

حركة مناهضة
العنصرية



Anti-Racism
Movement

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



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Events Timeline

JAN

Increase in USD Exchange Rate in Black market and unemployment among migrant workers
Increase in demands for evacuation

FEB

Increase in inability to transfer money to home countries
First case of COVID-19 detected in Lebanon

MAR

Full lockdown
Increasing unemployment among migrant workers
Increase in demands for evacuation

APR

Murder of Faustina Tay
Heavy impact on economy due to lockdown
Increasing evictions of migrant workers by landlords

AUG

Beirut port blast
More abandonment by employment
More protests for evacuation

JUL

Projections of passing new standard unified contract (SUC) by Ministry of Labor (MoL)
Continuous evictions of migrant workers by landlords

JUN

Continuous evictions of migrant workers by landlords

MAY

Employers abandon migrant domestic workers in streets and at consulates/embassies
Protests at consulates/embassies
Increasing evictions of migrant workers by landlords

SEP

SUC passed by MoL
Continuous evictions of migrant workers by landlords

OCT

Block of SUC by Council of State due to appeal by Syndicate of Recruitment Agencies in Lebanon (SORAL)

NOV

More calls for evacuation
Continuous evictions of migrant workers by landlords

DEC

Continuous evictions of migrant workers by landlords

About Us

Our Mission

ARM works to achieve social, economic, and gender justice for all migrant workers and racialized groups in Lebanon.

Our Vision

A just society where all migrants enjoy decent living and working conditions.

Our Values



Migrant Voices First

We privilege the voices of migrant workers in every aspect of our work.



Care at the Core

We adopt feminist ethics of care in our work, where we value attentiveness, responsibility, responsiveness, and compassion.



Justice

We employ the social justice framework as the basis towards upholding fundamental human rights for everyone in our communities.



Solidarity

We value the expression and practice of solidarity among all marginalized communities as a necessary alliance against oppressive and unjust systems.



Political Engagement

We view our everyday work as political and seek to always address the larger social, economic, cultural and policy structures that enable discrimination, abuse, and rights violations.



Community

We value the importance of building safe and strong communities that sustain the activism and offer supportive social networks for migrants and their allies.



Theory of Change

Our theory of change is rooted in working with women migrant domestic workers, and other racialized groups in Lebanon to build a movement against the systems that exploit them. Our aim is to build social justice systems that respect workers' rights and freedoms with no exceptions. We believe this political change is possible through building strong and supportive communities for migrant workers against an environment that often only treats them as cheap labor or "beneficiaries" of aid.

Our approach shifts the positionality of migrant workers from

beneficiaries and recipients of services to leaders and agents of social change in Lebanon. ARM's Migrant Community Centers (MCCs) provide the space, tools, resources, and capacity for migrant workers to self-organize and lead awareness and rights-based campaigns to help end discrimination and exploitation, and guarantee protection, rights, and access to justice. In parallel, ARM's advocacy efforts tackle social issues related to racism, and aim to shift social norms by stigmatizing undesirable attitudes and behaviors, and building support for policy change.

Strategic Goals

ARM works to support migrant worker communities through advocacy, community-building, casework and creating space for migrants to support each other and represent themselves. Our strategic goals are:

- Advance structural change against racism in Lebanon.
- Strengthen and support migrant worker communities, self advocacy, and collective action in Lebanon, especially women domestic workers.
- Organisational development of ARM.

What We Do

The significant economic, political and health difficulties in 2020 presented new and even more pressing challenges for migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in Lebanon. The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, the August 4th explosion in Beirut and the ongoing economic crisis has left MDWs in an even more vulnerable condition. The numbers of migrants made homeless, without an income and without the paperwork or funds to return to their home country has created an increasingly dire situation. Meeting the most basic of needs, such as food and paying rent, has become a constant concern for many members of the MDW community. As a result, our plans in 2020 needed to adapt to the context, as did our activities.



1 Advocacy

After ten years of campaigning for the right of migrant workers to live in Lebanon in safety and in dignity, in 2020, we found ourselves campaigning for their immediate evacuation. We called it “evacuation” because for many leaving Lebanon in the middle of its downfall, this constituted an emergency exit, an escape from the imminent dangers of homelessness and hunger. Thousands of migrant workers lost their jobs as employers

failed to sustain the payment of their salaries in US dollars, and often even in Lebanese pounds. The financial collapse did not spare anyone. The suffering of workers from Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Bangladesh, and many other countries, suddenly became visible to the Lebanese public, as many gathered outside consulates and embassies, chanting in unison: “We want to go home.”

ARM’s response to their call

2020 Campaigns

With Kenyan community organizers, we helped expose the corruption of their Honorary Consul. With Sierra Leonean women, we pressured the Sierra Leone government to find means for evacuation and the consulate raised enough funds from the Lebanese-Sierra Leonean community to pay for more than 100 airplane tickets, PCR tests, healthcare, as well as temporary shelters. With Cameroonian workers, we accelerated the paperwork of a previously unresponsive consulate, which resulted in the consulate finally fulfilling its job of issuing laissez-passer documents for more than 80 undocumented women. With Ivorian protesters, we tracked files lost for months in the bureaucracy of the Lebanese government, and secured amnesty and exit clearance for more than 40 women and children.

Our efforts to support migrant communities in their struggles did not always result in success, however. Responding to a call from Sri Lankan women, we sent a letter to their government urging their intervention to provide an emergency exit to their citizens in Lebanon. An unprecedented total of 60 organizations from Sri Lanka and Lebanon endorsed that letter. We followed it up with a targeted social media campaign and a press conference in Sri Lanka. The embassy refused to respond.

