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THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MIGRANT RESOURCE CENTRES IN THE ARAB STATES



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FAIR WAY



A migrant resource centre (MRC) is a physical space which migrants visit to obtain information and assistance

An MRC in a country of destination is often a 'one stop shop' – run by government, trade unions, civil society, faith-based organizations, or a coalition of multiple partners - which offers migrants access to needed services and grievance mechanisms, including:



LEGAL SERVICES



RECREATIONAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES



MEDICAL AND HEALTHCARE SERVICES



COUNSELLING AND OTHER PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT



VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION



SUPPORT IN ORGANIZING AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

The key aspects that make an MRC a place that migrants want to access are:



FIXED, ACCESSIBLE AND SAFE LOCATION



FRIENDLY, WELCOMING AND NON-DISCRIMINATORY ATMOSPHERE



EXTENDED OPENING HOURS



EASY WAYS TO ACCESS INFORMATION ABOUT THE MRC

including through a hotline or website (such as Facebook) and in workers' own languages



There are many organizations that can establish MRCs

A few promising global examples (from the Asian region) include:



MRC RUN BY 'TRIPARTITE COALITION' (SINGAPORE)

Set up in 2009 by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and the Singapore National Employers Federation (Snef), the MRC in Singapore operates with the full support of the Singapore Government, labour movement and employers. The centre has 17 staff members and 500 volunteers and runs a 24-hour hotline, two branches of the MRC – as well as a travelling 'help kiosk' at different recreation centres and a shelter. It has directly assisted more than 20,000 migrant workers with problems and conducted outreach to more than 650,000 migrant workers since 2009.



MRC RUN BY GOVERNMENT (REPUBLIC OF KOREA)

The Korea Support Center for Foreign Workers was established in December 2004 by the Human Resources Development Service of Korea to protect the rights and welfare of migrant workers. The Support Center implements various educational programmes that are necessary for migrant workers, and informs them about the traditional culture of Korea. The Center provides counseling services as well as a number of welfare facilities.



There are many organizations that can establish MRCs



MRCs BY TRADE UNIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY (MALAYSIA)

The Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) has made a number of achievements towards organizing migrant workers, including through its 'migrant desks' and MRCs. MTUC formed a Domestic Worker Desk with all female staff in 2005, working closely with civil society organizations. MTUC, in collaboration with the ILO, also set up MRCs in the Northern, Central and Southern region of Malaysia to provide support services to migrant workers, including legal services. The case work is also a valuable source of information for MTUC to guide its advocacy on migrant worker issues.

Working alongside the MTUC is **Tenaganita** – a civil society group which provides counseling to migrant workers on rights for informed decision making; legal support for increased access to justice through labour courts; and negotiations for settlement with employers (this assistance is provided irrespective of migrant workers' legal status or nationality). More than one thousand women migrant workers referred to Tenaganita in 2015 were provided with access to justice through legal and medical assistance (including hospital visits).



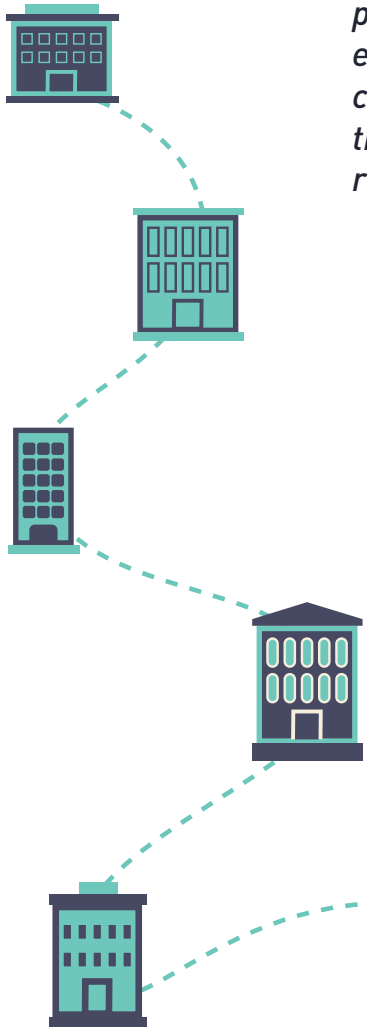
MRC BY FAITH GROUPS (TAIWAN, CHINA)

The Hope Workers' Center was established in 1986 by a Catholic missionary society and provides services to migrant workers in terms of casework, education, lobbying and advocacy, community enhancement, and pastoral programmes (church services and spiritual support). As part of its assistance, the Center helps workers with resolving work-related problems (through full-time caseworkers who are experts in the labour law), and also acts to welcome and encourage migrants to celebrate their culture through festivals and public events.

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There are only 6 identified MRCs in the Middle East

The mapping of MRCs in the Middle East focussed on 1) centres/institutions offering migrants a regular, permanent meeting space and which; 2) provide migrants with a range of services to support, protect and/or empower them; and 3) are not limited to one nationality of migrant workers. The study was limited to those centres that are currently active and responded to requests for information by the authors of the study. Based on the specified criteria, the mapping of MRCs in the Middle East suggests that only six organizations are currently running MRCs – four in Lebanon and two in Jordan (though none, at present, in the Gulf countries).



