

Local

Kuwait welcomes newly-recruited helpers today, but fewer numbers taking up jobs

Pending issues delays recruitment of domestic helpers from Philippines

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti government has allowed entry of newly-recruited domestic helpers from labor-exporting countries such as the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere starting today. But here's the reality on the ground. India is not discouraging its nationals to work as domestic helpers in Kuwait, but fewer are taking up such jobs, although if they apply to work as housemaids, they can easily get hired.

Sri Lanka continues to send domestic helpers to Kuwait, but they only represent around 11 percent of the total domestic helper population. Talks are ongoing for the return of Ethiopian, Nepali and Indonesian housemaids, but there is no clear date as to when the agreement will be signed. Bangladesh only sends male domestic helpers to Kuwait and only a few hundreds come from Ivory Coast, Benin and Madagascar.

As for the Philippines, the second country after India to send the largest number of household workers to Kuwait, there are still pending issues to be settled, particularly the issue of the unified contract. According to a Kuwait Times source, if the unified contract is signed, deployment of new domestic helpers will resume immediately.

According to the source, until such a document is signed, there will be no deployment of new Filipino domestic helpers. Only returning Filipino domestic helpers can re-enter Kuwait, although they need to follow the 14-day quarantine procedure set by the government, plus the two required PCR tests upon arrival and at the end of the quarantine period.

Before the lockdown in March 2020, there were some ongoing talks between Kuwait and the Philippines (joint committee meetings) on the rights of domestic helpers and employers, but the talks stalled due to the pandemic. "A series of joint committee meetings between Kuwait and the Philippines were held, and the only remaining part is the signing of what has been agreed upon. But due to the lockdowns, these efforts are pending. Technically speaking, all the concerns of both sides were tackled and almost resolved, but due to the coronavirus, talks were suspended and documents have not been reviewed and signed yet," the source added.

Recruitment ban

On Jan 3, 2020, the Philippines implemented a ban on sending domestic workers to Kuwait following the death of Jeanelyn Padernal Villavende on Dec 28, 2019. The ban was lifted a month later after consultations with the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the filing of appropriate charges against the perpetrators and after Manila and Kuwait City agreed the full implementation of a harmonized employment contract for Filipino domestic workers. On Dec 30, 2020, a death verdict by hanging was handed by the criminal court to a Kuwaiti woman who killed Villavende. The woman's husband was sentenced to four years in jail for covering up and not reporting the crime.

Nationality	النسبة (%) Percentage (%)			العدد Number			الجنسية	الترتيب serial
	جملة Total	انث Females	ذكور Males	جملة Total	انث Females	ذكور Males		
India	47.6	28.0	68.6	324,081	98,526	225,555	الهند	1
Philippines	21.7	41.9	0.2	147,909	147,090	819	الفلبين	2
Bangladesh	11.5	0.3	23.5	78,258	903	77,355	بنجلاديش	3
Sri Lanka	11.2	17.3	4.8	76,253	60,618	15,635	سيريلانكا	4
Ethiopia	2.6	4.8	0.3	17,850	16,773	1,077	اثيوبيا	5
Nepal	2.2	4.0	0.3	15,048	14,053	995	نيپال	6
Indonesia	0.4	0.7	0.0	2,383	2,371	12	اندونيسيا	7
Ivory Coast / cote D'Ivoire	0.3	0.6	0.1	2,354	2,175	179	ساحل العاج	8
Benin	0.3	0.6	0.0	2,281	2,181	100	بنين	9
Madagascar	0.3	0.5	0.0	1,714	1,711	3	مدغشقر	10
Other Nationality	1.8	1.4	2.2	12,131	4,869	7,262	باقي الجنسيات	11
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	680,262	351,270	328,992	الاجمالي	

* Source: Integrated Database - LMIS .

* المصدر: البيانات المتكاملة - نظام معلومات سوق العمل

KUWAIT: A table showing the number of domestic workers in Kuwait per nationality, as of the latest available government statistics.

The recruitment of domestic helpers from labor-sending countries was suspended due to the coronavirus, and people working in this sector have been praying hard for a favorable decision to resume their business the soonest. "The death sentence handed to the perpetrator recently was really good news to the family of Villavende and to the Philippines in general, because it means justice is

being served here in Kuwait," the secretary of a recruitment agency told Kuwait Times.

680,000 workers as of June 2020

In the new unified contract, provisions will be added such as prohibiting employers from confiscating the passports of their housemaids. Domestic helpers also have the right to own a phone, work not more than 12 hours a day and get enough rest and a weekly day off. They are also prevented from being transferred to other employers without written consent from the worker. As of June 2020, there were nearly 680,000 domestic workers in Kuwait - 325,000 from India and nearly 150,000 from the Philippines. Local and their international partner agencies are allowed to charge employers up to KD 990 for hiring new domestic helpers.

Online platform

Kuwait had allowed the return of domestic helpers with valid visas but stuck abroad starting Dec 7, 2020. On Thursday, aviation authorities announced launching an online platform named 'Be'Salamah' to facilitate the return of domestic workers from so-called 'high-risk' countries, in line

with specific procedures and mechanisms that take into account the required health measures. The platform aims to decrease the cost of return that the sponsor will pay, in addition to relocating the 14-day quarantine to be in Kuwait instead of a transit country. The program's return costs KD 270 (\$980) for every worker registered under Article 20 of the residency law, which applies to domestic helpers. The cost includes a 14-day quarantine, according to health requirements, meals, security and three PCR tests. The tickets are not included in the return program, as they are different depending on destination.

Domestic workers must hold a document from a laboratory accredited by their countries showing they tested negative before boarding their flights to Kuwait. When arriving in Kuwait, the passengers will be subjected to another PCR test, and if the tests' results are negative, the workers will be transferred directly to the designated places for a 14-day quarantine in line with the health requirements. By the end of the 14-day quarantine, the workers will undergo a third PCR test, and can go to their sponsors' homes if the results are negative. As for those who have positive results, the Ministry of Health (MoH) will be responsible for transferring them to other quarantine facilities.

News in brief

Smart licenses starting today

KUWAIT: The interior ministry will start issuing smart licenses for all drivers - citizens and expats - from today, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported. The ministry began issuing smart licenses for Kuwaitis from August, and to first-timers from Sept 27. Informed sources said traffic departments in all governorates will receive expats and bedoons to exchange their current licenses with the smart ones, which allows them to drive in any country in the world. The sources said the new licenses have high security specifications and are "impossible to forge," according to them. The license has a chip that stores the holder's data.

Marijuana farm found

KUWAIT: The Drugs Control General Department said a house in Surra was raided earlier last week, where officers found an area that was transformed into a marijuana farm, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported. Two Kuwaitis were arrested and officers confiscated the marijuana, 70 Captagon pills, 50 gm of hashish and seven marijuana seedlings, in addition to seeds the suspects said they obtained by courier. The department acted after receiving tips that the Surra house was used to cultivate marijuana, so investigations were carried out, confirming the tips. A warrant was obtained and the raid was carried out. The suspects claimed the illicit substances were for personal use, but evidence point to them trading in drugs.

Oil price down

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 31 cents to \$55.61 per barrel Friday, after being at \$55.92 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The price of Brent crude went down by \$1.32 to \$55.10 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went down by \$1.21 cents to \$52.36 pb.

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