



9th Annual Freedom From Slavery Forum
**“Resilience and Resistance to Modern Slavery:
Key Priorities for MENA”**

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Introduction

Background

The Freedom from Slavery Forum was established to gather anti-slavery leaders from around the world to create a collegial space to coalesce, create partnerships, discuss promising practices and develop a shared agenda for action. Participants have built relationships and prioritized actions in advocacy and collaboration with other sectors.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has allowed the 9th Freedom from Slavery Forum to take a new form and better serve the anti-slavery movement. Countries have taken measures to contain the COVID-19 global pandemic, but modern slavery – including sexual slavery, child labor, forced labor and human trafficking – has grown worse. Civil society organizations are at the front of the fight, but are experiencing increased demand for services while facing a decrease in funding, driving an urgent need for innovation in advocacy and other programmatic design and delivery.

While the pandemic is global, its effects are felt locally. Instead of one, large global convening, this year's 5 virtual, regional Forums will be opportunities to increase access, ensuring that grassroots ideas and voices are instrumental in and foundational to the movement. The new regional approach allows the Forum to be a better reflection of the modern anti-slavery movement and put the focus on equity, democratization, and inclusion, ethos that have long been the foundation of the movement itself.

2021 Forum Format and Participation

Anti-slavery movement leaders virtually convened via Zoom for two days at the fourth regional Freedom from Slavery Forum - MENA to discuss issues most pertinent to the continent and set priorities for the next year around the theme of “Resilience and Resistance to Modern Slavery: Key Priorities for MENA.”

The virtual Forum was an opportunity to increase participation, interaction, networking, learning and sharing with an emphasis on regional priorities, ensuring that MENA grassroots ideas and voices are instrumental in and foundational to the movement as a whole. It ensured that MENA organizations will have greater access to the global

movement and more opportunities to share their experiences and discuss solutions. The Forum highlighted experts and organizations from the continent as panelists and presenters while showcasing research and programming occurring in the region.

Each day's programming centered around a different theme, starting with local issues and increasingly zooming out to global ones. Day one focused on "Exploring vulnerabilities to modern slavery" and Day two centered around "Ending the cycle of exploitation and strengthening the modern slavery movement through innovation."

Each day was structured into several panels by multiple speakers each followed by a Q&A session. A small group workshop session closed the second day where participants came together to discuss the prevailing challenges and identify solutions. After attending both days of the MENA Regional Forum, participants were re-inspired to tackle modern slavery from multiple angles and in new innovative ways. Participants left the Forum with increased knowledge about vulnerabilities to human trafficking both pre- and post-migration, barriers to reintegration, as well as the effects of Covid-19 thereon. Furthermore, they were introduced to possible solutions in the form of legal reforms of international and national frameworks, survivor engagement, and corporate social responsibility in business practices and recruitment.



Day One: Exploring vulnerabilities to modern slavery

Overview

Day 1's sessions focused on "Exploring vulnerabilities to modern slavery" in MENA. The day highlighted the different vulnerabilities to forms of modern slavery including labor trafficking, sex trafficking, and domestic servitude, some of the most prevalent forms of modern slavery in MENA.

Topics for discussion throughout the day included a focus on Covid-19 as an exacerbating factor on vulnerabilities of risk groups, related to mobility restrictions, job loss, and lack of resources. Furthermore, barriers to reintegration were considered from a psychological perspective, as well as the importance of a survivor-led movement.

Participants started the day learning from experts about the factors driving migration and exacerbating vulnerabilities, especially in light of the ongoing pandemic. Furthermore, vulnerabilities and barriers to reintegration were considered, as well as possible solutions to guarantee a successful reintegration led by survivors and their communities.

The day's programming contemplated questions such as:

- What are factors driving migration and how does this lead to vulnerability to human trafficking?
- What is the role of mental health in both the pandemic and reintegration?
- What is and should be the role of survivors in the fight against human trafficking?
- How does the kafala system exacerbate human rights violations? How can this be changed?

To address these questions and more, the Forum invited research experts from UN agencies, civil society organizations, and international organizations. Day One speakers included:

- **Forum Advisory Committee Host:** Bukeni Waruzi | Free the Slaves
- **Moderator:** Linda Alkalash | Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights
- **Speakers:**

- Igor Bosc | International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office
- Namrata Raju | EQUIDEM
- Rima Kalush | Migrant Rights
- Bhanuja Sharan Lal | Manav Sansadhan Evam Mahila Vikas Sansthan (MSEMVS)
- Alexandra Cheng | Crossroads Foundation

Introduction and Welcome

Igor Bosc commenced his presentation by introducing the Work in Freedom Program which was established within the ILO and examines issues of migration, especially related to women and domestic work. The purpose of the Program is to reduce vulnerability in the long run. Bosc mentioned that in order to assess changes in vulnerability to forced labor, it is important to regard changes in the working and living conditions related to migration.

Before considering the effects of Covid-19, Bosc introduced some of the pre-existing drivers of vulnerability to forced labor. It is important to remember that migrant workers are the backbone of most economies in the MENA region. Nonetheless, key resources of the economy are fully controlled by local minorities whose wealth and power depends on control of the labor force. This becomes both a threat and an opportunity. Legal political and economic systems are meant to be structurally unequal, whereby migrant workers are purposefully excluded from the legal framework. The prevalent Kafala system in the GCC describes regulations and policies that are focused on residency and labor whereby employees are allowed to remove the legal status of migrant workers by terminating their contract, refusing new residence permit, or filing reports that makes them criminally liable. This puts migrant workers into an extremely vulnerable position. Furthermore, Bosc highlighted the countries of origin in several ways. They provide a large scale of labor supply to the destination countries because of a change from subsistence to extractive economies which is exacerbated by climate change. This means that the precarity of labor supply will intensify and urban jobs become insufficient for migrant workers to make ends meet. Adding the variable of gender violence and conflict, this further intensifies the precarity of labor supply. Not feeling safe serves as a good reason to leave the respective country of origin. Additionally, policies on mobility tend to increase vulnerability.

