Verité Help Wanted: Worker Profiles

**AHMED**

**TRAVELED:** 2,282 miles from Kerala, India  
**WORK LOCATION:** Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

**BAIT**

Ahmed found a job in Saudi Arabia as a driver for an individual employer with a salary of USD 201 per month plus free room and board. With the promise of such a good salary, Ahmed happily paid the USD 1,340 recruitment fee for a work visa and plane ticket.

**SWITCH**

Once in Riyadh, Ahmed had to sign a three-year contract at a lower salary. Despite working long hours and being on call around the clock for eight months, Ahmed was never paid at all.

**ABUSE**

Ahmed's employer kept his passport to ensure he would not run away.

Ahmed's employer threatened him both physically and verbally.

Ahmed's work permit stated he could only work for that specific employer in Saudi Arabia.

**PILING ON THE DEBT**

Ahmed's employer "deducted" the entire amount of Ahmed's pay, allegedly to pay for his work visa, but Ahmed had already paid for the work visa up front.

Ahmed is a 40-year-old driver from a small village in Kerala, India. He is married with two children. Job opportunities are very limited in his village so he decided to look for work in the Middle East.

There Ahmed worked 12- to 14-hour days, 6-7 days per week and received no pay. He returned home after eight months still owing his broker debt of USD 1,340.

**ALEJANDRO**

**TRAVELED:** 1,942 miles from Guatemala  
**WORK LOCATION:** Northwest USA

**BAIT**

Alejandro used a "reputable" coyote, or illegal broker, to cross the US border, who promised employment once in the US for a fee of USD 5,000.

**SWITCH**

The border crossing took 22 days, and included inedible food, unsanitary, dangerous traveling conditions with very little water, and a seven-day walk through the Mexican desert.

**ABUSE**

At several stops on the journey, Alejandro was grouped with dozens of other migrants in unsanitary housing with little food.

Immigrants who objected to their treatment were beaten or left in the desert.

Drug and gang-related personnel oversee operations and threatened or beat those who tried to escape or complain.

**PILING ON THE DEBT**

Once Alejandro arrived in California, he had to pay an additional USD 1,000 to the coyote to get to Colorado. Alejandro was also charged USD 125 a month in interest on his loan.

Alejandro served in the Guatemalan military. When his family farm ran into financial difficulty, he decided to use a coyote to enter the US illegally for work.

Alejandro lost 15 pounds during his border crossing and was over USD 3,000 in debt. Fortunately, he got a job was able to begin working to pay off his debt.
**BENNY**

**TRAVELED:** 824 miles from Manila, Philippines  
**WORK LOCATION:** Taipei, Taiwan

**BAIT**
A Manila recruiter promised Benny a two-year factory job in Taiwan where he could amass significant savings. Benny paid US$556 up front for recruitment fees with the promise to pay the rest (US$1,657) once he began working.

**SWITCH**
Benny’s debt currency was converted from Philippine pesos to Taiwanese dollars. After deductions for several monthly fees, Benny earned half of his promised salary. Taxes were also deducted, with the cover for they would be reimbursed at the end of the contract period.

**ABUSE**
Benny’s passport was held by the broker, limiting his freedom of movement. Benny was required to work 12 to 17 hours a day, six to seven days a week.

**PILING ON THE DEBT**
Benny had to pay forced savings of 20 percent of his salary, which was later used for his plane ticket back to the Philippines. It took Benny 21 months to pay back the recruitment fees. Benny was never reimbursed for his tax deductions.

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**ERIC**

**TRAVELED:** 996 miles from the Philippines  
**WORK LOCATION:** Limbang, Malaysia

**BAIT**
The recruiter offered Eric a plantation job that paid US$444 per month, including meals and accommodation, with potential for overtime. His work visa would be on-site upon arrival.

**SWITCH**
Workers had a quota of 150 fruit bunches per day. If workers didn't meet the quota, they had to continue working, minus their ride and walk 13 hours home. Food and water was inadequate—Eric had to buy canned food on credit and boil rain water for drinking and cooking. Eric never received his work visa. He was paid at the first plantation and left after two weeks for another plantation with poorer living conditions. When work conditions did not improve at the second plantation, a group of workers objected. In response, the labor contractor had the workers arrested for improper visas. Eric was taken to a detention center for deportees, where he spent almost three months.