2 Migrant Community Centers



ARM’s Hamra, Ashrafieh and Jounieh Migrant Community Centers were closed at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic for the safety of the members, volunteers, and staff. MCC’s Members Board voting procedures were put on hold until the lockdown would be lifted.



In person classes were shifted online, and MCC’s Education programs were delivered online via WhatsApp, Facebook, Youtube and/or phone calls. Several information and awareness sessions, as well as community-building and advocacy activities were delivered online for two months before ARM shifted to relief work.

These activities were instrumental in maintaining space for members to regularly connect and engage with each other during those difficult times.



3 Supporting Self-Organization of Migrant Domestic Workers

ARM recognizes the significance of self-organizing and collaboration, as we support migrant domestic workers' activism in their fight for their rights. What we offer as allies is capacity-building support and help in maintaining their safety where needed, so that MDWs can assume a place of being central actors in their struggle, thus shifting their positionality from being only "beneficiaries" to agents and leaders of social change. We support migrant communities to design, lead and implement advocacy efforts to improve their living conditions and advance their socio-economic rights. We also provide legal advice and support to MDW community leaders who have increasingly become targets of arrests and deportations because of their organizing.

ARM currently runs a capacity-building program for MDWs which provides workshops and training sessions that focus on activism, self-advocacy and social change. These workshops have been expanded to cover topics and skills related to leadership, project planning, campaigning, soft skills, computer, languages, and human rights. At the beginning of 2020 from January to March, a series of workshops and trainings were provided to 105 MWs. Topics included creative writing, communication and media trainings.

Through this program, we've also provided direct funding to several MDW-led activities and initiatives, including social media campaigns and MDW-led awareness sessions at schools, universities, and public events, in addition to connecting several MDW-led groups to external sources of funding. 11 MW-led activist groups were formed or supported through MCC. Most of these groups continue being active in their communities until today.

In addition, we've been organizing workers' day protests with MDWs demanding labor and migrant justice on a yearly basis in collaboration with other organizations since 2011.



4 Improving Access to Social, Legal, and Medical Support



Besides the usual challenges handled by our team due to human rights violations inherent to the Kafala system, 2020 brought in even more obstacles.

These presented themselves in many forms, such as the huge influx of cases following the economic crisis, the delays by GS and court procedures due the repetitive lockdowns, the decreasing access of MDW to means of communication, and the challenges associated with working remotely on such delicate matters.

Many freelance migrant domestic workers lost their jobs and income and became unable to fulfill their basic needs including food, shelter and healthcare. Others were threatened with evictions, sometimes violently. ARM started a separate relief program, which included food and hygiene kits distribution, as well as housing support.

Homelessness became widespread, as did cases of suffering resulting from the deterioration of the mental health of migrant workers. While ARM relied for years on the community's support for sheltering sensitive cases in their

homes or fundraising to find rooms or apartments for members of the community. The community was already stretched thin, and it became impossible to meet the ever-increasing demand. ARM had to stop taking sheltering cases as we were past the stage of any effective case-by-case intervention.

All of this meant a rising need for evacuation. A significant number of the callers were asking for financial, legal, or administrative support for their evacuation. ARM's cases team counseled and referred them, until ARM ended up creating a separate program for evacuation.

The crisis also led many employers to stop paying their MDWs, often going as far as abandoning them in the streets or at their embassies with no wages or plane tickets to leave. Hundreds of cases came in a very short period of time, and ARM handled them in collaboration with other NGOs, but the number of cases exceeded our capacity. We are currently looking into new partnerships while considering employing an inhouse lawyer.

These cases of labor violations posed a challenge of their own.

First, the Covid pandemic, and the repetitive lockdowns, as well as the overwhelming number of complaints received by GS from different NGOs, further slowed an already cumbersome system. This translated into very long processes during which the worker remained at the mercy of social support, and often lost trust in the justice system. Many ultimately decided, or were forced by the situation, to give up on their rights: in many cases the case leaders ended up travelling without their salaries.

After we were able to understand the new timelines, ARM tried remedying the situation by being more straightforward about the lengthiness of the process from the start, by assigning lawyers and signing power of attorney forms to follow up on the case even if the worker leaves the country. We also provided SIM cards in sensitive cases to stay in contact with the case leader.

Second, the devaluation of the Lebanese pound meant a lot of uncertainty when it came to the value of the unpaid wages. This translated into attempting to refer more cases for negotiation as opposed to taking the lengthy, most likely

unfruitful legal pathways. Working remotely also meant we often had no in-person contact with the case leader, which in turn limited our capacity to counsel, build trust, and even in some cases, get accurate information. Logistically, many workers had limited access to their phones, often with a bad connection. ARM's case workers still consulted sensitive cases in person, while taking adequate protection measures. As for the rest of the cases, we implemented a three-way call translation system, and we adapted to the worker's preferred means of communication which often meant a more time-consuming intervention.

New trends of cases also emerged, posing a challenge on how to intervene. These include migrant-on-migrant violence, which stems from the dire socio-economic and psychological situation experienced by MDWs. We also received cases reaching out after being evacuated to their home countries with various needs including arrest for debts related to their travel to Lebanon. While these cases did not fit our criteria, we still tried to mediate where possible.

5 Solidarity Response: The Relief Project

MAR 2020

SEP 2020



workers and migrant domestic workers households. ARM also raised emergency funds to distribute temporary materials to make homes livable, provide cleaning materials and labour as well as first aid/medical items for the wounded by the 4th of August Beirut Blast. However, since other organizations with more expertise, funds and capacity were already taking care of house rehabilitation and medical provision, we decided to focus more on food distribution, housing and evacuation. In fact, all the funds were later reallocated towards evacuation.



