

# HTMS Ambassador Programme

# Domestic Workers & Domestic Servitude

**Human trafficking & modern slavery (HTMS) is the exploitation of people through the use of threats, fraud, coercion or deception. It involves the abuse of an individual's position of vulnerability - domestic workers can be particularly vulnerable due to the circumstances in which they work.**

**It is estimated that at least 75.6 million people are employed as domestic workers, of which over 76% are female, with more children working in domestic service than any other form of child labour[1].**

## Domestic Workers

Domestic workers work in private homes, undertaking a range of tasks which may include cooking, cleaning, running errands and perhaps even caring for children or the elderly. Domestic workers may also live in their employer's home and thus be required to be 'on call' 24 hours a day. Such arrangements can easily lead to situations of abuse.

Domestic workers may migrate from other countries for the purpose of employment - referred to as migrant domestic workers. However, it is also important to note that some may be trafficked to the UK for the sole purpose of domestic servitude.

## Domestic Servitude

Domestic servitude is a form of type of **forced labour**. It can be difficult to identify because the work is carried out in private residences and the individual often resides with the employer and may not have much freedom to leave the premises. Such live-in arrangements can increase the vulnerability and exploitation of individuals.

Workers recruited from abroad may find themselves in a situation of **debt bondage** whereby they incur a debt for their travel and work placement, with subsequent fees added for things such as food and accommodation, thereby continuing to increase their debt and preventing them from being able to pay it off. Debt-bondage is a form of exploitation which keeps people trapped in situations of slavery.

Not all domestic work is forced labour but may turn into a situation of exploitation once conditions change[2]:

- if the employer prevents them from leaving the premises
- if pay is insufficient, delayed or withheld
- if pay is given 'in-kind' in the form of food and/or accommodation
- if workers are subjected to violence or threats (including threats of deportation)
- if workers' identity documents are withheld
- if employers limit workers' contact with family

### REFERENCES:

[1] <https://www.ilo.org/topics/domestic-workers/who-are-domestic-workers>

[2] <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/domestic-work-and-slavery/>

## Overseas Domestic Worker Visa

The visa was created in 1998 following a campaign by migrant domestic workers for legal recognition as workers. However, changes to the visa in 2012 introduced restrictions which negatively impacted workers. Under changes, visa-holders entered the UK for 6 months on a non-renewable visa which tied them to their visa sponsor - their visa sponsor is their employer. In tying workers to their employer, these changes increased the risk of exploitation and abuse for workers.[3]

**Kalayaan**, a specialist organisation working to provide support for migrant domestic workers and advocate on their behalf, noted an increase in already high rates of exploitation. Subsequent changes to the visa failed to address the issue and advocacy efforts to reinstate workers' rights continue. **The Voice of Domestic Workers** is a support network and campaign organisation calling for the rights of migrant workers to be re-instated[4].

## Familial exploitation & Forced Marriage

Migrant domestic workers are often unrelated to their employer, but there are cases where family members may sponsor individuals to travel to the UK, often under false pretences of further study, only to exploit them in domestic servitude. There are also cases of children being informally fostered by distant family members and transported to the UK under the guise of a better future, only to be exposed to abuse and exploited for household chores and child care.

Another form of familial exploitation is tied to forced marriage. Spouses, who may have been the victim of a forced marriage, are forced to undertake household chores for their spouse and in-laws. This form of domestic servitude often involves sexual exploitation and domestic abuse. Individuals may marry from abroad, utilising the spousal visa, to bring over a spouse with possibly limited English language abilities and no form of support in the UK, thereby exacerbating their vulnerabilities and keeping them subjugated. In some cases, the marriage may be a sham with the spouse forced to live with and care for the in-laws, whilst the partner lives elsewhere. There are also reported cases of British nationals being forcibly taken abroad to marry and forced into a life of domestic servitude. If you have any concerns regarding forced marriage, you may contact the **Forced Marriage Unit**: [fmu@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:fmu@fcdo.gov.uk).

### If you are concerned about someone, seek help:

You are never wasting anyone's time if you raise concerns about possible harm.

If it is an emergency, call **999**

If you wish to report a crime anonymously, you may call **Crimestoppers**:  
**0800 555 111**

If you are concerned about someone and wish to discuss further, **Kalayaan** is a specialist organisation supporting migrant domestic workers: **0207 243 2942**  
<http://www.kalayaan.org.uk/>

You can also report any concerns to the **UK modern slavery and exploitation helpline**, a free 24-hour helpline where you will be able to discuss your concerns, receive advice and support.

You may call the helpline on: **08000 121 700** or you may visit the website and report your concerns online at <https://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org/>

#### REFERENCES:

[3] <https://labourexploitation.org/news/before-and-after-a-brief-account-of-how-the-uk-government-stripped-migrant-domestic-workers-of-their-rights-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

[4] <https://www.thevoiceofdomesticworkers.com/our-campaign>