



## **HOPE FOR WOMEN Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the Maldives, May 2020 (36th session)**

**3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019**

### **Introduction**

Hope for Women (HFW) is a non-governmental organization in the Maldives, registered on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2010 under Law No. 1/2003 (Associations Act). At Hope for Women, we envision a society where women and girls are free from violence and discrimination and are empowered and fully engaged in all aspects of public life. In that regard, our work involves the following:

- Raise issues of gender injustice and violence against women and girls with policy-makers and work to influence changes in the policies for the benefit of improved women's rights.
- Promote dialogue and discussion on causes and consequences of women's rights violations, while also working to promote and protect women's rights.
- Conduct training and capacity building programs on gender equality, gender based violence and violence against women.

### **ECOSOC Accreditation**

Hope for Women has been working closely with UN agencies since its establishment in 2010. In 2017, Hope for Women became the first CSO in Maldives to be granted the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)'s special consultative status.

### **Establishing Hope Institute for Research and Training**

On 12 June 2018, an Institute by the name 'Hope Institute for Research and Training' has been established. The main objectives of the institutions are:

- Identifying the critical issues/gaps and conducting research on areas related to Gender and Human Rights;
- Creating more opportunities for the general public, particularly women, to further enhance their education and skills necessary to access and enjoy a better livelihood.

Hope for Institute for Research and Trainings has conducted project management workshops, seminars on prevention of sexual abuse and harassment act and positive parenting.

### **Establishing MenEngage Alliance in Maldives**

In collaboration with two other CSOs, Hope for Women has been working on to join the global MenEngage Alliance and form a national MenEngage Alliance in the Maldives. The goal is engaging men and boys as agents of change in working to establish a society which is just, non-



discriminatory, violence free and equal. The ground work has been laid out, and the alliance will be launched in late-2019.

### **Network with CSOs working for gender equality and women's rights**

Hope for Women found the need of networking and alliance building among CSOs both at the local and national level to combine resources within the civil society sector, especially for strengthening the pursuit for common goals. To achieve this, Hope for Women has taken the initiative to organize and host network meetings with CSOs working in Maldives. Since 2018, Hope for Women has been assisting other CSOs to co-host these network meetings quarterly.

### **Scout Group**

To engage and encourage youth to contribute to social services and volunteerism and to develop skills among youth and to actively engage them in the professional field, Hope for Women has formed a community service crew of Rovers in January 2019.

### **Gender Trainers Network**

To tackle the rising gender issues in the society, Hope for Women has established a Gender Trainers Network. This network consists of Gender Trainers who have completed Training of Trainers who are willing and committed to continue the gender advocacy in the Maldives. Hope for Women keeps records of the trainers in the network and mobilize them when needed.

### **Focus Areas and Information Gathering**

The focus areas of this report are female migrant workers, implementation of Law No. 16/2014 (Prevention of sexual harassment and abuse Act), childcare facilities and political participation of women. In order to gather information of the aforementioned areas, we approached relevant stakeholder institutions. We were able to meet up Labour Relation Authority and Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services. Also we were able to get relevant data from the President's Office and other state institutions.



## Female migrant workers in the Maldives

The National Bureau of Statistics estimates there are 114,981 expatriate workers in the Maldives, out of whom 10,228 are women. A majority of them are from South Asian and South East Asian countries.<sup>1</sup> Almost half of all female expatriates work in the crowded capital Male City, while a majority of the remaining workers reside in central atolls where most of the tourist resorts are located.<sup>2</sup> Female migrant workers mostly work in tourism (3,707), ‘community, social and personal services’ (2,476) or health and social work (1,454).<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding occasional media reports<sup>4</sup>, there is limited documentation of violence or exploitation faced by female migrant workers, but female workers being victims of sex trafficking<sup>5</sup> and sexual harassment<sup>6</sup> has long been identified as issues needing attention.