At the beginning of 2020, during the first lockdown in response to the pandemic, ARM conducted an assessment targeting 400 members from the Migrant Community Centers to identify the most pressing challenges and needs of migrant communities. Migrant communities were struggling in securing food, accessing healthcare, paying rent, and covering the expenses of evacuation.

ARM initiated a “solidarity response”, launching a relief program with three components: food distribution, housing support, and evacuation. The relief program included a one-time distribution of hygiene kits. In collaboration with Tadamon al Nas – a newly formed grassroots group – ARM set up a food distribution system run by volunteers to package and deliver food packages. As reach increased, so did requests for food packages and other forms of aid.

Data on eviction threats, medical issues, and UNHCR status were collected. The helpline served as a data source for internal referrals for the housing (evictions) and cases team (medical and other cases). The number of callers increased exponentially and ARM supported hundreds of migrant





6 Housing

Lebanon had to endure a year challenging on every level imaginable, and MDWs were not spared. Yet, we tried to adapt the best we can and launched an eviction intervention in collaboration with the Housing Monitor - a project by Public Works Studio in April 2020.

Securing housing was a challenge in itself. Most of the migrant workers that were threatened with evictions had already lost their only source of income. This weakened negotiations with the landlords from our end, especially with owners who relied on rent revenue as their only source of income.

COVID-19 exacerbated the crisis not only because many lost their jobs, but also by making it far worse for them to be evicted in the midst of a pandemic, where people in their



SEP 2020



DEC 2020

Prior to September 2020, the Relief Project was conceived as separate to the housing project, but efforts to reinforce coordination led to the integration of the two components under the relief umbrella. Great efforts were set in establishing more realistic targets in relation to the team's capacity to respond to the emergency. Previously, we were short on clear monthly targets that could set an efficient work pace, and the implementation areas were not circumscribed, meaning that ARM was distributing all over the country and the number of recipients fluctuated on a monthly basis, hindering consistency in the distribution. Starting September 2020, the relief project underwent a process of internal reorganization where we focused on setting clear objectives, strengthening the coordination within the project's components (food and housing) as well as with other ARM teams, and hiring new personnel. A monthly target of 1,200 to 1,500 kits to be distributed was agreed upon. In November

2020, the food aid operations moved to a more spacious location acting as a stock and distribution center which allowed us to store more supplies and to increase the number of packaging volunteers, boosting our outreach and number of kits distributed per month, as well as reducing the waiting time to 25 days.

At the same time, the helpline operation team was enhanced and expanded: a food helpline coordinator was appointed and two additional helpline operators joined the team. The necessity of upgrading the service was based on the belief that the helpline operators covered a fundamental role, considering they are the first responders to Migrants and refugees calling for assistance. Having a helpline coordinator also improved the communication and coordination with other components (housing) and teams (casework/evacuation/advocacy) within ARM.



communities might not be able to welcome them in their house as a safety precaution. COVID-19 and quarantine also made our team's work more difficult, since we had to work from home while maintaining consistent communication. It also made it challenging to execute certain plans like safely intervening in a housing situation and supporting the tenant in escaping dangerous situations, while also being aware of the restriction on movement. However, we were constantly improving our work based on accumulated knowledge and team discussions. Our teamwork allowed us to respond to these crises collectively and allowed us to overcome the mental burnout of working beyond our capacity.



7 Evacuation: Protests and Evictions



We believe that in emergency situations such as the one still unfolding in Lebanon, foreign governments have a responsibility to evacuate their citizens promptly and at their own cost. At the same time, the local government in crisis also has a responsibility to facilitate the exit of those who wish to leave by reducing bureaucratic barriers and waiving all penalties and fees that could prevent the migrant workers' return to their home country.

Given the delays and reluctance of some foreign countries to organize and fund the evacuation of their citizens, ARM set up the Evacuation Project to prevent mass homelessness and hunger among migrant communities in Lebanon who wished to go back home. However, ARM did not absolve governments of their responsibilities. The Evacuation Project was a temporary and rapid emergency response that provided an opportunity for fast exit to migrant workers stranded in Lebanon with no alternative means of a safe return.

The process has taken shape slowly, considering the lack of

HR capacities at the beginning of the project. With one person operating the Evacuation Project, and with the support of the Advocacy and Cases Managers, the process was established through trial and error, amended by long conversations on the vision and steps ahead. An Evacuation Manager joined the team later in December 2020.

One of the main challenges encountered was the lack of responsiveness and cooperation from various embassies and consulates (often honorary), which led to major delays in issuing the laissez-passer for undocumented people wishing to return home. This is due to corruption and lack of interest and will to support their nationals. The Evacuation Registration Officer was responsible for building relationships and following up constantly with embassies and consulates, through face to face meetings and a consistent exchange of emails and calls to retain the engagement of those involved.

