

MEDIA MONITORING

Analyzing News about Migrant Workers in Lebanon



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**The Institute of Media Research and Training (IMRT) at Lebanese American University
in partnership with the Anti-Racist Movement (ARM-Lebanon),
funded by the Migration and Communication Rights program at WACC.**

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**Institute of
Media Research
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حركة مناهضة
العنصرية  **Anti-Racism
Movement**



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At a Glance

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Executive Summary

This media monitoring report analyzes news about migrant workers in Lebanon. The report focused on analyzing how workers under the Kafala system are underrepresented and misrepresented in the Lebanese news media.

The methods used in this report include both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of news published by Lebanese magazines, news agencies, TV stations, newspapers, and news websites. The report focuses on news stories collected from January 2020 until September 2021, with a sample size of 197 headlines (152 in Arabic and 45 in English) for quantitative analysis and a sample size of 18 news reports (13 in Arabic and 5 in English) for qualitative analysis.

The findings of the quantitative analysis showed that the overall news coverage of migrant workers in Lebanon has dropped by half, yet the headlines over time are getting more negative. The analysis also found, news in Arabic presented a near equal number of headlines that were negative, positive, and neutral towards migrant workers. Meanwhile, 60% of English headlines were positive. NGO and feminist media had zero negative headlines. Newspapers and news websites published a near equal amount of positive and negative headlines, news agencies published an equal amount of neutral and positive headlines, and the majority of headlines coded from TV stations and magazines were positive.

The findings of the more in-depth qualitative content analysis showed that almost all of the news reports published by newspapers and news websites did not quote migrant workers concerning the news being reported. In addition, the analysis found that many of the news articles reproduced xenophobic, racist, and/or gendered stereotypes in their coverage, even when the news report was written from a positive bias towards migrant workers.

The research findings informed nine practical recommendations to improve the representation of migrant workers in Lebanese news media. These recommendations advised journalists to quote migrant community members as one mechanism to advance more fair and accurate portrayals. This study concludes that better news media practices are needed to promote and achieve the communication rights of migrants in Lebanon.

Introduction

Lebanon is a small country with nearly 7 million residents. Since the 1970s, Lebanon has facilitated the employment of migrant workers under the Kafala or “sponsorship” system. Prior to the 2020 economic crisis in Lebanon, there were over 400,000 migrant workers whose employment in Lebanon is structured by the Kafala system, and more than half of those workers are migrant domestic workers who are mostly women from different parts of Africa and Southeast Asia (IOM, 2020).¹ Today, the number of migrants is estimated at 207,696 with the majority of migrant workers coming from Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Sri Lanka, and Sudan.² In addition, the Kafala system also applies to thousands of displaced Syrian workers also residing in Lebanon, who need a sponsor to work informal jobs (e.g. delivery, construction, grocery stores, etc.), whether or not they have refugee status (including Syrians who have been in Lebanon before 2011).³

The Kafala system contracts the labor of foreign workers to a citizen-employer for a specific time period and job. Migrant workers under the Kafala system are legally linked to their employers and bound by their contracts to not seek other employment. Migrant workers’ contracts under Kafala are tied to their residency, so they must leave Lebanon once their contract is finished or terminated. A worker under the Kafala system who is fired or remains in the country after their contract is terminated is criminalized by Lebanese law and can be subjected to arrest and/or deportation. Since 2021, the running away charge has been replaced by a simple declaration that the “worker left her/his place of employment,” which is no longer considered a criminal charge. The Lebanese Code of Labor “exempts” migrant domestic workers or “domestic servants employed in private households” (Article 7)⁴ because domestic work is not recognized as labor, thus they have no right to unionize or to a minimum wage.

The Kafala system in Lebanon has been called an exploitative system similar to slavery and human trafficking (HIR, 2020).⁵ Several reforms to the Kafala system made in 2020 by the Labor Minister resulted in a non-enforceable template contract that suggests a minimum salary, acknowledges freedom of movement and communication, and allows workers to unilaterally terminate employment only with a prior one-month notice to their employer. In October 2020,

¹ IOM. (2020, October 16). Well-Being and Security of Migrant Workers in Lebanon Deteriorate Since Beirut Blast | International Organization for Migration. Retrieved September 30, 2021, from <https://www.iom.int/news/well-being-and-security-migrant-workers-lebanon-deteriorate-beirut-blast>

² IOM. (2021, August 19). *Lebanon: Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Migrant Presence Monitoring (MPM) Baseline assessment – Round 1*. ReliefWeb. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MPM_Baseline_Report_R1.pdf

³ ARM (2021, July 14) Lebanon Civil Society Submission to the 104th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. https://armlebanon.org/sites/default/files/lebanon_civil_society_submission_-_cerd_104th_session_-_arm_2021_website.pdf

⁴ Lebanese Code of Labor: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/710/Labour%20Code%20of%2023%20September%201946%20as%20amend.ed.Publication%202010.pdf>

⁵ Rak, P. (2020, December 21). *Modern Day Slavery: The Kafala System in Lebanon*. Harvard International Review. <https://hir.harvard.edu/modern-day-slavery-the-kafala-system-in-lebanon/>

the Syndicate of Owners of Recruitment Agencies in Lebanon (SORAL) successfully challenged the amended standard unified contract in Lebanon's highest administrative court and it was deemed unconstitutional (Dagher et al., 2020, p. 2).⁶ According to the Anti-Racist Movement in Lebanon, the problem is the lack of an enforcement mechanism to implement the new contract, which renders these reforms performative and useless despite the positive new clauses mentioned above. Regardless, the problem of the legal dependence of migrant workers on sponsors remains a key component of the overall structure of Kafala (ARM, 2020).⁷ The ongoing human rights disaster for workers under the Kafala system in Lebanon has resulted in increasing poverty and homelessness, leaving many migrant workers with a precarious status that could result in arrest and deportation.

Social and political inequality in Lebanon is exacerbated by systems like Kafala. The ongoing economic and political crisis in Lebanon is affecting everyone, but the communities who are marginalized socially and politically, like migrant workers, are deeply affected. The ideologies that maintain the exploitation of migrant workers in Lebanon, such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, and scapegoating (in the context of the current crisis and collapse), are reproduced within media coverage of the Kafala system and migrant workers.

Media in Lebanon portray migrant workers, both men and women, unfairly. Bias in news reporting frames migrant workers as inferior or weak and they are often portrayed as victims. Workers under the Kafala system are typically only represented in the media according to their residency status as migrants ("il/legal," "ir/regular," or "un/documented" and never just worker or resident), rather than focusing on their background, experiences, opinions, lives outside of work, etc. Migrant workers are not quoted in most local media and when they are, it is usually to comment in relation to their status under the Kafala system. To build an anti-racist and anti-sexist society that does not discriminate against migrant workers, media should play an important role in centering the experiences and narratives of workers under the Kafala system.

This media monitoring report compiles the findings from a qualitative and quantitative analysis of print and TV news content produced for Lebanese audiences in Arabic and English gathered from one magazine, two news agencies, five television stations, seven newspapers, and twenty-four news websites (see Table 1 for the detailed list of media organizations) within the span of one year and nine months from January 2020 until September 2021.

This timeframe was chosen because the ongoing economic and political collapse in Lebanon exposed the plight of migrant workers and migrant domestic workers as well as exacerbated their oppression under Kafala. Specifically, the economic downturn exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic over 2020 resulted in the local currency (Lebanese lira) steadily and at times rapidly losing value against the US dollar, the currency the majority of workers under the Kafala system send home. Previously valued at 1515 Lira to 1 USD, today the rate of exchange on the black market has exceeded 20,000 Lira to 1 USD. See Table 2 that compiles data to compare the

⁶ Dagher, J.; Wood, D.; and Boswall, J. (2020). Cleaning Up: The Shady Industries that Exploit Lebanon's Kafala Workers. <https://www.thinktriangle.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Cleaning-Up-The-Shady-Industries-That-Exploit-Lebanons-Kafala-Workers-1.pdf>

⁷ ARM. (2020, July 6). No Ethical Contract Under Kafala. Anti-Racism Movement - Lebanon. <https://armlebanon.org/content/no-ethical-contract-under-kafala>

economic crisis in Lebanon from January 2020 to September 2021 with migrant domestic workers' wages. Table 3 shows the decline in the number of new and renewed work permits issued by the Ministry of Labor to foreign workers and domestic workers in 2020.

Political turmoil continued after the popular October 17, 2019, protests that were followed by the Prime Minister and several Members of Parliament resigning from government. A new Prime Minister was appointed in December 2019 and a new cabinet was approved by Parliament in January 2020. The new cabinet included Lamia Yammine as Labor Minister and during her time was outspoken against Kafala, motivating the reforms in 2020 mentioned above. Later, Beirut was massively impacted by the August 4, 2020, explosion in the port that killed over 200 people (although the official death toll does not include many migrants also killed)⁸ and left tens of thousands without homes, including displacing migrant workers and leaving hundreds abandoned and homeless (ARM, 2020).⁹ In the aftermath of the blast, migrant workers from many nationalities organized protests demanding evacuation from Lebanon. These protests for evacuation were triggered by employers abandoning dozens of migrant workers in front of their respective embassies without their rightfully earned wages and (in a lot of cases) without their passports. Soon after August 4th, the Lebanese government resigned and over a year later a new Prime Minister and Cabinet were approved by September 2021.

