migrasia

2022 IMPACT REPORT

MIGRASIA GLOBAL SOLUTIONS LTD

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LETTER FROM THE TEAM

Greetings from the Migrasia Team!

In 2022, Migrasia continued its mission of eliminating the pervasive and systemic exploitation of migrant workers globally. Through our dedicated efforts, we have made significant strides in providing assistance to victims of human trafficking and debt bondage, enforcing anti-trafficking laws, conducting research, and engaging with key stakeholders.

Our Migration Specialist Team assisted over 2,600 clients in 2022, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to supporting migrant workers. Notably, we achieved significant success in the enforcement category, conducting 375 law enforcement actions, leading to the recovery of **PHP2,943,141** (HK$411,969) in illegal proceeds for our clients.

Migrasia is currently involved in various new projects, and the 2022 Impact Report provides key insights into each of them. We recently expanded our board, welcoming 3 individuals from diverse backgrounds to strengthen our leadership and strategic decision-making process. We upgraded our migration support system through standardization and automation, and enhanced our risk management and corporate governance. Additionally, Migrasia had the opportunity to collaborate on a consulting project under the IOM's Corporate Responsibility in Eliminating Slavery and Trafficking (CREST) Initiative in Asia.

As we reflect on the achievements of 2022, it is important to acknowledge the invaluable support of our donors and stakeholders who have made our work possible. We extend our sincere gratitude to every individual, organization, and institution that has contributed to Migrasia' s mission of empowering and assisting migrant workers. Your generous donations, collaboration, and engagement have been vital in bringing positive change to the lives of countless individuals.

Moving forward, we remain committed to our cause and will continue to leverage technology, research, and partnerships to address the complex challenges faced by migrant workers and strive to expand our reach, enhance our systems, and advocate for improved support services to create a more equitable and just migration industry.

Sincerely,
The Migrasia Team

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

In 2022, our Migration Specialist Team assisted over 2,600 clients in several countries around the world. Overall we conducted 375 law enforcement actions, leading to the recovery of **PHP2,943,141** (HK$411,969) in illegal proceeds for our clients.

Enforcement

- PHP2,943,141 (HK$418,000) in illegal proceeds recovered during 2022
- 375 total law enforcement actions taken in 7 countries/regions to enforce safe migration
- 9 legal pathways used to achieve remedial action for migrant workers

Migration Support

- 2,600+ migrant workers assisted by our Migration Specialist Team
- 4,578 social media posts shared to educate and inform migrant populations
- 2,178,914 people reached via social media communications

Research and Thought Leadership

- 150 migrant workers in the care, hospitality, entertainment and informal economy sector surveyed
- 45 interviews with migrant workers, employers, and key informants to identify risks in recruitment and employment
- 15 Migrasia clients interviewed to understand support seeking and social media engagement behaviours
- 10 presentations & capacity building sessions for 300+ stakeholders including researchers, government, CSOs and migrant workers

OVERVIEW OF MIGRASIA

Migrasia is a tax-exempt social enterprise and incubator for solutions to migration-related problems in Asia. We focus on a wide-range of issues ranging from unethical labor migration to modern slavery and human trafficking. Migrasia leverages technology, novel legal strategies, and knowledge sharing to promote change within the labour migration industry at large. In collaboration with the Global Migration Legal Clinic within The University of Hong Kong's Faculty of Law, Migrasia has reached millions of current, former, and prospective migrant workers through our social media triage system. Migrasia's programs have led to direct assistance for thousands of migrant workers in countries throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Context

Every year, migrant workers across Asia face information asymmetry and structural disadvantages that put them at risk of labor abuse. The process begins with recruitment agencies, which often have an extreme level of control over a migrant worker's journey towards employment due to the administrative and legislative burden associated with working abroad. This creates a situation where migrant workers are systemically vulnerable to labor exploitation and abuse, leading to many instances of working conditions akin to forced labour, debt bondage caused by excessive fees incurred during the migration journey, ineffective complaint and grievance procedures, restrictions on freedom of movement, isolation, and limited access to justice.