Bosc also presented the common challenges faced by countries of destination during the pandemic. These include return migration and a reduction of frequency of migration flows, a drastic reduction of workforce for domestic and garment workers, a significant rise of grievances, and government policies characterized by ad-hoc and symbolic relief measures for migrant workers, as well as measures restricting their voice and mobility rights.

Furthermore, Bosc presented the consequences of Covid-19 on the example of several case countries. Common challenges thereby included massive job loss, return migration, less food consumed, an increased workload, abuse, violence, mental stress.

Additionally, many women who lost their jobs returned to their homes or were left stranded in transit and saw an increase in unpaid work. Even though some countries had financial stimulus packages, these had difficulties reaching the workers. Concerning some countries of the GCC, Kuwait experienced a suspension of recruitment of migrant workers due to a cost ceiling, leaving many domestic workers stranded in the countries of origin. Those that were able to keep their jobs encountered an increase in workload, as well as a change of terms and a decrease in wages.

Jordan's total number of migrant domestic and garment workers decreased and workers experienced an increase of grievances including incidents of violence, non-payment of wages, non-renewals of work permits, verbal and physical abuse, extracting money for terminating contracts, etc. Domestic workers in particular suffered from hunger and abusive working conditions, as well as challenges to uphold social distancing. Garment workers on the other hand were increasingly dismissed based on reduced demand, and they also saw a delay or refusal of wages. A lack of transparency failing to explain why some workers were asked to work and others were asked to stay at home led to unrest and riots in the country.

Bosc finalized his presentation by describing that Lebanon had multiple crises, as they experienced a political and economic crisis on top of the pandemic, combined with the port blast leading to hyperinflation, pauperization and emigration. This led to a drastic fall in formal employment of live-in migrant domestic workers and saw the conditions of remaining workers deteriorate.

Panel 2: Vulnerability post-Migration

To start the second panel, Linda Alkalash introduced the second speaker of the day, Namrata Raju, to discuss the situation of workers through migration and how their vulnerability makes them susceptible to human trafficking.

Raju started her presentation with a quote that emphasized the role of mental health and the obligation of the government to help against the rising suicide rate. She connected this with workers who are forced to assume debt as a result of high recruitment fees and arrive in countries of destination with debt that they are unable to pay back due to the ongoing pandemic. She stated that the bias of government responses on the needs of nationals as opposed to migrant workers plays a role exacerbating the effects of the pandemic. Even though migrant workers are an important work force, they are excluded from labor protection.

Raju also focused on exacerbating recruitment frauds that increase the vulnerability of migrant workers. Many find themselves stranded and unable to go home, while others are put on flights they can only afford by taking out loans. For example, migrant workers in Southasia were unable to go back to GCC after having had to pay high recruitment fees with borrowed money. They never got their money back, cannot pay back their loans, and find themselves stranded and unable to go back to GCC. All of this causes an immense psycho-social impact.

According to Raju, there have been a number of reforms undertaken in the MENA region. Qatar and Saudi Arabia relaxed entry and exit requirements for workers to increase mobility, but this alone is insufficient. Many of the problems, such as discrimination against worker migrants, falsified criminal charges, and a lack of trade unions, are deeply systemic and structural. Furthermore, Saudi reforms exclude migrant workers (domestic, farmers, drivers, etc.), leaving them vulnerable. Qatar made additional efforts in the health care sector, such as providing insurance for migrant workers and helping them to get information in their languages. Nonetheless, existing problems persist: migrant workers are not paid enough, workers that were marginalized before are pushed even more to the margins, and the financial impacts of the pandemic are being passed down to workers. In general, the more vulnerable the worker, e.g. by migrating, the worse they experience the effects of Covid-19.

Raju concluded her presentation by claiming the necessity of further reforms. The ongoing problem of allowing workers to be unpaid and salaries to be reduced, call into question whether the reforms actually happened. She recommends the need to consult employers and recruitment agents and to research whether they are engaging in fraud. Furthermore, it is crucial to formulate worker committees to ensure their voices are heard and ensure social protection for all workers, including migrant workers.

Alexandra Cheng continued the second panel of the day by discussing the effects of the pandemic on refugee children and their families from a psychological (and trauma informed) perspective, as well as considering the reintegration of victims. She commenced her presentation by asking the participants to imagine a scenario in which they are an 11-year old boy, at the top of the class at a private school in Damascus, who loves football, and has all sorts of plans for secondary school. He has two loving parents who are supportive of his education and all is well. But one night, his father is taken and imprisoned, their neighbor's house is destroyed, and he is forced to flee with family towards Lebanon. As the only man in the family, he becomes responsible for taking care of the family, and has to take on work where he is sexually, emotionally and physically abused. He gets paid little, just enough to take care of the family and endures the abuse because he is paid extra for letting the men abuse him. This is the truth for many refugee children.

Cheng continued her panel by explaining that extended barriers to reintegration have to do with systemic barriers. This leads to toxic stress for children and interferes with their development. It is important to acknowledge that children who are displaced often can't access their rights and are perceived as migrant workers.

During Covid-19, Cheng's trauma sessions shifted to remote work. She holds most sessions around 2:00 - 3:00 AM since this seems to be the best schedule that corresponds with workers' availability; they sometimes have sessions after work or after their children have gone to sleep. According to Cheng, suicide alarms have risen during the pandemic and are connected to a lack of jobs or income, hunger and poor nutrition, or being overworked. Cheng emphasized that mental health is one of the barriers for reintegration and these have been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic.

Questions & Answers

The panel was closed with a round of questions and answers led by Alkalash. One participant asked how to bridge the access gap in providing mental health facilities in the context described by Cheng. She responded by suggesting that her approach is to train frontline workers in the health care sector who can spot those who need support (nurses, teachers, school bus drivers, security guards) so they can identify the children that need help. Furthermore, she trains primary health care facilities to understand code words, such as those that victims may use to share their fear they might have STDs. Another question was asked about the stigma surrounding mental health and how to go about bridging that gap with vulnerable populations. Cheng suggested allowing communities to refer to her as they wish (such as doctor, nurse, or teacher, rather than psychologist). She added that often adults use children to access health care, claiming that their children need mental support when in reality, they are the ones interested in accessing care.

