



## <Work in Freedom – Independent Midterm evaluation>

### QUICK FACTS

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**Evaluation type:** Project

**Evaluation timing:** Mid-term

**Administrative Office:** ILO-New Delhi and ILO-Beirut

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## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

### Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

Work in Freedom (WIF) is a ten-year development cooperation programme supported by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) that commenced in 2013. It has adopted an integrated and targeted approach to creating practices and multi-sectoral policy measures to reduce the susceptibility of women and girls to trafficking and forced labour in South Asian countries of origin (Bangladesh, India, and Nepal) and chosen destination countries (India, Jordan and Lebanon).

The main goal of the WIF Programme is to help reduce the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking and forced labour along migration routes leading to the care sector (particularly domestic work) and the garment sector. By 2023, the Programme's second phase aimed to reach at least 350,000 women and girls directly at source and destination areas in designated countries.

There are three objectives for the programme.

- Women have greater ability to make their own decisions throughout the migration process in an enabling atmosphere for safe migration into decent work.
- Increased levels of collaboration, accountability, and respect among key actors along migration pathways in order to create an enabling environment for safe migration into decent work.
- Strengthened laws, policies, practices, and systems for social protection, safe labour migration, and decent work for women.

Work in Freedom is managed by a Chief Technical Officer based in the Arab States Regional Office in Beirut. National Project Coordinators are located in each of the five programme countries and a MEL Officer in Nepal.

### Present situation of the project

Work in Freedom will end its second phase in March 2023. Since its start in 2014, the programme's results framework has evolved considerably, from initially treating migrant workers and potential trafficking victims in an extremely passive way to turning this round fully and focusing on developing their agency, alternate options and freedom to choose.



At the same time in this second phase WIF has had to deal with the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ill-effects of the economic downturn on employment in both countries of origin and destination. The huge loss of jobs in destination locations (in India as well as the Middle East) reduced worker rights and protections, and the effects of repressed economies on depressing demand for migrant workers and national domestic workers, has shifted the demand to that for part time workers. This shift, which goes against the nature of the kafala system, where employers are wholly responsible for their workers, has been resisted so far by policy makers.

Altogether WIF has faced and sought to address many complex challenges. Whilst it may be difficult for the project to meet all its result targets, its role in holding the line on some of these policy issues is vital, whilst at the same time making progress where possible to empower, protect and create opportunities for potential, existing or returnee women migrant workers.

In these final months of the programme, the main requirement is to ensure the ongoing sustainability of as many activities as possible. Progress has been made in Nepal and India, but more is needed, in particular with regard to the Workers Centre in Jordan.

**Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation**

The mid-term evaluation has two different purposes: accountability and learning. The main purpose is **to review the programme’s strategy and performance in the evolving national and regional context and to enhance learning within the programme.**

In addition, the MTE aims **to review the extent to which annual and cumulative targets planned in the log frame are attainable considering the 50% budget cuts in years 4 and 5 and other changing labour migration trends**, such as the COVID-19 crisis, falling wages and demand for migrant workers, and to gather information needed to evaluate the programme as recommended in the evaluability assessment and designed in the logical framework.

With WIF due to end after 10 years of programming at the end of March 2023, the MTE also focuses on the question of what overall has the programme achieved, what will be its impact, how sustainable are its core activities, and how should WIF’s legacy be

