



## Research on the Future of Domestic Work in the Gulf, with a Special Focus on the United Arab Emirates

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### A. Background

*What drives the demand for domestic workers in the GCC?*

In 2013, the Middle East, primarily the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), hosted the largest number (or 27 per cent) of the 11.5 million international migrant domestic workers in the world (ILO 2015).

Globally, women are more likely to be domestic workers; about 73.4 per cent or 8.5 million of all migrant domestic workers are women. Conversely, the GCC hosts 50.8 per cent of all male migrant domestic workers (ILO 2015).

With varying national differences, the demand for home-based non-professional paid care and domestic work in the countries of the GCC is generally linked to a number of interacting factors, among them:

*(a) an increase in the employment of national women and the transformation from single to dual wage-earning families (Kapiszewski 2006; Rutledge, Al Shamsi, Bassoon and Al Sheikh 2011; Malit and Ghafoor 2014):* higher education levels among women and nationalization schemes have enabled national women to enter the labour market and subsequently triggered a demand for migrant domestic workers to address child care needs.

*(b) a sizeable population of dual wage-earning expatriate families with child care needs;*

*(c) demographic transformations such as longer life expectancy, lower fertility and a growing old age dependency ratio (Sibai, Rizk and Kronfol 2014; Shah, Badr and Shah 2012; Hussein and Ismail 2016):* longevity means that more people will need support and care in their old age. Low fertility means that less people are able to provide care.

*(d) a tradition of family-based care and a culture that frowns upon placing an ageing relative in elderly care institutions (Shah, Badr and Shah, 2012; Hussein and Ismail 2016):* although state-sponsored initiatives exist, families are increasingly opting for support from live-in domestic workers to provide long-term care;

*(e) large households (Shah et al. 2002; Tayah and Hamada 2017):* the physical size of the housing unit (i.e., number of rooms, bedrooms, and bathrooms) and its type (for example, a villa with a garden) are positively associated with the number of domestic workers;

*(f) higher income levels and aspirations to higher social status (Shah et al. 2002; Fernandez and de Regt 2016); and,*

*(g) until recently in Saudi Arabia, a dependence on male domestic workers to act as drivers on behalf of women who were not permitted to drive.*



In fact, households may employ more than one worker. According to 2013 estimates, each household in the UAE employed, on average, three domestic workers (ILO 2013, 33). In Kuwait, 43 percent of households counted two or more domestic workers in 2002 (Shah et al. 2002, 253).

The decision to hire one or more domestic workers is based on the following considerations: (a) the number of the family members (including extended family members) who occupy the house; (b) the level of dependency of these members on the worker (the children, elderly, sick and disabled are more dependent on the services of the worker than are adults); (c) the number of rooms and their type; and, (d) the number of domestic workers who are working in the house, their occupational profiles (cooks, gardeners, cleaners, nannies etc.) and work-sharing arrangements (Tayah and Hamada 2017).

Unlike in other sectors, the demand for domestic work has proven resilient to economic downturns, first during the 2008 global financial crisis (Thimothy and Sasikumar 2012, 3) and more recently in Saudi Arabia where the Cabinet concluded a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Bangladesh “to address the shortage of domestic workers” at a time when it was undergoing a fiscal deficit.<sup>1</sup>

A greater realization of the size and dependence on domestic workers has led to a number of legal and institutional reforms aimed at improving the governance of the sector in Bahrain (in 2012 and 2017), Saudi Arabia (in 2013), Kuwait (in 2015), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar (in 2017).

## B. Rationale and justification for the research:

### *What are future drivers?*

Across the world, the governance of the domestic work sector is being revisited from the perspective of the care economy, primarily because the growing share of the world’s population aged over 65 has created a spike in the number of people in need of long-term care. Conjointly, the world is facing an ever-expanding shortage of health care professionals (e.g., doctors, midwives, nurses). The deficit was estimated at 7.2 million health care workers in 2013 and is expected to reach 12.9 million by 2035 (WHO 2013).

