

The Contribution Migrant Domestic Workers make to the Global Economy

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Photo by: Justice 4 Domestic Workers (J4DW)
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Executive Summary

As a migrant domestic worker myself and with the domestic worker visa under threat of being abolished I wanted to see what contribution MDW's make to the global economy. I decided to interview a number of domestic workers and to see in this small way if in fact they do make a contribution to the global economy. There are 14 domestic workers in my survey all of whom come from around the world including the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Nigeria, Brazil, Morocco and Pakistan. I interviewed eleven personally and the other three I asked them to respond to the questionnaire I sent to them by Facebook. I also interviewed an additional 9 in a Focus group. The results of my survey shows that MDW's do in fact make a significant contribution to the global economy.

My survey identified that 12 of the 14 employers are professionals – earning good salaries, paying tax and National Insurance and spending money in the United Kingdom. They are free to do this because they have domestic workers to care for their children and to do the housework. In my survey of the 14 employers, I discovered that 30 children are looked after by migrant domestic workers. I also identified that the duties carried out by the domestic workers include: cleaning, cooking, ironing, gardening, child minding, taking the children to school and the dogs walking. They worked from 8 -13 hours a day. Most of them worked overtime, some without pay. Two in the survey worked part-time.

The employers in my survey come from the Far East, the Middle East, West Africa and Latin America.

The domestic workers come mainly from the Far East, Latin America and Africa clearly showing the internationality and global aspect of the world economy. All of the domestic workers in my survey make the necessary sacrifice living and working in the UK mainly because in this way they can earn money and support their families.

As part of this survey it was important for me to learn how the money earned by the migrant domestic workers is spent. I discovered that they send home from £250 - £1,000 each month. This money is used to feed, educate and support their families in their home country. In the UK the money is spent on rent, food, clothing, transportation etc.

Chapter 1:

Central aim

My main reason for carrying out this research is to show that migrant domestic workers make a significant contribution to the global economy. As of now MDWs in the UK have basic rights as workers specifically a right to change employer. They also have access to the Labour Courts when the employer doesn't pay their wages or denies them holidays and proper working hours. The government is about to introduce new legislation withdrawing those rights. Under the new legislation MDWs coming to the UK with their employer will be given a visa that allows them only six months. They will not be allowed to change employer. This means that even when they are badly treated i.e. not paid wages, sleeping on the floor, being physically or mentally abused they won't have access to redress. They will be expected to leave the country at the end of the six months. The government says that domestic work in the private household is low or non-skilled, that anyone can do it and that there are plenty people here in the UK who will do this work thereby reducing unemployment. But, I hope to show that the contrary is the case.

As a migrant domestic worker myself, I know that not many people want to do live-in domestic work. I also know that having the right to change employer is very important in terms of being able to access the rights MDWs now have as workers. I also feel that we do very important work both in caring for children and doing all the household tasks. This enables the employers go out to work.

From the focus group, this emerged: MDWs seldom avail benefits because for them as long as they have work they could support themselves and their families. On the other hand they free employers who are mostly high powered professionals. MDWs pay tax and national insurance. Migrant domestic workers are therefore major contributor to the economy and society.

(ii) The purpose of your research

I decided to carry out this research because I myself am a domestic worker and a member of a domestic workers organisation, Justice 4 Domestic Workers. The present Government is planning to change the domestic worker visa which will take away all the rights as workers presently enjoyed by migrant domestic workers. This legislation will be introduced on the 6th April 2012. This then will have serious implications for future migrant domestic workers coming to the UK. Under the new legislation the government is proposing that migrant domestic workers will be admitted on a six month visa without the right to change employer. At the end of the six months the domestic worker will have to leave the country which will make life very difficult for the employer, but more so for the domestic worker herself. Very often domestic workers get into debt going abroad to work and are expected to repay loans etc as soon as they go abroad. Many employers don't pay their staff any salary while in the UK, and so the worker gets into more debt and also the family at home will have difficulty surviving. So, the domestic worker will be forced to leave their employer before the six months is up and they will go underground and work as undocumented. This of course is bad both for the worker and for the society. The worker will not have access to any rights or benefits e.g. health care, etc and will become criminalised i.e. working without the right to do so in the UK. The new employer with whom they will work won't be able to pay tax or NI for them as they will be employing undocumented workers and won't be able to declare that.

The government says that migrants are taking British jobs and that domestic workers are low or non-skilled and that anybody can do this job. They only want the brightest and richest migrants in this country. They want to reduce net migration from hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands. Essentially migrants are being blamed for the economic crisis.

Through my research I want to show that migrant domestic workers rather than being a liability are in fact making a major contribution to the global economy.