Mission

Migrasia seeks to eliminate the systemic exploitation of migrant workers around the globe. Migrasia achieves its mission through (i) direct client support to victims of labour exploitation and forced labour via social media and our in-person clinic (ii) enforcement of anti-trafficking laws and investigation of unethical migration intermediaries; and (iii) primary research into anti-trafficking interventions and migration solutions. Data aggregation and analysis are integral across Migrasia's core programmes, providing essential evidence-based inputs that fuel program activities. Clinical work and observations then form the foundation for Migrasia's thought leadership and community engagement within the migration field to promote education, knowledge sharing, and collaborative solutions.

Migrasia's Cyclical System

Migration Support

- Access to information & education
- Social media victim identification and support
- Victim triage and referral
- Data and evidence collection

Enforcement & Remediation

- Case analysis for legal violations
- Access to remediation
- High-impact case work and strategic litigation
- Law enforcement reports
- Legal partner referrals

Education & Community Engagement

- Trainings for migrant workers
- Training for government, civil society & stakeholders
- Community outreach & advocacy
- Information sharing

Research & Thought Leadership

- Primary & secondary research
- Addressing information gaps
- Social media research
- Authoring case studies & educational materials

Migrasia achieves its mission through a cyclical system that combines four interrelated components:

1. The mass identification of victims through social media and other advanced data techniques, such as network mapping of recruitment agencies and their subsidiaries

2. When victims are identified, providing support both online and in-person through referral of cases to legal partners, law enforcement agencies, or handling cases directly via the Global Migration Legal Clinic

3. Collecting and documenting information about the experiences of our clients and migrant populations more broadly and publishing research findings

4. Engaging the community through education and partnership and capacity building with key stakeholders in government and civil society to improve support services offered to migrant workers

These four pillars form the basis of our Theory of Change.

This cyclical system is unique within the migrant worker NGO sector, particularly in terms of how Migrasia uses data and social media to identify and empower victims, triage cases, and engage the target groups. The process has been designed as a positive feedback loop between the four components, and allows us to leverage all of our partnerships and expertise to the fullest extent.

MIGRATION SUPPORT

Our primary focus for 2022 was updating and streamlining our Migration Support System. We were receiving so many inquiries from migrant workers around the world that we had to standardize and automate certain processes, otherwise the work would have been unsustainable. Through a lot of trial and error, we formalized work flows, implemented a client management system (CMS), and created a social media template library to standardize our client intake process and case management. While that may not sound exciting, creating this efficient foundation has allowed us to substantially scale our team and impact, which we hope to do over the next few years.

Standardization

Formalising the Migration Specialists' Work Flows

Our Migration Specialist System is a model that we think really works, and is scalable across the globe. Through it we've been reaching millions of people a year in dozens of countries. The most important component of our system is our team of Migration Specialists - full-time employees in relevant sending countries who monitor and share relevant content on social media pages, and support migrant workers when they encounter trouble. But as our engagements increased, our remote team became more challenging to manage and monitor. In order to continue scaling our impact while simultaneously ensuring the quality of our engagements and the safety or our team, we knew that some work was required.

Accordingly, we spent considerable resources in 2022 to standardize the System. We started by mapping out existing workflows, asking all Migration Specialists to log their client interactions and content creation activities. By analyzing the breakdown of how the System operated, we were able to better streamline our work flows, allocate our resources, and select the right tools for automation. We also updated the team's internet connection and hardware, established a management hierarchy, and implemented internal training.

Client Management System Implementation

In order to streamline and standardize the processes of our System, we implemented a lean client management system (CMS). The key in designing our system was to not overburden our team with excessive or overly formal procedure, but rather, to design a system that fits logically into the workflows of our client work and collects data without adding unnecessary friction.

After mapping our existing workflows, the first step of this was to ensure consistent intake. We did this by piloting a chatbot on select pages that would categorize the type of client inquiry coming in and pass it along to the appropriate team members for response. Understanding that a chatbot can be impersonal to some, we pared down the questions being asked only to those that were most pertinent to categorizing the inquiry.