The result is that out-patient care in private homes has taken primacy over service provisioning in hospitals, especially in the case of long-term and post-operative care. Further, (care)site-shifting is leading to task-shifting, with migrant domestic workers taking on the role of unregulated nurses (Kofman and Raghuram, 2013, p. 113) – administering drugs, changing gavage feeding tubes, cleaning post-operative wounds, bathing and taking the blood pressure of long-term care patients – while specialized nurses take on the role of doctors, “supervising others who give essential physical, emotional and psychological care” (Pearson 2003, 626).

To capture the growing complexity and multifunctionality of domestic work and the occupational niching within the sector, countries are developing competence standards and

<sup>1</sup> Global Times, “Saudi cabinet approves hiring of Bangladeshi domestic workers,” 14 November 2016. Available from <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1017908.shtml> [Accessed on 1 January 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Contratto collettivo nazionale di lavoro sulla disciplina del rapporto dei lavoro domestico (2013-2016), available at: <http://www.colfebadantionline.it/images/ccnlavorodomestico2013-2016.pdf> [Accessed on 3



corresponding skills programmes for domestic workers. These programmes aim to provide specialized and quality services for employers, structure wages according to workers' skill and competency levels, and recognize the skills of workers with a view to promoting their professional mobility within and outside the sector (Tayah 2016, see chapter on skills).

Depending on the context, these programmes can be funded by governments, the private sector, employers' associations, recruitment agencies, individual workers, and/or workers' organizations. These programmes are more effective when linked to national qualification frameworks (or model competency standards for domestic workers) and to corresponding national wage setting categories that reflect workers' skill and competency levels. In the Middle East, where domestic workers' wages are negotiated bilaterally between the countries of origin and destination, on-arrival skills programmes may be an alternative to nationality-based wage differentials.

**Table 1: Skills programmes for domestic workers: Modalities, structure, and corresponding wage categories.**

<b>Hong Kong, SAR</b>	
<p>The Hong Kong Trade Union Confederation (HKTUC) offers a skills programme for domestic workers (128 hours) and a job matching service.</p> <p>Trainees receive 90 training hours in job skills (e.g., cleaning, laundry, care, cooking) and 36 training hours in life skills (e.g., professional ethics, communication skills, job search and interview skills, occupational safety and labour laws).</p> <p><b>Since 1996, the job matching centre has placed over 40,186 trainees (Tang 2017).</b></p> <p><b>The programme is subsidized by the Government of Hong Kong, SAR.</b></p> <p>HKTUC works jointly with its affiliate, the Domestic Workers General Union (DWGU) to campaign for wage standards based on skill level and promote the use of employment contracts (HKTUC 2017).</p>	<p>Current wage categories for domestic workers in Hong Kong SAR, China:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General cleaning: 10 USD/hour.</li> <li>• Special / intensive cleaning: 14 - 16.6 USD/hour.</li> <li>• Post-natal care: 2,250 USD/month (Tang 2017).</li> </ul>
<b>Italy</b>	
<p>The ACLI Colf/Family Collaborators, a "movement" organization counting 25 local associations of domestic workers in Italy supports a skills programme for carers and domestic workers.</p> <p><b>The programme is funded by trade unions and employers' associations.</b> It is tied to</p>	<p>Job classification of workers according to the national collective agreement on domestic work, 2013:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level A: domestic workers with no experience</li> <li>• Level B: assistants to self-sufficient individuals</li> </ul>



