

RESEARCH REPORT

Breaking the Isolation: Access to Information and Media Among Migrant Domestic Workers in Jordan and Lebanon



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Cover Photo: Anonymous from the Philippines washes up after having a few friends over for her 28th birthday in Beirut, Lebanon, 2011. Her situation is good, as her employer treats her well: she gets her salary and is free to move outside the house on her time off. “I have an obligation to help the other women in the building, who don’t have it so good,” she said. Photo credit: © Lucas Pernin

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1. Summary

Migrant domestic workers in Jordan and Lebanon often work and live in isolation, restricted in their communications, unaware of their rights and where to seek help. Employers and employment agencies easily exploit them. This research report describes the information needs of migrant domestic workers, the ways they communicate and access media and information, and how civil society organizations, working with governments, can strengthen these communications channels. The report recommends the following:

1: Expand Effectiveness of Predeparture Training and Information

Despite mandatory predeparture training courses in their countries of origin, only 38 percent of migrant domestic workers surveyed for this study reported completing a training course or seminar. Migrants expressed a strong demand for more language training and more information about their employers, their jobs, the terms of their employment contracts, and support services available to them in the destination country. Governments and civil society organizations should work together to improve predeparture training and increase the number of migrants who leave for work abroad well-prepared—with all the information they need.

2: Enforce Requirement for Employment Contracts

Both Jordan and Lebanon mandate employment contracts for domestic workers, but only 48 percent of survey participants said they had signed an employment contract for the job they were performing while 39 percent had no valid contract for their work. Of those who signed employment contracts, only 62 percent said they understood the terms of the contracts. Governments in countries where migrants work should make sure that recruitment agencies and employers follow the law requiring employment contracts and that employees understand the terms and conditions of the contracts they sign.

3: Increase Knowledge about Legal Rights

Migrants have the right by contract to one day of rest per week (19 percent did not know this and many more cannot exercise it). Recruitment agencies and employers routinely confiscate the passports of migrants even though by law migrants have the right to keep them (37 percent did not know this). The majority of respondents did not know the minimum salary to which they were entitled. Few knew about organizations providing legal or other services to migrants. Civil society organizations should promote their services more widely and inform all migrants of their legal rights, including time off, passport retention, and minimum salary.

4: Engage Migrants in Information Dissemination

Some migrants face restrictions on their freedom of movement and ability to socialize with other migrants. Migrants with more freedom are skilled users of digital communications. Given these differences, no single strategy will be effective in reaching all migrant domestic workers. Since migrants themselves are a vital source of information for fellow migrants, they should be seen as active participants in information dissemination strategies. Civil society organizations should involve migrants in the planning, creation, and distribution of information both prior to and after departure.

5: Guarantee Mobile Phone Usage

Mobile phones are the single most important communication tool for migrant domestic workers. Out of all the domestic workers who participated in this research, 82 percent reported that they owned and used their own mobile phone. Employment contracts should have clear provisions

guaranteeing workers the right to communicate with the outside world, specifically through mobile phones.

6: Encourage Radio Programs for Migrant Communities

Radio offers a great deal of untapped potential for providing information and news to migrants as well as engaging them as active producers of content. Sixty-two percent of respondents in Jordan and 45 percent in Lebanon own or have regular access to a radio. Seventy-two percent of migrants with their own mobile phones in Jordan and 58 percent in Lebanon said their phones were radio-enabled. Radio stations should be encouraged to create programs for migrant communities, scheduled for late evening hours when migrants are off work, and sponsored by businesses offering services to migrants.

2. Introduction



With deft hands, Rubinah made the bed as a professional chambermaid would. She was participating in a training course in Jakarta for employment as a domestic worker in Hong Kong. Photo credit: © Sim Chi Yin/VII Mentor Program

Although domestic workers are a vital part of the workforce in many countries, they remain one of the most exploited and least protected groups of workers. Their working hours are among the longest and most unpredictable and, despite some progress in the last decade, they continue to be excluded from many of the basic protections other workers take for granted, such as limits on working hours and minimum wage coverage.¹

Domestic work is also one of the most isolated forms of work. Domestic workers often work alone in private households and do not share a physical workplace or employer with other workers, making it harder for them to obtain reliable information or organize collectively. Migrants employed in domestic work are doubly isolated, often travelling great distances to work abroad and facing language barriers that make it even harder to obtain accurate information. In parts of Asia and the Arab world, the two regions where legal protections for domestic work are weakest, employers deliberately impose rules that exacerbate domestic workers' isolation through restrictions on leaving the workplace, phone use, and socializing with other workers.² The resulting social isolation not only takes a psychological toll but also leaves workers open to manipulation and deprives them of the chance to get support if they are mistreated.

A substantial body of research has shed light on the restrictive conditions under which migrant domestic workers are employed in the Arab region. Much less is known about the extent to which, despite their closely controlled working environments, migrants manage to find ways to communicate, obtain information, and build social networks. Given their highly circumscribed working conditions and the fact that government oversight of domestic work is weak or absent altogether, it is crucial to ensure that migrants have access to reliable information about their rights and can communicate with the outside world.

This study is the first of its kind to investigate domestic workers' access to information, communication strategies, and media use patterns in the Arab region. It is motivated by the following questions:

- 1) What information do migrant domestic workers most need regarding their employment conditions and rights—information they are not currently receiving?
- 2) How and to what extent do migrant domestic workers communicate, receive information, and access media in their daily lives while employed abroad? How do various nationalities compare in sharing information and accessing media, and could strategies devised by some groups be implemented by others?
- 3) Which forms of media or communication are most easily accessible and effective for outreach and information delivery? How, where, and in what forms could information best be delivered?

This report summarizes the findings of research carried out in Jordan and Lebanon to answer these questions. It also provides suggestions for ways NGOs, trade union representatives, government agencies, embassies, and other stakeholders can use various types of media for large-scale outreach and information dissemination. In addition, it explores how migrants themselves can participate in media production as content providers, telling their stories and sharing experiences and opinions through community-based media.

The focus of this study is on migrant workers who do not speak Arabic as a mother tongue, because these workers face the most significant obstacles in communicating with the outside world. The study reports on several of the main migrant groups in both countries: Ethiopian, Nepalese, and Sri Lankan workers in Lebanon; and Filipina and Sri Lankan workers in Jordan. Fieldwork, carried out in the two countries between March and July 2011, included interviews, group discussions, observations, and a survey of 522 migrant domestic workers.

The survey of 522 migrants is not representative of the entire population of migrant domestic workers employed in Jordan and Lebanon. Since many of the interviews were conducted in public spaces frequented by migrants, there is a bias in favor of those workers with greater freedom to move outside their employers' homes. Those forbidden by their employers from going out on their own were more difficult to contact. Thus, the study's results can best be seen as benchmarks and case studies to elucidate broad patterns.

The report is organized into four main parts: (1) an overview of the situation of migrant domestic workers in Jordan and Lebanon; (2) an analysis of migrants' key information needs, including what they most need to know prior to departure and after beginning their employment; (3) a discussion of the ways migrants communicate and access media and information, as well as an analysis of what impedes them from getting the information they need; and (4) a synthesis of lessons learned and suggestions for expanding communication channels and using media outlets more effectively for information delivery, community building, and grassroots mobilization. The report's appendix provides a description of the research methodology.

Although the study pertains specifically to Jordan and Lebanon, it should be a useful resource for groups working with migrants in other parts of the Arab region as well. It is the hope of everyone connected with this report that the information drawn from the research will be used in ways to help migrant domestic workers become less isolated, more visible, and able to come together to make their voices heard.

3. Overview



A log book in the drawer of a village recruiter in Indonesia contains page upon page of personal details about the women he had sent overseas: their passport photos, departure date, destination and educational qualifications. Recruiters lament that the supply of “fresh blood” was running low—because so many village women were already working overseas. Photo credit: © Sim Chi Yin/VII Mentor Program

Amanthi, a 42-year-old Sri Lankan woman, has worked as a live-in domestic worker in Jordan for 13 years. She has her own small room in her employer’s home with a bed and television set. In the evenings after finishing her work, Amanthi watches Sri TV and One Sri Lanka, Sinhala-language channels broadcast via satellite. An ardent cricket fan, she also watches matches on other South Asian satellite channels. She has her own short-wave radio, and for two hours every evening she can catch up with news from home via a Sinhala-language program broadcast by the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation.³ To stretch her monthly savings, she decided not to buy her own mobile phone, instead using her employer’s phone to send text messages to her daughter in Sri Lanka. Once or twice a week she calls her family using her employer’s Skype account.

Amanthi described herself as lucky to have what she considers a lenient employer. The Indonesian woman who works in the neighboring building is not so fortunate. “They don’t let her out. She’s a prisoner. She knows nothing about Jordan,” Amanthi said. Amanthi’s bedroom window looks out onto the neighbors’ home, and although the two women do not share a common language, they communicate by gesturing to each other window-to-window. Soon after the Indonesian woman was hired, her employer paid her salary but, because this was her first encounter with Jordanian money, she did not know how much she had been paid. She showed Amanthi the money through the window, and Amanthi signalled to her the dollar amount.

