

Urgent Need for Reform of the Overseas Domestic Worker Visa

The current UK Overseas Domestic Worker (ODW) visa regime has left thousands of migrant domestic workers exposed to severe exploitation and abuse, trapped in a system that facilitates **modern slavery behind closed doors**—often in some of the most privileged households in Britain. Essential rights were stripped away in 2012, and migrant domestic workers have been campaigning for their restoration ever since.

A vicious cycle of exploitation

Domestic workers who have survived modern slavery can become trapped in a vicious cycle of exploitation, escaping abuse only to fall into the hands of traffickers once again because working abroad is the only way to put food on their family's table.

When UK authorities uphold a visa proven to facilitate exploitation, or when they remove survivors of modern slavery back to their countries of origin without the support needed to rebuild their lives, they become complicit in perpetuating this cycle.

- Workers in the UK on the current ODW visa earn a median **wage of 52p per hour**¹
- 94% of them are **not given a day off** from work²
- 59% of domestic workers who returned to the Philippines as their country of origin **could not afford basic needs** like food, healthcare and education for their families³

Domestic work is the work that makes all work possible, and it makes a vital contribution to the UK's economy and society. Reinstating the pre-2012 ODW Visa is **the most effective way to break cycles of abuse**.

We urge Members of Parliament to:

1. **Advocate for reform** of the ODW visa that restores workers' rights and protections, including enabling domestic workers to renew their visa if they are in employment, and to apply for settlement.⁴
2. **Urge the Home Secretary (Yvette Cooper) and Minister for Migration and Equalities (Seema Malhotra)** to engage in **direct consultation** with affected workers and their representative organisations, including the Voice of Domestic Workers and Kalayaan.
3. **Engage with migrant domestic workers in your constituency.** Without lived experience at the heart of policymaking, well-intentioned reforms risk repeating the mistakes of the past.

Without reform of the ODW visa, the UK is complicit in the very forms of modern slavery it has pledged to lead the way in eliminating. **Yet basic protections for migrant domestic workers are within reach.**

This message supports a wider call for Members of Parliament to champion the rights and voices of migrant domestic workers, and to restore dignity, safety, and justice.



¹ Begonia and Reynolds, *Domestic Work is Work: Findings from a Survey of 200 Overseas Domestic Workers in the UK* (LSE and the Voice of Domestic Workers, 2024)

² *Domestic Work is Work: Findings from a Survey of 200 Overseas Domestic Workers in the UK*.

³ Parry-Davies et al., *Outcomes for survivors of trafficking who return to the Philippines as their country of origin* (King's College London, 2023)

⁴ Kalayaan, *12 Years of Modern Slavery* (Kalayaan: 2024)