During the meeting held with the Labor Relations Authority, officials noted that a lack of legal requirements stipulating minimum standard of living for migrant workers prevented the authority from taking formal action even if problems are flagged during inspections. Officials informed that 8 complaints were filed by female migrant workers in 2013, which include 7 complaints of unpaid wages and 1 complaint of unlawful termination. In 2014, the authority received 4 complaints of unpaid wages and 1 complaint of sexual harassment by the employer. No data was provided for the reporting period. Officials noted that although the majority of the complaints the authority receive from female migrant workers concerns unpaid wages, many issues are often identified when they are questioned to take a statement.

Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services reports that no case of violence was reported under the Sexual Abuse and Harassment Act during the reporting period. Domestic violence cases are the only type of violence against female migrant workers that are reported. Ministry officials noted that there is no specific standard operating procedure developed to assist and attend to migrant workers who are subjected to different forms of violence. When questioned about how they overcome the language

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<sup>1</sup> National Bureau of Statistics (2019), Expatriate Employment by Nationality and Sex  
<http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/yearbook/2019/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2019/08/5.10.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> National Bureau of Statistics (2019), Expatriate Employment by Locality  
<http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/yearbook/2019/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2019/08/5.12.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> National Bureau of Statistics (2019), Expatriate Employment by Industry and Sex  
<http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/yearbook/2019/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2019/08/5.11.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://thepress.mv/103068>

<sup>5</sup> US State Department (2019), Trafficking in Persons Report: Maldives  
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-trafficking-in-persons-report-2/maldives/>

<sup>6</sup> Maldives Red Crescent, Strategic Plan 2019-2030, p24  
<https://redcrescent.org.mv/beta/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/MRC-Strategic-Plan-2019-2030.pdf>



barrier, it was informed that there are no translators employed, but translators are hired as consultants when required.

Female migrant workers can be considered to be one of the most vulnerable groups in the Maldives. This is due to their large numbers (documented and undocumented), their negative experiences with the Maldives justice system, language barriers, lack of awareness regarding Maldivian laws, and the difficulties faced when seeking legal counsel. Most female migrant workers are not aware of the rights and protection they are entitled to under Maldivian law. This may prevent the victims from coming forward and reporting cases of violence against them.

Therefore, it is important to conduct mandatory awareness raising sessions, and develop policies to make the governing bodies responsible for ensuring a good quality of life for them. In addition to this, the Maldivian government needs to move forward with the ratification of migrant workers convention<sup>7</sup>, as it is a major step towards promoting equality and protecting the rights of migrant workers.

### **Survey on the implementation of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Prevention Act (16/2014)**

The Sexual Abuse and Harassment Prevention Act (16/2014) passed to address sexual abuse and harassment at workplace and by service providers. However, little effort was given to enforce this law; hence the need for the survey to identify implementation level of this act at government level. Hope for women conducted the survey on the implementation of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Prevention Act (16/2014) from January - November 2018. All government Offices were requested to meet and give information for the survey questionnaire.

To rollout the law, a service memo regarding the implementation of the law and the composition of 'harassment prevention committee' created for each institution was informed to all staff via a memo. However, since the initial circular, there was very limited awareness work done on behalf of the act. Although the act enlists certain activities to adhere by all employers & institutions under this act, there is limited knowledge among the staff on the rights provided under the act.

Major findings of the survey:

- Lack of training provided on the rights of the act or the behaviors listed in the act as harassment for members appointed to the committees created under the act.
- Lack of awareness on the act for employees and for visitors of the institutions
- 2014 to 2018, all 21 line ministries combined, there was only three cases filed under the act.
- Only 38% institutions have policy and procedure on reporting and the committee created under the act registered in tribunal

Challenges in implementation of the act

- Lack of awareness and training provided to staff and committee members on the types of act that fall under abuse / harassment
- Lack of awareness among employees on the act the rights protected under the act
- All employees do not believe this act applies to them

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<sup>7</sup> World Health Organisation (2007), Health and Human Rights Factsheet: Maldives

[http://www.searo.who.int/maldives/documents/Maldives\\_Health\\_and\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Factsheet\\_2007.pdf](http://www.searo.who.int/maldives/documents/Maldives_Health_and_Human_Rights_Factsheet_2007.pdf)



- Lack of awareness on the act by the committee's members and the lack of attempts made to conduct trainings for committee members and all employees on this act
- Lack of reporting is believed to be due to lack of awareness on the types of behavior that falls under abuse or harassment and the due to friendly nature of work environment and not having clear professional boundaries, it is believed that there may be more confusion from reporting.

