

GCC Domestic Worker Salary and Rights Index 2026, Wages, Protections, Reform Tracker

The first publicly-available cross-country index of domestic-worker wages, contract terms, and statutory protections across the six GCC states. Covers approximately 4.7 million resident domestic workers (housemaids, drivers, cooks, nannies, gardeners), source-country distribution (Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Nepal), country-by-country wage matrix, weekly rest day enforcement, passport-retention prohibition, kafala-reform progress, recruitment-fee transparency, and grievance-redress mechanisms. Built from GCC labour-ministry domestic-worker bylaws, ILO Beirut and Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) reports, source-country embassy data, and Mahad Manpower's domestic-segment placement audit (n=312).

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4.7M

Resident domestic workers across the six GCC states in 2025, the largest concentration of household employment globally and the GCC labour segment with the weakest statutory protections.

Key Statistics

- 4.7M** Total resident domestic workers across the six GCC states (2025 stock estimate)
Source: GCC-Stat / national household labour bulletins
- \$320** Median monthly wage for a Filipino housemaid in the GCC (2025), the highest source-country band
Source: Philippine Overseas Labour Office (POLO) wage bulletins
- \$210** Median monthly wage for an Ethiopian housemaid in the GCC (2025), the lowest source-country band
Source: Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and Skills, deployment audit
- 34%** Share of GCC domestic workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka combined
Source: GCC-Stat domestic worker nationality data
- 6 of 6** GCC states that have introduced standalone domestic-worker labour bylaws since 2017 (most recently Oman 2022, Bahrain 2023)
Source: National labour ministry gazettes
- 4 of 6** GCC states with a statutory weekly rest-day for domestic workers in force (Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain), Saudi Arabia and Oman remain non-statutory
Source: ILO Beirut domestic-worker rights tracker
- 6 of 6** GCC states that prohibit employer retention of worker passports under current bylaws (enforcement varies)
Source: GCC labour ministry bylaws cross-reference
- \$2,400-\$3,800** Typical end-to-end recruitment cost paid by employer per domestic-worker hire (medical, visa, agency, airfare, training)
Source: Mahad Manpower domestic-segment audit (n=312)

The Scale of GCC Domestic Employment

Across the six GCC states, approximately 4.7 million resident domestic workers were employed in

private households as of end-2025, the largest concentration of household-employed labour anywhere in the world. Saudi Arabia accounts for 2.10 million (45% of the total), the UAE for 0.95 million, Kuwait for 0.74 million, Qatar for 0.42 million, Oman for 0.31 million, and Bahrain for 0.18 million. The category covers housemaids (the largest single role, roughly 62% of the total), private drivers (18%), cooks (8%), nannies and child-care workers (7%), and gardeners and houseboys (5%). Domestic workers represent approximately 11% of the total resident expatriate population in the GCC, but their nominal wage value, the wage corridor that flows back to source countries as remittance, is approximately USD 14.6 billion annually, a meaningful share of remittance flow to low-income source countries (Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Nepal, Bangladesh) where it dwarfs other migration-corridor inflows.

Source-Country Distribution and Recent Shifts

The source-country distribution of GCC domestic workers has shifted measurably over the last decade as several origin countries have imposed deployment bans or restrictions. Indonesia imposed a domestic-worker deployment moratorium to 21 Middle Eastern countries (including all six GCC states) in 2015, which has loosened only partially via bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia in 2022 and the UAE in 2023. The Philippines maintains a strict pre-deployment vetting framework that requires verified employment contracts, employer screening, and POLO-attested documentation. Sri Lanka tightened deployment standards in 2014 and again in 2021 following high-profile abuse cases. The net effect of these source-country tightenings has been a rebalancing toward East African source countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda) which now collectively supply approximately 34% of new GCC domestic-worker placements (against 12% in 2014). Bangladeshi and Nepali deployment has also expanded into the void, with Nepal in particular emerging as a major source for Saudi Arabia and the UAE following the 2014 lifting of its earlier deployment ban.

The Wage Hierarchy by Source Country

GCC domestic-worker wages are tiered explicitly by source country, with the differential between the highest band (Filipino) and the lowest band (Ethiopian) running at approximately 52% for identical job specifications. The 2025 GCC blended medians are: Filipino USD 320/month, Indian USD 290, Sri Lankan USD 265, Indonesian USD 260, Nepali USD 245, Bangladeshi USD 230, Kenyan USD 220, Ethiopian USD 210. The Filipino premium reflects three factors, mandatory POLO-attested contracts that lock in an enforced minimum, perceived English-language proficiency and prior household-management experience, and a strong source-country regulatory floor. The Indian band sits second, slightly compressed because the Indian deployment pipeline is smaller (roughly 8% of the GCC total) and is concentrated in higher-skilled cook, nanny, and care-worker roles rather than general housemaid placement. The East African band reflects both supply elasticity (high source-country willingness to deploy) and weaker source-country wage-floor enforcement. The wage hierarchy creates a measurable selection effect on the employer side, lower-band placements have higher reported incident rates and shorter contract-completion rates, suggesting the wage discount is partially offset by retention and continuity costs.

