



# Direct Services Report

2013





# Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)

## Direct Services Report 2013

---

*TWC2 offers a range of assistance to migrant workers in need of help, including free daily meals for the destitute, help to obtain treatment for medical emergencies, guidance to reclaim owed salaries and rescue from abusive employers. Besides recording the scale of these direct services rendered in 2013, this report provides indications of the complaints and issues raised by migrant workers in Singapore. It summarizes the resources that the organization is able to deploy and identifies future needs.*

---

### **Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)**

5001 Beach Road, #09-86

Golden Mile Complex

Singapore 199588

Tel: 6247 7001

# Contents

---

Introduction.....	Page 4
Direct Services.....	Page 5
Organisation.....	Page 7
Project Details.....	Page 8
Profile of Complaints and Enquiries for 2013.....	Page 11
Issues.....	Page 13
Future Directions and Needs.....	Page 19
Increasing TWC2's Capabilities.....	Page 20
Conclusion.....	Page 21
Appendix One: Glossary of Terms.....	Page 22
Appendix Two: TWC2's Work Against Trafficking in Persons.....	Page 24

---



*Social worker Karno and volunteer Christine distribute information flyers (in Tamil) to a worker near Sembawang MRT Station*

# Introduction

---

This year, on 18<sup>th</sup> August, it will be ten years since Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) was gazetted as a society. Over this decade, we have worked for the rights and well-being of migrant workers through advocacy, research, public education and direct services. Vitrally important as the other activities are, it is direct services that have taken up most of our working time and efforts as a society.

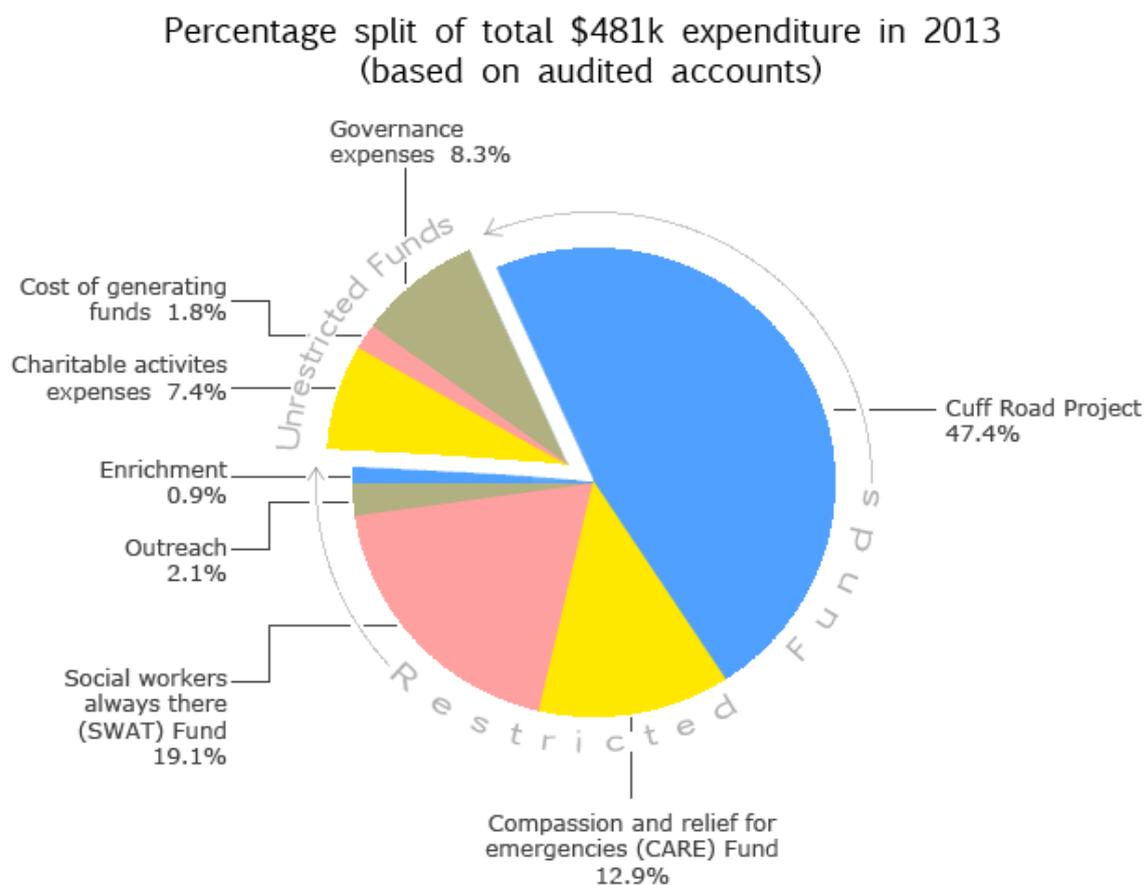
In 2013, our records show that TWC2 directly assisted a total of at least 3116 workers. This total includes 361 workers we were already assisting at the beginning of the year and 2755 who came to us for the first time in 2013. That this was achieved despite having a relatively small budget and only three full time and one part time staff members in all, was in large measure thanks to the efforts of the many volunteers who came forward to take part in our work: it would not have been possible without them.

We are grateful to our volunteers, and to the generous donors who provided us with the means to pay our way and to sustain the range of services that the society provides.

Our 2013 report provides an overview of our direct services work in the past year, giving particular attention to new trends and changes as compared to previous years. Our last two reports (2010-11 and 2012) are available on our website.

---

*TWC2 spending in 2013 by categories:*



*Of the \$481,139 expended in 2013, we spent only 8.35% on administration. By contrast, the 82.4% of our spending from the restricted funds was on various forms of direct services.*

## Direct Services

Direct Services is the name we give to the practical assistance we provide to migrant workers who turn to TWC2 for help.