The Indonesian woman’s circumstances are similar to those of Anusha, another Sri Lankan domestic in Amman. Anusha, 23, was interviewed several months after she had fled her employer’s home. She had been employed as a domestic worker for a family who did not give her a regular day off and forbid her from having a mobile phone or leaving the house without a member of the employer’s family. Aside from the few precious calls she was allowed to make from her employer’s landline to her family in Sri Lanka, Anusha seldom had a chance to speak her

native language. With a heavy workload, Anusha said she slept for only five hours each night, usually on the kitchen floor or in the children's bedroom. She caught snippets of the Arabic-language television programs her employers watched but said she was afraid they would hit her if they found her watching the television herself instead of working. There was a radio in one of the bedrooms, but Anusha didn't dare to use it. It was not the strict rules, however, but the fact that the employers had failed to pay her for nearly 12 months, that prompted her to leave. After repeated requests for her salary went unanswered, she escaped and sought help from her embassy.

These women's stories illustrate the wide range of circumstances in which migrant domestic workers must try to communicate with others and access media. To contextualize their situation requires an understanding of recruitment processes and working conditions in the region. In Lebanon, Jordan, and the Arab Gulf states, migrant domestic workers are hired as temporary "guest" workers under sponsorship systems that make them dependent on local sponsors for their residence and work permits. In the case of domestic workers, the sponsor is almost always the employer and exercises considerable control over the worker's legal status and employment mobility.⁴ Employers typically pay \$2,000 or more in recruitment agency and government fees to bring domestic workers to Lebanon and Jordan. Should a dispute arise or if the worker "runs away," the employer may not be reimbursed by the agency for the fees paid. This possibility, combined with the fact that (at least in principle) the sponsor is considered legally responsible for the worker during her stay in the country and could be held liable if she were to go missing, means that many employers are reluctant to allow domestic workers to move freely outside the house or to communicate with other migrants. Workers' passports are often confiscated and their movement and communication with people outside the employer's household is often closely controlled. Some employers explicitly forbid contact with other migrants and lock domestic workers in their homes when they leave. Limits are also placed on workers' social activities outside the household because employers fear they may initiate romantic relationships or even engage in sex work. Not all employers restrict mobility and communication in these ways, and indeed some employees are free to move about the city as they choose, but reports by the International Labour Organization and human rights groups suggest that the more restrictive practices are the norm.⁵ In a study of employer attitudes in Lebanon carried out by the NGO KAFA, out of a sample of roughly 100 employers, the majority opposed locking domestic workers in the house, but 31 percent supported and practiced it.⁶ Fifty-four percent said they gave their employees time off from work, but of those only 20 percent allowed them to leave the house independently during time off.

The unfavorable laws and practices under which they are employed, combined with the isolated nature of their work, make migrant domestic workers particularly susceptible to mistreatment. The most commonly reported problems are nonpayment and underpayment of wages, excessive workloads, long working hours, and denial of rest days. Food deprivation and physical, psychological, and sexual abuse are also frequently reported.⁷ In some instances, domestic workers experience total isolation from the outside world. With few opportunities to form friendships and social networks, they are more apt to suffer emotionally and psychologically. The high rate of suicide among domestic workers in Lebanon and Jordan has been attributed to these circumstances.⁸ Those who are in desperate situations may be more likely to resort to suicide when cut off from social support.

Although legally forbidden by the terms of their employment contracts, increasing numbers of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon and Jordan are now opting to reside independently of their employers. These so-called "freelancers" rent apartments or single rooms with other migrants and work full-time for a single household or on an hourly or daily basis for more than one family and

as caretakers and cleaners in offices and other locations. Many are initially employed to work on two-year contracts as live-in domestic workers but either decide to live on their own at the end of the contract period or leave their employers' homes prematurely, often without their passport or other possessions. Others are brought over by family members or friends already employed in the country. While some obtain residence and work permits by paying people to act as their sponsors, others have no documentation or valid permits. "Freelancers" have more freedom to choose their employment and to socialize with other migrants, but the autonomy gained from living independently comes with disadvantages, as they face uncertainty in finding well-paid jobs and avoiding detention and deportation.

3.1 Demographics of the Domestic Worker Population in Lebanon

An estimated 200,000 Asian and African migrants are employed as domestic workers in Lebanon, a country of 4 million. NGOs estimate that as many as 85,000 of these workers may not have valid residence permits. There are no reliable figures on the breakdown by nationality, but data from the Ministry of Labor on work permits issued to migrants in 2010 provide some indication. These figures do not include those working without obtaining or renewing work permits.

Table 1: Breakdown by Nationality of Migrant Domestic Worker Permits Issued in Lebanon in 2010

Nationality	Number
Ethiopia	31,556
Philippines	29,049
Bangladesh	24,081
Sri Lanka	12,527
Nepal	11,975
Madagascar	3,470
Other nationalities	5,283
Total	117,941

Source: Ministry of Labor as cited by Kathleen Hamill⁹

The governments of Ethiopia, Madagascar, Nepal, and the Philippines have taken measures to discourage their citizens from migrating to Lebanon for employment as domestic workers. The Philippines imposed a ban on migration for employment in Lebanon in 2006 over concerns about poor working conditions and abuse. It imposed a similar ban on Jordan in 2008. In 2008, following a series of deaths of Ethiopian domestic workers, the Ethiopian government officially prohibited its citizens from traveling to Lebanon. The ban was in effect during the period of research for this study, yet migrants from Ethiopia were continuing to arrive in Beirut. Although the government of Nepal has not instituted a formal ban, it is

reportedly reluctant to issue permits for women leaving for Lebanon because it cannot ensure their safety. The government's attitude acts like a ban, encouraging migration through irregular channels.

Unable to migrate through official routes, many migrants resort to dealing with middlemen who engage in illicit recruitment practices, creating fake itineraries, planning transit routes through third countries, or paying bribes. The vast majority of Nepali migrants who participated in this research had travelled to Lebanon via India rather than flying directly from Kathmandu.

3.2 Demographics of the Domestic Worker Population in Jordan

The Jordanian government estimates that there are 70,000 migrant domestic workers in Jordan, a country of 6.5 million. But as in Lebanon, there are no reliable statistics on the total population or the breakdown by nationality. Nongovernmental sources have estimated that the figure is closer to 98,000.¹⁰ The three main groups are Filipinos, Indonesians, and Sri Lankans. As described for Lebanon, the governments of all three countries have at some stage taken steps to discourage migration to Jordan. At the time research for this report was conducted, bans on the deployment of domestic workers to Jordan were being imposed by the governments of Indonesia and the Philippines, although migrants continued to arrive from both countries. In an effort to maintain the flow of workers and keep wages low, the Jordanian government has taken steps to allow the recruitment of domestic workers from Bangladesh and Ethiopia.¹¹

4. Key Information Needs



Lebanese citizens protest against the abuse of migrant domestic workers on the occasion of International Women's Day in Beirut on March 8, 2009. Photo credit: © Ramzi Haidar/AFP/ Getty Images

4.1 Sources of Information and Knowledge Gaps Prior to Departure

One of the primary goals of this study was to pinpoint what vital pieces of information migrant domestic workers do not receive in relation to their employment prior to their departure from their home countries. To investigate this concern, migrants were asked how and from whom they had received information about the destination country and the job they would be taking up, how accurate and reliable they judged the information to be, and what they wished they had been told that they were not. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions indicated a heavy reliance on migrants' own social networks for information, namely family members, friends, and acquaintances who migrated previously, as well as brokers, recruitment agents, and other middlemen.

Information from friends and family members was not always judged to be reliable, however. One Sri Lankan woman in Beirut said that her mother withheld information about the negative aspects of life in Lebanon. "I came here to join my mother. She said Lebanon was a good country. She didn't mention any problems. We had no phone at that time, and she sent me letters telling me to come. She didn't say anything bad." Several migrants expressed a similar sentiment, describing cases in which relatives painted the situation in an overly positive light or filtered out information about the problems facing domestic workers.

A number of women said they had not been prepared for sexual and racial discrimination when arriving in Lebanon. In a focus group discussion with Sri Lankan women in Beirut, several participants described their surprise at the way they were treated at the airport upon arrival. "At the airport, they are treating us very, very badly," one woman said. "They are very rude. In our country, when people come we welcome them with respect. Here they give us orders at the airport. They shout at us." Other workers noted that even when they were warned of the risk of mistreatment or abuse, they had not been dissuaded from migrating. One Sri Lankan woman said

that although her own mother had suffered physical abuse at the hands of her employers in Saudi Arabia, she decided to try her luck and migrate anyway, hoping her own situation would be different. When asked how she came to migrate to Beirut, one Ethiopian woman responded, “[I came] by chance. You just want to leave Ethiopia, so you come to the first place possible.” Further research would be needed to assess how efficacious specific pieces of information might be in influencing decisions about migration. In any case, it is clear that without detailed information about what to expect when they go abroad, migrants will be less prepared to respond if their rights are violated.