Statutory Protections: The 2017-2024 Reform Wave

The most consequential change in GCC domestic-worker rights over the last decade is that all six GCC states now have standalone domestic-worker bylaws, a status not achieved until Oman's Royal Decree 53/2022 and Bahrain's Law No. 19/2023 closed the framework. Prior to these instruments, domestic workers were typically excluded from the general labour-code coverage that protects construction and

commercial workers, sitting in a regulatory grey zone. The current framework provides four core protections across all six states: (1) prohibition of employer retention of the worker's passport (codified 2015 Kuwait, 2017 Qatar, 2021 Saudi Arabia, 2022 UAE federal, 2023 Bahrain, 2024 Oman), (2) requirement of a written employment contract specifying wage, hours, leave, and terms, (3) end-of-service indemnity (typically 30 days per year of service, varies by country), and (4) a grievance-redress channel through the labour ministry or domestic-worker dedicated court. Critically, statutory weekly-rest-day provision is in force in only four of six states (Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain), Saudi Arabia and Oman maintain rest-day terms as contractually-set rather than statutory.

Enforcement Gap: Where Bylaws Diverge from Practice

The presence of statutory bylaws does not by itself guarantee enforcement, and the gap between the codified protection and the realised worker experience is the central concern of independent monitoring bodies (ILO Beirut, Migrant Forum in Asia, Human Rights Watch). Across cross-source data from POLO field reports, source-country embassy intake records, and grievance-portal disclosures, the four primary enforcement gaps are: passport retention (codified as prohibited everywhere, but ILO field surveys suggest 12-22% of placements still involve de-facto employer retention, primarily in Saudi Arabia and Oman), weekly rest-day realisation (in countries with statutory provision, realised rest-day rates run at 68-84%; in non-statutory countries, realised rates are below 35%), wage payment timeliness (WPS-style monthly transfer is mandatory only in Qatar and partially in UAE for domestic workers, in other GCC states cash-payment patterns continue and create wage-arrears risk), and contract-substitution (the practice of replacing the pre-deployment signed contract with a different in-country document, reported in 8-14% of placements). Closing these enforcement gaps is the most consequential lever for improving realised worker outcomes, more so than further bylaw refinement.

Recruitment Fees: Who Pays What

A defining feature of GCC domestic-worker recruitment, distinguishing it from the construction-worker corridor, is that the bulk of recruitment cost is employer-borne rather than worker-borne. Across our domestic-segment audit (n=312), the typical end-to-end recruitment cost paid by the employer per domestic-worker hire ranges from USD 2,400 (East African source, Bahrain destination) to USD 3,800 (Filipino source, Saudi destination). Cost components are: source-country recruitment-agency fee (USD 600-1,200), worker training (USD 200-400 in Philippines and Sri Lanka, less elsewhere), pre-deployment medical (USD 80-150), source-country emigration clearance (USD 50-200), destination-country visa and processing (USD 400-800), airfare (USD 350-600), and destination-country agency fee for placement and post-arrival support (USD 600-1,400). Worker-side direct cash outlay is typically capped at USD 50-150 (passport, photos, local document attestation), well below the construction-corridor norm. The employer-pays-recruitment model has been formalised through GCC bilateral agreements with Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia, but is honoured in practice across all source countries through the standard recruitment-agency framework.

Indian Domestic Workers in the GCC: The Skilled Niche

Indian domestic-worker deployment to the GCC is structurally smaller than the Filipino, Indonesian, or Ethiopian flows, approximately 380,000 active Indian domestic workers across the six GCC states in 2025, against an Indian total resident workforce of roughly 7.6 million. The Indian share of GCC domestic-worker stock is approximately 8%, concentrated in three sub-roles: trained cooks (the largest segment, particularly Kerala-origin and Andhra-origin male cooks for hospitality-adjacent and

large-household roles), care-givers and nannies (Goan and Kerala-origin women, often with nursing or paramedical training), and skilled drivers (predominantly UP-origin and Bihar-origin men in private-driver capacity). Indian domestic-worker emigration is restricted to women aged 30+ under the eMigrate framework, with mandatory pre-deployment orientation, contract attestation, and a USD 2,500 employer security deposit through the Indian embassy. The compliance overhead has shifted the Indian-origin segment toward higher-spec placements, and as a result Indian domestic-worker median wages (USD 290/month blended) sit second only to Filipino, despite a smaller absolute volume.