Panel 3: Barriers to reintegration

Rima Kalush began the third panel with a presentation about gendered and racialized vulnerabilities under the GCC labor migration system. She explained that the living and working conditions of migrant domestic workers are key factors affecting their vulnerability to human trafficking. Vulnerabilities in countries of origin include false promises, taking out loans, and being trafficked into the countries of destination on a visitor visa. All these are perpetuated by the Kafala system. In the GCC, more than 90% of households employ domestic workers. Most are female migrants. Live-in workers experience isolation and are unable to establish a network, blurred home-life-work lives, overwork, nonpayment of wages, discriminatory payment and treatment, as well as sexual harassment. These violations are commonplace as a result of structural factors. Migrant workers are not protected by labor laws in many countries. Their visa and residency status are linked to their employer, and changing jobs often requires employers' permission. Furthermore, accusations by employers (false theft cases) increases their vulnerability since they are seen as potential criminals. Although there have been minor legal reforms, for example, an upper limit of working hours for migrant domestic workers, in reality not much has changed.

Kalush also emphasized the problem with a lack of access to complaint mechanisms and shelters. She added that destination countries lack support to victims of labor trafficking. The impunity of employers offers few incentives for legal compliance. Furthermore, little happens when cases of rights violation are opened against employers. Another problem is the lack of regulation concerning the termination of contracts. Often workers are deported if they quit. This pushes workers into irregularity, as they want to live in their community and are forced to take up undocumented work.

Focusing on the possibility to reform the kafala system, Kalush suggested a gradual tinkering of the system rather than abolishment, as abolishing the kafala system will not change persisting vulnerabilities. Instead, an alternative to the live-in model is required as this would allow workers to live in their own communities. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to be legalized, as there is a lack of affordable housing. Furthermore, it is important to create a better relationship between the employer, worker, and recruitment agency through training, orientation, employer blacklists, closing loopholes (e.g. visit visa), and abolishing absconding charges. Rima placed her hope on the next generation, relying on the fact that they are not as interested in live-in work and are in general more exposed to and involved in social justice. Nonetheless, change also depends on states' attitudes and responses.

Linda Alkalash introduced Bhanuja Sharan Lal to talk about the efforts regarding rehabilitation and reintegration for victims of trafficking and how to avoid being re-trafficked. He described the main barriers to reintegration as stigma around prostitution and sex work, meaning victims have difficulties being accepted by their families and communities upon return. In his experience, many children return to work right after returning home. Additionally, a lack of legal protection, as well as gender discrimination and economic instability, increase their vulnerabilities.

Lal suggested that a community-based approach to reintegration must be enforced to see results. Knowledge, education and empowerment are essential factors. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of empowering survivors through leadership, given their experience and knowledge, and partake in the process of reintegration. Efforts also need to be made to reintegrate victims with community participation and the help of the government; reintegration must be a collaborative effort between multiple actors. Lal underlined the need to integrate government services, educate communities and survivors, and empower survivors to lead efforts. His organization has been able to free more than 300 people from trafficking as a result of adopting this approach. In many cases, survivors were reintegrated successfully because communities led the reintegration and were involved in the process. Thus, victims must also be active participants during each part of the process and survivors must lead their reintegration for successful reintegration.

To end the day, Alkalash summarized the main points discussed in the panels and invited everyone to join the second day of the forum.



Day Two: Ending the cycle of exploitation and strengthening the modern slavery movement through innovation

Overview

While Day 1 of the Forum focused on vulnerability to human rights abuses in the MENA region with special regard to the kafala system, programming on Day 2 took a closer look at possible solutions to break the cycle of exploitation and identify ways to innovate and cooperate. The sessions focused on legal reforms on the national and international level, as well as introduced a community-based approach and a solution to start at the recruitment process. Considering the solutions on all three levels gave participants a good overview of the existing ideas. Furthermore, the work of the Alliance 8.7 was introduced as an example of how to achieve results through innovation and cooperation.

Participants heard from seven different panelists who shared their view on the various issues and were able to take part in the conversation through a workshop at the end of the day. The workshop also saw the creation of regional priorities that will be discussed at the global Forum held in Marrakech, Morocco from December 5-8, 2021.

The day's programming contemplated questions such as:

- How do legal loopholes contribute to the continuation of exploitation in the MENA?
- How can victims gain access to justice?
- What is the role of journalists and CSOs in the fight against modern slavery?
- How can monitoring the recruitment process help to stop exploitation?

To address these questions and more, the Forum invited CSO and policy experts. Day Two speakers included:

- **Forum Advisory Committee Host:** Bukeni Waruzi | Free the Slaves
- **Moderator:** Linda Alkalash | Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights
- **Speakers:**
 - Brigitte Chelebian | Justice Without Frontiers (JWF)

- Hussein Hassan | United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Shariful Hassan| BRAC
- Lucy Turay | Survivor; Domestic workers Advocacy Network
- Yussra Al Ajlan | International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- Nihal Akl | International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- Alice Eckstein | Delta 8.7

Introduction and Welcome

Bukeni Waruzi opened the second day of the forum and emphasized the need to include structural factors including mechanisms and advocacy to combat modern slavery in the MENA region. The moderator Linda Alkalash announced the topic of the day, ending human trafficking and modern slavery through innovation, and introduced the first panelist of the day.

Panel 1: Advocating for Legal Reforms

Brigitte Chelebian, Director and Founder of Justice Without Frontiers, shared her experience with domestic workers in Lebanon. She explained that all migrant workers are excluded from the national labor law and are not protected as other workers regarding minimum wage, maternity leave, social security, etc. This is not aligned with the international governing body, the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights (ICESCR), under which workers should enjoy protection without discrimination. Instead, they are governed by the kafala system which ties their legal status to their employers who control their salaries, mobility, legal status and residence. Thereunder, the worker cannot change their job without the consent of the employer. If a domestic worker refuses to leave work after being fired, they risk losing their residence permit. A further problem is that their work contract is in Arabic, and most often is not translated into the mother language of migrant domestic workers. Under the ICESCR, this is illegal. But even though it may be illegal on paper, domestic workers are mostly not aware of their legal rights and obligations, and lack knowledge on how to access the justice system. Therefore, many workers experience human rights violations for a long time. Most of the violations that are brought forward are not investigated or prosecuted. However, there are some present cases of domestic workers who flee home when their employer presents a complaint to a prosecutor, often accusing the domestic workers of theft fraud. This leaves migrant domestic workers with little to no legal protection and resources.