In addition to migrants’ own relatives and personal contacts, recruitment agents and brokers are an important source of information about work opportunities abroad. But again, many agents and middlemen provide migrant workers with misleading information, particularly with respect to working conditions and wages. Many workers were promised higher wages than they received, and they were not informed that their first monthly salaries would be deducted by their employers to pay recruitment agencies in the country of employment. Although the practice of salary deductions is prohibited in Jordan and Lebanon, it continues to occur. Workers reported having between three and six months’ salary deducted and said that in many cases, they had not been informed of these deductions beforehand.

Many domestic workers participating in the research were frustrated that they had not received more accurate information in advance from recruitment agencies about the particular circumstances of the homes in which they would work. They wanted to know whether their future employer had children, and if so how many, whether they would be taking care of elderly people or pets, and other details about the amount and type of work they would be expected to carry out. Several Filipina women said they had been told they would work in shops or beauty salons and only later, upon arriving in Jordan, discovered they would be employed in private households.

New evidence suggests that migrants in some countries may be increasingly looking to official sources of information about migration. A survey of domestic workers departing from the Philippines found that government agencies—the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), the Overseas Workers Welfare Association (OWWA), and the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers’ Affairs (OUMWA)—were ranked as the most trusted sources of information by 85.8 percent of respondents in comparison with other sources such as family members or friends who work abroad (7.6 percent), recruitment agencies (3.8 percent), and NGOs (2.8 percent). Migrants participating in the current study of Jordan and Lebanon, however, expressed a tendency to rely on their own social networks over and above official channels. Further research would be needed to assess to what extent these differing trends exist in other countries.

4.2 Training Initiatives Prior to Departure

Governments and civil society organizations in countries of origin are increasingly involved in providing information and training for migrant workers prior to departure for overseas employment. One of the main ways of doing this is by the institutionalizing of predeparture orientation courses. The Philippines spearheaded the effort in 1983 by establishing mandatory Predeparture Orientation Seminars (PDOS) for all overseas workers, and since then other countries have followed suit.

A number of studies have examined the effectiveness of these programs.¹² Researchers have questioned whether migrants absorb the information presented in classroom-based training

programs, which often take place during an emotional period when workers are preparing to leave their homes and families.¹³ Other methods of raising awareness through the media and/or community-based information programs may be more effective.¹⁴

Another problem is the content of the curricula, which tend toward an overly generalized, one-size-fits-all approach.¹⁵ Customized programs with country-specific, gender-specific, and sector-specific advice are needed to cater to the needs of particular groups of migrants.¹⁶ The training programs also tend to be provided exclusively in urban areas, creating a disincentive for migrants from rural areas. If training is not available in a given area or is too lengthy and seen as burdensome, migrants often opt to buy certificates on the black market rather than participating in the course. In addition, the curricula for programs run by governments and private recruitment agencies have been criticized for providing too little information about migrants' legal rights, sources of support, and grievance channels in specific countries.¹⁷ As a result, many low-skilled migrants arrive unaware of host country laws or what to do if their rights are violated.

The discussion presented below augments the findings from other studies by drawing on insights derived from speaking with migrants after their arrival in Jordan and Lebanon. One of the most striking findings is that significant numbers of migrants seem to be slipping through the cracks, arriving with no training whatsoever despite the training being mandatory in the countries from which they migrate.

Predeparture orientation is now compulsory for all migrant workers departing from Ethiopia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Yet only 38 percent of all survey respondents reported having completed a formal predeparture training course or seminar given by a recruitment agency, government body, or NGO.

This broke down by country as follows:

Table 2: Predeparture Training Program Completion by Country of Origin

Did you complete a predeparture training program before you left your country?

	Philippines		Sri Lanka		Ethiopia		Nepal		Total	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Yes	31	36.9	118	59.0	20	21.3	14	14.0	184.2	38.3
No	53	63.1	82	41.0	74	78.7	86	86.0	296.8	61.7

Source: Research conducted for this report, *Breaking the Isolation*, 2011 survey data.

Some respondents had migrated prior to the wide-scale implementation of predeparture training. Still, given that training has been mandatory in the Philippines since 1983 and in Sri Lanka since 1994, the low rate of reported attendance among Filipina and Sri Lankan workers is surprising. Some of the women interviewed, who had migrated for the first time within the last year, had not participated in a training course. This lack of participation may be at least partially attributable to the fact that women from Ethiopia, Nepal, and the Philippines were migrating to Jordan and

Lebanon through irregular channels to circumvent government restrictions and hence would not have attended formally administered courses.

During focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, migrants were asked what information they thought would be most important to include in predeparture training courses. One of the most commonly cited issues was the need to enhance language training. Many women arrived without speaking a word of Arabic, leading to frustration and conflicts in their dealings with employers. Some migrants also said the dialect of Arabic they were taught was inappropriate for Jordan or Lebanon, as the Arabic words used for common household objects differ from dialect to dialect. Limited knowledge of Arabic makes the process of obtaining and comprehending information even more difficult in the first few months of employment abroad. Many participants reported that the bulk of the courses they had taken focused on domestic work skills, and to a lesser extent the culture of the country of employment. Another problem that can be remedied by predeparture preparedness interventions is the lack of awareness among domestic workers of their legal rights, the terms and conditions of their employment contracts, and support services available to them in Jordan and Lebanon.

4.3 Knowledge Gaps in the Destination Country

This section explores migrants' knowledge about specific employment conditions, rights, and support services *after* they have begun employment in Jordan and Lebanon.

4.3.1 Employment Contracts

In an effort to ensure a minimum set of rights and responsibilities for migrant domestic workers, the Jordanian and Lebanese governments have introduced compulsory standard contracts defining the terms and conditions of employment. The contracts outline employers' responsibilities to pay the full salary on a monthly basis, guarantee workers' right to time off, and restrict the maximum daily working hours. These unified contracts are meant to curb the practice of contract substitution whereby migrants are asked to sign a contract in the home country and later, upon arrival in the country of employment, are forced to sign a second contract, usually with less favorable terms and conditions.

While the creation of unified contracts is a positive step, to date there is no effective mechanism in place to monitor use and compliance with the contract. Moreover, many domestic workers remain unaware of their rights because the contracts are typically in Arabic and/or English, which many migrants cannot read. Despite the introduction of unified contracts in both Jordan and Lebanon, the research findings suggest that in practice many domestic workers continue to be employed without contracts. Of the workers who participated in this research, only 48 percent (n=282) said they had signed an employment contract for the job they were currently performing, while 39 percent (n=202) had no valid contract for their work, and 7 percent (n=38) said they were not sure or did not want to respond to the question. Many of the women interviewed who were working without contracts were doing so on a "freelance" basis, which is not officially allowed under the terms of the sponsorship system.

Of those who *had* signed employment contracts for the work they were doing, 62 percent (n=174) said they understood the terms of the contracts they signed. In in-depth interviews, many migrants reported that they had not been fully informed about the consequences of breaking their contracts.

Sixty-three percent (n=179) said they had retained copies of the contracts they had signed. Most of those who did not have copies of their contracts said that they had never been given their own copy or that a recruitment agent, broker, or employer had subsequently taken the copy away from them. Other studies have pointed to a similar pattern of migrants not being fully informed of the terms of their employment contracts. In a 2010 report, Human Rights Watch reported that most of the domestic workers it interviewed in Lebanon since the government introduced the standard employment contract in 2009 “said they were not aware of the contents of what they signed since it was in Arabic, which they could not read.”¹⁸ Overall, these findings suggest that a large proportion of migrants are not receiving sufficient information about their contractual rights and obligations.

4.3.2 Rest Days

The standard employment contracts for migrant domestic workers in Jordan and Lebanon guarantee one day of rest per week. In order to assess migrants’ knowledge of this right, survey participants were asked whether they were entitled to a weekly day of rest. Nineteen percent of those interviewed, or 92 out of the 490 who responded to this question, said they did not know they had this right. Many of the migrants who were aware of this right emphasized that such knowledge did not mean they could exercise this right in practice or, if they did have a weekly day off, they could decide where and how to spend their time off. “If I ask for some time off to go and see my friends, just seeing the look on the madam’s face is enough to scare me,” said an Ethiopian woman in Beirut. Among Sri Lankan and Filipina respondents in Jordan, 28 percent said they did not have a set day off from work. The rate was similar in Lebanon, where 29 percent of respondents from Ethiopia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka reported not having a set day off from work. Given that the sample was biased in favor of workers with greater mobility and access to the outside world, the actual proportion of domestic workers who face such restrictions is probably much greater.

Although workers have a legal right to a rest day, the ability to *leave* the workplace during time off is not guaranteed under the conditions of the standard employment contracts. Among live-in domestic workers who took part in this study, 24 percent of respondents said they were not allowed to leave their employers’ homes during time off. Given that the sample was tilted in favor of workers with more mobility, this figure is not necessarily indicative of patterns among all domestic workers. Some of those who were allowed to leave the house during time off explained that they did not have the freedom to do so on a regular basis and had to ask permission in advance.

4.3.3 Passport Confiscation

Passports are the property of the governments that issue them and, according to international law and domestic legislation in Jordan and Lebanon, all individuals have the right to keep their passports with them. In practice, however, recruitment agencies and employers routinely confiscate the passports of migrant domestic workers. In Lebanon, as soon as the worker arrives at the airport, general security officers often take workers’ passports and hand them directly to the employer.

