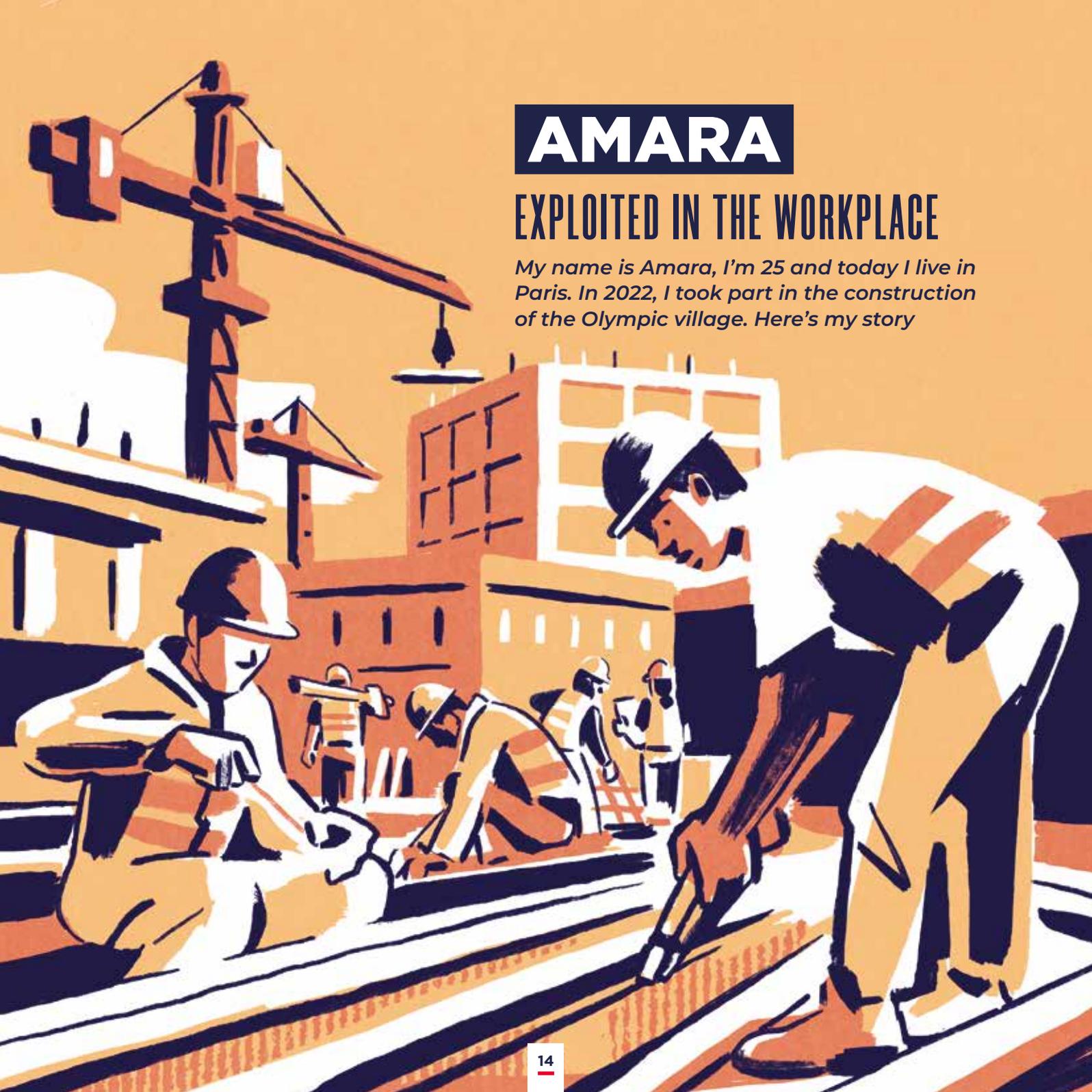


AMARA

EXPLOITED IN THE WORKPLACE

My name is Amara, I'm 25 and today I live in Paris. In 2022, I took part in the construction of the Olympic village. Here's my story



I was just a child when my mum died. So, I had to leave school and go and live with my aunt. But she was spiteful and violent. When I was 12, I tried to find a way out and got a job in a garage. But, 9 years later, my boss sold the business. So there I was, without a job, and my aunt, who did not support this situation, kicked me out.