(iii) Literature review

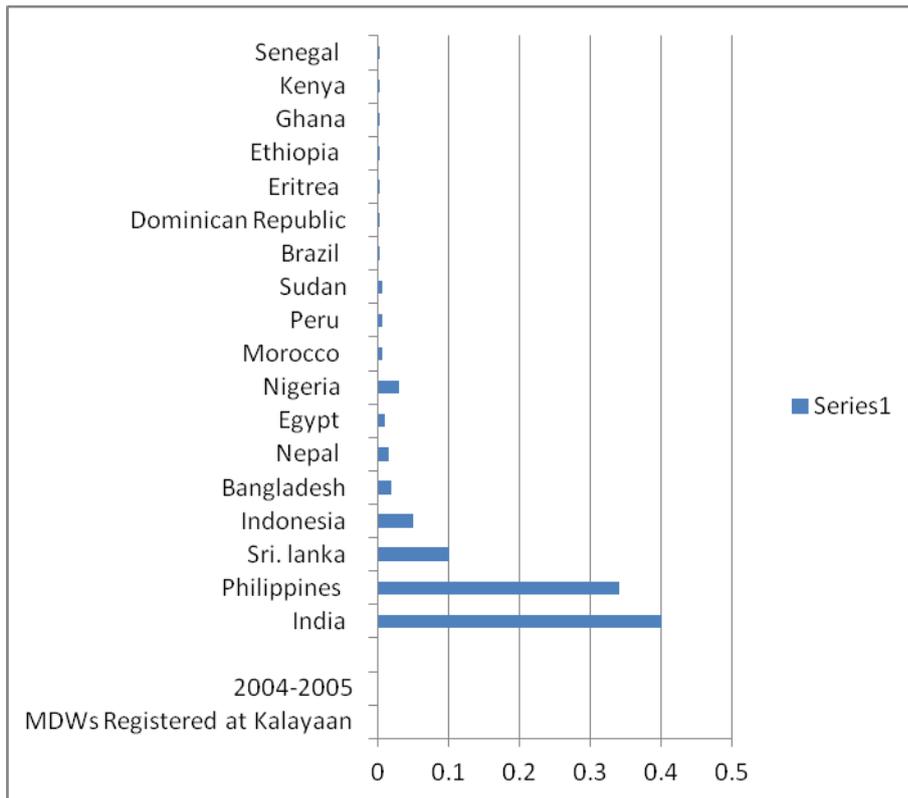
Migrant Domestic workers enter the UK in the Overseas Domestic Worker Visa under two categories, one is the domestic worker in private household, they have rights under employment law including right to change employer and right to settlement under the old system and another one is the domestic workers in diplomatic household who have no labour rights as of the domestic workers in private household, they can only change employer diplomat to diplomat employer but they do have right to settlement after working 5 years continuously in the UK. In April 6, 2012 all these rights have been abolished.

Kalayaan and Justice 4 Domestic Workers (J4DW)

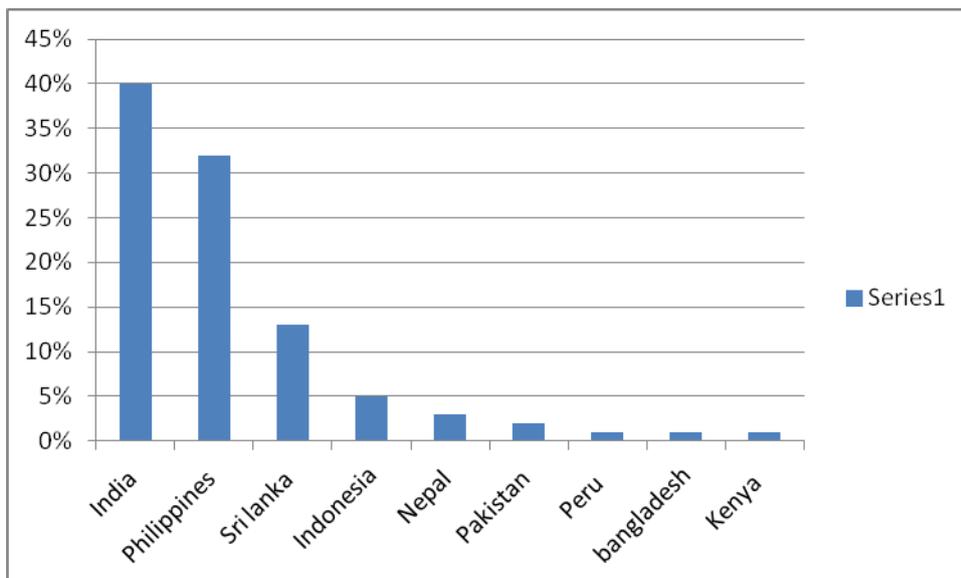
Kalayaan is an organization offering immigration advice from experts that provide services to MDWs and campaign for the rights and welfare of MDWs. Many MDWs registered at Kalayaan when they first escaped from abusive employers or when they change employer for various reasons, Kalayaan has collected data and information on what kind of abused.

