



State of the Art

**The Power to Organise and Engage:
The use of ICTs by women migrant
domestic workers' organisations**

**Hsiao-Chuan Hsia and Philippa Smales
Hong Kong / Taiwan**

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The **Gender and Citizenship in the Information Society** (CITIGEN) research programme, launched in 2010, aims to explore the notion of marginalised women's citizenship as a normative project or an aspiration for equitable social membership contained in the promise of an emerging techno-social order. Six research partners from Sri Lanka, Philippines, China, Thailand/Taiwan, Bangladesh and India are studying various aspects of the terrain. Also three eminent scholars of the field from Costa Rica, Pakistan and Thailand, are writing think pieces delving into the research subject from their perspectives to further enrich the research process.

The **State of the Art** is an analysis of the current state of the field researched. It includes a literature review, based on the hypothesis developed in the research proposal.

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APWLD is Asia Pacific's leading feminist, membership driven network. They hold consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Their 180 members represent groups of diverse women from 25 countries in the region. For nearly 25 years APWLD has been empowering women to use law as an instrument of change for equality, justice, peace and development. They use research, training, advocacy and activism to claim and strengthen women's human rights.

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Introduction

1. Women migrant domestic workers

This introduction does not intend to give a full background into women migrant domestic workers, the push and pull factors, global female migration, or list the abuses that they commonly face. This background information is already contained in various publications, including three by APWLD and the organisations affiliated to this research (see e.g. United for Foreign Domestic Workers Rights, 2010; APWLD, 2008; APWLD, CARAM Asia, GAATW, 2009). Instead, this section will outline some reasons as to why there is so much interest currently in domestic workers and to dispel some misconceptions concerning women migrant domestic workers.

Out of all the different forms of employment, very few have specific instruments introduced by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in order to protect their rights, such as seafarers, miners; and very soon domestic workers too will join this group. In June 2011, member governments will vote to adopt or reject a convention and recommendation on domestic work in order to protect domestic workers. Yet, why are they in need of this special protection?

A) *The unique situation of migrant domestic workers*

a. Current national laws and polices do not protect them:

In the next section, the inclusion and exclusion of domestic workers in the national legislation of Taiwan and Hong Kong is outlined. Hong Kong is interesting as it is one of the few countries that include domestic workers under national labour laws, most countries in Asia do not¹.

b. Domestic work employs mainly women, who are often from lower social economic backgrounds:

This is partly the reason as to why domestic work is not included in the law. Cleaning, cooking and caring is seen as women's work, which does not add to the productive economy. Stemming from an assumption that women's 'traditional' work is not a form of employment, women are placed outside of any labour protections by the refusal to recognise domestic work as work. This means that employers are often free to arbitrarily determine the workers wages, hours and other work conditions. A recent report from Kathmandu stated that:

“Domestic work is the only labour sector where we can find the women dominance [sic] all over the world [...] Domestic Worker reflects the social power structure of the society. The relationship between workers and employers is based on the social power structure [...] The employing community is found so called high class people and hold power status in society, while domestic workers are from rural, ethnic community and considered as powerless in the society.” (CWISH, 2009: 24)

¹ Out of ten Asian countries studied, only three include domestic workers in their labour laws, and only Hong Kong provides full labour protection to domestic workers, including migrant domestic workers (UFDWR, 2010).

Domestic workers are often referred to as ‘helpers’ or as part of the family. Women from lower social economic backgrounds - and in places such as India, from lower classes - are paid to ‘help’ out in wealthier households. Young girl children in some countries, such as Indonesia, are often taken in by wealthier families, who may pay a wage or for the child to go to school - but at the least give her food and a roof over her head - in exchange for domestic duties (Human Rights Watch, 2009: 37). The girls may be said to be a part of the family rather than employees, but the girls are often exploited and abused. Girls and women domestic workers are often restricted to domestic work by their lack of opportunity for further education or skills building, and many will live for years away from their families in the country, in order to continue to work.

In terms of international migration for domestic work, women from developing countries migrate to the wealthier countries, be it Canada, America, Japan, or Malaysia, for the chance to earn more money to care for their families. Women from developing countries employed for domestic work are often subjected to ‘special policies’. In Taiwan, for example, they have to submit to health checks, including a pregnancy check, upon arrival and every six months thereafter (even if they have not been allowed out of the house) and if they are found to be pregnant they are deported (Cheng, 2003: 173). Women migrating for work in wealthier countries can face isolation due to cultural and language barriers. They may also be treated as having a subordinate status, as women and as foreigners, and face discrimination on the basis of gender, race, class, caste, as well as nationality.

c. The work is carried out in the employers’ house:

This is the most important aspect of domestic work, which makes it unlike any other source of employment. It is the cause for most of the abuse the workers suffer and the other main reason as to why domestic work is not included under labour laws. There are other forms of work carried out in the private sphere of the household by plumbers, electricians, etc., but these jobs are for a limited time and are contracted rather than employed directly – and only – by the members of the household. Furthermore, many migrant domestic workers are required to live-in. This means that they are under the control and scrutiny of their employers 24 hours a day, they are always on call, many have no privacy and are forced to share a bedroom or sleep in communal areas. Live-in domestic workers have greater difficulty in forming social or support networks or being involved in collective action, if they are not allowed days off or to leave the house then their isolation can be almost absolute.

Due to the fact that the work is carried out in the private sphere, there are concerns about how legislation can protect such workers, how their work can be monitored. With domestic work, workplace visits would have to be one household at a time and require entering a space which is considered to be private and therefore an intrusion. Whether or not labour inspectors can have the right to enter a household and considering the large numbers of extra inspectors that would be required, prevents legislation in several countries from being passed (ILO, 2010). However, there

are various best practises and examples of how this concern can be overcome², and that someone is working in the private sphere of the household, cannot be an excuse for abusing their rights.

B) *Myths and misconceptions*

There are also some misconceptions that are unique to migrant domestic workers, which cause the widespread abuse of, and the need for, special protective measures for women migrant domestic workers in particular. This includes the misconceptions that migrant domestic workers:

a. Are unskilled and uneducated:

Since they are being employed for ‘women’s work’, which was commonly done by housewives and mothers, such work is seen as not requiring special skill or knowledge. Cleaning work is also seen as a dirty or undesirable form of employment and therefore only those who have little choice or ability to do other forms of employment, it is assumed, would do such work. This view leads to particular treatment, as one domestic worker commented; “when I first arrived, she told me not to touch the air conditioner, the phone, and other stuff in the house [...] She is afraid that I would break them [...] She looks at me like I am stupid and ignorant” (Cheng, 2004: 58).

