# THANK YOU | Out |

UNHEARD VOICES OF KAFALA: SEEKING HEALTHCARE UNDER THE KAFALA SYSTEM



ILLUSTRATIONS AND STORY BY RAPHAELLE MACARON



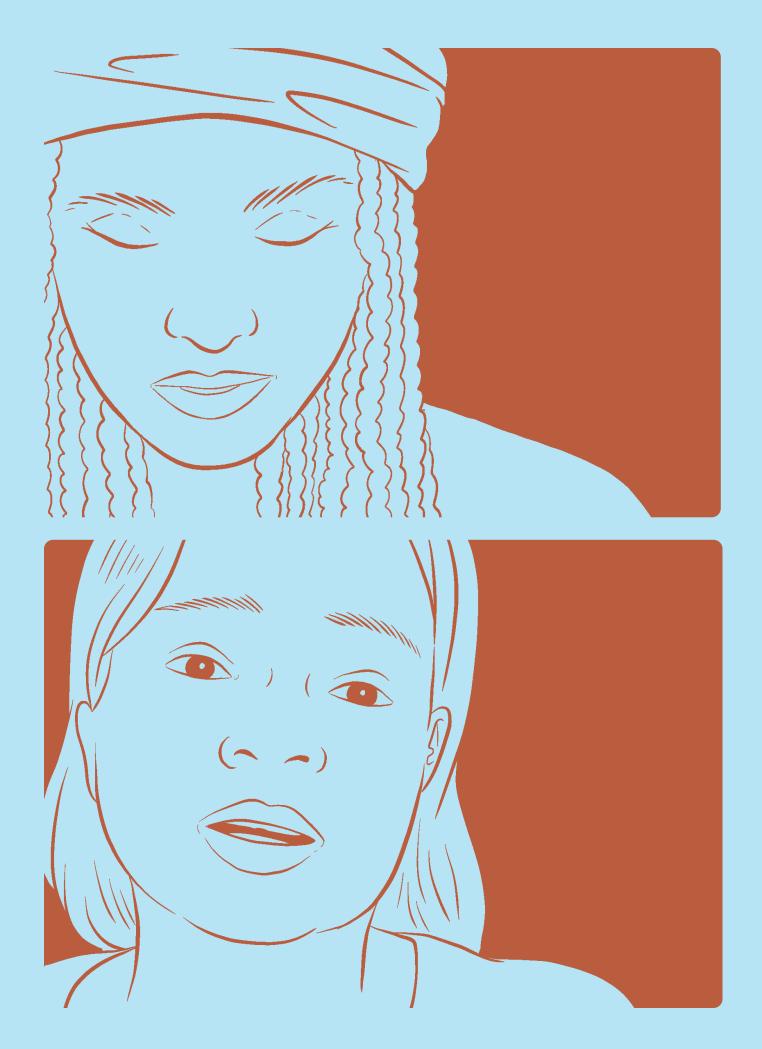
### INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) opened a clinic in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, providing general health consultations and specialist mental health support, free of charge, to migrant workers.

In these consultations, our patients – most of them women – have described to our staff the poor living and working conditions experienced by them under the Kafala system. This system is currently the only legal option for migrants to work in Lebanon since they are excluded from Lebanese Labour Law.

Despite the medical and mental health needs of migrant workers in Lebanon, they face multiple obstacles when trying to access health services, including discrimination, not having the right documents, a shortage of translators, the high cost of care, and gaps in health insurance coverage.





Their vulnerabilities were heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing economic crisis. With employers struggling to pay their salaries, many workers suddenly found themselves without a job. Some were simply dropped off in front of their embassies and left to fend for themselves.

The very nature of the Kafala system, which ties contracts to residency status, means that as soon as migrant workers lose their jobs, they are deemed to be living in Lebanon irregularly, making it even harder to access basic services. Most find themselves living in overcrowded or unsafe housing and many resort to harmful behaviours to cope.