Regarding the consequences of Covid-19, Chelebian shared that since the beginning of the pandemic, many workers were abandoned by their employers and left on the streets without any money, luggage, belongings, or passports. In Lebanon, Ethiopian women who were abandoned were dependent on CSOs for assistance. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, port explosion in August 2020 and an economic crisis, many migrants in Lebanon were left jobless, homeless and unable to return to their countries of origin.

Alkalash asked Chelebian about the role of CSOs to help workers access justice. According to Chelebian, some organizations provide legal support and shelter in Lebanon and work against the kafala system. Furthermore, the Minister of Labor proposed that CSOs and advocacy groups lobby and draft an amendment for the national labor law. Although this amendment was drafted, it has not yet been submitted. It has become clear that the kafala system leads to the abuse and trafficking of persons. But the problem is that victims are unprotected unless there is proof of abuse. As this proof is almost always absent, employers benefit from legal loopholes, while migrant domestic workers suffer the consequences.

Chelebian finished her presentation by providing a list of recommendations. She suggested legal reforms, such as in the form of the labor law amendment to protect migrant domestic workers under Lebanese labor law. Furthermore, she focused on the need to abolish the kafala system, as well to create laws that protect workers against discrimination. She also recommended involving embassies, lawyers and translators in the recruitment process. Additionally, there is a need for more shelters. She emphasized the importance of granting access to justice at the individual level and raising awareness of legal rights and the justice system. At the community level, she suggested raising awareness, increasing capacities, and engaging in advocacy to abolish the kafala system. Finally, at the systemic level, she recommended new policies to protect workers, change behaviors and work on non-registered children of workers who were married to Lebanese or Egyptians, as marriages are not registered, making it difficult for them to return to their country.

For the second panelist, Alkalash introduced Hussein Hassan, Legal Advisor at UNDP. He shared his knowledge on how to transfer legislation in the field and how to enforce international conventions through innovation. He offered a little context, explaining that the last decade saw a rapid emergence of modern slavery as a main human rights issue. Trafficking, child labor, human and sex trafficking, prostitution, war time abuses, as well as the exploitation of workers and migrants all constitute human rights violations and are considered crimes under international law, although research is still being conducted to further identify other violations that resemble modern slavery.

Hassan also highlighted the responses of governments and international organizations. Despite a number of international organizations pushing for a reformed agenda, most governments are reluctant to do so for economic reasons. It is important to tackle the root causes, including by addressing modern slavery in multinational corporations' supply chains. Hassan focused on the need to shift from focusing on describing and diagnosing the problem to identifying and evaluating solutions. He explained that while it is good to place the focus on legal reforms, modern slavery is a cross-cutting issue, so a single law or convention cannot suffice. Rather, changes have to be made to labor law, migration law, and other fields of law involved.

Moreover, there is a need to establish effective and reliable reviewing mechanisms for international conventions. The mechanism of the United Nations against corruption serves as an example thereof, applying a peer review mechanism between countries in

the implementation of the convention. Countries should highlight how they are implementing and periodically reviewing standards against modern slavery. Hassan added that while good laws exist in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the kafala system has been abolished in many countries, in reality nothing has changed. It is therefore important to differentiate between developing and implementing an effective legal framework. According to Hassan, risk management methodologies in the private sector should also be used to tackle modern slavery crimes to avoid them altogether. Furthermore, Hussein recommended differentiating between stable countries and countries in transition or in conflict as the problem cannot be tackled in the same way and different tools are needed for different environments. When developing a legal framework, it is important to remember that different ideologies define modern slavery differently.

Additionally, it is crucial to pay close attention to legal definitions. Hussein explained this with an example from Libya on protecting migrants through the legal framework. Libya's legislature had to exercise caution with the terms being used and avoided focusing on illegal migration. Instead, they employed the term *unregulated migration* since it is a term that prevents associating migrants with criminal acts. The interpretation of national legislation is important and may help to protect migrants by way of the law. In the case of Libya, the term *forced measure* was also applied. As a result, migrants who were forced to enter illegally were treated not as criminals but as victims. As a result of the government adopting these terms, law enforcement agencies have also shifted in their treatment of migrants.

Questions & Answers

The first panel closed with a round of questions and answers. One participant inquired into the use of strategic litigation for social change: considering that most countries signed human rights conventions and anti-trafficking protocols, meaning they have legal obligations, how can conventions be implemented? Chelebian responded that in such cases, it is important for lawyers and judges to be aware of the respective international conventions. In the case that international and national law conflict, the international convention applies. Furthermore, she suggested bringing in civil society and the media to raise awareness and spread information. Additionally, presenting an accumulation of cases to the court allows for lobbying of law amendments; she explained that in Lebanon, there is no policy to amend laws easily since when one law or article is amended, there may be a contradiction. Therefore, it is important for parliament and community and decision-makers to be included in the process.

Hassan agreed that it is important to raise awareness regarding international conventions among law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. Furthermore, there is a need for skills training on the technicality of investigating, prosecuting, etc., as well as for increased support and an exchange of knowledge between GCC and non-GCC countries. He deemed the use of technology helpful to create a database of modern slavery crimes to understand trends, root causes, and effective tools. He also

suggested cooperating with legal aid centers in the country, both governmental and civil society, as most migrants lack access to the justice system.

Panel 2: Promoting a survivor-led movement

The first speaker of the second panel, Shariful Hassan, was introduced by Alkalash to speak about the role of CSOs and journalists helping victims of human trafficking. Hassan mentioned that it is common for governments in receiving and giving countries to have their own agenda. Despite amendments to the law, the reality is often not beneficial to migrant workers. For example, in many countries of the GCC, it is a law that a migrant worker's passport cannot be confiscated by an employer, yet this violation is commonplace. As a result, migrant workers who experience torture or abuse may be unable to leave the country since they lack official documentation. In order to solve this, Hassan suggested bringing survivors to the front line of the battle. Furthermore, embassies and local CSOs can also be brought in to help victims obtain their passports. Another solution would be to monitor and keep an open line of communication, which could help identify the existence of a problem once this communication is cut or stopped. It is important for the mechanisms to be monitored. Hassan also suggested a global phone number for slavery issues as a possible solution.