Then I decided to leave Mali. I managed to survive on odd-jobs but I was living in extreme poverty. Next, I tried my luck in Libya. There, I fell into the hands of criminals who tortured me before letting me go. So I decided to flee to Europe. Crossing the Mediterranean was a nightmare, but I made it alive to Paris where I found a place to sleep in a squat. This was in June 2019.

All around me, people were saying that I could find work by offering my services outside professional hardware and supplies stores. This was how I met my boss, a tradesman aged about 50 who was specialised in masonry. He promised to sort out my residency documents and give me a permanent contract on the minimum wage.

During the first months, I worked for about 8 hours each day, on various sites, including on the construction of the future Olympic village. I didn't have a contract or any payslips.

Very occasionally, I was paid some cash but my employer promised me that he was paying me a salary each month, to an account in my name, and that I would have access to this account once I had my documents.

Then, my boss suggested I should live in a room located in his workshop. From this moment, my living conditions changed drastically. I was working 13 hours a day and then on weekends too. There was never any rest. My life was limited to the sites and the workshop. At work, my boss was constantly pressuring me. I didn't even have the right to get water without his authorisation! And I still didn't have any documents. I was scared that I would be sent back to my country if I spoke to the police or that I would end up in the street. So I had to put up with the situation and just survive.

Then I had an accident. In February 2023, my employer dropped a block of concrete which tore off 3 of my fingers and broke bones in my foot. While I was being treated in hospital, I met someone from social services. She was concerned about my living conditions and alerted a specialist association which got in contact with me and provided me with support to help me out of this situation.

"I was scared that I would be sent back to my country if I spoke to the police."

KEY POINTS

Human trafficking for exploitation in the workplace, commonly known as modern slavery, involves vulnerable individuals who are subjected to physical and psychological force in order to provide underpaid or unpaid work, deprived of their freedom and whose housing and working conditions violate human dignity. In these situations, we observe elements such as: confiscated passports and identity documents, interruption of family connections and cultural isolation.

As in Amara's case, exploitation of this kind can take place within a company or business. This is then described as "forced labour" or "exploitation in the workplace".



WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Victims can be of any age and nationality. However, they usually have multiple difficulties which render them vulnerable. For example, they may not speak French, not be able to read, not know their rights in France or they may have a physical or mental disability.

In cases of exploitation within companies and depending on the economic sector, victims tend in their majority to be men, in contrast for example to cases of exploitation in a domestic context where most victims are women.

HOW CAN THEY BE IDENTIFIED?

It is very difficult to identify these victims who are rendered invisible by those exploiting them. However, we can all be vigilant and put discreet questions to workers whose working conditions (lack of any safety equipment, concerning physical condition, etc.) attract our attention. We can all also take the time to listen carefully, for example, to someone who is in the street because they have had to flee a place of exploitation.

It is always important to turn to specialist associations who will be able to advise you on how to act without putting yourself in danger. You are strongly discouraged from confronting any employer you suspect of being guilty of exploitation.



WHY DOES THIS SITUATION OCCUR ON THE SIDELINES OF MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS?

In preparation for major sporting events, the construction of the host infrastructure generally requires the use of one or even multiple levels of subcontracting. During the event, there is a very high demand for manpower. All this can have an impact on the phenomenon of human trafficking for the purpose of exploitation in the workplace.

For example, the impossibility of falling behind schedule may encourage a subcontracting company to be less vigilant when it comes to the working conditions imposed on workers hired by its subcontractors in order to ensure that infrastructure is completed on time.

During the event itself, the very temporary demand for insecure jobs (security, cleaning, etc.) may encourage the massive and undeclared recruitment of vulnerable workers, so as to employ them for a brief period of time and in an intensive way only, often with difficult working hours.