Table 1: List of media organizations included in the data set

Magazine	News Agencies	TV Stations	Newspapers	News Websites
<i>Executive</i>	Al Markazia & National News Agency	Aghani, Al Jadeed, LBCI, Manar TV, & MTV	<i>Al Akhbar, Al Modon, Aliwaa, Annahar, Daily Star, L'Orient le Jour, Nida al Watan</i>	Al Ahed News, Al Ankaabout, Al Mada, Alnashra, Beirut.com, Beirut Today, Cedar News, Centre Libanais des Droits Humains, Daraj, IMLebanon, Kafa, Kataeb, Lebanon 24, Lebanon Debate, Lebanon Files, Legal Agenda, Nabad, Naharnet, Now Lebanon, Saida Online, Sharika Wa Laken, Stepfeed, The 961, & Ya Sour

⁸ From [ARM's weekly news report](#) from September 27-October 3, 2021: A new comprehensive list of 72 non-Lebanese victims of the Beirut explosion was published by Legal Agenda and Rights Frontiers in an article on the lack of compensation by the Lebanese state, and the discrepancies between official and non-official lists. The list included the following nationalities: One Palestinian; one Pakistani, one Iranian, one German; one Dutch; one Australian; one French; 2 Ethiopians; 3 Egyptians; 4 Filipinas; 6 Bangladeshis; and 50 Syrians. Original report in Arabic: <https://tinyurl.com/233x523s>

⁹ ARM. (2020, September 2). Homelessness among Migrant Workers on the Rise. Anti-Racism Movement - Lebanon. <https://armlebanon.org/content/homelessness-among-migrant-workers-rise>

Table 2: The economic crisis in Lebanon from January 2020 to September 2021 and migrant domestic workers' wages¹⁰

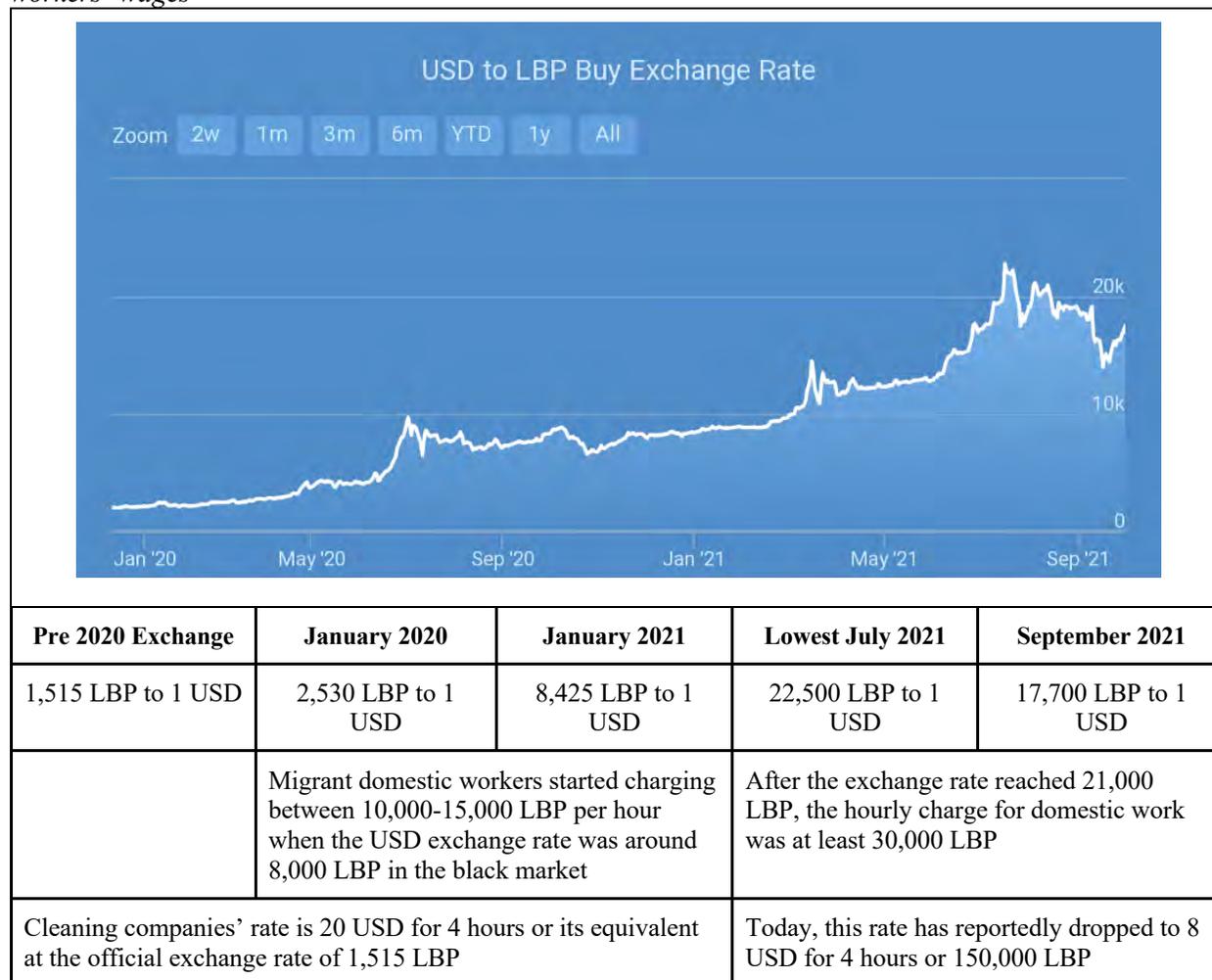


Table 3: Work Permits issued by the Ministry of Labor in Lebanon from 2019-2021¹¹

YEAR	New Work Permits	Of these New Permits for Domestic Workers	Renewed Work Permits	Of these Renewed Permits Domestic Workers
2019	43,825	32,938	203,263	149,439
2020	11,453 (-73.8%)	9,362 (-71.5%)	143,532 (-29.3%)	108,507 (-27.3%)
2021	According to Information International: "During the first 9 months of 2021, the number of new foreign workers increased to 18,214."		<i>Data not available</i>	

¹⁰ Table compiles data from <https://lirate.org/> and data included in ARM's weekly news report from September 6-12, 2021, "Report on Declining Ability to Hire Migrant Domestic Workers" from <https://armlebanon.org/weekly-updates/weekly-news-report-september-6-12-2021>

¹¹ According to Information International based on the Ministry of Labor's figures, see: https://monthlymagazine.com/article-desc_4992 & <https://middleeast.in-24.com/News/336930.html>

Problem Statement

Workers under the Kafala system are underrepresented and misrepresented in the Lebanese news media. News reports representing migrant workers or their issues in Lebanon are dominated by officials (government or police), citizen-employers (i.e. sponsors), recruitment agencies, and NGOs who speak about or for migrant workers, which propagates their narrow and stereotypical image in the media of the host society. This leads to these entities and the media framing the plight of migrant workers as an individual or isolated problem caused by a few "bad" employers or agencies who abuse migrant workers and do not represent the majority experience under the Kafala system.

Methodology

This media monitoring report uses a mixed method approach based on both qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The quantitative content analysis coded a random sample of 197 headlines (152 in Arabic and 45 in English) published in English and Arabic by Lebanese TV stations, newspapers, and news websites from January 2020 until September 2021. The articles were found randomly through keyword search (including Kafala, migrant worker, domestic migrant worker, etc., and the equivalents for both pronouns in Arabic).¹² This was followed by an in-depth analysis of 18 news reports (13 in Arabic and 5 in English) selected through a purposive sampling of an equal number of stories coded as portraying negative, positive, and neutral bias (6/6/6) from the random sample gathered for the headlines analysis. The purposive sampling selected an equal number from 2020 and 2021 (3/3/3 each) as well as considered the type of media (tv and print plus state, private, or feminist/NGO), audiences (popular and diverse), and the concepts (from the framework) and themes arising from the data. The quantity of the articles purposively selected for the data analyzed qualitatively (n18) represents nearly 10% of the articles for the quantitative analysis (n197).¹³ Quantitative data was aggregated across platforms and media organizations, as well as separated out by platform (TV stations, newspapers, news agency, magazine or news websites) and type of media organization (state, private, or feminist/NGO). Any articles concerning migrant workers in Lebanon not under the Kafala system, such as expats or other foreign workers and Palestinian refugees, were excluded.

The following framework for detecting media bias, adapted from Media Smarts,¹⁴ guided the method for coding the headlines:

¹² The full list of keywords include: Kafala, domestic servant, domestic worker, housemaid, foreign worker, recruitment agency, Minister of Labor, General Security, her / his employer, servant, Ethiopian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Filipino, India, Cameroon, Sudanese, & African

¹³ We estimate that 30 articles will represent 10% of what we found randomly.

¹⁴ Johnson, M. (2016). How to detect news bias [student handout]. Media Smarts. Retrieved from: https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/lesson-plan/Lesson_Bias_News_Sources.pdf

1. Sentiment of bias: Positive, negative, or neutral according to Year, Language, Ownership, Platform, and Topic
2. Bias through selection (what detail is included?) and omission (what is omitted?)
3. Bias by word choice and tone (words can have positive, negative or neutral connotation)

The following framework, adapted from WACC’s Global Media Monitoring Methodology,¹⁵ Media Smarts news bias detection method, and informed by scholarship about media representations of migrant workers, guided the qualitative content analysis:

1. Who **appears** or is **quoted** in the news about workers under the Kafala system (workers, government officials, agencies, citizen-employers, NGOs, citizens, migrant activist groups, etc.)?
2. Are workers under the Kafala system the **central focus** of the report? When workers under the Kafala system are represented in the news, **what is the news topic**? What news topics are migrant workers invited to speak about in the media?
3. Are workers **depicted according to their status** as a sponsored migrant worker under Kafala or as a migrant domestic worker? Are they described as residents or any other occupational or social role identified?
4. What is the **news role** for workers under the Kafala system depicted: spokesperson, eyewitness, expert or commentator, personal experience?
5. Does the news report **challenge or perpetuate** the stereotypical representation of migrant workers? Does the report show workers in leadership roles or activists or as decision makers? Are workers portrayed as “tragic victims” (Ringrose and Stubberud, 2019)?¹⁶
6. How are **gender and race** part or not part of the news report? Is national origin included, race or gender described? Are there any **overt or inferentially racist or sexist terms** (Hall, 2011)¹⁷ used to describe the workers as a slave (*Abed*), threat, lazy, incompetent, criminal, dirty, etc.? Are there any **ideologies** reproduced in the news report (Hall, 2011)-sexism, racism, xenophobia, scapegoating, etc.?
7. Does the report acknowledge that the Kafala system applies to both men and women migrant workers, or does the report **assume gender** by assuming all migrants working under Kafala are migrant domestic workers who are women?