The team also faced difficulties identifying organizations in home countries that can offer support to migrant

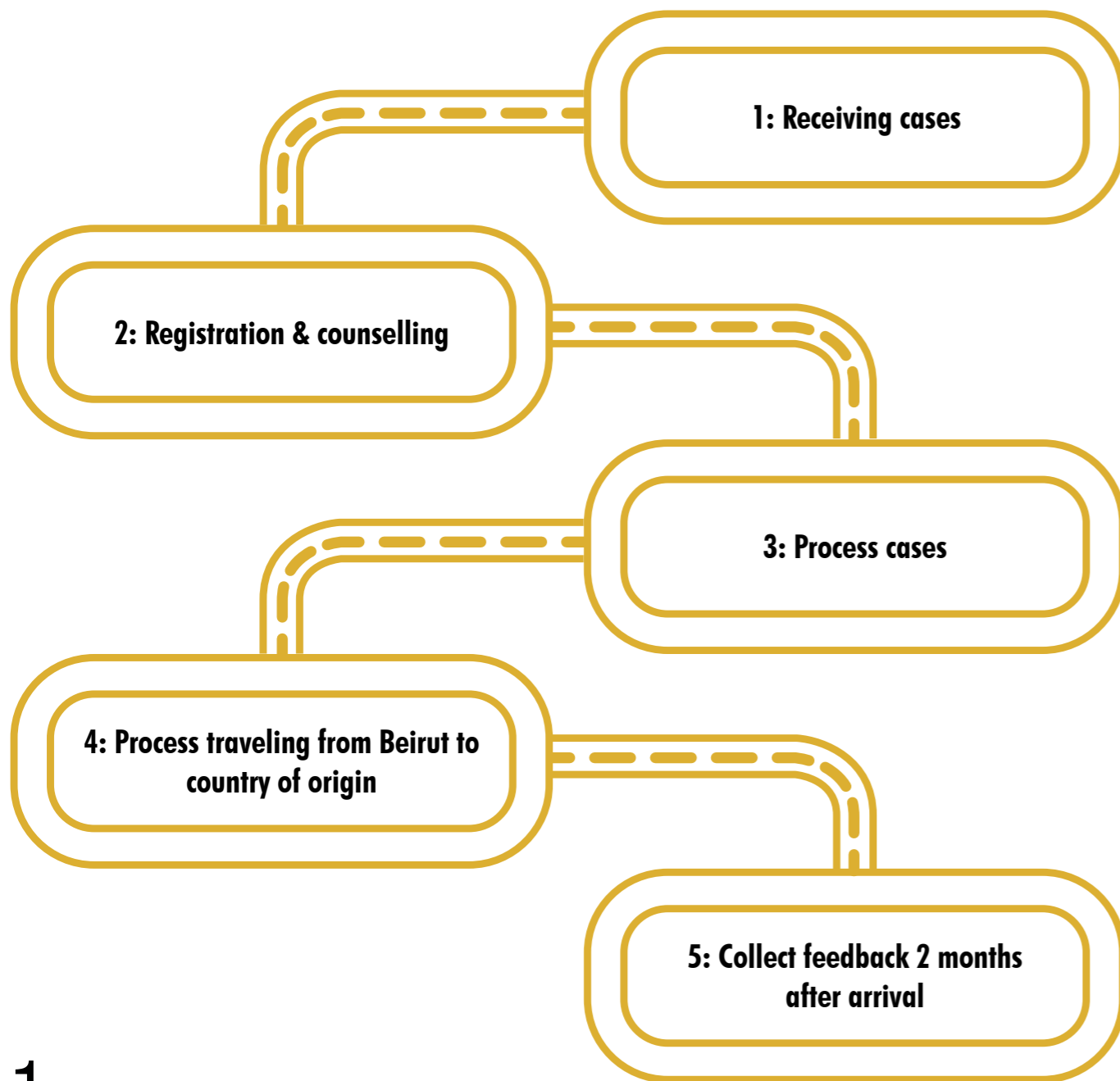
workers upon their return. The advocacy team worked hard on identifying partners in home countries that could respond to the needs of MWs. However, this was challenging considering these organizations also had limited resources, and might have had projects with scopes different from the needs of MWs, or in areas far from the remote towns where they lived. The evacuation process could not always include a reintegration plan. Accordingly, ARM provided all relevant information about reintegration services available or not available to each person before registering them for evacuation. Each would then choose for themselves if they wish to stay or leave.

Another challenge faced was the lack of time and space to meet every single person individually. In the beginning, we received many group referrals, and with the limited HR capacities, there was no time and capacity to meet with every person face to face. Sometimes communication with MWs wishing to leave happened through embassies/

consulates or community advocates and organizers, to ensure everyone had all the necessary information. There was also no physical space dedicated for evacuation registration. We often resorted to group evacuations because it was easier logistically to deal with embassies/consulates and GS. At the time, we tried our best to call every person and explain the process and take their consent, but it was impossible to do it with every single worker.

In 2020, a few people who left us they were unhappy in their home countries.

Their concerns led to the development of a feedback system which was in operation since February 2021. This issue was also addressed through hiring counsellors who spoke with MWs wishing to return home, giving them the space to think about the advantages and disadvantages of their decisions. This goes in line with ARM's philosophy and approach that is rooted in supporting MWs in having more freedom of movement, and facilitating their ability to make informed decisions within the principles of safe and fair migration.



1 Receiving cases

Since the demand to leave was so much higher than our financial and HR capacity, we had decided not to share the Evacuation helpline on any public platform. Referrals were received through:

- Community advocates
- General Security referring people in detention centres
- Embassies and Consulates
- Internal ARM staff and external NGOs
- Word of Mouth from individuals who were supported by ARM

2 Registration

When the evacuation team receives a case, a meeting is scheduled with the person wishing to return back home to register more information about the person, and take their consent to proceed.



1. Identifying documentation status, residency status and if there are unpaid wages

The process of Evacuation for MWs normally requires having a valid passport which should be given to the GS to obtain an exit clearance. Once the exit clearance is issued, MWs are free to travel.

- **Food:** food kits, hygiene kits and kits for babies (diapers and milk) while waiting for their repatriation. Previously referred to relief team at ARM.

- **ARM's advocacy team** for support against entities (Consulates/Embassies and government entities) who were not doing their duties towards the communities who need assistance.