It was in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis that MSF was asked to provide urgent medical and mental health support to migrant workers. Some of them had severe mental health disorders due to the extremely precarious situation in which they suddenly found themselves.

Two years after MSF's clinic in Beirut first opened its doors, patients continue to describe the impact on their health and wellbeing of living and working conditions under the Kafala system. Our patients seek care for a range of medical conditions directly linked to the tasks they are required to perform, while restrictions on their movements and their lack of autonomy deeply impact their mental state.



In 2022, the UN estimates that 135,000 migrant workers reside in Lebanon, mostly in Beirut and Mount Lebanon governorates.

This graphic novel is based on interviews with MSF patients and staff who have been personally affected by the Kafala system. Their stories demonstrate how the current system creates physical and mental suffering for the migrant workers providing Lebanese families with much-needed services, including childcare and care of the elderly. Our teams can treat the symptoms of the Kafala system, but to see a tangible improvement in the health and wellbeing of migrant workers, the system needs to be reformed.

All names have been changed to protect the identities of those in the story.



# 1.



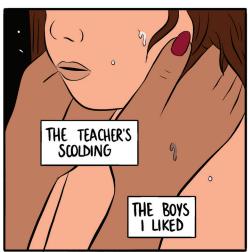










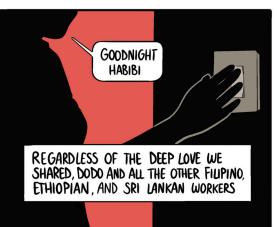














MIGRANT WORKERS ARE EXCLUDED FROM LABOR LAW. CURRENTLY, THE KAFALA SYSTEM IS THE ONLY WAY TO GET



WITHOUT A"KAFEEL" OR SPONSOR, THEY ARE REGARDED AS ILLEGAL AND CAN FACE PROSECUTION.



WORK CONTRACTS ARE EXTREMELY VAGUE AND CONTAIN A POWER IMBALANCE BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES, MAKING IT EASY FOR EMPLOYERS TO EXPLOIT DOMESTIC WORKERS



THEY CAN'T LEAVE THE EMPLOYER OR END THEIR CONTRACTS, WITHOUT THE EMPLOYER'S APPROVAL, EXCEPT IN CASES OF SEVERE ABUSE WHICH IN PRACTICE ARE VERY HARD TO PROVE





