ANTI-RACISM
MOVEMENT

Established by a Lebanese NGO called the **Anti-Racism Movement** in Beirut 2011, the MCC has four regional locations in Lebanon. The MCCs offer migrant workers free language classes, computer classes, health and rights awareness sessions, advocacy training, cultural events, social gatherings, and opportunities to celebrate national holidays. The target groups are migrants of Asian and African origin, with a special focus on women migrant domestic workers.



CARITAS

Established and supported by the global NGO Caritas Internationalis, the **Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center** runs a MRC in Beirut and provides legal assistance to migrants in Lebanon. The Center also supports cultural celebrations for migrant workers during their respective national holidays and offers a meeting space which can be pre-booked by different communities.

There are only 6 identified MRCs in the Middle East



AMEL

AMEL Association International, a Lebanese NGO established their Migrant Center in 2011 as part of a European Union-funded program. Amel currently has two permanent centers offering weekly empowerment activities (language classes, employment-related trainings, literacy classes) to women migrant domestic workers in Beirut, and also provides services (legal, health, psychosocial and social) on a 'needs-basis' in 8 centers across Lebanon (not specific to migrant workers).



WORKERS'
CENTER
BETTERWORK

The BetterWork Jordan Programme (a partnership between ILO and the International Finance Corporation) in 2014 initiated the establishment of a Workers' Center in Al-Hassan - the largest garment export zone in Jordan. The Center is managed by an Association comprising tripartite representatives (government, trade union and employer). Services in the Center have grown to serve over 1,000 workers per week, offering them skills' training, access to legal aid, access to recreational activities (including gym and dance lessons), health awareness and protection to respond to sexual harassment.



DOMESTIC
WORKERS
UNION
FENASOL

The Domestic Workers' Union

operates under the auspices of the National Federation of Workers and Employees Trade Union in Lebanon (FENASOL) and offers a space accessible to all members and potential members of the union. The centre offers ad-hoc training on such topics as sexual and reproductive health, communication strategies, and will, in future, offer language classes.



CARITAS

Established and supported by the global NGO Caritas Internationalis, **Caritas Jordan Community Centre** (hereafter 'Caritas Jordan') was established in 2002 to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to refugees and migrant workers. The Centre offers cash assistance to migrants in need, access to medical services, social and legal awareness sessions, and vocational trainings.



Allowing migrant workers to meet, celebrate their culture and shared experience is an achievement of MRCs

While the primary focus of such an MRC may be providing information, advice or training, as well as psycho-social and legal support services, by creating an opportunity for workers to meet and interact, MRCs may also offer an important opportunity for workers to organize, and strengthen their solidarity with each other and with trade unions (where these exist), to improve their working and living conditions.

Where centres are seen as a place where the workers can 'express and celebrate their cultural and personal identities', this can be seen as an important element of supporting the dignity of the workers, as well as an important coping strategy. For example, migrant workers accessing MRCs in Lebanon noted the feeling that the MRC was a 'community' where workers felt accepted and supported. Though dance lessons or celebration of cultural holidays might appear as purely recreational activities, they are instrumental in improving the mental health of workers and creating the environment for increasing their self-confidence, including potentially their ability to change and improve their conditions.



Strong networks are critical to ensure success of MRCs



The ability of MRCs to provide a wide range of services and facilities for migrants varies significantly, depending on the human and financial resources of each MRC, but the ability to create a strong referral network is an important mechanism for ensuring services to migrants even when they cannot be covered by the MRC staff.

This network need not be limited to civil society organizations. For example, strong engagement with employers and trade unions (in the case of Al-Hassan Workers' Center in Jordan) provides a number of advantages as stakeholders contributed to the initial costs for setting up and running the Center, covering the substantial costs of construction of the building, donating furniture and computers in-kind, landscaping and internet and communications services, and training. However, where employers (and sometimes trade unions) are viewed with apprehension by migrant workers, there may be initial challenges to building the trust of workers.



Not all MRCs specifically promote empowerment of workers as change-agents but those that do apply a number of methods



The MRCs also varied in terms of their focus on services provision only or also on building the capacity of migrants to lead self-advocacy initiatives and campaigns. Those MRCs that focussed on building the self-capacity of migrant workers were also the ones to introduce membership-based systems, which could be seen to have key advantages – in that they bring a small amount of funds to support MRC activities, but more importantly create a sense of ownership and commitment. For example, the Migrant Community Centres in Lebanon focus on building the capacity of large groups of migrant workers to lead self-advocacy initiatives and provide them with support and safe spaces. For instance, they offer advocacy and capacity building trainings for migrants, to organize an online campaign, to shoot a video, to design a poster; and to work with different community groups. This is also a strategy of Lebanon's Domestic Workers Union, which has recently established an MRC.