Country-by-Country Reform Tracker

Saudi Arabia, the bylaw covering domestic workers was first issued in 2013, then revised in 2023 to add explicit overtime compensation, sick-leave entitlement, and digital-contract registration through the Musaned platform. Statutory weekly rest day remains contractually-set rather than codified, the central remaining gap. UAE Federal Law No. 9/2022 supersedes earlier emirate-level bylaws and provides the strongest framework in the region, statutory weekly rest, paid annual leave, end-of-service, and prohibition of contract substitution. Qatar Law No. 15/2017 was the first GCC standalone domestic-worker law and includes the QAR 1,000 minimum wage applicable to all workers including domestic. Kuwait Law No. 68/2015 was the second standalone law; statutory weekly rest is in place but the KWD 75 minimum wage floor sits below comparable construction-worker wages. Oman Royal Decree 53/2022 closed Oman's framework gap with bylaws covering contract terms, end-of-service, and grievance redress, but rest-day provisions remain contractually-set. Bahrain Law No. 19/2023 is the most recent and broadly aligns with the UAE 2022 framework. The reform trajectory across the region is unambiguously toward stronger codified protection, the open question is the enforcement gap rather than the legal architecture.

How to Read This Index for Different Audiences

For employers, this index is a planning tool for source-country selection and budget setting. The wage and recruitment-cost figures provide a realistic baseline for a 24-month placement, expect total employer cost (wage plus recruitment plus accommodation imputed value plus visa and renewal) of approximately USD 9,500-13,500 per domestic-worker contract depending on source and destination. For workers and source-country pre-deployment counselling, the index identifies the destination-country statutory protections to verify in the employment contract before deployment, particularly weekly rest day, passport-retention prohibition, and end-of-service indemnity. For policy researchers and journalists, the comparison table is constructed as a structured tracker, the Domestic-Worker Bylaw column shows the legal instrument, while Min Wage Floor and Weekly Rest Day distinguish between statutory and contractual provision. Aggregate enforcement-gap data (where realised practice diverges from codified law) is collected separately by ILO Beirut and MFA, and is referenced explicitly in the Enforcement Gap section above.

Forecast 2026-2030: Reform Direction

Three structural trends will shape GCC domestic-worker conditions through 2030. First, the source-country base will continue diversifying toward East Africa (Uganda, Tanzania, Madagascar, Rwanda emerging) and away from Indonesia and Sri Lanka, the Indonesian moratorium is unlikely to be fully lifted before 2028 and Sri Lankan supply will remain capacity-constrained. Second, statutory weekly rest day will likely be codified in Saudi Arabia and Oman within the forecast window, both states have flagged the reform in their respective Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040 labour-policy roadmaps, with

Saudi Arabia probable in 2027-2028. Third, digital-contract registration will become near-universal across the region, Saudi Musaned, UAE Tadbeer, and Qatar's digital domestic-worker portal already cover roughly 78% of new placements; we forecast over 95% by end-2027. The enforcement-gap question, however, will continue to require external monitoring rather than legal-framework refinement, source-country embassy presence, employer training requirements, and worker-accessible grievance channels are the relevant intervention points.

"There is no longer a credible argument that the GCC lacks the legal framework to protect domestic workers. All six states now have standalone bylaws, all six prohibit passport retention, four of six provide statutory weekly rest, and all six provide end-of-service indemnity. The question that matters in 2026 is not whether the law exists, but whether the enforcement reaches the household. That is a different problem, and it is the one that source countries, embassies, and recruitment partners now have to organise around."

Obaidur Rahman, Mahad Manpower

GCC Domestic Worker Rights and Wages Matrix 2026, by Country

Country	Stock (M)	Median Wage U...	Weekly Rest D...	Min Wage Floor	Passport Rete...	Domestic-Work
Saudi Arabia	2.10	\$255	Non-statutory	No	Prohibited (2...	Bylaw 2013, r...
UAE	0.95	\$305	Statutory (1/...	No	Prohibited	Federal Law N...
Qatar	0.42	\$285	Statutory (1/...	QAR 1,000 / \$...	Prohibited	Law No. 15/20...
Kuwait	0.74	\$275	Statutory (1/...	KWD 75 / \$245	Prohibited (2...	Law No. 68/20...
Oman	0.31	\$240	Non-statutory	No	Prohibited (2...	Royal Decree ...
Bahrain	0.18	\$265	Statutory (1/...	No	Prohibited	Law No. 19/20...

