

## FILIPINO DOMESTIC HELPERS WANTED

Written by Hanane Jazouani (France-Morocco),  
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7:30am, Amman - “Monica” starts her shift in a well-known hotel as a housekeeping supervisor, she is a 42 years old Filipina, a short and very elegant lady in her uniform. Jordan is her second homeland, where she has been living for 12 years. She got married with a Jordanian man with whom she got divorced few years later. As the other 70 000 foreign workers, Monica works in Jordan to help her family and to provide a better life to her children, whom she is proud of. Her children are her best success. When she talks about them, we can see the pride in her eyes. Her son is studying management in the United States and her daughter studies tourism in Jordan. They have all Jordanian citizenship that provides them, - according to Monica - a security and stability status, also allows her to talk much easier.

APPLICATION FORM

Ref No: RW 004

التبعية Religion: كاثوليكية

الوظيفة Position Applied: Housemaid

الاسم Name: \_\_\_\_\_

تاريخ الميلاد Date Of Birth: JAN 05 / 1973

مكان الميلاد Place Of Birth: أريتريا

رقم الجواز Passport No.	تاريخ الاصدار Date Of Issue	Expiry Date	Place Of Issue
شهادة الجنسية Civil Status الزوجة	عدد الاطفال No. Of Children 2 - TWO	تحدث انجليزي Speak English	مستوى التعليم Educ. Attainment ELEMENTARY
الخبرة بالخارج Experience Abroad	المدة Duration	ملاحظات Remarks FIRST TIME	
غسل Washing	تنظيف Cleaning	تربية اطفال Baby Siting	طبخ Cooking
الطول Height	الوزن Weight	مدة العقد Contract	الراتب Salary
Sign Of Agency :	Sign Of Employer :	Sign Of Applicant :	Interviewed by :

*“They do not live, they just survive”*

However when you ask her about the working conditions of other Filipinas in Jordan, her face changes and simply answers “They do not live, they just survive”...She considers herself lucky compared to the other women’s situation. In Jordan, there are about 16 000 Filipino workers and 90 percent are female. Most of them work as housekeepers, domestic helpers, housemaids, *hammam staff* or factory workers...and the list is endless. Only in the hotel for instance, there are three other Filipina housekeepers and one from Bangladesh. Their job is to clean all the 66 rooms, each of them needs to be cleaned within 10 minutes. Monica is like the Filipinas’ mommy. She teaches them as she puts it “to be wise”. She gives them advice about how to save money, how to behave with their employer and above all how to be mistrusted with men who “just use them” as she says. Moreover, she tells us the tragic story of a young Filipina who was having an affair with a Jordanian married man. Once they had an argument next to the fireplace, the man threw gasoline on her...All her body and face were burnt. The woman is still in hospital.

Unfortunately, tragedy is part of the every day life of certain Filipinas. Tragedy happens most of the time in their workplaces. Behind the touristic and beautiful curtains of Jordan, some Filipina workers live in hell.

Many of them has been undergoing abuses such as rape, physical insults, food deprivation, no salary payment or the lack of legal contract, furthermore being accused of stealing things from the households. Therefore, after receiving reports of rising case of mistreatments, the Filipino Government has decided at the end of January, 2008 to ban the Filipino workers from working in Jordan. This ban affects Filipinas who want to go to Jordan for the first time and not the 16000 already working in the country according to the official statistics. The ban is still on today. In addition to that, Jordan is even ranked on the fifth position of the unsafe

place to work in after Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Nigeria after the Filipino government's decision.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the abuses on Filipinas are not a new phenomenon. The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies explained that already in the 1990s, the Philippines also imposed a deployment ban to Jordan due to high cases of maltreatment and exploitation committed by Jordanian employers. In 2006, a report from the news agency Reuters reported "at least 10 domestic helpers who committed suicide in Jordan after psychological breakdowns at the hands of abusive employers, according to health officials." Thousands of other workers have reported mistreatment. "Every single day, the corridors of the Philippine Embassy in Amman are jammed with domestic helpers fleeing from abuse. The majority do not want to go back to their employer, so they are just repatriated to their homeland" – points out the Amman Center for Human Rights.