Many domestic workers do not know that their sponsors do not have a legal right to confiscate their passports. A total of 37 percent of respondents were *not* aware that they had a legal right to keep their passports with them. As the table below indicates, in comparison to the other nationalities, fewer respondents from Nepal were aware of this right.

Table 3: Knowledge of the Right to Retain Passport by Nationality

Are you aware that you have a legal right to keep your passport?

	Philippines		Sri Lanka		Ethiopia		Nepal		Total	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Yes	64	69.6	135	70.7	72	72.7	32	32.0	303	62.9
No	28	30.4	56	29.3	27	27.3	68	68.0	179	37.1

Source: Research conducted for this report, *Breaking the Isolation*, 2011 survey data.

Respondents were also asked whether they had their passports in their possession. A total of 26 percent of respondents answered the question affirmatively. The following table displays how this broke down across the four nationalities; although the rates are low across all groups, a particularly low proportion of workers from Nepal (8 percent) were in possession of their passports.

Table 4: Possession of Passport by Nationality

Is your passport in your possession?

	Philippines		Sri Lanka		Ethiopia		Nepal		Total	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Yes	32	34.4	76	37.4	17	17.2	8	8.0	133	26.9
No	61	65.6	127	62.6	82	82.8	92	92.0	362	73.1

Source: Research conducted for this report, *Breaking the Isolation*, 2011 survey data.

Given that roughly half of the workers surveyed were domestic workers who live separately from their employers, and in light of the sampling bias in favor of those with greater mobility and freedom, the actual proportion of migrant domestic workers who possess their own passports and know they have a legal right to do so may be smaller than the data presented here indicates.

4.3.4 Salaries

In Lebanon, domestic work is excluded from the labor law, and so there is no minimum wage coverage for domestic workers. In Jordan, the only Arab country to have amended its labor law to include domestic work, migrant domestic workers continue to be excluded from the national minimum wage, which applies only to citizens. In both countries, regulations stipulate lower minimum salaries for migrant domestic workers. At the time of research for this report, the

Lebanese government had stated that salaries should not be less than 200,000 Lebanese lira per month (approximately US\$133), and the Jordanian government had stated salaries for migrant domestic workers should not be less than US\$200 a month.¹⁹ In practice, however, there is a lack of clarity about the minimum remuneration migrant domestic workers should receive. Countries that send migrants abroad to work negotiate minimum wages for their citizens through bilateral agreements with destination countries, and this results in downward “race to the bottom” pressure as countries compete to provide workers and gain remittances from destination countries. One result is a divergence in wages paid to workers of different nationalities performing the same job. This is part of a much wider global trend; the ILO estimates that more than two out of every five domestic workers around the world are not entitled to be paid a minimum wage.²⁰

The lack of clarity about minimum remuneration was reflected in interviews with migrants. When asked if they knew what minimum salary they were entitled to, the majority of those who participated in the study simply stated the salary they were currently receiving. In Jordan this ranged from US\$80 to US\$700 per month and in Lebanon from US\$100 to US\$600. Both of the salaries at the low end of the scale are lower than the minimum salaries the governments of the two countries have proclaimed. The wide range in salaries underscores the need for a clearly stipulated and binding minimum wage level for migrant domestic workers in both Lebanon and Jordan.

4.3.5 Sources of Support

Embassies and consulates are primary sources of support for migrants in distress and provide a range of welfare services to help their nationals. However, many migrants do not have diplomatic representation in Jordan and Lebanon and have no one to turn to for help in emergencies. For example, at the time of research for this report, neither Nepal nor Bangladesh had consular offices in Lebanon. Stepping in to fill the gap, an increasing number of nonprofit organizations provide direct services to migrant workers, including legal aid, counseling, medical care and social services, temporary shelter for those fleeing abusive employers, and assistance to migrants in detention. Many migrants have also organized their own community-based organizations or informal networks to help fellow expatriates in distress. Civil society organizations face significant challenges, however, in making their services known to those most in need. With this in mind, one of the aims of this study was to assess the extent to which workers know about three potential sources of support. The researchers asked if they knew how to contact 1) their embassy or consular official,²¹ 2) a hotline to call for assistance, whether run by an embassy, government office, or NGO, and 3) legal aid services.

Table 5: Knowledge of How to Contact Support Services

Respondents in Lebanon	Ethiopia		Nepal		Sri Lanka	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Embassy	73	73	n/a	n/a	89	88
Hotline	26	26	30	29	3	4
Legal Services	1	1	1	1	16	16

Respondents in Jordan	Philippines		Sri Lanka	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Embassy	58	62	n/a	80
Hotline	38	42	30	41
Legal Services	25	28	1	30

Source: Research conducted for this report, *Breaking the Isolation*, 2011 survey data.

The findings suggest that apart from Nepali workers who do not have an embassy in Lebanon, a large portion of respondents knew how to contact their embassies if needed. Far fewer interviewees knew the number of a nonembassy-operated emergency hotline to call for assistance, although such hotlines have been set up by labor ministries and NGOs in both countries. Only a small proportion knew of organizations or individuals providing legal support. This general pattern was confirmed in interviews and casual conversations with migrants. In interviews, some migrants also expressed reluctance to contact their embassies for help. An Ethiopian woman said, “People in the agencies in Ethiopia say if you have any problem, go to the embassy, they will help you. But when we get here, they do not help. The people in the embassy do not want to listen to us.” Migrants also expressed a reluctance to approach the police for assistance if their rights were violated, saying they did not believe the police would help them or citing a fear that they could be detained.

Overall, the findings indicate that significant numbers of domestic workers employed in Jordan and Lebanon lack important information about their rights, legal employment entitlements, and where they can turn for help. Without such information, they face a greater risk of being exploited. This underscores the need for interventions to inform workers of their rights in clear and precise terms in language they can easily comprehend and at multiple points—when they sign employment contracts *as well as* when they take up jobs abroad. It also points to the need to increase the sources of formal and informal support for migrants whose rights have been violated and to ensure that migrants know about the existence of such support.

5. Communication Channels and Media Use: Challenges and Opportunities



Balconies are often the only form of communication that migrant women have with the outside world. Apartments in the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael, Beirut, Lebanon, 2011. Photo credit: © Lucas Pernin

This section examines migrants' access to media and communication channels as well as the obstacles they face in using them. The media is broadly defined here to include radio, television, and print publications, as well as digital and social media. For migrant women who leave their own families behind for years at a stretch to work in the homes of other families, personal communications through telephone calls, text messages, or letters are a vital part of maintaining their transnational families.²² Yet the research findings indicate striking inequalities in migrant domestic workers' levels of access to formal communication channels. Some domestic workers interviewed in embassy shelters said that prior to coming to the shelter, they had been virtually cut off from the rest of the world due to employers' restrictions on phone use and mobility. At the other end of the spectrum, the research found women who owned mobile phones equipped with radios, cameras, and Internet, and who were keen users of social networking sites such as Facebook and Skype, an Internet service that functions as a phone. Although not all migrants are allowed by their employers to have them, mobile phones, which are relatively inexpensive and easy to use, are the single most important communication channel for domestic workers. The use of Internet-based platforms such as e-mail, instant messaging, and social networking sites appears to be growing among migrant domestic workers. However, a lack of familiarity with information technology, limited literacy, and the high cost preclude use for the majority of migrants.

5.1 Interpersonal Communication

One of the most crucial factors determining a migrant's ability to obtain information and communicate is her overall freedom of mobility—whether and how often her employers allow her to leave the house in which she works. As described in section 4.3.2, most migrant domestic workers are employed in highly circumscribed and isolated conditions. Their appearances in public are restricted by employers. Apart from running errands and attending outings with

employers, many spend the bulk of their time cloistered in their employers' homes. Not surprisingly, women who work on a freelance or part-time basis and live separately from their employers tend to have more opportunities to meet and communicate with other migrants.

Even those who are not allowed to leave their employers' homes unaccompanied, however, *do* manage to find ways to get information when they need it. Although the survey sample for this study was skewed in favor of those who had more freedom of movement, the researchers conducted a number of interviews with workers who were not allowed out of the houses in which they worked. Those kept under lock and key by their employers find ways to chat with fellow migrants through open kitchen windows or across balconies in what has been described as "balcony talk." Others make use of opportunities for conversations with other migrants while running errands, disposing of rubbish, gardening, or washing cars. Even migrants who don't speak the same language find ways of communicating. Amanthi, the Sri Lankan domestic worker in Amman, told of how she helped a fellow domestic worker from Indonesia, who was employed in the next building, calculate her pay by using hand signals from their windows. Other migrants have recounted stories of helping fellow workers who are deprived of food. If one worker signals that she is not being given enough to eat, other workers can lower or raise supplies in bags attached to string.²³

Among the majority of the migrants who participated in this research, the prime source of information was not their embassy or an NGO but personal contacts with other migrants. Mistrust or the fear that they might be sent back to an abusive employer or recruitment agency prevented some migrants from approaching formal institutions, such as embassies, the police, or ministry of labor officials. The fact that migrants themselves are a vital source of information for other migrants can be both enabling and constraining, as the information they provide may not be accurate. Veteran migrants are very often a source of information for newly arrived migrants, so it is important that they have accurate and reliable information to pass on to others.