Social Media Template Library

In the spirit of standardisation, we are looking into how we can improve our content management strategy. Harnessing our Innovations for Poverty Action funded research on improving social media post virality and engagement, we are applying insights to create a template library of social media posts. This will ease the strain on our Migration Specialists, who not only have to manage hundreds of cases, but also have to create timely and consistent content. We hope that by standardising a library resource, this process can be streamlined but still remain flexible enough to accommodate new trends and individual approaches.

Automation

Chatbot and Airtable Connection

In order to ensure we can continue to scale our support for migrant workers around the world, we developed an automated chatbot that connects directly to Airtable, our client management database. The chatbot automates many common responses, and helps us filter simple problems from those that require additional attention. It also helps to capture client and case information, improving data aggregation and impact measurement. Most importantly, our Migration Specialists are freed up to spend their time where it matters the most.

Finally and most crucially we conducted training for all the Specialists to understand the procedure of working on Airtable, which itself consolidates the tracking across numerous spreadsheets. This training included not only the mechanics of what information and assets to store where, but why each datapoint was important not just for case management, but for research and impact measurement.

Actionable Data

To automate the capture of case data, we have put in place a dashboard with the use of software Porter to update and warehouse information on a system, page, and post level. We are now integrating the use of the dashboard into our weekly team meetings, to ensure that all team members are familiar with the kind of information that is available to them. Our next phase is to distill actionable insights from these dashboards so as to inform better content and community management.

Case Example

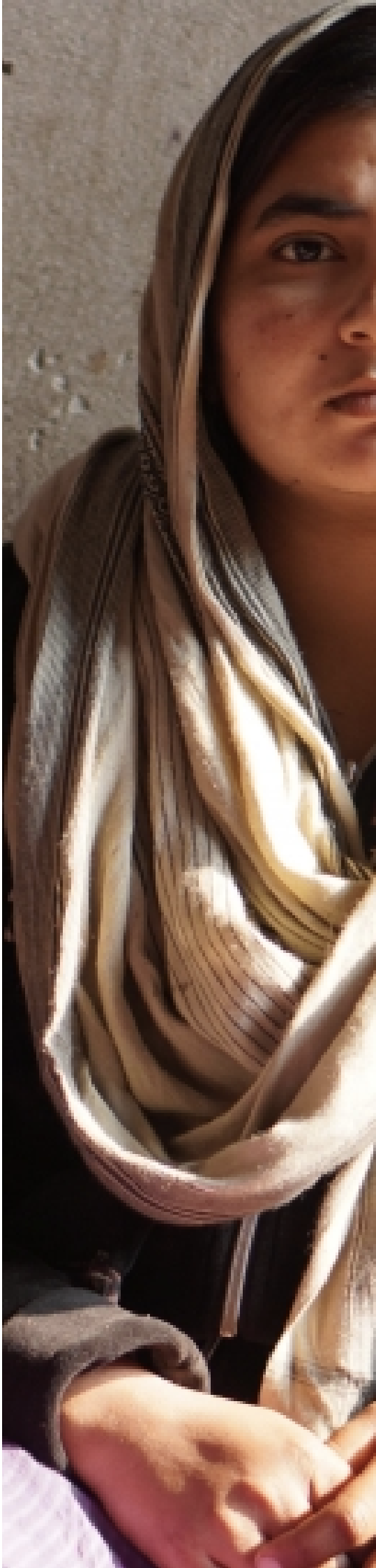
An Illegal Contract Sale in Riyadh and a Long Road to Repatriation

Julia's case came to our Migration Specialist team through a friend who reached out to one of Migrasia's online communities. While working with her employer, Julia suffered physical abuse and threats to "cut her hands" if she ran away. Her phone was often taken away, which left her no means of contacting or seeing anyone that might help her.

Julia arrived in Saudi Arabia in November 2021 with the understanding that she would work in the capital city of Riyadh. But she found herself in a rural mountain village with a new employer in December 2021. Like many others, Julia fell victim to an illegal contract transfer when her intended employer sold the contract to a third party, likely facilitated by the employment agency in Saudi Arabia.