#### Recommendations from findings

- Members of the committee need to understanding the nature of relationships in their work environments and help set clear boundaries at work among coworkers
- The Act need to be revised to clearly identify a monitoring body under the act to increase accountability
- Need to increase awareness on the act for all employees to accept that the act is relevant for all and not just civil servants or private sector
- Enforce close monitoring under the act in all areas of employment

#### **Affordable child care facilities**

Similar to the most developing countries, Maldives also has observed unequal rates between males and females in the labour force participation. While 75.1% of males are in labour force, only 42.2% of females are in the labour force (HIES employment, 2016). One of the main noticeable reasons behind this could be obstacles in accessing to affordable child care facilities. Having affordable child care facilities in an era where the number of nuclear families are rising, acts as a token for women to resume working after the maternity leave. It will also be helpful to single parents and mostly single mothers to earn for themselves while raising a child by themselves.

Currently child care facilities are provided by private daycare centers only located in the greater Male' region. There is no record of registered day cares in the atolls, making it harder for women living in the atolls to be in the labour force. The average price in the child care facilities for each child between 1 to 8 years per month is \$324 to \$518. This seems to be a highly unaffordable rate to a large percentage of the population. According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2016, the average monthly household income is \$1712 (HIES income, 2016). The current childcare rates seem not at all affordable if considered the families with more than one child.

There is dire need for a government intervention into controlling the rates and making such facilities available to women all across the Maldives. It is stated in the Gender Equality Law (2016) (Chapter 5, 25b) that Government and the relevant State authorities has a responsibility, to formulate and implement policies related to the identification and overcoming of barriers faced by women in their economic empowerment, that arise due to the roles assigned to men by society, albeit the apparent equality between men and women in accessing economic resources.

Therefore, Government and relevant State authorities should create a monitoring system of the current child care facilities and lower the current rates. Even though there have no recorded cases of abuse from any of these places, having an established monitoring system will ensure quality of services and the rates. Government also must look into the possibilities of having childcare facilities in the preschools which would function as a daycare in the atolls. This way, it will be helpful to those parents, especially women who wants to be in the labour force.



Links to references:

- GEL - [https://maldives.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Gender%20Equality%20Act\\_0.pdf](https://maldives.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Gender%20Equality%20Act_0.pdf)
- HIES 2016 income - <http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/nbs/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/HIES-Report-2016-Income-Updated.pdf>
- HIES 2016 employment - <http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/nbs/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/HIES-Report-2016-Employment-Update-6112018-1.pdf>

### **Political Participation of Women**

Women are still under represented in public offices. Hope for women acknowledges the recent developments in the empowerment of women, especially the recent appointment of two female justices to the Supreme Court. However, on the same note we regret to highlight the decline in the percentage to women being represented at policy level. Below is the table that shows the changes in the representation of parliamentarians since 2000.

Year	Total no. of MPs	No. of Female MPs	%
2000	50	6	12%
2005	50	9	18%
2009	77	5	6.49%
2014	85	5	5.88%
2019	87	4	4.60%

The table above shows that since 2005 percentage of female MPs has declined to 4.6%.

Below is the table on current percentage of women being represented at government level.

Level	No. of Female	No. of Male	Percentage of Female
Ministers	7	13	35%
Ministerial Rank	0	6	0%
State Ministers	8	27	23%
State Ministers Rank	4	10	29%
Deputy Ministers	11	29	28%
Deputy Ministers Rank	9	16	36%
Ambassadors	7	9	44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>29%</b>