However, studies have shown that many women from developing countries, such as the Philippines, have high levels of education and have worked as teachers, nurses, entrepreneurs and managers, some even have graduate degrees (Lan, 2003: 147). When their work is undervalued, there is little work available and they know that they can make a lot more money overseas; the choice to migrate for domestic work is a sound economic decision, despite the undesirable nature of the job. In any case being able to manage a household and children does require a multitude of skills, including time management, child development and can be far more demanding than working in an office. Many employ domestic workers for their own household in their country of origin, who, in comparison, “are the women who possess less economic and cultural capital; they are neither sufficiently qualified nor can they afford the costs of seeking employment outside [their own countries]” (Lan, 2003:148).

There is also the fact that patriarchal structures and gender segregated labour markets have limited the choices, for migrant women in particular, to flexible deregulated or informal employment. Therefore, migrant women are crowded into a few relatively poorly paid, ‘unskilled’ occupations, such as domestic work. If wealthier countries opened up their labour markets then women from countries such as the Philippines may have more chance to occupy positions more suitable to their education and skill sets, and avoid the so called brain-drain or brain waste.

b. Are docile, naïve or are sexually promiscuous and either way should be kept in the house:

There are comments in the literature that women from the country side or from developing countries such as Thailand or Indonesia are seen by employers as docile, obedient, simple, innocent or naïve (Cheng, 2004). Many domestic workers are also very young which adds to this perception. Household employers, especially the women, therefore take a maternal role and restrict the

² See further details in *Workers in the Shadows* (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

movements of domestic workers ‘for their own good’ or to protect them. This can be seen by the comment of an employer in Taiwan of a domestic worker only four years younger than herself; “Last time she said she wanted to go to visit a friend in Yi-Lan. I said no. I couldn’t let her go out by herself. I am her custodian in Taiwan. If something happens, how can I face her parents?” (Lan, 2003: 533). Many women put on the ‘act’ of being a domestic worker in front of their employers – of being docile – in order to keep their jobs and to maintain an employee / employer boundary.

On the flip side, domestic workers can also be seen as sexually promiscuous, dressing inappropriately, smoking, etc., this label is usually given to the more independent Filipino domestic workers (Cheng, 2003: 178). Employers may be concerned about what their workers are up to while they are out of the house, especially when they are out late, therefore domestic workers may have a day off, but they still most often have an evening curfew³. As mentioned above, in many countries domestic workers are sent home if discovered to be pregnant, again the household employer may restrict the workers movements to protect the worker, and their investment in hiring the worker.

Migrant domestic workers are often confined to the household due to the employer’s fear of the worker making social connections, learning about their rights, or even ‘running away’. In Taiwan in particular, the household employers must pay a guarantee deposit, which they will lose and will be unable to hire a new domestic worker until the missing one is found and deported (Cheng, 2003: 174). Migrant domestic workers in many countries are unable to change employers or recruitment agencies and if they approach the authorities they are either deported or sent back to their employers, therefore in order to escape abuse, and to seek payments or for accessing their documents they are forced to ‘run away’ to NGOs and church run shelters (Kennelly, 2008). Those employers who restrict their workers movements and keep them locked inside the house indefinitely are more likely to cause the worker emotional and psychological stress, which in turn will cause the workers to want to escape when they have the chance.

c. Can be paid very low wages:

The low wages of migrant domestic workers is often justified by the fact that it is still higher than what they would get back in their country of origin. Household employers may also feel that taking in and employing a migrant from a ‘poor country’ is an act of charity and therefore they often do not pay more than a minimum wage, “employers often feel that domestics should not ask for more money, in that they already earn more in Taiwan and they should be grateful to the job opportunity” (Cheng, 2004: 57).

Of course it is true that a migrant domestic worker will earn more in wealthier countries, this is why they migrate away from their families. The monthly minimum wage of a migrant domestic worker in Taiwan is one of the higher rates at NT\$15,840 (approximately US\$507), this is lower than the minimum wage for other forms of employment, which was recently raised again to NT\$17,880.00⁴ in January 2011 (Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, 2009; *Domestic Workers [...]*, 2010). Domestic work has not been included in at least the last two minimum wage increases in Taiwan, but the

³ For example, between seven and nine o’clock. (Lan, 2003: 539)

⁴ Exchange rates checked on 29 September 2010.

amount is still “about three times the amount of a secretary’s wage or twice that of a teacher’s salary in the Philippines” (Lan, 2003: 137). The 'minimum allowable wage' (MAW) for entering into a new contract with a migrant domestic worker in Hong Kong is \$3,580 per month (approximately US \$461), since 10 July 2008 (Constitutional and Mainland Bureau Affairs, 2008)⁵.

The problem is that this is not the amount that the workers actually receive. A large percentage of the workers wages are taken in fees and charges, especially in the first couple of months, and other additional expenses that they may not have been aware of before migrating. They may also not receive the minimum wage at all. In Hong Kong the labour laws state that recruitment agencies fee is limited to 10% of the first month’s wage, however most domestic workers pay more. According to a survey carried out by APWLD in 2006, workers paid around 80% of their wage to recruitment agencies during the period of six to eight months and most of them still received below the minimum wage for the duration of their contracts (APWLD, 2008: 46). Other fees and expenses that migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong may incur include “departure from his/her place of origin and entry [...] medical examination fees, authentication fees by the relevant Consulate, visa fee, insurance fee, administration fee or other fees of similar nature imposed by the relevant government authorities” (*FAQs Foreign Domestic Workers*, 2010). In Hong Kong if a migrant domestic worker pays these fees then the employer should fully reimburse the amount as stated in Clause 8 of the Standard Employment Contract (ID407), however that may not always happen.

In Taiwan, the placement fee to recruitment agencies should be covered by employers, but a study by Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) in 2009 states that up to NT\$6,703 a month is deducted for 15 months from Indonesian domestic workers wages and Filipino domestic workers pay from NT\$65,000 – NT\$100,000 through salary deductions, unless they have been direct-hired⁶. On top of this amount domestic workers have to pay a monthly service fee to Taiwanese brokers; “1st year - NT 1,800/month, 2nd year - 1,700/month and 3rd year – 1,500/month”⁷. Finally, migrant domestic workers also have to pay health Insurance of NT\$236, Alien Residence Certificate at NT\$1,000 a year and health check-ups at NT\$8,000 for a three year period (APMM, 2009: 24). With all the fees etc., workers lose more than half their already low wages and if they lose their job before the fees are paid, they end up in debt.