These services are:

- The Cuff Road Project, which, six days a week, serves free meals to destitute workers waiting for the resolution of salary and workmen's compensation claims.
- Toll-free Helpline for migrant workers and members of the public (Tel: 1800-888- 1515).

- Intervention and case management, to ensure that workers have their problems addressed by the relevant authorities.
- Emergency and compassionate assistance for needy cases.
- A range of legal advice and assistance.
- An enrichment programme offering a selection of Sunday courses, currently for domestic workers.

It should be noted that the figures provided in the report do not reflect the full extent of our direct services work. Our social workers and volunteers are frequently asked for basic information or advice and give it freely; our records do not generally catch this sort of day-to-day assistance. Volunteer assistance to workers, in particular, is under-recorded. Nor do our figures give a full sense of how much effort can go into assisting individual workers. While the majority of requests for assistance may not take much time or effort individually, there are a lot of them, and a minority can take a great deal of attention and effort over days, weeks or even months.

Of course, our statistics take no account of the benefits deriving from our advocacy and research work, which stand to better the position of tens or even hundreds of thousands of migrant workers.

Since the launch of The Cuff Road Project in March 2008, the great majority of workers recorded as having been assisted are men. The project has provided a ready point of contact between TWC2 and a great number of South Asian workers. More recently, our outreach to Chinese workers has not specifically targeted male workers, but there are more Chinese men than women in Singapore, and that is reflected in the proportions seeking assistance from TWC2 (341 men and 21 women in 2013).

Still, our work with domestic workers continues and develops. A key part of it remains advocacy for a weekly day off for all domestic workers, which is still not a reality, in spite of the introduction of a mandatory day off as of 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2013. To the best of our knowledge, a substantial proportion of domestic workers still do not receive any days off at all during their employment in Singapore, while many others only have one day off each month. The proportion enjoying a weekly day off is still well under 20 per cent. As we have argued many times in the past, weekly days off ought to be a right for all workers: besides providing a much needed chance to relax and meet friends, they can allow those facing problems to seek advice and help – precisely what some ‘no day off’ employers seem to want to prevent. A weekly day off can be a barrier against abusive behaviour: it would both enable more domestic workers to seek assistance in asserting their rights and make it less likely that they will need to do so.

Our strong cooperative relationship with the Indonesian Family Network and the Filipino Family Network was sustained in 2013. These informal groups of domestic workers are good contact points for fellow workers. They are regularly approached for advice by domestic workers of their own nationalities, and it helps that they speak the same languages as the workers who approach them and that, through their own experience, they are normally familiar with the issues fellow workers raise. Occasionally, with more complicated problems that need professional assistance, the networks approach TWC2's social workers or refer a case to them.

Towards the end of the year, TWC2 was able to give a little support to FFN's aid drive for communities hit by Typhoon Haiyan, or, as it is known in the Philippines, Typhoon Yolanda. FFN organized a series of collections that provided aid to villages that suffered damage to help them to get over the immediate crisis and start their recovery. The typhoon was the cause of great anxiety to the many domestic workers in Singapore who came from the stricken Iloilo area and the society was pleased to be of assistance.

Not having a shelter for domestic workers has hampered TWC2 since our launch. We have had to refer workers desperate enough to need to leave their employers to other organizations, simply because we had nowhere secure for them to stay. Even if they turned to us before anyone else, we were not able to continue to handle their cases. We want to be able to follow through with the domestic workers who turn to us for urgent help, and are seeking to overcome this long-standing problem of lacking a shelter. To anticipate a little, we were in a position to provide a limited number of domestic workers with shelter from early in 2014.

## Organisation

---

Our Direct Services Sub-Committee oversees this sector of TWC2's work. It provides a forum for discussing cases and monitoring their progress. It also advises on the management of case work.

The Direct Services Sub-Committee reports to TWC2's Executive Committee, sometimes making proposals to it or raising issues for discussion. These include points for the society to consider raising with the Ministry of Manpower or other appropriate official bodies, as well as matters that might be the subject of broader advocacy work. The sub-committee also asks the Executive Committee to decide on matters that fall beyond its scope, such as ones that might warrant a change in policy or extra expenditure.

Heavily reliant on volunteers to sustain our programmes, we publicise needs through a Facebook page, on our website, in a weekly members' bulletin and a bi-monthly newsletter, as well as other channels. We hold 'Heartbeat', a monthly gathering for potential volunteers. Often, 20 or more people attend, and some volunteer to help in direct services. Normally, new volunteers learn basic skills mainly through being partnered with long-term volunteers. For this reason, we prefer to have long-term volunteers rather than those who are unable to make a minimum commitment: it is not a good use of experienced volunteers' time and effort to train someone who does not stick around for very long. At this stage in TWC2's development, we also find that a growing proportion of our volunteer needs are for people with specific skills.

## Project Details

---

The Cuff Road Project served a total of 105,544 meals in 2013, a further rise compared to 2012 (101,819) and previous years. This brings the total number of meals served since the project was launched in March 2008 to 467,720 as of the end of December 2013. As expected, the total reached half a million in the first half of 2014 (at the end of April).

1930 workers registered with the project in the course of 2013. The growth in the number of workers coming to the project brought TWC2 to the point, in September, where it looked as if drastic cuts to provision might have to be made. We made plans for cutbacks, if necessary, while seeking additional support for the project. Thanks, above all, to the generosity of the Lee Foundation, we were able to secure the support needed to sustain the project for a further year, with minimal cutbacks.