	built upon? The clients of the evaluation include the ILO and FCDO, the donor.
<b>Methodology of evaluation</b>	<p>The MTE has been carried out by a team of 3 people, after a South Asian team members was forced to withdraw through illness. Physical visits were undertaken in Bangladesh, India (Chennai and Delhi), Jordan and Lebanon. In Nepal the work was undertaken only virtually. Altogether some 60+ key informant interviews (KIIs), 9 focus group discussions (FGDs), and a range of other discussion meetings were conducted with WIF staff and partners.</p> <p>A wide ranging literature review was also conducted of WIF annual reports, the large number of special research studies commissioned and conducted by the programme, online news and journal articles, and other briefing documents.</p> <p>Part of the findings section reviews the set of OECD-DAC plus additional ILO cross-cutting criteria and associated questions provided in the ToR. A synthesis matrix then includes a colour coded summary to indicate the programme’s current level of achievement for each of the criteria, with justification and evidence provided for the rankings.</p>
<b>MAIN FINDINGS &amp; CONCLUSIONS</b>	<p><b>Key Issues</b></p> <p>The following summarises key issues that the programme has sought to address.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sequenced annual <b>50% budget cuts</b> in programme funds from the FCDO during years 4 and 5 resulted in the early curtailment of some of the community based awareness raising and women’s empowerment activities in South Asia especially.</li><li>• Dealing with the <b>effects and repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic</b>, both in terms of its drastic effects on migrant workers jobs, benefits and circumstances, and on its prevention of work related travel and physical meetings.</li><li>• The economic and political challenges in CoOs and CoDs have <b>decreased job opportunities</b>, increasing both demand for migration but reducing opportunity supply. This has created added pressure on WIF’s pro-choice approach, whilst at the</li></ul>

same time increased the need for it, since the environment is more conducive for unethical recruitment.

- ***Achieving kafala system reform/ elimination in the Middle East*** has become more rather than less challenging, as economic circumstances have deteriorated in many countries and political systems become more insular and inflexible.
- ***Middle East challenges within the tripartite structure.*** In Jordan, all members are collaborating to eliminate an effective complaints system. In Lebanon, RAs have been using WIF engagement to strengthen their position and obstruct labour rights reform rather than change their behaviour.
- ***Intolerance of migrant worker grievance mechanisms*** within the Middle East. This is a major issue for workers' rights given the current negative climates towards workers' rights in many countries and in particular the lack of receptiveness to the submission of complaints by workers.
- ***Protecting the legacy of WIF*** – For a migration programme concerned with anti-trafficking and workers' rights issues, the learning achieved by WIF is invaluable and irreplaceable, but it is not currently guaranteed that it will be preserved and built upon within ILO.

#### **Findings by Location and Outcome**

In countering these issues, Work in Freedom has made some key strategic advances within South Asia, and in the Middle East shown persistent stamina and a commitment to research that deepens understanding of issues and helps generate ideas for innovation and advancing in particular workers' voice, even if this can be challenging to translate into policy gains.

- ***Advancing women migrant workers' empowerment and choices.*** The shift in WIF's approach to the 'pro-choice' orientation, guidance and capability development work in South Asia is a prime example of what a well-led, adaptive 'learning' programme can achieve. This work, undertaken through a set of partnerships in all three South Asian countries with civil society organisations that specialize in women's empowerment work and have familiarity working



with migrant workers, has resulted in the development of approaches capable of wider dissemination and scale up.

- **The commitment to analysis and investigation** of the ‘knotty’ problems to achieving kafala system reform and improved rights and protections for migrant workers of WIF has also been remarkable and laudable, a second example of an effective learning programme. The social research undertaken by WIF has led to a better understanding of the ‘push’ contexts that create a supply of potential migrant workers, and the receiving contexts in which migrant workers have to learn how to make the best of their circumstances. Although the benefits of the research are also longer term, WIF has used the insights and understanding generated to inform their advocacy and intervention strategies. Publications have been organized under the following themes: Policies to address unfree labour; Agrarian crisis and women’s migration; Labour market intermediation; Working and living conditions; Violence in the world of women’s work
- WIF has achieved a series of **solid and valued relationships** across origin and destination contexts. This improves the likelihood of progress in approaches being sustained to some extent in countries of origin through alliances of local partners with local government units or other funding agencies, but less so in countries of destination where the challenges are more intractable. Nevertheless, the work in contexts like Lebanon has led to an increased commitment to supporting forms of migrant worker organization, capacity building, and access to forms of legal services to address labour rights issues.
- **Facilitation of effective advocacy work at different levels**, notably at national level. WIF partners have worked well with district and state governments in South Asian countries, but of particular importance has been the national level advocacy work that WIF has often led or facilitated. This includes changes to the law allowing women domestic workers to migrant in Nepal (even though now the over-restrictive preconditions need to be addressed), the leadership role of WIF in the kafala working group in Lebanon, leading to the



2020 reforms in the Standard Unified Contract, which even if subsequently put on hold by the Shuria Council still provide a template for future reform; and the advocacy work led by SEWA with opposition and ruling MPs in India on domestic worker legislation.