<p>the collective bargaining agreement of 2013, guaranteeing wage increases (above the minimum wage) in accordance with workers' skill level (Villavert 2017).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level C: individual assistants to non-self-sufficient individuals, unskilled.</li> <li>• Level D: individual assistants to non-self-sufficient individuals, trained and skilled.</li> </ul> <p>Level D is the highest earning category. For the subcategories to A, B, C, and D, please refer to the full text of the sectoral national collective bargaining agreement.<sup>2</sup></p>
<p><b>Argentina</b></p>	
<p>Argentina's vocational training for domestic workers is nested within a broader legislative context where qualified domestic workers are entitled to wage increases above the general minimum wage based on occupation.</p> <p>The programme was launched in 2006. It was <b>developed and funded by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, and implemented by local governments, NGOs and domestic worker union-affiliated training schools.</b></p> <p>According to 2016 statistics, more than 19,000 domestic workers were trained since the programme's establishment.</p> <p>The programme is structured according to three occupational fields: (a) domestic work; (b) elderly care; and, (c) child care (METSS/ILO 2015).</p> <p>Domestic work is a five-module course consisting of 61 lessons and 128 course hours (METSS/ILO 2015a).</p> <p>Elderly care is a five-module course consisting of 52 lessons and 104 course hours (METSS/ILO 2015b).</p> <p>Child care is a five-module course consisting of 49 lessons and 98 course hours (METSS/ILO 2015c).</p>	<p>Job classification of workers according to the collective bargaining agreement for private household personnel in Argentina, 2013:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisors: personnel hired to coordinate and supervise the tasks of two or more domestic workers.</li> <li>• Cooks: personnel hired exclusively to cook.</li> <li>• Caseros/as: live-in personnel performing tasks for the preservation of the dwelling.</li> <li>• Caregivers: personnel providing non-therapeutic assistance and care to children, elders, the sick and people with disability.</li> <li>• Personnel for general tasks: personnel hired to perform a number of household tasks such as cleaning, washing, ironing, maintenance, preparing and cooking meals.</li> </ul> <p>Supervisors, cooks and caregivers are the highest earning categories (in that order).</p>

<sup>2</sup> Contratto collettivo nazionale di lavoro sulla disciplina del rapporto dei lavoro domestico (2013-2016), available at: <http://www.colfebadantionline.it/images/ccnlavorodomestico2013-2016.pdf> [Accessed on 3 January 2018].



Qualification frameworks can also be regional in scope when they receive the support of regional economic commissions or intergovernmental political and economic unions, thereby facilitating the regional positioning regarding the sector and promoting the mobility of domestic workers across borders within one region.

For example, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong (China), India, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand have contributed to the development of Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS) for domestic workers in ASEAN.<sup>3</sup> The RMCS template is an adaptive tool, composed of six functional areas: (a) core competencies; (b) domestic cleaning and basic housekeeping; (c) cooking and food handling; (d) caring for infants and children; (e) caring for elderly people; and (f) caring for household pets and plants. Each functional area consists of competency standards identifying the key roles that the worker is expected to perform, which are then broken down into a number of “units of competence”; these are then further subdivided into “elements of competence”. For each element, “performance criteria” are defined which form the basis for assessment with “range statements” provided for guidance such as support requirements, cultural and religious needs, possible risks, equipment and aids (ILO 2014).

**Table 2. Regional Model Competency Standards for Domestic Work in ASEAN.**

<b>Core competencies</b>	A1. Communicate effectively in a domestic work environment; A2. Work in a socially and culturally diverse workplace; A3. Maintain health, safety and security in a domestic work environment; A4. Plan, organize and manage own work; A5. Undertake calculations relevant to domestic work; and A6. Use a language other than the local language to communicate in a domestic work setting.
<b>Domestic cleaning and basic housekeeping</b>	B1. Apply basic cleaning principles to perform cleaning tasks; B2. Clean and maintain bedrooms and living areas; B3. Clean and maintain bathrooms and toilet facilities; B4. Wash cloths, linens and fabrics; and B5. Iron and store laundered items.
<b>Cooking and food handling</b>	C1. Clean and maintain food preparation, storage and service areas; C2. Follow basic food safety practices; C3. Organize and prepare basic food in a domestic setting; and C4. Serve food and beverages.
<b>Care for infants and children</b>	D1. Work effectively with families to provide care and support for infants and children; D2. Provide care and support for the infants and/or toddlers in a household; and D3. Provide care and support for children in a household.
<b>Care for elderly people</b>	E1. Provide support to elderly people to meet personal care needs; and E2. Assist client with medication.

