

# Guidebook for Foreign Domestic Workers' Rights and Employment in Saudi Arabia

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# Introduction

HelperChoice is an online and ethical recruitment agency that provides a FREE online service platform for foreign domestic workers who want to work in Saudi Arabia.

This guidebook aims to help applicants to be prepared for their employment by knowing the basic things about the country's culture and language and also to find information about their eligibility and the regulations in the country.

Knowing your rights and responsibilities will equip you to work in the Kingdom and help you build and nurture a good working relationship with your employer.

**Find a job!**



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# **I. Be Prepared for Your Employment in Saudi Arabia**



# Geography and Climate

## Geography

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia's geography is diverse, with forests, grasslands, mountain ranges and deserts. **The capital city is Riyadh.**

## Climate

Contrary to popular belief, it's not always hot in Saudi Arabia. The kingdom experiences four distinct seasons —from chilly winter breezes in January to peak desert heat in August —and a climate that varies between regions.

The climate varies from region to region. Temperatures can reach over 110 degrees Fahrenheit in the desert in the summer, while in the winter temperatures in the north and central parts of the country can drop below freezing. Saudi Arabia gets very little rain, only about four inches a year on average.



**Saudi Arabia is 7,944 kilometers away from Manila, Philippines. The flight typically lasts between 10 to 11 hours**

**Saudi Arabia is home to two of Islam's holiest cities:**

- Mecca - where the Prophet Muhammad was born.
- Medina - where Prophet Muhammad is buried.

# Customs & Culture

Saudi traditions are rooted in Islamic teachings and Arab customs. The highlights of the year are the holy month of **Ramadan** and the **Hajj (pilgrimage) season**, and the national holidays that follow them.

The holy month of Ramadan, during which Muslims fast from dawn to dusk, culminates with the Eid-Al-Fitr holiday, in which it is customary to buy presents and clothes for children and visit friends and relatives.

The other highlight is the Hajj season, during which millions of Muslim pilgrims from around the world come to Makkah. The Hajj season concludes with the Eid Al-Adha holiday, in which it is traditional for families to slaughter a sheep in memory of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son.

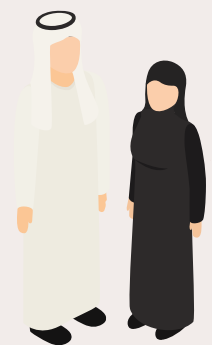
## Language and Custom

Arabic is the official language in Saudi Arabia

**Women customarily wear a black outer cloak (abaya)** over their dress, which may well be modern in style. On their heads, Saudi women traditionally wear a shayla – a black, gauzy scarf that is wrapped around the head and secured with circlets, hats or jewelry. Traditional dress is often richly decorated with coins, sequins or brightly colored fabric appliqués.

# Religion

The country is officially a **Muslim** nation. Most Saudi Muslims are Sunni, with a Shia minority that accounts to 10-15% of the population.



# Festivals and Observances



Saudi traditions are rooted in Islamic teachings and Arab customs.



The highlights of the year are the holy month of Ramadan and the Hajj (pilgrimage) season, and the national holidays that follow them. The holy month of Ramadan, during which Muslims fast from dawn to dusk, culminates with the Eid Al Fitr holiday.

- Eid al-Fitr - National Holiday
- Eid al-Adha - National Holiday
- March Equinox - Season
- June Solstice - Season
- Muharram (Muslim New Year) - Observance
- September Equinox - Season
- December Solstice - Season

The Pilgrimage season draws millions of Muslim pilgrims from around the world come to Makkah every year. It concludes with the Eid Al Adha holiday.

Saudis' valuable Arab traditions include generosity and hospitality. Arabic coffee (its preparation is also a form of cultural tradition) is often served in small cups along with dates and sweets as a hospitality gesture offered to visitors, friends or family.

# Food and Etiquette

Arabs are restricted by Islamic conventions from eating pork, most carnivorous animals, and unscaled fish. Alcohol is forbidden.

- Meat must be butchered in line with Qur'anic ritual known as Hallal or "permitted"
- The staple of the Arab diet is dark pita bread.
- Lamb is the most common meat.



Kabsa is the national dish of Saudi Arabia which perfectly represents the culture and traditions of Saudi Arabian culture. It is a mixed rice dish. Long-grained basmati rice is the main ingredient of the dish. Rice is mixed with meats and vegetables.