2. Identifying type of support needed from ARM in order to be able to go back home

ARM can cover the following: Flight ticket, paying the fine to waive overstay fees at the GS, PCR tests in Lebanon and on arrival, a travel insurance, 1 luggage/person if needed, transportation to the airport in Lebanon.

4. Referral to government, UN agencies or NGOs in home countries, where partnerships have been identified by ARM (Not always possible)

ARM tries to reach out to any relevant governmental bodies, UN agencies and NGOs in countries of origin who might be able to assist the people who travel with reintegration. For each country, we aim to mobilise at least one agency to assist with the following: Transportation from the airport, psycho-social support, legal support, vocational training / tools for economic empowerment , micro Financing for small businesses. Evacuation is not conditional upon securing a commitment from any agency to provide these services. One of ARM's core values is the acknowledgement and respect of migrant workers' agency and their ability to make the best choices for themselves when presented with different options. ARM provides all relevant information about reintegration services available or not available to each person before registering them for evacuation. The person will then choose for themselves if they want to stay or leave. Anyone can choose to benefit from ARM's Evacuation Project despite the lack of support or insufficient support available to them for reintegration in their home country.

3. Referral to other services if needed

- **Medical issues:** physical and mental health conditions, or referrals of people who tested positive before their repatriation flight and in need of a space in the isolation centre. Usually done to MSF.

- **Trafficking cases** to IOM that usually take in charge their repatriation and reintegration in their home country
- **Legal support,** be it for GS complaints or for individuals who needed legal assistance to get unpaid wages and cases of abuse to the cases team at ARM.

- **Shelter/housing:** homeless people, covid positive cases who need housing after they exit MSF's isolation centre, while waiting for their next flight, people experiencing abuse at their house or employer's house awaiting repatriation. Referrals made to the housing team or to Concern's shelter program

3 Processing cases

Each case will need different types of support in their cases and papers. Below are the cases that are commonly faced.

- **Invalid passport/no passport:** Individuals who have an invalid passport or no passport at all have to obtain a Laissez-Passer (a one time travel document) from their respective Embassies/ Consulates.

- **Exit clearance:** it is a form of approval to exit the country obtained from GS after GS verifies that there are no complaints against the worker (theft, murder) and that penalty fees resulting from an expired residency are paid, and therefore they can leave. All MWs need an exit clearance.

- **Waiving penalty fees:** A penalty fee is imposed on MWs for each year that they overstayed (300 000 or 400 000 LL/year depending on the worker's classification). Workers whose residence permits expired between March 2020 and end of December 2020 and could not renew their permits are automatically exempt from any penalty fees. Workers who were irregular even before the crises are not automatically exempted but in practice, when consulates / embassies are submitting a list of names to GS and requesting a waiver of all fees, GS is systematically waiving the penalty fees. The cost of the waiving fee is 140,000 LL. When the penalty fees are waived, the irregular workers who did not pay the penalty will no longer be allowed to come back to Lebanon in the future.

- **Legal issues/Complaints:** Individuals who have legal complaints against them have to settle their cases in order to receive the exit clearance. In these cases, individuals are referred to cases team who help them either personally or by referring them to other organizations. The process in these cases might take a long time to be cleared, an issue that is communicated to the workers.
Unpaid wages: Some migrant workers want to file a complaint against their sponsors to retrieve their unpaid wages or for other reasons. This should be referred to the cases team. Others just want to go home so they decide to forego their rights and skip this step. The cases team can only support those who have more than 3 months of unpaid wages in the last 2 years, not more. Cases as such take more time to leave than others due to the legal bureaucratic process which requires hiring a lawyer, filing a complaint after which the worker can sign a POA (Power of Attorney). After that the worker can travel and the lawyers can handle the file in her absence, after



which we can transfer the money to them upon collection.

- **Traveling with kids (Documents):** Single mothers or families traveling with kids have to obtain the following documents for their kids:
 - Birth certificate for each kid from the Mokhtar.
 - Laissez-Passer for each kid. Birth certificates should be submitted to Embassy/Consulate to issue Laissez-Passer.
 - Father's Authorization. This document should be issued with a Notary writer and it should state that the father does not mind the mother traveling with the kid/s. This document is then submitted to the GS to get the clearance for the kid/s. This always caused issues in cases of MDW who have kids from Lebanese fathers, where in every single case as such, the father refused to provide this authorization letter, even in cases where the father refused to take responsibility for the kids and mother or even support them in any way possible.
- **Traveling with Kids (Age groups):** As per airlines regulations, every infant under the age of 2 years can only be escorted by 1 adult. This is to say that 1 adult cannot escort 2 infants under the age of 2. In one case, a mother was traveling with 4

kids, 2 of which were under the age of 2. We had to ask her to wait until we found someone else from the same community who wanted to travel and was willing to help the mother with the other infant under the age of 2.

- **Individuals who need physical assistance:** After finishing the documents and getting the clearance, we need to contact the airlines to inform them of the person who needs physical assistance in order for them to provide him with help in the airport in Lebanon, in the airport of the country of layover, as well as the airport of the country of arrival. In one case we encountered, a man who had a brain stroke and lost the ability to walk and talk was safely taken to his country by doing all of the above. We made sure we are booking his ticket with an airline that takes these matters seriously and we contacted them several times to make sure of their process and to organize the logistics with them. We also provided him with a wheelchair upon arrival at the airport with which he was escorted to the meeting point where the assistant from the airline was waiting. We also contacted an NGO in the country of destination who took on the responsibility to take

him from the airport after arrival and continue his medical treatment.