However, Jordanian and Filipino authorities have interest to find a prompt solution to avoid these abuses, indeed, these interests are quiet high for both parties. Firstly, if the Filipinos leave the Hashemite Kingdom, it means that all the families, factories and hotels where they work will be without labor, there will be a significant lack of supply for domestic workers for Jordan. On the other hand, the remittances – monies foreign workers send home to their families – "play a key role in the global market exerting a positive influence and fostering development" as the Amman Center for Human Rights studies explained.

*"Remittances from Filipino workers reach the figure of 16 billion US dollars a year"*

According to the World Bank, the Philippines have the fifth rank globally in terms of remittances received from overseas workers and many of them in Jordan. In 2007, remittances from Filipino workers reached 16 billion US dollars a year. According to economists, the remittances do not only help families but have also an impact on the macro and micro economic level because they increase the income of recipient and the origin countries'. A World Bank study in 2007 found that when official international remittances rose by 10%, babies have a higher birth weight and families spend more on education that benefits more on girls, thus boosting the economic growth and investment.

These are the main reasons why Filipinas dream of coming to the Middle East to work. They heard the stories of women being mistreated but that does not stop them. Every year 1 million of Filipinos leave their homeland to work abroad, and the numbers are likely to keep growing.

Chart: Overseas Filipino Workers (selected dates – overall 11 millions Filipinos working abroad)

(source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overseas\\_Filipino](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overseas_Filipino))

<b>United States</b>	<b>4millions</b>
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>2millions</b>
<b>Canada</b>	<b>437,940</b>
<b>United Arab Emirates</b>	<b>450,000</b>
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>200,000</b>
<b>Mexico</b>	<b>200,000</b>
<b>Kuwait</b>	<b>144,955</b>
<b>Australia</b>	<b>129,400</b>
<b>Jordan</b>	<b>16,000</b>

*“They are treated like slaves, like animals”*

“According to the Jordanian labor law the foreign domestic workers are excluded, thus there is no legal protection for them” – explains Luna Sebbah, a lawyer and director of Amman Center for Human Rights, a Jordanian-based NGO. Each year 100 abuse-related cases is delivered to the Center, but according to experts the numbers are even higher, just the lack of confidence and information puts a barrier to the hopeless foreign workers. Even if a worker makes a decision to go to the trial, the costs of having a lawyer are high, thus they prefer to go to their embassies in order to be protected before they get home.

“At that point they are treated like slaves, like animals” – goes on Ms. Sebbah. The Center’s main goal is to create legal circumstances for the foreign workers which would have both economic and political effects.

On the contrary, there are some serious bodies that take the problem into consideration. Rowida from a recruitment agency in Amman explains that every worker coming from abroad will have a contract with her/his employers, which means obligations are needed on both sides. For domestic helpers - Rowida says - the first step is to go and visit a recruitment agency in the Philippines to see what kind of work they can do in their destination country. And then the application forms are filled out then sent to Jordan.

Any Jordanian family who is wishing to have a foreign maid, simply goes to one of these agencies and then can choose among the application forms (see the attachment), that include the potential maid’s religion, experiences abroad, civil status, education, and even her height and weight as well. If the maid is chosen, then comes the red tape part of the story: families have to pay for four main things: first, the residence card which is valid for 1 year (365JD); then, the blue card is the permission that allows the foreign workers to work in Jordan (350JD); an airline ticket going home every second year and the insurance as well.

The agency first checks the bank account of the family to see whether they can afford to have a maid, the minimum money for the worker is 700JD each month. In the contract the Fourth Article points out that the “Employer shall pay a monthly salary of 105 JD or its equivalent in foreign currencies within seven days of the due date. “ If anything goes wrong in the “hostfamily” the maid can go to agency and they make the required steps to solve the problem and to find another family for her. It is definitely a tangible sign that in the office of the agency we could see all the presents they get from their clients.

5:30pm, Amman – all Jordanians are about to finish their work, but Monica is going to her second job (barmaid) so that she can support her family from the 550US dollars she earns each month working 15 hours a day.

*2008, May - Amman, Jordan*