Our team sprang into action and began a tireless campaign to alert every relevant government agency. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration prosecution team took the case and suspended the license of the Philippine agency. But Julia was still stuck, and so our team persisted. After eight months of pressuring the foreign employment agency with regular emails and calls, Julia finally received her exit visa and plane ticket. She arrived home in August 2022.

It is worth noting, this case took a very long time to resolve and the team ran into myriad logistical and bureaucratic hurdles along the way. As much as we should applaud the Team's persistence and proactivity, we must look for a better, more efficient way to repatriate workers who find themselves in dangerous circumstances. It is also important for us to understand how the Kafala system impacts such cases. As more migrant workers head to the Middle East, the employer-centric dynamics of this system will continue to foster oppressive conditions that impact our ability to help clients access remedies. While we work on finding and establishing new pathways for remedy, we are raising awareness on these dangerous schemes and identifying the players involved. It may not always be possible to fight back after deployment, but assisting migrant workers to find ethical agencies and spreading the word on what to do while on the ground are places to start.



Case Example

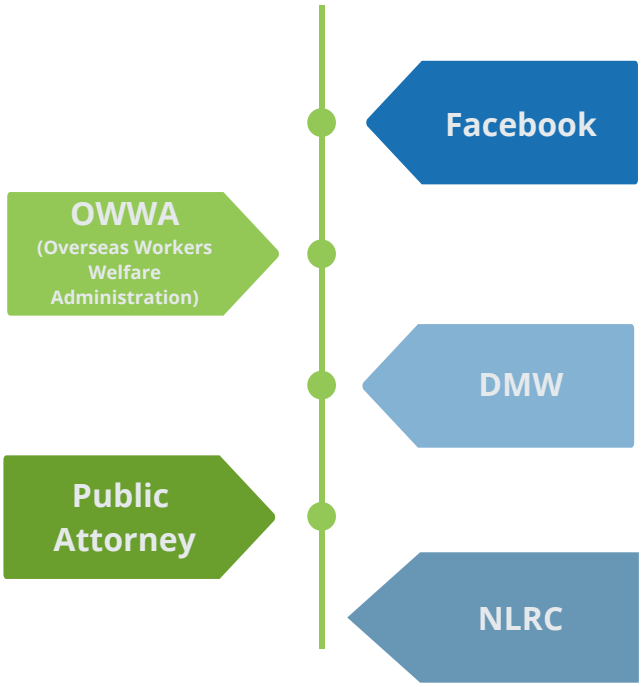
National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC): Justice in the Philippines for OFW's Pay Deductions Suffered in Singapore

Colleen, a Philippines migrant domestic worker, applied to the Mayon International Trading Corp recruitment agency in March 2020. What she didn't realize was that a migration journey fraught with problems and mistreatment awaited her. Trumped-up placement fees, accommodation costs for quarantine, and even baggage fees were deducted from her salary. To make matters worse, her employment situation was burdened by threats, passport withholding, persistent overwork, and poor treatment.

While little would have made the situation better, what Colleen did have was an ally in the Migration Specialist Team. She reached out for help through Facebook, the only means of communication available to many migrant domestic workers. The Migration Specialist Team started small, providing what information and resources could be given from far away. When the time for Colleen's return home finally arrived, the Team talked her through her journey and began drafting filings to Department of Migrant Workers. Due to the severity of the claims, they were escalated to and resolved in the Philippines National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC).

The NLRC made clear that labor protections of the Philippines extend beyond its borders; even though Colleen's case happened in Singapore, she was eligible to seek justice back home.

At the end of a two-year quest for justice, Colleen was awarded: (1) the unrealized value of her contract (2) exemplary damages and (3) moral damages. Altogether, worth approximately US$10,000.



Identifying Colleen

Be alert to messages and comments, careful reading might reveal violations that we can assist with. Be sure to explain what claims are possible and what their rights are in the situation.

Create Evidence Trail

We urged Colleen to email OWWA with a narrative of her situation, so that upon return it would support her DMW filing.

Timely DMW Submission

While memory is fresh and evidence is available, encourage clients to file when they are able and give them a sense of what to expect.