The cutbacks implemented in November 2013 consisted of putting a cap on meal provision of 2000 a week and ceasing the provision of lunch on Sundays – the day of the week when workers are most likely to be able to find alternatives. We will keep the level of provision under review.

This leaves the project continuing to provide breakfast and dinner on weekdays, as well as lunch on Saturdays. As in previous years, the number of workers coming for dinner tended to be nearly twice that of those coming for breakfast.

Our helpline received calls from at least 376 individuals in 2013, significantly up on recent years (268 in 2012, 221 in 2011 and 111 in 2010). Much of this increase resulted from our outreach work to Chinese workers: they accounted for 214 of the calls. 43 calls came from 'concerned others' – Singaporeans raising issues of the

treatment of migrant workers. 103 of our helpline callers were women, meaning that the majority of women who contacted TWC2 for assistance did so through the helpline.

Case-work is handled, as appropriate, by our social workers and several volunteer case workers. When workers approach TWC2 with a problem, an initial assessment is made and action options considered, including alternative channels for seeking help. Following this information and referral step, an intervention may then be undertaken. This involves actions on behalf of a worker such as accompanying the worker to a hospital or police station, providing financial assistance for medical or dental work, or registering the worker in our free food programme. Case management requires the most far-reaching commitment from our workers. It is undertaken if the worker needs extended assistance, usually resulting from complicated issues or having to deal with very stubborn employers.

In 2013, our social workers handled 449 cases as well as the 376 calls for assistance on our helpline. The total of 825 compares with 704 in 2012 – a marked increase.

Our CAREFund (Compassion and Relief for Emergencies Fund) is used when, for one reason or another, a worker is unable to obtain support in an emergency from his or her employer. Employers may disclaim responsibility for workers who have been injured while not at work. There can be reasons why an ill or injured worker is unable to obtain support for treatment, such as when an employer has failed to buy insurance, run away to evade responsibility, or declared bankruptcy. A worker waiting for a case to be settled may have medical problems that are unrelated to his employment and therefore not be covered by his employer's insurance. Though, in law, the employer may still have a duty towards providing for the worker's wellbeing, in practice, it can be difficult to enforce such provision.

We always try our best to ensure that employers meet their legal obligations when it comes to paying for medical treatment for injured workers, in particular, but we will not leave a worker to suffer while trying to persuade an employer to pay up.

On some occasions when a worker has needed expensive treatment for an injury or condition that was not covered or only insufficiently covered by an employers' insurance, we have looked for financial help from other sources, rather than severely depleting the CAREFund and risking our capability to help many other workers in need. An example of where we provided some support and then were able to help a worker with the help of an anonymous donor is provided in the following article on our website:

<http://twc2.org.sg/2013/11/12/while-employer-resists-giving-treatment-and-mom-acts-slowly-twc2-saves-afzals-future/>

This was a case in which an employer stopped giving the worker support in obtain-

ing medical treatment following an accident.

We disbursed a total of \$52,211 from the CAREFund. It was spent as follows:

Category of assistance	Number of Recipients	Amount
Medical, including dental	80	\$11,641
Miscellaneous (Food, accommodation, clothing, etc)	20	\$3,958
EZ-Link cards	748	\$36,612
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>848</b>	<b>\$52,211</b>

Some may wonder why money has been spent on EZ-Link cards. We consider that this was important to workers who had no income, and who needed to be able to keep medical appointments, meet case workers or the MoM, come to TCRP for food, or, in those cases where workers qualified for the MoM's Temporary Job Scheme, for them to go along try to obtain work.

While we have a good grounding in the main legal measures concerning migrant workers, there are times when we need to seek advice from lawyers or to ask their assistance with a specific case. In 2013, TSMP Law Corporation was particularly helpful.

We have provided space and cooperated with the Indonesian Family Network and the Filipino Family Network in the courses they provide on Sundays. In the course of 2013, we moved to a new office that was larger than the old one. That eased the space problem for the networks, but they have also been using other facilities and we expect this need to grow.

In 2013, we produced a basic leaflet for distribution during outreach work. There are versions in Bahasa Indonesia, Bangla, Burmese, English, Mandarin, Tagalog and Tamil. A Mandarin-speaking volunteer team held monthly outreach activities aimed at Chinese workers in the course of the year, thus contributing to the growth in the number we see. In October, a general outreach programme was launched. Once a month, on the third Sunday, a team would go to a different area of the country with leaflets in the full range of languages that we have available, distributing them to workers there.

We have worked on the issue of trafficking since 2006. We have focussed on advocacy, but also assisted a number of workers who we believed to have been trafficked. The statistics in past reports have not reflected this. In many cases, workers came to us seeking help with pay issues or other problems, and that is what our statistics reflect: the main reason for which they approached us. Sometimes, we did deal directly with trafficking cases as such, but generally not through our social

workers, so those cases are not included either in the figures they compiled or the TCRP figures. In this report, we therefore provide an appendix on TWC2's anti-trafficking work. (See Appendix Two)

## Profile for Complaints and Enquiries for 2013

Workers Assisted	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Female Workers	177	266	56	70	102	143	124
Male Workers	102	118	2386	2117	2018	2686	2631
Total Workers	298*	384	2442	2187	2120	2829	2755
Others	85	61	67	29	46	47	43**
Total	383	445	2509	2216	2166	2876	2755

*Numbers of workers assisted 2007-2013. Workers already being assisted at the start of each year are counted in the previous year's total only. Cumulative total: 13,015; with workers assisted through calls by concerned others (335, from 2007-12): 13,350.*

*\*Includes 19 whose gender was not recorded*

*\*\*In our 2013 figures, we have already assigned workers assisted as a result of calls made by 'others' to the totals for workers assisted, so this figure is not recounted in the total*

The number of workers turning to TWC2 for assistance was close to last year's highest-ever total. The number of female workers assisted remains low, though it should be noted that most of the calls from 'others' came from Singaporeans or others seeking to assist domestic workers. Taking this into account, the actual figure for domestic workers assisted by our social workers was 124. The following breakdown of workers by nationality only includes the workers who approached TWC2 directly.