### **OECD-DAC and ILO Criteria Review**

#### **Relevance**

The holistic approach to the migration cycle, the active involvement of WMWs (especially experienced returnee MWs), the use of participatory research to inform design and the experience of key staff has ensured the programme's ongoing adaptation and support from all partners. Much of the programme's core work has been to influence policy in different countries and regions, since often policy and legislation has failed to recognise and protect migrant worker rights adequately, especially those of WMWs working in more vulnerable occupations. With the Covid-19 pandemic and economic downturn of the last few years WIF has also been adept at adapting to changing circumstances and constraints, aided by partners working within migrant sending or receiving communities.

#### **Coherence and Validity of Design**

The WIF programme theory of change, with its focus on the empowerment of women migrant workers and expanding their knowledge, choices and protections, remains as relevant as ever. The consistency, coherence and adaptive nature of the design are all programme strengths. Risks and vulnerabilities addressed through the programme exist through both lack of information about the nature of the migration process and how to navigate it safely, and the nature of the patriarchal relations in sending communities, which often limits women's control and decision-making authority. WIF is tackling both these major factors and attempting to cultivate women leaders and put local institutional mechanisms into place (with their leadership) to sustain mechanisms in the longer term. This is a solid strategy, and its robustness has been shown by the adaptiveness that took place during the pandemic, and now in the post-pandemic phase, with continuing economic fall outs in origin and destination countries and locations. WIF has contributed to country programme outcomes in all its operational contexts. In Nepal, WIF has



contributed perhaps to the greatest extent, but progress has been made in India, Bangladesh, Lebanon, and even Jordan, as documented in the country findings sections.

### **Effectiveness**

The country of origin interventions have been highly effective, whilst the tenacity of country of destination interventions continues to chip away at outdated and abusive systems and practices and inject opportunities for change. WIF has followed through on recommendations made in the EA conducted during 2020. Multi-level advocacy work has been strengthened in the three South Asian countries, where this is most feasible. Efforts to continue the focus on promoting women's agency, in order to enhance their choices and shift patriarchal power relations, has also continued, but been affected by the funding cuts to orientation work over the last two years. The engagement of TUs in Tamil Nadu, SEWA in the Delhi area, and Awaj and BOMSA in Bangladesh has advanced the process of collectivisation and unionisation of workers in South Asia, and the already well developed process in Nepal has been advanced further. The one area of concern remains the poor state of women's rights and protection and the lack of choices they have, including for instance around the option for part time work, which has been a stated preference of many employers as well as WMWs in destination contexts. Nevertheless, WIF has continued its search to find points of leverage and opportunities for innovation in these contexts, whilst maintaining relations, even if difficult, with key tripartite actors in both Jordan and Lebanon.

The research promoted by WIF has provided in depth understanding of the lives of women migrant workers in sending and receiving communities and this has contributed substantially to WIF's ability to provide evidence based contributions to policy debates. The depth of knowledge held by WIF programme staff, coupled with their constructive approaches to building relationships and working in progressive networks has gained widespread respect.

WIF differs from many anti-trafficking and migration programmes in its treatment of women as active agents, capable of control over their own lives, rather than as passive (potential) victims of illegally acting recruitment agents and exploitative sets of social relations. The latter two do exist and need to be addressed, but focusing on them rather





than the women, is not the most effective way to address the risks, vulnerabilities and power relations involved. Educating and empowering the women and strengthening the legal and policy support environment in complementary ways, is an effective mechanism, as WIF has ably demonstrated. There are a series of high quality WIF publications that highlight differences between conventional approaches to anti-trafficking and more effective approaches tailored and tested by WIF.