Drafting Position Paper

Preparing the position paper for NLRC, reach out to the Public Attorney to see if they are able to prepare one or at least notarize it on our behalf.

Endorsed for NLRC

Once it's endorsed for consideration to NLRC or Adjudication, begin to prepare the position paper.

ENFORCEMENT & REMEDIATION

In 2022, Migrasia continued putting effort into conducting investigations, enforcing the law, and holding unethical migration intermediaries accountable. Below are two case updates that Migrasia has been following for several years.

Case Updates

Talent Kenya Company Limited License Revocation

For several years Migrasia has assisted Kenyan migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong who fell victim to an unethical employment agency, Talent Kenya Company Limited. The unethical agency was accused of several violations, including charging illegal recruitment fees, forcing migrants to work for months without a day off, as well as coercing them to commit Immigration offences by forcing them to work at multiple residences. The IOM concluded that at least one of these migrant workers was a victim of human trafficking, and that there were likely to be additional victims.

In 2022, Migrasia assisted multiple victims of Talent Kenya to provide formal statements to the Employment Agencies Administration of the Labour Department, as well as the Immigration Department. In addition, we worked directly with local activists and journalists, to publicize these issues in the Hong Kong press. This month after several years of fighting this case and many victims, Talent Kenya's employment agency license was revoked by the Labour Department. The revocation of this license was a great triumph for the numerous groups working on this case as the agency has brought countless more victims to Hong Kong during the last year despite a conviction for overcharging in May of 2021 that was pending appeal.

Case Updates

WHT & Remy Case

Starting in 2019, Migrasia was alerted to non-existent jobs being advertised to hundreds of migrant workers. Investigations soon led to employment agencies: WHT Consultant Company and Remy Consultant Company.

Looking further into the history of the proported scam, Migrasia traced enforcement actions taken by other NGO actors — first under the employment ordinance and later in Small Claims Court. While the involved parties were ultimately convicted in the latter case, they absconded to avoid the legal consequences.

Fast forward to 2019, the agencies started up the same scam, charging upfront fees ranging from HK$4,000 to HK$16,000 per victim. Building on past efforts but taking a different approach, Migrasia instead built a case under suspected violations of the Trade Description Ordinance, a statute enforced by the Customs & Excise Department.

The Customs & Excise Department, empowered with arrest power, took law enforcement action within weeks of receiving Migrasia's detailed reports. The use of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance rather than the Employment Ordinance also stripped the suspects of their ability to disappear, dodge court proceedings, or avoid arrest.

The judgment at the end of September in District Court marks the end of this long battle with the defendants, not only for charges successfully brought under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance, but for money laundering. The proceeds of these crimes — in the sums of HK$299,745 and HK$110,500 — evidence the scope of the defendant's operations over the years unchecked by the legal system.

Employment Agency
WHT & Remy
Successful Strategic Litigation under the Trade Description Ordinance

28-month & 30-month jail sentences

The first time unfair trade practice involving the employment agency industry led to imprisonment under the TDO since it was amended in July 2013. Also the first time that an offender of unfair trade practice has been prosecuted for money laundering at the same time.

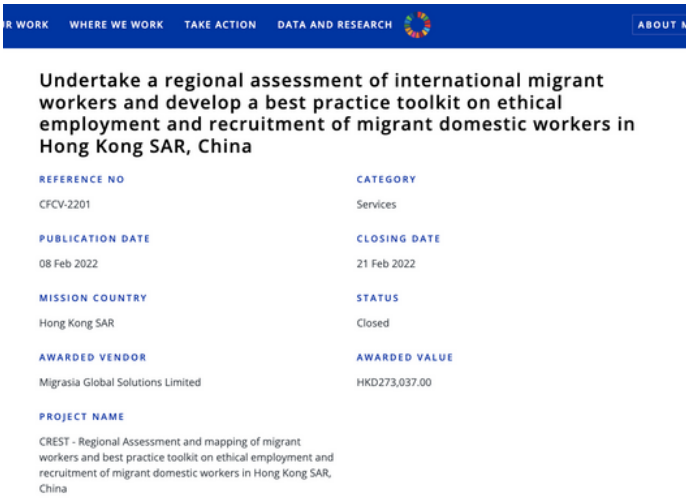
RESEARCH & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

In 2022, Migrasia conducted several research projects regarding migration, labour exploitation and human trafficking. Below are two projects that cooperated with the University of Hong Kong (HKU), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA).