Above the fees workers pay, employers may also withhold a percentage of the earnings and deposit it in a bank account which the worker can only access once they have finished their contract or returned to their country of origin. Forced savings of one-fifth to one-third of a worker’s monthly wage, is a practice that is common in Taiwan and is sanctioned by the government (Cheng, 2003:

⁵ Exchange rates checked on 29 September 2010.

⁶ A MOU between Philippines and Taiwan allows direct hiring of domestic workers through the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA). (APMM, 2009: 21)

⁷ This is to cover: “Providing transportation services to and from the airport. Providing transportation and food whenever there is medical examination. Providing board and lodging in case the worker is allowed to transfer to another employer. Getting the Alien Residence Certificate (ARC) of the worker. On site orientation. Providing assistance to the worker in case he/she is to be terminated by the Employer. Providing assistance in terms of mediating between the worker and employer whenever there is friction between them based on the methods of settlement agreed upon by MECO-CLA. Providing assistance in filing information/documents/cases to the authorities concerned in Taiwan like the tax bureau, police, labour, bureau, etc. If it becomes necessary, to assist the worker in transacting business with the bank and of remitting money to his/her family.” (APMM, 2009: 20)

174; Lan, 2003: 533). The low wages may also be justified by the fact that many migrant domestic workers live in and therefore their cost of living is lower. However, it is common for workers to be deprived of food, forced to eat leftovers or food that is not what they are used to at home (Lan, 2003: 531-4). They may therefore need to spend additional money on buying food at nearby places. Also, unlike other forms of employment, if a domestic worker accidentally breaks something, such as a plate or vase, they will have money deducted from their pay for the mistake (Kennelly, 2008: 57). In Hong Kong, the “Employment Ordinance, to which all the Helpers are subject, specifies an employer’s right to deduct money from a Helper’s wages for any broken or damaged item of up to HK\$300, but not more than one-quarter of the monthly wages in that pay period”.

2. Women migrant domestic workers in Taiwan and Hong Kong – Laws and Policies

As a major destination for domestic workers from Philippines and Indonesia, there were approximately 273,609 migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong in March 2010, and the number is still slowly growing (Communication and Public Affairs, 2010). In Taiwan, at least 169,000 women, “approximately half of Taiwan's foreign work force” (American Institute in Taiwan, 2009), are employed as domestic workers from Indonesia, followed by Vietnam, Philippines and Thailand (*Taiwan’s caregivers [...]*, 2010). At the end of September 2009, 120,554 were documented women migrant workers from Indonesia alone, and most of them worked as housemaids or as caregivers to the elderly (Noviantoro, 2010: 1). Taiwan has a quota system for migrant workers and differentiates between domestic helpers and domestic caregivers, however often one person will do both roles. Hong Kong refers to its domestic workers as 'foreign domestic helpers'. Abuse of domestic workers in Taiwan is not as well documented as in Hong Kong, but the demand for domestic workers in the country is also increasing.

In brief, both Hong Kong and Taiwan include migrant domestic workers into some of their labour laws, unlike most of the other wealthier countries in Asia⁸. However, this may not mean that the rights of domestic workers are protected; cases rarely go to court as migrants are unable to find new employment and continue to earn while their cases are being heard.

Hong Kong includes domestic workers under the Employment Ordinance, upon which the standard contract for hiring of migrant domestic workers is based. The ordinance applies to all employees, including migrant domestic workers, and covers a comprehensive range of employment protection and benefits for employees. Domestic workers, whether local or migrant, are therefore entitled under the law to similar rights and protection as those of other local employees. This includes a weekly rest day, paid sick days, maternity leave, twelve statutory holidays per year, annual leave, and payment cannot be offered in lieu. There are also regulations outlining termination and severance pay, as well as conditions for the employment of children over the age of 13, and, as mentioned above, the commission of recruitment agencies should not exceed 10% of the employees first month's wages.

For Taiwan, the inclusion of migrant domestic workers into the law is more complicated. Domestic workers were included under the Labour Standards Law in Taiwan briefly in April 1998, but the

⁸ For more information see *The Right to Unite* (UFDWR, 2010).

government dropped the inclusion due to the difficulty of determining working hours and remuneration for overtime (*Indonesia: Guarantee Domestic [...]*, 2010). The Labour Standards Act (2009.04.22 Modified) does not cover domestic workers, they are covered by the Employment Services Act 2009.05.13 (Amended), but it does not protect rights to the set minimum wage, set work hours, days off, holidays or leave. Under the Employment Service Act they are unable to freely change employers. The Immigration Act 2003 only includes provisions on the entry, stay and exit of migrant workers. Migrant domestic workers in Taiwan have one benefit over those in Hong Kong as they are not required to live-in, their employers can arrange for them alternative accommodation.

Despite their inclusion in other laws migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong are not completely protected. They do not have limitation of working hours, meaning that domestic workers are effectively on call 24 hours a day. Furthermore, the Immigration departmental policy known as the 'two week rule' requires that migrant domestic workers leave Hong Kong within two weeks of premature termination and then they must apply for a new contract in their place of origin before returning (APWLD, 2008: 19). A Household Service Act, drafted in 2003 by NGOs working with migrants, became a bill before the Taiwan Parliament in 2008, but has since stalled. It comprehensively includes provisions on residency, health, legal termination, work hours, leave, days-off and labour contracts and if passed the domestic workers in Taiwan would have similar protection as in Hong Kong.

3. The background on organising and of citizenship in Taiwan and Hong Kong in relation to migrant domestic workers

A) Citizenship

Under the Employment Ordinance of Hong Kong, it is mandatory for migrant domestic workers to enter into a maximum two-year standard employment contract (ID 407) directly with the employers, not with the recruitment agency. After two years the worker needs to return home to apply for a new contract or to renew a contract with their employers. This policy restricts domestic workers from seven years of continuous residency and therefore from becoming permanent residents, these conditions do not apply to any other migrant workers. There are no standard contracts in Taiwan, but workers often sign contracts with recruitment agencies at home or agreements with brokers and employers in Taiwan. Migrant domestic workers can work legally for a period of three years before they must return home to renew their contract or for a new contract, in total they can only work in Taiwan for nine years, although there have been discussions on extending this term (APMM, 2009; Chao, 2011). Low-skilled migrant workers are ineligible to become permanent residents or citizens under Taiwanese migration policy. Therefore, in both countries, if they want to stay or bring over their families they must marry a citizen of the state. Migrant domestic workers are unfairly discriminated against by the policy in Hong Kong, and Taiwan shows prejudice against lower-skilled migrant workers by not allowing them to stay permanently, and this affects not just their ability to organise, but their political involvement.