Alkalash asked Hassan how victims can report cases of abuse and obtain assistance. Since BRAC is unable to act in MENA due to having been founded in Bangladesh, he explained the process as follows: usually when BRAC receives a complaint from a family, they reach out to the respective embassy and ask them for help to rescue the victim. Through this method, BRAC has been able to rescue more than 300 women, among the thousands that they have helped.

Following this discussion, Alkalash introduced Lucy Turay, a survivor of the kafala system in Lebanon who has now returned to her country of origin, Sierra Leone, to share her experience with the kafala system and the importance of establishing survivor networks.

Turay shared that it was difficult for her and many other migrant workers to return home empty handed. Many survivors often cannot earn money for their families abroad due to the abusive conditions under the kafala system. She herself was abused physically and verbally. Upon termination of her contract, she slept on the streets of Lebanon for four days before returning home. In Lebanon, she began networking with other survivors who came together to advocate for their rights and consult and support one another.

When asked about the mechanism to report a case, she explained that there are different methods of identifying oneself. She would also consult as a group, as sisters, about what to do next. Showing up to the office is more effective as a group than as an individual. According to Turay, the government does not support survivors, the only organization that supported them was the IOM. Together with other survivors, she organized a group of more than 5000 survivors to have their voices heard.

Her recommendations to prevent human rights abuses first and foremost center around awareness raising, especially among government, since they indirectly support human trafficking given their ignorance about the contracts made under the kafala system. It is therefore important that they understand the differences and similarities between the kafala system and human trafficking, as it is necessary to change the contracts to see positive results.

Panel 3: Advocating for ethical business practices and recruitment

Linda Alkalash introduced the speakers of the third panel, Yussra Al Ajlan and Nihal Akl, from IOM Kuwait and IOM Egypt, who presented on the effects of Covid-19 on the risk of forced labor and human trafficking and IOM's response.

Al Ajlan shared that the mobility restrictions due to Covid-19 have negative consequences on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). She gave an overview of the risks and exploitation of migrants. 60% of migrants are migrant workers, and most reside in North Africa, Europe and the Arab states. The GCC is the top destination. Migrant workers constitute the majority of the population in Oman and Saudi Arabia. North African countries serve as the main transit and origin points to migration to Europe, allowing migrants and refugees to enter Europe through the region, especially through Libya and Morocco.

She continued sharing the risks that migrants face. While the majority have a positive experience, recruitment fees and unclear terms and conditions throughout their journey contribute to their vulnerability. Isolation, a lack of understanding of the culture and language, and overfilled houses also contribute to their vulnerability. As already mentioned by other panelists, vulnerability to forced labor and human trafficking increased immensely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 restrictions have led to a boost of smuggling in the region, as organized crime adapted to continue the exploitation of migrant workers by taking advantage of loopholes in the region. Border closures have meant more dangerous routes and higher costs for migration, making migrants more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Migrant workers in destination countries experienced a rise in debt and were left stranded and unprotected. Stranded women and girls have been most affected. Many migrant workers cannot make informed decisions since they are unfamiliar with the local language and face mobility restrictions. During the pandemic, many lost their jobs and income, faced a rapid Covid-19 spread with no access to health, and also experienced stigmatization and marginalization. Migrant workers have to endure the risks associated with migration coupled by those imposed by Covid-19, despite the fact their contributions during the pandemic are essential: they constitute a large part of supply chains in transportation, hospitals, and supermarkets.

Al Ajlan's colleague, Nihal Akl, closed the panel by highlighting the IOM's response in form of the Corporate Responsibility in Eliminating Slavery and Trafficking (CREST). The initiative works with stakeholders, governments, CSOs, businesses, and survivors to identify beneficial solutions. They are primarily focused on upholding the rights of

migrant workers in key business sectors. In MENA, they primarily focus on awareness raising and have had great success in this area. CREST is also active in Asia. The model builds on UN guiding principles and holds companies and recruiters responsible. The goal of CREST is to facilitate easier access for migrant workers, as well as protect them in supply chains. Furthermore, Akl emphasized that the increased cost of migration cannot be passed on to workers. There is a need for collaboration and a multi-stakeholder approach to build and unite all efforts.

When asked about the progress made regarding GCC governments' commitments, they shared that Kuwait, for example, has agreed to a voluntary reporting agreement. Furthermore, Egypt is responsive and interested in extending training to employers, services to migrant workers, and awareness raising activities to the private sector.

Panel 4: Advancing advocacy and policy efforts through global and regional alliances

Alice Eckstein, the project manager for Delta 8.7 at the United Nations University, was introduced by Alkalash as the last panelist of the forum. Delta 8.7 corresponds with the work of Alliance 8.7, targetted at eradicating modern slavery and human trafficking under SDG 8.7. Delta 8.7 is the statistical part of the Alliance and is responsible for researching effective solutions. Eckstein explained that 82 global experts in working groups assess various solutions and do additional research on potential solutions.

Within their research, three broad areas have been established: Justice, (related to access, health care, etc.), Crisis (related to conflict, humanitarian action and migration), and Markets (related to economic, trade and financial policies). In each area, Delta 8.7 has developed a policy guide that includes information on how to accelerate the process to meet SDG 8.7. The guides do not dictate how to do this, since this is dependent on the situation and the resources of the countries. Rather, they provide an evidence-based approach that is useful across countries for governments, decision makers, and CSOs. The guidance is not comprehensive or definitive, but sometimes rather speculative. The primary goal of the guides is to capture current ideas of what is effective and facilitate future change. The research reflects key hypotheses and a qualitative level of confidence. The guides are also published and submitted to a panel of survivor experts to ensure that they can be used as a resource to help eradicate slavery. The guides can be consulted [here](#).