Most of the women we assisted were domestic workers, apart from the 21 Chinese women. They were generally on S-Passes and employed in restaurant and shop work. The number of Myanmar domestic workers approaching TWC2 remained very low.

<b>Female Workers</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
Philippines	45	43	61	50
China	3	17	39	21
Indonesia	15	39	36	16
Myanmar	0	1	3	4
India	1	0	1	2
Sri Lanka	4	0	0	2
USA	0	0	1	0
Unknown	2	2	2	0

*Female workers assisted, by nationality: 2010-2013*

<b>Male Workers</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
Bangladesh	1466	1427	1990	2047
India	641*	554	616	440*
China	10	42	214	341
Sri Lanka	0	48	1	0
Malaysia	0	0	1	6
Myanmar	0	0	1	6
Philippines	0	0	0	7
Singapore	0	0	1	0
Thailand	0	2	0	0
Unknown	0	0	3	0

*Male workers assisted, by nationality: 2010-2013*

*\*This includes a few Sri Lankan workers.*

The main points to note in the figures for male workers assisted are the fall in the number of Indian workers and the rise in the numbers of Bangladeshi and Chinese workers. We have no explanation for the drop in Indian worker numbers. The rise in Bangladeshi numbers seems to be in line with the trend over previous years. As to

the Chinese workers, the marked increase in their numbers is a reflection of successful outreach work: we do not think it can be taken to indicate a change in the number of Chinese workers facing problems during their employment in Singapore.

## Issues

---

Male workers' complaints focus on salary issues or work injury compensation; female workers complaints are more diverse, though salary problems are the biggest single problem for them too.

There has not been much significant change overall in the profile of complaints brought to us by workers compared with previous years, but there are two longer term trends that are significant, as will be seen below.

The main change in the past five years in the problems that men bring to us is the drop in complaints about "no work, no pay". In 2008 and 2009, men complained about this in their hundreds. They would come after a few months in Singapore when it became clear that the company had no intention of supplying them with work – and while they were not working, they would not be paid. Men told us that they suspected, in some cases, that companies were simply profiting from money the men had paid to obtain a job in Singapore, though this was something that would be hard to prove. In other cases, companies may have hired men on the off-chance that they would be able to put them to work, which indicated a reckless lack of consideration for the hardships the absence of paid work would impose on men and the families who looked to them for support.

TWC2 highlighted this problem to MOM and it has decreased considerably over the years as MOM has tightened up on companies that regularly repatriated large numbers of workers within a short time. We still see cases where it appears that the company is purposely paying less than promised, possibly with the intention of "churning" the workers, but very few workers complain that they're given no work. Suspension from work is still, however, used as punishment.

The second major trend to note is in the statistics for male workers' complaints. There have been large year on year increases in the number of workers coming to us with injury cases. Adding together cases brought to The Cuff Road Project and those taken up by our social workers, the totals in the past five years are: 2009 - 469; 2010 – 887; 2011 – 1073; 2012 -1727; 2013 – 2396.

We do not think that this reflects a rising injury rate. To some extent, it reflects an increase in awareness of TWC2's services, but we think that a more basic explanation may be that more workers are seeking to leave intolerable employment conditions behind, and an injury may be the occasion for doing so. However, this is some-

thing that will require further investigation and thought.

One heading that we did not include in the past is 'resignation'. This covers the problems that a worker may face when wishing to leave an employer either to return home early or to take a job with another employer. It may sometimes have come under the heading of 'transfer issues' in the past. It seems to have been most commonly faced by Chinese workers, and we were not aware of it as a significant issue until our work with them expanded markedly in 2012-13. It has started to be mentioned more frequently by South Asian workers in the past year. This may be the result of tighter government policies on issuing new In Principle Approvals (IPAs) for hiring migrant workers: it could be that employers are keener to hold on to the workers they already have, since it has become more difficult to replace them. Overall, we think that this will be to the benefit of migrant workers: they will be better placed to stand up for their rights in a tighter labour market. However, the difficulties that migrant workers face in leaving their existing employers should be dealt with by amendments to the law, so that migrant workers have a more secure status in Singapore, without the threat of expulsion at their employers' whims, and are able to move to other employers who offer better terms, as citizens can.

Another issue that has been raised more frequently by migrant workers in the past year is that of problems over their repatriation. In 2012, our social workers handled complaints about repatriation problems from 15 men. In 2013, they handled 49 complaints from male workers and 11 from women workers. The most common issue here is that of employers seeking to evade their legal obligation to pay for their workers' repatriation when they cease to employ them. Some make deductions from workers' salaries each month for 'savings' and then take the cost of the return journey out of that; some attempt to use workers' final salaries to pay for their return home. It is not clear whether the figures represent a growing problem or the greater willingness of workers to take a stand over the issue: possibly both. Firm enforcement of the law is probably the only way to eliminate this problem.

In the past, the following breakdown of issues would simply have dealt with all workers under the headings of 'domestic workers' or 'male workers': we hardly ever saw women workers who were not domestic workers. This year, we have split the breakdown into four. Figures for women assisted are headed "Issues for Domestic Workers" and "Issues for Chinese WomenWorkers", in recognition of the fact that the Chinese women workers who we now see now are not domestic workers, whereas practically all the other women we see are. The Chinese women are concentrated in service trades. Those we saw clearly faced problems getting paid their due, but not with days off, nor with abuse.