B) *Organising and country policies*

Hong Kong, as subsumed under China, has ratified the Right to Organise and the Freedom of Association Convention, but not the UN Migrant Workers Convention. However, in Hong Kong all domestic workers, whether local, under 18 or migrant, have the right to organise under the Employment Ordinance. Also under the standard employment contract they cannot be terminated for trade union membership and activities. Due to this there are many associations and trade unions in Hong Kong that include domestic workers. Taiwan is not a party to any of the three main conventions; the Right to Organise and the Freedom of Association Convention, or the UN Migrant Workers Convention, however, prior to 1971 before it came under the People's Republic of China, it had ratified the Right to Organise Convention. Migrant workers in Taiwan cannot be leaders of trade unions and so the difficulty of becoming a citizen hampers the ability of migrant domestic workers to organise, furthermore, they are doubly disadvantaged as both local and migrant domestic workers are not permitted to form trade unions.

Under the Immigration Act, as amended on August 2008, documented migrants in Taiwan do have the right to assemble and to rally. Before the amendment, migrants were not entitled to those rights because the immigration act stated, "Aliens who are visiting or residing in the State may not engage in activities or employment that is different from the purposes of their visits or residence". The Immigration Act was amended after years of protest by the Alliance for Human Rights Legislation for Immigrants and Migrants (AHRLIM). However, under Article 50 of the Employment Services Law, those who change employment can face deportation; therefore, employees and the police use this law to suppress the protesting of migrant workers (Tierney, 2008: 486). Unfortunately, trade unions in Taiwan also tend not to be supportive of migrant workers joining or participating, and with the financial crisis in 2008, they went as far as to mobilise against the importing and employment of migrant workers (AHRLIM, 2008). The labour unions contribute significantly to the migrants' experiences of neglect and marginalisation because they have done little to support struggles for better wages and conditions and for opposing racist violence (Tierney, 2008: 483).

C) *The ability to organise*

That domestic workers in Hong Kong have Sundays off is a major advantage for the domestic workers resident in Hong Kong since it allows them to leave the place of employment – not only to meet each other and socialise, but also to organise and to be organised. The right to one day off a week "is crucial for organising work, because MDWs [migrant domestic workers] can then congregate on Sundays and avail themselves of opportunities to become ... organised" (Hsia, 2009: 128). Women bond together informally in their regional and language groups (of which both Philippines and Indonesia has many) and they also form groups in the formal sense as associations, with funds, officers and activities. Although it is the Filipino groups who are the most organised in terms of their regular meetings on Sundays, the Indonesians have learned fast from the Filipinas and formed similar associations.

It is these smaller groups which interact with alliances, faith based groups, NGOs and larger Unions in Hong Kong. For the larger groups, it is easy to interact with associations who always meet on the same day and usually in the same place – mainly being Central park. Stalls are set up as an outreach and information source, and help is available through these volunteers and the local churches. The NGOs, unions and faith based groups help the workers with the legal and political aspects of their employment and organise safe houses for the workers who have left their place of employment. They connect the Filipino and Indonesian associations to the Hong Kong government and to their own governments, to legal services and other services that workers are unable to seek help from directly as they are not open on Sundays. The network from language based groups to associations to larger groups and supporting organisations informs, enables and empowers migrant women domestic workers in Hong Kong. For example, in 2008 there was an intensive campaign by ATKI-HK, Indonesian Migrant Muslim Alliance (GAMMI) and PILAR who held continuous picketing actions, of up to 5,000 protesters at its height, over six weeks outside the Consulate in Hong Kong (PILAR, GAMMI, 2008). These actions lead to the withdrawal of the policy that prohibited Indonesian Domestic Workers in Hong Kong to change employment agencies within the first two years of employment in Hong Kong (SE2258/2007).

In Taiwan, migrant workers are very limited in their ability to organise since they are not able to form their own unions, be officers of unions, and they are often not welcome in other unions. They also do not have a legally mandated day off. Filipino migrant domestic workers are protected by the Migrant Workers Overseas Filipinos Act 1995 and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) which has standard contracts for migrant workers. The standard contract includes a weekly day off, however Filipinos are often made to sign side agreements with Taiwanese brokers in which they sign away this right (APMM, 2009: 24-25). According to a recent survey 66% of domestic workers in Taiwan had no days off, 22% had one day off a month and 12% had two or more days off a month (APMM, 2009: 48). Their days off are also not always on a Sunday as they are in Hong Kong. The lack of Sundays, or any day off increases their isolation and new strategies are need in order to enable them to organise and for them to push for their rights. This is where ICTs can be an important tool to organise migrant domestic workers.

D) *Organisations*

There are a few registered associations for Indonesian and Filipino migrant workers in Taiwan such as the Taiwan Indonesian Workers' Association (TIMWA) and KaSaPi (united we stand) for Filipino migrant workers. Most of the organising is supported by Taiwan International Workers' Association (TIWA) a self funded NGO who also organises the Promotion Alliance for the Household Services Act (PAHSA), an alliance of 13 groups aimed at getting a law passed for migrant domestic workers. There is also the New Immigrant Labour Rights Association (NILRA), and the Alliance for Human Rights Legislation for Immigrants and Migrants (AHRLIM) mentioned above. The other main advocates for domestic and other migrant workers are faith based groups. In December of 2009, a public rally was organised by Migrants' Empowerment Network in Taiwan (MENT) and Church-based organisations to draw attention to the situation of domestic workers (*Taiwan: Church calls*

[...], 2009). The groups provide shelter and legal services for all migrant workers, but they do not have much coordination with advocates outside of Taiwan (Tsai, Hsiao, 2006) and the groups need to include more domestic workers as members.