The Al-Hassan Workers' Center in Jordan has furthermore worked to strengthen workers' own negotiation power with employers, by supporting/guiding workers in their discussions with the factory owners. While the Center does not actively promote collective action among migrant workers (this is the role of the trade union), the Center can assist them with advice about their rights, and the legal way to engage in industrial action, if this is what the workers have agreed upon. The Center can also assist workers with access to translators so that they can better organize themselves, unify their demands and collectively bargain.



There are many promising practices in terms of outreach to vulnerable groups of migrants



Outreach to migrant communities is considered a key priority, with MRCs applying a number of strategies, including visiting faith-based organizations, cultural events, radio programmes, introducing hotlines, social media platforms and identifying 'community leaders'. These outreach strategies are crucial in getting core information to migrants regarding their rights, as well as attracting workers to the centres, but need to be complemented with a sustainable provision of services and facilities. Given language barriers, such outreach is often not easy but can be facilitated by volunteers from the migrant communities. For example, the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Centre and AMEL (also in Lebanon) visited and mobilized migrant workers in the areas where they live, in churches and in the airport upon arrival, as well as key social and religious events. They also communicated with organizations and networks in their countries of origin to coordinate with them pre-departure training and share information about the centres.



There is a pressing need for more MRCs in the Middle East



In the absence of migrant worker unions (and limited representation of migrants by existing trade union federations), MRCs have provided an opportunity to raise awareness on issues considered important to migrant workers themselves. This has been an achievement in itself and also contributed to advocacy messages and input to the enactment of legislation and sometimes collective bargaining agreements (eg. For the garment sector in Jordan).

It is clear that MRCs fill a much-needed gap in Middle East countries to provide accessible services to migrant workers and a safe meeting space, for both workers in a regular and irregular situation. Many more migrant workers could benefit if more MRCs were created, particularly in Gulf countries where no such facilities currently exist. Unions, civil society organizations, migrant worker/diaspora associations and religious organizations should consider whether they could support the establishment of such a centre – using the findings of this mapping as a guidance tool in carrying out a needs assessment/feasibility study; establishing an institutional framework; deciding on a financial sustainability plan; launching the centre; outreach to workers, and monitoring and evaluation.



Experience shows that there are some key steps involved in establishing a successful MRC

Effective planning, research and preparation can help to ensure a successful MRC.

Key amongst these steps is to review the national laws on establishing an MRC and determine whether it is necessary to establish a separate entity, or if an MRC can be established by an existing CSO or union and if so, what are the necessary permits and licenses required. The next step is to carry out a **needs assessment** to identify the main potential 'client base', including the most disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups, noting in particular the needs and barriers in access to services by domestic workers (many of whom may not receive a day off to access an MRC) and migrants in an irregular situation. Such research can be undertaken through one-on-one interviews, focal group discussions or confidential (online) surveys with migrants and – depending on the circumstances - can also involve research with employers as their 'buy in' may be important in ensuring that workers are freely permitted to access the MRC.

STEPS TO DEVELOPING A MRC

STEP 1

Research the national laws on establishing an MRC and consider what would be the best legal basis for an MRC

STEP 2

Carry out a needs assessment to identify target groups and needed services as well as research with other stakeholders including employers on how to ensure their support (or at least non-interference)

STEP 3

Decide which services to provide and how, including by building networks with local partners

STEP 4

Draw up a budget and develop a financial strategy, including a fund-raising strategy

STEP 5

Determine policies and operating procedures, including monitoring and evaluation

STEP 6

Find an appropriate and accessible location

STEP 7

Draw up a communications strategy and outreach strategy to build members/beneficiaries as well as volunteers

(adapted from IOM 2015) .

Experience shows that there are some key steps involved in establishing a successful MRC

Once a target group has been identified, there is a need to determine how best to provide services to this group, which might include: face-to-face consultations in the MRC, telephone information services or hotlines, web-based material, outreach services through churches, embassies or consulates, and mobile centres, as well as referrals to other services and agencies.

Running a successful MRC incurs costs and this means planning from the start how to cover items such as staffing, rent, utilities, etc. and ensure **financial sustainability**

Like any organization, the smooth running of a MRC relies on having clear **operational procedures** in place which ensure transparent recruitment and retention of qualified staff, and quality of services (including regular monitoring and evaluation).

Choosing a location for the MRC will depend on the research undertaken earlier, which can help to determine the most accessible area for the migrant group. Transport accessibility and safety of the location should also be primary considerations – this might require additional research on the likely views of the local population in the proposed area, as well as a consideration of the safety of migrants with irregular status from interference from authorities.

Financial sustainability is a challenge, but can be managed



The majority of surveyed centers consider financial sustainability a major challenge since they rely heavily on short-term funding projects. Many MRCs are founded based on donor-funded projects and must regularly apply for new grants, which can be time consuming. Charging subsidized fees can therefore be an important mechanism to help with income generation, while also encouraging migrants' ownership of the centre. However, given limited capacity, other means will need to be found – whether these involve drawing on a proportion of trade union dues, allocation of a civil society organization's regular budget, and/or a fundraising strategy for how to search and apply for funding opportunities on an ongoing basis.

