

Domestic Workers in the GCC: A Diverse Population

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In 2022, the GCC region hosted 4.5 to 5 million domestic workers. The sector employed 8 to 32 percent of all foreign workers, respectively in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and up to 72 percent of foreign employed females in Saudi Arabia. The above estimates are likely to be an undercount, but the rare data available on domestic workers in GCC states sketch a relatively diverse population, performing an array of tasks and originating from many countries.

Table 1. Number of domestic workers by gender (mid-2022)

	Males	Females	Total	% Females
Bahrain	22,148	52,748	74,896	70.4
Kuwait	315,545	339,219	654,764	51.8
Oman	N.A.	N.A.	271,976	N.A.
Qatar*	64,413	96,373	160,786	59.9
Saudi Arabia	2,509,842	877,227	3,387,069	25.9
UAE	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

N.A.: no data available. *Qatar: 2021 data

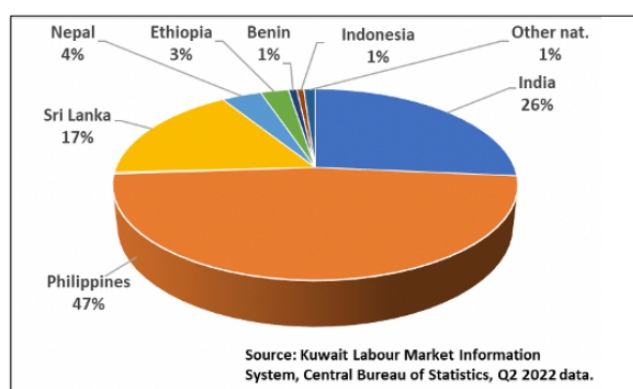
Source: National sources, given countries, see:

<https://gulfmigration.grc.net/glmm-database/demographic-and-economic-module/>.

Judging from the example of Kuwait, domestic workers are not a young population. Males' average ages were 39, while females' average ages were 41 in mid-2022, which suggests that most of these workers spend years in the region. Men made up around half of workers in the sector, and up to three-quarters of these employees in Saudi Arabia (Table 1). The

category of "cleaner" encompasses most females (98-99 percent in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia), while 69 percent of male domestic employees were private drivers in Saudi Arabia; 27 percent were servants and 2 percent cooks. A similar distribution of male domestic workers was found in Bahrain. In Qatar, official data stated that domestic labourers worked 50 hours weekly and received on average 3,000 QR (820 USD) monthly in 2021. The bulk of these workers in Qatar held a secondary education or below. However, qualitative studies indicate that domestic workers in the region, especially females, perform tasks beyond the scope of their occupation labels, for example as unofficial nannies and nurses.

Figure 1: Kuwait: Female domestic workers by country of origin (Q2, 2022)



Male domestic workers are most often Indians and Bangladeshis in Kuwait and in Bahrain. Filipinas dominate numerically among females in Kuwait (Figure 1) and in Bahrain (38 percent), followed by Indians, Sri Lankans, and Indonesians. Yet, domestic workers are increasingly being recruited in East African countries (i.e., Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda). In search for ever cheaper workforce, recruiters also target West Africa (i.e., Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia), and countries usually turned towards Europe (i.e., Mali, Benin, Ivory Coast, Madagascar).