**ABUSE**
Upon arrival, Eric’s passport was taken.
He was housed with 9-12 workers per bedroom.
Eric was charged US$10 a week for food (almost two days of work)
Eric had no access to even basic services, such as potable water.
**FERNANDO**  
**TRAVELED:** 2,148 miles from Guatemala  
**WORK LOCATION:** Northeastern USA

**BAIT**
A recruiter in Guatemala offered Fernando minimum wage for 3-6 months planting trees in North Carolina as an H2B worker. He was going to the United States on a legal visa, through a good broker, and he wasn’t generating any interest on his debt to get the job.

**SWITCH**
Fernando was illegally tricked to New England to work long hours at a plant nursery for miserly pay, technically performing H2A work under the much less stringent H2B program.

**ABUSE**
Fernando was told not to leave the worksite at all, even when not working. He was forced to sign a contract in English — a language he does not speak. His passport was taken away and he was threatened with deportation. Seven men shared a filthy two-bedroom inner city apartment. Workers were forced to work when sick and given unreasonable daily quotas.

**PILING ON THE DEBT**
Fernando paid close to US$2,000 for the embassy interview, plane ticket, and living expenses.

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**HRISHI**  
**TRAVELED:** 1,883 miles from Kerala  
**WORK LOCATION:** Dubai, United Arab Emirates

**BAIT**
HRishi paid a recruiter US$2,010 for travel and a visa, which allows him to work at any job in Dubai. Once in Dubai, HRishi was confident he could pick up work in construction, since Dubai was undergoing a construction boom. He took out a loan at the bank to pay his recruiting fee.

**SWITCH**
When HRishi arrived at the Dubai airport, the employer was not waiting for him as promised and did not return his calls. HRishi realized that he had been tricked, since he had only a visitor visa, he was in a precarious situation.

A stranger approached HRishi in the airport, promising good wages for fair work. Thinking of his debts, HRishi accepted, but was later locked in a basement with 50 other immigrants.

**ABUSE**
HRishi’s visitor visa was confiscated.
He was subjected to harsh physical and verbal abuse and was not allowed to leave the basement unless he was working.
The agent sent HRishi to work in informal, underground jobs in marketplaces and workshops.
**RANI**

**TRAVELED:** 150 miles from Kamimalapatti

**Work Location:** Tirupur, India

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**Bait**

A neighbor's brother who was a broker promised Rani a decent job with a good stipend plus $375 at the end of three years, with free room and board in a secure, safe environment.

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**Switch**

Rani worked in a spinning mill where she performed chemical washing and bleaching. She worked 12-hour shifts with frequent overtime for which she was usually not paid. Rani's monthly stipend was $520, $25 of which $112.20 was deducted for food and lodging expenses. She was left with only about $290 per month.

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**Abuse**

The lack of onsite health and safety precautions left Rani with burns on her skin due to the harsh chemicals. Unfortunately, medical expenses were not covered above $5.

Rani was not allowed to go anywhere unattended, and rarely allowed to leave her hostel. She was instructed not to speak to anyone, including her family, without an "escort."

Rani was subjected to harassment and abuse in the factory and in the hostel.

Rani was told the employer would terminate her work contract and withhold all of her lump sum payment that had accrued if she complained.

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**RICARDO**

**TRAVELED:** 6,933 miles from Chile

**Work Location:** Western USA

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**Bait**

A recruiter in Santiago offered Ricardo a cattle herding job in the US at $51,000 to 6,500 per month plus benefits, with travel expenses covered by the employer. Ricardo paid the $3,000 recruitment fee by borrowing from family members.

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**Switch**

At the Santiago airport just prior to boarding, the recruiter made Ricardo pay an additional recruiting fee and sign a contract listing his salary as $5,000 per month.

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**Abuse**

Up to $320 per month was deducted for food, insurance, telephone use, and travel.

Ricardo was alone in the desert for three months, stretching working 24/7.

Ricardo's passport and visa were held by his employer, making him a virtual prisoner.

Ricardo's income was deposited into a bank account where only his boss had access.

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**Piling On The Debt**

Ricardo's employer deducted for travel expenses and living accommodations.