



# PERCEPTIONS OF THE KAFALA SYSTEM IN LEBANON

HOW DO LEBANESE CITIZENS PERCEIVE  
DOMESTIC LABOR AND THE KAFALA SYSTEM  
IN LIGHT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS?

حركة مناهضة  
العنصرية



Anti-Racism  
Movement

The Anti-Racism Movement is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) established by a group of local activists who work together with migrant workers to secure social, economic, and gender justice for all migrant workers and racialized groups in Lebanon. ARM runs a community center dedicated to migrant domestic workers in Lebanon where they can meet, learn new skills, organize, and access information and assistance. We mobilize public support for the abolishment of the Kafala (sponsorship) system and the realization of migrant domestic workers' rights through advocacy and alliance-building. We also help migrant workers access services related to legal support, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, education, and shelter.

**Lead Researcher :** Sarah Wansa

**Research Assistant :** Ahmad Saleh

**Edited by:** Salma Sakr and Ramy Shukr

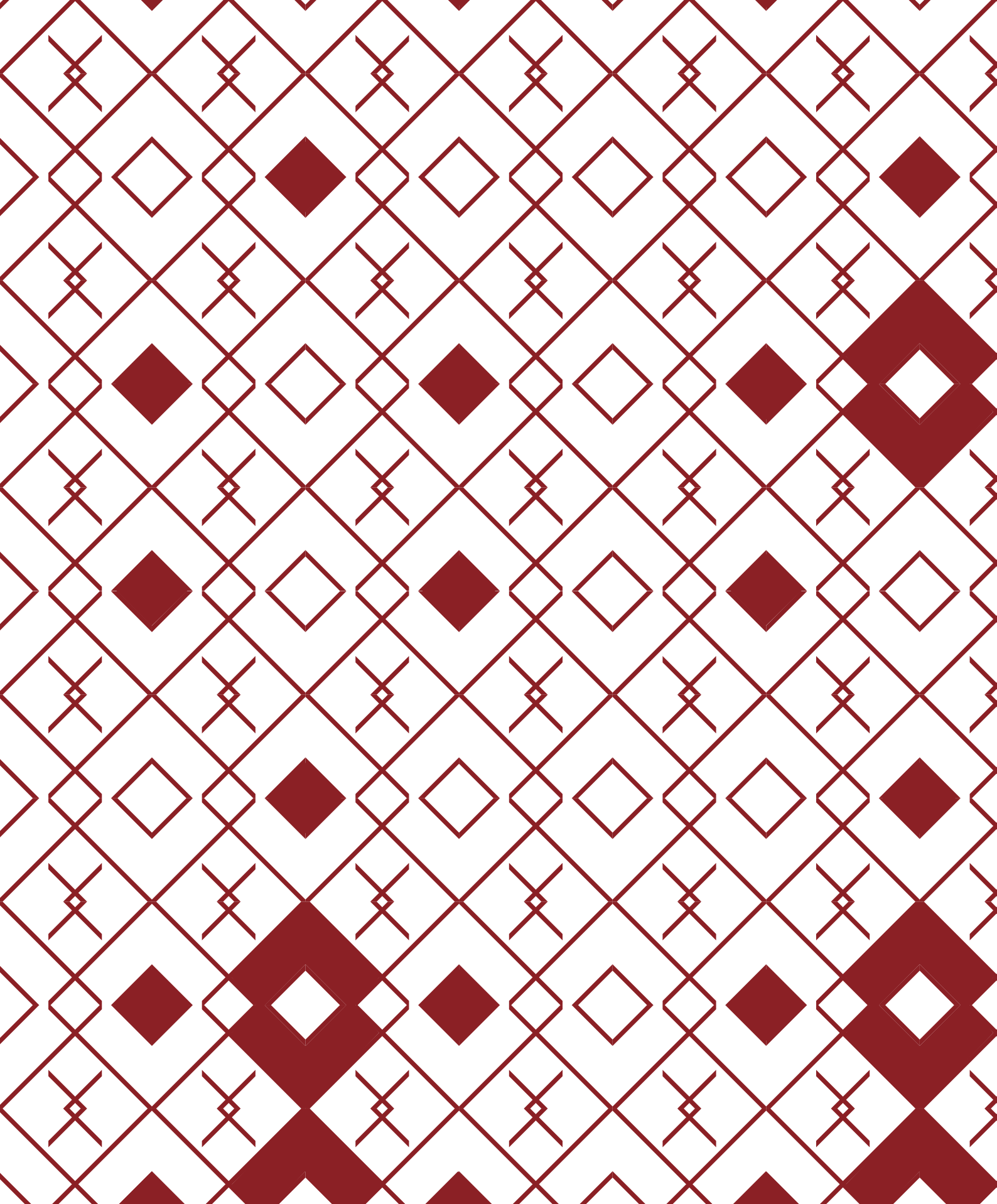
**Data collectors:** Hoda Faour, Kareem Nasr, Maha Faour, Ahmad el Akhdar, Rania Hamzeh



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# Executive Summary





# Executive Summary

*The unprecedented economic collapse in Lebanon since late 2019 has impacted all aspects of the lives of Lebanese citizens and people residing in the country. High inflation rates and the national currency devaluation hit the middle class in particular. This study looks at these repercussions in the domestic labor market and, more particularly, the perceptions of Lebanese citizens of the governing Kafala (sponsorship) system.*

The sponsorship system is not only the root cause of structural abuse towards Migrant Domestic Workers (MDWs) but also a financial system that generates profits, commodifies domestic labor, and exploits workers. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut blast led many Lebanese employers to lay off MDWs, leaving many in the streets outside their embassies. Previous studies on employers' understandings and perceptions of the sponsorship system, albeit covering live-in women MDWs, demonstrated similar findings over the years (mainly between 2005 and 2016). More specifically, they showed the prevalence of violations against fundamental human rights.\*

This study adopts a primarily quantitative methodology to explore the perspectives of Lebanese respondents regarding the Kafala system. It focuses on the market demand aspect of Kafala and attempts to understand what socioeconomic factors might impact people's perceptions. It focuses on the respondents' socio-economical profiles before and after 2019 and why they have or do not have a contractual working relationship with an MDW. This follows a pre/post-2019 (referring to pre/post-crisis) approach to understand and offer different analyses on how the financial crisis impacted the local domestic work market and the perception of Lebanese nationals towards the sponsorship system.

In 2023, the most recent report published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated the presence of 160,768 migrant workers in Lebanon. Most of the migrant workers surveyed by the organization were women. The figure reflects a recovery from a drop at the beginning of the crisis. However, while the number of permits and authorisations issued by the Ministry of Labor (MoL) started to increase, it might be too soon to speculate that there is a readjustment in the domestic work market to the number from before the crisis.

The research included Lebanese nationals residing in Lebanon and 25 years or older. Although most previous studies geared their respondent recruitment on employment status by surveying employers of MDWs (especially live-in MDWs), we also aimed to include non-employers. We believe that Kafala is a structural system (both legally and socially). As such, any individual can become a participant of this system at any moment.

While the study primarily leans towards exploratory quantitative research, it was complemented by focus group discussions (FGDs) involving migrant workers and key informant interviews (KIIs) with Private Recruitment Agencies (PRAs).

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\* *Editor's note* : The report uses the abbreviation MDW, this abbreviation is not meant to be reductive to Migrant domestic workers, or migrant women, but rather used to avoid repetitions seeing the length of the report.

The impact of the financial crisis on the job market was slightly identified when respondents were asked if they were working before 2019, i.e. pre-crisis, if they had the same job/employer, and the reasons for changing jobs when this occurred. The collected data shows a clear switch in the demand from live-in to live-out (freelance) MDWs, and reflect a clear pattern in respondents' hiring practices before and after the crisis, showing a 50% decrease in hiring live-in MDWs and a 50% increase in employers opting to hire freelance MDWs. According to the respondents, the main reason for hiring an MDW was to help with housekeeping, followed by a smaller portion who reported other reasons related to care work responsibilities. This contradicted the input of five PRAs interviewed within the research who shared that the demand for MDWs today is justified and motivated by the need for assistance in care work, especially for the elderly and children.

The specific reasons for hiring a live-in MDW varied, but the majority of responses indicated a preference for the worker to be available throughout the day. As for those who hired a freelance worker, almost half reported that it was a more cost-effective option. There also seems to be a clear switch of employers hiring MDWs directly post crisis, versus relying on a PRA or a cleaning company pre crisis.

It is a usual practice among PRAs and government officials to advise employers to withhold the workers' passports for them to secure their "investment" (fees paid to employ a live-in MDW). This system shapes people's perception of it, of domestic work, and of the person doing the work, the domestic worker herself. Employers found no problem stating that they were withholding the MDW's papers. Only a third of the employer sample who hired a live-in MDW answered that the worker was in possession of both her passport and residency permit. Otherwise, the majority reported that the worker had neither her passport nor her residency permit, with a very small percentage reporting the worker either had only her passport. However, there seem to be some changes in these practices before and after 2019.

*Regarding the perceptions of the Kafala system, no significant difference was noted between answers given by employers and people who never employed an MDW regarding their perceptions of the Kafala system. This supports our earlier hypothesis that people's knowledge and perception of a particular system does not come solely from first-hand experience but also from social structures that shape such perceptions.*

Almost half of the respondents believed incorrectly that it is the sponsor's responsibility if an employed MDW committed a crime or a felony. This common misconception stems from a particular perception among sponsors that they are responsible for all aspects of the MDW's life, even her personal life. On the other hand, the great majority of respondents agreed that it was the sponsor's responsibility to take care of an MDW in case of an accident.

Almost half of the respondents believed correctly that under the Kafala system, MDWs are obliged to live in the same household as their sponsors, versus a third who believed they were not. In terms of freedom to change employers, a high majority also believed correctly that they could not. However, almost three-quarters of the respondents agreed that laws and regulations should make it possible for MDWs to change their employer and/or employment if and/or when they choose to do so without the employer/sponsor's permission. A similar proportion agreed that laws and regulations should allow MDWs to obtain and renew their residency and work permits independently. Conversely, half of the respondents believed incorrectly that the employer has the right to keep the MDW's passport in his possession. The two questions to which the respondents provided wrong answers (withholding passports and the committing of a crime) engage the MDW's agency, and her ability to choose and move freely.

In terms of perceptions related to the presence of MDWs, almost half of the respondents agreed that migrant workers compete with Lebanese workers for jobs in Lebanon, while the other half disagreed. However, over half of the respondents also believed that Lebanese Domestic Workers (DWs) are more likely to have higher salaries than their migrant counterparts. Furthermore, over half of the respondents disagreed that MDWs participate positively in the Lebanese economy, even though the majority recognised that MDWs provide cheaper care labor than the Lebanese.

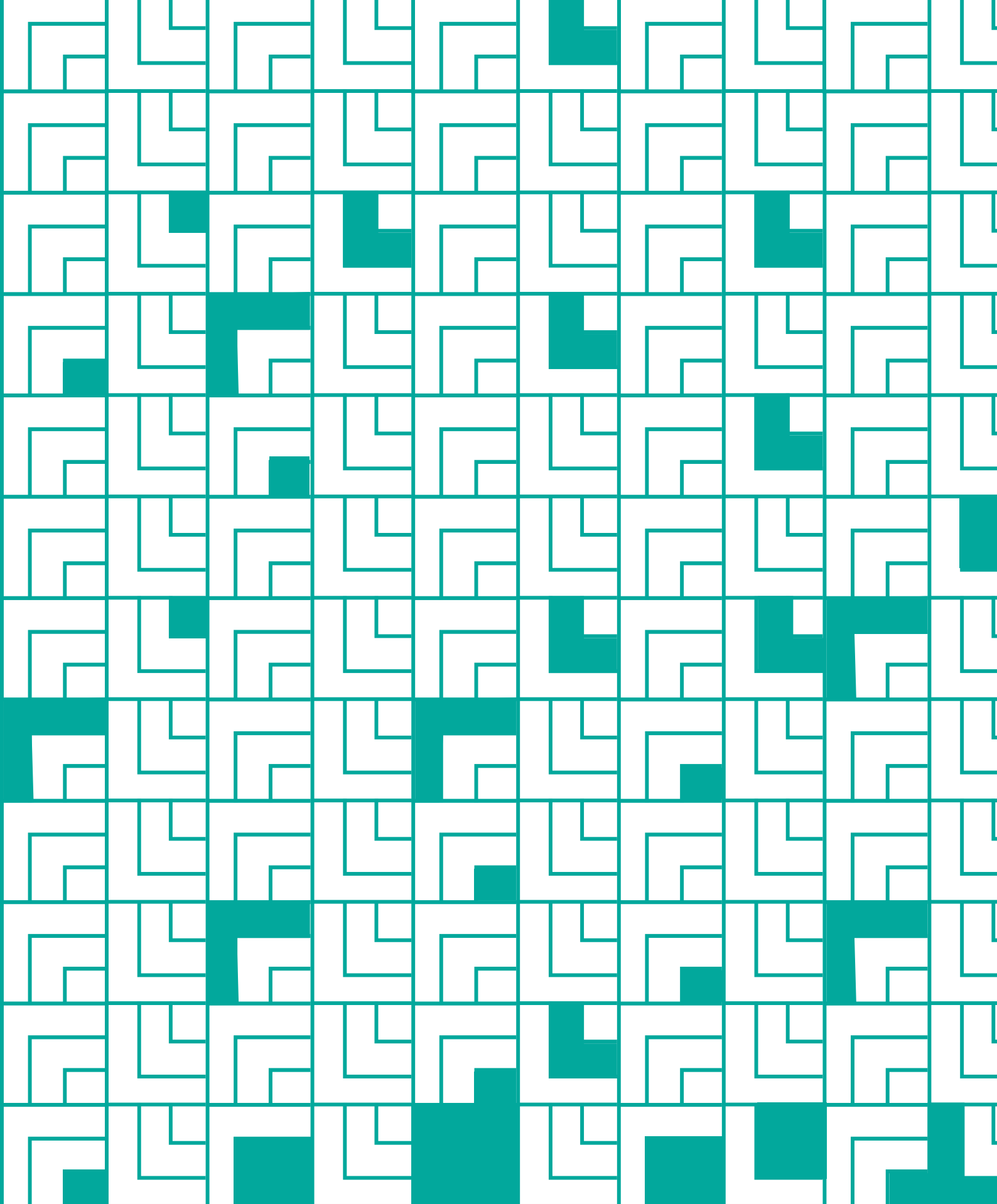
In terms of salaries, the majority of the respondents believed that most MDWs are getting paid in USD. However, data from this survey indicate that this is not entirely accurate. While it confirms this regarding live-in MDWs, it is not the case for freelance MDWs, as the survey data shows that only 32.5% of respondents are paying freelance MDWs in USD post-crisis.