The Regional Assessment, Mapping & Toolkit

IOM UN MIGRATION

CREST - Regional Assessment and mapping of migrant workers and best practice toolkit on ethical employment and recruitment of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong SAR, China


R WORK WHERE WE WORK TAKE ACTION DATA AND RESEARCH ABOUT

Undertake a regional assessment of international migrant workers and develop a best practice toolkit on ethical employment and recruitment of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong SAR, China

REFERENCE NO
CFCV-2201

CATEGORY
Services

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Migrasia Global Solutions Limited

AWARDED VALUE
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PROJECT NAME
CREST - Regional Assessment and mapping of migrant workers and best practice toolkit on ethical employment and recruitment of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong SAR, China

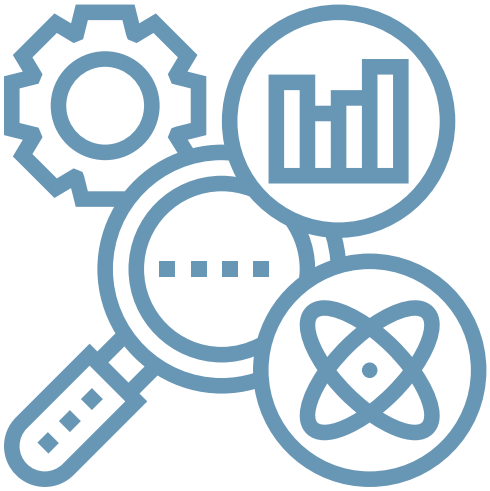
In February 2022, Migrasia conducted a consulting project under IOM's Corporate Responsibility in Eliminating Slavery and Trafficking (CREST) Initiative in Asia.
In this project, Migrasia:

- Produced a regional assessment of international migrant workers employed in the care, hospitality and entertainment and informal economy sectors in Hong Kong SAR, China;
- Conducted a mapping of available resources and initiatives to promote the ethical recruitment and employment of international migrant workers in the care industries, with a focus on business-led initiatives;
- Developed best-practice toolkits that makes the business case for inclusion of care and hospitality workers in responsible business efforts and features links to tools, guidance and resources on the ethical recruitment and employment of migrant workers in these industries

Social Media Effectiveness Research

Using Social Media to Provide Information and Support for Migrant Workers about Illegal Recruitment Practices in Hong Kong and the Philippines

Funded by IPA's Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI), Migrasia and the University of Hong Kong collaborated on a pilot research project evaluating the effectiveness of social media campaigns in reducing the incidence of migrant worker exploitation. Migration intermediaries play a legitimate role in the efficient matching of labor supply and demand across borders. However, exploitation and forced labor can occur when unethical intermediaries, such as employment agencies, training centers, and medical clinics take advantage of information asymmetries to charge exorbitant fees to migrant workers for their services, who often take on substantial debt and risks to finance recruitment related costs.



Migrasia has used social media to overcome information barriers and improve the identification, protection, and empowerment of migrant workers and increase accountability of malicious recruitment agencies and other migration intermediaries. Building on past research that indicates that social media can be useful in spreading awareness where information barriers exist (Özdemir 2012), the research team assessed the feasibility and suitability of conducting a randomized evaluation to determine the effectiveness of Migrasia's social media campaigns in reducing the incidence of migrant worker exploitation. The campaigns aim to prevent workers from being overcharged on recruitment fees and related costs and provide support and access to redress for those who have been financially exploited by recruitment agencies and other intermediaries across Asia, with a focus on the Hong Kong-Philippines migration corridor.