---

<b>Issues for Domestic Workers</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>
Dispute with Employer	16
Transfer	16
Repatriation	9
Salary Problems	12
Day Off	8
Resignation	4
Dispute with Agent	3
Abuse	5
Work Permit	2
Illegal Deployment	1
Miscellaneous	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>

*Domestic workers' issues for 2013*

<b>Issues for Chinese Female Workers</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>
Salary Problems	8
Resignation	2
Illegal Deployment	2
Dispute with Agent	1
Repatriation	1
WICA	1
Miscellaneous	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>

*Chinese female workers' issues for 2013*

Our statistics for male workers assisted are also divided into two. This reflects different systems of data collection undertaken by our social workers, who recorded the main issue which each worker brought to us, and by our team at TCRP, which, because of the pressure of time involved in dealing with large numbers of workers, groups their complaints under four headings only.

Issues for Male Workers (from social workers)	Number of Cases
Injury/Work Injury Compensation	277
Salary	168
Repatriation Matters	49
Resignation	45
Work Permit	22
Dispute with Employer	12
Dispute with Agent	10
Lawyer Discharge	5
Transfer Matters	3
Illegal Deployment	3
Abuse	3
Miscellaneous	104
Total	701

### *Male workers' issues for 2013*

The heading 'Dispute with employer' usually involves a number of issues, but most often the main one concerns salary problems: this would also be true of 'Company Cases' at TCRP (below). 'Lawyer Discharge' is a new heading: these are cases in which a worker wishes to proceed with a claim (generally for work injury compensation) and not retain a lawyer, which can sometimes lead to speedier case resolution and make more sense financially.

There are a large number of cases under the heading of 'Miscellaneous'. Examples of what that includes are:

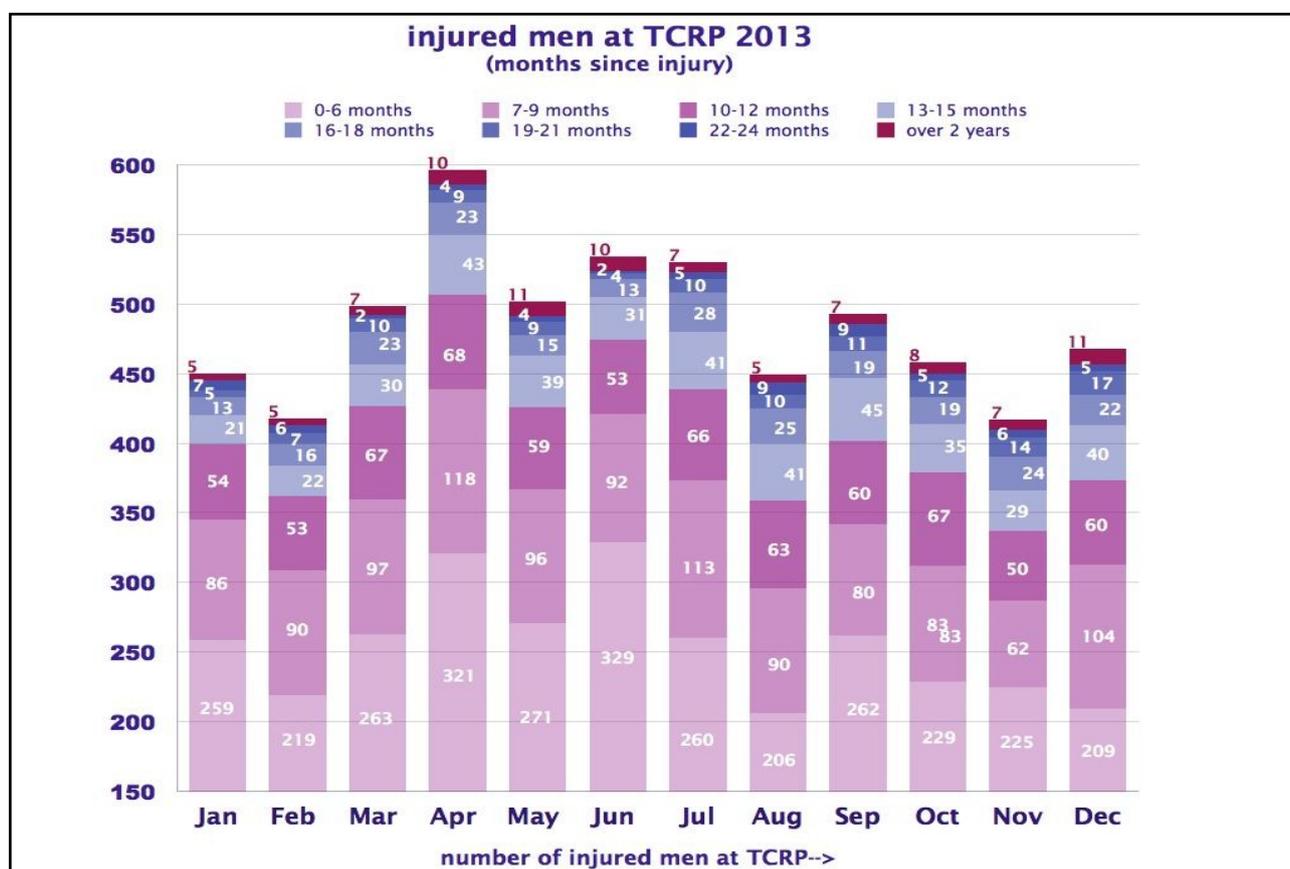
1. Request by a 'concerned other' for counseling for a worker;

2. Request concerning assistance for medical treatment for a foreigner who used to work in Singapore;
3. Seeking job placement via TWC2;
4. Information on MOM or TWC2;
5. Possible sources of legal assistance for a case involving a civil offence.