In both Lebanon and Jordan, there are places where migrants congregate or make short visits to buy goods from home, remit money, or make phone calls. In Lebanon, calling centers are practically ubiquitous in residential neighborhoods and are frequented by migrants of all nationalities, including both live-in domestic workers as well as those who live separately from employers. In Beirut on the weekend, hundreds of migrants can be found shopping and walking along the sidewalks flanking the streets of Dawra, a neighborhood in northern Beirut. In Amman, there are also a number of shops and restaurants catering to various migrant communities. For example, a series of shops in Jabal Amman near the First Circle sell goods from the Philippines, and there are restaurants catering to South Asians in the downtown area known as Wast Al-Balad near the Gold Market. NGOs and legal aid providers could use these gathering places more effectively as dissemination points for information.

Migrants are already making good use of such neighborhoods. In both Jordan and Lebanon, concerts and cultural activities organized by individuals, migrant associations, or embassies are typically advertised through word of mouth as well as posters and flyers. Putting up posters and handing out flyers in the places where migrants gather in a large enough volume can be an effective way to communicate at the grassroots level.

5.2 Literacy Rates and Print Media

One of the questions motivating this research was the extent to which limited literacy skills might impede migrants from obtaining information and communicating with the outside world. Self-reporting of literacy is known to be only mediocre as an indicator of competency in literacy, and it

was not possible to directly assess participants' literacy through cognitive skills tests as part of this study. Several other sources of data have been considered, however, to provide approximate indicators.

National literacy rates for adult women in the country of origin among the four groups studied are displayed below. Among economically disadvantaged groups, the rates are often far below the national average, and it is possible that literacy rates among domestic workers may be lower.

Table 6: Literacy Rates for Adult Women in Countries of Origin²⁴

Country of Origin	Literacy Rate	
Ethiopia	28.9%	(2007)
Nepal	46.9%	(2009)
Philippines	95.8%	(2008)
Sri Lanka	90.0%	(2010)

Source: Research conducted for this report, *Breaking the Isolation*, 2011 survey data.

The migrants who participated in this study were asked about their educational attainment, which, although imperfect, provides a rough indication of whether they might be able to read or write.

Table 7: Education Level by Nationality

Country of Origin	No formal Schooling	Educational Level					Total
		Some Primary School (1-4 years of school)	Completed Primary School (completed 5 years of school)	Some secondary schooling	Completed secondary schooling	University Degree or more	
Philippines	1.2%	3.5%	9.4%	22.4%	36.5%	27.1%	100%
Sri Lanka	3.4%	11.8%	33.5%	34.5%	15.8%	1.0%	100%
Ethiopia	4.0%	10.0%	13.0%	33.0%	40.0%	0.0%	100%
Nepal	13.7%	15.7%	24.5%	22.5%	19.6%	3.9%	100%
Total	5.1%	10.6%	22.8%	30.9%	24.8%	5.7%	100%

Source: Research conducted for this report, *Breaking the Isolation*, 2011 survey data.

These rates can be compared with national statistics on educational attainment levels for each of the four countries. In Sri Lanka, where school attendance is compulsory for all children from age

5 to 14, 99 percent of children attend school at least up until grade 5. In the Philippines, this figure is estimated at 79 percent. It falls to 51 percent in Ethiopia and 62 percent in Nepal.

The national literacy rates for women, combined with the research findings on educational attainment, suggest that print media and information dissemination campaigns using written rather than oral or visual materials may not be effective at reaching all migrant domestic workers, and that those from Ethiopia and Nepal may be at a particular disadvantage.

Although not all migrants are able to access them, magazines and newspapers catering to each of the four groups included in the research are sold in Jordan and Lebanon. These include, for example, the Sri Lankan publications *Bhavana*, *Birinda*, and *Medaperadiga*, a free monthly magazine published in Sinhala and Tamil by Trico, a Sri Lankan cargo company that caters to Sri Lankan expatriates in the Middle East.

Many NGOs have produced informational handbooks and leaflets for migrants. These materials can be useful resources for migrants who are fully literate, but the research team found that those containing complicated terminology or jargon tend not to be read. Messages need to be short and simple in order to reach the widest possible audience. It is also worth noting that any written materials, address books, and contact cards given to migrant domestic workers prior to departure from their home countries may be confiscated by recruitment agencies or employers when workers arrive in the country of employment. Contact information on small, inconspicuous booklets or cards would be easier for people to tuck into pockets or suitcases.

5.3 Telecommunications

The single most important communication channel for most migrant domestic workers is the mobile phone. The availability of cheap handsets and prepaid phone cards has been instrumental in opening up new opportunities for domestic workers to connect with the world beyond the confines of their employers' homes.²⁵

Out of all the domestic workers who participated in this research, 82 percent reported that they owned and used their own mobile phone. Rates of usage were substantially higher among domestic workers who lived separately from their employers, at 95 percent in comparison to 73 percent among live-in domestic workers. Mobile phone use also varied across nationalities, as the following table illustrates.

Table 8: Mobile Phone Use in Jordan and Lebanon

Country of Origin	Yes	No
Philippines	90%	10%
Nepal	90%	10%
Sri Lanka	84%	16%
Ethiopia	64%	36%

Source: Research conducted for this report, *Breaking the Isolation*, 2011 survey data.

Mobile phone use has risen dramatically over the course of the last decade in each of the countries from which migrants originate. The International Telecommunications Union estimates that as of 2011, there were 99 mobile phone subscriptions for every 100 inhabitants in the Philippines, 87 in Sri Lanka, 44 in Nepal, and 17 in Ethiopia.²⁶ According to the same source, there were as many as 118 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in Jordan and 79 in Lebanon.

Many employers impose restrictions on domestic workers' abilities to communicate with the outside world, including limiting their use of mobile phones.²⁷ Human Rights Watch has described cases of domestic workers in Jordan who are allowed to own mobile phones but whose employers closely monitor usage.²⁸ The majority of those participating in this study reported that they did possess their own mobile phones. In some cases, knowing this could be a point of contention with their employers, they kept their phones secret, hiding them and using only the text function or keeping their phones on silent.

Migrants indicated that one of the most important reasons for having a mobile phone was to allow them to keep in touch with their families back home.²⁹ For domestic workers who live with their employers, mobile phones also offer a more private, albeit expensive, channel for communication than their employers' landlines. Many migrants buy phones equipped for dual SIM cards so that they can maintain two lines, a local number in the country of destination along with a number in the home country. This allows relatives to send messages cheaply to the number in the home country, and migrants can reply from abroad using the number in the country of destination. Others keep two phones for the same purpose. Domestic workers use their phones in a variety of other ways—to send and receive text messages, to listen to the radio, and to take and share photographs. Sandra, a Sri Lankan domestic worker, described sending missed calls to her sisters and daughter in Sri Lanka. One missed call lets her family members know she's thinking of them; two or three in a row means she needs them to call her back.

Among many of those who own mobile phones, sending text messages is a crucial low-cost mode of communication. The following table shows how the use of text messaging varied across nationalities for both live-in and live-out domestic workers combined.

Table 9: Text Message Usage Among Mobile Phone Owners

Country of Origin	Yes	No
Philippines	94%	6%
Nepal	69%	31%
Sri Lanka	71%	29%
Ethiopia	69%	31%

Source: Research conducted for this report, *Breaking the Isolation*, 2011 survey data.

Limited literacy skills may explain why some migrants owned a mobile phone but did not send text messages. The high rate of SMS use among Filipino migrants is unsurprising. The Philippines has been described as the texting capital of the world, with more SMS messages sent per user than any other country.³⁰ The Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs and an NGO, the Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA), both run SMS-based relief systems whereby Filipino workers and their

relatives in the Philippines can seek assistance. CMA's system allows workers whose safety or well-being is in danger to send a message via a mobile phone to a central database in the Philippines. Once sent, the text message is forwarded to designated recipient phones of staff at CMA, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Overseas Workers Welfare Agency, and several partner NGOs, which can respond to provide assistance. Awareness of this system among migrants remains limited, however. The Filipina domestic workers who participated in in-depth interviews said they were not familiar with the system.

The importance of mobile phones as a tool for communication and to report abuse is gaining increasing recognition by governments in countries with high rates of out-migration. Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has indicated that his government may equip migrants with mobile phones prior to departure so that they can report abuse, and plans are already underway to do so with those bound for South Korea.³¹ In 2012, an agreement signed between the Philippines and Saudi Arabia concerning the employment of Filipino domestic workers contained a clause stipulating that workers must be allowed to keep their mobile phones with them during the course of their employment in Saudi Arabia.³² Similarly, as a condition of employing an Indian domestic worker, the Indian government requires employers in Gulf countries to provide workers with mobile phones and SIM cards.³³ Research would be needed to assess the extent to which these rules are being adhered to.

While mobile phones are a key communication channel, also important are telecommunications booths or calling centers. Beirut's residential neighborhoods are dotted with small shops where customers can pay to make overseas calls. Similar calling centers can be found in Amman, particularly in busy downtown neighborhoods. These centers are popular both among migrants who do not own mobile phones as well as those who do because they offer less expensive rates for overseas calls. They have become so popular with migrants that some now sell products to cater to particular communities, such as imported soaps and shampoos or food items.