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Apart from providing support to clients of the legal clinic, Migrasia also partnered with the University of Hong Kong to provide community and education engagement opportunities for students to gain research, legal casework, and other kinds of working experience. Below are two examples of education engagements: Global Migration Legal Clinic and Impact lab. They not only inspired students to think critically and explore alternative remedial pathways and solutions, but have also helped students to strengthen their soft skills, leadership, and ability to apply their knowledge and competence in a business environment.

Global Migration Legal Clinic

The Global Migration Legal Clinic, run by the University of Hong Kong's Faculty of Law and in partnership with Migrasia, identifies and supports migrant domestic workers who are victims of bonded labor and other illegal labor practices. Students in this Clinic study and assist with specific legal casework and problems, and devise holistic solutions to migration problems. While our solutions often involve legal recourse or research of some kind, students in this Clinic also explore broader solutions, including: education and community legal empowerment, media and social media exposure, lobbying, commercial solutions, etc. We have trained more than 100 students via the GMLC project since inception.

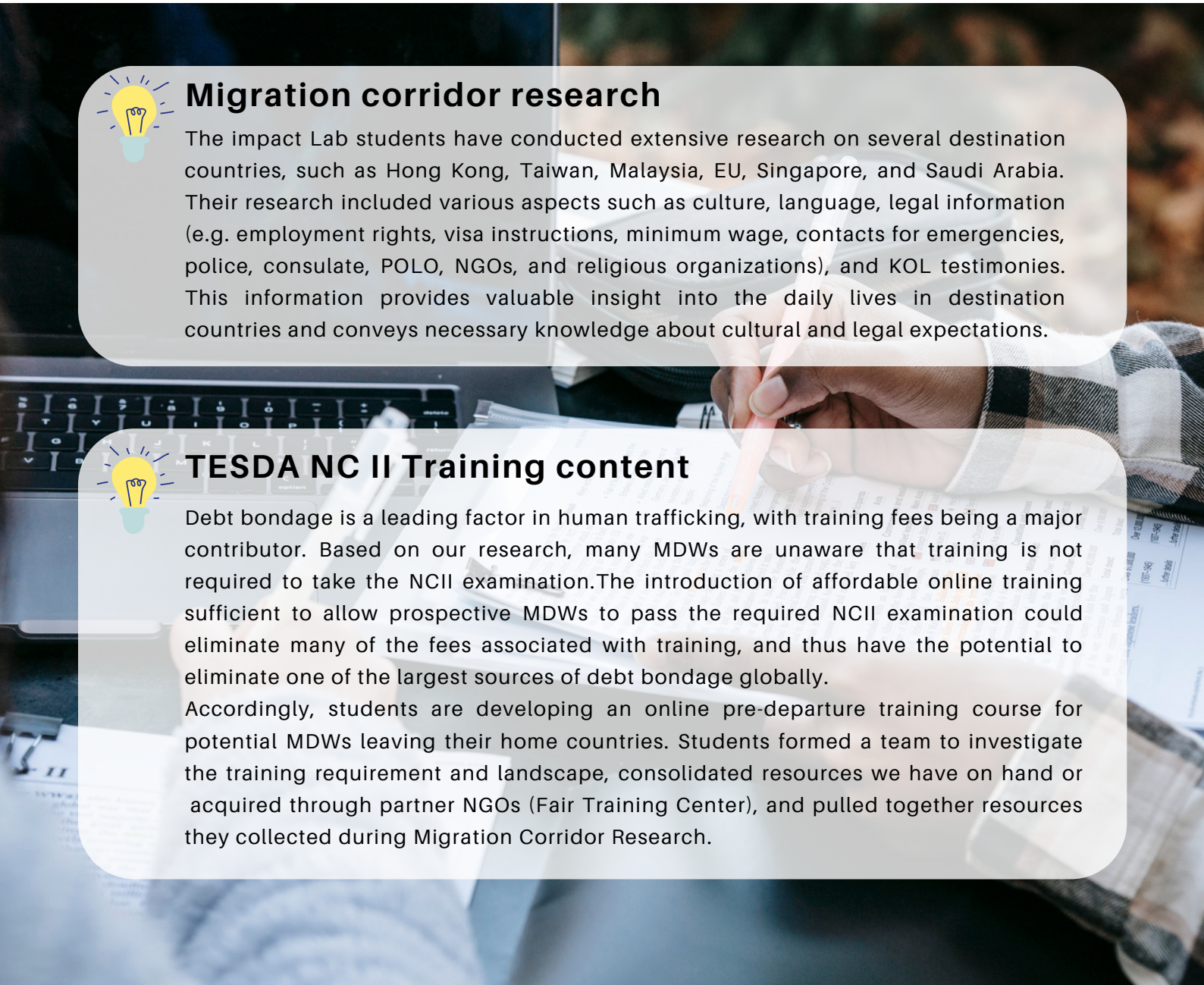
2022 GMLC Project List

- Sex Work in HK
- Research and reporting of migrant workers deaths
- Disclosure requirements for listed companies (ESG)
- The Swiss economic actor burden
- Modern slavery the $150 Billion Industry
- How Fintech is related to Human Trafficking
- Trafficking from Taiwan & Hong Kong to Southeast Asia

Impact Lab

The Impact Lab is a research and innovation lab established by the University of Hong Kong to promote innovation and entrepreneurial solutions to social and environmental challenges in Hong Kong and beyond. It provides a range of support and resources for academics, students, and social entrepreneurs.The Impact Lab course allows students to gain important work experience. All students interviewed after the internship emphasised how the work they did for Migrasia helped them gain confidence and develop essential client skills which are invaluable in the job market.

Migrasia offers a supportive environment for students to learn and challenge themselves. The learning curve is steep, and students are afforded an unusual degree of freedom to develop themselves and contribute according to their own strengths. In the clinic, the creativity of the organisation also inspired students to think critically and explore alternative remedial pathways and solutions. The Impact Lab course, meanwhile, helped students strengthen their soft skills, leadership skills, and ability to apply their knowledge and competence in a business environment.