- **Individuals who suffered from psychological difficulties:** Dealing with individuals who suffered psychologically was also very delicate. We have to contact their doctor to explain the process of evacuation and understand better what suits them. After making sure with the doctor that the patient is able to travel, we have to organize their travel with the presence of another member from the same community who wants to travel to ensure that the person feels safe traveling with someone they can connect with. In 2020 we helped 2 ladies who were admitted to a psychiatric hospital in Lebanon.

4 Processing traveling from Beirut to home countries

1: Buying ticket with travel insurance.

2: PCR test 72 hours before the flight: Individuals who test positive have to be referred to an isolation center for treatment. We usually refer people to MSF. Some people refuse to be admitted so we ask them to quarantine in their houses for 14 days and put them in touch with MSF for consultations and follow-ups. We also follow up with them on a regular basis. In cases as such, tickets are put on hold until the person finishes their quarantine, after which the ticket is rescheduled. With cases where individuals refuse to go to an isolation center and are not welcomed by their flatmates due to being positive, the housing team takes on supporting them with an alternative housing until they finish quarantining and test negative again, after which they can go back to their houses.

3: Transportation to the airport in Lebanon if needed.



5 Collect Feedback 2 months after arrival

The evacuation manager contacts people who left, 2 months after their arrival, in order to collect feedback on how the repatriation process facilitated by ARM went, and their situation in their home country, and mainly the challenges they are facing, their quality of life, their relationships with their community members. This will help us adapt our repatriation process accordingly and make strategic decisions regarding if/how to move forward with this project through better understanding the impact of repatriation on people who left.



Numbers of calls/cases received:

We don't have an exact number of the calls we received in 2020 but we can easily say we received more than 300 calls from different communities, especially after the helpline number spread among the communities. From these calls we managed to support 110 individuals from different communities

By Country of Origin

Cameroon	Ethiopia	Sierra Leone	Nigeria	Ivory Coast	Burkina Faso	Sudan
30	12	1	2	14	7	4

Kenya	Bangladesh	Benin	Rwanda	Ghana	Mali
1	27	8	1	1	2

By Gender

Women	Men
85	25

By Age group

Adults	Infants
98	12

Families (Full Families or Single mothers with kids) Vs. Individuals

Families	Individuals
7 (21 individuals in total)	89

Valid Documents Vs. Invalid Documents

Note: People with Valid Documents still need to pass by the GS to check if there are any complaints

Valid	Invalid
15	95

Families Supported By Country of Origin

Country of Origin	Families	Individuals by family
Bangladesh	4 Families	Father, Mother and 2 kids (5 years and 2 years)
		Mother, Sister and daughter (3 years)
		Mother and 4 kids (6 years, 5 years, 2 years, 1 year)
		Mother and 2 kids (6 years, 1 year)
Ivory Coast	1 Family	Mother and her son (8 years)
Ethiopia	1 Family	Mother and her son (2 years)
Cameroon	1 Family	Mother and her son (1 year)

Ethical & Political Dilemmas in 2020

In the feminist spirit of self-reflection and continuous learning, we would like to share with you a few key ethical and political dilemmas that haunted our 2020.

A Brief but Disappointing Convergence of Interests

For the first time in the history of the Kafala system, one demand was shared among the majority of the workers, the employers, the Ministry of Labor, the General Security, and ARM. At first glance it may seem that we were all on the same side, working towards the same goal of facilitating the evacuation of migrant workers who wished to leave. Being in the same camp as actors whose motives were flawed at best and racist at worst, raised some question marks among our supporters. However, in truth, our motives could not have been more divergent.

When we pushed for waiving the penalty fees for undocumented workers who wished to leave, the General Security granted our demand willingly. While we did it out of concern for the future of migrant workers in Lebanon, they were simply pleased with having fewer migrants in the country. While we pushed for the creation of an adequate justice mechanism for the wage theft that reached an unprecedented scale, the Minister of Labor was quick to sympathize with employers caught in the crisis and refused to even entertain our demand. Yet, she facilitated the evacuation of Sri Lankan workers, among others, through close collaboration with embassies. The Minister of Labor just wanted migrant workers to leave. The motive was never truly hidden, but it became very clear when the General Security released data indicating an 83% decline on new work visas granted to migrant workers in 2020, compared to 2019. Several government representatives were quick to claim this as a win for Lebanese workers who now have more opportunities for employment.

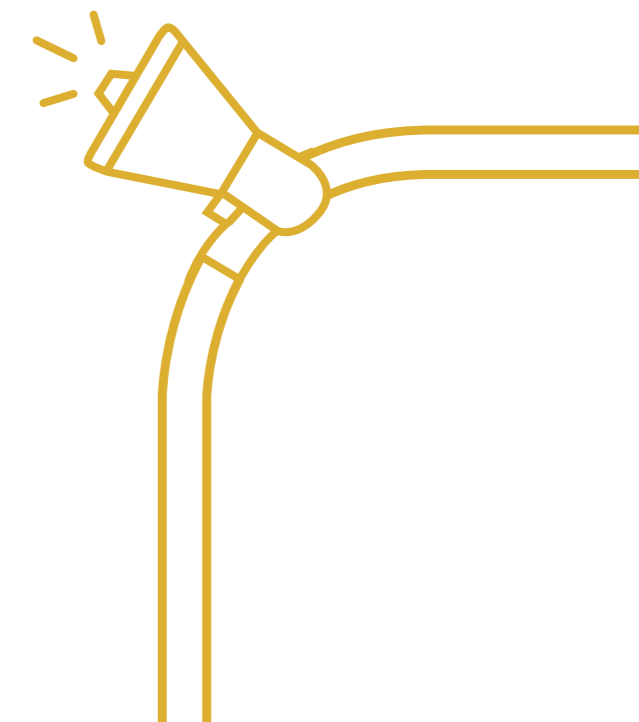
Taking advantage of this brief and shallow convergence of interests, we intensified our advocacy for evacuation, which ultimately resulted in the voluntary evacuation of thousands of migrant workers to their home countries in 2020 alone.