Justice for Domestic Workers was established on March 15, 2009. It is an organization of multi-national MDWs which manage by themselves with the support of individuals. We help, share educate ourselves to support our fellow MDWs in need and campaign to improve the living and working conditions of domestic workers and fight the change in immigration policy that affect domestic workers. Both Kalayaan and J4DW are campaigning to restore the ODW Visa and the ratification of ILO C189 on the rights of domestic workers.

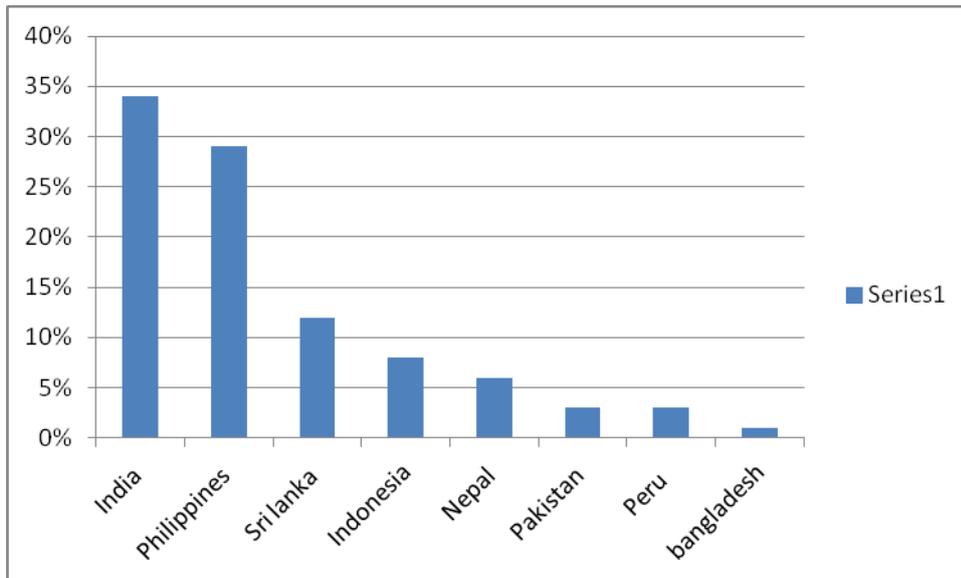
Registered MDWs in Kalayaan 2004-2005



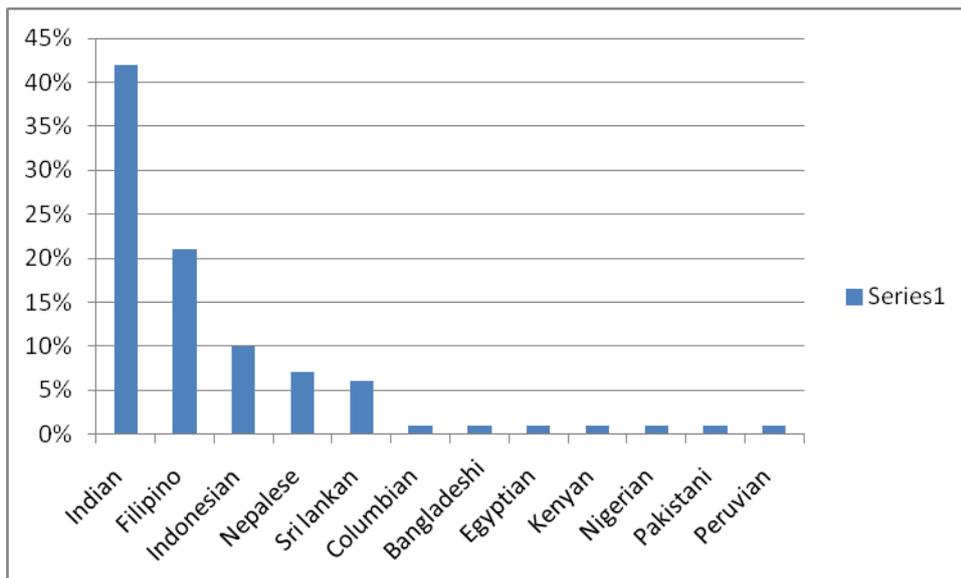
MDWs registered at Kalayaan 2005-2006



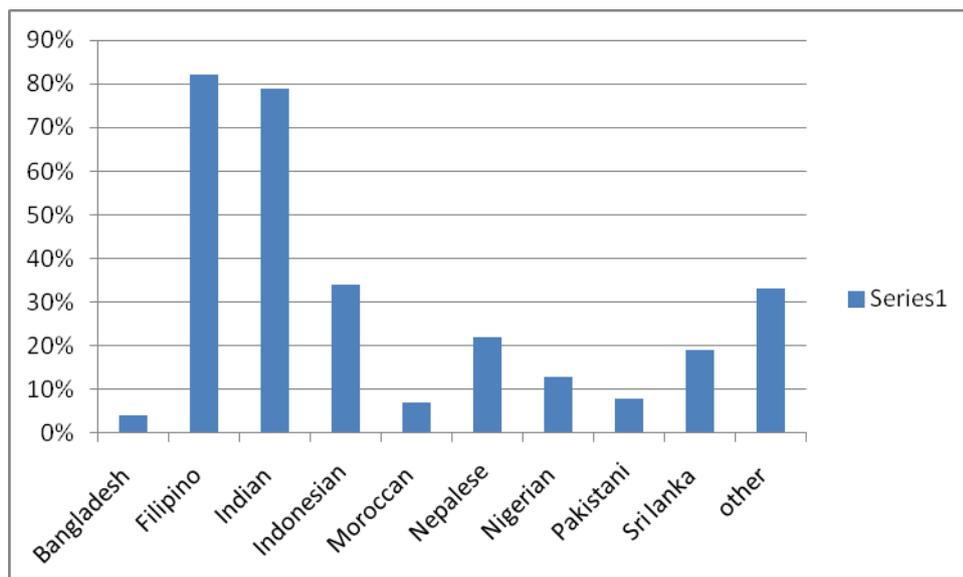
MDWs Registered at Kalayaa April 2007- March 2008



MDWs registered at Kalyaan 2008-2009



MDWs registered at Kalayaan 2010-2011



The British Government says

Migrants are taking British jobs. They want the brightest and richest migrants in this country. Domestic workers are low or non-skilled, anyone can do this job. Net migration is to reduce from hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands. Migrants are being blamed for the economic crisis.

My Response

Based on the survey I have carried out it is clear that British people will not do the work that migrant domestic workers do. All migrant domestic workers in the UK have been brought here by their employers so they are not taking anybody else's job. Some people say au-pairs will do this work but we know that au-pairs come to the UK for a different purpose they come to study the language and culture. They are only supposed to do light house work and to be treated as a member of the family. They should be given pocket money. On the other hand migrant domestic workers are highly skilled and multi-task all the time. They wash, clean, iron, shop, cook, bring and collect the children to school and help with the homework. On net migration which the government wants to reduce the numbers coming in to the country however under the work permits system for

domestic workers it is clear that only small numbers stay in the UK e.g. according to Kalayaan survey only 0.5% apply for settlement. (In 2009 only 750 applied for settlement).

Implications for domestic workers if visa is withdrawn:

12 of the 14 will be seriously affected by the new legislation (one has ILR and the other has a diplomatic domestic worker visa so will not be affected). They won't have the right to change employer, therefore they won't be able to access their rights as workers – e.g. If the employer doesn't pay their salary, with-holds their passport or abuses them they will not be able to access legal protection