Issues for Male Workers (TCRP)	Number of Cases
Injury/Work Injury Compensation	2119
Company Case	320
Overstaying	85
Miscellaneous	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>2565</b>

### *Issues for Male workers at TCRP: 2013*

Evidently, the overwhelming majority of those who come to TCRP were workers who have been injured and were awaiting settlement of their cases. Case settlement times overall have improved since TCRP was launched in March 2008, but can still stretch out for quite a few workers, as the graph below illustrates:



It should be remembered that injured men are not supposed to work. They are entitled to MC (Medical Certificate) wages for up to a year after their injury. For the first 60 days, this is equivalent to their full monthly average salary, but then it drops to two thirds of that salary for up to one year after the injury (or until the MC expires, if that comes first). After that, injured workers are not entitled to further salary payments from their employers. As our graph shows, there are quite a number of men who may end up in this situation.

In addition, they may not have the accommodation that their employer is meant to provide for them. “Migrant Worker Housing: A Survey of Men in TWC2’s Cuff Road Project” found that of 167 men interviewed, only one was in company-provided accommodation. (This can be accessed through: <http://twc2.org.sg/2013/09/24/study-on-injured-workers-housing-conditions-reveals-widespread-neglect-of-employers-responsibilities/> )

We think that the problems faced by these men can be countered by continuing efforts to shorten the time taken for case settlement. We would also like to see men who have recovered from an injury being certified as fit to work again and being allowed to seek employment as a matter of course, so that they can earn money and that the skills they have developed in Singapore can be deployed usefully here. We have made proposals to this effect in a submission on Singapore’s 2014 budget.

The category of ‘overstaying’ covers men who have been caught by the authorities and have been kept in Singapore while legal cases connected with them are settled. The number of men overstaying and who come to TCRP has declined over time, and particularly in the last year: 2010 - 322; 2011– 240; 2012 – 297; 2013 – 85. This may, in part, reflect greater thoroughness in checks at the point of entry on people coming as tourists but suspected of wishing to stay on and work illegally, as well as a greater effort at detaining and repatriating overstayers speedily.

It should be borne in mind, in considering our statistics, that they reflect the main issues that workers bring to TWC2. In the course of interviews, others are often mentioned, but, in our experience, migrant workers generally tend to put up with a lot of hardships without complaining much: they seek help out of desperation. Normally, that happens when they are not able to work and earn money for their families or are not paid: in spite of poor conditions of accommodation, in many cases, seizure of their passports by employers, and, for many men, being transported in the back of lorries or trucks, they bear with their conditions until their ability to earn money is removed or impaired.

As stated in last year’s report, the high level of placement costs is a major underlying problem for the great majority of migrant workers. Efforts have been made to curb charges imposed on workers, and yet we still find that many have to part with exorbitant sums to middlemen. A Filipina domestic worker, for example, should not be charged anything in the Philippines for her placement, and in Singapore, for a

two year placement, she should be charged no more than two months' salary, and yet we still encounter Filipina domestic workers who pay seven or eight months of salary deductions after arriving in Singapore. It is worse for most male workers, who generally have to work at least a year to clear their placement costs.

TWC2 continued to raise the issue of the high cost of placement in 2013. As stated in our 2012 report: "Workers who bear heavy debts at the beginning of their time in Singapore are reluctant to complain about their conditions out of fear of losing their jobs and being sent home, so their discontent with their treatment may fester for some time before they feel driven to act on it. This has allowed some issues such as employers taking workers' passports and other documents, or housing workers in poor accommodation, to persist for far too long now."

For full definitions of the issues mentioned above, please refer to Appendix One.

## **Future Directions and Needs**

---

TWC2 welcomes the steps now being taken towards the introduction of itemised pay slips for workers – something we've urged for years, including in last year's Direct Services Report. It is our view that, as a further means to ensure that workers are paid what they are due, their salaries should be paid into bank accounts over which they have sole control.

As we said last year, the pay stated in the In Principle Approval letters given to workers in their home countries should be strictly enforced: we continue to encounter workers who arrive in Singapore only to face demands that they accept salaries substantially less than those promised. If they have come on S-Passes or Employment Passes, accepting those demands makes them party to a breach of Singaporean law, and liable to fines and/or imprisonment, but if they refuse to accept lower pay, they have good reason to fear that their employers will dismiss them and send them home, still in debt from their placement costs. We believe that the main responsibility for acts of deception in this instance rests firmly with the employers of these workers, and that it is unjust to penalise workers severely after they have been faced with an unenviable choice.

We stand by our calls for a mandatory weekly day off for all domestic workers; otherwise, it is too easy for workers to be coerced into agreeing to sign away their days off by the threat of not being employed and being sent home.

---

# Increasing TWC2's Capabilities

---

We re-affirm that TWC2 sees a need for three specific types of shelter:

I. For domestic workers whose position with their employers has become intolerable. TWC2 could not accommodate any in 2013. A small shelter would enable us to meet the current needs of our work. We have explored the option of being able to provide ongoing support to domestic workers housed in accommodation provided by other institutions in the past year, including embassies and official bodies, but without success. At the beginning of 2014, we took a big step forward when we were able to find volunteers willing to put up domestic workers in urgent need in their own homes. The numbers are small, but this significantly improves our capacity to support domestic workers in the worst situations.

