



# Brief on Work in Freedom Programme in India



## » Women and girls on the move in India

For many, migration is an important alternative to the realities of home. People move long distances in pursuit of jobs for varying reasons ranging from economic aspirations or loss of habitat resulting from processes of economic transformation, poverty, climate change or gender based violence. While some migrate internally, many also migrate abroad. For women and girls, especially of indigenous, dalit or low-income backgrounds, the experience of further impoverishment and discrimination makes migration a viable option. While many are able to improve their livelihoods in cities at home or abroad, many also face deception by unscrupulous labour recruiters or exploitation by employers – practices that amount to forced labour.

The Work in Freedom programme adopts an integrated and targeted approach to reduce vulnerability to trafficking of women and girls in South Asian countries of origin (Bangladesh, India and Nepal) and in selected destination countries (India, Jordan and Lebanon). It expects to reach at least 150,000 women and girls by 2018.

## » Mobility by choice

The programme consists of tailored interventions to support more informed and prepared migration both by directly targeting migrants and by working with groups and institutions that work with migrants.

On the one hand interventions strengthen both migrants and aspiring migrants' understanding of their own rights in the context of patriarchy, mobility and work. This includes building women's capacity to assert their rights in likely situations of potential disempowerment such as access to entitlements, relations with relatives, labour recruiters, agents of different types, border officials, employers and other stakeholders. From another angle the programme strengthens the capacity of local and regional groups and institutions to better guarantee labour mobility and livelihood options.

The Work in Freedom Programme works in close coordination with the Ministry of Labour and Employment, central trade unions, and partners such as CINI in Jharkhand and Samarthan in Chattisgarh.

More than 90,000 women in India have already benefited from interventions such as door to door visits, orientation sessions, referral services, pre-decision counseling sessions, street drama, life

skill training and other outreach initiatives to promote more informed migration and livelihood choices. Programme partners including SEWA, JGKU and Prayas have provided vocational and rights training to 645 women and girls. The programme builds-on, rather than adds-on, community groups, structures and programmes that support women's empowerment, employment and social protection.



## » Fair recruitment to decent jobs

India is both a source and destination country for migrant workers and has a high incidence of interstate migration. While only a marginal percentage of interstate migrant domestic workers are employed through recruitment agencies, employment in the garment sector for interstate women migrant workers occurs through informal channels. Recruitment of women to overseas garment work is rare, and most recruitment of overseas migrant domestic workers occurs informally. In spite of strong public calls to protect migrating women from the pitfalls of trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery, in practice the presumed responsibility of ensuring fair migration outcomes is eroded among multiple formal and informal stakeholders. Migrants therefore face multiple risks and challenges in their efforts to find jobs such as paying exorbitant fees, taking out high-interest loans ahead of their departure that can lead them into debt bondage, deception about the nature and conditions of work, having contracts substituted by less favourable ones on arrival, having passports confiscated, being subject to illegal wage deductions, threats or physical violence.

Work in Freedom works with employers, with labour recruiters, workers and regulators both in the places of origin and destination of migrant workers, to support better regulation and practices of recruitment. It reviews laws and regulations on foreign employment and recruitment, and it also tests and assesses recruitment practices. It also works with migrant

rights organizations and trade unions to increase accountability in the recruitment process.

The Work in Freedom programme has engaged the Ministry of Labour and Employment, trade unions and recruitment agencies in improving regulations and practices of recruitment. In partnership with FICCI, a workshop was organized to bring together 16 domestic and overseas recruitment agencies to consolidate the recruitment agencies around fair recruitment practices.

SEWA has organized over 21,500 workers in destination areas in India. SEWA is working in the states of Delhi, Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, and Kerala. In Odisha it partnered with the National Alliance of Women Organizations (NAWO) and for intra-state migrants between Tamil Nadu and Kerala with National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM).

ILO, in cooperation with ITUC, IDWF, and FES has provided technical guidance to develop and sustain a common action plan for advocacy on promoting decent work for domestic workers.

## Law and policies for dignity and decent work for migrant garment and domestic workers

Several laws, policies and administrative practices in India need to be reviewed to improve prospects of safety and dignity for migrant workers. The Work in Freedom programme, along with the South Asia Labour Migration programme of the ILO and FICCI provided technical inputs to review the Emigration Act that governs international migration. At the request of the Government of Jharkhand, it provided technical inputs on draft recruitment legislation concerning domestic workers. It has also produced a study on the employers' attitudes towards domestic workers, a policy brief on domestic work, a study on the feasibility of workers' centres and identified best practices that can play an important role in driving accountability on fair recruitment in garment and domestic work.



### For more information please contact:

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