Eckstein shared recommendations based on the research by Delta 8.7. This includes ensuring that survivors have sufficient support, centering justice and prosecution around the victim, cooperating with victims and survivors, and ensuring that law enforcement agents account for gender, language culture barriers, etc. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the issues around modern slavery and human trafficking are not siloed but are intertwined with poverty, debt, inequality, etc., so they must be solved by taking into account the wide range of factors that contribute to vulnerability.

Workshop

After hearing from the panelists, participants were asked to participate in a workshop to discuss the issues and solutions presented throughout the forum. This session allowed participants to engage with one another and to develop regional priorities. Participants were asked to come up with the most important challenges and recommendations to tackle those.

Closing of the forum

Bukeni Waruzi closed the regional forum by thanking everyone for the interesting discussions related to modern slavery and key issues in the region regarding child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking. He urged participants to be proactive and cooperative in pushing the anti-slavery movement further.



MENA Priorities

Overview

Throughout the Forum, participants gained knowledge on numerous topics related to modern slavery and human trafficking in the MENA region. The last day concluded with a workshop in which participants discussed priorities for the region. The recommendations are listed below in an effort to construct an agenda for the regional movement.

Priority Actions Relating to the Alliance 8.7 and the Global Movement

Considering the problems that were discussed in the forum, a variety of recommendations on how to tackle modern slavery were made at the global level. On the legal front, there is a need for effective reviewing mechanisms of international conventions. Though they may exist on paper, the reality is that many human rights abuses that are illegal under international law still go unnoticed. A possible way to do this would be to introduce a peer review process in which countries assess each other on their application of international conventions.

Another recommendation that surfaced was developing an international database to collect data on crimes in order to understand trends, root causes and effective tools. This would allow a more detailed analysis of the ongoing abuses and would aid stakeholders to tackle the issues in cooperation. Delta 8.7 can serve as an international body to push forward development in this field, as they are continuously researching the ongoing trends and are testing hypotheses of effective solutions.

Additionally, participants emphasized that collaboration among governments, regional bodies, unions, CSOs, academics, and service providers is lacking and is hindering individual efforts to combat modern slavery throughout the region. It was noted that greater collaboration at the global level would allow for strengthened protocols which would in turn benefit vulnerable populations at risk of modern slavery.

Participants also emphasized the need for governments around the world to raise awareness of trafficking vulnerabilities; greater awareness in countries of origin may

prevent migrants from becoming victims. Furthermore, supporting vulnerable groups with offers and contracts they may receive to migrate to the GCC can help counteract legal loopholes that could otherwise be used to exploit migrants.

Another recommendation that was given during the forum is the development of an international hotline for victims of exploitation and modern slavery. This requires all stakeholders to work closely together.

Priority Actions Relating to MENA Governments and MENA Movement Leaders

The second set of recommendations that participants curated applies specifically to MENA governments and the leaders of the MENA anti-slavery movement. These actors are especially crucial to ending modern slavery given the wide breadth of actions they are able to take.

To begin with, an important recommendation for MENA governments and the MENA anti-slavery movement was increased collaboration, between country governments, as well as with CSOs and national and local government bodies. A few countries were mentioned as examples (i.e. Sudan, Egypt, among others).

Along with greater collaboration, increased support and capacity was at the top of the list of priorities identified. Participants noted that increased capacity building for government frontline workers would better equip them to not only recognize vulnerable individuals or victims, but would also make them more likely to intervene on their behalf. This includes identifying potential cases of suicide among migrant workers as a result of the pandemic. Additionally, migrant workers' capacities to recognize trafficking must be increased post-migration in order to prevent their exploitation. Another important recommendation is acknowledging the role of local CSOs in assisting migrant workers with translation (especially of their contracts). Contracts and other legally binding documents are provided in Arabic only, increasing the chance of exploitation due to a lack of understanding. In general, a community-based approach to ending exploitation was recommended throughout the forum. This includes the need to educate communities in order to reduce stigma and reduce barriers to reintegration.

Regarding migrant workers' position within the kafala system, it was deemed necessary that local movement leaders educate migrant workers on their rights under the system. By assisting them in gaining access to the justice system, human rights abuses can be avoided. By cooperating with legal aid centers in countries of destination, migrant workers can be supported in achieving justice. In cases where migrants are falsely accused of theft, engaging local legal aid centers is essential to ensure justice in these cases. Furthermore, MENA leaders need to make an effort to unite to abolish, or at least tinker with, the kafala system. This includes providing an alternative to the live-in model which gives migrant workers more independence, as well as a community to live in. In order to achieve this, it is also important to find affordable housing for workers. Furthermore, training and orientation for employers, workers, and recruitment agencies

should be conducted in order to establish a better relationship between the parties. A blacklist of employers could help mitigate impunity in the GCC and awareness between employers (household members) with regards to the rights of domestic workers and clear communication between both parties in terms of the contract details (vacation days, working hours, what to work on, ...) would also support this.

Nonetheless, the role of the government is instrumental, since MENA movement leaders cannot solve the problem of lack of housing and lack of childcare on their own. Furthermore, governments need to implement the necessary legal and policy reforms for a transformed system that prevents the exploitation of migrant workers. It is therefore crucial for all GCC countries to protect migrant workers in their labor laws, as well as all other legal frameworks that are connected to the problem of modern slavery. This can be done through the introduction of laws against discrimination towards migrant workers and vulnerable groups and the rectification of definitions and legal language surrounding exploitation to best protect the rights of migrant workers.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of involving embassies in the GCC countries to support migrant workers. This refers to both the legal reforms described above, as well as cooperation with local CSOs. Embassies can be brought on board to guarantee that migrant workers have access to passports or necessary documentation. Through communication with employers, embassies can also identify cases of human rights abuses and exploitation. Furthermore, embassies can serve as middlemen between CSOs and migrant workers by communicating with victims' families in their countries of origin.

A final recommendation was the establishment of worker committees to ensure that migrant workers' voices are heard. This would also imply implementing legal reforms, as many countries in the GCC currently prohibit this establishment, and enhanced collaboration between diverse actors, especially activists, victims, and survivors.

Priority Actions Relating to Private Sector and Civil Society Actors

Participants also had many recommendations for the private sector and civil society actors in the fight against modern slavery, principle among them being increasing collaboration and support.