Some of the common food items in Saudi Arabian cuisine include wheat, rice, lamb, chicken, yogurt, potatoes, seafood and dates.

## Hygiene & Etiquette

Hands are usually used during a meal so it is a must to wash their hands before and after every meal. The right hand is usually used to eat while the left hand should not be kept in the table as a form of etiquette. Passing food with the left hand is also not acceptable.

Guests are served hot coffee and dates as a symbol of generosity and hospitality. The same practice is carried out in the month of Ramadan. Muslims in Saudi Arabia break their fast with dates, water and Arabian coffee. The caffeine in the coffee and the carbohydrates and iron in dates nourishes the fasting person with a lot of energy. This helps them perform the Tarawih held in the evenings during Ramadan.

# Arabic Food

The Saudi cuisine is well known for the use of spices. These spices bring out the unique flavors in every Saudi Arabia dish and drink. Some of the most spices in the Kingdom are Saffron, Cumin, Curry and turmeric.

## Common Spices



Turmeric  
**korkom**



Chili  
**shattah**



Pepper  
**Felfel**



Cardamon  
**Hel**



Saffron  
**Za'afaran**



Curry  
**carry**



Cinnamon  
**Qerfah**



Cumin  
**Cammon**



Parsley  
**Bagdones**



Thyme  
**Za'atar**

# Arabic Food

## Fruits & Vegetables



Broccoli  
**brokli**



Carrots  
**gazar**



Onion  
**bassal**



Cabbage  
**koronb**



Cauliflower  
**karnabit**



Dates  
**balah**



Pumpkin  
**al kar'**



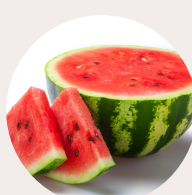
Cucumber  
**kheyar**



Potatoes  
**batates**



Eggplant  
**al bathenjan**



Watermelon  
**bateekh**



Grapes  
**e'nab**



Peaches  
**khokh**



Tomato  
**tamatem**

# Arabic Food

## Meat



Lamb  
**kharoof**



Chicken  
**dagag**



Mutton  
**lahm al da'n**



Fish  
**samak**



Beef  
**samak**



Turkey  
**deek romi**

## Staple Foods



Bread  
**khobz**



Rice  
**orz**



Wheat  
**Kamh**



Milk  
**samak**



Butter  
**zebda**



Yogurt  
**zabadi**



Cheese  
**gebna**



# Working in Saudi Arabia



Saudi Arabia remains to be a top destination for Filipino domestic helpers. 1 out of 4 OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) workers in the kingdom.

With the recent improvements on the regulations, such as improved health care coverage, move leaves and also employment protection, domestic workers can experience a safer environment when it comes to working in Saudi Arabia.

Like any other domestic worker-employer relationship, the one between you and your employer is one that needs nurturing.

Knowing some basic Arabic words and phrases to communicate with your employers and their family is helpful in building a good relationship and to settle into work and life in Saudi Arabia.



Kamadan

# Greetings

## How to say "Hello"

- Peace be with You / Hello  
"As-salaam 'alykum"
- Hello  
"Ahlan"
- How are you?  
"kaifa haluka"



## Basic Greetings

- Good Morning  
"Sabahu al-hayir"
- Good Afternoon  
"masa al-hayir"
- Good Night  
"tusbih 'ala hayr"
- How much is this?  
"bikam hada"
- Goodbye  
"ma al-salamah"
- Please  
"min fadlik"
- Yes  
"na-am"
- Okay  
"hasanan"
- Help  
"al-nagdah"
- See you later  
"arak-lahiqa"
- Excuse me  
"udran"
- No  
"la"
- I'm sorry  
"ana asif"

## When meeting people

- What's your name?  
"ma 'ismuk"
- I am (then your name)  
"ana (then your name)"
- Nice to meet you!  
"tasarrafna"

## How to say and acknowledge a Thank you

- Thank you  
"shukran"
- Thank you for the present  
"shukran ala al hadiya"
- You're welcome  
"afwan"

