



Domestic helpers gather in Central to enjoy their day off. Hong Kong may soon be faced with an acute shortage of maids. Photo: David Wong

Fears of maid shortage by 2017

Growing economies may see Indonesia and the Philippines urge citizens to pursue skilled jobs

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Domestic helper agencies in Hong Kong say there could be an acute shortage of maids by 2017 as the Indonesian and Philippines governments plan policies to discourage their citizens from doing such work overseas.

Two factors are at work; the economies of Indonesia and the Philippines, which supply the vast bulk of Hong Kong's 300,000 helpers, and rising demand for maids among the city's families.

Indonesia set a target in January for the number of migrant workers sent abroad to reach zero by 2017.

The situation in the Philippines is less clear. The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported last week that the government is considering a plan to end deploying domestic helpers abroad by 2017 but a spokesman for the country's consulate in Hong Kong said "it is not the intention".

Both countries, however, are

seeking better conditions and more clearly defined terms of employment for their overseas workers, while encouraging skilled citizens to work at home.

The number of domestic helpers in Hong Kong continues to grow but the growth has slowed, statistics from the Immigration Department show. The increase was 17,903 in 2010 but it dropped to 14,280 last year.

At the same time, agencies say, an illegal trade is growing in the hiring of mainland helpers on two-way visit permits, which forbid them from working.



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JOE CHOW, MAID AGENCY

Indonesia's proposed ban comes under its Domestic Worker Roadmap 2017, which is now being drawn up.

"Under the road map, we target zero sending-out of domestic maids," Manpower and Transmigration Minister Muhaimin Iskandar said in January.

The Philippine labour attaché in Hong Kong, Manuel Rotdan, said the government's intention was to encourage skilled Filipinos to work at home or abroad and not become domestic helpers. But the government would not ban its citizens from working as domestic helpers overseas if they wished.

Maid agency representative Joe Chow Kui-ken said Indonesia's economy had improved over the years so many Indonesians preferred to work at home.

"In the past, our customers could choose the helper they liked from three candidates. Now they do not have the choice to choose," said Chow, chairman of Asosiasi PPTKI Hong Kong, which represents 239 agencies.

An agency owner, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said mainlanders on two-way permits are cheaper – about HK\$3,000 a month compared to HK\$3,800 for an overseas helper – and they speak Chinese.

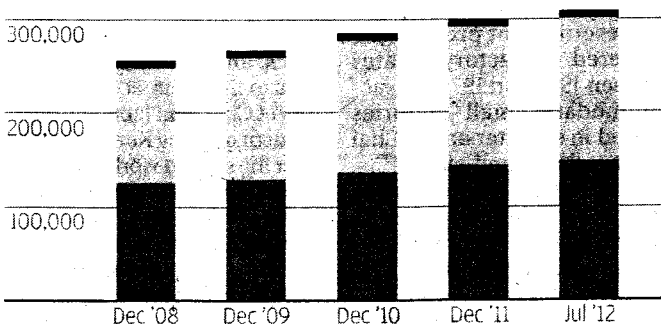
He said about one per cent of agencies were doing this illegal business. He expected the practice to grow if bans in Indonesia and the Philippines go ahead.

An Immigration Department spokesman said the government had no plans to import domestic helpers from the mainland. He said 155 foreigners were arrested last year for working illegally as domestic helpers in Hong Kong. The number was 97 in the first seven months of this year.

Heavily reliant

Foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong, by nationality

■ Filipinos ■ Indonesians ■ Others



Source: Immigration Department

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