If they leave their employer they will become undocumented, without any right to live or work in the UK. The maximum stay with the new visa will be 6 months, so whether they leave their employer or stay with them, after the 6 months, they will become undocumented workers

This will not only affect their life here in the UK but it will also seriously impinge on the lives of their families, who may go hungry, education for the children will have to stop and if they get ill they won't be able to access health care.

According to the responses of the MDW`s in the survey they will be very sad and some expressed they will die.

The ILO Convention 189, Decent Work for Domestic Workers

The International Labour Organization (ILO) take a positive step forward in protecting domestic workers including children from exploitation, abuse and trafficking This ILO Convention 189 on the rights of domestic workers was adopted last June 2011 and will benefit more than 100 million domestic workers in the world. Unfortunate on June 16, 2011 during the adoption of this convention, the UK government was one of only eight countries that abstained from voting in its favour, along with the Czech Republic, El Salvador, Malaysia, Panama, Singapore, Sudan and Thailand.

“We are moving the standards system of the ILO into the informal economy for the first time, and this is a breakthrough of great significance,” said Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General. “History is being made. Bringing the domestic workers into the fold of our values is a strong move, for them and for all workers who aspire to decent work, but it also has strong implications for migration and of course for gender equality,”

“This is a truly major achievement,” said Manuela Tomei, Director of the ILO’s Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, calling the new standards “robust, yet flexible.” Ms. Tomei added that the new standards make clear that “domestic workers are neither servants nor ‘members of the family’, but workers. And after today they can no longer be considered second-class workers.”

http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS_157891/lang--en/index.htm?t=dXNlcmlkPTY2ODEsZW1haWxpZD0yMQ%3D%3D

The Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC)

The Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) is the professional body dedicated to representing the interests of the UK’s £19.7 billion recruitment industry in Parliament, Whitehall, and the European Commission and to press and opinion formers.

