

RITA DOMESTIC SLAVE

My name is Rita and I'm from Manila in the Philippines. I left my home and travelled far away in order to work and support my family. But I never imagined that I'd end up in Paris. Here's my story.



When I was 32, I was living in the Philippines with my two children, working a series of different jobs. We lived in very harsh conditions and I had to help my parents make ends meet. That was when I saw an ad published by an agency on the Internet which offered training as a maid to go and work abroad. It looked interesting in financial terms and all of the costs were covered. So I applied and, a few months later, I left all alone for Saudi Arabia.

Upon arrival in Riyadh, I met my employers. They were immensely rich and from a large family. They immediately confiscated my passport. There, I had to look after an aunt who was severely disabled and also help my colleagues with the housework, the cooking, serving at table and looking after the children...

My working conditions were gruelling. My days started at 5 a.m. and ended at around 11 p.m. and I slept at the foot of my patient's bed. I never had a day off and I had to insist in order to be paid. In Riyadh, I had no contacts outside the home because I was not allowed out by myself, it's the law.

To start with, I put up with the situation and hung on. But after two years, I wanted to go back to the Philippines. Only my employer still has my passport. He threatened to hand me over to the police if I tried to leave. I felt trapped and I was missing my children.

Then, my employers decided to travel to Paris for a sports event. They took me with them and we left with their three children and their baby aged just three months.

In Paris, we stayed in a luxury suite. I slept in the drawing room, on the sofa, next to the crib. I looked after the baby all the time and I had to accompany the family during all of their activities. I was exhausted by the visits and was not given proper

meals by my employers. I did the housework and, when the family went out to watch the matches, I was shut in alone with the baby. I was absolutely exhausted.

So, when, one day, my employers left the keys in the room by mistake, I seized the opportunity and ran away. After one night in the street, I decided to ask a passerby for help. She took me along to the offices of a specialist association. They helped me find somewhere to stay, to file a complaint and find a decent job here, in Paris.

"My days started at 5 a.m. and ended at around 11 p.m."



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 for Rita and Kim, this kind of exploitation can happen in a domestic context, i.e. within a family and a private home. This is then described as “domestic servitude or slavery” or “domestic exploitation”.



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 suffer from a physical or mental disability. In cases of domestic exploitation, victims tend to be women, sometimes still underage, in contrast for example to cases of exploitation in the workplace where most victims are men.



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, worrying 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?

During major sporting events, the significant influx of tourists and diplomatic parties can increase the risk of families employing people in unfit conditions coming to France with such individuals without bringing their working conditions into line with French standards.

Another factor that can lead to an increase in the number of cases is the strong demand for short-term property lets, for example, through platforms used to rent accommodation by and to private individuals. People who are already being exploited in private homes or who have been recruited for this special purpose can then be forced to clean these rental properties in addition to working in the normal home of the employers.