# Basic Arabic words



## Household Terms

### Tagalog

kwarto

sala

kwartong tulugan

hapag kainan

kusina

banyo o paliguan

Susi

Linis

Mga gamit panglinis

mop

brush na pangkuskos

spongha

timba/balde

tuwalya

basurahan

vacuum

sabon

### English

Room

Living Room

Bedroom

Dining Room

Kitchen

Bathroom

Key

Clean

Cleaning tools

mop

scrub brush

sponge

bucket/pail

towel

trash bag

vacuum

soap

### Arabic

ghurfat

ghurfat almaisha

ghurfat alnawm

ghurfat altaam

Matbakh

Hammam

muftah

tandif

adawat altandif

mmsaha

forshat lelhak

esfanga

satel

menshafa

kys alqomamah

meknasa

saboon

## **II. Domestic Worker Employment Regulations**



# Are you Eligible to work in Saudi Arabia?

## For Filipino nationals

- At least 23 years old
- TESDA Domestic work NC II training
- Medically fit to work
- No derogatory record
- Has a valid passport



# Contract Status



## Finished contracts

“Finished contract” domestic workers are foreign domestic workers who have completed their 2-year contracts in Saudi Arabia. Therefore they are either renewing with their current employers or looking for a new one.

The advantage of “finished contract” is that it is easier for them to find a new job in Saudi Arabia, why? Because,

- they already have experience with either local or foreign employers;
- they are most likely currently in Saudi Arabia so they can start searching for a new job before the end of their contracts;
- they can do face-to-face interviews as they are in the country;

# Contract Status



## Terminated contracts

“Terminated contract” domestic workers are foreign domestic workers that have been dismissed by their employers. Therefore they finished their contract earlier than the two-year period.

### Terminated for special reason

1. Relocation of Employer's family. If the family decides to move and not take the helper, the family is forced to terminate her.
1. Change in the family's financial situation. Some families can experience a sudden change in their financial situations, such as the breadwinner of the family loses his/her job or has to be hospitalized for a long time. In this case, they may not be able to afford to support the helper anymore. In that case, they are forced to terminate the helper too.
1. The employer passes away, or when the person that the domestic helper was hired to care for passes away. It mostly happens in families where helpers take care of the elderly. In this case, the helper is not needed anymore, and she can be terminated “for reasons”.

### Terminated contracts for other reasons

Poor working performance. It can be an issue as big as stealing or abusing children, or as small as being viewed by employers as too lazy or eats too much. Therefore, you should always call the helper's previous employer to find out why the helper is terminated. If you think that the reason why her previous employer terminated her does not apply to you, you can consider hiring her.

# Contract Status

## Broken contract

“Broken contract” means that the domestic helper quit the job and did not finish the 2-year contract.

Some reasons for breaking the contract are unsatisfactory working conditions, culture shock, discrepancy between the contract and actual work situation, or homesickness which is quite common



## Overseas or first-timers

“Overseas” or “first-timers” are prospective domestic workers who are currently in their home country, either have experience abroad or plan to leave for the first-time.

First-timers are required to undergo domestic work training before they are deployed to work abroad to teach them necessary skills and introduce them to the culture of the country they will be working in.

The recruitment process will take a maximum period of 45 days, provided that the worker is specifically chosen by a Saudi Arabian citizen and will be recruited through the **Musaned** website.



# Salary

The Saudi Arabian government does not specify the minimum allowable wage for domestic workers and usually depends on the nationality of the helper.

For Filipina helpers, the minimum allowable wage is set at USD 400 or SAR 1500 as bilaterally agreed upon by the Philippine government with the government of Saudi Arabia.

## Payment of wages

Domestic workers are not included in the Wage Protection system but the employer is obliged to facilitate the opening of a bank account under the domestic helper's name for the deposit of her monthly salary as provided in the employment contract.

It is a prepaid MADA card that enables the employer to pay the domestic workers' wages and incentives electronically via recognized banking channels. The employer shall pay the helper's salary at the end of every Hijri month, unless otherwise agreed upon in writing on another payment method in accordance with the regulations and instructions on wage protection.



# Food Allowance

Employers are not required to provide food allowance but are obliged to provide sufficient food and a nutritious diet to ensure the worker's health and wellbeing which is vital to efficiently perform her duties.

The worker can either share meals with the worker or be provided with raw materials to cook his/her food separately in cases of cultural/religious differences. It is important for the employer and the domestic worker to discuss their arrangements beforehand to ensure both their needs are met.

## Food Reminders:

Arabs are restricted by Islamic conventions from eating pork, most carnivorous animals, and unscaled fish. Alcohol is forbidden.

- Meat must be butchered in line with Qur'anic ritual known as Hallal or "permitted"
- The staple of the Arab diet is dark pita bread.
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# Salary Deduction

The employer is not authorized to deduct the recruitment fees or any amount from the regular salary of the domestic worker except in the following cases and without exceeding 50% of the wages payable to the domestic worker in that wage period:

1. Costs of what he/she intentionally or negligently damaged.
2. An advance received from the employer.
3. Execution of a judicial judgment or an administrative decision issued against him, unless it is stated in the judgment or administrative decision that the deduction exceeds half the wage.

