you can afford a maid and that you don't clean, because cleaning is seen as an indecent work.