<sup>3</sup> The RMCS were not adopted.



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<b>Care for household pets and plants</b>	F1. Provide care for pets in a household; and F2. Provide care for plants in a household.
Source: ILO 2014.	

While the GCC region remains relatively young in comparison with Europe, North America and East Asia, it is predicted that by 2050 all GCC countries will achieve sub-replacement fertility levels.<sup>4</sup> Average life expectancy in almost all the GCC countries will be 75 years in 2025 and 80 years in 2050 (Khan, Hussein and Dean 2017, 475). The old age dependency ratio will increase in all GCC countries leading to an increased burden for young wage earners and the government, therefore putting the sustainability of the family-based care model to the test. The UAE will have the highest ageing index; it is estimated that in 2050, the UAE will have 147 elders for every 100 persons younger than 15 years old (Khan, Hussein and Dean 2017, 476).

More attention needs to be paid to the socio-demographic changes in the GCC and to their implications for the management of human resources. Domestic workers are an important cogwheel in the GCC demographic transition. The organization of the sector, as it progresses from housekeeping to home-paid care, must take into consideration how the long-term demand in the sector will be structured.

### C. Case study: The UAE

*Revisiting the meaning of domestic work in the UAE and other GCC countries.*

There are around 750,000 domestic workers in the UAE, almost 65 per cent of whom are based in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah.<sup>5</sup> They cater to national and expatriate families alike. According to the UAE Federal Law No. 10 of 2017, domestic work encompasses 19 occupations – namely; housemaids, private sailors, watchmen and security guards, household shepherds, family chauffeurs, parking valet workers, household horse groomers, household falcon care-takers and trainers, domestic labourers, housekeepers, private coaches, private teachers, babysitters/nannies, household farmers, gardeners, private nurses, private agriculture engineers and cooks.

In 2017, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MOHRE) of the UAE announced that it was accepting franchisee applications for the brand name Tadbeer Service Center (TSC), under license from the Ministry. Franchisees provide services on behalf of the Ministry through a corporate partnership between the Ministry and the private sector, set according to the standards and guidelines of the Emirates Government Services Excellence Program. TSCs offer comprehensive services related to recruiting foreign domestic workers according to the rules and regulations stipulated by the Ministry.<sup>6</sup>

This partnership is an opportunity to transform domestic work into a proper segment of the labour market. Based on assessments of current and projected trends in the sector (and the

<sup>4</sup> TFR = 2.1 births per woman.

<sup>5</sup> *Tadbeer centres to recruit domestic workers*, available at: <http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/society/tadbeer-centres-to-recruit-domestic-workers-1.1998797> [Accessed on 2 January 2018].

<sup>6</sup> To ensure accuracy in describing the legal nature and mandate of the TSC, the text was extracted verbatim from the call for the TSC franchisee applications, available at: <http://www.mohre.gov.ae/assets/8ba1d1a1/tadbeer-service-centers.aspx> [Accessed on 2 January 2018].



body of knowledge on domestic work and the care economy), the MOHRE can guide and harmonize TSC service delivery across the 40 centres.

The ultimate objective is for these services to:

- capture the occupational segmentation within the sector;
- match employer expectations with worker qualifications;
- develop, assess, and recognize workers' skills against a national benchmark;
- promote workers' mobility within the sector (from lower to higher complexity tasks) in accordance with these same benchmarks;
- progressively move away from the nationality-based wage differentials to a waging system modelled after the benchmarks; and,
- improve the quality of the services delivered to employers, especially those related to child, elderly and post-operative care where developmental, safety and hygiene protocols are paramount.

Against this backdrop, the MOHRE is seeking the technical support of the International Domestic Workers Federation<sup>7</sup> to implement a research on the future of domestic work in the GCC with a special focus on the UAE. The objective of the proposed research is to examine the nature of the current and long-term demand in the sector with a view to guiding TSCs service design and delivery. Owing to cultural, social, demographic and economic similarities between GCC countries, the research (framework, method and findings) will hopefully add to national discussions regarding the future of domestic work in other GCC countries.