Deductions must be reflected in the helper's pay slip.



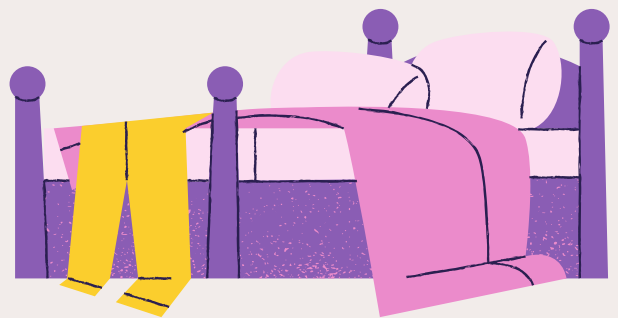
# Accommodation & Rest day

## Live-in rule

All foreign domestic helpers in Saudi Arabia are under a live-in arrangement with their employers - they can not stay out of the employer's house

## Accommodation arrangements

The employer shall provide suitable and sanitary accommodation to the helper. It is vital that the living quarters respect the helper's privacy as well as the privacy of the employer's family, while ensuring safety where the doors can be locked if a separate room is provided.



# Accommodation & Rest day

A decent accommodation must include a bed, pillows, blankets, wardrobe/storage space, a light, access to water, toilet and bathing facilities.

The helper should not sleep in the same room with anyone of the opposite sex. Given the conservative culture and religion of Saudi Arabia,

Due to big housing spaces in Saudi Arabia, majority of employers provide a separate, provide bedroom for domestic workers that can be adjoining or outside the employer's residence.

## Rest days

The household worker shall be provided with continuous rest of at least nine (9) hours per day and at least 1 rest day per week, which is equivalent to 24 hours of uninterrupted rest.



# Duties assigned to the worker

## Types of duties acceptable

A reasonable job scope consists of tasks the domestic helper can carry out on her own without undue physical or psychological stress, and which she is skilled or experienced to perform.

According to the Musaned website, the employer must comply with the following conditions:



- The domestic service worker shall not be required to perform any work other than the work agreed upon in the contract, or to work with other parties, except in cases of necessity, provided that the work to which it is assigned does not differ materially from the original work.
- The domestic worker shall not be required to carry out any dangerous work that threatens his/her health, his/her integrity or his/her human dignity.
- Employers are not allowed to hire or lease the domestic worker to others, or to allow them to work on their own.
- 

## Part-time jobs

Domestic helpers in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to take part time jobs even during their days off. The helper must work solely for the employer and his immediate household. Doing so is a violation of the Employment Contract thus making the domestic worker subject to deportation or repatriation if found.

# Medical and Insurance

The contract of employment and the domestic labor law obligates the employer to provide medical care “in accordance with the rules and regulations enforced in the Kingdom.”

It is best to relieve her of work until recovery. The worker is entitled to “paid sick leave not exceeding thirty days per year upon a medical report proving his/her need for the sick leave.”



## Medical Certificate of the helper

Medical Care shall be provided to the domestic helper in accordance with the rules and regulations enforced in the Kingdom.



## Maternity protection

Currently, migrant domestic workers are not entitled to maternity protection or benefits in Saudi Arabia. According to Saudi Arabia's regulations, if a domestic worker gets pregnant, she will lose her right to stay in the kingdom and make her subject to immediate deportation.

# Leaves and holidays

## Paid Leaves

The domestic helper is entitled to a one month paid leave with a round trip economy class ticket after two years of service and desires to renew the contract for a similar period.



## End of Service Benefits

A domestic helper who has completed 4 consecutive years of service under a single employer is entitled to an end of service benefit equivalent to one month's salary.

## Rest day

The domestic worker is entitled to one rest day weekly. To cater to the needs of the family, the rest day can be fixed or flexible as agreed upon by the employer and the helper.

The employer is also obligated to provide the domestic helper a proper rest of at least 9 hours per day to ensure adequate sleep and recuperation from the day's work. This will ensure the helper is physically and mentally recharged to continue with her responsibilities.



# Leaves and holidays



## Sickness allowance

A domestic helper is entitled to “**paid sick leave not exceeding thirty days per year**”. A medical report is required to prove his/her need for a sick leave. In times of sickness, it is best to relieve his/her of work until recovery.

