

# Protection call

NUMBERS of abused female migrant workers seeking protection have increased by 25 per cent, according to campaigners.

A shelter in Manama, operated by the Migrant Workers Protection Society (MWPS), gave sanctuary to 156 women last year – up from 124 in 2012.

Almost all the women who sought help from the society were former domestic workers who had suffered some form of physical abuse, had not been paid or were in need of medical treatment, said MWPS general secretary Beverley Hamadeh.

“Quite a high percentage have reported sexual abuse and harassment,” she told the *GDN*.

According to latest figures compiled by the society, 156 women were given shelter in 2013, which was a 25pc spike compared to the year before.

By GREG FOUNTAIN

The statistics show that the biggest issue the women faced was physical abuse by employers, which made up 42pc of complaints.

Salary was owed to 37pc of the women, while 11pc had faced sexual abuse and 10pc were health-related.

In 2012, 45pc of the women housed by the shelter had not been paid, while 44pc complained of physical abuse, 31pc of excessive workload, 7pc sexual abuse and 4pc of complainants were sick.

Ms Hamadeh said mistreatment of domestic workers happens for a variety of reasons, but the abuse can be traced as far back as their home countries.

“Many of the problems start in the countries of origin, because the women are misled about what their conditions of work will be – which include the hours, the salary, and even the type of work,” she said.

“If they are coming from places like Kenya and Ghana



■ Domestic workers face exploitation all over the world

then they are actually paying money to come – so they give up their savings for what they are told is going to be a higher paid job.

“In some cases, they are not even told that it’s going to be work as a domestic worker.”

Once in Bahrain, the women were at the “mercy of their sponsors”, said Ms Hamadeh.

“Sponsors have complete

control and they can renew or cancel a visa without engaging the employee in that decision,” she added.

This total control, coupled with lax restrictions on who can actually employ a domestic worker, leads to abuse, she said.

“The Labour Ministry says that you have to earn a minimum of BD350 before you can bring in a housemaid,”

she explained.

“Where does the housemaid’s salary fit into that budget?”

MWPS chairwoman Marietta Dias said the sponsorship system was the “root cause” of problems faced by workers.

“Even in death, you can’t repatriate the body until the employer gives the go-ahead to cancel the visa,” she said.

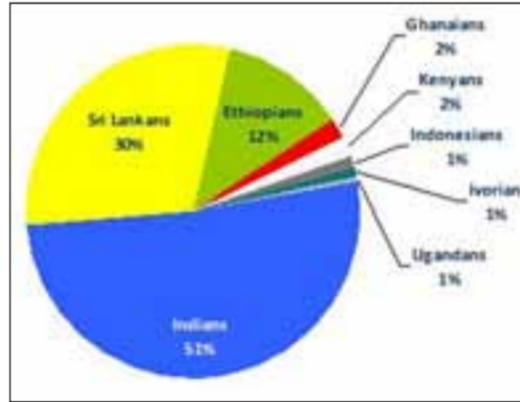
“Once you are stuck in the system, you have two options: either you run away, become illegal and no-one will employ you or you stick it out with the abuse.

“Most of these people are not complaining about working 15-hour days, which is unrealistic in itself, but what they want is their salary. They want to be treated with a little respect and dignity.”

She said one woman who had sought refuge at the shelter had been given so little food by her employer – a doctor – that she had to be taken straight to hospital and put on a saline drip.

However, she said the increase in the number of women seeking help reflects an increase in awareness of the MWPS’ work as much as it shows any increase in violence against domestic workers.

greg@gdn.com.bh



■ A breakdown of MWPS shelter users in 2013 by nationality

MINI-BAHRAIN.COM



WORK HARD.  
PLAY HARDER.



Starting from BD 11,995 on road with BD 1,000 cash back, you can have it all with the MINI Cooper. Enjoy unbeatable roadholding, a broad range of tech features, and world famous go-kart feeling with this jaw-dropping special offer. Students who get a MINI today will also receive a free MINI lifestyle merchandise. So you can rock out MINI style.

Terms and conditions apply.

Book your MINI test drive today at **Euro Motors**,  
810 Sh. Jaber Al Ahmed Al Subah Highway, Al Hamriya 611, Sitra,  
Kingdom of Bahrain, Tel: 17 750 750, MINI@euromotors.com.bh