¹⁵ Women Media and Development - TAM (2017). Media Monitoring of Palestinian women’s image and representation in news related to peace and security. Bethlehem, West Bank – Palestine. Retrieved from: <https://tam.ps/newsite/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/media-monitoring-report-english-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁶ Ringrose, P., and Stubberud, E. (2019). The Emotional Politics of Representations of Migrant Domestic Work in Lebanon. *Middle East Critique*, 28:4, 405-424, DOI: 10.1080/19436149.2019.1664798

¹⁷ Hall, S. (2011). The Whites of Their Eyes: racist ideologies and the media. In Dines, G., & Humez, J. M., *Gender, race, and class in media: A critical reader* (3rd ed.). SAGE. Retrieved from: <https://rajsivaraman.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/hall-whites-of-their-eyes.pdf>

8. “Love is not what will challenge the power relations” (Ahmed, 2004)¹⁸: Does the news report reproduce **the discourse of “conditional love” or “part of the family,”** where media publish claims of love or familial relationality made by citizen-employers for workers under the Kafala system, whereas these declarations are typically non-consensual and contingent on being grateful or “so-called good or obedient behavior” (Inouye, 2012)¹⁹ and do more for constructing the image of a loving and ethical citizen-employer and Lebanon as a welcoming and equitable country?
9. Is the precarity, slavery-like, or **“unfreedom of migrant work”** (Inouye, 2012)--whereby working in Lebanon is tied to the conditions set by the Kafala system, agencies, and the whims of citizen-employers--depicted in the news report? Is this unfree condition of work excluded or included, and portrayed as negative, positive, or neutral?
10. Does the news report mention **exploitation and overwork**, such as: withholding of identity papers (passport, etc.) or salary or plane ticket home; denial of a day off or freedom of movement or medical care or freedom to practice religion or other cultural activities; restricted communication; social-political exclusion within society or marginal economic and political status under the Kafala system?
11. How is **violence**, threat of violence, abuse (including sexual, physical, or mental), death, or murder reported of a migrant worker? Who is blamed or responsible? Is the worker’s family or support network included or excluded? Is the focus on what “officials say”? How are the citizen-employer and the employer’s family portrayed or other citizens (agency representatives or officials) portrayed in relation to the worker, positive vs negative? Is there any reporting on investigations or results of investigations? Is there any reporting of arrests or criminal charges?
12. Are migrant workers given a platform to **speak** about their “frustration or anger against their conditions of work” (Inouye, 2012)?
13. Who is the **assumed audience** of the news report? Is it speaking to citizen-employers, agencies, government officials, workers under the Kafala system, citizens who oppose Kafala or supporters of workers’ rights, feminists or anti-racists activists? General public or neutral citizens?
14. Detecting **news bias** in the photo/image, caption, and text/script of the news report:
 - a. Bias through selection and omission
 - b. Bias through placement (according to the inverted pyramid, most important details are first event in TV reports)
 - c. Bias by word choice and tone

¹⁸ Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. New York, NY: Routledge.

¹⁹ Inouye, K. (2012) Conditional love; representations of migrant work in Canadian newsprint media. *Social Identities*, 18:5, 573-592, DOI: 10.1080/13504630.2012.692895

- d. Bias by photos or images, captions or text at the bottom of the screen, lighting, framing, and camera angles
- e. Bias through use of names and titles
- f. Bias through statistics and crowd counts (are numbers used to make the news spectacular or sensational)
- g. Bias by source control (who is the source for the news - “officials say,” NGOs, migrant activist groups, etc.)

Results of the Quantitative Analysis

News coverage drops

The number of news headlines concerning migrant workers dropped from 2020 to 2021. In 2020, there were 139 headlines published across Lebanese news platforms, but during the first nine months of 2021, there were only 58 headlines published in comparison to the same time period in 2020 that saw 112 headlines or nearly double the news coverage of migrant workers.

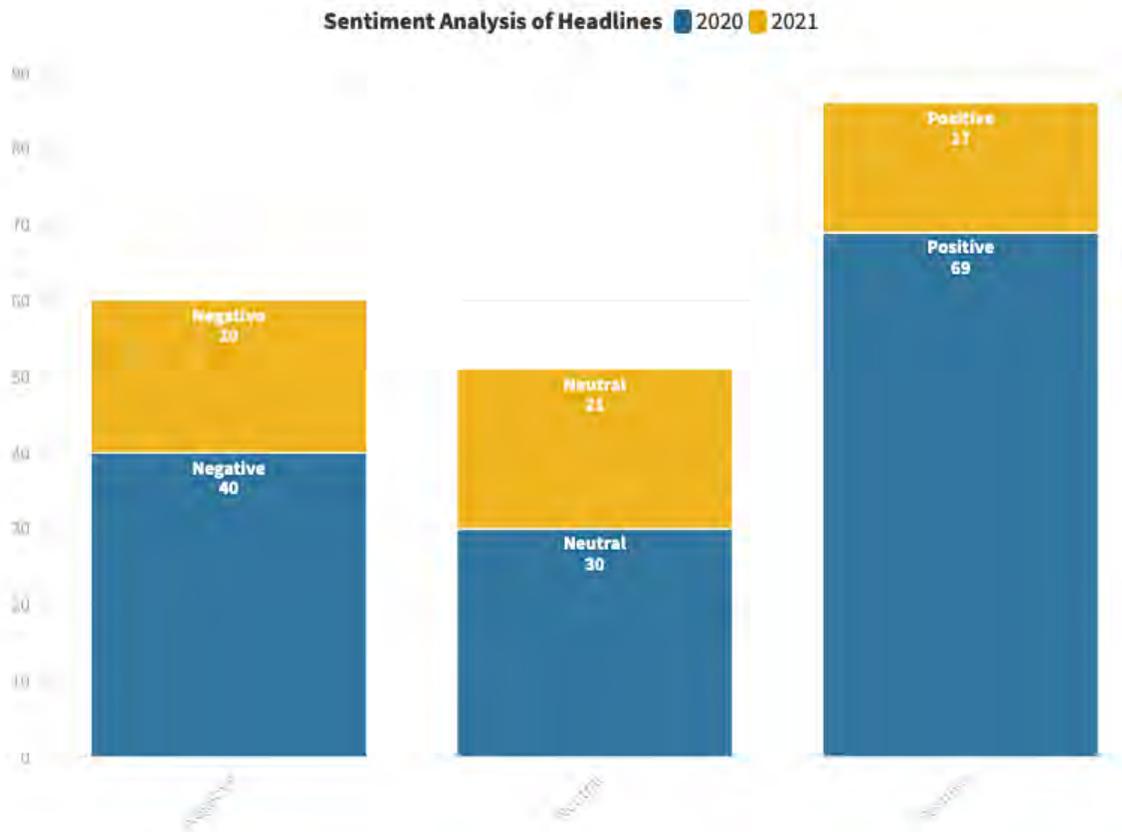


Figure 1: Sentiment of Headlines by Year

News headlines are getting more negative

The analysis of the sentiment coded in 197 headlines showed that in 2020 there were more headlines that were positive towards migrant workers than found in 2021. Specifically, there were 40 Negative, 30 Neutral, and 69 Positive headlines in 2020 versus 20 Negative, 21 Neutral, and 17 positive in 2021, as illustrated in Figure 1. This analysis shows that nearly 50% of headlines published in 2020 were positive and only 29% of the headlines published in 2021 were positive.

Headlines published in Arabic and English differ in sentiment

The analysis of the sentiment also coded the language of each headline. Arabic news media in Lebanon published a near equal number of headlines that were negative, positive, and neutral towards migrant workers. Specifically, the analysis found that 34% of headlines in Arabic were negative, whereas 28% were neutral and 38% were positive. English headlines differed, offering 16% of headlines that were negative, whereas 24% were neutral and 60% were positive, as illustrated in Figure 2.