In general, CSOs are the central actors supporting migrant workers with regard to rights education and justice system access. However, international organizations can take appropriate action as well by cooperating with local CSOs and pooling resources for maximum impact.

Considering the need to raise awareness on the international conventions that apply to crimes of modern slavery, CSOs can serve as educators for judges and lawyers that can then in turn help victims access justice. The media can also play a big role by engaging not only the legal elite, but the public as well. Additionally, participants recommended CSOs commit to training individuals on the technicalities of investigating

and prosecuting to increase the number of cases that are actually processed. As of now, this number is alarmingly low, meaning that most migrant workers suffering from abuse never obtain justice.

Regarding the private sector, companies are largely responsible in recruitment and must abide by UN principles and eradicate modern slavery. Although bodies like the IOM are raising awareness on human trafficking issues among businesses and recruitment agencies, more has to be done. The International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS) of the IOM needs to be promoted more frequently and implemented by recruitment agencies in order to guarantee ethical recruitment. To achieve the best possible results, it is crucial for all stakeholders to cooperate and collaborate.



Next Steps

Participants left the Forum with increased knowledge about how vulnerabilities to human trafficking in the MENA region arise and how they have been exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, a focus was placed on post-migration vulnerabilities and barriers to reintegration, taking into account the heavy toll that exploitation takes on victims' mental health. Additionally, possible solutions on the legal, community, and recruitment level were discussed. After attending both days of the MENA Regional Forum, it is our hope that participants are re-inspired to tackle modern slavery from multiple angles and in new innovative ways.

This Forum was the fourth in the series of regional Freedom from Slavery Forums, which will take place throughout the rest of the year. The North America, the Caribbean, and Europe Forum will take place in November and will be the final regional forum. To continue following along with each regional Forum, please watch our [website](#) and follow us as we live tweet each event at [@FFS_Forum](#).

After all the regional Forums take place, we will hold a global convening, which will take place in Marrakesh, Morocco from December 5-8, 2021. The goal of this convening is to elevate the regional agendas and make connections with the larger global agenda.



Participation and Evaluation

Across the two days of Forum virtual events, 117 individuals from 42 countries registered and 55 individuals participated (including presenters). Of the 55 individuals who participated, 25 different countries were represented. The countries with the most participants included: Bangladesh, Egypt, Morocco, and the United States.



Speaker and Presenter Bios

Day One: Exploring vulnerabilities to modern slavery

Moderator	
	Linda Kallash (Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights)
Panelists	
	<p>Igor Bosc is the Chief Technical Adviser of the Work in Freedom Programme in the ILO. The purpose of the programme is to reduce vulnerability to forced labour among migrant women in South and West Asia. Igor has also worked in senior positions for UN agencies and human rights organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United National Fund for Population Affairs (UNFPA), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) in Latin America, Central and West Asia, Eastern Europe and Asia covering governance of social policies, migration and human rights. Igor has a multi-cultural background and is fluent in several languages. He holds a Masters Degree in International Relations with honours at the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations in France and also has a graduate diploma in South Asian Studies with a specialisation in human geography at the Sorbonne University.</p>



Namrata Raju is a labor migration expert and leads Equidem's India work, also collaborating closely with Equidem's initiatives across South and South East Asia, East Africa and the Arab Gulf. As a researcher for over a decade based out of both South Asia and the Middle East, Namrata has worked on a number of migration and labour issues, ranging from recruitment, remittances and the future of work, to post conflict livelihoods in Sri Lanka. Namrata has been a research advisor across multiple sectors in the MENA region, including to various government departments and banking and financial institutions. She has also worked closely with the International Labour Organisation (ILO)- Sri Lanka office; advising on various inputs to the country's National Labour Migration Policy, when she was a fellow at Harvard University's Women and Public Policy Programme (WAPP). An interdisciplinary researcher, Namrata has a Masters in Public Administration from Harvard University (2018) and a Masters in Economics from University of Warwick, UK (2008).



Rima Kalush is the Deputy Director of Majal.org, and editor of Migrant-Rights.org. She joined Migrant-Rights.org in its infancy and has overseen its financial and programmatic growth. Her work has been published and referenced by institutions including Al Jazeera, the International Labor Organization, Jadaliyya, Gender Across Borders, and the Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights. She holds a Masters of Philosophy in Middle Eastern Area Studies from the University of Oxford.



Dr. **Bhanuja Sharan Lal** is the Executive Director of Manav Sansadhan Evam Mahila Vikas Sansthan (MSEMVS) based in Varanasi.

Around 1996, Bhanuja began to work directly on issues of child labour, especially in carpets. He joined MSEMVS as an intern in 1996 after completing 'Masters in Social Work' and was involved in women empowerment programmes in rural areas. Mr. Bhanuja throughout his career realized that without a strong mechanism for rehabilitation other efforts are not going to sustain the freedom of the child laborer. He has always stressed on the proper rehabilitation of the freed laborer through education and livelihood building. Mr. Bhanuja became the Director of MSEMVS in 2003, and he is responsible for leading more than 75 frontline anti trafficking workers in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Bhanuja and his team have enabled communities to progressively dismantle entrenched systems of bonded labour at brick kilns, farms, and quarries etc. in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand.

Mr. Bhanuja Sharan Lal was awarded the "TIP Hero 2014" by US Department of State for his tremendous work addressing Human Trafficking. Each year, the Department of State honors individuals around the world who have devoted their lives to the fight against human trafficking.

Bhanuja is the member of: working Committee of NITI AAYOG, Govt. of India for the sustainable engagement with CSOs; Task Force on Bonded Labour and Child Labour in Varanasi at district level; and, the Monitoring Committee "on Laws related to women and children i.e. Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act, Juvenile Justice Act, Adaptation Act etc. at Commissioner Level of Varanasi.

While directing MSEMVS, Bhanuja completed his Ph.D. on the issue of Child Trafficking along with Graduation in Law with Labour Laws.



