

## Equality Mainstreaming Workshop Case Study 26 June 2021

This note outlines a case study which we will refer to and work on during the workshop.

### Case study - *Improving workers' rights in Thalassa*

- **Country:**

Thalassa is a low-middle income country, with 45 million inhabitants. Since the discovery of oil in the Western part of the country, Thalassa has been named as one of the fastest growing economies in the region by the World Bank. Thalassa's economic growth has triggered an influx of investment into the region and the growth of big business. While this has brought more job opportunities for locals, it has also shed light on gaps in the law that enable, among other things, the exploitation of land rights, discrimination, poor labour conditions, child labour, a lack of safety and security, and a failure to meet the living wage; as well as a lack of adherence by companies to those labour laws that do exist.

- **Partners:**

Equality for All is a legal rights organisation in Thalassa comprised of lawyers and judges who believe that the law should protect the rights of all. Equality for All therefore seeks to address the human rights gaps created during this exponential economic growth to reduce the risk of harm to local communities and to protect marginalised groups who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Employment Support is a UK-based NGO that was founded in 1980 to support workers' rights. Comprised of lawyers specialising in employment law and equality law, it has led the way in advocating for improved workers' rights, strengthening legislation and training lawyers to better represent workers. In recent years, it has also begun to provide support for organisations abroad who wish to improve workers' rights as the growth of big business increases opportunities for exploitation.

- **Partnership:**

Employment Support and Equality for All formed a partnership in 2020, after an initial scoping visit by Employment Support lawyers to Thalassa in late 2019. Equality for All will lead on programme development, engaging its network of lawyers, while Employment Support will bring its experience in employment and equality law and advancing workers' rights in the UK.

The broad objective of the partnership is to strengthen workers' rights in Thalassa. The first activities of the partnership will involve trainings for lawyers and judges on international labour standards, as well as roundtables between key stakeholders. The trainings will be conducted by Employment Support with some input from Equality for All.

### **Theory of Change:**

If we...

1. Provide training to lawyers and judges on international labour standards and workers' rights
2. Conduct a roundtable between business owners, Ministry of Labour officials and lawyers

Then we will see...

1. Improved representation of workers in the courts
2. Improved laws offering more legal protection for workers

This is because...

1. Lawyers will be better placed to represent clients in employment matters and judges will be more informed when hearing cases
2. Gaps in the law will be identified to inform the drafting of legislation

## **Political Economy Analysis Findings**

**Through this analysis, the partnership became aware of several matters that would require special attention and care when designing the project. These included:**

- There exists a large informal sector, with little enforcement of laws.
- A large number of refugees live in the country who mainly work in the informal sector without permits, such as in construction.
- Around 30% of women in the country undertake paid labour (higher among refugee women). Most women work in the garment industry or (for local women) office jobs, such as banking.
- There was a lack of understanding of these issues among many lawyers and judges, who also displayed negative attitudes towards women and LGBTQ+.
- Some groups had already begun to protest the sale of their land to big business. Women's rights groups had already identified necessary amendments to labour laws.
- These groups requested assistance in accessing legal representation and in lobbying the government to address these issues and pass legislation to better protect their rights. It was also recognised that there was need for improved coordination and communication between different segments of society affected by the growth of big business.
- Discrimination against women, members of the LGBTQ+ community and persons with disabilities, for varying reasons, is commonplace. Issues include workplaces not wanting to pay for maternity leave, men typically being able to work longer hours due to a lack of other responsibilities, refusing to employ people they believe to belong to the LGBTQ+ community, misconceptions about persons with disabilities and a lack of incentives to employ them.
- Many of those who experience exploitation or discrimination are afraid to take cases to court due to their status, stigma, or a lack of confidence in the justice system.
- Those consulted believed that Employment Support's experience in advocacy, network-building and strengthening legislation could be of value, provided that they were not excluded from the process.