The domestic worker is allowed to rest and is entitled to receive his/her regular salary in case of acceptable medical reasons. The employer shall shoulder the medical expenses incurred by the worker so it is advisable for an employer to get health insurance for the worker to cover the said medical costs.

## Vacation leave

The domestic helper is entitled to a one month (30 days) paid leave with a round trip economy class ticket after two years of service and desires to renew the contract for a similar period.

# Employment contract



## Termination of the contract

The employer may terminate the contract by serving upon the domestic helper a written notice. Such termination shall be effected only on the expiry of a period of 33 days from the date of service of the notice on the domestic worker.

The helper shall be paid the wages for this period of 33 days. However if the termination is intended with immediate effect the notice shall state the same and shall be accompanied by wages of two months.

The helper may also terminate the contract by giving a written notice of 33 days to the employer and shall pay the employer an amount equivalent to one month's wage before departure. However, if the employee terminates the contract with immediate effect, he/she shall pay an amount equivalent to two months' wage before departure. The employer on payment of the amount mentioned here in above shall immediately provide necessary papers to effect the exit of the helper from Saudi Arabia.

## Termination of the contract without notice by the employer

The employer can legally terminate the contract upon their own will during the probation period (90days upon commencement) of the domestic worker without any of the responsibility falling on him, if and only if the domestic worker is proved to be unfit.

# Employment contract

## Termination of the contract without notice by the worker

In case the domestic worker leaves the job without notice, the employer must immediately inform the nearest police station to his or her home, and the police station shall do the following:



- Inform the Passport Department of the worker's escape to take the necessary action.
- 
- Inform the Labor Office of this situation, to ensure that the domestic worker does not have a claim against the employer, or that the employer has a claim against the worker. When there is an action, the Labor Office must inform the Passport Department
- Provide the employer with a copy of the escape notice.

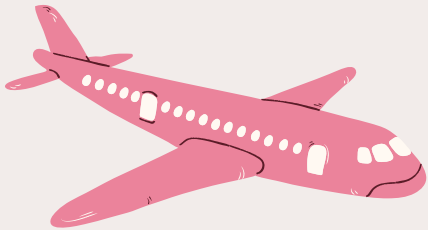
## Death of the employer



A domestic worker's contract will legally expire upon the death of the worker's employer. Should the immediate family decide to keep and employ the helper, they must confer with the Labor Office with the accurate name of the employer and follow the necessary procedures.

# Employment contract

## After the contract



The employer must bring a clearance document proving that the worker or worker has received all of his dues, certified by a domestic recruitment office or from the maids affairs care center, as the General Directorate of Passports stipulated that the beneficiary's record be free of any financial dues in order to be able to issue a final exit visa from the Kingdom.

The employer is required to provide free transportation to the site of employment and back to the domestic worker's country of origin upon expiration of the contract to ensure the worker's timely repatriation. In case of termination not attributable to the domestic worker, the employer shall bear the cost of repatriation of the worker to the Philippines and other sending countries.

## Change of employer/sponsorship

The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has started to allow transferring sponsorship of domestic helpers under the condition of "Sponsorship transfer". Under this condition, a domestic helper's status can be renewed but for not more than a year.

The first thing that the worker should do is to secure his sponsor's approval of his request to transfer to another sponsor/employer. The procedure then is for his prospective sponsor to write a letter expressing his interest in the worker's service and requesting for his release. If the conditions are so acceptable to the present sponsor, he should formally consent thereto and sign the release papers.

# Employment contract

Thereafter, the prospective sponsor should present these documents with the application for transfer of sponsorship and iqama for official approval.

Unless the legal rules and procedures are followed, an employer may not allow his worker to work for others and a worker may not work for another employer. Similarly, an employer may not employ workers of other employers. An employer may not allow a worker to work for his own account and a worker may not work for his own account.

## Overstaying after my visa expiration

Like in any other countries, a domestic worker who overstays in the Kingdom upon visa expiry shall be subjected to statutory penalties as custody, fining and deporting. The domestic worker will be detained while finalizing his deporting procedures after collecting the statutory fines, issue an exit visa for him and expedite his travel.

Anyone who shelters a worker whose visa has expired and harbors or assists to stay in the country illegally shall also be subject to fines and/or imprisonment with the severity depending on his/her citizenship status.