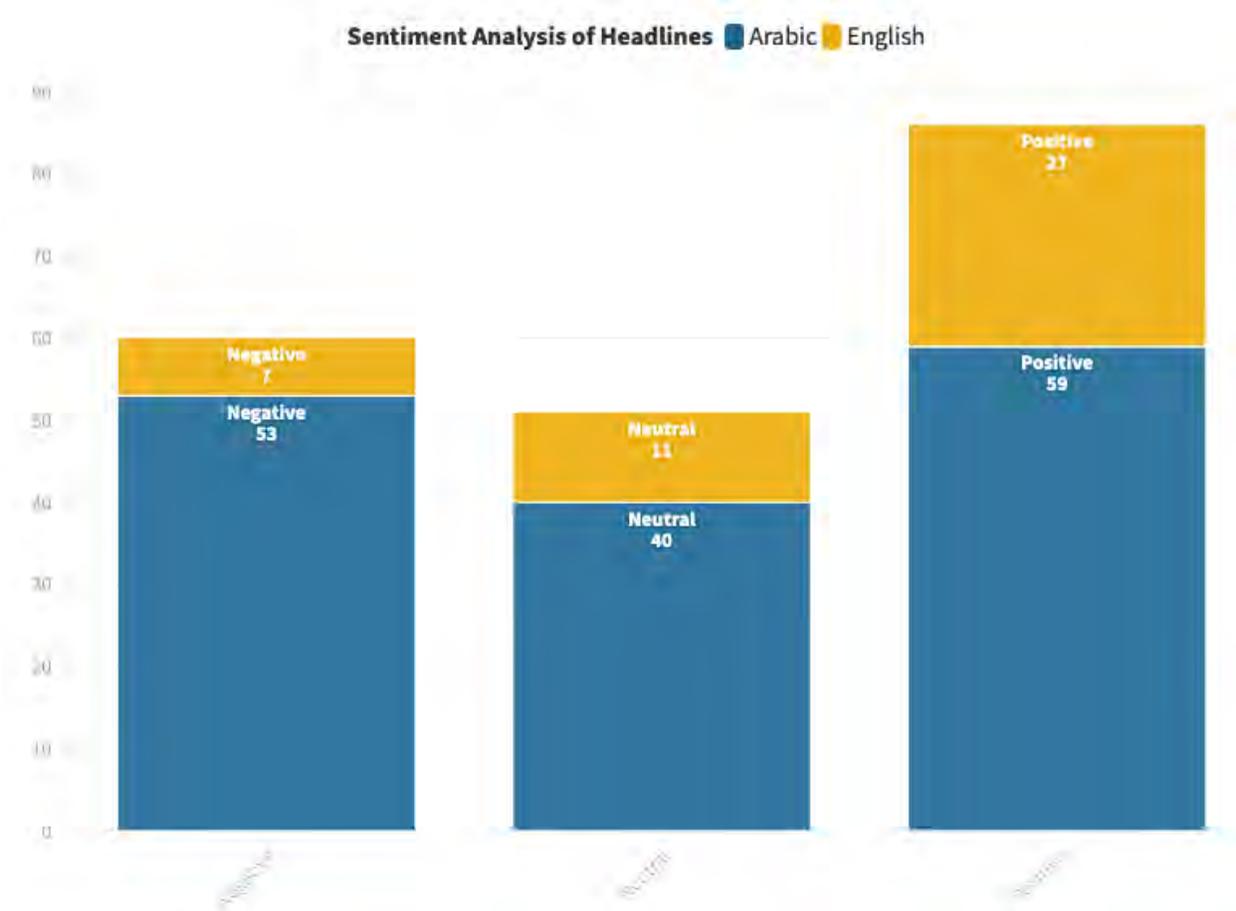


Figure 2: Sentiment of Headlines by Language

Headlines differ in sentiment according to media ownership

The analysis of the sentiment also coded the ownership of each media outlet. In total, 76% of headlines were published by privately owned media, 18% by state owned media, and 6% by NGO/feminist owned media. The analysis found that private media published a near equal amount of negative and positive headlines, or 37% and 42% respectively. In state owned media, the sentiment found in headlines was equally neutral or positive, or 45% and 40% respectively with 14% of negative headlines found in state media. By contrast the majority of articles published by NGO/feminist media was 75% positive with zero negative headlines, as illustrated in Figure 3.

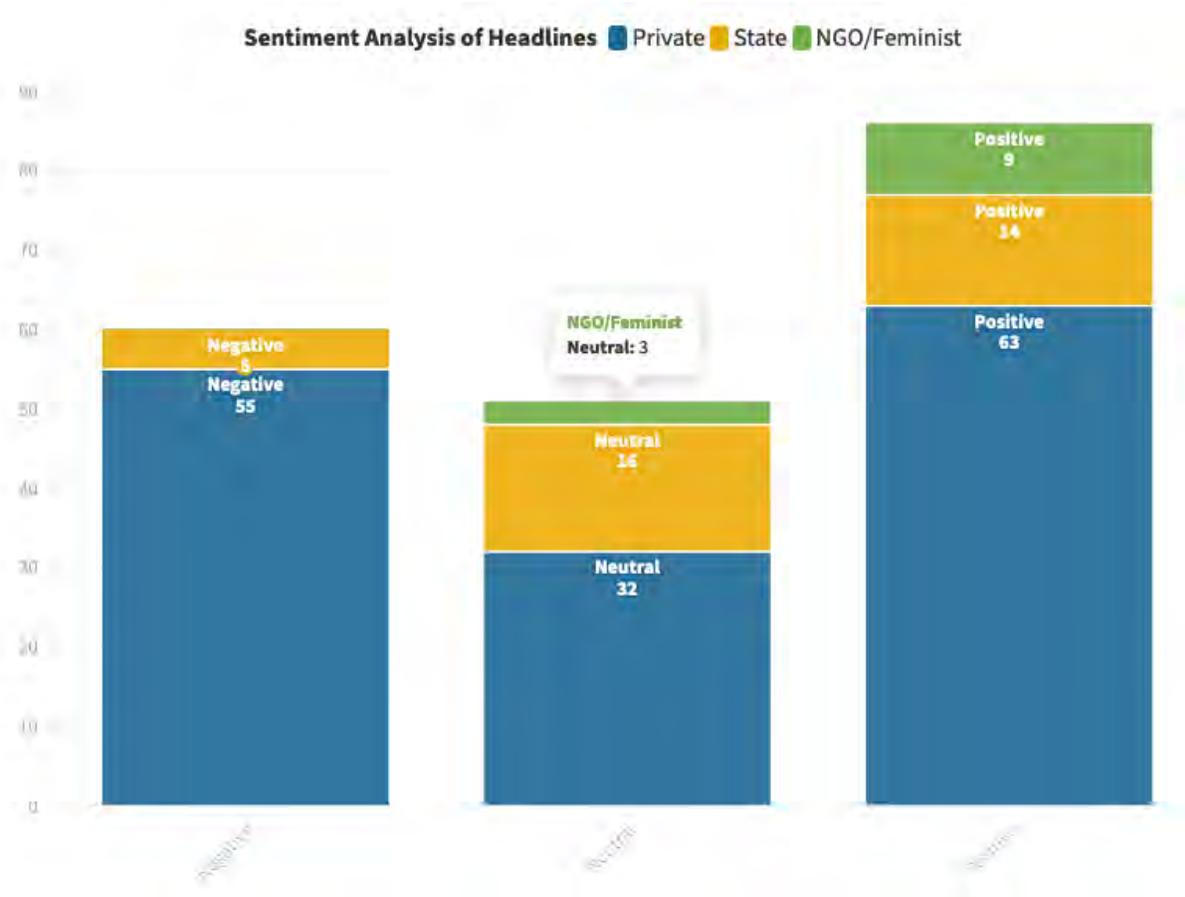


Figure 3: Sentiment of Headlines by Ownership

Headlines differ in sentiment according to platform

The analysis of the sentiment also coded the platform of publication for each headline. In total, 38% of headlines were published by news websites, 26% by newspapers, 20% by news agencies, 15% by television stations, and 1% by magazines. The analysis found that newspapers and news websites published a near equal amount of positive and negative headlines. Specifically, newspapers published 36% negative headlines and 44% positive, whereas news websites published 37% negative headlines and 44% positive. News agencies by contrast published a near equal amount of neutral and positive headlines, or 40% and 35% respectively. In addition, the majority of headlines, or 50%, coded from TV stations were positive and all of the headlines found in magazines were positive, as illustrated in Figure 4.