II. For trafficked women. There is no dedicated shelter for women trafficked into sex work in Singapore, though there are institutions that provide varying levels of assistance. In our view, women in these circumstances need a dedicated shelter, since other migrants or battered women in sheltered accommodation can be unsympathetic to their situation, and their counselling needs are quite different from those of most other migrant women workers. TWC2 at present does not have the capacity to run such a shelter, but we are ready to cooperate in having one that fully takes these factors into account established. Our main concerns are that it should be integrated into a victim-centred approach to trafficking and that it should be sustainable for the long-term.

III. For male workers. At present, shelter provision for male workers is extremely limited in relation to the needs that we see. We believe that thousands of male workers sleep out every night, and many more stay in very unsatisfactory accommodation. We encounter cases of workers who have just had operations and been told to rest, or who are in need of decent accommodation while they are being treated, but who are either not being sheltered by their employers (as the law requires) or do not want to stay in accommodation where they fear that they might be harassed or even seized and thrown out of the country by their employer or a repatriation company.

We think that employers who drag their feet over providing decent and secure accommodation for workers awaiting case resolution should be pressed hard to fulfil their obligations and be penalised if they don't. When this does not achieve the desired results, the Ministry of Manpower should place the worker in appropriate accommodation and bill the employer for the accommodation and its own costs; this could initially come out of the employer's security bond. We also want to establish a shelter for men. At present, when all else fails, we make arrangements to house

injured men who need to rest during or following treatment, renting beds in decent dormitories when necessary, but we'd like to be in a position to come up with accommodation of our own for male workers in especially difficult situations.

In the past year, many people have come to our monthly sessions for volunteers. In direct services, what we need most are volunteers with specialised skills, such as languages of migrant workers, or non-specialised volunteers who feel able to make a commitment to work in a specific field regularly and over a period of months, at least.

## Conclusion

---

The number of workers assisted by TWC2's direct service programmes reached a new high in 2013. Our resources were stretched further and we had to make a small readjustment to TCRP in order to keep it manageable. It is clear that, to develop any programme further or launch one of the initiatives that we see as desirable, additional resources will be needed. We will try to find them and would welcome help in doing so.

We wish to conclude by expressing our thanks and appreciation to our social workers, volunteers and supporters who have made it possible for us to sustain our direct services over another year. Many donors assisted our work in the past year, and we are grateful to all of them. We wish to give a special mention to the Lee Foundation for its support for the Cuff Road Project, the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple, for its contribution to the CAREFund, the Chen Su Lan Trust and to Mr and Mrs Thio Shen Yi and a donor who wishes to remain anonymous whose contributions paid the cost of our social workers' employment in 2013.

---

# Appendix One: Glossary of Terms

Bad Accommodation	Refers to unsuitable accommodation, such as overcrowding, hygiene and sanitation problems.
Basic Needs	Includes insufficient food, homelessness, etc.
Dispute with Employer	A range of issues, such as working with an abusive employer and often including salary problems.
Dispute with or Complaint against Agent	1. Workers' disputes with their agents before their placements.
	2. Workers accuse agents of cheating them.
	3. Workers threatened by their agents.
Forced Overtime	Workers forced to perform overtime beyond the legal limit, or involuntarily. Under the Employment Act (Chapter 91) Part IV Section 38, workers cannot work more than 72 hours per month of overtime on top of the legislated 44.5 hours a week for 4.5 weeks. The Employment Act does <b>not</b> at present cover domestic workers.
General Information about TWC2	Calls requesting information on TWC2. For instance, on the kind of assistance TWC2 can offer, what TWC2 does, etc.
Health Issues, Medical Problems or Illnesses	1. Workers denied time-off to seek medical consultation or are asked to pay for the mandatory periodic medical checkups.
	2. Workers dismissed by their employers due to poor health.
	3. Employers don't utilise their insurance policies to compensate workers for injuries, for fear of a premium increase.
	4. Workers are not covered by any health insurance.
Illegal Deployment	Workers asked to do jobs other than they are contracted for or to perform work for which they are not contracted.
Information on Transfer Procedures	1. Enquiries pertaining to procedures for transferring from one employer to another.
	2. Workers want to know alternatives when their employers refuse to accede to their requests for transfers.

Information on Work Permit	Includes enquiries pertaining to work permit cancellation procedures and workers' concern about the consequences when their employers have cancelled their work permits.
Lawyer Discharge	Workers wish to proceed with a claim without retaining the services of a lawyer.
Loan Repayment Issues	Workers receive only a small part of their salary or no salary at all for many months in order to pay off loans stipulated by recruiting agents/employment agencies.
Long Wait for Resolution at MOM	A long resolution time compromises the emotional and/or physical well-being of workers, as they wait for the relevant authorities to resolve outstanding matters with their employers or employment agencies.
No Access to Personal Documents	Workers' employers or agents withhold their passports, work permits, bank passbooks, etc. from them.
No Off Day	Workers are not given a full rest day or they would like advice on how to approach their employers to ask for a day off.
No Overtime Pay	Workers have worked overtime but are not given overtime pay.
Others	Includes a wide variety of issues such as sexual harassment, classes for female domestic workers, blacklisting, no work, etc, not covered otherwise.
Overstaying	Workers stayed in Singapore even though their work permits or special passes are no longer valid.
Overwork	Excessive working hours without adequate rest. Usually applies to domestic workers who, not being covered by the Employment Act, lack a resort in law to limit their working hours.
Physical Abuse	1. Includes slapping, striking, punching, kicking and other acts which cause pain and injury that are not tantamount to causing of grievous bodily harm or death.
	2. Deprivation of sleep, adequate food and access to medical help and medication leading to pain and injury which are not tantamount to causing of grievous bodily harm or death.
	3. Also includes threats of abuse.
Premature Termination of Contract	Employment is terminated before workers' contracts expire or before the agreed-upon duration of employment.