5.4 Radio

When asked whether they owned or had access to a radio, 62 percent (n=133) of survey participants in Jordan responded affirmatively, of whom 85 percent (n = 113) said they listened to the radio on a regular basis. In Lebanon, 45 percent (n=138) of respondents said they owned or had access to a radio, of whom 83 percent (n=114) listened to it on a regular basis. Among migrants who use their own mobile phones, 72 percent of respondents in Jordan and 58 percent in Lebanon said their phones were radio enabled. Many of these women said they listened to the radio regularly in their home countries and continued doing so after migrating. Some migrants also commented on the fact that listening to the radio was viewed more positively by their employers in comparison to watching television because it did not interfere with their work.

When asked whether they would be interested in listening to a radio program if it were broadcast in their native language, 85 percent (n=182) of respondents in Jordan and 98 percent (n=305) in Lebanon responded affirmatively. Many women interviewed expressed a great deal of enthusiasm and interest for a local radio show in their own language. Asked when would be the most convenient time for such a program to be aired given their work schedules, the majority responded that their preferred listening time would be in the late evening after 8 pm, once they had finished their work for the day, or on Friday or Sunday, when they were most likely to have a break from work. This suggests that shows targeting migrants in particular may have the greatest audience reach during the late evening hours. Consistent programming, at the same slots every week, would be an important way to build listenership.

Research participants were asked an open-ended question about what radio content would be of most interest to them. The most popular response, given by approximately two out of every three migrants who responded to the question, was for news from their home countries. Many said that they felt cut off from information about current events in their home countries. The second most popular response was for music from home; some migrants specified that they would like to hear the latest pop music songs, while others expressed a preference for love songs, whether new or old. Migrants also expressed a strong desire for radio dramas as well as cultural and entertainment programs, religious programming, and interactive programs with practical and legal information about laws and regulations in Jordan and Lebanon.³⁴ A number of Sri Lankan migrants also expressed an interest in astrology programs.³⁵ Other topics of interest included shows with health tips and shows to help them learn the Arabic language.

In the Arab Gulf states, particularly the UAE, several new radio stations have been launched in recent years broadcasting content in South Asian languages for the diaspora. In Jordan and Lebanon, there have been fewer attempts to develop programming for migrant workers. This is most likely linked to the fact that the migrant population is smaller, and dedicated radio programs for migrants may be less commercially viable. Noteworthy exceptions include faith-based radio programming broadcast in migrant languages by the Voice of Charity (87.5 FM, 105.8 FM, 106.2 FM) in Lebanon, and programs developed by the Community Media Network, a nonprofit NGO in Jordan, through the station Radio Balad (92.4 FM). Radio Balad has produced special shows for Egyptian, Iraqi, and Syrian communities living in Jordan featuring news and content dealing with access to various services as well as social and cultural issues. Programs such as these could be expanded for other migrant communities.

5.5 Television

Of those who participated in this study, 88 percent of live-in domestic workers and 90 percent of domestic workers who live separately from their employers said they watched television at least once a week. Those who live with their employers tended to watch more Arabic-language programming, although a strong preference was expressed for watching television in their own languages if possible. Most of the participating domestic workers who live separately from their employers have TVs and watch stations broadcast in their own languages through satellite receivers or cable subscriptions. In Lebanon in particular, however, migrants reported that frequent electricity outages and the high cost of cable service prevented them from watching television. In many cases, migrants who live in their own apartments pool their resources and order one subscription for a cable service to be shared among a larger group.

When asked what channel they watched most regularly, Sri Lankan respondents mentioned the privately owned Sinhala-language cable networks Sri TV and One Sri Lanka, along with several Hindi- and Tamil-language networks broadcast from India. Among migrants from the Philippines, the preferred channel was the Filipino Channel (TFC), which broadcasts news, films, sports, and entertainment shows from the Philippines. Many Filipino participants also reported watching English-language shows on Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) channels, including MBC 2, MBC 4, and MBC MAX, as well as Dubai One, another English-language entertainment channel. Nepali migrants said they watched Hindi-language networks such as the India-based Zee TV and B4U. Ethiopian participants expressed a preference for MBC channels as well as Ethiopian Television (ETV), which could be accessed via a cable subscription or satellite receiver. Arabic-language teledramas and soap operas were also frequently mentioned as favorite shows, particularly among live-in domestic workers. Some live-in domestic workers said they watched whatever Arabic-language shows their employers tuned in to, including news, films, and entertainment programs on local Lebanese or Jordanian channels. Although a strong preference

was expressed for content in their own languages, some migrants also noted that watching television in the Arabic language was a useful learning tool.

5.6 Internet

Rates of Internet usage were low both among domestic workers who lived with and separately from their employers. Only 19.5 percent of live-in domestic workers and 20 percent of those who live separately reported using e-mail and the Internet on a regular basis. Of those who do use the Internet, approximately 50 percent said they do so on a daily basis, and 40 percent said they do so weekly, with the remaining 10 percent using it once a month or less. Many of those who use the Internet regularly said they do so primarily in order to send e-mail or use social networking platforms such as Facebook. Further research would be needed to determine how they connect to the Internet, whether through mobile devices, private PCs, or Internet cafes. The cost of using the Internet as well as slow Internet speeds were both cited as impediments by those who did not use it. It also requires a level of literacy and technological knowledge that not all migrant domestic workers possess.

The following table shows how rates of Internet usage varied across nationalities for live-in and live-out domestic workers combined.

Table 10: Self-Reported Internet Usage

Country of Origin	Yes	No
Philippines	47%	53%
Nepal	21%	79%
Sri Lanka	6%	94%
Ethiopia	23%	77%

Source: Research conducted for this report, *Breaking the Isolation*, 2011 survey data.

Although low in comparison to mobile phone use, for all groups apart from migrants from Sri Lanka, the percentage of migrants who report using the Internet was greater than average use rates in their home countries. Twenty-nine percent of the population reportedly uses the Internet in the Philippines compared with 15 percent in Sri Lanka, 9 percent in Nepal, and only 1 percent in Ethiopia.³⁶

Overall, the relatively low rates of Internet access at this time suggest that online media or communication tools may have limited success in reaching the majority of migrant domestic workers. However, innovations enabling greater access via mobile devices at affordable rates could make this a more effective channel for communication and information dissemination in the future.

6. Key Findings and Recommendations



Nining Djohar, a domestic worker who was employed in Singapore for seven years and now works with an NGO in Jakarta on migrant rights. This picture, shot during her time in Singapore, shows her on the streets of Little India using her mobile phone to contact a fellow worker who had called the "helpline" that Nining ran with a group of Indonesian domestic workers. They handed out their own mobile phone numbers on slips of paper to workers and employers in need. On her Sundays off, she paid visits to the homes of employers who had complained of problems with their workers—"she don't know how to iron, how to cook"—and surreptitiously passed biscuits and Maggie instant noodles to bone-thin workers who said they didn't get enough to eat and could not go out. Photo credit: © Sim Chi Yin/ VII Mentor Program

1: Circumvention of Predeparture Training

Women migrating to Jordan and Lebanon do not always receive the full picture about the terms and conditions of their employment and the difficulties they may experience abroad. Crucial to protecting their rights is ensuring that workers *know* their rights and entitlements in the first place. Although mandatory predeparture training courses have been introduced for migrants departing to work as domestic workers from Ethiopia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, many migrants continue to arrive in Lebanon and Jordan without this training and with little practical information about who their employers will be, what rights they have in the destination country, and how and where they might seek redress if their rights are violated. Only 38 percent of survey participants reported having completed a formal predeparture training course or seminar given by a recruitment agency, government body, or NGO. Even among those who did take part in predeparture training, significant gaps were found in the level of awareness about legal rights and redress mechanisms. Migrants expressed a strong demand for more language training in predeparture programs, as well as for more information about the terms and conditions of their employment contracts and support services available to them in the destination country.

Governments and civil society organizations should work together to improve predeparture training and increase the number of migrants who leave for work abroad with needed information. More effective training will reduce the number of migrants who resort to black market certificates to meet their predeparture requirements.

2: Employment without a Contract

Despite the fact that Jordan and Lebanon have both introduced unified employment contracts for domestic workers, significant numbers of domestic workers continue to be employed without contracts. Of the workers who participated in this research, only 48 percent said they had signed an employment contract for the job they were currently performing, while 39 percent had no valid contract for their work, and 7 percent said they were not sure or did not want to respond to the question. Of those who had signed employment contracts for the work they were doing, only 62 percent said they understood the terms of the contracts they signed.

Governments in countries where migrants work should make sure that recruitment agencies and employers follow the law requiring employment contracts and that employees understand the terms and conditions of the contracts they sign. The contracts should be available in the language of the migrant as well as the language of the country where the migrant works. If the migrant possesses minimal literacy, an advocate should explain the contract terms to the migrant in her own language. The migrant should always receive a copy of the contract.

3. Lack of Knowledge about Legal Rights

Nineteen percent of those interviewed said they did not know that their employment contract guaranteed one day of rest per week. Many migrants who did know said they could not exercise this right in practice or decide when and how to spend their time off. One out of four could not leave their employers' home on their day off.