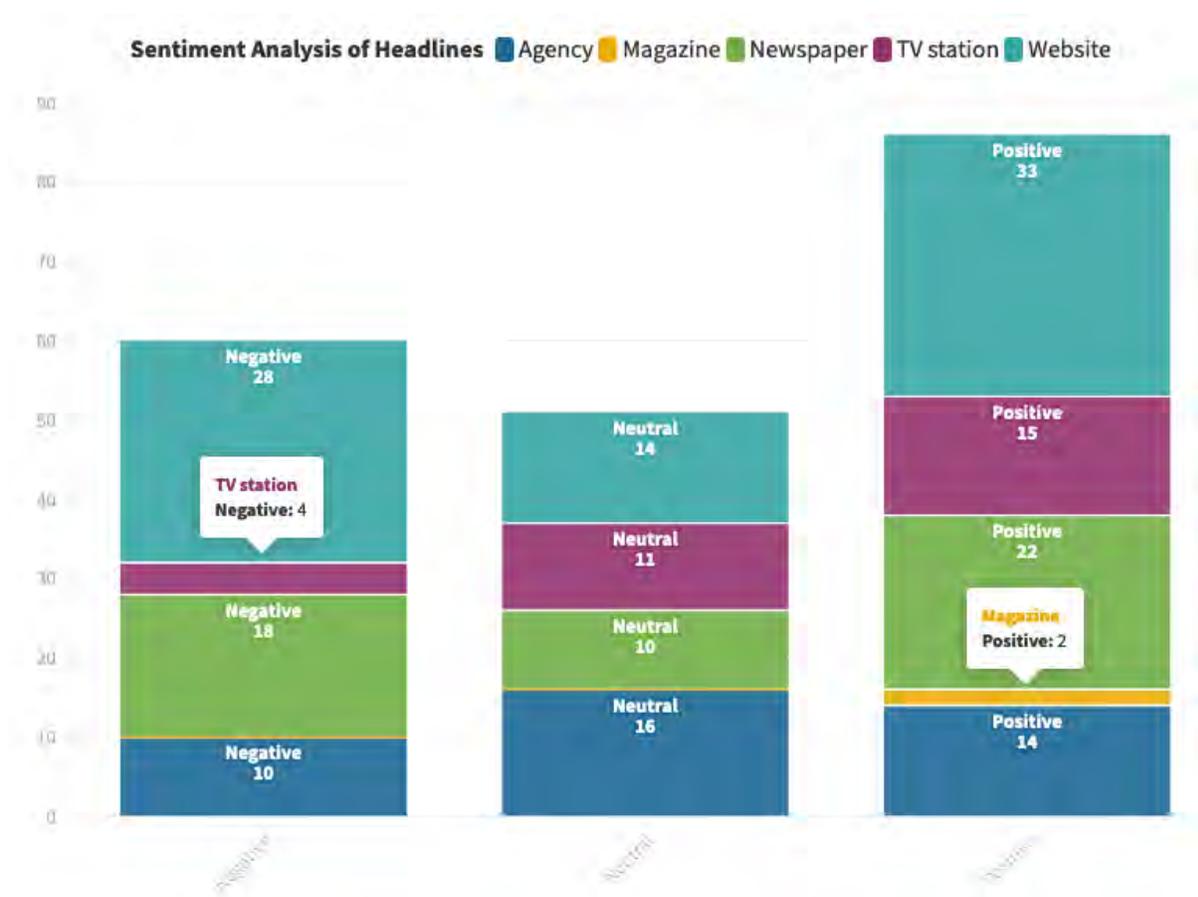


Figure 4: Sentiment of Headlines by Platform

Headlines differ in sentiment according to topic

The analysis of the sentiment also coded the news topic of each headline found about migrant workers. The majority of headlines focused on topics concerning the economic crisis in Lebanon, making up 41% of headlines, and the law or Kafala system, which made up 32% of headlines. The remaining headlines largely focused on the Covid 19 pandemic or 11% of headlines, followed by a focus on crimes against migrant workers (7%), suicide by migrant workers (5%), the experience of migrant workers after the Beirut Port explosion (3%), or crimes by migrant workers (1%). There was only one headline published that mentioned a victory by migrant workers.

The analysis of the sentiment found within coverage of the economic crisis showed a near equal amount of negative, neutral, and positive headlines or 35%, 32%, and 33% respectively. For topics that focused on the law or the Kafala system, the majority of headlines or 63% were positive. On the other hand, the majority or 45% of headlines about migrant workers that focused on the Covid 19 pandemic were negative, 32% of headlines related to Covid 19 were positive and 23% neutral. For topics concerning crime, the headlines that focused on crimes against migrant workers were 54% negative and those that alleged crimes by migrant workers were 100% negative. In addition, headlines that mentioned migrant workers who died by suicide were

45% negative and 33% positive. Lastly, the few headlines found concerning migrant workers and the aftermath of the Beirut Port explosion were largely positive or 80% of headlines analyzed, as illustrated in Figure 5.

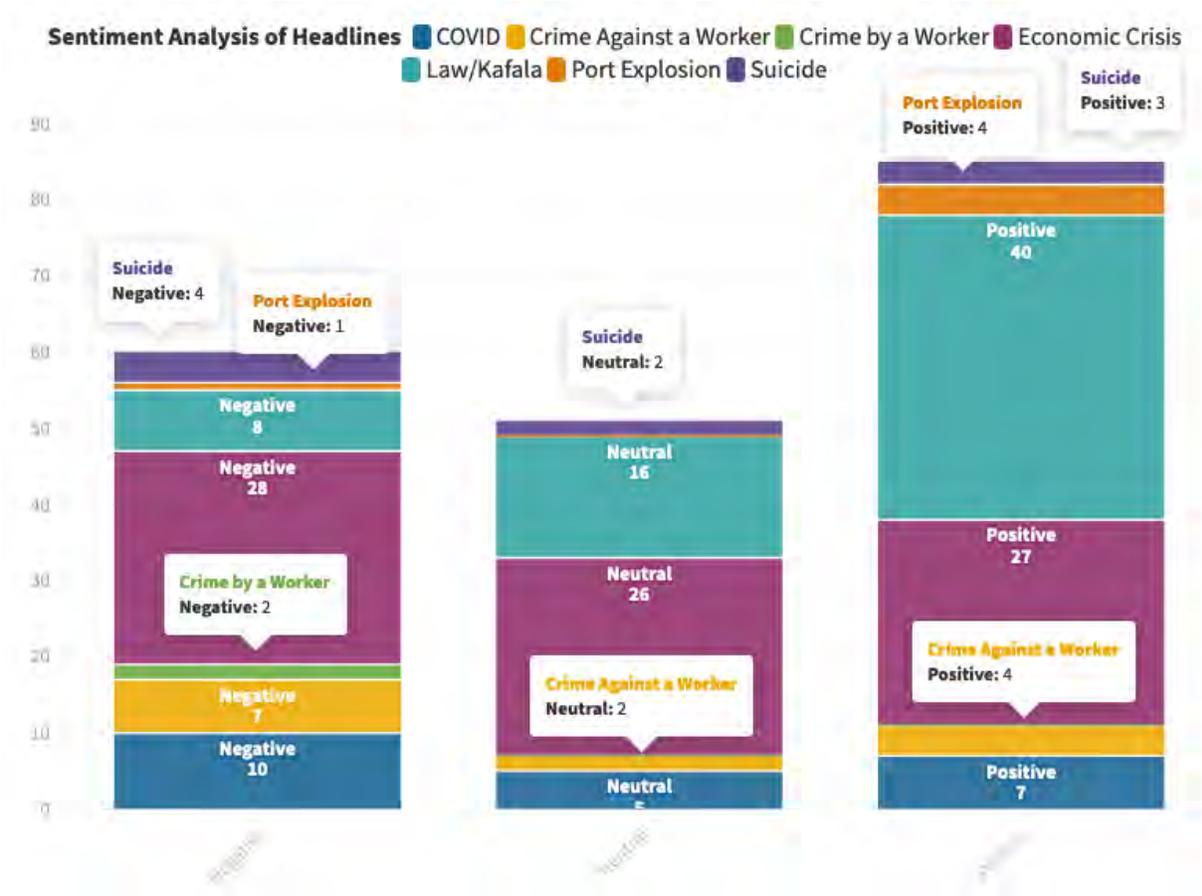


Figure 5: Sentiment of Headlines by Topic

Bias through selection and omission

The 197 headlines were also coded for the details omitted and the details selected to be included in each headline. Within many the “why” was missing from the headlines. Examples of this omission include:

- Migrants were protesting or on strike, but no mention of why;
- Minister takes a decision or expresses concern regarding the fate of migrant workers, but the why is omitted;
- Many headlines reported that migrant workers are being fired or leaving Lebanon or leaving their employer or that recruitment is down, but no mention of why;
- Migrant workers in Lebanon need or are receiving help, but no mention of why;
- Naomi Campbell called for African women to boycott Lebanon, but the why is omitted;
- Some countries refused to allow workers to migrate to Lebanon, but no mention of why;
- A death by suicide is reported, but the why is excluded.

In other cases, the headlines reported actions against migrant workers, but the actor is not mentioned. For example, multiple headlines reported a migrant worker in Lebanon was put up for sale on social media, but did not mention the citizen-employer placed the notice. Other headlines reported the eviction of migrant workers or that workers are being made homeless, but no evictor is mentioned. Some headlines

included that workers were being sent back home, but no mention of who is sending them. One headline suggested that abusing migrants is bad for Lebanon, but did not mention who is doing the abusing.

In the case of headlines that reported the deaths of migrant workers most included the migrant's nationality and status, but some omitted the detail that they are also workers and in almost all cases omitted the name. One headline mentioned the name of a domestic worker who died by suicide, but did not include her nationality or worker status.

Other headlines selectively blamed the economic crisis and shortage of dollars on migrant workers, who were blamed for sending dollars out of Lebanon rather than spending them in the country. Many headlines selectively pitted Lebanese workers against migrant workers and in some cases pitted Lebanese women against migrant domestic workers.

Bias by word choice and tone

Words can have positive, negative or neutral connotations; thus, the coding process investigated the word choice and tone across the headlines collected.

One example of neutral connotation is where several headlines reported that the Minister spoke to condemn a "death," choosing a neutral word, rather than using the word "murder."

Concerning negative wording in headlines, several used the derogatory Arabic word "khadam" or servant rather than worker. In other cases, headlines referred to the employers of a migrant domestic worker as "her owners." Another headline used words to negatively name a new crisis: "Ethiopian Women Worker's Crisis." In another case, a headline negatively referred to migrant workers as a ticking "bomb" in Beirut or the Covid 19 infections of migrant workers as a "horror."

Several headlines also negatively referred to migrant workers as criminals who violate the residency system. In several headlines, migrant workers were negatively referred to as "victims" and some headlines used terms like "sacrificing angel" or "silent witness" or "abused" or "neglected" or "need protection" to describe the experience of migrant workers in Lebanon. On the other hand, some headlines referred to the "victim" of the migrant worker crisis as the citizen-employer.

Some headlines used negative wording in a positive way for migrant workers by referring to the Kafala system as a "shame" or "slavery" and to citizen-employers as "abusers" or even in one case the "lowest of humanity" and in another "disgusting." Negative wording was also used to describe the conditions for migrant workers as "isolated" and "confined."

On the other hand, positive tones were observed in several headlines that praised or even glorified the work of the Lebanese government to provide vaccines for migrant workers or reported reform efforts to regularize the status of migrant workers.

Results of the Qualitative Analysis

Negative sentiment

The following six articles published by newspapers and news websites (5 in Arabic and 1 in English) were coded as negative in sentiment towards migrant workers and selected for detailed

content analysis. All six articles did not quote migrant workers concerning the news being reported, thus silencing migrant workers. Most of the articles portrayed Lebanese as victims, but one perpetuated the trope of migrant workers as tragic victims. Most of the articles positioned citizen-employers as superior to migrant workers and Lebanese workers as above to domestic work, perpetuating racist, sexist, and scapegoating discourses. Many of the articles also represented Lebanon as welcoming and Lebanese as loving, representing migrant workers as ungrateful, greedy, hateful, and violent.

Article 1: Lebanon24. (2020, July 23).

