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MAAN-WORKERS ASSOCIATION [R.A.]

BARRED FROM THEIR JOBS!

A report by **MAAN**
Workers Association

- The October 7 attack resulted in banning 200,000 Palestinians from their work in Israel
- Two years into the Gaza war, **MAAN** analyzes the dire implications for Palestinian and Israeli societies

SEPTEMBER 2025



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Disclaimer:

The responsibility for this publication and its analysis rests solely with the MAAN Workers Association.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1 - Palestinian workers are abandoned without a source of income.....	6
Chapter 2 - Israel revokes Gazan workers' permits - thousands arrested and tortured	10
Chapter 3 - Uncertainty drove workers to risky options	13
Chapter 4 - Palestinians are working in the settlements again, so why not in Israel?	16
Chapter 5 - The Palestinian economy in total collapse	19
Chapter 6 - Migrant workers are not a viable alternative	23
Chapter 7 - Israeli construction industry is reeling from worker shortage	27
Chapter 8 - Economic hardship forces workers to enter Israel without permits.....	30
Chapter 9 - MAAN's unique stance in support of workers	34
Chapter 10 – MAAN's relations with its unionized workers during the war.....	38
Conclusion - Deep policy changes needed on Israeli and Palestinian sides	42

Introduction

In this report, the MAAN Workers Association (hereafter MAAN) presents the plight of Palestinian workers who were employed in Israel until the outbreak of war in October 2023, placing their situation at the center of public discourse.

MAAN has long represented Palestinian workers, advocating for their rights with both employers and Israeli authorities. Since October 7, we have continued our fieldwork, maintaining daily contact with workers to protect and support them during this critical period.

During these months, MAAN stood out as the most prominent—and indeed the only—organization to speak publicly and unequivocally on behalf of workers, consistently calling for their reinstatement in the Israeli labor market.

Our position has been clear: the return of these workers is not only an economic necessity but also an essential first step toward rebuilding trust between Israelis and Palestinians—a step that serves the interests of both peoples.

The devastating situation Palestinian workers faced after Hamas' attack on Israel, and the subsequent war that escalated into a regional conflict of catastrophic scale, must be understood in the context of the complete failure of both Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to provide a viable roadmap for peace and stability.

As detailed in this document, decades of Israeli policy marked by overconfidence, hubris, and constant postponement of realistic solutions led directly to the government's misguided decisions regarding workers after October 7, 2023.

At the same time, the dominance of extremist discourse on the Palestinian side silenced any effective voice advocating for workers and their reinstatement in the Israeli labor market. We also discussed how the provisions of the Paris Protocol, signed by Israel and the PLO in 1994 as the economic supplement to the Oslo Accords, provided Israel with the legal basis to implement destructive policies against Palestinian workers.

This report draws on two years of monitoring developments, documenting the effects on both the workers themselves and the economies of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. It exposes the tragic reality of Palestinian workers who, despite their vital economic and social role, remain unrepresented and largely excluded from public discourse.

MAAN is an Israeli labor union with a unique role in the country's labor relations landscape. We represent and unify both Israeli and Palestinian workers on the basis of full equality.

We invite readers to view this report as a call to engage in serious discussion about how they can contribute to supporting this struggle. MAAN remains open to dialogue and committed to joining any genuine effort aimed at reversing the current destructive course.



Since the decision to ban the entrance of Palestinian workers, thousands made their way to Israel through the wall in A-Ram near the Qalandia checkpoint (Photo with permission)

Chapter 1

Palestinian workers are abandoned without a source of income



Palestinian Workers waiting in line in front of the checkpoint at the entrance of Mishor Adumim Industrial Zone (Photo by MAAN)

The sudden halt of Palestinian workers' entry into Israel following the outbreak of war on October 7, 2023, left around 200,000 workers in a state of economic and personal paralysis, without any tools to cope. Prior to the war, 120,000 Palestinians held official work permits for employment in Israel, with an additional 40,000 employed in the settlement areas. An estimated 40,000 more worked in Israel without permits. Altogether, these 200,000 workers supported entire households that had long depended on income coming from the Israeli economy. Overnight, they became unemployed and lost their only source of livelihood¹.

Now, suddenly workers found red signs on their page in the "Al-Munasek" app (which regulates worker entry), indicating that their valid permits would not allow them to enter Israel, regardless of the fact that the permits were not revoked.

¹ See MAAN report: Jobless, Unpaid, and Uncompensated: The Plight of Palestinian Workers Amidst Crisis (Nov. 2023): <https://wac-maan.org.il/jobless-3/>

This left the workers helpless and immobilized. Although they perform manual labor, this group constitutes a middle class within the Palestinian Authority, whose weak economy had relied heavily on employment and income from Israel and its industrial zones. The loss of this vital source of livelihood thrust many families into immediate poverty.

This crisis is twofold: not only did these workers suffer severe personal disruption and a dramatic upheaval of their daily lives, but they also lacked any form of social safety net. Palestinian workers in Israel are not covered by unemployment insurance (Israel's National Insurance Institute covers them only for work accidents, employer bankruptcy, and maternity leave for female workers)².

The resulting hardship was devastating. Most who tried to find work in the West Bank failed. Workers told MAAN that Palestinian businesses, which had previously employed salaried workers, let them go in order to hire members of their own kin who had lost their jobs in Israel. The wages for the occasional temporary jobs—when such work could be found—were extremely low, as are wages in the Palestinian Authority in general, leaving workers impoverished. Through MAAN, one worker, issued a desperate appeal to the Israeli public to highlight the severity of the situation³.