# Other main provisions of the Employment Ordinance



## Severance payment

The employer must pay the fare for the domestic worker to return to her home country and any unpaid salaries due to her, if the contract has finished or the employer has terminated it for an unjust reason.

## End of Service Benefits

A domestic helper who has completed 4 consecutive years of service under a single employer is entitled to an end of service benefit equivalent to one month's salary.

## Employment protection

The domestic helper has the right for employment protection. The employer shall pay the cost of the domestic worker's residence permit (iqama), exit/re-entry visa, and final exit visa, including the renewals and penalties resulting from delays. This employment contract will be the only valid contract. Any subsequent contract entered into between the employer and the employee in substitution of this contract shall not be valid.

Notwithstanding any provision in the applicable regulations of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia related to the domestic service workers, the provisions of this contract shall remain effective. The contract is written in Arabic and English languages, both languages being equally authentic.

# Other main provisions of the Employment Ordinance

Employers who break the law shall be fined SAR 2000, and be banned from recruiting another domestic helper for a year. Second-time offenders will be fined SAR 5000, and banned from recruiting for three years, while three breaches will incur a lifetime recruitment ban and a fine of SAR 10,000.

# Finding Help in Difficult Situations

## Government agencies to contact:

The Embassy in Riyadh, the Consulate in Jeddah, and the POLO under the two missions are always ready to provide appropriate advice and assistance to either category. However, their respective solutions are different.



### Filipinos may call the following hotlines:

- POLO Riyadh Hotline - 0545917834
- POLO Eastern - 0501269742
- POLO Central - 0507537997
- Philippine Consulate General Jeddah- 0555219613, 0555219614 Email : pc.jeddah@gmail.com
- Philippine Overseas Labor Office - 056981972 Email: polojeddah2018@gmail.com / owwa\_jeddah@yahoo.com (*For Labor-related matters, including Unpaid Salaries, Unfavorable Working Conditions, Contract Substitution and Violations, Employer-related concerns*)
- Assistance-to-Nations Section PCG - 055 521 9613 / ans@pcgjeddah.org (*For Police/criminal cases, Detention, Legal Assistance, Shipment or Burial of remains, Medical Assistance for Undocumented OFWs, Other Assistance for undocumented OFWs.*)



# Finding help in difficult situations

## Legal

Complaints and disputes are referred to a Labor Committee for amicable resolution within 5 days. If the matter is not resolved, the Committee takes a decision within 10 days. It is possible to appeal against this decision to the Labour Court electronically.

## Repatriation Guidelines (Filipinos)

An EXIT Visa is required to leave the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and return to the Philippines.

- If you have an employer or sponsor (kafeel) - your employer or sponsor can get your exit visa online using Absher or personally visit Jazzwat (Passports Office) to process it directly.
- If you are Undocumented, has no iqama, has an expired iqama, Huroob or has no legal employer - you may seek assistance from the Philippine Embassy or from POLO to go to Jazawat and process your exit visa.
- If you had or have a pending criminal case - you are advised to seek assistance from the Philippines embassy. You have to finish the hearing of your case, including the private rights of the one who filed the case and complaint if applicable, before your exit visa can be facilitated.



# Finding help in difficult situations

## Retaining passport / Iqama

The passport and work permit (iqama) of the domestic worker shall solely remain in her/his possession. Employers who are found to violate this ruling shall be subject to appropriate fines and may disqualify them from employing a household domestic worker in the future.

## Salary payment issue

Domestic workers are not included in the Wage Protection System but all employers must register for the Household Payroll Card under which workers can withdraw salary by automated teller machine (ATM).

A domestic worker may request to change employer or sponsor with her recruitment agency if the employer fails to pay the salary for 3 consecutive or intermittent months.

## Maternity

Currently, migrant domestic workers are not entitled to maternity protection or benefits in Saudi Arabia. According to Saudi Arabia's regulations, if a domestic worker gets pregnant, she will lose her right to stay in the kingdom and make her subject to immediate deportation.

# About Us



HelperChoice provides an online platform that aims to improve foreign domestic workers' living and working conditions, enable millions of migrant domestic workers to have access to the job market for free and foster the disappearance of unethical recruitment agencies.

Find a domestic worker job now: <https://www.helperchoice.com/>



# Disclaimer

The latest news is subject to change in government announcements. The information provided is a guide for domestic workers and we do not assume any responsibility or accept liability for any inaccuracies or outdated information. Domestic workers should check the government's official website and contact the relevant embassy for the latest updates.