

WhatsApp to the rescue of Indian workers in Gulf countries

[Deepa H. Ramakrishnan](#)



A group in Tamil Nadu, which includes volunteers and journalists, guides those in distress to return safely.

WhatsApp is helping Indian domestic helps stuck in hostile conditions in the Gulf countries to get back home. A woman from Tamil Nadu, for example, who went to Jeddah to work as a cook, was able to get in touch with an NGO in Chennai and eventually return.

Sister Valarmathi, Tamil Nadu Coordinator, National Domestic Workers Movement/ Migrant Forum, said in the last few months, her group has coordinated in at least three cases through WhatsApp. “The migrant workers somehow manage to get our number through their families back home. We form groups for each case, involving locals including volunteers, journalists and lawyers who are willing to help and guide them. Once the worker returns home, the group is disbanded,” she said.

In one case, where a woman escaped from a household in which she had to cook for 36 persons and also for a catering service run by it, the group managed to guide her to the Indian embassy. “I was beaten up badly... since I have to repay a loan of Rs. 2 lakh that I incurred for my daughter’s wedding I decided to work. But I didn’t realise I would be treated badly. I have worked in the Gulf countries earlier but never been beaten up. WhatsApp helped me remain in touch with several Tamil-speaking persons, and finally a group of volunteers and an advocate helped me. They gave me moral support,” said the woman, now back home.

‘200 cases’

A domestic worker from Madurai was also rescued in a similar manner. “We are at present working on at least 200 cases using WhatsApp. Even if the person in distress does not have WhatsApp, networking with others helps. However, in some places it is dangerous for migrant workers to use mobile phones. In some camps like in Kuwait, there are restrictions. Since the number of cases we are dealing with is increasing, we need a Minister to deal with issues pertaining to migrant labour,” said Sister Valarmathi.