

Combating Human Trafficking

Case Study Six

Victim: Matus, 19-year old Lithuanian male in the UK

Type of Trafficking: bonded labour



Matus' Story:

It was very difficult to find work at home, especially when you come from a poor rural family and didn't do so well at school. An offer of a job in the UK seemed like a passport to a better life. I would work on a farm, which I was used to; travel with a small group of other workers to the UK and my meals and accommodation would be provided. The traffickers did tell me that I would have to pay a fee for finding me a job but I could pay that after I started earning. As I had no savings, that was important. There was also a weekly charge for room and board which would be deducted from my wages. They reassured me how quickly other workers paid off their debts and moved on to better jobs in London.

All seemed fine until we arrived at the farm. We were told how much we actually owed our employer and that it would be weeks before we would actually be paid. When we were shown our accommodation, my heart sank when I saw the state of it. It was filthy and already crowded with other workers when my group arrived. We were expected to sleep on the floor on mattresses which were infested with fleas. But that was just the start. We were sent to bed without any food that evening and woken up at 4 am and told to get in a van. After driving for hours we were let off at a farm and told that our job was to catch chickens. We weren't told how to catch them just that we had to catch them and catch a lot of them. It is dangerous work. All of us suffered injuries at some point. We were not given any clothing to help protect us.

Some days we would drive straight from one farm to another, with no rest or food. We ate raw eggs when we had to. What choice did we have? Many times we were without proper toilet facilities. When one of us slowed down or could not keep up, the supervisors were happy to beat us. They would then not give us any food in order to punish us. They also withheld our wages when they felt like it.

I felt powerless and trapped. There was no point in complaining. Who would I complain to? My English was not good enough. I didn't know if I was able to leave the farm or whether I would be arrested if I did. Even if I could leave the farm, where would I go? I didn't have a passport. How would I survive without money?

I later found out that the eggs from those farms were sold on to many of the fast food restaurants in cities all around the country and to supermarkets who proudly promoted them as free range. It makes you think. Every time I pass a restaurant, I think about those chickens and how they were free, a lot freer than we were on the farm; freer than the workers like me who were made to catch them after they laid all their 'free range eggs'. The people that did this to me and the other workers are also free; even after they were caught and charged with trafficking.