اعتداء دموي ووحشي في بئر حسن... عاملة أجنبية تطعن مواطنة وابنتها بالسكين
Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://tinyurl.com/9mtfcxhx>

This article reported a stereotypical example of how alleged attacks by migrant domestic workers are portrayed in the media. There is a focus on the gory details and the vicious violence allegedly committed by the worker who is referred to by her gender, race, and status rather than her name. The worker is not quoted nor is her point of view included. The perspective in the report that appears is that of the family of the citizen-employers who commented on behalf of the worker that she was “comfortable” and added that when the worker requested to go back home, her employers did all the procedures for her smooth travel. Through including the employer’s perspective only, the article constructs a narrative of “conditional love” that asserts that the employers were loving and undeserving of the alleged attack. The news report portrayed the domestic worker as a monster who lashed out at the innocent with zero perspective from the worker. This story of an alleged attack by a migrant worker is several paragraphs long, but when a migrant worker is killed, the media offer little coverage as in this example from Annahar (2020, October 14)²⁰ that published a single sentence to report the murder of a migrant worker.

Article 2: Al Markazia. (2020, November 13).

؟رغم سلبيات السياسة وتشنجاتها... الدولار على ثباته لماذا
مراد: العمال الأجانب يستنزفون العملة الخضراء

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://www.almarkazia.com/ar/news/show/268009>

The article reported the perspective of the president of the Syndicate of Money Changers in Lebanon. The news frames the Lebanese money changers as the “victims” of the “greedy” migrant workers when it comes to the dollar exchange rate versus the Lebanese Lira. The story reported the claim that money changers are paying dollar bills out of pocket to accommodate the migrant workers’ needs. This representation of money changers depicts them as sacrificing and portrays Lebanese businesses as meeting the needs of migrant workers. Furthermore, the article pitted migrant workers against Lebanese students abroad, as both need access to dollars. Specifically, the article portrayed migrant workers who need to send their wages in dollars back home as less worthy of the dollar bills in comparison to the Lebanese students studying abroad who will come back to build this country. The news report is inferentially scapegoating migrant workers as the reason behind the Lira’s collapse and the shortage of the dollar bills in Lebanon. No migrant worker was interviewed to validate the claims of the president of the Syndicate of

²⁰ <https://www.annahar.com/arabic/section/77-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B9/14102020101505167>

Money Changers in Lebanon. The article quoted the president as the only source accusing migrant workers of exhausting dollars from the Lebanese market and people, who are more deserving.

Article 3: AlMada. (2020, November 27).

عاملات اثيوبيات من المطار: تعوا اشتغلوا خدام عنا! فيديو

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://www.almada.org/عاملات-اثيوبيات-من-المطار-تعوا-اشتغلوا>

This controversial news article went viral, resulting in a deluge of racist comments on social media about migrant workers in Lebanon. The article reported reactions from Lebanese people to a video posted on social media, depicting migrant workers at the airport in Lebanon. Quoting from and describing the video, the report was titled: “Ethiopian domestic workers mocking Lebanese women.” The article pitted “ungrateful” migrant domestic workers against Lebanese women by reporting “enraging” quotes from the video and paring this with quotes from social media by angry Lebanese people. The report included a tweet from a Lebanese journalist who declared her anger by stating the actions depicted in the video are unacceptable as the women do not “look abused,” concluding that video is evidence of migrant workers’ “ingratitude and class hatred.” The article does not include any comment from migrant workers concerning this claim. In this way, the report perpetuates a racist narrative that Lebanon is a welcoming and loving country for migrant workers who are evidently undeserving of this love. The article also demonstrated negative bias through selecting similar videos from social media to depict that all migrant workers think and behave in the same ungrateful manner. Another article from Annahar (2020, November 30)²¹ reported about the same video, but included mention of a supposed rebuttal video produced by an Ethiopian migrant worker, yet no link was provided. Most media reporting on this story focused on the reaction of Lebanese people on social media with many articles quoting comments that used racist terms against migrant communities as a whole. The same article and video with fewer details were posted on Lebanon Files (2020, November 26)²² and Tayyar.org (2020, November 27).²³

Article 4: Cedar News. (2021, September 8).

في لبنان: قاصر يقتل عاملة منزلية بعد أن قتلت والده

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://cedarnews.net/news/lebanon/395426/>

This news article reported about the murder of a migrant worker allegedly by a young boy, and the murder of the young boy’s father allegedly by the migrant worker. The entire article revolves around the murdered father, featuring different parties close to the man and no sources are quoted with knowledge of the murdered woman, nor her embassy or anyone that has to do with her or with migrant workers in general. The article included quotes from the police, the minor son, and the chief of the village. These quotes reproduce a discourse of undeserving love, where the father is portrayed as a loving divorcee who cares for his household and the migrant worker, who’s alleged actions shocked the family and the community, is dehumanized as her murder by the son is portrayed as justified in avenging the murder of his loving father. In addition, the

²¹ <https://www.annahar.com/arabic/say7at/30112020095820617>

²² <https://tinyurl.com/3ffabt82>

²³ <https://www.tayyar.org/News/Lebanon/386263/>

article included a quote from the young boy that stated he always heard his father fighting with the migrant worker, but never knew why. Yet, the report does not investigate this issue or ask questions about the motives or provocations of the migrant worker that led to the violent incident. The murdered worker has no role in the story other than as the alleged murderer who deserved to be killed.

Article 5: The Daily Star. (2021, May 26).

Migrant workers hit by Lebanon crises, UN warns

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2021/May-26/520468-migrant-workers-hit-by-lebanon-crises-un-warns.ashx>

This news article reported on migrant workers in Lebanon, where “multiple crises” have resulted in “half of them [leaving] jobless.” Migrant workers are depicted as men and women who are suffering under the Kafala system. Because the article only quotes a representative from the International Organization for Migration, the UN's migration agency, migrant workers are quoted and therefore are portrayed as silent and tragic victims. The news report does not give migrant workers a platform to address the “multiple crises” that are impacting their lives and joblessness in Lebanon or motivating their leaving the country. The article mentioned that migrant workers in Lebanon are subject to exploitation, overwork, as well as physical, sexual, and emotional violence due to employers and the Kafala system, yet no migrant worker is quoted in the report.

Article 6: Farfour, H. (2021, June 30). *Al-Akhbar*.

عاملات المنازل: لبنانيات محلّ الأجنبيّات... والاستغلال مستمر

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://al-akhbar.com/Community/310009>

Migrant domestic workers are not the central focus of this news report; however they are indirectly the focus of this article and the main focus of the photo included, which depicts a migrant domestic worker wearing a t-shirt referencing the Domestic Workers Convention (C189). The article reports the increasing number of Lebanese women seeking employment as domestic workers. The article does not quote migrant domestic workers, but does quote a Lebanese domestic worker, the President of the Syndicate of Owners of Recruitment Agencies in Lebanon (SORAL), and a social worker in the anti-trafficking unit in “KAFA,” a local/feminist NGO. The article represents the “unfreedom” of domestic work and attributes these problems to the Labor Law and the Kafala system, while acknowledging the unfreedoms rooted in the Kafala system do not affect Lebanese women. Yet, Lebanese women being employed as domestic workers is portrayed as a new “phenomena” due to the economic situation in the country. The article positions Lebanese women as above being employed for domestic work that is normalized as “inferior” work better suited for racialized migrant women (as the photo depicts), who are preferred by Lebanese as live-in domestic workers. This negative discourse is perpetuated in one of the opening paragraphs that mentions working as a domestic worker was a last “resort” for women in Lebanon.

Neutral sentiment

The following six articles published in Arabic by one news agency, one TV station, and three news websites were coded as neutral in sentiment towards migrant workers and selected for

detailed content analysis. Five of the articles did not quote migrant workers concerning the news being reported, thus perpetuating a voiceless tragic victim stereotype. The one report (by NNA) that included quotes from migrant workers in Lebanon did not attribute the quotes by name or title. Five of the articles detailed problems with the Kafala system, though one article (by Tayyar) neglected to mention any problems experienced by migrant workers because it focused on the problems experienced by recruitment agencies. Some articles maintained a neutral tone, but also included negative frames that misrepresent migrant workers as commodities or tragic victims and dehumanize workers by talking about them rather than centering their narratives or opinions. Coding the following articles as neutral in tone does not mean that they did not include negative sentiments, rather the neutral tone was constructed in all of the articles by acknowledging problems with the Kafala system. This inclusion constructs a "balanced" or neutral tone for the reader, even though some of the articles include omissions and frames that are negative towards migrant workers.

Article 1: Tayyar. (2020, January 26).

النصف بعد 17 تشرين بالأرقام: استخدام العاملات الأجنبيات تقلص الى

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://www.tayyar.org/News/Lebanon/329233>

This article reported the dropping numbers of migrant workers in Lebanon. The interviews quoted were done with recruitment agencies and the Lebanese General Security. No migrant worker or representatives or ambassadors were interviewed to give their side of the story and discuss what issue the workers are facing to come or to leave Lebanon or the reasons why some countries are forbidding their citizens to migrate to Lebanon for work. Though the tone of the article was neutral, the language used is stereotypical, using racist and sexist tropes of migrant workers under the Kafala system, such as repeating references to “female domestic workers' or portraying the worker as a “commodity” for the customer (i.e. the citizen-employer). The tragic victims in this article are the agency owners who lost a profitable business due to the economic situation. The central focus of the report is on the inconveniences and losses that the agency is facing due to the economic crisis and the lira-USD exchange rate instability that caused their decreased ability to bring migrant domestic workers to Lebanon. The article excludes any mention of complaints against agencies for neglecting or violating the rights of migrant workers.

Article 2: Sharika wa Laken. (2020, January 21).