In Hong Kong, where domestic workers are able to freely organise, they have a lot more support, including; Bethune House domestic helper shelter, Asian Migrants Coordinating Body, Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, Asian Migrant Centre, Helpers for Domestic Helpers, Asian Domestic Workers Union (ADWU). For Indonesians there is The Hong Kong Coalition of Indonesian Migrants Workers Organization (KOKTIHO), Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (IMWU), Indonesians Against Overcharging (PILAR) (an alliance of 23 Indonesian migrant’s organisations), Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (ATKI – HK). Finally for Filipinos there is the Abra-Tinguan Ilocano Society – Hong Kong (ATIS-HK), (Filippino), United Pangasinan – Hong Kong (UPHK); (Filippino), Association of Concerned Filipinos (ACFIL), United Filipinos in HK (UNIFIL) and the Filipino Migrant Workers’ Union (FMWU).

Table summary of the legal situation of migrant domestic workers in Taiwan and Hong Kong		
	<i>Hong Kong</i>	<i>Taiwan</i>
<i>Number of migrant domestic workers (approx.)</i>	273,609	169,000
<i>Included under national labour legislation</i>	Yes	Some legislation
<i>Basic rights protected under national labour legislation</i>	Yes	No
<i>Migrant domestic workers have labour rights</i>	Yes	No
<i>Right to form registered unions under national legislation</i>	Yes	No
<i>Day off protected under national legislation</i>	Yes	No
<i>Required to live-in</i>	Yes	No, employer can arrange alternative accommodation
<i>Standard contract</i>	Yes	No
<i>Contract period</i>	Two years	Three years, max. total nine years
<i>Minimum wage</i>	Yes, HK\$3,580 (approx. US \$461)	Yes, NT\$15,840 (approx. US\$507)

The State of the Art on the use of ICTs

1. The current use of ICTs and mobile phones by migrant workers and women migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Taiwan

There are currently no comprehensive studies on the number of women migrant domestic workers that use ICTs in Hong Kong and Taiwan, however, the saturation of ICTs in Asia in general is high. According to the e-readiness rankings of 2009, Hong Kong is ranked 8th and Taiwan 16th out of 70 countries, but the countries of origin for the migrant domestic workers rank much lower at 54th for Philippines and 65th for Indonesia (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2009: 5). The rankings come from evaluating the technological, economic, political, social assets and information economies of each country to determine the countries ICTs 'state of play'. What this means is that although there may be a high level of access to and use of ICTs within the destination countries, the migrant domestic workers are coming from countries where they may not have had any exposure or access to the use of ICTs at all. However, this ranking system is focused more on the economic penetration of ICTs and does not rank the use of ICTs by everyday users, nor the use of mobile phone by citizens generally. The penetration of mobile phone technology tends to be higher than that of other forms of ICTs. As one article discussing mobile phone use in developing countries states; "Mobiles are being adopted faster than even the most basic services, such as routine medical care and schools" (Kang, 2010). The e-readiness rankings also state that; "Today, more people have a mobile device than do not, and the distribution has spread mightily throughout the developing world-nearly one-half of all mobile subscribers are in Asia" (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2009: 6).

To understand the use of mobile phones in Taiwan and Hong Kong by migrant domestic workers, we need to also look at the use of mobile phones in the workers country of origin. If the workers were users of mobile technology before their arrival in Taiwan and Hong Kong, then they are more likely to continue that use when they migrate. Despite the low e-readiness rankings, mobile phones are more than prevalent in the Philippines. Cecilia Uy-Tioco (2007: 256) notes that back in 2005 "the two main mobile phone companies, Globe Telecom and Smart Communications, were serving a total of 32.8 million cell phone subscribers in a country of 89 million people—36 per cent of the population. This number is significant because 40 per cent of the country lives below the poverty line on less than a US\$1 a day", five years later that number is up to an estimated 85% of the population or 80 million mobile phones in 2010⁹. The Philippines is now known as the "text capital of the world", because they send and receive more SMS messages than any other country (Uy-Tioco, 2007: 256; Castells *et al.*, 2004: 189; Pertierra, 2006). There is even an article on the practice of 'transnational mothering' by Filipino migrant workers using their mobile phones and due to the 'mobile mania' young users are known as generation Txt, rather than generation X (Uy-Tioco, 2007; Castells *et al.*, 2004: 189).

Indonesian women may be less technologically savvy as the saturation levels for ICTs in Indonesia is one of the lower rates in Asia, but, they are catching up in terms of mobile phone use. In 2005

⁹ Although it is noted that this may be because some people have two or more phones. (*Cellphones hit 80 million[...]*, 2010; Cruz, 2010; Hamlin, 2010)

there were 20-30 million mobile phone users in Indonesia (Barendregt, 2008: 63), in 2009 there were an estimated 144.65 million phone users, and a saturation rate of 56.8%, meaning that Indonesia has surpassed other Asian countries such as India (*Indonesia: Mobile (...)*, 2009). As Bart Barendregt comments, “at the turn of the 21st century Indonesia is also a country that in the near future promises to be one of the fastest growing markets for the new and mobile media, not only within Asia, but worldwide” (Barendregt, 2008: 60-1).

Those migrating overseas who are already familiar with mobile technology are therefore more than likely to continue this mobile phone and text usage to keep in touch with those back home. However, it is a little difficult to determine the usage of mobile phone of Indonesian and Filipino migrant workers in Taiwan and Hong Kong, let alone migrant *women domestic* workers. The number of mobile phone subscribers in 2010 in Taiwan stood at 24.6 million, or 107% saturation rate (*Asia-Pacific Regional (...)*, 2010). In May 2010, the saturation rate of mobile phone in recorded by the government of Hong Kong was already 180.1%, with most people having more than one (*Region Key Telecommunications (...)*, 2010). The figures indicate that as the saturation is so high, it is probable that women have equal access and ownership of mobile phones in these countries. These figures may not however reflect the number of mobile phone users among the migrant worker population, and especially among the women migrant domestic workers, of those countries.

To determine the current use of mobile phones by migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Taiwan, we can, however, look to literature that discusses the use by migrants in other comparative countries in Asia. There is a study by Ke Yang on the use of mobile phones by migrant workers in Beijing. The survey was of 178 Chinese internal migrant workers, and of these, 71.8% were male and employed in construction and as security guards, therefore the results may not reflect the mobile phone use of female (overseas) migrant domestic workers (Yang, 2008: 65). However the study made some interesting observations as to mobile use by workers, who although still Chinese, are in a very different environment from their rural origins. All of the interviewees use mobile phones and 158 of 178 owed their own mobile and regularly used it. In another article from 2007 on ICTs use, it mentions two other Chinese cities with high internal migration rates; Shanghai had almost 100% mobile penetration rate and Guangdong was at 84.3% (Law, Rodney, 2008: 43).