REC represent 3,750 Corporate Members, with more than 7,700 branches, and 5,550 Individual Members within the Institute of Recruitment Professionals.

In 2011, because of the proposals of the Government to abolish the Overseas Domestic Worker Visa, REC did a survey on impact on the employers if the ODW Visa will be abolished. Employers responded positively that it will have a huge negative effect to their family life and work.

(iv) Methodology

In carrying out my survey I used two different methodologies:

1. One on one interviews
2. Focus Group

AN interview can be a face but generally a one to one interaction where a research asked a series of questions to gain/ explore a point of view and gather more in-depth information that is confidential.

A focus group is a group discussion led by an interviewer/moderator with some questions/ prompts to explore a group's point of view. The participants, ideally 8 -12 participants, share ideas and opinions. They are selected because they share some attribute such as they are all Domestic workers.

The interview was appropriate because it allowed 121 interactions and the interviewer asking questions about their lives, why they are here, how they spend their money – it allowed me to explore confidential issues that may not be appropriate for a focus group.

The focus group allowed debate and lots of ideas to come out in a short space of time. It was also an appropriate tool because I am a DW and they were willing to talk to me and trusted.

In the one on one interview I was able to gain a lot of information from those whom I interviewed specifically on how the new legislation would impinge on the life and work of migrant domestic workers in the UK. The interviewees were very open and shared how they manage in their work with their present employers. They talked about the benefit of being able to change employer as each of them had bad experiences with the employer who brought them to the UK. They also shared how they felt the new legislation would impact on their life here in the UK and also on their family at home. I found this system a

good way of getting specific information and I was happy to see how open my fellow domestic workers were with me. The challenge for me was in finding the time to interview the participants and also in arranging for the interviewees. I found it interesting to see how the workers with good employers were easier to communicate with and to arrange the time off so that I could interview them. Whereas, those who had strict or harsh employers found it difficult to ask for the time off, even though it may have been their day off, if the employer wanted them at home.

With the Focus Group, in one sense it was easier as I was able to organise the group at one of the Sunday meetings. Again, I found them very willing to share their experiences and in fact sometimes too much information was coming in at one time. They all wanted to share and even the quieter ones in the group were encouraged to share when the others were talking. The challenge for me was to try and keep notes of what each one was sharing. I had to be very disciplined and to try and maintain order in the group. At times I found it difficult to keep to the issues I needed answers to. But I felt at the end of the focus group session that I had gained good information from the participants.

(v) Ethical considerations

In carrying out the survey I was very conscious that I was working with migrant domestic workers of different nationalities. I was aware that there were different levels of understanding in speaking and writing in English and so I had to be very particular and make sure that the interviewees knew what I was asking of them and that they understood the questions to the best of their ability.

I was also aware of the cultural differences in the group and was sensitive to that when interviewing and when managing the focus group. The group consists of various religions and none so I kept that in mind when working with them.

I used a consent form where the participants gave their consent to take part. Through this I explained the research.

I told the participants what they told us would be confidential. This is very important to protect the DWs. Some of them didn't want their name published as they don't want their employers to know their names/ to find out. Therefore all of the research is anonymised.

The data and information was protected as I have ensured it was securely stored with J4DW. We didn't use names even in this recording. We also agreed that we can use all the data whenever we need it for J4DW's advocacy work.

Chapter 2: Research findings

My research findings are as follows: out of the 14 domestic workers I interviewed 12 of them worked for professional employers. These employers earn huge salaries; they pay tax and national insurance and spend money in the UK. They are free to do this because they have domestic workers who live-in, look after their children and do all the household chores thus freeing the employer to go out to work. In my survey I discovered that in these 14 households 30 children are cared for by migrant domestic workers. I also identified the duties carried out by the domestic workers include: cleaning, cooking, ironing, gardening, child minding and this includes helping the children with their school work and taking them to and from school, and walking the dog. They worked from 8-13 hours a day. Most of them worked overtime, some without pay. Two in the survey were working part-time.

How their money is spent:

I discovered that the migrant domestic workers I interviewed send from £250 - £1000 home each month. This money is used to feed, educate, pay for health care needs and in general support their families in their home countries. In the UK the money is spent on rent, food, clothing, transportation etc.

“My husband is politician in my home village in Indonesia, we don’t want corruption so salary is not enough; through my domestic work in the UK, I managed to build 2 Nurseries in my home town for the poor children to have education and I also have fruits plantation which all these could help to employ people in my village.”