Tensions Between Short and Long-term Goals

In 2020, priorities shifted dramatically for migrant workers, and so they shifted accordingly for us. With every new symptom of the country's collapse, we had to reflect on the tensions between short-term and long-term gains, and how each jeopardized the other. We attempted to weigh immediate individual needs against longer term goals that would benefit a bigger number of people.

Should we focus on abolishing the Kafala system, or respond to the more immediate demands rising spontaneously from different groups of migrant workers, like going home, finding shelter, distributing food? Should we camp out with the Ethiopian workers abandoned by their employers or push the consulate to shelter the workers safely and then evacuate them? Does sheltering hundreds of migrant workers hide the severity of the problem from public eyes, and would that delay or even eliminate the chance for any potential government intervention to put an end to this despicable practice? And would that absolve employers from their legal responsibility to abide by the signed contracts and basic human rights?

None of the choices we made were easy. We labored over questions with no clear, right answers in sight, and doubted whatever decisions we landed on. What we knew for sure was that doing nothing, as a pretext for "doing no harm," was not an option. In the face of such acute suffering, imperfect action was better than no action at all.



Agency in Times of Uncertainty

Keen on reflecting migrant workers' voices and demands, we raised the slogan "Evacuate Now" in every meeting with embassies and organizations, in every media interview, and on every platform available to us. Our analysis and projections of the socio-economic situation only reinforced the sense of urgency with which we communicated this message: (1) Unemployment among migrant workers in Lebanon would become nearly absolute, with negligible exceptions in upper class households and some instances of absolute necessity among other classes. (2) The majority of migrant workers would leave the country to find employment elsewhere. (3) Lebanon would undergo a transition process that would last years before migrant workers would reconsider the country as a worthwhile destination for work again.

This projection cannot possibly account for the specificities of each worker to assess the best possible course of action for their individual circumstances. We trusted that each person would be best placed to make the right decision for themselves about staying or leaving. Yet people were confronted with so many uncertainties that ultimately many of them relied heavily on our analysis and projections.

On the one hand, we had a responsibility to communicate all the information we had, regardless of the uncertainty. We relayed messages from the General Security about the end of the amnesty period for undocumented workers which would make it more difficult for them to leave after December 2020. We also shared our own concerns about the endless devaluation of the Lebanese pound and its catastrophic consequences. On the other hand, our information was incomplete as it did not account for the specific circumstances awaiting each person in their home country. Clearly, each worker's agency and ability to make an informed decision was at least partially compromised by this imperfect information.

Not only did we need to estimate the severity of the economic and political crises in Lebanon, and the political and financial response of the international community to these crises, it was also equally important to assess the political and economic situations of each country of origin, as well as the individual circumstances of each person wishing to leave Lebanon.



From National to Collective Identities, and Back Again

For years we worked on fostering solidarity among the different communities of migrant workers. Our advocacy efforts centered around the labor aspects of the Kafala system and emphasised the identity of migrant communities as working communities. Our Migrant Community Centers became a hub of diversity as well as a place of unity where people from different nationalities and ethnicities repeated the same demand: "Abolish Kafala!"

In 2020, however, the arbitrary system of borders and nations reasserted itself and inserted itself into our work. Meetings previously vibrant with diversity, became more homogenous in many aspects. Many community groups lost touch with people from countries different from theirs. The unfortunate reality was that, to effectively respond to the situation, we had to tailor our advocacy to each consulate, each embassy, each country, and their respective specificities. To understand the obstacles to evacuation for each particular group, we had to hold meetings based on their countries of origin. This approach threatened to at least partially undo years of uniting efforts and left some of us with lingering feelings of unease.

Moving Forward: Capitalizing on Existing Trends to Abolish Kafala

The social and economic landscape of domestic work was changing rapidly. The decreasing number of MWs in Lebanon could be an advantage for live-in workers, as wealthy families were still willing to employ them, but they were much harder to recruit. We heard of stories where freelancer MDWs were offered full-time jobs and the regularization of their status, and they were able to negotiate a salary higher than the usual salaries of live-in DWs.

Though the need for domestic work remains high, possibly even higher than pre-2020, the ability to pay for this service as it is offered today has greatly decreased. A new model has expanded: hiring domestic workers by the hour, instead of employing them as full-time live-in workers. Though technically illegal under the Kafala system, freelance domestic work became more widespread than ever and seemed to coincide with the interests of cash-strapped employers. This offered a rare opportunity to advocate for the legalization of freelance work for migrant domestic workers.

The domestic labor market was also expanding to include Lebanese women, employed by the hour. This new entry could provide an incentive for policymakers to extend the protection of the Labor Law to domestic work, a sector explicitly excluded from the law's provisions.

For decades, abolishing the Kafala system through policy change seemed virtually unattainable. Today, the Kafala system may well be collapsing on its own, preceding any change in policy. How can we capitalize on these trends to bring an end to this system once and for all?