As for the Kafala system, almost half of the respondents believed that it should be abolished, with two-fifths who also agreed that migrants should fall under the Lebanese labor Code. These answers show a notable contradiction between employers' attitudes and practices towards MDWs and their belief that the Kafala system should be abolished. However, it should not be interpreted negatively because attitudes and practices are subject to change if a change occurs on a structural level.


Respondents tended to agree that PRAs profit the most from the Kafala system, and most respondents had also reported that the fees requested by the PRAs are too high. Second in place were state agencies such as General Security (GS) and the MoL, followed by the employer, and finally ending with the party that makes the least profit under the Kafala system, the MDW herself. These results indicate that the population is well aware of not only the exploitative nature of the Kafala system but also of the main beneficiaries of this system, including themselves.

The Kafala system has been in place in Lebanon for decades. It is inherently abusive towards MDWs as it gives the employer/sponsor full control and power over the worker. Despite many civil society campaigns directed at employers and the general population, abusive practices and behaviors are still widespread, as the data from previous surveys and our survey shows. It is well evidenced that the financial crisis in Lebanon has impacted all categories of the population, each in a relative way, respective to their socioeconomic class and status. The hardships and the high cost of living mentioned by MDWs are pushing some to prefer working as live-in workers instead of freelancers. This issue should be taken seriously and observed more closely. Campaigns should focus on the preference and higher demand for live-out DWs as an entry point to advocate for abolishing the Kafala system and covering migrant workers, including women MDWs, through the Lebanese labor Code. This becomes especially pertinent as employer preferences and market trends create further contradictions in the system and allow various types of violations. Such a campaign might resonate with the general population, especially considering the current financial context.





# Introduction



The collapse of the Lebanese economy (usually referring to the period extending from late 2019 till now), the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut blast of August 2020 considerably impacted MDWs' livelihoods in Lebanon. As employers/sponsors "disposed" of "their" MDWs in front of their respective consulates and embassies, the Lebanese state and the media apparatus blamed MDWs for the financial crisis. According to the government and some media outlets, the shortage in US dollars, the devaluation of the national currency, and the spike in inflation were partly caused by MDWs wiring back their salaries to their countries of origin.

*As the blame continued, the government made an unprecedented move. It started a campaign entitled, "There is no shame in women working" calling on Lebanese women to participate in the domestic labor market. The campaign warrants a closer look, especially to the context during which it came to light and its many aspects, particularly the gendered ones. Although Lebanese women are the campaign's exclusive targets, it is women, whether Lebanese or not, who have been carrying the burden of unpaid domestic labor since the early stages of capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the notion of "shame" is only mentioned when such work becomes paid. However, in light of the acute financial crisis, it is surprising that the call to join the domestic labor market did not target Lebanese men. It is also worth noting that this campaign did not even consider abolishing Article 7 of the Lebanese labor Code, which explicitly excludes DWs, nationals and foreigners, and agricultural workers from its protection. This oversight raises questions about the campaign's seriousness and whether it is merely a populist call based on fuelling hate speech. **Evidently, its essential aim is not to consider domestic work as deserving of wages and protection by the labor Code. Instead, it blames working-class foreigners for the financial downfall of the country.***

The only step taken towards a policy change regarding domestic work and the Kafala system was in 2020 through an attempt at amending the standard unified contract (SUC). A few months after urging Lebanese women to participate in the paid, but excluded from the labor Code, domestic work market, the Lebanese Minister of labor, Lamia Yamine, issued an amended version of the SUC that brought few improvements to the old version. However, despite its many shortcomings, the amended version recognised the presence of some practices and abuses in the sponsorship system.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the new SUC did not last for long. On the 14th of October 2021, the Lebanese State Council issued a [decision](#) to stop working with the new version of the contract after an appeal by the Syndicate of Owners of Recruitment Agencies in Lebanon (SORAL). After meeting SORAL, Moustafa Bayram (Lamia Yamine's successor in the labor Ministry) worked on a revised version. However, Bayram's version was described by [several Non Governmental Organizations](#) (NGOs) as an 'absolute scandal that audaciously violates basic human rights in favor of the vested interests of a handful of traders embodied by the recruitment agencies in Lebanon'.

In times of financial crisis, the exploitation of the working class and the demonisation of vulnerable populations intensifies. Nevertheless, [some believed](#) the financial crisis could lead to the sponsorship system's abolition or at least loosening its grip. Despite the absence of improvements on the policy or legal framework levels, the acute financial crisis in Lebanon impacted the financial capacity of employers to pay recruitment fees and monthly salaries to live-in MDWs, thus impacting the domestic work labor market.

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<sup>1</sup> Silvia Fedirici, Wages Against Housework, 1975

<sup>2</sup> Nizar Saghie, Lebanon's New Standard Domestic Worker Contract: A Coin with Two Sides, Legal Agenda, 2020/11/27

While previous studies surveyed and analyzed perceptions, attitudes and practices of Lebanese employers towards the Kafala system, this survey comes at a very particular economic and social context, in which we try to examine and analyze the potential impact of the financial crisis on Lebanese residents' perceptions of the sponsorship system.

# 1. Review of Main Findings from Previous Studies

**Table 1. Overview of the findings from four studies regarding employers' practices towards their employed MDWs.**

STUDY/YEAR	ILO	Kafa	Insan	ILO
	2005	2010	2014	2016
Respondents	18	102	200/50*	1200
Withholding Passport	82%	88%	78%	94.3%
Denying of Day Off	N/A	45.5%	36%	50.7%
Locking the MDW in the household/workplace	N/A	31.3%	50%	22.5% **

Sources: \*Insan's study surveyed 200 employers and 50 MDWs. The employers reported on passport withholding, while the MDWs reported on rest days and whether they could leave the house.

\*\*While it might seem that this pattern of abuse is decreasing, this is not necessarily the case as survey respondents might have provided a false answer as the ILO report briefly states that "this finding might be unrepresentative given the social undesirability of disclosing this practice."

These studies on employers' understandings and perceptions of the sponsorship system focused mainly on employers' attitudes and practices towards live-in women MDWs. As shown in Table 1, the studies demonstrate similar findings over the years (mainly between 2005 and 2016) regarding employers' attitudes and practices. They specifically show that violations of fundamental human rights are still widely present. In this study, we focused on Lebanese nationals' understanding of the sponsorship system, how they define it, and what it entails in practice. We also tried to understand how the ongoing financial crisis continues to impact their socio-economic status (SES) and demand for domestic work. Another question was related to the extent to which a particular economic conjecture influences people's perception of the sponsorship system and a very particular market: the Lebanese domestic labor market. We extend our analysis to include live-out/freelance MDWs who represent a large category of MDWs in Lebanon (and for whom the demand has been rising in recent years, as this report shows). Moreover, this category is at constant risk of arrest, as the Lebanese Kafala system does not recognise freelance work for MDWs. Any MDW who is working as a freelancer or not residing and living in their sponsor/s household is subjected to arrest, detention and deportation.

Before delving into the survey's methodology and results, we look at the numbers related to the domestic work market. More specifically, we examine the expenditures generated by the current sponsorship system and the official numbers of work permits and residencies given to MDWs.

## A. How much does the Kafala generate in expenditures?

According to a study published in 2020 by Think Triangle,<sup>3</sup> the Kafala system generates more than 100 Million US Dollars per year. However, this figure is based on numbers from 2019 and does not take into account the monthly wages paid to MDWs. Furthermore, the estimates shown are based on the exchange rate of 1USD to 1.507.5LL, which corresponds to the situation before Lebanon's economic crisis.

According to the study, the Kafala system generates money for the private and public sectors. While the public sector generates around 45.42M USD, the private sector generates around 60M USD annually.

The methodology the researchers used to obtain this number calculated the recruitment fees, which ranged between 1,800 USD and 4,300 USD according to SORAL's estimates. It also took into account the number of MDWs who entered Lebanon in 2019 (39,951) and the cost of a residency permit (200 USD/year), a working permit (200 USD/year), and medical insurance (around 86 USD/year) for each MDW. The study assumed the lowest range of recruitment fees in their calculations and concluded that in 2019, recruitment agencies received 57.5M USD from the Kafala market. Recruitment agencies are the ones who make the most money from the Kafala system. They also pay Lebanon's public Habitat Bank a one-time deposit of 50 million Lebanese Liras,<sup>4</sup> which allows each agency to obtain a permit to bring in 300 MDW a year.<sup>5</sup>

These numbers are telling because they show how much money is made out of the exploitation of MDWs. They also demonstrate how much the Lebanese economy depends on the system, which might be why the Lebanese state refuses to abolish Kafala and include domestic work in the labor code. However, many of the expenses calculated (such as residency and work permits, notary fees, and medical insurance fees) do not necessarily fall under the Kafala system and would still exist without it. The only revenues directly related to and generated by the Kafala system are the fees requested by the PRAs, which constitute the primary income generated through this system.

## B. Migrant Workers in Lebanon

Lebanon has no official census, whether for its citizens<sup>6</sup> or other residents. The only available numbers or estimations result from data from international organizations such as the IOM. According to a report issued in October 2022,<sup>7</sup> the IOM identified an estimated 135,240 migrant workers in Lebanon, compared to the 207,696 identified in their August 2021 report, showing a decrease of 35%.

Their most recently published report<sup>8</sup> in 2023 noted an 18% increase in migrant workers residing in Lebanon compared to 2022. The current estimate is 160,768 migrant workers in 2023. The majority of the migrant workers population (65%) surveyed by the IOM are women. Migrant workers are primarily residents of urban areas. According to the report, "the highest concentration of migrant workers was found in Mount Lebanon, accounting for 55%"<sup>9</sup> followed by the Beirut governorate with 19% of the migrant workers' population.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Dagher, David Wood, Jacob Boswal, "Cleaning up: The shady industries that exploits Lebanon's Kafala workers", 2020/11/30, Think Triangle

<sup>4</sup>Article 19, Resolution 2022/05/11 .1/41amended Article 13, law 2015/11/27 .168and changed the amount of the one time deposit from50 millions LL to300 millions LL. The research done by Think Triangle was published before the devaluation of the Lebanese Lira.

<sup>5</sup> Article 13, law 2015/11/27 ,168

<sup>6</sup> Last census took place during 1932, Lebanon was still under the French mandate.

<sup>7</sup> IOM, [Migrant Presence Monitoring](#), Round 2, October 2022

<sup>8</sup> IOM, [Migrant Presence Monitoring](#), August 2023

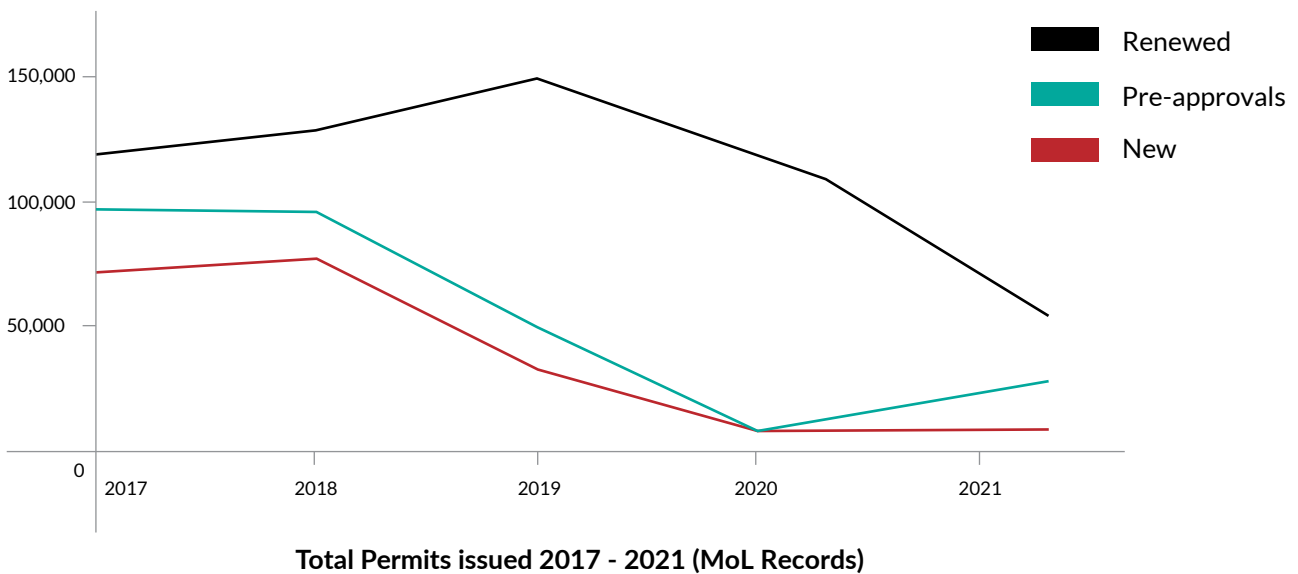
<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



### C. Work Permits Issued by the Ministry of labor to MDWs

This part takes a closer look at the number of new working permits issued to MDWs by the MoL. We also look at the number of pre-approvals (part of the recruitment procedure) and work permit renewals to try to grasp the impact of the crisis on the local domestic work market. It is important to note that these numbers are official and, therefore, do not count undocumented MDWs.

**Figure 1. Number of total work permits issued by the MoL between 2017 and 2022. Permits are disaggregated by newly issued, renewed, and preapprovals.**



As Figure 1 shows, the numbers reflect a decrease that starts in late 2018, reaches a bottom value in early 2020, and then starts to recover, albeit not reaching the initial values of the 2018-2017 period. The drops most likely reflect the advent of the economic crisis, compounded (temporarily) by the COVID-19 pandemic.

New work permits issued by the MoL to women MDWs started to decline during 2018 and 2019, where we note a decrease of 57% in the number of first-time work permits given in those two years. The table shows an increase in first-time work permits issued after 2019 compared to the total in 2019. However, the numbers show a drastic decrease when compared to pre-crisis years. Comparing the periods 2015-2018 and 2019-2020, we also note a decrease of 72% in a similar direction. While 2020 was a particular year due to the COVID-19 pandemic with its travel restrictions (only 8660 pre-approvals were issued by the MoL in 2020), which might explain this major drop, numbers from the following years did not reach the pre-2019 plateau. First-time work permits issued in 2022, although higher than in previous years, remain much lower compared to 2018 and before. The number of pre-approvals issued by the MoL follows a similar pattern. When comparing the number of pre-approvals in 2018 to that of 2022, we note a decrease of 58%. While the number of permits and authorisations issued by the MoL started to increase, it might be too soon to speculate that there is a readjustment in the domestic work market.