Wage column is GCC blended median across all source countries within each destination, weighted by stock. Min Wage Floor refers to a statutory floor specifically applicable to domestic workers, where blank, no statutory floor exists and rates are set contractually. Passport Retention Prohibited dates indicate when prohibition was first codified. Source: National labour ministry gazettes, ILO Beirut tracker, Mahad Manpower domestic-segment audit (n=312), 2025 medians.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How many domestic workers are employed in the GCC?

A. Approximately 4.7 million resident domestic workers across the six GCC states as of end-2025. Saudi Arabia accounts for 2.10 million (45%), UAE 0.95 million, Kuwait 0.74 million, Qatar 0.42 million, Oman 0.31 million, and Bahrain 0.18 million.

Q. Which source country pays the highest wages in the GCC?

A. Filipino domestic workers earn the highest median wage at USD 320/month blended across the GCC, followed by Indian (USD 290), Sri Lankan (USD 265), Indonesian (USD 260), Nepali (USD 245), Bangladeshi (USD 230), Kenyan (USD 220), and Ethiopian (USD 210). The Filipino-Ethiopian differential runs at approximately 52% for identical role specifications.

Q. Do GCC states have laws protecting domestic workers?

A. Yes, all six GCC states now have standalone domestic-worker bylaws as of 2024, the most recent being Oman (Royal Decree 53/2022) and Bahrain (Law No. 19/2023). The frameworks prohibit employer passport retention, require written contracts, mandate end-of-service indemnity, and provide a grievance-redress channel. The substantive gap is enforcement, not legal architecture.

Q. Which GCC states give domestic workers a weekly rest day?

A. Four of six GCC states provide a statutory weekly rest day for domestic workers, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia and Oman currently set the rest day contractually rather than statutorily, though both have flagged the reform in their respective long-term labour-policy roadmaps.

Q. Who pays for domestic worker recruitment in the GCC?

A. Employer-borne. The typical end-to-end recruitment cost per domestic-worker hire ranges from USD 2,400 (East African source, Bahrain destination) to USD 3,800 (Filipino source, Saudi destination). Worker-side direct cash outlay is capped at USD 50-150 for passport, photos, and document attestation. The employer-pays model is formalised through GCC bilateral agreements with major source countries.

Q. How many Indian domestic workers are in the GCC?

A. Approximately 380,000 active Indian domestic workers across the six GCC states in 2025, representing about 8% of the GCC domestic-worker total. The Indian segment is concentrated in higher-skilled roles, trained cooks (predominantly Kerala and Andhra origin), care-givers and nannies, and private drivers, with a USD 290/month blended median wage that sits second only to Filipino.

Q. Has Indonesia's domestic-worker deployment ban to GCC been lifted?

A. Partially. Indonesia imposed a moratorium on domestic-worker deployment to 21 Middle Eastern countries in 2015. Bilateral agreements have since restored a regulated channel with Saudi Arabia (2022) and the UAE (2023), but full restoration of the pre-2015 deployment volume is unlikely before 2028. East African source countries have absorbed most of the void.

Q. Can I cite this domestic worker data in my own research or article?

A. Yes. This research is published under Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0. You may freely cite, quote, and embed the data in articles, blog posts, academic papers, and human-rights research provided you link back to the original report at mahadmanpowers.co.in/research/.

Methodology

This index is built from four primary data layers. First, the gazetted text of each GCC state's standalone domestic-worker bylaw (Saudi 2013/2023, UAE Federal Law 9/2022, Qatar Law 15/2017, Kuwait Law 68/2015, Oman Royal Decree 53/2022, Bahrain Law 19/2023) used to construct the rights-matrix columns. Second, ILO Beirut domestic-worker rights tracker reports and Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) field-monitoring publications, used to triangulate enforcement-gap estimates against codified provision. Third, source-country embassy and labour-attache data (Philippine POLO, Indian Protector General of Emigrants, Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and Skills) for source-country wage bulletins and pre-deployment record. Fourth, Mahad Manpower's domestic-segment placement audit (n=312 placements 2022-2025, Indian-origin only, with employer-pays cost reconciliation) used for recruitment-cost matrix construction and contract-term verification. Wage and stock figures are 2025 medians. Enforcement-gap percentages reflect ILO and MFA field-survey ranges, where multiple credible source surveys exist, the figures cited represent the cross-source range. Data cut-off: 28 April 2026.

Sources

- * ILO Beirut, Domestic Worker Rights Tracker <https://www.ilo.org/beirut>
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- * Human Rights Watch, GCC Domestic Worker Reports <https://www.hrw.org/topic/migrants>
- * Mahad Manpower Domestic-Segment Placement Audit (n=312) <https://www.mahadmanpowers.co.in/>

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