More specifically, the research proposes to examine the following aspects of domestic work in three states; Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah, while controlling for the preferences of national employers and those of employers who are expatriates. The analysis will build on statistical sources and interview and focus group data with employers, workers, and TSC operators/staff.

	<b>Aspects of the care economy and employment arrangements for domestic workers</b>	<b>Scope</b>	<b>Data sources</b>
1	<b>Demographics / population statistics / Employment statistics</b>	Fertility, life expectancy, mortality, old-age dependency ratio, health statistics, and female labour force participation rates.	Statistical sources, administrative records. <i>GCC and UAE</i>
2	<b>Employer profiles</b>	Income, household type, size and breakdown, family structure (nuclear or extended; number of dependents – this includes children, elderly and people with disability), and employment profile.	Interviews and focus groups with employers. <i>UAE only</i>
3	<b>Social policy scan</b>	Policies pertaining to child care,	Desk review.

<sup>7</sup> The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) is a membership-based organization with 65 affiliates in 53 countries, and over half a million individual domestic workers as members. Most of its members are trade unions or national trade union federations while the rest are membership based associations and worker cooperatives. IDWF's objective is to build a strong, democratic and united organisation to promote the rights of domestic workers everywhere. IDWF is present in the Middle East since 2017.



		elderly care/ageing, people with disability, maternity benefits and leaves etc.	<u>GCC and UAE</u>
4	<b>Availability, affordability and accessibility of child and elderly care institutions</b>	Employer (nationals and expatriates) attitudes and behaviours.	Interviews and focus groups with employers.  <u>UAE only</u>
5	<b>Employer preferences</b>	Cultural assumptions regarding care institutions, preference for employment arrangements (live-in, live-out), preference for worker profiles, “job descriptions”, number of domestic workers required per household and preference for work-sharing arrangements.	Interviews and focus groups with employers and labour recruiters/TSCs.  <u>UAE only</u>
6	<b>Worker profiles</b>	Age, family status, education, work experience, experience with existing services.	Interviews and focus groups with domestic workers.  <u>UAE only</u>

A two-hour intake session with Tadbeer Center operators and MOHRE officials was organized on 16 January 2018 in the context of the Special Workshop on Labour Recruitment and Harmonized Skill Ecosystems. This session was instrumental in validating the objectives of the research, securing participants’ buy-in, assessing available data sources and defining the scope and parameters of the research.

## D. OUTCOMES

This research will contribute to the following outcomes:

<b>MoHRE and/or ADD Outcomes</b>	<b>Contributions of this research</b>
<b>Setting domestic work on the agenda of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue</b>	This research will produce a report on the future of domestic work in the UAE and the GCC for discussion during the Abu Dhabi Dialogue Senior Officials’ Meeting in May 2018.
<b>Developing national competence standards for domestic work in the UAE</b>	The Abu Dhabi Quality and Conformity Council is looking into the possibility of developing national competence standards for domestic work. The findings of this research will inform the design of these standards.
<b>Piloting an electronic system for labour admission, including for domestic workers</b>	The UAE is developing an electronic system for labour admission that streamlines labour recruitment, with a view to ensuring compliance with international standards, and the proposed elements of a skill acquisition, certification and mutual recognition systems. The findings of this research will inform the design of a





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	pilot on domestic work across at least one Asia-GCC corridor which will likely be launched during the next ADD.
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## E. REFERENCES

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HKCTU's Training and Job Placement Service for Domestic Workers in Hong Kong, available at: [http://www.idwfed.org/en/resources/hkctu2019s-training-and-job-placement-service-for-domestic-workers-in-hong-kong/@@display-file/attachment\\_1](http://www.idwfed.org/en/resources/hkctu2019s-training-and-job-placement-service-for-domestic-workers-in-hong-kong/@@display-file/attachment_1) [accessed on 1 January 2017].

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