#### **Efficiency**

Considering the exacting constraints of the last several years, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the growing economic crisis in many operational countries, and the reduction in budgets over the last two years for some of the orientation activities in countries of origin, WIF's achievement of programme outputs in terms of quality and quantity, is better than could reasonably be expected. The programme has used its resources well and wisely, and demonstrates good value for money when the achievements from comparatively low investments in local partners are analysed. Partner organisations bring their perspectives, knowledge and skills. There is learning across organisations and networks. WIF has been good at integrating its work into that of its civil society partners; all have talked about the WIF work as being fully aligned with their own organisational objectives. Programme staffing has also been much improved this phase of WIF.

#### **Gender and Non-Discrimination**

Overall, WIF continues to sharpen its approach to gender and inclusion through its ongoing research into the complex nature of social contexts across the migration cycle. In respect of gender and power relations, these are couched broadly within the context of patriarchal social relations in both South Asia and the Middle East. WIF has done well to collaborate with progressive women's organisations and networks in South Asia, since these organisations will not work with organisations they would view as having an insufficient grasp of the issues and commitment to social reform and women's empowerment to be effective. With these partners WIF has developed effective methodologies that have enhanced the self-awareness and decision making ability of work-age women and girls,



especially in communities of origin, but progress has also been made in destination communities. The potential multiplier effects lie in the ability to secure further resources for the orientation and capacity building work in communities of origin, for which there is huge expansion potential, as well as the more focused work in communities of destination. In destination communities, work has proceeded both within the confines of the kafala system and outside it. Workers in Lebanon and Jordan who are working informally outside the kafala system also continue to need support to regularise this way of working that meets also a growing employer demand, as well as those within the system for improved rights and protections. On the policy front, WIF together with its partners, has published several policy briefs, papers and studies that frame the issues affecting women's lives within the migration cycle and ways in which a pro-choice approach can be advanced.

### **Sustainability**

There is substantial potential to sustain the outcomes of the WIF programme given the effectiveness of the approaches that have been developed and the quality of the research that has been undertaken, the civil society partners by and large, and the programme staff. What is needed however are further resources, on a lower scale than previously, to maintain and expand these approaches, as well as the retaining of key staff. The evidence thus far from Nepal, where the government at national, district and local levels has been supportive of WIF's work, is an encouraging example of this potential. WIF's innovative approach to pre-decision orientation training that focuses on addressing constraints on women and increasing their agency and decision making ability, is being spread from the original five to 13 districts in a government supported initiative, funded by USAID.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the placing of a migrant resource centre in each district administration office, where women have to go to obtain a passport, is now being extended to 44 district centres, with all women passport applicants being referred to these desks for guidance information.<sup>2</sup> For the future, WIF and the ILO should work on twin tracks – with the traditional tripartite partners and with progressive women's

<sup>1</sup> The Hamro Samman project implemented through the Foreign Employment Board.

<sup>2</sup> Discussion with NPC Nepal, October 2022.



empowerment focused civil society organisation, that include or work directly with women migrant workers. In particular, it is important that WIF focus efforts on collaboration with government at different levels in the final months of the programme. Nepal provides a good example, with its adoption of the pre-decision orientation training and the migrant resource centres. Support by government has also been received in some Indian States, Bangladesh, and even if grudgingly, in Lebanon. This support is critical for legitimacy purposes and potentially expanding the scale of WIF approaches.

### **Impact**

WIF has evolved and demonstrated a highly effective agency focused approach. Whilst the scale of impact is still limited, there is ready potential to expand this considerably. In each context in which WIF operates WIF interventions have now left clear marks – the orientation approaches in Nepal, Bangladesh and the states of origin in India, the work with garment and domestic worker unions in Tamil Nadu, and with SEWA in Delhi, the Workers Centre in Jordan, and the work with organizing and capacity building of migrant workers in Lebanon. All of this work has laid foundations for WIF to work on policy issues with partners in a knowledgeable and expert manner, backed by its topical social and policy research. As an overall approach to achieve impact on complex, long term issues such as improving women migrant worker rights and protections, reform of the kafala system, changing patriarchal social relations to recognize better women's agency and rights, WIF has ticked many of the right boxes. More can be done during the remainder of this phase to assess and document these overall achievements.