**Table 2. Numbers of newly issued work permits, renewed permits and pre-approvals issued by the MoL to women MDW from 2017 to 2022<sup>10</sup>**

<b>YEAR</b>	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
<b>New Work Permits</b>	36299	49447	63272	70840	<b>76545</b>	<b>32938</b>	<b>9362</b>	<b>9676</b>	<b>19962</b>	368341
<b>Renewed &amp; Approved Work Permits</b>	92414	105306	107201	118622	129358	<b>149439</b>	<b>108507</b>	54737	44601	910185
<b>Pre-Approvals</b>	N/A	70426	N/A	96480	94905	49401	8660	28520	40828	389220
<b>Total</b>	128713	225179	170473	285942	<b>300808</b>	<b>231778</b>	126529	<b>92933</b>	105391	1667746

However, the above figures do not show information about the different nationalities of women MDWs. While new work permits were mainly issued to Ethiopian women MDWs throughout the years, we were surprised to see the number of new work permits issued for Kenyan women as it increased from 3217 new work permits in 2021 to 5979 in 2022. The Kenyan MDW community in Lebanon has been facing several problems, holding protests outside their consulate<sup>11</sup> in Beirut in 2020<sup>12</sup> and 2022. The increase in work permits given to Kenyan MDWs is also reflected in the IOM Migrant Presence Monitoring 2023 Report, which noted "a significant increase in the number of migrants from African countries, including Cameroon, Sierra Leone and Kenya. Conversely, there has been a notable decrease in the migrant population from Gabon, Malaysia and Togo."<sup>13</sup>

What also caught our attention was that one of the new work permits issued in 2021 was for a Lebanese domestic worker. However, this number is not taken into account by the data shown in the table above, which only lists authorisations issued to migrant workers. Thus, it could be the first time such authorisation was issued to a Lebanese woman, or at least the first time it was mentioned in the reports issued by the MoL. Interestingly, this number appears in 2021, one year after the government decided to "encourage" Lebanese women to enter the paid domestic work market.

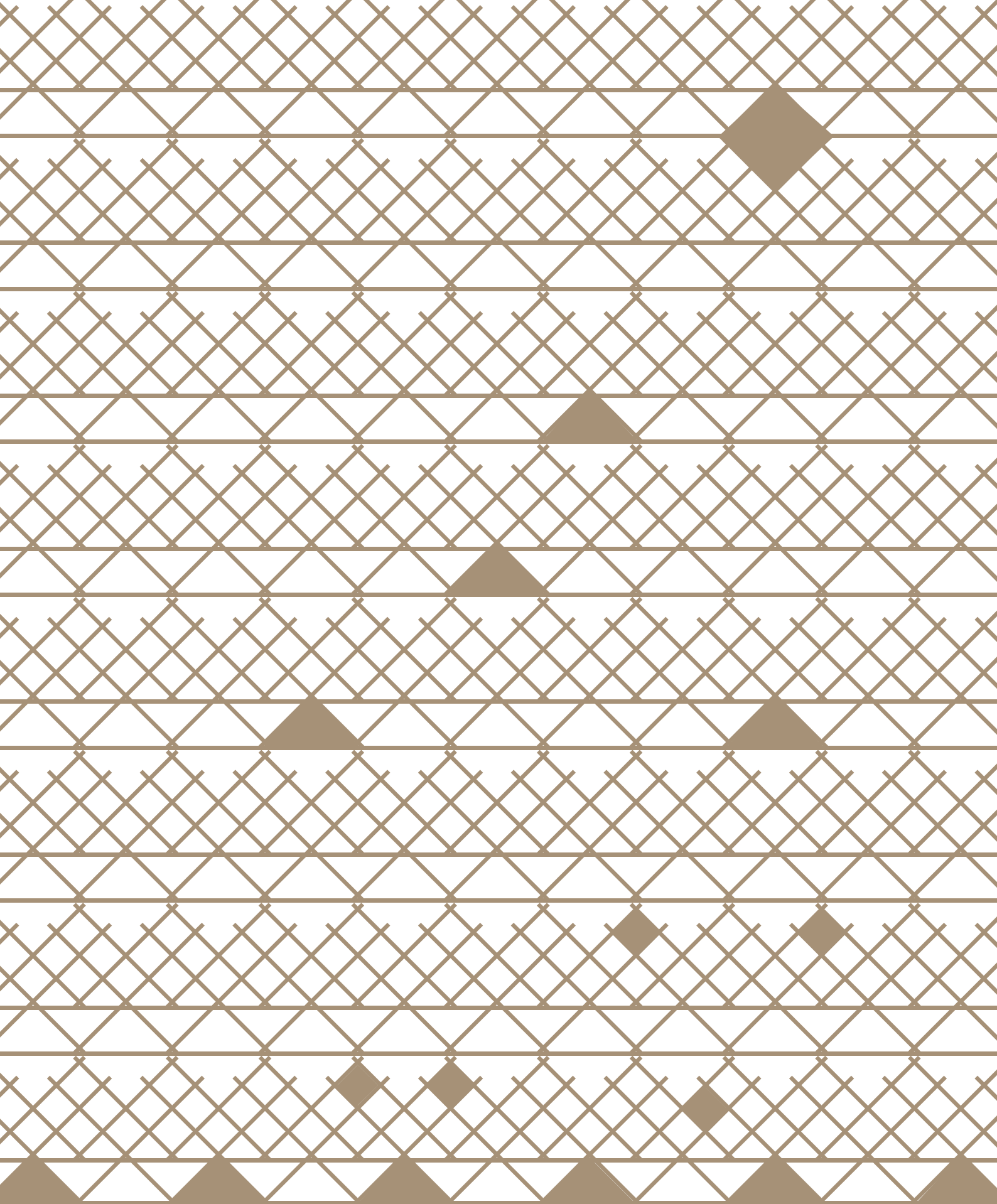
<sup>10</sup>These numbers are taken from reports issued by the MoL, available on the following link: <https://www.labor.gov.lb/StatList.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> William Christou, 'I just want to go back home': Kenyan domestic workers protest for repatriation from Lebanon where 'living life with dignity is impossible', 2022/1/14, The New Arab

<sup>12</sup> Lebanon: IDWF Statement in Support of the Kenyan Migrant Domestic Workers' Sit-in Action for Repatriation and Free of Abuses, IDWF, 2020/8/12, available

here: <https://idwfed.org/en/updates/lebanon-idwf-statement-in-support-of-the-kenyan-migrant-domestic-workers2019-sit-in-action-for-repatriation-and-free-of-abuses>

<sup>13</sup>IOM, Migrant Presence Monitoring, August 2023.



**Rationale**

# 1. Context: Why are we surveying now?

The sponsorship system is not only the root cause of structural abuse towards MDWs but also a financial system, a system that generates profits, commodifies domestic labor, and exploits workers. The ongoing financial crisis significantly impacted all social classes in Lebanon. The high inflation rates and the devaluation of the national currency impacted the income of the middle class in particular.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut blast led many Lebanese employers to lay off MDWs, leaving many in the streets outside their embassies. As noted in the previous section, the official numbers show a decrease in authorisations (such as new work permits and pre-approvals) issued for MDWs even though official fees (including public notary costs, Habitat Bank fees, and residency fees) are still priced [the same in the Lebanese pound](#). Could these numbers from the MoL indicate a decrease in the demand for MDWs or at least a decrease in the demand for live-in MDWs?

In light of the above, *we ask if the sponsorship system is still profitable for employers. Could this mean a shift in employers' perceptions of the sponsorship system (Kafala)? Moreover, is there a shift in their demand and preferences for live-out DWs instead of live-in DWs?*

# 2. Objectives: What are we surveying?

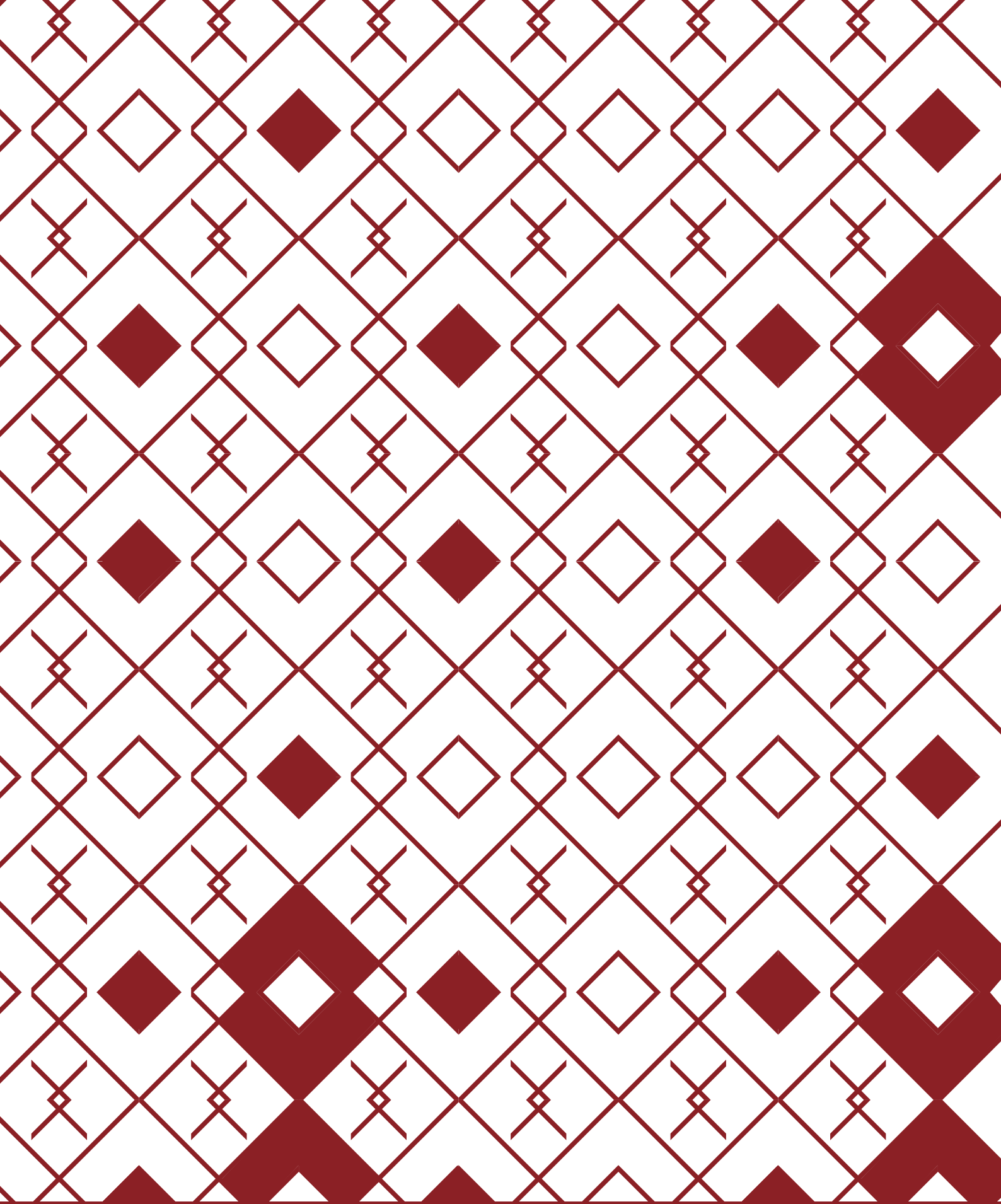
This study adopts a primarily quantitative methodology to explore the perspectives of Lebanese respondents regarding the Kafala system. It focuses on the market demand aspect of Kafala and attempts to understand what socioeconomic factors might impact people's perceptions.

We focus on the respondents' socio-economic profiles before and after 2019 and why they have or do not have a contractual working relationship with a MDW. It was also vital to survey any emerging preference for live-out MDWs (versus live-in) that might be attributed to the economic crisis.

Furthermore, this research aims to understand the factors that drive employers' preferences for employing women MDWs between live-in and freelance and evaluate possible shifts in these preferences before and after Lebanon's economic crisis.

As such, this survey will follow a pre/post-2019 (referring to pre/post-crisis) approach to understand and offer different analyses on how the financial crisis impacted the local domestic work market and the perception of Lebanese nationals towards the sponsorship system.

In that regard, we looked at how many respondents had employed a MDW (whether as a freelancer or a live-in) before the crisis and whether they continued to be employers post-2019. We also examined the work agreement/contract for any changes made after the economic crisis, such as in salaries, the currency in which the salaries were paid, and the number of working days.



# Methodology



# 1 • Respondents: Who are we surveying?

The research included Lebanese nationals currently residing in Lebanon and 25 years of age or older. Respondents were recruited through random sampling, regardless of whether they currently employ MDWs (live-in or live-out). Although most previous studies geared their respondent recruitment on employment status by surveying employers of MDWs (especially live-in MDWs), we also aimed to include non-employers. We believe that Kafala is a structural system (both legally and socially). As such, any individual can become a participant and implementer of this system at any moment.

## 2 • Survey Design

The survey was developed through an iterative process between a team composed of the two lead authors and two team members from ARM. Once the survey was drafted, two reviewers were asked to provide their input on the survey items and design, followed by a pilot phase to test the tool. The pilot phase included a sample of 18 respondents recruited through the same process elaborated in the next section.

The survey is composed of 143 questions covering five sections. The first section of the study served as a screening tool to verify the respondents' eligibility to participate in the study and identify them as current, previous, or non-employers of MDWs. The second section of the survey had three parts based on the respondent's employment history. The first part was reserved for current employers, the second for previous ones, and the third and final part included questions for non-employers. In each part of the section, question items covered areas such as the duration of employment of MDWs, reasons for respondents' decision to hire an MDW, status of the MDW, and working conditions (live-in vs. freelance). The third part included questions related more to the reasons for not previously employing an MDW, whether the respondent would/might consider employing an MDW in the future, and the reasoning behind their answers. In addition, the third section of the survey covered two parts, which all respondents were asked to answer. It included statement items related to the respondent's knowledge of some aspects of the Kafala system and their perceptions and attitudes. Answers in the second part of this section were collected on a scale of degree of agreement (five-point scale). The last two sections covered question items detailing the socio-economic profile of the respondent and demographic descriptive items. The survey took around 15 minutes to fill.

We also asked the respondents to estimate the monthly salary they paid their workers. However, the estimated average salary that the respondent pays the worker is not necessarily the full income of the worker per month, as is the case for freelance workers. The survey is attached at the end of this report (Appendix 1).

# 3. Sample size and respondent recruitment

Although this is primarily an exploratory study, we planned a sample size of 385 using Epilnfo™ with a standard margin of error of 5% to allow us to do any statistical tests we might need during the data analysis. Calculations using other methods, including focusing on the Likert scale items, stipulated adopting smaller sample sizes. The study's final sample size was 289 respondents, which still satisfied the study's parameters.