In the comparative country of Singapore - which like Hong Kong has a high number of migrant domestic workers - the saturation of mobile use is also very high, one article mentions that “the telecoms regularly sponsor beauty pageants for Filipina domestic workers, festivals for various national groups such as Thai ‘Songkran’ (New Year) celebrations and similar events” (Thompson, 2009: 366). The use of mobile phones by domestic workers, in Singapore at least, are often integrated into their everyday lives with frequent text messages and calls (Thompson, 2009: 371), this seems to also be true in Hong Kong at least, as one article states:

“The mobile phone has become the ubiquitous accessory of Filipino domestic workers in Singapore and Hong Kong. In both cities, you can purchase handsets, SIM cards and pre-paid phone cards that allow you to communicate on Philippine networks. Malls crowded with Filipino workers on their days off resonate with the tones of incoming messages. They are texting each other, of course, but also texting 'home'.” (McKay, 2004: 14)

In Hong Kong and Taiwan, the Filipino have the advantage of often being able to speak and read English, and so this makes it easier for them to access the technology, follow the instructions etc., and the Indonesian can often speak Cantonese and therefore talk to the to the shop keepers. Also, as mentioned above, there often seem to be vendors and street sellers of phones and phone credit that can speak the languages of main migrant groups. In destination countries migrant workers wanting to keep costs low become knowledgeable on the different providers and deals, as Thompson details:

“In interviews on this topic with foreign workers, these complexities immediately became apparent. Not only did they often describe a great variety of different technologies (and combinations of technologies) but also clearly had a detailed knowledge of the various options available, their relative costs, quality and so on [...]” (Thompson, 2009: 368)

Pei-Chia Lan comments that migrant workers in Taiwan often have new small and reasonably expensive mobile phones as a kind of status symbol. One Indonesian migrant explained that they had no choice but to follow this rule because of peer pressure: “All of us have small mobile phone. If you buy a big one, people will laugh at you: 'Is this a shoe? An alarm clock? So you have to buy a small one' ”(Lan, 2006: 180).

2. The impediments to accessing mobile technology for women migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Taiwan

A) Government and service providers

In both Taiwan and Hong Kong, mobile phones, SIM cards and prepaid top-up are widely available. This is important because previously most mobile phones were locked to a particular provider and along with the SIM cards, could only be used on a contract with that service provider, like home or fixed line phones still are now. Migrants would therefore need to have a sponsor or guarantor in the destination country, this would have been an impediment to most domestic workers owning or using a mobile phone. Contracts can still be used, but the convenience of prepaid top-ups without paperwork or deposits means that a domestic worker can have as many SIM cards with as many different providers as they wish and top them up with credit whenever they are able to. According to Pei-Chia Lan, the Taiwan media is even calling the prepaid top up cards ‘foreign labourers’ cards’ (Lan, 2006: 178). With the wide availability of prepaid unregistered mobile phones there does not seem to be any impediments on the use of mobile phone technology by the service providers¹⁰.

In Singapore, the places where migrant domestic workers frequent on their days off, particularly on Sundays, are targets for the advertising by mobile phone providers. In the article by Eric C. Thompson the Golden Mile Complex, which is popular with Thais, is described as being “draped with banners in English and Thai, promoting Starhub’s ‘Green’ SIM Card” (Thompson, 2009: 366). The SIM cards and top up cards or vouchers also have instructions in the languages of the main migrant populations; Bengali, Chinese, Tamil, Indonesian, Burmese, Filipino, Sinhalese and Thai (Thompson, 2009: 367). In Hong Kong, mobile phone credit is readily available at the stores in

¹⁰ Although note that in Mainland China they have begun the registration of new mobile phones.

WorldWide Plaza, the commercial hub for migrant domestic workers especially from the Philippines (Koh, 2009: 32).

It is possible for the government to block mobile phone use and it is possible that they may do so - for example, on days when protests are advertised to occur - in order to disrupt plans and limit participation. Blocking has been known to occur in Burma (Myanmar), Belarus and recently Egypt during civilian protests. Although, in countries such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, the economic effects of blocking cell phone use in the city, even temporarily, may deter the governments from taking such action (Paulo, 2007: 74). Otherwise there are no current impediments placed on the use of mobile phones by the governments of either country.

Access and use may not be a problem for migrant workers but the cost of the mobile phone itself may be the highest impediment. The technology is expensive for migrant domestic workers, as Thompson notes, “On salaries that range from about 250 to 500 Singapore dollars per month for domestic workers and only slightly more for construction workers, a handphone is often a foreign worker’s most expensive budget item” (Thompson, 2009: 368). Estelle Maria Kennelly mentions that for migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, “the monthly mobile fees and cost of calls, especially to the Philippines, can entangle them in more financial debt” (Kennelly, 2008: 126). However, cheap basic or reasonably good second-hand mobile phones retail for approximately US\$40-60. Although the migrant workers may also bring mobile phones from home or reconditioned second hand mobile phones maybe available on the streets for much cheaper. The price of a local text message in 2008 in Taiwan was US \$0.08 and “Mobile Off-Network Call Price for 1-minute local call during non-peak hours 2008 in US \$ 0.16” while during peak hours is \$0.37 (Taiwan, 2010). In Hong Kong, mobile phones are cheaper to use; “Mobile Off-Network Call Price for 1-minute local call during non-peak hours 2008 in US \$ 0.02” peak hours are the same and text messages are \$0.06 (Hong Kong, 2010). Text messages sent home to Indonesia or the Philippines are more expensive, but many migrant workers tend to use phone cards or their SIM cards and special values or budget deals from home instead of their country of destination prepaid SIM cards.

B) *Employers*

A problematic impediment to migrant domestic workers' ICTs and mobile usage is the employer. The literature mentions mobile phones being taken away from workers, or of the workers hiding their phones and phone usage from their employers. For example, Thompson mentions that one of the great benefits of mobile phones is the ability to use the silent text messages to communicate and that domestic workers were able to keep and used their mobiles without their employer’s knowledge (Thompson, 2009: 373). Ke Yang also notes that “mobile phones are small and easier to hide than TV sets or computers” (Yang, 2008: 68). The blog 'Maid in Singapore' and the article by Kennelly mention migrant domestic workers being fired because she had a mobile phone and the employer would not allow that, and another migrant domestic worker said, “I am not allowed to use the phone or receive calls – only emergency calls. My Employer says they might disturb the baby” (Kennelly, 2008: 111; *Wanted to call sick [...]*, 2010).

