

Seema Malhotra, Minister for Migration and Citizenship
Jess Phillips, Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls
By email

29 January 2025

Dear Seema Malhotra, Jess Phillips,

Thank you for inviting us to speak with you at the Home Office on 8 January 2025 to discuss the ongoing abuse and exploitation of migrant domestic workers in the UK. The three workers who joined us for this meeting also wish to thank you for your time and the opportunity to share their experiences with you.

Action to address the deep injustices caused by the changes to the Overseas Domestic Worker Visa remains long overdue. As explained in our meeting, the UK issues approximately 20,000 Overseas Domestic Worker visas each year. What happens to these workers after they arrive in the UK is not fully understood in the absence of any monitoring or regulation of their work inside private households.

Kalayaan, the UK's leading charity providing specialist casework support and advice to migrant domestic workers, has been uniquely placed to collect data on the experiences of these workers abroad and once they arrive in the UK. The Kalayaan report, *12 years of modern slavery: the smokescreen used to deflect state accountability for migrant domestic workers* was published last year and includes a data analysis of over 2,000 workers and their experiences in the UK. We understand this to be the largest data picture that exists.

The evidence is clear that rates of abuse have risen exponentially since changes were made to the Overseas Domestic Worker visa regime in April 2012. The limited changes made in 2016 as a concession following the Government-commissioned Ewins review into the scheme have made little difference.

- **14%** of workers issued a visa prior to the 2012 changes presented with indicators of trafficking. This rose to **40%** of the workers issued a visa after the changes in 2012 and **41%** of the workers issued a visa after changes made in 2016.
- **47%** of workers issued a visa prior to 2012 did not have access to their passport in the UK. This rose to **73%** of workers issued a visa after the 2012 changes and 2016 changes respectively.
- **38%** of workers issued a visa prior 2012 did not have their own bedroom or private space. This rose to **64%** of workers issued a visa after the 2012 changes and **53%** of workers issued a visa after 2016 changes.
- **17%** of workers issued a visa prior to 2012 had irregular food. This rose to **42%** of workers issued a visa after the 2012 changes and **61%** of workers issued a visa after the 2016 changes.

The rights provided for under the pre-April 2012 visa regime embedded safeguards that were instrumental in preventing abuse escalating. They also assisted workers in accessing reporting mechanisms to hold employers accountable whilst in the safety of alternative employment. As noted by the 2009 Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Trafficking, these protections were the **single most important issue in preventing the forced labour and trafficking of such workers.**

We remain committed to working with this Government to ensure the safety and protection of this especially vulnerable workforce. We welcome the opportunity to revisit our discussion and meet again in the next two months to see how we may work together to uphold and protect the fundamental rights of migrant domestic workers in the UK. We would be grateful for some dates to arrange this with your office.

Yours sincerely,

Marissa Begonia, Director, The Voice of Domestic Workers

Avril Sharp, Policy Officer, Kalayaan

Kate Roberts, Head of Policy, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)

Diana Holland, Former Assistant General Secretary for Unite the Union