In their 2022 Migrant Presence Monitoring Report, the IOM found that the migrant worker population in Lebanon resides primarily in urban areas, "56% in Mount Lebanon (20% in Metn & 11% in Baabda), 18% in Beirut, and 10% in Aley."<sup>14</sup> Based on this information and logistical considerations, we decided to administer the survey in various neighborhoods in Greater Beirut, which mainly covered the administrative areas of Beirut and Baabda. Field interviewers encountered potential respondents on the street at designated locations where potential respondents were asked to take part in the study. Following an encounter, the field interviewers explained the purpose of the study and what participation in this study included. All the information was also provided to the respondents in a one-page informed consent form. Following confirmation of their eligibility, those who agreed to participate in the study were provided with the survey and filled it out with the support of the field interviewers. The field interviewers administered the survey using tablets, and the survey was hosted using Kobo Toolbox. The survey was administered in Arabic.

**Table 3. Distribution of study respondents by areas of data collection (n = 289). NA = not available/missing data.**

Areas of Data Collection/Gender	Female	Male	TOTAL
Beirut	27.8%	47.9%	39.4%
Mount Lebanon	61.1%	41.7%	50.2%
Baabda	10.3%	11.7%	11.1%
Metn	50.0%	30.1%	38.8%
N/A	0.80%	0.0%	0.30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88.9%</b>	<b>90.2%</b>	<b>89.6%</b>
<b>N/A</b>	<b>11.10%</b>	<b>9.8%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>14</sup>IOM, Migrant Presence Monitoring, Round 2, October 2022

# 4 Interviews design and respondent recruitment

While this study primarily leans towards exploratory quantitative research, we chose to complement it with FGDs involving migrant workers and KIIs with PRAs. Including these qualitative methods informed our findings and results, providing a broader perspective for interpreting the data.

After finalizing the survey, we created interview guides tailored to each focus group and KII. We organized two FGDs, categorizing participant MDWs into newcomers and long-term residents in Lebanon. The participants for these focus groups were recruited with the assistance of ARM and MCC's network. Eleven participants attended: seven took part in the focus group for long-term residents and four in the second focus group for newcomers. The focus groups' questions centered on the participants' experience with the Kafala system and their insights on the crisis and its effects. We also attempted to organize a focus group with Lebanese employers, but we could not get potential participants to participate. Furthermore, We interviewed four PRAs and a representative from SORAL.

We use elements from our qualitative and quantitative data while describing and analyzing the results below.

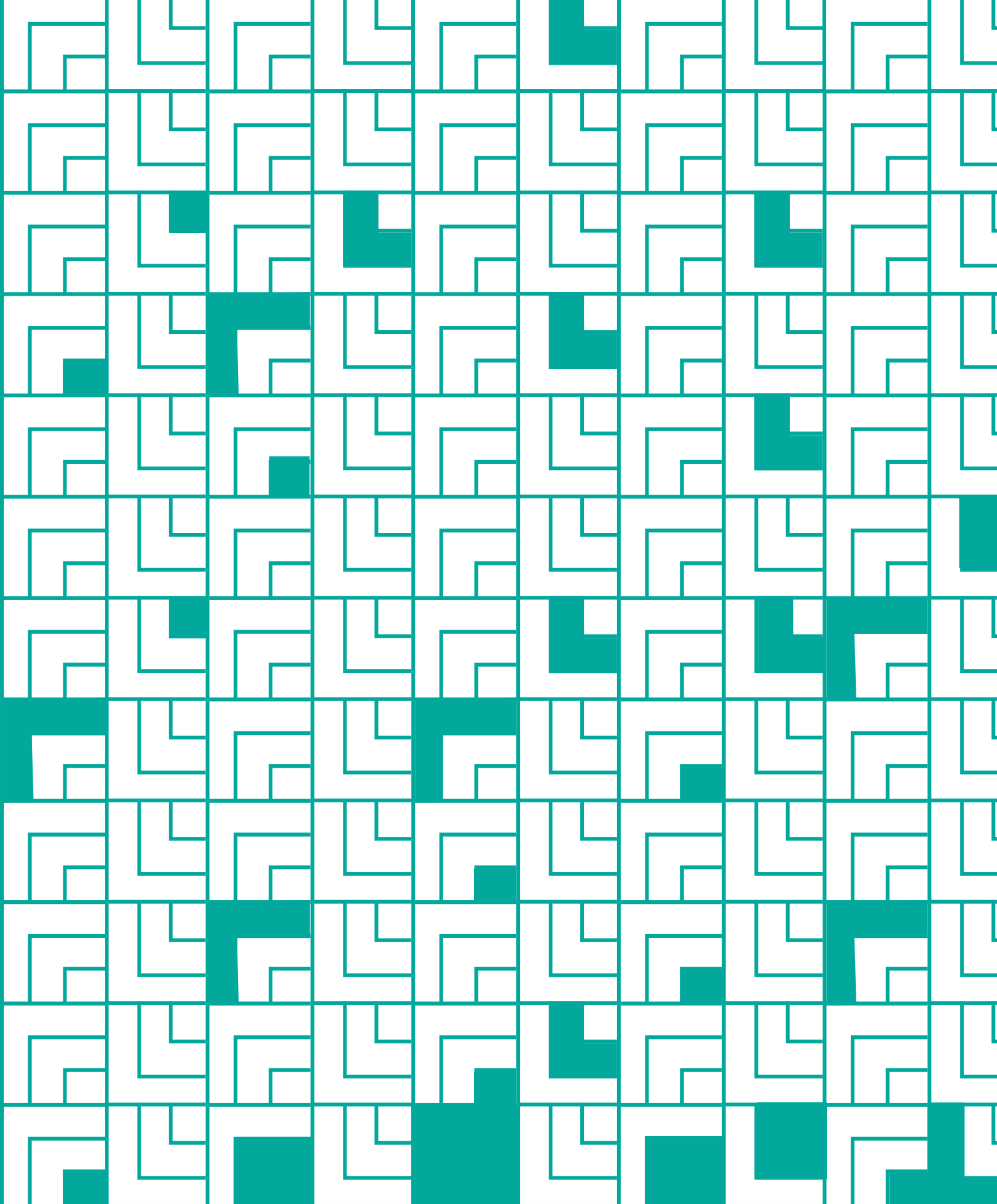
## Challenges and limitations of the study

This exploratory, descriptive study provides some insights into the perceptions and practices towards MDWs and the Kafala system in Lebanon. It would be useful to use some of the study's findings as a baseline for follow-up research on how some of these perceptions and practices evolve as the economic crisis continues.

The methodology used for sampling might open up contentions about their generalizability, including sampling bias, introduction of random and unknown errors, and low external validity. Our survey data captures a diverse population sample somewhat skewed towards respondents of a higher SES. This fact plays a positive role in the design of such studies so that we can reach and recruit employers of MDWs, who tend to be from a relatively higher self-assessed socioeconomic class than the general population.

Logistically, there was a small time frame to implement the study and some challenges to creative recruitment. It was midsummer with intense heat waves in a context of uncertain economic collapse, bringing together challenges that affected how easily we could recruit participants. Data collectors reported that a relatively high number of individuals refused to participate in the survey. Although we tried to limit the survey to 15 minutes to control for respondent fatigue, the field interviewers reported that several respondents wanted to elaborate further on their experiences.





# Results & Analysis

# 1 • Sample Descriptives

The study involved 289 participants in total. The median age was 37, ranging from 25 to 83 years. Most of the respondents lived in Mount Lebanon (56.7%) or Beirut (34.6%), while the remaining participants resided in other parts of the country (ranging from 2.4% to 0.3%). In terms of gender, male respondents were slightly more prominent, making up 56.4% of the participants compared to 43.6% who were female.

**Table 4. Distribution of respondents by area of residence.**

Distribution of respondents by area of residence			
Area	Male	Female	Total
Mount Lebanon	56.4%	57.1%	56.7%
Beirut	33.7%	35.7%	34.6%
North Lebanon	2.5%	2.4%	2.4%
Bekaa	2.5%	1.6%	2.1%
Nabatieh	3.1%	0.8%	2.1%
South Lebanon	1.8%	0.8%	1.7%
Baalbak - Hermel	0%	0.8%	0.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%

## Household Size and Marital Status

About half of the participants mentioned being single (51.2%); a nearly equal percentage indicated being married (43.6%). Looking at family size, the median number of individuals in the respondents' families was three, with the largest household accommodating up to nine people. When questioned about the number of dependents, respondents provided a comparable distribution, not limited to those residing in the same household

**Table 5. Summary of sample respondents' reporting on the number of individuals living in households and dependants.**

Household Size			
	n	Range	Median
Nb. of People Living in household	289	1-9	3
Nb. of dependents	289	0-9	3

# 2. Respondents' Socio-economic Status

Looking into the SES of the surveyed population is essential to, first, have a better understanding of the social class employers belong to, and second, to understand the impact of the financial crisis on their specific class, their needs, their capacity to fulfill their needs, and on their demand for domestic labor. In order to do so, we looked at different indicators: whether respondents are currently employed or not, if and how the economic crisis impacted their income, and the currency in which they receive their income.

## A. Employment status

The majority of the respondents (85.1%) reported being currently employed, while 14.9% reported being unemployed. Similarly, the majority, two-thirds (60.2%), reported working in the private sector or a freelance occupation (27.2%). Only a tiny fraction of those employed reported working in the public sector (6.5%). Additionally, slightly over a quarter (28.9%) of those currently employed also had a second job at the time of the survey. Of those in the public sector, only 18.75% (n=3/16) have a second job.

**Table 6. Distribution of sample respondents by employment status and sector of employment**

	Male		Female		Total	
<b>Currently Employed</b>						
Yes	144	88.3%	102	91.0%	246	85%
No	19	11.7%	24	19.0%	43	14.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Sector of Employment</b>						
Private Sector	75	52.1%	73	71.6%	148	60.2%
Freelance	52	36.1%	15	14.7%	67	27.2%
Public Sector	6	4.2%	10	9.8%	16	6.5%
Daily Worker	9	6.3%	3	2.9%	12	4.9%
Other	1	0.7%	1	1.0%	2	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>99.3%</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>99.6%</b>
Missing	1	0.7%	1	0.0%	2	0.8%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Have a Second Job</b>						
Yes	42	29.2%	29	28.4%	71	28.9%
No	102	70.8%	73	71.6%	175	71.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The impact of the financial crisis on the job market was slightly identified when respondents were asked if they were working before 2019, i.e. pre-crisis, if they had the same job/employer, and the reasons for changing jobs when this occurred.

A higher percentage of the respondents reported working during or before 2019 (n=136, 81.7%). A third (33.2%) reported working in a different occupation than their current one. When asked about the reason for changing their occupation after 2019, three-fifths (59.7%) of that group reported quitting their job, which indicates a voluntary act of ending the employment agreement, while a third (n=23, 31.9%) reported that they were let go.

On the one hand, we asked about changes in their employment status (whether they are still holding the same job they had pre-crisis) to better assess the impact of the crisis more broadly. Did people lose their jobs because of the crisis? Were they let go? On the other hand, we wanted to see if the respondents who lost their jobs are the ones who no longer employ an MDW post-crisis.

*While the employment rate amongst respondents at the time of the survey was reported to be 85.1%, we note that 31.9% of those who changed jobs after the crisis were fired. The percentage is higher for women, as 45.2% who changed jobs had been let go. However, the collected data did not show any correlation between losing or quitting a job and no longer employing an MDW or switching to a freelance MDW instead of a live-in MDW. However, it did show that employed people are more likely to employ an MDW (whether freelance or live-in) than unemployed people; only 16.27% (n=7) out of the unemployed sample reported employing an MDW.*

**Table 7. Distribution of sample respondents by employment during and/or before 2019 and reasons for changing their employment sector**

	Male	Female	Total
<b>Employed before 2019</b>			
Yes	83.4%	79.4%	81.7%
No	16.6%	19.8%	18.0%
Total	100.0%	99.2%	99.7%
Missing	0.0%	0.8%	0.3%
Grand Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Worked in the same job</b>			
Yes	68.0%	65.2%	66.8%
No	32.0%	34.8%	33.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>Reason for changing employment</b>			
I quit	68.3%	48.4%	59.7%
I was let go	22.0%	45.2%	33.6%
I retired	4.9%	0.0%	2.8%
Other	4.9%	6.5%	5.6%
Grand Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

## B. Income

Over half of the employed respondents (55,7%) answered that they receive their income in USD, and a little over a third (32,9%) in both USD and LBP. Only a small fraction, whether working in the private or the public sectors or as freelancers (n=24, 9,8%), had their income solely in LBP.

**Table 8. Distribution of sample respondents by currency of salary currency**

Currency of current Salary	Male	Female	Total
USD	53.5%	58.8%	55.7%
LBP	9.7%	9.8%	9.8%
Both	34.0%	31.4%	32.9%
Prefer NTA	2.8%	0.0%	1.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

When asked how the economic crisis affected their income (as in the actual salary, not the value of their income), more than half of the respondents (n=138, 54,3%) reported that their income decreased, while a fifth (21,1%) reported that their income increased. A sixth (15,6%) reported that their income was still the same.

**Table 9. Distribution of sample respondents by their self-reporting of the impact of the crisis on their income.**

Impact of crisis on Income	Male	Female	Total
Income Decreased	57.7%	50.0%	54.3%
Income Increased	20.9%	21.4%	21.1%
Income is the same	14.7%	16.7%	15.6%
Prefer NTA	0.6%	0.8%	0.7%
Total	93.9%	88.9%	91.7%
Does Not Apply*	6.1%	11.1%	8.3%
Grand Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

\*Category of "Does not apply" refers to individuals who were not employed before 2019.

Almost all respondents who worked in the public sector reported that their income decreased (n=13 out of 14). The respondents who worked in the private sector were among those who most reported having their income decrease compared to pre-crisis (n=77, 55,8%) followed by freelancers (n=36, 26%). Notably, respondents working with the private sector represent more than the majority (n=44, 73,3%) of those who answered that their income increased and are currently working, followed by freelancers (n=14, 23,3%).

## C. How do respondents fare in comparison with other categories of the population?

The survey asked the respondents to evaluate their current SES based on several parameters compared to other Lebanese families and their neighborhoods. Respondents were also asked to compare their current SES with their own before 2019, and to that of their own families when they were their age. We asked these questions to understand how the respondents self-assess their SES and if any correlation can be made between their assessment in light of the financial crisis, employment status, and the history of employing MDWs.

**Table 10. Distribution of sample respondents by self-reporting on SES status**

### *How do you evaluate your own SES?*

	Better Off	Same	Worse	Prefer <sup>NTA</sup>	Total	Missing	Grand Total
In comparison with other Lebanese families (general)	30.8%	47.4%	19.4%	2.4%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
In comparison with other Lebanese families living in your neighborhood	29.8%	52.9%	13.5%	1.0%	97.2%	2.8%	100.0%
In comparison with your own SES before 2019	24.2%	12.8%	62.3%	0.3%	99.7%	0.3%	99.9%
In comparison with your own family when they were your age	15.9%	6.2%	76.5%	1.0%	99.7%	0.3%	100.0%

### **In comparisons with others**

When asked how they compared their status to other Lebanese families, %47.4 believed they had a similar SES to that of other Lebanese families, while a third (%30.8) reported being either better off or way better off. Finally, a fifth (%19.4) reported being worse off. The respondents also reported similar answers when asked to compare their SES to other families in their neighborhood.