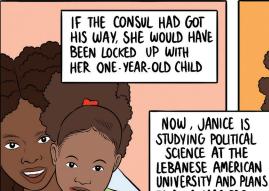


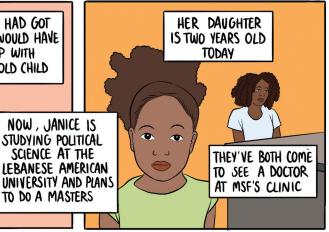
















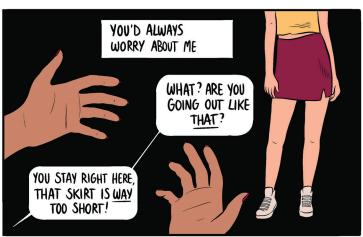








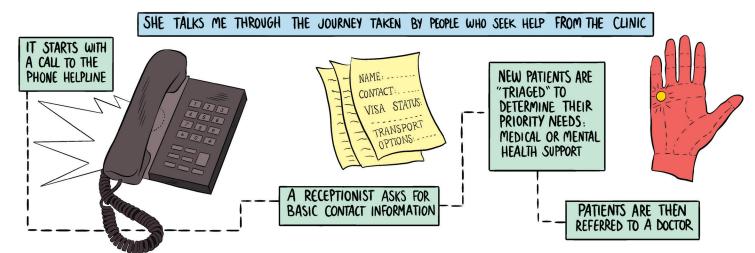


















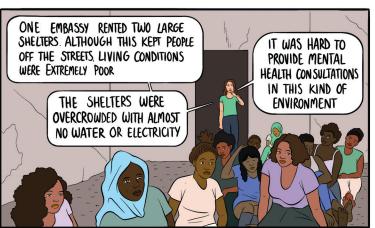












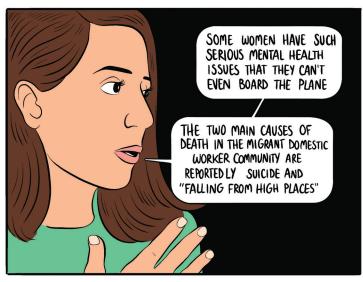


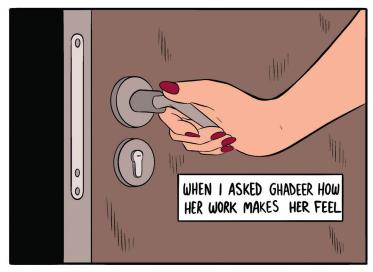


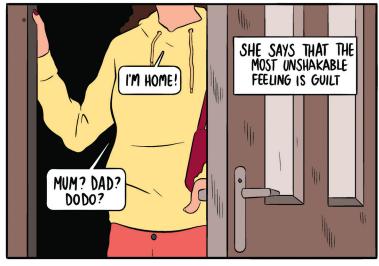




















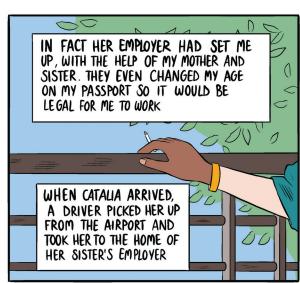


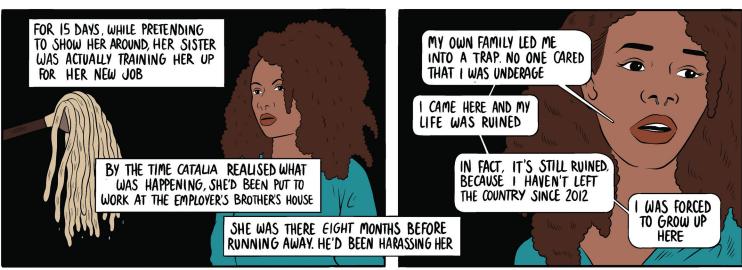












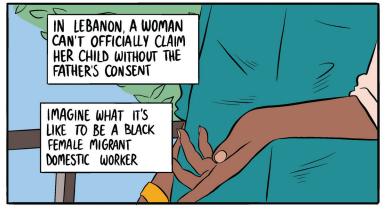


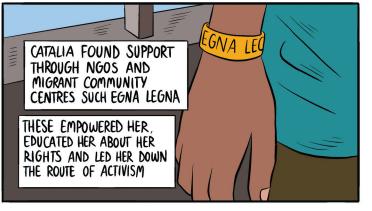


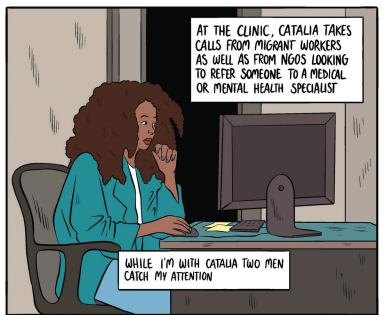
SHE GAVE BIRTH
TO HER SON IN
SOUR - THE CHEAPEST
HOSPITAL, AS WELL
AS THE ONLY ONE
WILLING TO TURN
A BLIND EYE TO HER
EXPIRED PASSPORT

