

Weekly Rest Days for Foreign Domestic Workers

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Flexibility to compensate worker with pay

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1. The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) will require a weekly rest day for foreign domestic workers (FDWs), while providing employers the flexibility to compensate their FDWs with extra pay if the FDW agrees to work on their rest day. The new weekly rest day requirement will apply to FDWs whose work permits are issued or renewed from 1 January 2013.
2. FDWs play an important role in the lives of many families. Improving their well-being has a direct impact on the quality of care that the FDWs provide. More than just physical rest, a rest day provides the FDW with an emotional and mental break from work. This helps to improve their productivity at work, and reduce the likelihood of management problems.
3. A weekly rest day is regarded internationally as a basic labour right. Local workers and non-domestic foreign workers already enjoy this right under our Employment Act. As Singapore is among the few FDW receiving countries with no provisions for weekly rest days, this regulation is also expected to enhance Singapore's attractiveness as a destination for quality and experienced FDWs.
4. To ensure that the new requirement is pragmatic and balances the needs of employers and FDWs, time and flexibility will be given to employers to adjust to the new regulation. For existing FDWs, this new regulation will not apply to the remaining tenure of their work permit. The weekly rest day requirement will only apply when the FDWs' Work Permits are up for renewal on or after 1 January 2013. New employers who hire an FDW for the first time from 1 January 2013 will also be subject to the new regulations. Employers will retain the alternative option of compensation in-lieu if the FDW expressly agrees to work on her rest days.
5. Please refer to Annex A for key features of the changes.

MOM's Review of the FDW Management framework

6. MOM's move follows a comprehensive year-long review of the FDW management framework, including a study of the major FDW destinations worldwide¹, and extensive stakeholder consultations with employers, FDWs, employment agencies, NGOs, and source country representatives. As part of this review, MOM already announced that the

FDW Entry Test would be replaced with a Settling-In Programme (SIP) for first time FDWs this year.

7. MOM's approach recognises that some employers may have genuine difficulties giving FDWs a weekly rest day, and that some FDWs may prefer the option to work and earn more by forgoing their rest days. Households that genuinely need an FDW - such as those with frail elderly who are most likely to offer compensation-in-lieu, can check if they are eligible for the new \$120 monthly FDW grant announced by Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam in his Budget speech. This grant is over and above the existing \$95 monthly levy concession enjoyed by all households with elderly members above 65, young children under 12 years or disabled members.

Rest Day Activities

8. Employers have also raised concerns regarding the activities that their FDWs may engage in on a rest day. The SIP will cover FDWs' employment responsibilities and give FDWs advice on what constitutes appropriate behaviour on a rest day. The Ministry will also be reviewing employers' obligations for medical and repatriation costs for exceptional circumstances that employers have little or no control over. This will be part of the review of the Employment of Foreign Manpower Regulations to ensure an equitable balance of rights and responsibilities between employers and workers.

¹ Out of 20 countries/cities polled, 15 legislated a weekly rest day for domestic workers. Countries which do not have a legislated rest day for domestic workers include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea. (While Malaysia does not have a legislated rest day provision for FDWs, its recent MOU with Indonesia includes a weekly rest day requirement with the option for compensation in-lieu of a rest day.)

Annex A - Key features of the changes to be implemented from January 2013

<http://www.mom.gov.sg/Documents/press-releases/2012/Annex%20A%20-%20Key%20features%20of%20the%20changes%20to%20be%20implemented%20from%20January%202013.pdf>

Annex B - Working examples

<http://www.mom.gov.sg/Documents/press-releases/2012/Annex%20B%20-%20Working%20examples.pdf>