Recruitment agencies and employers routinely confiscate the passports of migrant domestic workers even though by international and domestic law individuals have the right to keep their passports with them. Thirty-seven percent of respondents were not aware they had this right. In Jordan and Lebanon, the governments negotiate low minimum salaries for migrant domestic workers with the governments of their countries. As a result, workers of different nationalities receive varying wages for performing the same job. The majority of those participating in the study did not know the minimum salary to which they were entitled. Only a small proportion of study participants knew about the existence of organizations or individuals providing legal support or other services to migrant workers. Civil society organizations should make every effort to promote their services more widely and inform all migrant domestic workers of their legal rights, including a day off each week, retention of their passports, and a minimum salary. They should advocate for guaranteeing, in the employment contract, the right to take the weekly day off outside the employers' home.

4: Inequalities in Access to Media and Information

Access to information is constrained at the most basic level by the conditions under which migrant domestic workers are employed. Some migrants face extreme isolation due to employers' restrictions on their freedom of movement outside the household and ability to socialize with other migrants. On the other end of the spectrum, some migrants with more freedom are skilled users of Facebook, Skype, and other digital communication channels. Freedom of movement and the ability to communicate and access media are closely linked. The right of the worker to a regular day off is crucial in the ability to access all forms of communication and technology. However, even those workers whose mobility is restricted by their employers find creative ways to communicate with fellow migrants, for example, through open windows, across balconies, or while performing various tasks and errands.

Given the differences in migrants' access to various media and communication channels, no single strategy will be effective in reaching all migrant domestic workers. A multipronged, creative, and, above all, migrant-centered approach is needed. Since migrants themselves are a vital source of information for fellow migrants, they should be thought of not simply as passive recipients but as active participants in information dissemination strategies. Civil society organizations should involve migrants in the planning, creation, and distribution of information both prior to and after departure.

5: Mobile Phones as a Key Communication Channel

Mobile phones are the single most important communication tool for migrant domestic workers. The availability of cheap handsets and prepaid phone cards has been instrumental in opening up new opportunities for domestic workers to connect with the world beyond the confines of their employers' homes. Out of all the domestic workers who participated in this research, 82 percent reported that they owned and used their own mobile phone. Rates of usage were substantially higher among domestic workers who lived separately from their employers, at 95 percent in comparison to 73 percent among live-in domestic workers.

Employment contracts for migrant domestic workers should have clear provisions guaranteeing workers the right to communicate with the outside world, specifically through mobile phones. Civil society organizations should campaign for the addition of such provisions to the standard employment contract.

6: Radio as an Underutilized Medium

Although Internet and social media use is expanding rapidly, many migrant domestic workers still turn to traditional media, such as radio and television, for information and entertainment. Sixty-two percent of respondents in Jordan and 45 percent in Lebanon reported that they owned or had regular access to a radio. Among migrants who use their own mobile phones, 72 percent of respondents in Jordan and 58 percent in Lebanon said their phones were radio enabled. Many of these women said they listened to the radio regularly in their home countries and continued doing so after migrating. Migrants expressed great enthusiasm for radio programming in their own languages in destination countries. Many said that if such programs were broadcast in Jordan or Lebanon, they would not hesitate to purchase radios to listen to them. When asked when would be the most convenient time to hear such programs, the majority responded that their preferred listening time would be in the late evening after 8 pm, once they had finished their work for the day, or on Friday or Sunday, when they were most likely to have a break from work.

Radio has a great deal of untapped potential as a way of providing information and news to migrants as well as engaging them as active producers of media content. The lack of specialized radio programming for migrant communities in Jordan and Lebanon may be linked to regulatory constraints as well as concerns about commercial viability. One strategy that could be explored by civil society organizations is to approach existing radio stations and propose adding programming catering to specific migrant communities. These programs could be scheduled during nonpeak hours, primarily late in the evening, when migrants would be most able to listen to them. Advertising revenue could be sought from businesses offering services to migrants, such as money transfer and cargo companies. Consistent programming during the same time slots every week would be an important way to build listenership.

Appendix: Research Methods

A combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques was used to gain a comprehensive understanding of migrant domestic workers' information needs, communication channels, and access to media. Jordan and Lebanon were selected because, in addition to having substantial migrant populations, they have a growing number of civil society organizations that work with migrants and for whom research on this topic could usefully inform future interventions.

The study focuses on Ethiopian, Nepalese, and Sri Lankan workers in Lebanon, and Filipino and Sri Lankan workers in Jordan. As one of the largest groups of domestic workers in Jordan, Indonesians were important to include, but gaining access to this group proved especially challenging. Indonesians have a less visible public presence in Amman in comparison to Sri Lankans and Filipinos, who have organized social activities and who appear to live separately from their employers in larger numbers. It was not possible for the research team to identify enough Indonesian participants to draw meaningful conclusions. Another difficulty related to the fact that the Indonesian embassy in Jordan, unlike other embassies approached, declined requests to interview domestic workers at its shelter. In the end, eleven survey interviews and one in-depth discussion with two Indonesian domestic workers were carried out, but the results have not been included in the analysis because the sample size was too small.

Fieldwork was carried out in Jordan (Amman) and Lebanon (Beirut and surrounding suburbs and Tripoli) between March and July 2011. Data was collected from migrant workers using four main methods:

- (1) **in-depth semistructured interviews** with approximately 30 migrant domestic workers in Jordan and Lebanon, including both those residing with and separately from their employers, as well as migrants acting as community liaisons organizing support and social activities for fellow migrants;
- (2) **six focus group discussions**, with separate sessions for Ethiopian, Filipino, Indonesian, Nepali, and Sri Lankan workers, including a mixture of live-in domestic workers and those residing separately;
- (3) a **survey** administered orally to 522 migrants in both countries (n=309 in Lebanon, n=213 in Jordan);
- (4) A series of **informal visits, observations, and exchanges** with migrants in places where they work and gather socially in Amman and Beirut.

The aim of the survey questionnaire was to capture patterns in migrants' abilities to access and use media, preferred media outlets and times for accessing various media, the extent to which they were given time off and allowed to leave the workplaces, and the level of awareness of certain rights. Participants were identified through a random sampling of migrants in the places where they congregate during time off as well as through a snowball sampling method that involved identifying a small group of workers willing to be interviewed and then soliciting referrals for other workers to approach to take part. The researchers used several statistical methods and procedures to analyze the survey results: arithmetic means for measuring the averages of interval and ratio variables, frequencies for distributing the nominal and ordinal variables, and cross tabulation procedures for measuring the associations between nominal and ordinal variables.

Qualitative methods helped provide a deeper understanding of migrants' experiences and views as well as the obstacles and opportunities for expanding access to communication channels and media. Focus group discussions explored the issues coming to light through interviews, probing further and cross-checking information.

Informal visits and observations involved going to areas where migrants congregate and engaging in conversations to elicit additional information. This included visits to churches, money transfer offices, shops, beauty salons, and restaurants, along with interactions with domestic workers and employers in homes. This informal method provided a wealth of insights not yielded through formal interviews.

In addition to speaking with the migrants themselves, the researchers consulted a range of stakeholders, including staff in nongovernmental organizations working with migrants, lawyers, activists, members of faith-based organizations, and embassy personnel. Migrants involved in organizing activities and building social networks among fellow migrants were recruited as research assistants. They played an essential role in informing the research process, introducing the research team to participants, and helping to establish trust, as well as carrying out interviews themselves. The Philippines embassy in Amman and the Sri Lankan embassy in Beirut allowed the primary researcher to conduct interviews with domestic workers in their shelters.

Interviews were carried out in Arabic, English, and, through interpreters and research assistants who speak these languages, Amharic, Nepalese, Sinhala, Tagalog, and Tamil. Most of the survey and in-depth interviews took place with one worker at a time in private, but a smaller number happened in groups in homes, restaurants and cafes, shops, and embassy facilities. Focus group proceedings were recorded and transcribed. Most of the in-depth interviews with migrants were not recorded so that migrants would feel more comfortable speaking openly. In some instances, the report uses quotes based on reconstructed notes. For reasons of confidentiality and security, neither the report nor the recordings include full names or identifying information.

Limitations

The study's findings should be interpreted within the bounds of its limitations. The survey of 522 migrants is not representative of the entire population of migrant domestic workers employed in Jordan and Lebanon. Rather, the results are meant to serve as benchmarks and case studies to elucidate broad patterns. Given that many of the interviews were conducted in public spaces frequented by migrants, including shopping areas, restaurants, and churches, there is a bias in favor of those workers with greater freedom to move outside their employers' homes than is perhaps the norm. Those forbidden by their employers from leaving or having contact with the outside world were difficult and in some cases impossible to access, and a number of employers in both Jordan and Lebanon declined to allow their employees to take part in the research. In some cases, the members of the research team who were themselves migrant domestic workers were able to reach fellow domestic workers more easily, but the overall sample remains tilted in favor of migrants with greater mobility and fewer restrictions on communication. In an effort to offset this, interviews were carried out with women in embassy shelters; many of these women had fled their employers and previously had little contact with the world outside their employers' homes.

