

Sri Lankan Housemaids Being Traded Illegally In Oman



Housemaids from Sri Lanka and other

countries are being traded illegally by expatriate agents in an Omani town for less than OMR 1,500.

Agents in Sohar speak openly of skipping official government and embassy procedures to provide expatriate women to work as housemaids in Oman, the *Times of Oman* reported.

Housemaids from Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and African countries can be hired from Sohar easily either on a two-year contract or over a shorter period without embassies ever knowing. Under Omani law, all housemaid contracts in Oman must be registered with the government and the embassy of the relevant country.

"I have my own way to deal with embassies. You don't have to go to embassies. We will take care of everything. You have to pay only OMR 1,200 and feel free to choose one from the CVs here," one agent in a Sohar office told reporter the newspaper. The agent produced the CVs of a few Indian housemaids from Andhra Pradesh, complete with their pictures, ages and other private details.

The agents spoken to the *Times of Oman* offered catalogues of women complete with photographs and details of age and nationality.

"I have agencies in India. I can do it for you," one agent added.

He even said that women from Hyderabad are "not good" but those from Andhra "will work hard".

Another agent in the same street said that housemaids can be arranged for six months or shorter period without processing any papers. Our reporter was told to simply pay OMR 200 to the agent.

"If you need a housemaid for a shorter period, there is no need for maudinya (visa clearance). We will arrange housemaids in Muscat. I will give the number of an agent in Muscat. Just talk to her and fix the salary," the agent said.

Yet another agent in the same Sohar Street said that he could supply Sri Lankan housemaids fast with no need to go through the embassy.

"We need salary details, maudinya and ID card. We can bring housemaids. You can choose which one you want. No need to go to embassy.

We will do that," the agent said.

For an inexperienced housemaid, the monthly salary would be OMR 80, and for an experienced one, it would range between OMR 100 and OMR 120, the agents said.

However, the standard salaries set for housemaids that countries send are much higher than this and visa checks involving embassies, governments and host country foreign affairs office have to be carried out before anyone in Oman can legally recruit a housemaid. An official from the Sri Lankan embassy, while detailing the registration procedures to recruit housemaids from Lanka, said that the embassy's involvement is must.

"Agencies can recruit housemaids but job order and other papers have to be attested by embassy here and employment bureau in Lanka.

Without approval from all sides, a Lankan housemaid cannot be legally hired," the official said.

"We have come across around 70 cases of housemaids brought into Oman illegally by agents this year. We were worried and sought the help of Oman Government. They have taken necessary steps to prevent it and the numbers of housemaids coming illegally have come down," the official added.

According to the official, earlier, housemaids could come to Oman on a visit visa and convert that into a job visa.

"However, it was stopped. Now, housemaids come to neighboring countries on visit visas and then they enter Oman. They don't know that they are duped," the official said, adding that officially, it will cost OMR 1,500 to recruit a Lankan housemaid.

The official added that recently, three such cases have come to light even after the strict measures taken by Oman government.

"We are planning to make representations with Oman Government authorities again," the official added. A social worker in Sohar, on condition of anonymity, said that it is quite easy to hire a housemaid in Sohar without going through official norms.

"Women are coming to the UAE on visit visas and then they are brought to Oman most often illegally. "Sending country governments should adopt strict measures to stop this," the social worker who had rescued 13 trapped women during the last few months said.

Recently, an Indian woman who came to Ajman in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was forcefully brought to Oman to work as a housemaid. The housemaid was rescued by a social worker from Sohar and moved to the embassy. She had endured sexual assault, beatings and had her passport and phone taken away from her before being kept prisoner by a trafficking gang.

The housemaid was duped by an Indian agent in Mumbai and sent to the UAE.

Rafeek Ravuther, an Indian migrants rights activist, said that more than the host country, the sending country should adopt strict measures to avoid such tragedies.

"Most often women are duped by home country agents. Immigration officials in the sending country should act more strictly. They should check everything in detail before allowing a woman to board a flight for an overseas job," Rafeek added.