Topic: Increasing the rate of abuse reporting amongst Foreign Domestic Workers in Singapore

Executive Summary:

The issue of under-reporting among abused FDWs in Singapore is a pressing concern that demands immediate attention. This Task Force report delves specifically into the complex factors contributing to the fear of reporting among FDWs and proposes policy recommendations aimed at addressing this issue comprehensively. To understand the background of under-reporting among abused FDWs, as well as past policy efforts and current domestic barriers that hinder FDWs from help-seeking in Singapore, our project has examined literature from various sources including the current scholarship on abused FDWs and local reports from NGOs. Through case study comparisons with Argentina and Hong Kong, our research draws out best practices across different countries and identifies policy practices that are suitable in Singapore.

This report highlights several key factors that contribute to the reluctance of FDWs to report abuse. Foremost among these are (1) the fear of reprisal from their employers, including termination of employment and deportation due to the strong power asymmetry between employers and FDWs. Additionally, factors such as (2) language barriers and (3) a lack of awareness about available help services further exacerbate the situation. To tackle the causes of under-reporting, we have identified the gaps in the existing legislatures and offer five policy recommendations to remedy the situation. Our first recommendation seeks to strengthen the current 6ME framework to provide a safe space with trusted professionals for FDWs to highlight possible abuses. Our second recommendation calls for greater clarity, transparency, and standardisation in the employment contract to minimise the risk of exploitation. Our third recommendation strives to enhance enforcement mechanisms targeting employment agencies, which can deter abusive practices. In our fourth recommendation, we suggest implementing awareness campaigns in public spaces that are frequented by FDWs to encourage help-seeking. Similarly, our last recommendation proposes to reproduce the campaign in online spaces to garner an even wider reach of FDWs.

Addressing the problem of under-reporting among abused FDWs in Singapore requires a multifaceted approach that combines improving regulatory measures, strengthening legal enforcement, and mobilising awareness-raising efforts. By increasing the efficacy of regulatory health checks, standardising employment contracts, enforcing existing legislation, and raising awareness of rights and available support services, Singapore can create a safer environment for FDWs. Our policy recommendations thus aim to empower domestic workers to seek justice against abusive employers and deter abuse in the domestic work sector.