“Such restrictions are thought by the Filipinas to be another example of distrust by the employers implying that a Helper would spend her time on the phone rather than doing her work when the employer is out of the house. It could also be interpreted as the employer feeling a loss of control if the Helper can talk to others outside her, the employer’s, sphere of influence. Others said their employers did not want them to have friends, and viewed the inability to phone friends as a further loss of freedom.” (Kennelly, 2008: 126)

As mentioned in the earlier discussion of the ‘myth’ that migrant domestic workers ‘are docile, naïve or are sexually promiscuous and either way should be kept in the house’, migrant domestic workers are restricted in their movements. If they are unable to leave the house, then they may be unable to purchase a mobile phone and are also unable to add credit to their mobile phones, they could still call out using collect calls and possibly receive local calls, but they will be unable to text. Recruitment agencies have also been known to take mobile phones from domestic workers, saying that the employer will not like it if they have one (Thompson, 2009: 373).

3. The current use of mobile phones to collectively organise, inform and politically engage migrant workers

The importance of mobile phones for migrant workers is starting to be recognised around the world. Recently, a report mentioned that; “The authorities in Bahrain were making positive moves such as insisting sponsors provide their workers with mobile telephones” (PICUM, 2010). The literature also mentions that governments should have policies on mobile phones and contracts should include the right to external communications, including the right of the worker to have a mobile phone (Thomas, Lim, 2010; Lee, 2009). The blog, 'Maid in Singapore' defends the right of migrant domestic workers to use their mobile phone during their free time and a new programme championed by Cherie Blair and Hillary Clinton aims to provide more women around the world with mobile phone technology to meet development goals (*Wanted to call sick [...]*, 2010; *About mWomen*, 2010).

A) To collectively organise

Most of the discussion around the use of mobile phones by migrant domestic workers is only in terms of control and resistance – the interplay between the employer and employee. The literature also focuses on the ability to use mobile phone to maintain connections with family in transnational connections (Thomas, Lim, 2010; Lee, 2009). The literature, therefore, does not discuss in detail the use or potential use of ICTs to organise migrant domestic workers in a greater sense of communal organised resistance.

Again there are a few articles that discuss the organisations, unions and NGOs working with migrant domestic workers in Taiwan and Hong Kong (Hsia, 2009; Sim, 2003), but these focus on the organisations themselves and their formation, structures or activities, rather than the methods they use or could use to organise their members. For example, the article by Amy Sim on the three major migrant worker NGOs in Hong Kong only mentions the handing out information leaflets at the place where migrant domestic workers congregate on their days off (Sim, 2003: 448).

There is some literature and some news articles focusing on migrant workers in other countries that discuss the usefulness of mobile phones. In Singapore, the newspaper comments on “mobile phone-armed Filipinas [who] have on hand the numbers of their embassies and helplines” (Thompson, 2009: 37). In Kuwait there is the reporting of a domestic worker from the Philippines sending a SMS help message to Migrante Middle-East, “On her short messages to me, she claimed that she is not given food and water and she has been locked up at her employer’s house at the roof top. No doubt she is being abused and maltreated” (Lazaro, 2010).

The study by Ke Yang, mentioned earlier, discusses the use of mobile phone to “develop and maintain *jianghu* relations” which he explains;

“In Chinese, *jianghu* literally means “rivers and lakes,” thus connoting a wider world outside of one’s immediate circumstances. The concept of *jianghu* subculture is associated with the lower classes and itinerant wandering away from ones original home... For contemporary migrant workers, *jianghu* friendship is a kind of practical network.” (Yang, 2008: 69)

The mobile helps workers to connect to other people in their new environment, such as other migrant workers in the same situation as themselves. The author also explains how through these friendship links a worker was able to get a new job almost immediately. Using the mobile phone to connect to organisations and unions would be only one step beyond this common practice of mobile phone networking described. The author also discusses how “a mobile can be used to keep connected with *jianghu* friends, while at the same time maintaining a safe distance in these relationships” (Yang, 2008: 70). In the same way the mobile phone could allow connection to a organisation or union, while not drawing the attention of others, maintaining privacy and security from reprisals - for example from employers who may not want their worker to be involved in union activities.

In Singapore, Thompson noted that the Thai migrant construction workers were able to organise annual football tournaments over several month and with various teams primarily through mobile phones. He also noted that:

“Handphones make coordination of events easier and residents of Singapore and members of these communities generally acknowledge that the sense and strength of those ethnonational communities of foreign workers in Singapore among whom handphone use is more prevalent (Thais and Filipinas) is stronger than among those with relatively less access to handphones (Indonesians and Bangladeshis)” (Thompson, 2009: 375).

B) *Mobile activism for political engagement*

The use of mobile phones for activism is a relatively new development for campaigners to reach those who may otherwise be isolated. The sending out of text messages to spread a campaign is a technique becoming popular in Africa, there is even a book entitled ‘SMS Uprising: Mobile Activism in Africa’. The social justice organisation Fahamu, for example, has a text alert service, which enabled users to sign up for free text alerts about the progress of the campaign and Fahamu is working to establish a network of organisations in Africa who are using mobile phone technologies for social justice (*Mobile phones [...]*, 2008). There was also a text message sign up to a petition to

show support for the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the service also allowed people to opt in to an text message update on the achievements of the campaign, “The campaign did not aim to get many text messages; its goal was to persuade 15 governments to ratify the Protocol, which it did successfully [...] by virtue of the 'news value' of the initiative. It proved, as expected, a successful way of getting attention to the campaign” (Manji, 2008). It is interesting that many of the examples of mobile activism are from Africa, if organisations are able to use the technology there, it should also be able to be successfully used in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

In their country of origin, Filipinos are used to the idea of using mobile phones for advocacy and information campaigns. The first time that a mobile phone played a role in removing a president occurred in the Philippines in 2001, text messages were used not just to gather people for the demonstrations, but also to sign online petitions and to spread jokes about the president, so many text messages were sent that it overloaded the network (Castells *et al.*, 2004: 199). A Filipino consumer advocacy group called TXTPower has been operating for many years and has been campaigning against, amongst other things, a proposed text tax and the proposed compulsory registration of all prepaid SIM cards, through information and advocacy campaigns (*About TXTPower*, 2006). The biggest campaign of TXTPower is the 'Hello Garci' ringtone political tool, part of the growing anti-Arroyo movement in the Philippines. It began after a wire-tap between President Arroyo and an election official about rigging the 2004 elections and became a ringtone downloadable from the website and spread as a political protest used by an estimated one million Filipinos (Concepcion, 2006). The Filipino mobile phone activism spread to Hong Kong during the Anti-World Trade Organisation protests by a chapter of TXTPower (*TXTPower brings gospel [...]*, 2005).