Our Team

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Rawane Nassif	Partnerships Coordinator
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Sami Beshah	Caseworker
Imane El Hayek	Caseworker
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Jana Chokor	Helpline Operator
Alissar Kaghadou	Helpline Operator
Fatima Sabah	Intern
Chantale Salameh	Intern

Financial Report ARM 2020

1	Income Total:	1,228,000
2	Breakdown of income:	
	SDC: Swiss Development Cooperation	331,000
	OSF: Open Society Foundation	133,000
	ILO: International Labour Organization	110,000
	World Association for Christian Communication	25,000
	AWDF: African Women's Development Fund	122,000
	GFW: Global Fund For Women	31,000
	NPA: Norwegian People's Aid	88,000
	Medico	45,000
	KTK: Kvinna Till Kvinna	25,000
	TBHF: The Big Heart Foundation	45,000
	UN-VFCFS: United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery	20,000
	Bertha Foundation	20,000
	Mama Cash	12,000
	UAF: Urgent Action Funds	6,000
	Stichting WorldChangers	4,000
	UPP: Un Ponte Per	4,000
	Foreign and Commonwealth Office-British Embassy	7,000
	Diplomatic Spouses Association of Lebanon	4,000
	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development	5,000
	FNV: Federation of Dutch Trade Unions	5,000
	Individual contributions	186,000

	Givingloop	90,000
	Concerts and fundraisers	56,000
	Others	40,000
3	Expenditures total:	1,228,000
4	Breakdown of expenditures:	
	Relief-Food	404,000
	ARM staff: 37 full-time and part-time	388,000
	Taxes & staff benefits	75,000
	Relief-Evacuations	64,000
	Center coordination and services	45,000
	Computers, furniture & equipment	42,000
	Rent and utilities	42,000
	Transportation and communication	35,000
	Relief-Housing	34,000
	Legal fees	23,000
	Organisational development: evaluation & learning meetings, staff training & counseling sessions	20,000
	M&E, Workshops and capacity building	15,000
	Groceries and food supplies	13,000
	Translation, design and printing	9,000
	Auditing and ministry taxes	6,000
	Activities and trips	5,000
	Maintenance	5,000
	Travel costs	3,000

Looking Ahead



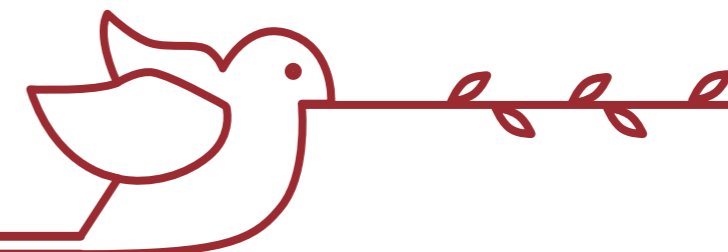
2020 was a year that escapes words. People residing in Lebanon lived through one shock after another, with almost no time to recuperate and plan ahead in between. Amidst all this, it is crucial to remember that cyclical crises are inevitable outcomes of our global oppressive capitalist system, as marxist critical theorists maintain. Moments of crises present the opportunity for a radical rupture and transformative change, one which is impossible without these unfortunate events. For us in Lebanon, it is unclear where exactly our current crisis will lead us, but building a different system necessitates cooperation across borders, especially when capital flow is borderless. But for that to happen, building and sustaining transformative social movements is key.

As evident from the previous sections of this report, we've faced significant and new challenges at ARM compared to previous years. Our core work is community-building, but how does one work communally in a situation of forced isolation and increasing impoverishment? This is particularly difficult in a context where our government is bankrupt and there is barely any wealth left to fairly 'redistribute'. The general crises in the country manifested in different ways for everyone, and it forced many of us to face difficult feelings of helplessness and demotivation. However, the current situation is a product of a political and social system that was not working to our advantage for many decades, ultimately bringing us to our current predicament. Returning to a previous status quo is bound to reproduce the same result, and as such, the political task becomes less reformist and more revolutionary.

"Cruel optimism," a term coined by the philosopher Lauren Berlant, refers to the feeling of optimism many workers hold on to in hopes of securing a better life in capitalist modernity if they work within the system. Their optimism is "cruel" since having faith in a better life under capitalism leads to their painful impoverishment and destitution, facilitated by the false promises of the system. In looking ahead, I want us to hold on to optimism that is not cruel, since another world is possible, and there is a need now more than ever to take part in the social change happening right now. Although this year has been one of the most painful for most of us, the fight is still ongoing, and we're still here.

What's at stake in this fight is the question of freedom and transformation. Psychoanalytically, in response to crises, we either continue resisting radical change and thus repeat previous patterns, or we are forced to incur a radical transformation based on a certain truth or desire. Our desire for freedom and justice – for a mode of existence that is not based on exploitation and alienation – alongside our commitment to community are what I think makes ARM a place of transformative potential. If there's one thing 2020 made clear, it is that the future is not as predictable as we may think, and this, ironically, reminds us of our ability to shape it.

Ramy Shukr
MEAL officer



Partners, Donors & Collaborators

ARM's work is made possible by a range of generous contributors, from the volunteers who donate their time, the people who campaign with us in person or online, or the people who entrust us to put their hard-earned cash to use. In addition to these individuals, ARM's work is supported by grants from and partnerships with the following organizations, who help grow our ideas into fully-fledged projects



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- Urgent Action Fund
- GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)
- World Association of Christian Communication
- International Labour Organization
- Embassy of Switzerland in Lebanon
- Norwegian People's Aid
- Global Fund for Women
- Mamacash
- Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women
- African Women's Development Fund
- Embassy of Switzerland in Lebanon

Networks and case work partners.

- Kafa (**Enough**) Violence and Exploitation
- Doctors Without Borders (**MSF**)
- Concern Worldwide
- Lebanese Center for Human Rights (**CLDH**)
- Amel Association
- International Committee of the Red Cross (**ICRC**)
- International medical Corps (**IMC**)
- International Organization for Migration (**IOM**)
- Legal Action Worldwide (**LAW**)
- Legal Agenda



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Givingloop: [Givingloop.org/mcc](https://givingloop.org/mcc)

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