في أسبوع واحد انتحار عاملتين أجنبيتين في لبنان

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://tinyurl.com/t6d9f5an>

This article presented a short news piece that reported the death by suicide of two migrant domestic workers in one week. The deaths are reported in the article within the context of continuous suffering and abuse experienced by migrant workers that is elevated by the economic crisis. The news article depicts migrant domestic workers as tragic victims of the Kafala system in Lebanon. The news report, written by a feminist NGO, does not interview any migrant community members to comment on the occurrence of such suicide incidents in Lebanon or discuss who is responsible in these cases. As with most of the articles that report migrant domestic worker suicide cases, the piece is short, undetailed of any human element, the citizen-employers are not mentioned, and no mention of an investigation happening, or how the corpse of the deceased worker will be treated and sent back home respectfully. The article is

dehumanizing because the migrant workers are treated as numbers with no names and the image selected does not show a face or person, but rather depicts a racialized person's hand extending from the shadows lying on a floor.

Article 3: LBCI Lebanon News 2. (2020, September 12).

أسئلة واستفسارات حول عقد العمل الموحد للعمال الأجانب الذي طرحته وزارة العمل

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyIpJAs8MLI>

This video news broadcast reported neutral facts detailing the new unified contract for migrant domestic workers and what are the next steps to solidify it. The package begins by quoting the announcement on Twitter by the Minister of Labor about the new unified contract. The interview that followed broadcasted comments by a lawyer from KAFA a local/feminist NGO who framed the migrant workers as being the victims of the Kafala system. The lawyer also observed that the new contract is vague and that there is no enforced mechanism to apply it. This was followed by a sound bite from the Minister of Labor who provided a general comment describing the contract as a “victory” because workers will be allowed to keep their legal status whenever the contract is broken with the citizen-employer. The report did not include an interview or quote from migrant workers or representatives.

Article 4: Laure Ayoub. (2021, March 9). Legal Agenda.

محمد زبيب يقرأ نظام الكفالة في ظلّ الانهيار: أخشى تعميم ممارسة استغلال العمال الأجانب على المقيمين

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <http://www.legal-agenda.com/-محمد-زبيب-يقرأ-نظام-الكفالة-في-ظلّ-الان-الان/>

This article presented an interview with an economics journalist talking about the Kafala system. There are no migrant community members quoted in the write-up before the interview. The transcribed interview includes five questions and the expert's responses. The questions focus on the Kafala system, how it came to exist, how it exploits workers, and what it means for Lebanon and the Lebanese people. The expert points out how in the past both women and men worked as domestic workers. He indirectly mentioned the racism, sexism, and xenophobia that runs through the Kafala system, observing that citizen-employers discriminate against migrant workers because they consider migrants as vulnerable and inferior. The entire article is not biased towards any side however, only pointing out factual problems about the Kafala system. The article does not show anyone as a hero nor as a victim, but rather stated the facts of what is happening on the ground, framing the ending of the Kafala system as important for Lebanon and a human right for migrants.

Article 5: NNA. (2021, May 24). National News Agency.

جمعية عمومية لمندوبي العمال المهاجرين في الاتحاد الوطني للنقابات عرضت أوضاعهم

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/545987/>

This article reported that a general assembly was held at the headquarters of the National Federation of Trade Unions and Employees in Lebanon (FENASOL) on International Labor Day for a delegation of migrant workers. The article explains that the President of FENASOL opened the event and goes on to details what each party discussed sharing quotes from both the President and migrant worker delegates. The brief article acknowledged that the Kafala system applies to

both men and women as well as quoted migrant workers about their frustration and anger against their conditions of work and life under the Kafala system. The news report focused on the facts from the event, including the establishment of a memorandum on the rights of migrant workers and the action the FENASOL will take to follow-up with relevant authorities.

Article 6: Aghani. (2021, April 2).

Meheret! يحاكي واقع العمالات الأجنبيات في لبنان ويطالب بإلغاء نظام الكفالة

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCSPOTrbffw>

This video reportage covered the opening premier of a new fiction film called *Meheret* (2021) produced by KAFA, a feminist NGO, and directed by Fadi Haddad. The film depicts the struggles of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. In the video report, the main actors who portrayed migrant workers are interviewed along with the director and director of photography of the film. The interviewees mention the exploitation and overwork of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. The script writer, who was also interviewed, mentions that the film does not seek to not criticize the citizen-employers nor the migrant employees. She describes the film as telling the audience it is okay if any side is not comfortable and needs to leave. This quote appeals diplomatically to the assumed audience that includes citizen-employers.

Positive sentiment

The following six articles (four in English and two in Arabic) published by one news agency, one TV station, two newspapers, and one news website were coded as positive in sentiment towards migrant workers and selected for detailed content analysis. Five of the articles did not quote migrant workers concerning the news being reported, thus perpetuating a voiceless tragic victim stereotype. By contrast, the report by *The Daily Star* mentioned the name and nationality of each migrant worker interviewed. Some of the articles included photos that contrasted the positive framing in the article. The positive tone in some of the articles also masked the use of negative racist, sexist, or xenophobic discourses.

Article 1: Sewell, A. (2020, October 28). *L'Orient Today*.

A new contract for domestic workers has been temporarily stopped from going into effect.

Here's what's going on.

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1238540/new-contract-for-migrant-domestic-workers-on-hold-pending-the-results-of-a-lawsuit-by-the-syndicate-of-the-owners-of-the-worker-recruitment-agencies.html>

The news article explained why the new unified contract for migrant domestic workers was stopped. Details are included about the discriminatory components of the Kafala system. Quotes are presented from the judicial council's ruling, the Minister of Labor, and various advocacy organizations for migrant rights, including representatives from Human Right Watch representative, the International Labour Organization, Legal Agenda, and the Anti-Racist Movement among others. However, the article also included a quote from the Syndicate of Owners of Recruitment Agencies in Lebanon (SORAL) framing the agencies and citizen-employers as the victims of the updated contract. No migrant community members were interviewed to see what their opinion is on the issue and what is happening. No comments were

included from the embassies whose nationals work as migrant workers in Lebanon. Although the article is positive towards migrant workers, the focus is on the opinions of officials, advocates, citizen-employers and recruitment agencies who speak about or for migrant workers. The absence of migrant workers' personal experiences or opinions frames migrant workers as voiceless tragic victims. The photo published with the article further enforces this framing by depicting a masked Ethiopian domestic worker who is sitting among bags in front of the Ethiopian Embassy in Beirut. Her body sits narrowly on one bag, while she holds another bag over one shoulder and clutches a much larger bag next to her. Her body is angled away from the camera, but her eyes appear over her mask and stare down into the camera lens. She appears alone, we do not see her mouth. She is identified in the caption only as "An Ethiopian domestic worker" and not quoted in the story. The photo of her without a quote in the news report, represents the unnamed migrant as a voiceless tragic victim.

Article 2: FitzHerbert, L., & Nadeem, M. (2020, March 4). *The Daily Star*.

Migrant workers in Lebanon seek exit amidst crisis.

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2020/Mar-04/502184-migrant-workers-in-lebanon-struggle.ashx>

This article is one of the rare articles that reported on migrant workers in Lebanon following the economic collapse that included their point of view. The article presented quotes by migrant workers and migrant activists as well as from officials and advocates, including a Colonel from General Security, a lawyer from KAFA (local/feminist NGO), the ambassadors of the Philippines and Bangladesh, and a coordinator at the Migrant Community Center. The article featured migrant workers in Lebanon from different nationalities and work statuses as well as both genders. When referring to the migrant workers interviewed, the article always mentioned her or his name. Migrant workers are depicted as spokespersons, eyewitnesses, and experts in discussing the issues they are facing due to the economic crisis. The news report mentioned the exploitation and overwork of migrant workers, such as withholding of passport and salary, and denial of a day off, or freedom of movement under the Kafala system. The article also details how migrant workers are being abused in different ways by agencies and citizen-employers without painting them as tragic victims. The photo included with the article depicts the aftermath of the economic crisis for migrant workers, who are shown crowded outside of the Bengali Embassy in Beirut. While the photo effectively represents the magnitude of the problem by showing the size of the crowd, the image contrasts with the article's framing by creating a visual superiority for the viewer through the high angle looking out over the faceless and chaotic crowd below.

Article 3: NNA. (2020, September 5). National News Agency.

نضال لأجل الإنسان تنوء بعقد العمل الموحد

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/500867/>

The short news report focused on a human rights NGO from Lebanon celebrating a new unified contract and how it will improve working conditions for migrant workers. Although the news article is positive towards migrant workers, the report failed to interview any migrant worker or migrant activist. The quotes used from the NGO mentions their opposition to the abuse and mistreatment that migrant workers suffer because of the current law. Somehow the article never specifically mentioned the Kafala system.

Article 4: LBCI Lebanon. (2021, January 22).

للعمال الأجانب: هذه الخطوات لمساعدتكم خلال جائحة كورونا

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/d/corona-virus/571907/lebanon-news-lbc/ar>

This report presented a tutorial video for migrant workers “especially illegal ones” on how to get help during corona. The title constructs a savior approach and superiority towards migrant workers who need help or saving. The report addresses migrant workers and their citizen-employers, but no quotes from migrant workers are included. However, the workers are addressed as migrant workers, yet, in the graphics most of the time they are portrayed as migrant domestic workers. The reporter adds a voiceover to explain the situation of this migrant worker without mentioning that she is a migrant domestic worker, but the illustration shows that she is. The next visuals shown is a group of migrant workers, but the woman with dark skin is the one holding a box of vegetables while the white woman stands all with her hands closed over each other. The main characters, whether the Red Cross, or members of MSF are all men. The VO uses grammar that indicates that the reporting is talking about a man only. When they show a nurse doing a PCR, the VO of the reporter mentions that the nurse is a man, although the visual shows the nurse is a woman. In an indirect way, the report shows that several NGOs and a hospital are there caring for migrant workers, even though the report says Lebanese people are unable to enter a hospital due to the pandemic. While the overall tone is positive, this masks the sexist and xenophobic language used in the script and the overall silencing of migrant workers voices.