There is little other than anecdotal evidence of mobile phones being used by migrant workers for mobile activism in other parts of Asia. For example, security concerns over the ability of migrants to use mobile phones to organise is believed to be one of the reasons as to why the use of mobile phones by migrant workers is banned by decrees in Phang Nga, Ranong, Rayong and Surat Thani provinces of Thailand, where migrant workers are also restricted from gathering (Human Rights Watch, 2010: 32). In Hong Kong, there was an intensive campaign by Indonesian domestic worker organisations that lead to the withdrawal of the SE2258/2007 policy prohibiting domestic workers to change employment agencies within the first two years of employment, those involved mention the use of mobile phones to quickly spread the message and gather support.

C) *To inform*

Mobile phones are also beginning to be seen as useful for humanitarian aid agencies and NGOs to reach people who are isolated. A good example of this is the Aidlink service in the Middle East and East Africa, provided by Souktel, which enables humanitarian agencies to easily set up mailing lists and to send out text messages to people to inform them that aid is available or to conduct surveys. Currently 15,000 people are being reached by the 30 aid agencies which use the service (*Case Studies: Souktel*, 2009; *Aidlink: Connecting Aid [...]*, 2010). There is also the FrontlineSMS free bulk email service for NGOs, current being used by over 400 members from the Orangutan

Information Centre (YOSL-OIC) in Indonesia, OneWorld Health (India), to The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), which is using the service in Pakistan to support people to return to their homes after being displaced by conflict (*Texting for life [...]*, 2010).

The use of mobile phone to extend health services to isolated women has also surged in the last few years, with women signing up to receive free text messages guiding them through their pregnancy in Ghana (Kang, 2010), the distribution of mobile phones and credit to midwives in rural Aceh Besar, Indonesia (Chib *et al.*, 2008), to the text message based counselling on HIV in South Africa (*RedChatZone, HIV[...]*, 2010).

A more important NGO use of mobile phones for this research is that of text message hotlines. There is one currently running in Haiti called Ayiti SMS SOS which can be used to report gender-based violence with just a text message (*SMS SOS: Reporting [...]*, 2010). Another example is the Centre for Migrant Advocacy (CMA) based in the Philippines, which has a SOS SMS system which runs 24 hours 7 days a week, unlike most other government run hotlines. Migrants working abroad access the system by sending a text starting with the letters SOS, a space and then the message and senders name to +63 9209 OFW SOS (+63 9209 639 767) (*Help is Just [...]*, 2010). Originally, the hotline was set up when there were fears for the safety of Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia during the Iraq war, and the main users are still from Saudi Arabia. The messages are received in the Philippines and forwarded on to activate a network of non-profits and government agencies to come to the workers' rescue, CMA follows up on each case "and logs details of each case, including response time and kind of intervention taken" (*Sos Sms Text [...]*, 2010). Examples of hotlines like this are important because organising migrant domestic workers is not just about the organisations and unions in Hong Kong being able to gather people for rallies and protests, but to also be able to communicate with, assist and document abuses of migrant domestic workers rights on an ongoing basis.

If CMA is able to operate such a helpline from Philippines with a network mostly in Saudi Arabia, then it is also possible for migrant workers organisations and unions to similarly operate a text helpline with a network in the destination countries of Hong Kong and in Taiwan. The networks could incorporate and build upon the current assistance in destination countries such as in Taiwan, for example, where there is already a phone-in hotline set up last year by the Council of Labour Affairs (CLA) (Huang, 2010).

There are other uses of mobile phones that can be advantageous for migrant women domestic workers during their period of employment or the other stages of migration for work. Migrant workers could be informed of these services through text messages sent by organisations and unions that they are associated with. This would include not just information on protests or for assistance in case of rights violations, but also information on meetings, language or computer training courses, on new regulations and policies, on agencies to avoid - anything that many benefit women migrant domestic workers.

Banking in particular is an area where information from reliable sources such as organisations and unions could help migrant women domestic workers to safely remit their savings to family

members. Mobile banking in particular is useful for domestic workers who may be restricted in leaving the employers household. For example, one of the largest mobile networks in the Philippines has a service allowing up to \$200 to sent home for much less than the usual bank fees; the recipient receives a text message and can get the money from licensed operators and shopping malls (Uy-Tioco, 2007: 263). The Philippines has two mobile banking services for migrant workers, but Indonesia is yet to have the technology up and running (UNIFEM, 2010: 31).

Mobile phone can also be used to inform others, including employers. Friends of Women Workers, an NGO based in Jordan, had a campaigning technique in 2008 which involved sending text messages on the appropriate treatment of migrant workers to Jordanian mobile phone users (Morse, 2009).

D) *Basic bulk text systems*

For those less technologically savvy, it may sound complicated and difficult to use mobile technology in this way; however it can be very simple. There are various bulk text mobile services available which can be used for informing, campaigning or organising, most of these services require initial payment and costs for each message sent out as well. However, for NGOs and other organisations with smaller needs and operating budgets, free services like FrontlineSMS are sufficient. FrontlineSMS, for example, is “an open source software that turns a laptop and a mobile phone into a central communications hub”, you need a mobile phone or GSM modem that can connect via Serial, USB or Bluetooth to a computer, then you simply install the programme on the computer and send messages to individuals or large groups, and receive messages back through the program (*Requirements' [...]*, 2010). Those using the service pay their local operator per SMS as usual, and those texting the service would also pay the standard charge, however, those using the service can also pay to get a national toll free or international calling number from providers. Advertising and publicity would also be needed so that people will text and opt-in to the bulk email system to receive the messages. Simple systems such as these could easily be set up and put to various uses by organisations working with migrant domestic workers.

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