Migration corridor research

The impact Lab students have conducted extensive research on several destination countries, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, EU, Singapore, and Saudi Arabia. Their research included various aspects such as culture, language, legal information (e.g. employment rights, visa instructions, minimum wage, contacts for emergencies, police, consulate, POLO, NGOs, and religious organizations), and KOL testimonies. This information provides valuable insight into the daily lives in destination countries and conveys necessary knowledge about cultural and legal expectations.

TESDA NC II Training content

Debt bondage is a leading factor in human trafficking, with training fees being a major contributor. Based on our research, many MDWs are unaware that training is not required to take the NCII examination.The introduction of affordable online training sufficient to allow prospective MDWs to pass the required NCII examination could eliminate many of the fees associated with training, and thus have the potential to eliminate one of the largest sources of debt bondage globally.

Accordingly, students are developing an online pre-departure training course for potential MDWs leaving their home countries. Students formed a team to investigate the training requirement and landscape, consolidated resources we have on hand or acquired through partner NGOs (Fair Training Center), and pulled together resources they collected during Migration Corridor Research.

Student Testimonials

Kiara McClelland, Student from the Global Migration Legal Clinic, 2022

Having the opportunity to take the GMLC course has been pivotal to my understanding of the issues faced by economic migrants. The big picture we were provided with, greatly helped to inform my comprehension and later provided invaluable foundations for the tasks which we were completing. This unique opportunity to support real life tasks alongside hearing from various practitioners in the area, has significantly shaped how I hope to one day use my law degree, more so than any other courses I have taken during my studies.

I had a number of responsibilities at Migrasia, including doing market research, developing a training programme to help foreign domestic workers get ready for the TESDA pre-departure tests, and taking part in campaigns to end labour exploitation. My professionalism has substantially increased as a result of the jobs I've been given and the responsibility of dealing with the company's clients, which has helped me develop a strong work ethic. Working with a team of experts and helping to eradicate such a serious social issue as labour exploitation inspired me to continue fostering effective solutions for societal problems and to pursue further education in NGO management.

Daria Karaulova, Student from Impact Lab, Autumn-Winter 2022

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