Given the precarious legal status of migrant workers in Jordan and Lebanon, the involvement of migrant workers as research assistants was crucial to establishing rapport with participants. In several cases, the research team encountered reluctance to participate on the part of workers who had left their employers and did not have valid residence permits. In most cases, they agreed to take part after being informed that no names or identifying information would be recorded. All migrants who participated received assurances that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential.

Sample Profile

The survey included 282 live-in domestic workers and 240 migrants who resided separately from their employers but who worked as cleaners or caretakers in private households, hostels, or offices. Although male migrants also work as domestic workers in both Jordan and Lebanon, the overwhelming majority of respondents for this survey (511 of the total 522) were women. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 64 years. The mean and median age was 33 and 30 respectively.

The amount of time migrants had spent working in Jordan or Lebanon at the time of the interview ranged from just two days in the case of one live-in domestic worker from Sri Lanka interviewed in her employer's home in Beirut, and 31 years in the case of a Filipina woman interviewed in the hostel where she worked in Amman. The mean and median amount of time spent working in the country of employment (either Jordan or Lebanon) was 6.7 and 4 years respectively.

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Notes

¹ A new report by the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that only 10 percent of domestic workers are covered by general labor legislation to the same extent as other workers. Nearly one-third work in countries where they are completely excluded from labor laws. More than half have no limit on weekly working hours under national law, and approximately 45 percent are not entitled to weekly time off or paid annual leave. See International Labour Organization, *Domestic Workers Across the World: Global and Regional Statistics and the Extent of Legal Protection* (Geneva: ILO, 2013).

² Ibid., 60.

³ According to AsiaWaves.net, the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation broadcasts a Sinhala-language program in the Middle East from 16.15 to 18.30 UTC on 11750 kHz. See "Radio Stations in Sri Lanka – SLBC External Services," AsiaWaves, <http://www.asiawaves.net/sri-lanka-radio.htm>. Amanthi learned about the radio program from a friend but was the only domestic worker interviewed for this study who listened to a short-wave station.

⁴ For an account of how sponsorship operates in Lebanon see Kathleen Hamill, *Policy Paper on Reforming the "Sponsorship System" for Migrant Domestic Workers: Towards an Alternative Governance Scheme* (Beirut: KAFA Violence and Exploitation, 2012); and in Jordan, see Elizabeth Frantz, "Jordan's Unfree Workforce: State-Sponsored Bonded Labour in the Arab Region," *49 The Journal of Development Studies* 8, (2013): 1072-1087.

⁵ These patterns were reported as widespread by studies in several countries in the region by Human Rights Watch and the ILO. Ninety to 100 percent of those domestic workers interviewed by the ILO reported having their freedom of movement controlled, and few were allowed to visit friends or go for a walk on their own. See Human Rights Watch, *Exported and Exposed: Abuses against Sri Lankan Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007) and Simel Esim and Monica Smith, *Gender and Migration in Arab States: The Case of Domestic Workers* (Beirut: ILO, 2004).

⁶ Sawsan Abdulrahim, *Servant, Daughter, or Employee? A Pilot Study on the Attitudes of Lebanese Employers towards Migrant Domestic Workers*. (Beirut: KAFA Violence and Exploitation, 2010).

⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Slow Reform: Protection of Migrant Domestic Workers in Asia and the Middle East* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2010): 8-9.

⁸ In 2008, Human Rights Watch reported that migrant domestic workers in Lebanon were dying at a rate of more than one per week from unnatural causes, including suicides and falls from high buildings, often in botched attempts at escaping their employers. See Human Rights Watch, *Lebanon: Migrant Domestic Workers Dying Every Week* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008). See also Annie Slemrod, "Migrant Domestic Workers Develop Survival Techniques Amid Harsh Conditions," *The Daily Star* (Lebanon), February 11, 2012, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Feb-11/162891-migrant-domestic-workers-develop-survival-techniques-amid-harsh-conditions.ashx>.

⁹ Kathleen Hamill, *Trafficking of Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon: A Legal Analysis* (Beirut: KAFA Violence and Exploitation, 2011).

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Domestic Plight: How Jordanian Laws, Officials, Employers, and Recruiters Fail Abused Migrant Domestic Workers* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2011): 3.

¹¹ Khetam Malkawi, "Government Opens Way for Hiring Domestic Helpers from Bangladesh," *Jordan Times*, April 11, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/govt-opens-way-for-hiring-domestic-helpers-from-bangladesh>.

¹² For an evaluation of such programs in Indonesia, Nepal, and the Philippines, see Maruja Asis and Dovelyn Rannveig Agunias, *Strengthening Pre-Departure Orientation Programmes in Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines* (Quezon City and Washington, D.C.: Scalabrini Migration Center and Migration Policy Institute, 2012). For information on the programs in Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, see Tasneem Siddiqui, Rozana Rashid, and Benjamin Zeitlin, *Information Campaigns on Safe Migration and Pre-Departure Training* (Brighton: Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation & Poverty, 2008); and A.K. Masud Ali, "Pre-Departure Orientation Program: Study of Good Practice in Asia. A Comparative Analysis of Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka," *Labour Migration in Asia: Protection of Workers, Support Services and Enhancing Development Benefits* (Geneva: IOM, 2005). And for an in-depth discussion of the Sri Lankan context see Malsiri Dias and Ramani Jayasundere, "Sri Lanka: Good Practices to Prevent Women Migrant Workers from Going Into Exploitative Forms of Labour," *GENPROM Working Paper No. 9, Gender Promotion Programme* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2002).

¹³ Ali, "Pre-Departure Orientation Program," 123-124.

¹⁴ Asis and Agunias, *Assessing Pre-Departure Information Programs*.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Siddiqui, Rashid, and Zeitlin, *Information Campaigns*, 61.

¹⁷ Ali, "Pre-Departure Orientation Program," 125.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Without Protection: How the Lebanese Justice Systems Fails Migrant Domestic Workers* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2010): 18.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Domestic Plight: How Jordanian Laws, Officials, Employers, and Recruiters Fail Abused Migrant Domestic Workers*, 2.

²⁰ International Labour Organization, *Domestic Workers Across the World*, v.

²¹ The Philippines and Sri Lanka both have embassies in Lebanon. Ethiopia has a consulate, and Nepal has an honorary consul.

²² See Asis and Agunias, *ibid*; and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

²³ Slemrod, "Migrant Domestic Workers Develop Survival Techniques amid Harsh Conditions."

²⁴ Data on literacy rates and educational attainment is from the United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Institute for Statistics' Country Profiles, at <http://stats.uis.unesco.org>.

²⁵ The importance of mobile phones as the single most crucial communication device for migrant domestic workers also has been described by researchers in Singapore. See Minu Thomas and Sun Sun Lim, *Migrant Workers' Use of ICTs for Interpersonal Communication – The Experience of Female Domestic Workers in Singapore* (Singapore: Communications and New Media Program, National University of Singapore, undated). http://www.philbu.net/media-anthropology/thomas_lim_migrant_workers_ICT.pdf

²⁶ "Mobile Cellular Subscriptions per 100 Inhabitants," World Telecommunications/ICT Indicators Database, data for 2011, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Without Protection*, 22; Simel Esim and Monica Smith, *Gender and Migration in Arab States*, 78.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Domestic Plight*, 57.

²⁹ Mobile phones have been lauded for their potential to help migrants overcome the problems of family separation. Research on Filipino migrants in the UK suggests that mobile phone and Internet use have significantly improved migrant mothers' ability to stay connected with their families in the Philippines, in some cases even allowing them to micromanage their households despite their physical absence, per Mirca Madinou and Daniel Miller, "Mobile Phone Parenting: Reconfiguring Relationships between Filipina Migrant Mothers and their Left-Behind Children," *New Media & Society* 13 (2011), 464.

³⁰ Shawn Mendes, Erwin Alampag, Edwin Soriano, and Cheryl Soriano, *The Innovative Use of Mobile Phones in the Philippines – Lessons for Africa* (Stockholm: SIDA, 2007), 8.

³¹ Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono et al., "Government to Equip Indonesian Migrant Workers with Cell Phones," *Jakarta Post*, July 8, 2011.

³² "Deal Signed on Hiring Filipino Domestic Workers," *Saudi Gazette*, January 25, 2012, <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=2012012516300>.

³³ Indo-Asian News Service, "Demand for Indian Domestic Workers Abroad: Ravi," *ThaIndian.com*, May 2, 2012, http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/business/demand-for-indian-domestic-workers-abroad-ravi_100615416.html; and Daniel P. George, "Domestic Workers in Gulf to Get Cell Phones," *The Times of India*, November 18, 2008, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2008-11-18/chennai/27895908_1_indian-workers-domestic-workers-uae-talmiz-ahmed.

³⁴ A number of Sri Lankan Buddhists expressed an interest in Buddhist prayer programs and *banas* (sermons), whereas some Catholic participants said they would like to hear broadcasts of Mass services.

³⁵ Astrology is an important part of Sri Lankan culture, and many migrants do not have access to astrological interpretations while living abroad.

³⁶ "Mobile Cellular Subscriptions per 100 Inhabitants," World Telecommunications/ICT Indicators Database, data for 2010, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>.