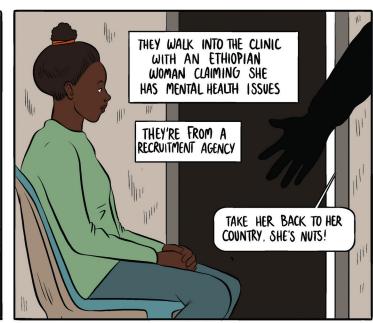
IT IS TECHNICALLY ILLEGAL TO GET PREGNANT UNDER THE KAFALA SYSTEM







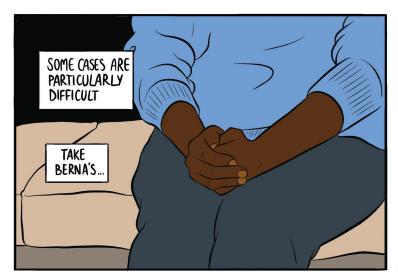


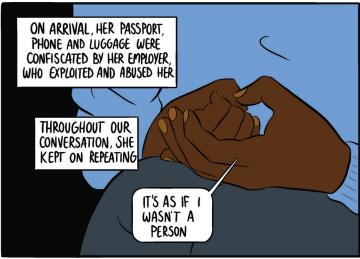












FOR MORE THAN A YEAR,
SHE WORKED IN A HOUSE
WHERE SHE WAS OVERWORKED,
ISOLATED, BEATEN, ABUSED
AND HALF- STARVED

SHE DIDN'T HAVE A ROOM TO SLEEP IN INSTEAD SHE SLEPT ON THE BALCONY SHE WASN'T ALLOWED TO CONTACT HER FAMILY. AS THINGS GOT WORSE, BERNA CONTEMPLATED SUICIDE

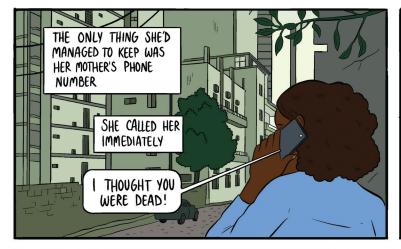
ONE DAY, HER EMPLOYER KICKED HER IN THE HEAD

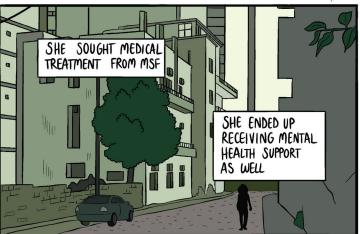
AFTERWARDS, SHE REMEMBERS IRONING CLOTHES AND BEING SCARED SHE'D STAIN THEM WITH HER BLOOD AND BE PUNISHED SHE ESCAPED WITH THE HELP OF A NEIGHBOUR.