“Back home in India, my husband work for a very low salary not enough for us to survive, I have to help out for better living and education of my children.”

“I used to be an office worker in Philippines, it maybe professional job but salary is not enough for our living so better to work abroad.”

“In Nigeria, I used to have tailor shop but it collapsed, I need to support my family so no other choice because no job that can be enough to sustain for our living.”

The multi-national aspect:

The employers in my survey come from the Far East, the Middle East, West Africa and Latin America. The domestic workers come from the Far East, Latin America and African countries. All of the domestic workers make the necessary sacrifice living and working in the UK mainly because they can earn money and support their families.

“At the age of 15, I was forced to work in a garment factory 13 hours a day 6 days a week. My salary was less than £4 a week. Life became even harder when my father passed away in 1995. I didn’t even see sunlight in the factory. I felt like a slave trapped in a building with no way to escape because my family would starve if I didn’t work. In 2000, my mother became very ill. I couldn’t afford her hospitalization, so in 2003 I decided to work abroad as a domestic worker. I went to Dubai because this was the fastest way to secure a job in another country. I worked for a good family there, but the hours were long for only £180 a month. In 2004, I came to the UK but just two years later, my mother passed away. I begged my employer to let me go home, but she refused. She said there was no need for me to go home because my mother was already dead. All I could do was cry. “

“Determine to give my children the decent living which they deserved, I came upon to choose between family and a job that will provide my children a better life and a better future. It was the most difficult and painful decision to leave my family behind in search for a decent job in a foreign land where I was even unsure of what kind of life awaits me but this was the only way I could think of. I could hear my children cried as I walked away from them, I shut my ears, with tears in my eyes I open my heart filled with love and hope for my children that they will never be starve and they will never suffer the way I did. Living in a foreign land was far difficult than I expected, I could hardly swallow the food; it was very hard living without my children. At first I wasn’t even sure if I would be safe behind this close door but the only thing I knew at that time I need to survive no

matter how difficult, lonely and frightening the life could be, I had to survive. Days, months and years passed by, no one and nothing could fill the emptiness in me of living away from my family but again I left with no choice. Life was tough and can be cruel with the rise of unemployment and low wages continue to strike the people back home, the rise of exporting manpower instead of goods and materials continue as well, settling back home seems I could find no answer.”

Existing Findings research on Employers hiring MDWs in recruitment agency:

This findings show the importance of MDWs in the work fields of employers and their family that allow them to do their own job and also the employment trust that grow within an employee and employer relationship with the employment and the problems they would face if Governments remove the overseas domestic worker visa.

The REC has conducted a survey in conjunction with several recruitment agencies that provide non-EU domestic workers to assess the impact it would have of the removal of overseas domestic workers visa and the alternatives to employing non-EU Domestic workers.

- 61.5 percent of clients use a domestic worker on nanny/housekeeper role.
- 34.6% believe that this appoint will last 4-6 years, whilst 30.2% expect that the candidate will be with them for 2-4 years.
- 65.3% believed that “not” employing a domestic worker on a domestic worker visa would affect their lives “badly”.
- 76.9% believed that this would affect their home life badly.
- 76.9% believed that this would affect their family life badly.
- 84.6% explained how they use a domestic worker to help care for a family worker.

If they were unable to employ a worker on domestic worker visa 30.7% said they would stop or reduce their hours of work at work and while 30.7% said they would attempt to hire an EU national.

What advantages do clients see on a non-EU worker on domestic worker visa?

- “Cultural differences often mean they have a different work ethic and can have more respect for the employers space in the home.”
- “They have far training in every aspect of household duties and in caring profession, we simply cannot get non-EU Workers to do such a good job and with such dedication.”
- “They are more willing to split the role between the household and children for instance. I have employed non-EU citizens and they do object in doing household chores and therefore not as appropriate and flexible to our needs,”
- “We didn’t really specifically want a non-EU nanny/housekeeper but Marie by far was the best person for the job and we made the right decision as she is great fun for our son and very caring.”
- “It is because they have been in the family for so long that they are a part of it.”
- “Since my wife developed MS, we have needed a full time housekeeper/nanny to look after her and our 8 years old twins. We have only once a person who was an EU citizen who applied for the job, and due to undisclosed medical problem they left after 2 days.”

Reference: Domestic Workers Visa Survey Results by Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC).

Migrant workers 'help UK economy'

A report last year claimed there were 1.5m foreign workers in the UK

Migrant workers have boosted the UK economy, with their influx not having a negative effect on employment or wage levels, the TUC has argued.