Dr. Alexandra Chen (A.B., A.M., Ed.M., PhD., Harvard University) is a trauma psychologist from Hong Kong serving refugees in conflict and post-conflict zones. For over a decade, Alexandra has been working with war-affected children and their families in and from the Middle East and Africa, most recently as advisor to UN agencies on the Syria crisis. Alexandra is currently partnering with UN, World Bank, government ministries and non-profit agencies to design mental health and early childhood interventions, and to provide therapy for victims of sexual violence and torture in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey.

Alexandra has spoken at the World Economic Forum in Davos since 2011 on behalf of refugee children, and has been interviewed by NYTimes, NPR, Aljazeera, and other international news outlets on her work studying and addressing the impact of trauma and toxic stress on refugee children’s cognitive functioning and mental health. She also serves on the Board of Directors and Trustees for multiple non-profits globally. Alexandra speaks 10 languages, including Chinese, Arabic and French.

Day Two: Ending the cycle of exploitation and strengthening the modern slavery movement through innovation

Moderator	
	Linda Alkalash
Panelists	
	<p>Brigitte Chelebian is an attorney-at-law and the Executive Director and founder of the organization Justice Without Frontiers (JWF). She was selected for inclusion on the UN Women ERAW Roster (2020) and certified to the Justice Rapid Response and UN Women -Sexual and Gender Based Violence - Justice Experts Roster. She has led programs to promote Women’s Rights, Access to Justice and Information, Victims and witnesses protection, Sexual and Gender based violence. She worked as legal and gender expert with different UN agencies, EU, and national and International</p>

	<p>organizations. Her Law Firm was recognized as one of the seven's best Law Firms in Lebanon in Social Responsibility through their legal practices. And she was featured in the Pioneers and Leaders Hub that was launched by the Women as Partners in Progress (WPP) Project Within Gibran Chair for Values and Peace at the University of Maryland.</p>
	<p>Hussein Hassan has 20 years of experience on Governance; Public Sector Reform; Anti-corruption; Anti-money Laundering; Migration, Mutual legal Assistance and Asset Recovery; Legislative Drafting and Assessment; International Relations and Development; International Litigation and Arbitration; Mediation and Dispute Resolution; Public Policy and Strategic Planning; and Results-Based Monitoring And Evaluation. Postgraduate studies and advanced training in law; governance; global governance and international relations; mediation; economics; legislative drafting; and anti-corruption assessment. Wide experience and network of experts and decision makers in the Arab countries, post conflict countries and countries in transition: Held technical and leadership positions at national governments and prominent international organizations, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); Registered international expert at UNDP's Crisis Bureau Roster System; and Extensive practical experience in anti-corruption research, capacity building and project management with regional and international organizations, including the European Union (EU), World Bank (WB), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Transparency International (TI), Revenue Watch Institute (RWI), and International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)</p>



Shariful Hasan has predominantly dedicated 16 years of his professional life to the migration and anti-trafficking sector to end modern-day slavery. Currently, he is working as the Programme Head of Migration Programme at BRAC Bangladesh, the world largest Non-government Organization. Through rigorous advocacy, he is trying to ensure the rights of the migrant workers and their families, from grass root level to policy level. His work area is also extended to combating human trafficking issues and ensuring dignified lives for all the vulnerable returnees through emergency rescue support to sustainable reintegration. He is a member of the Labour Migration Sub Committee of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment.

Shariful did his Masters in Journalism, Media and Communication from the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh and Oslo University College, Norway and had extensive working experience as a Senior Reporter in the Daily Prothom Alo. Before joining BRAC in 2017, he worked as a senior reporter for Prothom Alo, the highest circulated daily in Bangladesh. He produced hundreds of investigative reports on migration and trafficking from 2005 to 2017. He received the Migration Media Award consecutively in the years 2015 and 2016 for his special reports.



Lucy Turay is a former domestic worker. She now works under the kafala system (sponsorship) in Lebanon as an activist, advocating for migrant rights. She founded domestic workers Advocacy Network (DoWAN).



Yussra Al Ajlan is currently working in the IOM as the IRIS (ethical recruitment) focal point and is supporting the Labour Mobility portfolio. The IRIS programme is a multi-stakeholder initiative that includes CSOs, government, and the private sector. The current project she is working on under IRIS is aimed at promoting ethical recruitment practices in the private sector, specifically hospitality. Yussra graduated from the American University of Kuwait with a bachelor's in International Relations and resumed her education in London at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and graduated with a master's degree in International Studies and Diplomacy. Yussra was part of the Empowering Kuwaiti Women in Politics (EKWIP) programme launched by Dr. AlAnood Al Sharekh the founder of IBTKAR. Yussra is also the founder of ISTIQRAR, a nonprofit organization that raises awareness on Kuwait's stateless population (Bidoon) and collects donations to provide them with monthly groceries to help alleviate the financial burden that they face.



Nihal Akl is a Senior Programme Coordinator at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and is currently working on areas related to labour mobility. She joined the Labour Mobility and Human Development Unit at IOM in 2016 to promote the migration and development nexus through the engagement of Egyptian expatriates, prior to which she was a Liaison and Administrative Assistant for almost two years. Nihal holds a bachelor's degree in economics from the American University in Cairo.



Alice Eckstein | United Nations University Center for Policy Research, Delta 8.7 Alice Eckstein is Project Director for the Modern Slavery Program at United Nations University Centre for Policy Research. Previously, Alice was Executive Director at the NYU SPS Center for Global Affairs where she managed external relations, public events, and special programs to complement the Center's graduate and nonprofit education in global affairs.

Closing remarks



Bukeni Waruzi is CEO of Free the Slaves. Previously, he formed the non-profit grassroots group AJEDI-KA / Project Children Soldiers of the DRC to tackle widespread slavery and the use of children as soldiers by militias and armed forces. In Kenya, Waruzi worked for the Porticus Foundation, overseeing projects on human rights, civic engagement, education, and climate change. For nearly a decade he was program director for WITNESS in New York, a group that trains victims around the world to collect evidence that will bring perpetrators to justice. Waruzi has spoken before high-level audiences such as the United Nations Security Council, the International Criminal Court, and the Children's Caucus of the United States Congress. He currently represents anti-slavery groups as a civil society member of the Alliance 8.7 Global Coordination Group, the global initiative to achieve sustainable development goal 8.7 and end child and forced labor worldwide.