### **Before/After economic crisis**

When asked to compare their SES to that of their own during and before 2019, the majority (%62.3) reported that they were worse off than before 2019, a quarter (%24.2) reported that they were better or way better off, and an eighth (%12.8) reported that their SES is still the same.

### **In comparison to their parents**

When finally asked to compare their SES to that of their own families when they were their age, three-fourths (%76.5) reported that their status was worse off than that of their families back then, while a sixth (%15.9) reported that their status is either better or way better than that of their families back then.

### **What are the profiles of people who reported doing better after the crisis?**

When looking closer at the respondents who answered that their SES is better after the crisis (n=%24,70), we notice that the majority (%90) perceived themselves as having the same or better SES than other Lebanese families. Most (%87) also perceive themselves as having a better or the same SES as their neighbors. Furthermore, %95 were employed, %75 received their income in USD, while %24 were paid in both currencies. On the other hand, %60 said their income increased after the crisis and half of them own their homes.

Interestingly, out of the 70 respondents who said they were doing better today than before the crisis, 32 said they hired a domestic worker after the crisis, and 23 out of those 32 (almost 72%) employed an MDW for the first time in their lives post-crisis. We will delve more into the details and descriptives of employers in the next section.

## 3. General Descriptives of Employers

While the previous section presented the descriptives of all respondents, this section focuses on the socioeconomic specificity of employers and non-employers. The distinction between the two categories allows us to discern any potential link between the SES, their experience with the sponsorship system, their need and actual demand for a live-in or live-out MDW, and their attitudes and perceptions(s) of the Kafala system. The results show that people who employ MDWs are more likely to report higher SES, than people who have never employed a domestic worker. As we see below, all groups reported that their income decreased after the crisis. However, the highest decrease affected those who have never employed an MDW at %59.3, followed by previous employers at %48.7 and current employers at %47.9

## 4. History of Employment of Migrant Domestic Workers

The respondents were asked if they had ever employed an MDW, and a distinction was made based on the date of employment. We distinguished three categories of employers: <sup>15</sup>

- By current employers, we refer to those who employed an MDW after 2019 and were still employing an MDW at the time of the survey.
  - *Among this group, we also highlight in our analysis the important subset of first-time employers (respondents who hired an MDW for the first time in their lives after 2019 and are still currently in a working agreement with them).*
- By current and previous employers, we refer to the individuals currently employing an MDW with whom the contractual relationship had started before 2019.
- By previous employers, we refer to the individuals who had employed an MDW in the past but are not currently employing one.
  - *Among this group, we can also distinguish two subgroups in our analysis: those who hired an MDW before 2019 but were not employing an MDW at the time of the survey and those who hired an MDW during or after 2019.*

### Employers vs non-employers

Out of the sample pool, 171 respondents (%59.2) were either currently or previously employing an MDW, while the rest (%40.8) of the respondents never employed an MDW, whether live-in or live-out.

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<sup>15</sup> The category of “employers” excludes respondents who have never employed an MDW - be it a live-in MDW or a freelancer - and therefore never had a direct experience with the sponsorship system.

## Division of employers according to sex

Women and men employers had almost equal representation in the sample (46.8% and 53.2%). For women employers, the majority (n= 67, 83.8%) are employed, and more than half (n=41, 61.2%) are paid in USD, a third (n=22, 32.8%) in both currencies, and a few (n=4, 5.9%) in LBP only. Amongst men employers, (n=87, 95.6%) were employed, and similarly, more than half (n=52, 59.8%) are paid in USD, almost a third (n=25, 28.7%) in both currencies, and around a tenth (n=8, 9.2%) in LBP only.

**Table 11. Distribution of respondents according to categories of employers.**

	Female		Male	
<b>Employers</b>	80	46.8%	91	53.2%
<b>Current</b>	37	58.7%	26	41.3%
<b>Current &amp; Previous</b>	12	36.4%	21	63.6%
<b>Previous</b>	31	41.3%	44	58.7%
<b>Previous (Post'19)</b>	13	40.6%	19	59.4%
<b>Previous (Pre'19)</b>	18	41.9%	25	58.1%
<b>Non-Employers</b>	46	39.0%	72	61.0%

*Note: The sex columns for females/males are calculated out of total group size (by rows) while the total column is calculated by total sample size (by column).*

### A. Are the employers of MDWs employed themselves?

Here, we look more closely at the sample of employers of MDWs. Are they employed themselves? In which sector are they employed? We also take a closer look at the SES of each category of employers and non-employers in the subsections below.

Similar to the bigger respondents' sample, employers of MDW are almost all (n=154, 90.1%) currently employed, meaning they currently have an occupation that provides them with income. Almost two-thirds of the employers' sample (n=97, 63%) reported that they are working in the private sector, followed by around one third (n=41, 26.1%) working freelance, and less than a tenth (n=11, 7.1%) working in the public sector. Following a similar distribution, two-thirds of employers who had a current occupation (n=93, 60.4%) had their salaries in USD, while a third (n=37, 30.5%) had their salary in both USD and LBP, while less than a tenth (n=12, 7.8%) were paid in LBP only<sup>16</sup>.

A recruitment agency owner we interviewed for this study stated that "previously, our clientele were mainly teachers and bank employees [...] but today it is mainly businesses, families who have one of their kids living abroad or well off people, the rest all stopped [asking for an MDW]", while another one stated that "before [the crisis], a public sector employee could bring in an MDW, this is not the case anymore." However, our data could not verify this trend due to the small sample size of public-sector employers.

<sup>16</sup>. Employers receiving their wage in LBP only work in all sectors; three of them (%25) work in the public sector, six work in the private sector (%50), two work as freelancers (%16.7) and one work as a daily worker (%8.3).



**Table 12. Distribution of employers' groups by employment, employment sector, and income currency.**

	Current Employer	Previous & Current Employer	Previous Employer	Total
<b>Current Employment Status</b>				
Yes	98.4%	81.8%	86.7%	90.1%
No	1.6%	18.2%	13.3%	9.9%
<b>Sector of Employment</b>				
Private Sector	72.6%	51.9%	58.5%	63.0%
Freelance	16.1%	37.0%	32.3%	36.6%
Public Sector	4.8%	11.1%	7.7%	7.1%
Daily Worker	4.8%	0.0%	1.5%	2.6%
<b>Income</b>				
USD	66.1%	51.9%	58.5%	60.4%
LBP	6.5%	14.8%	6.2%	7.8%
Both	27.4%	29.6%	33.8%	30.5%
Prefer NTA	0.0%	3.7%	1.5%	1.3%

## B. Descriptives of current employers

As mentioned earlier, current employers refers to the people who employed an MDW after the crisis and are still currently employing that worker. Almost all current employers (98.4%) reported that they are employed with only one respondent who reported that they were unemployed. Employment of this subset before the crisis was somewhat similar, reported at 88.7% for those employed versus 11.3% for those not employed. Almost half of this sample (44.4%) reported that their income had decreased following the economic crisis, while the rest said that their income either did not change (23.8%) or had increased (25.4%). The vast majority (at least 92%) of current and first-time employers reported that they believe their SES to be either similar or better than general Lebanese families and families in their neighborhood.

We took a closer look at the subset of first-time employers (n=74, 77%), i.e. individuals who employed an MDW for the first time in their lives after the crisis, to see if their profile differs from that of the general current employers. Most current employers (n = 74 out of 96, 77%) are first-time employers, which is striking in light of the ongoing financial crisis, the spike in inflation, and the devaluation of the national currency. Also striking is that almost half of the first-time employers (44.5%) who hired an MDW did so after 2019, specifically during the past year (2022). This could be explained by the fact that two years after the start of the crisis, the market (as in supply and demand) "stabilized" or regulated itself.

In general, the two profiles are pretty similar, with an employment rate of 97% and a similar distribution of employment sectors: 72.5% working in the private sector, 20% as freelancers, and a mere 5% working in the public sector. Similarly, most of this subset was paid in USD (62.5%) and a third in both currencies (27.5%). This subset all reported that they believe they are doing better or the same than average Lebanese families and families in their neighborhood (at least 87.7%).

**Table 13. Distribution of current employers by self-reporting on SES status**

	Better Off	Same	Worse	Prefer <sup>NTA</sup>	Total
In comparison with other Lebanese families (general)	47.6%	47.6%	4.8%	0.00%	100.0%
In comparison with other Lebanese families living in your neighborhood	38.1%	54.0%	7.9%	0.0%	100.0%

Of the hired MDWs by all current employers, a quarter of them (22.2%) hired live-in workers while the majority (77.8%) hired freelancers/live-out workers. Half of these employers have hired their MDWs for 1.5 years or less. Those employing a live-in worker have a longer average duration of employment, as 75% have been hiring the same worker for up to 2.5 years. As for those hiring freelance workers, the third quartile is cut at 1.5 years or less, reflecting an overall shorter employment duration.

### C. Descriptives of Current And Previous Employers

“Current and previous employers” refers to individuals currently employing an MDW with whom their contractual relationship started before the crisis and was still ongoing at the time of the survey.

Among current employers who had previously employed MDWs before the crisis, the majority (81.8%) reported that they are currently employed, with half of them (51.9%) working in the private sector, followed by over a third (37%) as freelancers, and only three respondents in that group working in the public sector (11.1%). Almost half of them received their salaries in USD; a third (29.6%) were paid in both USD and LBP, while the rest (14.8%) were paid in LBP only. Half of this category of employers reported that their income has decreased (54.5%), and a quarter reported that their income has remained the same (24.2%). In contrast, seven reported an increased income (21.2%). Almost all of this subset of employers reported that they believe their SES to be either similar or better than Lebanese families generally and families in their neighborhoods (93.9% on both indicators). In other words, they tend to see themselves as middle to upper-middle class.

**Table 14. Distribution of current and previous respondents on reported SES status**

	Better Off	Same	Worse	Prefer <sup>NTA</sup>	Total
In comparison with other Lebanese families (general)	42.4%	51.5%	6.1%	0.00%	100.0%
In comparison with other Lebanese families living in your neighborhood	48.4%	45.5%	3.0%	3.0%	100.0%

Among this subset, those currently hiring a freelance MDW (n=19, 57.5%) were slightly more than those hiring a live-in MDW (n=14, 42.4%). This category of employers reported a higher duration of time employing the MDW, as would be expected. The duration of employment ranged between 4.5 years for both live-in and freelance MDWs, going as high as 18.5 years and 25.5 years for the higher range.

## D. Descriptives of Previous Employers

"Previous employers" refers to individuals who had employed an MDW before the crisis but no longer employed one.

The descriptives of those who stopped employing MDWs after the crisis are distributed almost along the same lines as those who continued to employ MDWs (Section above), with comparable results in terms of employment status, sector, and remuneration currency. However, compared to the subset of those who continued to employ MDWs, a smaller percentage (73% compared to 93.9%) reported their SES to be either similar or better than Lebanese families in general and families in their neighborhoods.

**Table 15. Distribution of previous respondents on reported SES status**

	Better Off	Same	Worse	Prefer <sup>NTA</sup>	Total
In comparison with other Lebanese families (general)	28.0%	45.3%	22.7%	4.0%	100.0%
In comparison with other Lebanese families living in your neighborhood	36%	44.0%	17.3%	0.00%	100.0%

Almost two-third of this subset (57.3%) hired the MDW before 2019 while the rest (42.6%) had hired her during or after 2019, but all of them were not employing any MDW at the time of the survey. Almost similar proportions were reported for those who hired a live-in MDW (40%) versus a freelance MDW (60%). The hired MDWs were mostly Ethiopians (45.3%), followed by Sri Lankans (21.3%), and Bangladeshis(14.7%).

Half of the 30 respondents who had previously hired a live-in MDW had been employing her for three years or less. The duration of the employment of freelance MDWs was one year or less. The two subsets of respondents also presented outliers who have been employing the same workers for up to 33 years and nine years, for live-in and freelance workers, respectively. However, in general terms and for most of the two subsets of employers who used to hire live-in and freelance MDWs, the working relationship ranged between five years for live-in and two years or less for freelance workers.

## E. Descriptives of people who have never employed an MDW

A little less than half (40.8%) of the survey respondents answered that they had never employed an MDW, whether as a freelancer or a live-in. Thus, they never had first-hand experience with the Kafala system.

The descriptives related to this subset are similar to the two above. However, they were less likely than the previous two subsets to believe their SES to be either similar or better than Lebanese families generally and families in their neighborhoods (68%).

**Table 16. Distribution of people who have never employed an MDW on reported SES status**

	Better Off	Same	Worse	Prefer <sup>NTA</sup>	Total
In comparison with other Lebanese families (general)	20.30%	47.50%	28.8%	3.40%	100.0%
In comparison with other Lebanese families living in your neighborhood	16.96%	63.39%	17.86%	1.79%	100.0%

*Almost half of people who have never employed an MDW (47.5%) reported that they never hired an MDW because they could not afford to pay her the salary. Three-eighth (36.4%) reported that they did not need any help with house responsibilities. Only five respondents (4.2%) reported not wanting to hire an MDW under the current Kafala system. Thus, the main reason for not hiring an MDW is financial rather than politically motivated.*

### Would people who have never employed an MDW do so in the future?

When asked if they would consider employing an MDW in the future, almost half the respondents (47.5%) said that they would consider the issue, while the rest said they would not (29.7%) or that they were unsure (22.9%). Of those considering employing an MDW in the future, two-thirds (76.8%) reported that they would prefer to hire a freelance MDW. When asked why they prefer to hire a freelance MDW, three-eighth (37.2%) reported that it is because they only needed her to be available at specific times. In comparison, one-third (34.9%) reported feeling more comfortable hiring a freelance worker and (20.9%) reported it is more affordable for them to hire a freelance MDW. Of those who preferred to hire a live-in MDW, five respondents declined to answer the question on the reasoning behind their choice. The rest reported other reasons than those provided (e.g., seeing it as a more cost-effective option, needing her to be present most of the day, or feeling more comfortable with that option) yet did not reply when prompted to explain their reasoning.

# 5. Live-in or freelance?

We asked the respondents if they were currently hiring a live-in or a freelance MDW and if this was the case before 2019. More than half of the employers (n=113, 66.0%) answered that they hired a freelance MDW, while only a third (n=58, 33.9%) answered that they hired a live-in MDW.

**Table 17. Distribution of MDW employers by employment status of the hired MDW as live-in or freelance/live-out.**

	Before 2019		After 2019		Total	
<b>Status of employment (all employers)</b>						
Live-in	43	56.6%	15	15.8%	58	33.9%
Live-out	33	43.3%	80	84.2%	113	66.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>44.40%</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>55.56%</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Status of employment (all current employers)</b>						
Live-in	14	42.4%	14	22.2%	28	29.1%
Live-out	19	57.7%	49	77.7%	68	70.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>34.3%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>65.6%</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Note:** The table shows the distribution of all groups of employers and those currently still hiring an MDW.