BUT SHE HAD TO LEAVE HER PASSPORT AND BELONGINGS BEHIND

THE EMPLOYER FACED NO CONSEQUENCES









## 4.

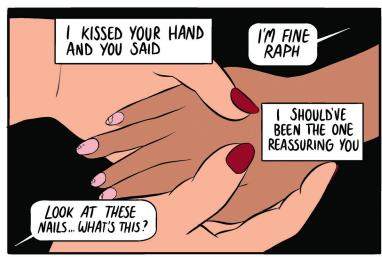


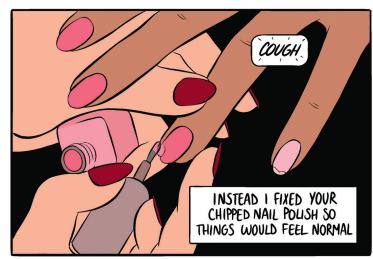




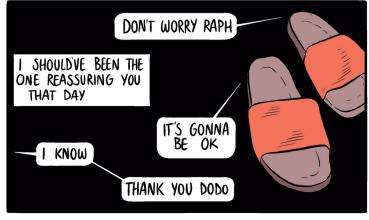


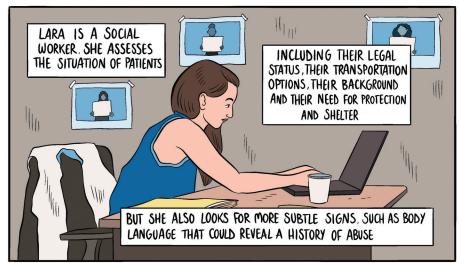












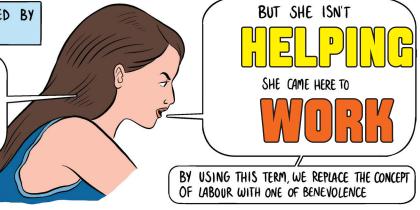






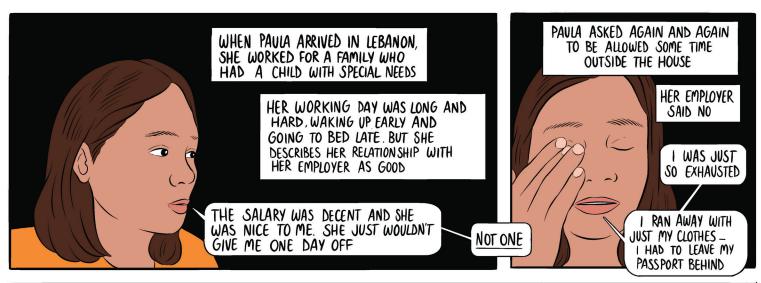


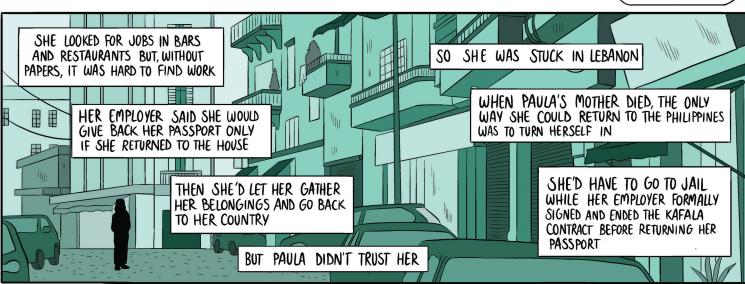






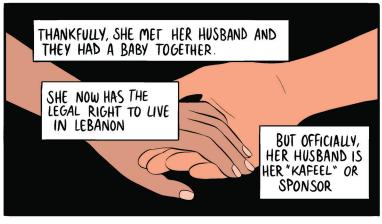


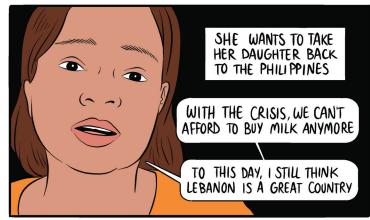


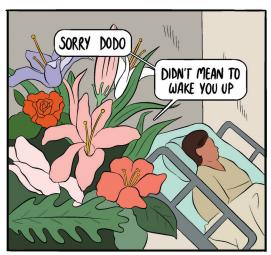






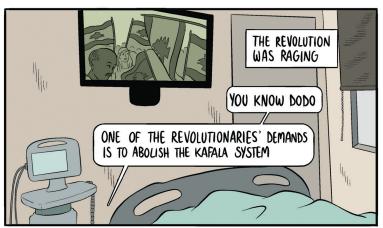




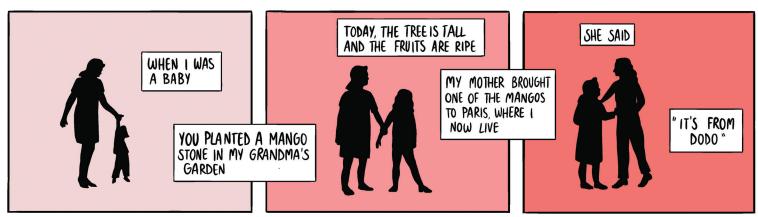
















### GREDITS

Illustrations and story by Raphaelle Macaron.

www.raphaellemacaron.com

This book wouldn't have existed without the engagement of the MSF staff and patients who accepted to participate in the project and trust me with their stories.

Special thanks to Melek Zertal and Joseph Matick for their precious help.

Designed by Raphaelle Macaron and Sunra Thompson





Thank you, Dodo.