

Bid to boost maternity leave to **70** days gains committee backing

Move comes as MPs cite regional benchmarks and growing support

● **The proposal — submitted by MPs Hanan Fardan, Jaleela Alawi, Basema Mubarak and Maryam Al Saegh — goes before Parliament on Tuesday**

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Women working in the public sector could soon receive 70 days of paid maternity leave, up from the current 60, if a new draft law wins parliamentary approval.

The proposal — submitted by MPs Hanan Fardan, Jaleela Alawi, Basema Mubarak and Maryam Al Saegh — goes before Parliament on Tuesday with the

support of the Legislative and Legal Affairs Committee.

At present, maternity leave begins from the delivery date stated in a medical certificate, with the option for an employee to start up to 15 days before her due date. After returning to work, Bahraini mothers are entitled to two

paid nursing hours daily until their child turns two, and may request unpaid childcare

leave for children under six for up to two years at a time, up to three times during their service.

Regional comparisons provided in Parliament show that Saudi Arabia grants working women ten weeks of fully paid maternity leave, while Egypt offers 90 days on full pay, covering pre- and post-delivery periods upon presentation of a medical certificate.

Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee said the proposal would not directly affect the state budget but could have indirect consequences, including reduced work output and a widening gap between benefits in the public and private sectors. The committee warned that more generous leave in government jobs could draw women away from private employment and highlighted additional concerns raised by economic advisers.

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The Civil Service Bureau took a more cautious stance, stating that extending maternity leave would directly affect productivity and the smooth functioning of ministries, as longer employee absences would require additional staffing or workload adjustments. With women making up 57.5 per cent of the civil service, the Bureau argued that extending the leave period would increase costs at a time when the government is seeking to curb expenditure.

The Supreme Council for Women noted that parliamentary recommendations must be processed by the government in line with its programme of work, emphasising that implementing the proposal would require a legislative amendment rather than an internal administrative decision.

The Bahraini Women's Union expressed support for the proposal.

Parliament has previously approved a separate recommendation from MP Dr Ali Al Nuaimi to extend maternity leave under terms aimed at balancing family needs with workplace efficiency.

A chair for every woman? MPs say it's only fair

Mohammed Darwish
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Seats for female staff would become mandatory across all workplaces if a draft law goes through Parliament on Tuesday, after the Services Committee backed an amendment to Article 36 of the Labour Law.

The proposal by MP Hanan Fardan would require employers who hire women to provide seating "in all places where they work, to ensure they can rest", alongside the existing duty to display regulations on women's employment. Fardan said allowing women to sit improves comfort, safety and productivity.

The memorandum cites health problems linked to long hours standing, such as varicose veins and back and joint pain, and argues that providing seats would improve both wellbeing and work performance.

During its review, the committee sought written comments from the Labour Ministry, the Supreme Council for Women, the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the two main labour union groupings.

The Labour Ministry said the current legal framework

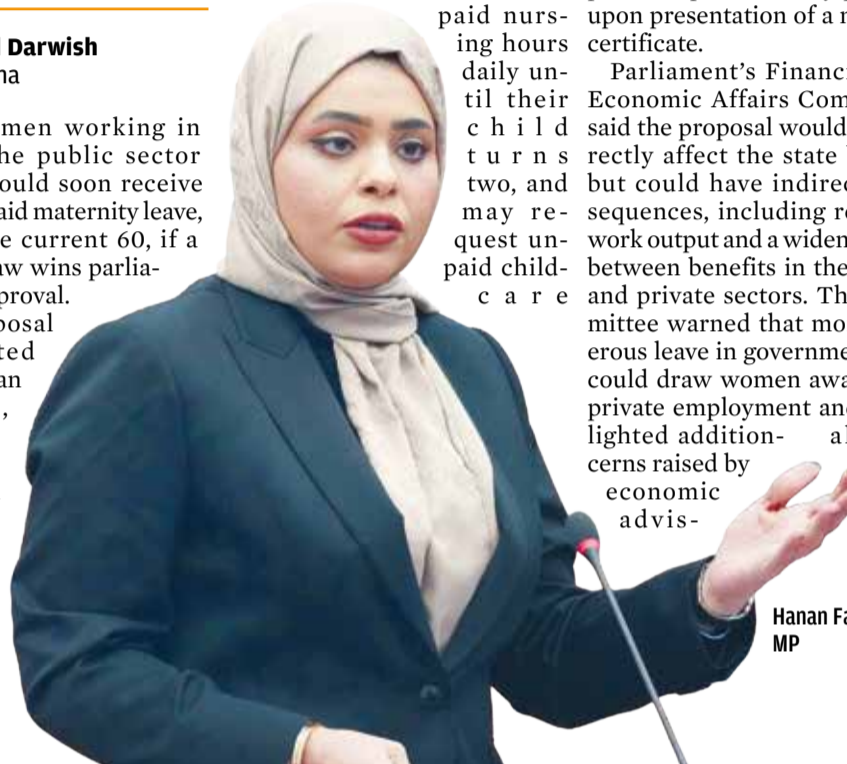
already offers strong protection for women workers, pointing to provisions on discrimination, maternity leave, protection from dismissal and paid childcare breaks. It argued that these rules ensure women's welfare more comprehensively than the proposed amendment. It also noted that issues related to workplace harassment and safety are already addressed under Decree-Law 59 of 2018 and international obligations, including ILO Convention 190.

The Supreme Council for Women added that rest facilities and seating fall under occupational safety requirements already covered by Article 166, and could be handled through ministerial decisions rather than amending the law.

The Chamber of Commerce opposed the change, warning of burdens on sectors where the nature of work may not require seating and cautioning against unnecessary statutory obligations.

Both trade union blocs supported the proposal, saying mandatory seating would protect women's health, reduce physical strain and align with international standards.

The Services Committee has urged MPs to approve the amended draft, saying it supports women's rights and strengthens their role in the labour market.



Hanan Fardan, MP



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