*The collected data (Table 17) shows a clear switch in the demand from live-in to live-out (freelance) MDWs. Before the crisis, 43 respondents (56.6% of the employers' sample) reported hiring a live-in MDW, compared to only 15 (15.8% of the employers' sample) after the crisis. Moreover, 33 respondents (43.3%) of the employers' sample hired freelance MDWs before the crisis, rising to 80 respondents (84.2%) after the crisis. These numbers reflect a clear pattern in respondents' hiring practices before and after the crisis, showing a (50%) decrease in hiring live-in MDWs and a (50%) increase in employers opting to hire freelance MDWs.*

These numbers confirm the continuity of a trend that started post-2019. It was also documented in 2021 in a report published by ARM and Asfari. "This persistent demand for DWs resulted in a noticeable change in the market. The drastic shift in the employer's ability to pay led to a shift from demand for live-in domestic work to demand for live-out domestic work (...) Our research confirms that the demand remains high; out of 46 advertisements requesting caretakers and DWs, 25 were posted by individuals requesting an hourly worker for a private household," the report said.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Domestic work in Lebanon post-2019: Reflections on emerging trends, Iman el Hayek, Zeina Ammar, ARM, 2022, p19

# 6. Nationalities of Domestic Workers

## A. Migrant domestic workers

According to the respondents, the majority of MDWs (out of the total sample) were Ethiopians (38%), Bangladeshi (23.4%), and Sri Lankans (15.8%).

## B. Syrian and Lebanese domestic workers

Syrian (n=5) and Lebanese (n=6) DWs constituted a tiny fraction of less than one-tenth of hired workers (6.4%, n=11).<sup>18</sup> All Syrian and Lebanese DWs were hired as freelance workers; seven were hired before 2019, and four were hired afterwards. All of this subset of DWs was hired directly by the respondent employer. Out of those who were hired after 2019, five were paid in USD and three in LBP. The three remaining workers who were hired before 2019 were paid in USD. Salaries ranged between 2,000,000 and 5,200,000 LBP (all after 2019) and between 50 - 200 USD (before 2019) and 48 - 80 USD (after 2019), with one having a salary of 400 USD. Despite the large variability in the salary range provided to Lebanese and Syrian DWs, the data is insufficient to compare with salaries provided to MDWs.

*The sample size of Lebanese and Syrians DW compared to other nationalities is negligible to discuss an emerging trend in hiring Lebanese and Syrians as DWs..*

# 7. Reasons for Employing MDWs

Most employer respondents (%80.1) reported that the main reason for hiring an MDW was to help with housekeeping, followed by a smaller portion (%15.8) who reported other reasons related to care work responsibilities.

## A. Reasons for hiring a live-in domestic worker

As for the specific reasons related to hiring a live-in MDW, two-thirds of the respondents (%63.8) reported that they did so because they needed her to be available throughout the day, followed by a fifth (%19.0) who felt more comfortable to hire a live-in worker than a freelance one.

## B. Reasons for hiring a freelance domestic worker

As for those who hired a freelance worker, almost half (%48.7) reported that it was a more cost-effective option, a third (%33.6) reported that they only needed the services of the worker at specific times, and a handful (%13.3) reported that they felt more comfortable with this arrangement.

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<sup>18</sup>. This subset includes six Lebanese and five Syrians

*However, data collected from interviews with five owners of PRAs contradicts the data we have collected on the reasons for employing a live-in MDW. Two of the five owners we interviewed mentioned that "before 2019, any person who needed to be relieved from house chores could bring a maid to help them. Today, if the person does not need to, because they do not have elderly people or children in the household, they will refrain from bringing a girl." According to interviewed PRA agents, the demand for MDWs today is justified and motivated by the need for assistance in care work, especially for the elderly and children. People can no longer afford to hire live-in MDWs for housework chores only, as they used to before the crisis.*

*According to another agent, "today, 70% of the clientele brings a maid to help with elderly care." There is an increasing trend of hiring (live-in) MDWs to provide for an ageing or ill member of a Lebanese family. One-fifth of the respondents (20.3%) reported hiring a live-in worker to care for an elderly person, and one-fifth (19.5%) reported doing so to care for a family member with an illness or disability<sup>19</sup>."*

ILO's 2016 study found an increasing trend of hiring MDWs (live-in) to provide skilled help to an aging or ill member in a Lebanese family. One fifth of the respondents (20.3%) reported that they hire a live-in worker to take care of an elderly person in the house and one fifth (19.5%) reported doing so to take care of a family member with an illness or disability<sup>20</sup>.

However, the divergent results might be explained by the fact that the ILO study only focused on live-in MDWs and omitted live-out MDWs. This situation is reflected in our data to a certain extent. More than two-thirds (38.5%) of those employing a live-in domestic worker did so because they needed assistance for care work purposes, while only (3.5%) of those who hired a freelance domestic worker did so for the same reason.

Moreover, the 2016 ILO study found that one of the main reasons behind employing a live-in MDW was that "family members work full time (31.4%)." <sup>21</sup>While our survey did not include this question or propose it as an option to the question on reasons for employing an MDW - which is a shortcoming from our end - the fact that 90.1% of MDW employers are actually employed and that 85.2% of them are employing a live-in MDW could indicate that being employed and working is a reason for employing a live-in MDW.

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<sup>19</sup>Intertwined, A study of employers of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, p.8, ILO, 2016

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

**Table 18. Distribution of employers' reporting on the main reason to hire MDW, both as live-in and freelance. Respondents were asked to include only one answer.**

	Before 2019	After 2019	Total
<b>Reason for employing an MDW</b>			
House Cleaning	68.8%	89.4%	80.1%
Care Work	26.0%	7.4%	15.7%
Other Household responsibilities	1.3%	2.1%	1.8%
Other Reasons	3.9%	1.1%	2.3%
<b>Reason for employing a Live-in MDW</b>			
I needed her available throughout the day	62.8%	66.7%	63.8%
I feel more comfortable	18.6%	20.0%	19.0%
More cost-effective	9.3%	6.7%	8.6%
Other	4.7%	6.7%	5.2%
Prefer NTA	4.7%	0.00%	3.4%
<b>Reasons for employing a live-out MDW</b>			
More cost-effective	42.4%	51.3%	48.7%
I needed her available at specific times	30.3%	35.0%	33.6%
I feel more comfortable	21.2%	10.0%	13.3%
I do not want the responsibility of being a sponsor	6.1%	1.3%	2.7%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Prefer NTA	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%



# 8. How did the recruitment happen?

The majority of the respondents (70.8%) hired the MDW directly, while (28.1%) did so via a PRA or through a cleaning service. PRAs were contacted mainly for hiring a live-in domestic worker (82.8%), with a notable decrease in relying on their services before and after 2019 (50% vs. 10.5%), most likely as employers began hiring more freelance and live-out MDWs (Table 21 & 22). Only two freelance workers were hired through a PRA/Cleaning company. One worker was hired through a PRA (during/before 2019), and one was hired through a cleaning company (after 2019).

**Table 19. Distribution of recruitment methods and currency of fees requested by PRAs and cleaning agencies as reported by employers of MDWs**

	Before 2019	After 2019	Total
<b>Recruitment of worker</b>			
Directly	48.7%	88.4%	70.8%
Through a PRA	50.0%	10.5%	28.1%
Through a cleaning agency	1.3%	1.1%	1.2%
Other Reasons	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Prefer NTA	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>Currency of pay (fee)</b>			
USD	82.1%	81.8%	82.0%
LBP	2.6%	0.0%	2.0%
Both	2.6%	0.0%	2.0%
I did not pay any fees	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Prefer NTA	12.8%	18.2%	14.0%

**Table 20. Distribution of recruitment methods reported by employers of MDWs and disaggregated by live-in and freelance MDWs**

	Live-in	Live-out	Total
<b>Recruitment of worker</b>			
Directly	15.5%	99.1%	70.8%
Through a PRA	82.8%	0.0%	28.1%
Through a cleaning agency	1.7%	0.9%	1.2%
Other Reasons	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Prefer NTA	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

# 9. Fees paid to recruitment agencies

Respondents paid the PRAs services in USD primarily (82%), with only two respondents who paid either in LBP or both currencies before 2019.

**Recruitment fees requested by PRAs increased after the crisis in Lebanon.** Before 2019, the fees ranged between \$200 and \$2650 and a median of \$1256. After 2019, the fees ranged between \$400 and \$5,500, with a median of \$1,800. Interviews with owners of recruitment agencies confirm these numbers. Almost all stated that recruitment fees may vary between 1,800 USD and 8,000 USD depending on the nationality of the MDW. Despite the slight increase reported in recruitment fees post-2019, no major changes have occurred. The findings reported in the ILO 2016 study show that "52% of survey respondents paid between \$1,000 and \$2,000 in recruitment fees, 24% paid between \$2,000 and \$3,000, just under 7% paid more than \$3,000, and 0.6% paid less than \$1,000."<sup>22</sup>

**Table 21. Summary distribution of fees paid to recruitment agencies before and after 2019**

	n	Range	1 <sup>st</sup> Quart.	Median	Mean	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quart
<b>Before 2019</b>	32	\$400-\$5,500	\$1,175	\$1,800	\$1,759	\$2,050
<b>After 2019</b>	8	\$200-\$2,650	\$375	\$1,256	\$2,000	\$2,650

# 10. MDWs Working Conditions

## A. Salaries of MDWs

The survey asked all employers to report on the frequency of the salary/wage of the MDWs and whether it is paid on a monthly, daily, or hourly basis. Employer respondents were also asked to specify the currency of the wages paid to MDWs and looked at whether the financial crisis had any impact on said wages. We remind the reader here that the reported wages and salaries are those paid by the respondent and do not include other sources of income, i.e. some MDWs might have other sources of income, such as additional freelance work at other households).

### - Live-in MDW

All live-in MDWs were paid every month. In contrast, the majority of freelance MDWs (83.7%) were paid on an hourly basis. The remaining freelance workers were paid daily (12.2%) or monthly (4.1%).

<sup>22</sup>Intertwined, A study of employers of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, p.16, ILO, 2016

Before 2019, most live-in MDWs were paid in LBP (67.4%), and a third were paid in USD (32.6%). However, the situation changed in the post-2019 period, where almost all started getting paid in USD (93.3%) except for one respondent who reported that they paid the hired live-in MDW in LBP.

While the fact that more live-in MDW were getting paid in USD post-crisis might seem surprising, it could be explained by the devaluation of the Lebanese pound.

In terms of salary, the monthly salary for live-in MDWs ranged between 150 USD and 400-600 USD, with a median value of 250\$. No changes were reported between before and after the crisis.

- **Freelance MDW**

On the other hand, freelance MDWs got paid predominantly in USD before 2019 (42.4%) or a combination of both currencies (36.4%). However, contrary to the trend noted with live-in MDW and as Table 22 shows, we note a slight decrease in the percentage of respondents paying freelance MDW in USD post-crisis.

**Table 22. Distribution of salary currency before and after 2019 as reported by employers of MDWs, disaggregated for employers of live-in and freelance MDWs**

	Before 2019	After 2019	Total
<b>Salaries of live-in MDWs</b>			
LBP	67.4%	6.7%	51.7%
USD	32.6%	93.3%	48.3%
Both	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Prefer NTA	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Salaries of freelance MDWs</b>			
LBP	18.2%	27.5%	24.8%
USD	42.2%	32.5%	35.4%
Both	36.4%	40.0%	38.9%
Prefer MTA	3.0%	0.0%	0.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

For freelance workers, respondents were asked to report the monthly amount even if they paid on an hourly or daily visit basis. The monthly salary in USD had a wider range for freelance workers, from \$5 to \$200 with a median of \$60 per month before 2019, and a range of \$6 and \$400 with a median of \$31 after 2019. For employers paying freelance workers in LBP after 2019, the monthly salary range was between 300,000 LBP and 3,000,000 LBP, with a median of 900,000 LBP.

**Table 23. Summary statistics for the amount of monthly salary for live-in and freelance MDWs disaggregated by currency of pay.**

	n	Range	1 <sup>st</sup> Quart.	Median	Mean	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quart
<b>Live-in MDW (USD)</b>						
<b>Before 2019</b>	40	\$1500 - \$600	\$200	\$250	\$249	\$250
<b>After 2019</b>	15	\$150 - \$450	\$200	\$250	\$255	\$300
<b>Freelance MDW (USD)</b>						
<b>Before 2019</b>	15	\$5 - \$200	\$45	\$60	\$78	\$100
<b>After 2019</b>	30	\$6 - \$400	\$18	\$31	\$54	\$60
<b>Freelance MDW (LBP)</b>						
<b>Before 2019</b>	14	LL5,000 - LL5,200,000	LL41,250	LL225,000	LL958,929	LL1,000,000
<b>After 2019</b>	47	LL300,000 - LL3,000,000	LL750,000	LL900,00	LL1,200,00	LL3,000,000

We also attempted to calculate the amount paid per visit (per day) for freelance MDWs<sup>23</sup> to have an idea on how much the daily pay changed, if it did, after 2019. We note that workdays might differ between workers and depend more on the actual hours spent working. Nevertheless, we hope to use these calculations as an indicator, albeit constrained by the data from the survey. It is also worth noting that we have lower valid responses due to missing data from respondents who did not specify the number of working days or monthly salary paid.