Repatriation Matters	1. Workers asked to bear repatriation costs, particularly airfares. By law, employers must pay for their workers' repatriation.
	2. Workers would like to know who should bear the repatriation costs in certain circumstances.
	3. Workers are repatriated against their will.
	4. This includes threats of repatriation.
Reporting on Unhappy Workers	Friends, neighbours or colleagues are concerned that workers may be in difficult situations and may need help.
Request for Resources	Includes request for information, legal advice for female domestic workers, retrieval of rents from landlords, the MOM contact number, assistance in referrals of cases to embassies, etc.
Resignation	Employers refuse to give a letter of release for workers to leave their employment or to cooperate in their return home before the end of their contract period.
Salary Problems	Includes non-payment of salaries, late payment of salaries and unjustified salary deductions.
Verbal Abuse	Includes yelling, swearing and verbal threats that intimidate and/or shame workers to an extreme degree.
Workmen's Compensation	This includes information, advice and clarifications on workmen's compensation matters.

## Appendix Two: TWC2's Work Against Trafficking in Persons

---

Since 2006, TWC2 has chiefly been active on the issue of trafficking through our advocacy work, but we have also encountered individuals who we believed were either trafficked or in danger of being trafficked. When they turned to us for assistance, it was for help in obtaining due payment or in returning home: trafficked people generally don't go looking for help saying that they have been trafficked. The issue is complicated by the fact that deception at the recruitment stage about the nature of the work a person will be doing, control through indebtedness, the confiscation of passports by employers, restriction of communication with families

or the authorities, controls on freedom of movement and other factors usually identified as 'trafficking indicators' are common experiences among migrant workers regardless of whether they have, in fact, been trafficked. It is only through in-depth interviews that it can be established whether or not a worker has been trafficked.

Our figures to date have not included a heading for 'trafficking', and such cases as we have encountered would have fallen under other headings. We have been considering how to improve our capabilities and reporting in this area, but it is important to stress that in all cases, our social workers and volunteers have done their best to assist migrant workers with their complaints and problems, however they were understood.

In 2013, we issued a research report by Sallie Yea, with contributions by Shelley Thio, on trafficking of Filipino men into the fishing industry. The report cited cases encountered in 2012 and referred to the involvement of Step-Up Marine, a Singaporean company in providing services to those exploiting the labour of the trafficked men. (The report, 'Troubled Waters', can be accessed through:<http://twc2.org.sg/2013/01/06/troubled-waters-trafficking-of-filipino-men-into-the-long-haul-fishing-industry-through-singapore/>)

Further research has been undertaken on workers trafficked into the fishing industry. In addition, we assisted a Cambodian NGO (LICARDO) in pursuing investigations into a case involving three fishermen who were repatriated from Singapore to Cambodia. Step-Up Marine was also involved in this case.

A further brief prepared by Dr Sallie Yea and Shellie Thio on trafficking of Filipino fishermen, not to be confused with the earlier 'Troubled Waters' report, was submitted to the Task Force. Sallie and Shelley met them about the issue of two Filipina domestic workers whose extradition is being sought in the Philippines connected to their role as recruiters for Step-Up Marine. There has so far been no response from the Task Force.

We also met an Indonesian who had been trafficked into the fishing industry, but he did not wish to pursue a complaint, just to return home as quickly as possible.

In all these cases, Singapore has taken the view that it has no responsibility to intervene since any offences against the fishermen took place outside its jurisdiction.

Our view is that trafficking is an ongoing offence, in which recruiters, those who transport and confine workers, those who exploit them and those who facilitate their exploitation are all culpable and should face prosecution. When a fishing boat docks in Singapore with trafficked workers on board, the offence of trafficking is still in progress.

We asked Dr Sallie Yea to consider a number of cases of men who came to TCRP and who we thought might have been trafficked. In some cases, Dr Yea concluded

that they were not trafficked, but there were others in which she thought there was a strong case to be evaluated.

Two groups of men were reported to the Task Force for consideration. The first was a group of 18 men. At the time of writing, they were on Special Passes waiting for their cases to be resolved, but there was no news on whether they were regarded as having been trafficked.

A group of men who had worked with a company called Prosper Marine was referred to MOM for consideration.

Several batches of men from this company came to us about salary issues. Eight men came on 24th July 2013, then four more groups, totaling in all 73 men. This seemed like a case of trafficking to us: the men had been promised one amount for their salaries by their Singaporean employer while in Bangladesh, only to be offered a lower amount on their In-Principle Approvals (IPA), and finally paid even less once they came to Singapore. They also had \$200 a month deducted for housing when the IPA stated they would have \$90 a month deducted.

The first group was awarded just over half of what they claimed they were owed, but later groups were given less than that. MOM explained that the first group was paid more at a conciliation meeting in order to settle the issue quickly, but that the employer didn't agree they were actually owed that amount.

MOM explained the discrepancy between the IPA figure and the actual salary saying "According to the company, the IPA declared salary was an oversight/mistake, and the housing deduction of \$90 declared was only an estimate." They also explained "the employer stated that both parties had agreed to the daily salary of \$18 back at the source country/ communicated via the agent, and had signed the employment contract when they first joined the company."

More information on the Prosper Marine case can be found on TWC2's website at:

<http://twc2.org.sg/2014/03/18/who-prospers-in-this-salary-saga/>

We did not deal with any cases of trafficking into sexual exploitation in 2013.

---