Foreign workers made a positive net economic contribution, it said, with their share of tax paid exceeding the cost of supplying public services.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6766003.stm>

Chapter 3: Discussion

All migrant domestic workers have been brought in the UK by employers so they are not taking anybody's job. Based on my survey, employers could do their respective jobs because of the domestic workers who can look after their children, household and look after the elderly as well. They are there when employers need them unlike for local British nanny, they too have to look after their own family so they couldn't adapt to a situation that they can be available any time the employers need them so that's where the migrant domestic workers filled the gaps in this job market where they are much needed to allow others to work and enjoy their social life even having work and family. Some Au pairs do this work as well but they come to the UK to study the language and culture. They normally just help out with some light house work and babysitting but should be treated as family members of the family and should be given pocket money therefore they couldn't provide the needs of employers of full time domestic workers.

According to the existing survey by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation that majority of employers used domestic workers on overseas domestic worker visa because they are more experienced, adaptable to various tasks and flexible to the time they need them. MDWs allow them to work and continue to enjoy social life even having children. They also have the special loving and caring attitude towards children and family.

A report published by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), migrant Workers contribute to the British economy, they haven't caused mass unemployment or held down wages as some would have us believe. But that doesn't mean they are willing to take low paid jobs and are flexible, they should abuse and exploited and that more need to be done to recognize this contribution and protect the vulnerable migrant workers.

How their money is spent:

MDWs left and work abroad for their families so most of their salaries spent on their families need such as food, housing, medical, clothes, education and there are also who have successfully become an entrepreneur. Their children managed to finish schooling and become university scholars who in turned are professional workers in their home land. Part of their salary also spent in the UK to pay Tax, NI and to buy their personal needs and also for those who are live-out they pay rent and for live-in they also sometimes pay rent for week end stay. This is a normal circumstance to domestic workers but their dedication and sacrifice to provide for their families and give them better living is their priority. Their remittance is not just for a better living for their families but for the economy of their home countries as well.

The Multi-national aspect:

Both employers and MDWs in my survey come from different countries. MDWs are working in the UK to support their family needs and they allow employers to their work.

My survey and all other related finding shared similar results that MDWs have special place in the market and is essential and they do contribute to the global economy.

Chapter 4

(i) Conclusions

1. The MDWs do contribute to global economy through their remittances to their respective home countries which provide their families a decent living and also keep the economy of their country afloat. They spent part of their salary in the UK through their own personal things, they are also renting rooms for those who live-out and when they are off in the weekend, food and travelling allowance.
2. MDWs are not taking British jobs, when they come to the UK they are employed by the employers who brought them via ODW Visa and according to the employers themselves in the REC Survey, they employ MDWs because they are flexible and adaptable according to their needs which allow them to do their job and have social life.
3. MDWs seldom avail benefits because they could support themselves. This also proved that given the rights and protection they can improve and contribute more to the society and economy which was shown as evidence by members of J4DW.
4. MDWs do not affect Net migration a study by Kalayaan claims that only 5% of ODW settle in the UK, based on figures from the UK Border Agency for 2010-2011. Furthermore, migrant domestic workers account for only 0.5% of total applications for UK settlement. UK Government shouldn't forget the protection of the OVDW Visa offered to the most vulnerable domestic workers and a worker without rights and status are opens to abuse and exploitation.
5. Importance of overseas domestic worker visa it affords to MDWs that it is the single most important protection that saves lives the MDWs and allow them to rebuild again and prevents further more exploitation as in the traffic victims, the

Visa does not only protect them but also recognize them as proper workers as they are workers. The ODW Visa also shows the vulnerability of Domestic Workers in diplomatic household compare to the domestic workers in private household with freedom of movement and rights as workers.

Recommendations

In this research, I would like to make the following recommendations

1. For the Government to recognize the valuable contribution of migrant domestic workers to economy and society.
2. For both sending and host countries to protect and improve the living and working conditions of MDWs.
3. For UK Government to restore all rights of MDWs with the Overseas Domestic Worker Visa including right to change employer and settlement and extend these rights to domestic workers in diplomatic household
4. For UK Government to ratify and implement the ILO Convention 189 on the rights of domestic workers.
5. For Funders to finance the advocacy work of J4DW.
J4DW also provides practical help and support to MDWs in destitution and provide education.
6. A follow up research to see the effect of the new law on overseas domestic worker visa both to MDWs, employers and economy.

(iii) The strengths and limitations of research

I don't have to worry of anything because of J4DW and our fellow members willing to participate. And all our supporters ready to help. I was able to enhance and improve my knowledge though I am a domestic worker there are many of new information I found out. We may have had many experience as well in running our own organization and dealing with the problems we faced in J4DW but putting all this in research project is one big challenge especially that I have shortage in vocabulary but I am happy that my mentor and supporters are there to help and correct my work.