For freelance MDWs getting paid in LBP, the devaluation of the Lebanese Lira impacts the results. In Table 24 below,<sup>24</sup> if we apply a conversion rate of 1,500 LBP/USD before 2019 and 89,500 LBP/USD for the post 2019 respondents, we note a severe decrease in the amount paid per visit for freelance MDWs. The range of \$6 to \$133 sharply falls to \$1.6 to \$9 per visit, while the median falls by half from \$8.3 to \$4.4. The mean paid falls even more sharply from \$34 to \$4.4 ***Obviously these numbers should be interpreted conservatively, but we can safely note that the amount paid to freelance workers has decreased post-2019.***

Data collected from our survey on salary currency and amounts also confirms data documented in previous studies that show that most freelance MDWs are getting paid in Lebanese pounds post-2019: “The majority of SEDW (freelance MDW) are paid in LBP. This applies to those working with individual employers, private institutions (...) as well as cleaning companies,” according to an ARM study in 2022.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Note that this is the wage paid by the employer/respondent. The freelance migrant domestic worker could have other sources of income.  
<sup>24</sup>Provided that we remain conservative in our interpretation of these calculations as the exchange rate between LBP/USD was not, and remains, stable during the period that we asked the respondents to report on.  
<sup>25</sup>Domestic work in Lebanon post-2019: Reflections on emerging trends, Iman el Hayek, Zeina Ammar, ARM, 2022,p.25

**Table 24. Summary statistics for the amount of pay per visit for freelance MDWs disaggregated by currency of pay.**

	n	Min	Max	1 <sup>st</sup> Quart.	Median	Mean	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quart
<b>Salaries for freelance MDW (LBP)</b>							
All	47	LL10,000	LL800,00	LL200,00	LL375,000	LL348,874	LL500,000
Before 2019	7	LL10,000	LL200,00	LL11,857	LL12,500	LL51,396	LL56,667
After 2019	40	LL150,000	LL800,000	LL400,000	LL400,00	LL400,938	LL500,000
<b>Salaries for freelance MDW (USD)</b>							
All	6	\$7.50	\$62.50	\$12.12	\$18.25	\$25.58	\$32.25
Before 2019	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
After 2019	6	\$7.50	\$62.50	\$12.12	\$18.25	\$25.58	\$32.25

## B. Working Days

We asked the employers' sample about the number of working days for both live-in and freelance DWs. We wanted to see how much employers rely on freelance DWs. On the other hand, for live-in DWs we were interested in knowing if employers still exploit the constant presence of the worker in the household by demanding extra hours and days of work. We wanted to see if this practice persists. As mentioned earlier in the introduction of this report, previous surveys have found that most employer respondents do not give live-in MDWs a day off.<sup>26</sup> Also similar to previous studies, we found that Lebanese employers continue exploiting live-in DWs by not giving them at least one day off per week.

It is important to note that a full day for a freelance domestic worker is not necessarily the same as a full day for a live-in domestic worker. The latter has working days exceeding 8 hours per day since she lives in her workplace, while freelance DWs can negotiate the number of working hours per day/visit.

### - Number of working days for freelance DWs.

For employers hiring freelance workers, most had the worker come in four days in a month or less.

<sup>26</sup> According to Kafa's 2010 study, "%45,5 of the survey respondents indicated that they do not give the domestic worker a day off." ILO 2016 study mentions that "%50.7 of Lebanese employers do not abide by this provision

- Number of working days for live-in DWs.

All live-in MDWs were reported to work between 5 and 7 days a week, with at least %75 working throughout the week without a day off. It is quite striking that more than half of those who responded to this question felt no shame in reporting that they do not give live-in MDWs a day off per week. The exploitation of live-in MDWs is highly normalized among Lebanese employers. As in the table below, this pattern of overworking and exploiting live-in MDWs is common among different categories of employers.

### C. How many are in possession of their passports and residencies?

The above question assesses if withholding MDWs' passports and residency permits remains an ongoing abusive practice among Lebanese employers, as documented in various surveys. The latest was by the ILO in 2016.<sup>27</sup> It found that "94.3% of the surveyed employers engaged in that practice."

We addressed this question solely to employers of live-in MDWs, as this type of abuse is specific to these cases. Our findings confirm that it is a widespread, ongoing pattern. *It is interesting to note that here also, employers found no problem stating that they were withholding the MDW's papers. Only a third of the employer sample (n=%29.31 ,17) who hired a live-in MDW answered that the worker was in possession of both her passport and residency permit. Otherwise, the worker either had her passport but not her residency permit (%7) or neither her passport nor her residency permit (n= %55.2 ,32). However, there seem to be some changes in these practices before and after 2019. According to the data obtained from the employers, workers who had possession of both their passports and residency permits rose from %23.3 to %46.7 while those who did not have either fell from a staggering %62.8 to %33.3. In almost all cases when the worker was not in possession of her passport (n=%91.9 ,34), the passport was in possession of the employer/respondent.*

Table 25. Distribution of MDW employers reporting worker's possession of passport and residency permit

	Before 2019	After 2019	Total
<b>Workers has in her possession</b>			
Neither	62.8%	33.3%	55.2%
Permit and passport	23.3%	46.7%	29.3%
Residency permit only	7.0%	13.3%	8.6%
Passport only	7.0%	6.7%	7.0%
I do not know	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Prefer not to answer	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Who has her passport</b>			
Employer	93.3%	85.7%	92.0%
Her Embassy	3.3%	0.00%	2.7%
Agency	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Passport is lost	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
I do not know	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	3.3%	14.3%	5.4%
Prefer NTA	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

<sup>27</sup> Intertwined, A study of employers of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, p.36, ILO, 2016

## D. How do MDWs describe the current situation?

To obtain the reading and analysis of the current situation in Lebanon by MDWs, we organized two FGDs with 11 participants as part of the participatory research methodology. We divided the focus groups according to long-term and short-term residents to see whether there could be a difference between their experiences and knowledge of the Kafala system and the Lebanese context in general. Most of the participants, whether long-term or short-term residents, are currently living independently, but all have had experience as live-in DWs in Lebanon at one point or another. They all had stories and experiences of exploitation and abuse as DWs. ;

The impact of the financial crisis on the livelihood of MDWs in Lebanon is reflected in the testimonies shared during the FGDs on salaries and workload. However, the most significant issue to come out of these discussions is the emerging trend amongst MDWs in Lebanon wanting to work as live-in MDWs despite knowing this severely restricts their freedoms and puts them at risk of severe abuse and exploitation. As we see below, the main reason behind this motivation is Lebanon's extremely high cost of living. Below, we present the main findings of both focus groups.

### - ***Continuous abusive and exploitative behaviors towards MDW***

As reflected in the quantitative data and as previously mentioned, abusive and exploitative behaviors from Lebanese employers towards MDWs are still widely practiced. These behaviors are encouraged by a structural system of abuse, the Kafala system. We mainly focus here on what was told by short-term residents, as this shows how deeply rooted these practices are, especially for those who came to Lebanon between 2019 and 2022. At least two of the participants had an abusive employer/sponsor. One of the participants stated: "Sometimes you work with no off days, they keep you in your room with no option, mistreat you using abusive words and starve you. You do not have time on your own."

Another participant said, "Even if you are sick, you can explain to your boss, but when with madame, she will say, 'I paid you money, and you have to work even if you are sick, even if you are taking medication, you have to work'". Another stated that "When you are working with a contract, some people are not allowed to use phones at all, and it makes it difficult to get in touch with your family."

***At least two participants from the long-term resident group stated that they were not in possession of their passports, which remained either with the ex-employer or office. At least three participants had to pay their previous sponsor or recruitment agencies to get their passports back. None of the short-term residents were in possession of their passports.***

One short-term resident focus group participant discussed the tasks expected from the live-in domestic worker: "You are supposed to do everything, everything. You clean, you cook, you take care of the kids. Maybe if they have a dog or pet in the house, you take care of it. You do anything and everything."



- **How, from their perspectives, did the financial crisis impact the domestic labor market?**

Participants from both groups of long-term and short-term residents were asked to describe how the financial crisis impacted the domestic labor market based on their personal experiences and observations. What came out of the discussions as a direct impact of the crisis was the amount of salaries and the frequency of work/visits. However, more interestingly, it seems that more MDWs want to work as live-in MDWs, despite knowing this puts them at risk of abuse because of the financial crisis and its impact on the cost of living. Even in cases where freelance MDWs are getting paid more than live-in MDWs, their expenses are high, and they cannot put savings aside or even make ends meet.

- **Impact on salaries**

According to one of the participants of the long-term residents focus groups, "the need for help in domestic labor is still there, but the financial crisis has definitely impacted the demand." Another participant said: "I used to work three days a week, but now I work less. There are many jobs, that is true, but not well paid, so I prefer not to take the job and to work for nothing."

Another one states:

*"The demand for workers is still high, but the payment is meager compared with before because of the economic crisis, and some of the Lebanese people are using these challenges to exploit the migrant workers. You go work for them and by the end of the day, you are not paid. Some are working, and by the end of the day, they are given 50\$; a whole month, someone is giving you 50\$".*

- **One participant in the short-term residents focus group states:**

"You know you will work, and the madame will tell you and agree on an amount of money. However, she will pay you half at the end of the month. When you ask for the rest of the money, she will tell you the dollar is up, so you have only that, and you wait till next month."

Another participant said: "Sometimes, they do not pay you at all. You know how they say go to the police and come for the money? Sometimes they threaten you with that." *Statements from MDWs show how the crisis opened the way to more exploitative practices from employers related to the remuneration of MDWs. As the statements show, some participants of the FGD reported getting paid less than the amount agreed on with employers who use their class privilege (and the fact that they are Lebanese) by telling underpaid and exploited MDWs to report them to the police. However, in light of the current sponsorship system, if a freelance MDW resorts to the police to file a complaint against her employer, she might be detained because she is not living and working at her sponsor's place.*

- **Are freelance MDWs looking for live-in contracts?**

*Participants from both focus groups reported that more freelance MDWs are currently looking for live-in contracts, even after having experienced abuse from previous employers while working as a live-in MDW. They refer to the cost of living in Lebanon today. Participants from the long-term resident focus groups said that "they are freelancers looking for jobs and work in Lebanon. Now, if you go for part-time work, you spend money on transportation and rent. So most people are deciding to do live-in jobs."*



- ***Another participant explained:***

"It is not actually a preference. It is more due to vacancy because of the repatriation of those who were on contract, and Lebanese households were no longer able to afford them because they had to pay in dollars and do all the document work. This is creating vacancies for those who were freelancers to go for the live in condition. So it is more of a vacancy [or demand], filling in the gap. You have people moving out, and you have freelancers coming and filling in these positions".

Comparing having a contract and working outside, a short-term resident FGD participant said: "Working outside is better if she or he mistreated you. You can just go. But when on contract, you are there all the time. For me, it is better because when you are outside, everything is on you, but when you are at Madame's house, she is giving you food. There are advantages and disadvantages to both sides."

*"Because when you are on a contract, and they pay a small salary, you stay, shower, and eat there, so you are not spending too much. But when you are outside, you have to spend. You work by the hour. At Madame's, you work throughout the day. Here, at least, you can rest (when working outside). When you work outside a contract and have some money, you can go and buy yourself a phone and talk to your family."*

# 11 Knowledge and perceptions regarding the Kafala system

## A. Did Lebanese' perceptions of the Kafala system evolve over the years?

Through the established Kafala system, the state delegates much of its responsibilities to the employer as "the sponsor". On the issue, Kassamali<sup>28</sup> notes: "What is unique about the Kafala system is the diminished role of the state as well as the legalized and customary transfer of responsibility for migrant workers to citizen sponsors or their proxies."

This section shows that although the Kafala system has been in place for decades, misconceptions surrounding its mechanisms, rights and duties still prevail among employers in Lebanon. The Kafala system is not represented in one codified law. It is a system composed of different directives and circulars issued by the MoL and the GS. This system of structural abuse facilitated the presence of customary practices that allowed different actors to play a role in people's perceptions of the Kafala system and their attitudes and practices. It is a usual practice among PRAs and government officials to advise employers to withhold the workers' passports in order for them (employers) to secure their "investment" (fees paid to employ a live-in MDW). This system shapes people's perception of it, of domestic work, and of the person doing the work, the domestic worker herself.

We dedicated several questions to understanding how much people, employers of MDWs in particular, know about the Kafala system and if their perceptions have changed throughout the years, especially recently in light of the financial crisis. The questions asked had a true or false option, in addition to "not sure." We asked these questions to determine the common misconceptions about what the Kafala system entails among the Lebanese population.

*It is interesting to highlight that before going into a deeper description of the results, no significant difference was noted between answers given by employers and people who never employed an MDW regarding their perceptions of the Kafala system. This might indicate that people's knowledge and perception of a particular system, in this case, the Kafala system, does not come solely from first-hand experience but from a structural system of perceptions.*

- **Penal responsibility in case the MDW commits an infraction or a crime through the established Kafala system in Lebanon**

We asked the respondents if it was the sponsor's responsibility in case an MDW commits an infraction or a crime in Lebanon. Almost half (50.9%) of the respondents gave a false answer as they believed it would be the responsibility of the sponsor if an employed MDW committed a crime or a felony, while a third (32.9%) believed otherwise, and the rest (16.3%) were not sure if the sponsor bore any responsibility in this case. This common misconception stems from a particular perception among sponsors that they are responsible for all aspects of the MDW's life, even her personal life. This is facilitated by the sponsorship system. For example, in the case of MDWs' personal lives, the GS issued a circular in 2015<sup>29</sup> asking sponsors to notify the GS directorate if the MDW is planning to get engaged or if she is pregnant. These directives that give the sponsor the status of the patriarch encourage such misconceptions. If they are responsible if the MDW wants to get engaged, they would definitely be so in case she commits an infraction or a crime. This perception was held similarly between men and women (50.3% and 51.6%, respectively) and to lower similarity between employers and people who have never employed an MDW (54.4% and 45.8%, respectively).

<sup>28</sup> Kassamali, S. (2017). Migrant worker lifeworlds of Beirut (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University).

<sup>29</sup> إلغاء تعميم منع الحب أو الإستعباد: في إستعادة لمحطات التحرك وجرم لمكاسبه، ، المفكرة القانونية، ٢٠١٥/٧/٣١

- ***Who is responsible in case the MDW has an accident?***

When asked the same question about accidents affecting MDWs (illness, accidents), most respondents answered correctly. The majority (83.4%) agreed it would be the sponsor's responsibility, while a tenth (9%) believed otherwise. This distribution was held between men and women respondents (82.8% and 84.1%, respectively) and between employers and people who have never employed an MDW (83.1% and 83.6%, respectively).

- ***Does The sponsorship system impose on MDW to live at their workplace?***

The answers were split when asked if the Kafala system forces MDWs to live at their workplaces/employers' houses. Almost half (48.9%) of the respondents provided a correct answer as they believed that under the Kafala system, an MDW is obliged to live in the same household as the sponsor. A third (29.5%) believed she was not obliged to do so, and a fifth of the respondents were unsure. This distribution was also held across the various answers among men and women (46.9% and 50.8%, respectively) and between employers and people who have never employed an MDW (45.3% and 50.9%, respectively). There was a slight difference when looking at employers and people who have never employed an MDW. The latter had a higher proportion who were unsure whether the worker was obliged to live in the same household as her employer (26.5% vs. 18.7%), but this can be easily explained by their inexperience with the Kafala system.

- ***Can MDWs change employers freely?***

When asked if MDWs can change employers freely, i.e., without the sponsor's approval, most respondents (82.4%) answered correctly by agreeing that MDWs can not change their employment/employer unless the employer permits them to do so. One-tenth (8.7%) believed the Kafala system does not require this, while another tenth (9%) were unsure.