WIF points the way to a different and more effective type of anti-trafficking programming that seeks to recognise and develop the agency of those that are vulnerable, and the need to develop their freedom of choice and expand the range of those choices. A learning focused approach has been used to achieve iterative programme improvements, particularly in countries of origin. As such the programme has enhanced both its impact and potential for sustainability over time, with support and approval of its partners. However, the aspirations of the programme are long term, and

although a great deal has been achieved, the work of WIF is not done. If sustainability is a really valued goal of both the FCDO and ILO, the work of WIF should be continued for another three years in order to embed fully operational practices and ensure the sustainability of institutions such as the Workers Centre in Jordan, and the effective approaches that have been developed for the protection and empowerment of migrant women.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Main findings & Conclusions

The recommendations in this section include recommendations both for the remainder of this phase of the programme, as well as for the broader ILO.

1) Adopting a programmatic approach and promoting the legacy of Work in Freedom.

The evolution undertaken by the Work in Freedom programme during its 10 year life span has been quite remarkable. When the first EA was undertaken in 2014, the approaches that WIF was using in countries of origin were didactic, disempowering and ineffective.<sup>3</sup> Since then the programme has built new strategic partnerships with women's organisations in South Asia, changed completely its outlook and philosophy, and generated orientation approaches that are both empowering of women and expand their knowledge and possible options. Now what is necessary is to build a longer-term commitment to these ground-breaking approaches, turning them into models and deploying them in a 10-15 year programme framework to ramp up the scale of impact.

2) Continue the twin track approach working with tripartite partners and progressive civil society organisations that include migrant women and advance principles of women's empowerment and gender equality in the contexts in which WIF and the ILO operate.

<sup>3</sup> Evaluability Assessment, Work in Freedom First Phase, 2014.

3) Seek forms of funding to sustain the pro-choice orientation and guidance approach developed for South Asia.

With the budget cuts made to the funding of orientation work in Nepal and India over the last two years, the opportunity to increase the scale of the work and generate a greater return of investment for WIF has been lost. Some additional funding has been generated in Nepal, with other projects expanding pre-decision orientation training and the district centre located migrant resource centres, but more is required if the work is to be sustained and expanded for the longer term, and also in India and Bangladesh, with further local and regional government support.

4) Special strategy needed for the Workers Centre in Jordan

The current situation in Jordan is especially bleak, given the lack of official support for migrant worker right, and now even the threat to the existence of the Ministry of Labour itself. The only point of light in a bleak context from the perspective of garment migrant workers is the Al-Hasan Workers Centre. Currently the Workers Centre is providing almost the only place where workers can go to discuss and register complaints, since labour inspectors no longer fulfil this role with the advent of the Hemayeh platform. The recreational and training role the WC plays is also essential. It also should provide health facilities, now shut down too with the same antipathetic logic. For WIF, the WC is the only current entry point to protect migrant textile worker rights, and the future of the centre needs to be secured before the end of this phase. We recommend a marketing campaign, for instance around South Asian national days and to draw in embassies, CSOs, and potential donors. The recreational role the centre plays needs also amplifying, to gain more support for the centre's continuing functioning from garment factory owners themselves.

5) Continue efforts to pilot new approaches in Lebanon.

A strength of the approach in Lebanon has been the efforts to use research to identify potential opportunities for new initiatives that will advance migrant worker rights and then to seek a way of

establishing a pilot to test the opportunity. One recent opportunity identified based on the rising demand for part time workers, and the fact that officially only Lebanese and Syrian women can meet such demand, has been through the agreement reached with the Ministry of Labour to pilot an app where potential employers could post requests and find care workers to meet their needs. This would require employers to agree to certain terms and conditions for employment, with the potential to link this to migrant worker conditions too. The MoL has now been pressured by WIF to agree to the pilot, and is why WIF should continue to seek to pilot such initiatives.