For me it's a total new learning experience of higher education that can be very useful in the advocacy of J4DW and to me as well. I hope this research will help the Government and Public to recognize the contribution of migrant domestic workers and through us in J4DW we can set a good example that providing us the rights and freedom as workers and humans, we could actually do more and contribute widely in our society both national and international.

In a future study, I would have more focus groups, more questions in interview, longer focus groups ...do it nationally, more researchers to help, gain more funding,

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Appendices

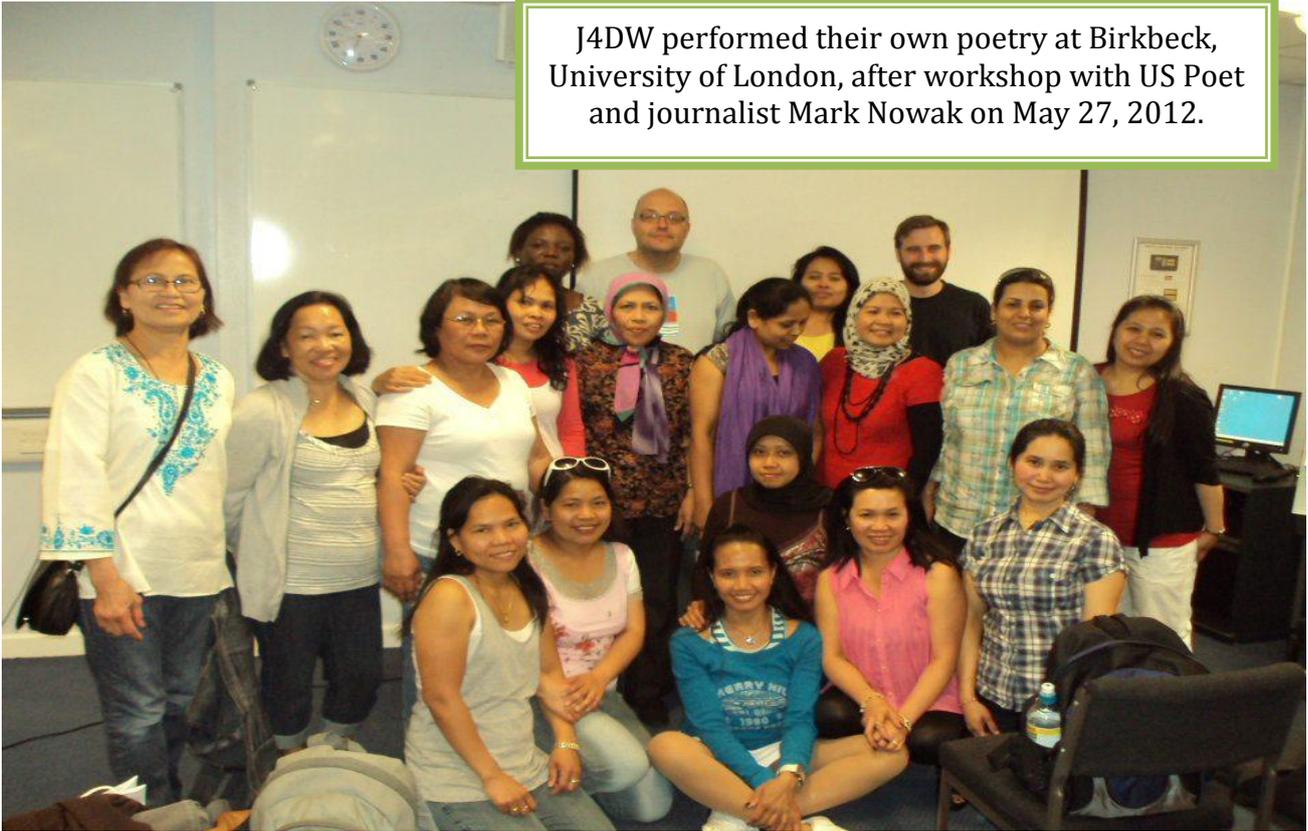
Focus group questions discussion

1. Why did you decide to work abroad?
2. Is there demand in the market for domestic workers? Can the au pairs or locals replace domestic workers?
3. Do you contribute to the economy? Why?
4. Are you taking benefits? What kind of benefits?

Interview Questionnaire

1. What is the job of your employer?
2. How many hours do they work?
3. How many children do they have?
4. What are your role and responsibilities as domestic worker?
5. How many hours do you work?
6. How do you spend your salary?
7. Where are you from?
8. Do you like to live and work in the UK?
9. Do you pay NI and Tax?
10. If overseas domestic worker visa abolished, what will you do?

J4DW performed their own poetry at Birkbeck, University of London, after workshop with US Poet and journalist Mark Nowak on May 27, 2012.



J4DW at the launch Event of ESOL NEXUS Project with British Council at Kingsway Hall Hotel, June 17, 2012.

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