- ***The sponsorship system allows employers to keep the MDW's identity documents in their possession***

When asked if the Kafala system allows employers to withhold MDW's passports, over half of the respondents (55.4%) believed that it does, which is false, as no text stipulates this right. On the contrary, many court verdicts condemned employers for doing so. While almost a third (28%) did not believe that the Kafala system allows them to do so, the rest (16.6%) were unsure. ***It is pretty interesting to note that the two questions to which the respondents provided wrong answers (this one and the one related to whose responsibility is it if an MDW commits an infraction) are questions that engage the MDW's agency, and her ability to choose and move freely.***

In the next set of question items, we presented several statements to the respondents and asked them how much they agreed with each statement. Although we gave them a 5-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," we will present the results on a 3-factor level of "agree," "disagree," and "not sure" for ease of reporting.<sup>30</sup>

## **B. Do the Lebanese believe that MDWs are competing with Lebanese workers?**

We presented respondents with two statements. The first asked if migrant workers were competing with Lebanese workers; the second statement was explicitly related to MDWs competing with Lebanese DWs. Almost half (45.8%) of the respondents agreed that migrant workers compete with Lebanese workers for jobs in Lebanon, while the other half (51%) disagreed. A similar result was also reported when we asked the same question regarding MDWs. (42.9%) agreed that MDWs are competing with Lebanese DW, while (53.6%) disagreed. However, over half (56.4%) of the respondents believed that Lebanese DWs are more likely to have higher salaries than their migrant counterparts, while three-eighth (36.7%) believed otherwise.

*Over half of the respondents disagreed that MDWs participate positively in the Lebanese economy, even though the majority recognised that MDWs provide cheaper care labor compared to the Lebanese. This might be explained by the fact that people tend not to perceive care work as contributing to the economy. This perception is also impacted by the discourse propagated by Lebanese media outlets, commentators, and politicians blaming MDWs - amongst many other marginalized categories of people - for contributing to the economy's collapse. It might also be related that when people think of MDWs and their contribution to the economy, they think of live-in MDWs, who spend less money in Lebanon (whether on rent or shopping, for example) because of the Kafala system and sponsors' attitudes.*

Three-fourths of the respondents (75.7%) believed that most MDWs are getting paid in USD, while only a seventh (14.2%) disagreed. However, data from our survey indicate that this is not entirely accurate. While it confirms this regarding live-in MDW, it is not the case for freelance MDWs, as the survey data shows that only 32.5% of respondents are paying freelance MDW in USD post-crisis.

## **C. Do MDWs have the right to set a minimum wage?**

Still, three-fifths (59.4%) agreed that MDWs should have the right to set a minimum wage, while a third (33.3%) disagreed. Non-surprisingly, individuals who have never employed an MDW agreed more on this statement, where MDWs can set a minimum wage, than did employers (66.9% vs. 54.1%). On the other hand, men and women respondents presented a slight divergence of opinion on this statement as well, with slightly more men agreeing that MDWs should have the right to do so than women (62.6% vs. 55.2%).

When asked about their personal preferences in hiring a domestic worker, (43.9%) reported that they preferred to hire an MDW. In comparison, a quarter (24.2%) disagreed (which indicates that they prefer not to hire a MDW, but it remains silent on whether they prefer a Lebanese DW or no domestic worker at all). A third (31.8%) were not sure. However, when asking Lebanese DWs the same question, a third (30.8%) said that they did prefer this option, while another third (32.2%) were not sure, and the rest (37%) disagreed.

It is important to note the slight contradiction in results. While there is a consensus that migrant workers (whether domestic or from other sectors) are directly competing with Lebanese for jobs, 42.9% agreed that MDWs are competing with Lebanese workers. However, when asked if they would hire a Lebanese domestic worker, only 30.8% said they would.

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<sup>30</sup>The full details of the results are presented in Annex II.

## D. Is there a preference between freelance or live-in MDW?

When asked about their preferences between employing a live-in MDW or a freelance MDW, three-fifths of the respondents (62.6%) preferred to hire a freelance domestic worker rather than a live-in worker, which is confirmed by earlier questions in the survey. Almost a third preferred otherwise (28.4%), and a tenth (9%) were unsure. When asked if hiring an MDW is better (than hiring a non-migrant worker) to preserve the privacy of the home, three-fifths (61.9%) disagreed, while a quarter (25.6%) agreed.

The 2016 ILO study also examined whether employers preferred live-in, full-time, part-time, or live-out work. The report states that "some employers, primarily those with smaller households, prefer the freelance option; other employers, especially those who need round-the-clock care, prefer a live-in full-time MDW. The preference for having a full-time, live-in worker relates to the worker's reliability, working hours and cost." The preference for live-out MDW seems to be an emerging trend. Insan's 2014 study asked employers about their opinion regarding live-out MDWs, "the study found out that 70.4 % of employers believe that MDW should not be able to live independently."<sup>31</sup> The main reasons given at the time were as follows "35.2% stated that this was due to "financial and practical implications (this included the inability of MDW to afford accommodation given their meager wage and their lack of family support in Lebanon. 26.9% stated that MDW cannot live independently because exposure to the world will put her at risk and sully her character,20.7% stated that since MDW cannot live outside their workplace as they are under the employers' legal responsibility , and 13.1% reported that the MDW is unable to live alone." <sup>32</sup>

## E. Laws, regulations and responsibilities

Similar to previous surveys, over half of the respondents (56.1%) believed that laws and regulations provide enough protection for employers in conflict. In contrast, a third (29.1%) of the respondents believed they did not. A similar number of respondents (57.3%) reported that they do not want to bear the responsibility of being a sponsor, while over a third (34.7%) reported that they do not mind doing so.

***Three-fourths of the respondents (75.4%) agreed that laws and regulations should allow MDWs to obtain and renew their residency and work permits independently. Another important result is that almost three-quarters of the respondents (71.4%) agreed that laws and regulations should make it possible for MDWs to change their employer and/or employment if and/or when they choose to do so without the employer/sponsor's permission.***

One-seventh believed otherwise (14.2%). These perceptions were uniform across genders regardless of whether the respondent was an employer. Obtaining the sponsor/employer's permission to change an employer is an abusive administrative procedure imposed on MDWs, as they are the only workers with a limited right to change employers/sponsors. Not only do they need to obtain their original sponsor/employer's permission to start working with another employer, but they only have the right to change employers twice. This administrative procedure allows employers to extort MDWs and request money for their "waiver' and permission to change employers.

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<sup>31</sup>The Kafala system, when employers also accepted to share their perspective, INSAN, 2014, pp.20

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

## F. Should the Kafala system be abolished?

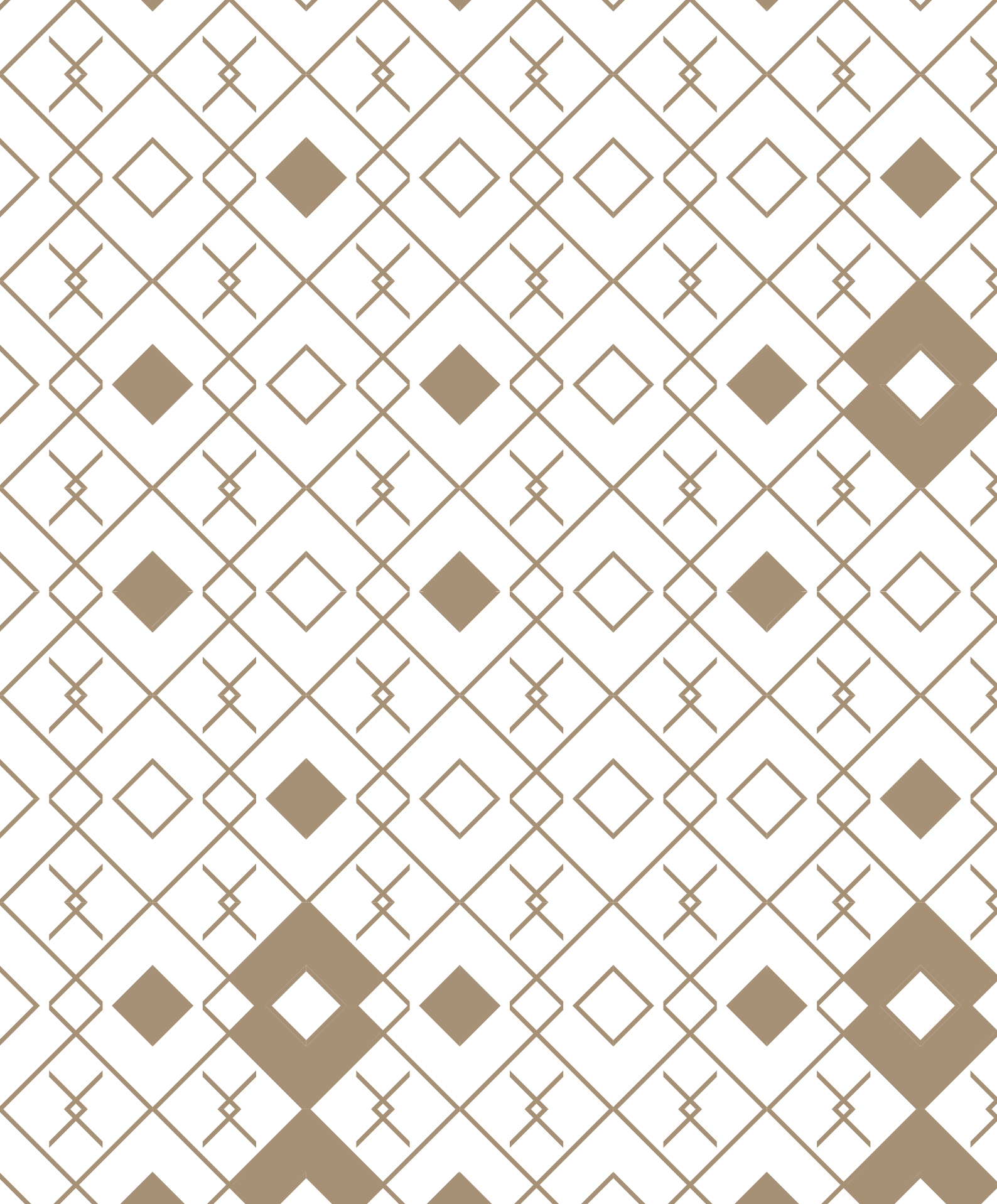
Almost half of the respondents (45.7%) said that they believed that the Kafala system should be abolished, compared to less than two-fifths (37.4%) who disagreed and a sixth (17%) who were not sure. When we asked the participants to identify possible alternatives to the Kafala system, almost two-fifths (38%) agreed that MDWs should be included in the national labor laws, a fifth (21%) selected the abolishment of the Kafala system, while a fifth (23%) reported that the Kafala system does need to change. Similar findings were reported in Insan's 2014 study: "55.8% of employer respondents reported that the Kafala system should be changed.". Of those respondents, "39% reported that Kafala should be abolished, 36.4% reported that it should be changed to make it easier on employers, while 24.6% reported that the Kafala system should be amended to guarantee MDW rights."<sup>33</sup> There is a notable contradiction between employers' attitudes and practices towards MDWs and their belief that the Kafala system should be abolished. However, it should not be interpreted negatively because attitudes and practices are subject to change if a change occurs on a structural level.

## G. Who profits from the Kafala system?

*When asked to rank the parties that make the most profit out of the Kafala system, the respondents ranked the PRAs first (73.3% agreement). Most respondents had also reported that the fees requested by the PRAs are too high, with a small minority (3.8%) who disagreed. Second in place were state agencies such as GS and the MoL (51% agreement), followed by the employer (51% agreement), and finally ending with the party that makes the least profit under the Kafala system, the MDW herself (69.4%). These results indicate that the population is well aware of not only the exploitative nature of the Kafala system but also of the main beneficiaries of this system, including themselves.*

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<sup>33</sup>The Kafala system, when employers also accepted to share their perspective, INSAN, 2014, p.25



# Conclusion & Recommendations



This report comes at a time where a very violently xenophobic discourse is being widespread in Lebanon, sponsored by the state. Resorting to xenophobic narratives and blaming the 'other' for the country's financial and social collapse has always been commonly used by the government and all political and religious figures in Lebanon. These narratives shape and impact people's perceptions and help maintain current structural systems. The Kafala system has been in place in Lebanon for decades. It is inherently abusive towards MDWs as it gives the employer/sponsor full control and power over the worker. Moreover, this system is not codified. It is a compilation of administrative directives and circulars issued by GS or the MoL, allowing employers to have different interpretations of what the Kafala means and what it entails.

***Despite many civil society campaigns directed at employers and the general population, abusive practices and behaviors are still widespread, as the data from previous surveys and our survey shows. Employers continue to withhold MDW passports and IDs and do not give a day off.***

Systems shape perceptions, attitudes, and practices. Even if some of these attitudes and practices fall outside the "scope" of the Kafala system, they are still the result of a structurally exploitative system and discourse. According to this system, employers not only protect their interests as a class but are also encouraged to police domestic workers and control their lives. To that end, they have been given the position of the father/patriarch and, to a certain extent, the state. They consider themselves "responsible," but not in the sense that they have responsibilities as employers towards the MDWs, with rights and boundaries to respect, but as a sponsor/patriarch figure, more afraid of potential "risks" regarding the decisions the MDW might make in her personal life (and as a worker).

However, perceptions are not fixed and can change and transform. In a particular context, a change in a financial situation can significantly impact a person's perceptions. The ongoing financial crisis in Lebanon for the past couple of years has significantly impacted the population's socio-economic status. The financial crisis also impacted the domestic labor market in Lebanon, as we noted a decrease of 48% in employers hiring live-in MDWs alongside an increase of 41% in employers hiring a freelance MDW.

We believe that this new trend in contracting freelance MDWs, coupled with the data obtained from the survey that 45.7% support the idea that the Kafala system should be abolished and that 62.6% said they prefer employing a live-out rather than a live-in MDW should be one basis for civil society campaigns. Campaigns should focus on the preference and higher demand for live-out DWs as an entry point to advocate for abolishing the Kafala system. However, PRAs will be firmly against it. They could lose their reason to be and their privileges, as they are legally prohibited from brokering freelance contracts and agreements. They could also lose their power and control over the lives of MDWs in freelance situations. They can extort less money, and more agency will be given to the workers regarding working hours and wage negotiations. Such a campaign might resonate with the general population, especially considering the current financial context. Freelancing in DW falls outside the scope of the sponsorship system, i.e. it is not recognised by the sponsorship system and puts the MDW at risk of arrest, detention, and deportation. As shown in this report, the financial crisis in Lebanon has impacted all categories of the population, each in a relative way, respective to their socioeconomic class and status. The hardships and the high cost of living mentioned by MDWs are pushing some to prefer working as live-in workers instead of freelancers. This issue should be taken seriously and observed more closely. It is a "preference" dictated by the financial situation (such as living expenses), the fact that freelance work is illegal (constant fear of arrest), and the fact that the negotiations for wages are done on an individual level, where no minimum wage is set, and other viable options are unavailable. Thus, there is an urgent need to abolish the kafala system and include MDWs and domestic work in the labor code.



# Annexes

- [Annex I - Survey Tool](#)
- [Annex II - Survey Results](#)
- [Annex III - Focus Group Questions](#)