Article 5: Lewis, E. (2021, February 19). *L'Orient Today*.

Domestic workers who leave their jobs can no longer be accused of a crime. Here's why that's important.

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1252551/domestic-workers-who-leave-their-jobs-can-no-longer-be-accused-of-a-crime-heres-why-thats-important.html>

This news article reported a victory for migrant domestic workers, resulting from a decision issued by the Lebanese General Security providing migrant domestic workers the right to leave their job without it being considered as a crime. The article explained why this decision is needed and how it affects the lives of migrant domestic workers on different levels in the face of the Kafala system. The article quotes government officials and NGOs about their work to support domestic migrant workers; however, the worker's voice is not heard in the article. The approach of the article does not quote any member of the migrant community and therefore frames migrant workers in a voiceless tragic victim position. Yet, the picture included with the article contrasts with this framing by depicting unnamed migrant workers protesting their work and living conditions, and raising a sign that says, “Our lives matter.”

Article 6: Zrein, R. (2021, January 22). The 961.

This Lebanese NGO Is Exposing Abusers Of Migrant Domestic Workers.

Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://www.the961.com/ngo-exposing-abusers-of-migrant-workers/>

This article focused on the work of the NGO This is Lebanon, explaining its history, work, and how their campaigns have helped migrant workers. No quotes are featured in the article, but instead the short text focuses on describing the NGO and their work exposing citizen-employer abusers of migrant workers in Lebanon. The article's original images are not captioned, but seem to depict migrant domestic workers who are all women and racialized African. Other linked images from Instagram are included from the NGO's campaigns and other posts by or about migrant workers. The report ends with a link to donate to the NGO.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: When the central focus in articles is on migrants, most news reports typically do not include any personal experience, opinion, or quote from a migrant community member. A better practice would be, making sure to include in the first paragraphs the point of view of migrant community members and their comments on what is happening, whether the news are about the Kafala system in general, or specifically about human rights violations or even a positive step towards achieving their rights as migrants. Migrant community members should be invited to comment as spokespersons, eyewitnesses, and experts.

Recommendation 2: Journalists must recognize the diversity of jobs performed by migrants and that these jobs under Kafala are often different for migrant men and women. Migrant women in Lebanon typically work in occupations such as domestic work or for cleaning companies, etc., whereas migrant men are typically employed by cleaning companies, gas stations, in construction or agriculture, as janitors, etc. Most articles assume that migrant workers are women, and many assume migrant workers are migrant domestic (women) workers. News reports, especially written in Arabic, tend to refer to migrant domestic workers collectively as being women instead of using grammar or wording that acknowledges that migrant domestic workers under the Kafala system can be women or men. Instead of assuming the gender of any migrant community, a best practice is to accurately refer to the different genders of migrant communities under the Kafala system, including migrant domestic workers. A better practice would also show that some migrant community members of all genders in Lebanon work outside the scope of domestic work.

Recommendation 3: News of a Lebanese citizen committing suicide is published in emotional details by the media. Yet articles covering the death by suicide of migrant workers dehumanizes them by usually being short, written in a dismissive tone, and missing any human element. Journalists should refrain from practices that offer only brief coverage, use expressions like "mysterious circumstances," and offer no follow up. A better practice would be to mention the name, where appropriate, of the migrant worker and include a human element to the story.

Recommendation 4: When covering human rights violations experienced by migrants in Lebanon, the majority of news reports dehumanize migrant workers, especially in reporting suicide, murder, or abuse. Better practices would name and quote migrant community members, where appropriate, in articles talking about their harm with the goal of humanizing and shifting

power to migrant workers, and not reducing them to numbers or victims. Journalists should put individual cases within context of ongoing human rights abuses under Kafala by connecting individual incidents to structural violence and questioning if/why no investigations are done by the authorities.

Recommendation 5: Similar to the point above, when the death of a migrant worker is reported, whether, by suicide or murder, the photos published frame migrant workers as defenseless victims or disrespectfully show a migrant's corpse. There are rarely any follow-up news reports about the investigation unless the event was sensationalized in the original report or the story went viral. A better practice would be to publish a humanizing and respectful photo (such as a portrait), and pair this image with better follow-up on the events after the death of a migrant worker is reported, following-up on the investigation or lack of. Also where any live-in migrant dies in the home of their employer, reports should name the citizen-employer or the recruitment agency associated with the case, when possible, to foster accountability.

Recommendation 6: When it comes to murder of a migrant worker or an alleged murder by a migrant worker, there is a recurring news media practice that frames the citizen-employer or the deceased Lebanese citizen as a victim. Most news reports of alleged crimes by migrant workers do not elaborate on the conditions or situation that preceded the events, nor do they mention when it is self-defense which is often the case. A better practice would be to humanize the accused migrant worker and, where appropriate, provide the opportunity to show their side of the story, follow-up on the investigation's development, and center the migrant community member's account of the incidents.

Recommendation 7: Only a few reports portray migrant workers in leadership roles or strong positions, most news articles either victimize migrant workers or silence them. When there are campaigns and activism led by the migrant workers in Lebanon, the events are poorly covered in the news. Photos and footage are used to visually sensationalize the events in news reports. A best practice would be to document these occurrences through images of migrant community members participating in and leading the events, representing migrant workers as survivors, fighters, and residents who have rights. Such photos should be paired with quotes from interviews with migrant community members, documenting their motives for the action and explaining the change being advocated for.

Recommendation 8: Similar to the point above, when articles discuss the topic of migrant workers' rights or cover their protests and social movements, migrant community members are less often interviewed. Most local media usually interview NGOs, lawyers, employees at the labor ministry, and representatives of recruitment agencies. Better practices would be for journalists reporting on topics directly related to migrant workers to include interviews with migrant community members to center their narratives and place these events within the context of the long history of organizing in Lebanon by migrant workers for their rights.

Recommendation 9: When reporting on crises in Lebanon (economy, Covid-19, etc.), most reports scapegoat migrants and pit Lebanese citizens against them. Some reports publish racist comments by Lebanese people or officials that frame migrant workers as the cause behind Lebanon's multiple crises, such as the lira-USD exchange rate instability. A better practice

would be to refrain from publishing racist comments, avoiding framing the story as Lebanese versus migrant workers, and instead focus on reporting the systemic problems, such as those that produced the economic crisis that impacts both migrant and Lebanese workers.

Limitations

The research methodology for this media monitoring report compiles a random sample of 197 headlines (152 in Arabic and 45 in English) through keyword searches (including Kafala, migrant worker, domestic migrant worker, etc., and the equivalents for both pronouns in Arabic). However, there are limitations for this method as some articles do not show unless there is a string of keywords tied together (such as searching Kafala and domestic migrant worker and African). Furthermore, Google searches for certain keywords will bury redundant articles with the same topic or title. The methodology for this report does not account for redundant articles because searching for a single keyword on Google buried these results.

Searching with a string of keywords reveals a “trend” whereby local media outlets copy and paste the same or nearly the same content of the articles from one website to the other without citing the original source most of the time. Future methods to locate redundant articles should also focus on themes and topics rather than just on keywords. For example there is the case of the articles reporting on the video of Ethiopian migrant workers allegedly mocking Lebanese at the airport. At least four local media platforms posted the same article with the same title, but searching by keyword shows results for only one of them (depending on the search engine optimization). However, if a Google search is done by the title or topic of the article, all the local and even regional news reports and videos appear.

Given this limitation, a recommendation for the Anti-Racist Movement or future media monitoring reports to better track more comprehensively the media published about migrants in Lebanon is to create several strings of keywords and current news topics to complement searches by keyword. This list of keywords, search strings, and topics can be updated whenever a new event or incident arises and be used to set well configured Google alerts. This way more news reports concerning migrants will be documented.

About the study

In 2020, the Anti-Racist Movement (ARM) in Lebanon and the Institute of Media Research and Training, with funding from WACC, facilitated a project on migrant communication rights in Lebanon. The project worked to prepare a Migrant Community Newsroom for migrants in Lebanon and a media monitoring report that investigated the coverage of migrants in Lebanese news media. The methods used in the media monitoring report include both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of news published by Lebanese magazines, news agencies, TV stations, newspapers, and news websites. The report focuses on news stories collected from January 2020 until September 2021, with a sample size of 197 headlines (152 in Arabic and 45 in English) for quantitative analysis and a sample size of 18 news reports (13 in Arabic and 5 in English) for qualitative analysis. The research findings of the report informed nine practical recommendations for journalists to improve the representation of migrant workers in Lebanese news media. The media monitoring report demonstrated that better news media practices are needed, whereas the report's recommendations and the content from the Migrant Community Newsroom provided a path forward for promoting and achieving the communication rights of migrants in Lebanon.

Institute of Media Research and Training

The Institute of Media Research and Training (IMRT) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) is an interdisciplinary center for media research, training, production and advocacy. It aims to produce and transmit scientific knowledge and media content that examines how media and digital communication systems shape and are shaped by local and regional politics, economics, and cultures; to develop media literacy curricula and programs and offer academic and professional training that advances media education in the region; and to advocate for ethical, professional, and equitable communication laws and practices and a free media environment. The institute builds on media literacy theory that aims to empower citizens with creative and critical thinking skills and digital competencies that help them become civically engaged global citizens capable of innovatively harnessing the power of media technologies to advance human rights, peace, and social justice.

Lebanese American University

The Lebanese American University is a leading, nonsectarian, private higher education institution in Lebanon. It operates under a charter from the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York and is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and colleges.

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