6) Build on the solidarity principle in origin and destination contexts to promote human security (freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity) of all domestic care and garment workers.

The initiative referenced above is an example of the solidarity principle within a human security framework, in that it seeks to align the interests of national (and Syrian) domestic carers and migrant workers performing the same role in Lebanon. In the conceptual framework section of the main report, the importance of the solidarity principle is described, and together with that, that of Common Security (and inclusion) – that one group can typically only be secure if the groups with whom it is significantly connected are secure too. For migrant workers, to advance the solidarity principle there are three key requirements:

- Decommodification of MWs requires them to be seen as workers not migrants
- Seeking to unify initiatives for decent work across national and migrant workers in a sector
- (Re-)Integration of MWs into sending/ receiving communities

7) Conduct an assessment of the effectiveness of the orientation work in communities of origin covered by WIF.

An area of work that has been impressive for WIF is the agency focused work on orientation guidance for potential migrant workers

in areas of origin, including the use of returnee migrant women to provide their experience. However, there is limited data on the efficacy of this work, and this is one survey we would recommend that is conducted by WIF to provide outcome indicator data. Our recommendation would be to work through the CSOs that have been conducting the work, and to use a participatory survey in keeping with the methodology itself.

8) Retain ILO technical staff knowledge and experience.

The collective experience of the WIF CTA and national programme coordinators has been noted in this evaluation. It is a sign of the overall quality of the WIF programme that it has gathered together and retained, a high calibre group of experienced professionals, who have now gained hugely valuable experience. Their collective persistence in the face of numerous obstacles, and their ability to maintain communications even with those whose attitudes and policies are in opposition to the aims of the programme is fundamental to the programme's effectiveness and considerable achievements. We would recommend extremely highly that the ILO seeks ways to retain all these staff if at all possible.

9. Consolidate a summary of the top 20 lessons learned.

Work in Freedom has produced lengthy glossaries of lessons learned, that are rich, full of detail, and very unlikely to be read by many people so extensive are they. The last three lessons learned documents covering the whole migration cycle are wonderful documents, and full of helpful guidance. We wonder however if WIF could not seek to distil all this documentation down to a set of 20 core 'must do' lessons learned during the programme's implementation. This will require a process of selection and synthesis that will be invaluable, allowing a set of core recommendations to be identified and presented. The lessons learned listed here are of course one attempt at a synthesis, but given the comprehensive and technical nature of WIF's own documentation, their own distillation will of immense value, and would be a widely read document.

- *Focus of final evaluation.*



The final evaluation will follow on shortly after the finalisation of this mid-term reporting. As such, the evaluation should be complementary and not repetitive. We would recommend that the evaluation focuses on assessing existing and generating new evidence around the Outcome indicators for the Results Framework. A second focus of any final evaluation should be the sustainability strategy for the programme. We have sought to highlight needs relating to that here, and there are just a few months to put more pieces into place regarding this. This should be a priority for the ILO itself, considering the quality of WIF's work, and the nature of its achievements thus far across its lifespan.

#### **Conclusion**

Few programmes evolve as much and as effectively as Work in Freedom has done during its ten years of existence. In the series of good practices it has developed, WIF is an exemplar, adaptive learning programme. Many of these practices are unusual within the ILO, and as such it is vital that appropriate broader lessons are drawn from within the organisation, especially with respect to approaches for working with migrant workers. The agency centred approaches of WIF with women are challenging of patriarchal practices in sending and receiving communities but undertake this through forms of dialogue that can lead to sustained engagement.

Overall, Work in Freedom has pursued an approach to anti-trafficking work that rehumanises women migrant workers, and in this process of de-commodification lies the future seeds for reform. Despite the cuts to the community outreach work in South Asia in the last two years WIF has shown it is capable of consistently exceeding its outreach targets. With its programmatic work influenced by the topical research undertaken to explore migration contexts in countries of origin and destination, there is much the programme has been doing right. What is critical now is that ways continue to be found to build upon and expand this success.