While Palestinian workers do have a pension fund (discussed further in chapter 9), accessing those funds requires termination of employment—and thus cancellation of the work permit. Israeli employers largely avoided canceling permits, even when it was clear the workers could not return, for two main reasons:

Preserving the relationship – Employers wanted to keep the connection with their professional veteran workers, in case they could return once the checkpoints reopened.

Economic consideration - avoiding severance pay⁴. Under Israeli law, if a Palestinian worker is prevented by authorities from entering Israel, it is not considered a dismissal and does not entitle the worker to severance pay. Employers understood that canceling a permit unilaterally would be seen as dismissal, making them liable for compensation.

As a result, only workers who voluntarily canceled their permits could access their savings—thereby risking their ability to return to work should the permits be reinstated in the future.

² See the ITUC Report on Palestinian workers from 2021 that explained why during the lock downs in the time of the Covid crisis Palestinian workers had no social safety net: "Palestinian workers are covered under the Law of Social Security in cases of work accidents, bankruptcy of employers and maternity leave. This meant that whilst Israeli workers received up to 75% of their monthly pay in unemployment benefits, tens of thousands of Palestinians spent months without pay." (Page 14 in the report): <https://www.ituc-csi.org/workers-rights-in-crisis-palestine>

³ Mahmoud Abu Zahra made an urgent call through MAAN website and Facebook page to the Israeli public - <https://wac-maan.org.il/workers-plea/> (Hebrew). Haaretz journalist Hagar Sheizaf published an important report on the subject in January 2024. In the research for the article Haaretz collaborated with MAAN, quoted Assaf Adiv, MAAN's Executive Director and also workers affiliated with MAAN including Mahmoud Abu Zahra: <https://wac-maan.org.il/haaretz-2/>

⁴ The precedent for this arbitrary policy was set by the National Labour Court decision (Feb 2011) in the case of Palestinian workers in Gaza who lost their jobs in the Katif settlement zone as a result of Israel disengagement from Gaza in 2005 – case No. 256-08 (Hebrew): <https://bit.ly/3F7Qb0L>

The Paris Protocol created total dependence of Palestinian workers on Israel

The status of Palestinian workers in Israel was defined in the 1994 Paris Protocol, which is part of the Oslo Accords. Like the broader political agreement, the protocol was heavily one-sided and gave Israel numerous levers to enforce its will without needing Palestinian approval.

For example, the labor section of the protocol (p. 14) states: *"Each side may temporarily suspend the entry of workers from its side, provided it notifies the other side."*⁵ This means either side can take unilateral action without needing mutual agreement, mediation, or intervention from a neutral party to determine whether such a suspension is truly necessary.

Originally intended as a temporary five-year arrangement, the protocol effectively became a permanent structure that placed the Palestinian Authority in a state of total economic dependence on Israel⁶. For more than 30 years, the Palestinian Authority has failed to develop for itself a viable national economic strategy. Dominated by the Fatah movement, it has become synonymous with corruption and ineffective governance. In the last elections held in the Palestinian territories (January 2006), Hamas won—largely due to public frustration with the Palestinian Authority's leadership⁷

No safety net or support from the Palestinian Authority

Since its establishment in the mid-1990s, the Palestinian Authority has not initiated meaningful national economic projects. Aside from positions in the public sector—teachers, police, municipal workers, healthcare staff—there has been little job creation.

Given that around 200,000 West Bank residents worked in Israel and the settlements before the war, it is clear they were a major contributor to the economy under the Authority. Yet, over three decades, the

⁵ For the full text of the 1994 Paris Protocol see: <https://bit.ly/4kf0hv5>

⁶ See Hana Hussein article on the "The Paris Protocol and the impoverishment of the Palestinian people" (2018) where she explains correctly that the Oslo Agreement and its economic annex left all the cards in the hands of Israel and thus made the PA totally dependent on Israel's (non-existent) good will: <https://bit.ly/4law8P0>

⁷ One assessment of the total failure of the PA to project a viable democratic and economically effective regime is the article by the Palestinian writer [Ghaith al-Omari](#) (a former official of the PA) who explained in his Atlantic Magazine article (October 2023) the nature of the PA as he sees it: "For the rest, the PA had itself to blame. It governed on the model of Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's in Tunisia—a model whose corrupt authoritarianism produced a region-wide backlash during the Arab Spring. Government jobs were political favors to be doled out to supporters; public funds, many of them from international aid, were mere means toward the enrichment of officials. Efficiency, responsiveness to the public, and the provision of services were all an afterthought. Palestinians became disenchanted with the PA and with government itself.": <https://bit.ly/4kbpbMh>

Authority failed to create any form of social safety net for these workers—including those employed within Palestinian territories.

Prior to the war, workers enjoyed health insurance coverage for them and their families, as an arrangement in which Israel deducted a monthly payment of 93 NIS from each documented worker, and sent this money to the PA. The latter registered those documented workers as entitled to health insurance. However, now that this payment stopped the PA cut off the health insurance. An article by Hagar Shezaf in *Haaretz* (January 2024) opened with this striking account:

*“A mother discovers her son has fallen and injured his head. She takes him to a doctor, who informs her that treating and bandaging the wound will cost 150 shekels. She cannot afford it at that moment. The doctor, worried he will never be paid, offers an extraordinary proposal: the boy will stay with him as collateral until the mother raises the money. As unbelievable as it sounds, this happened in Yatta, southern Hebron, this month.”*⁸

The Palestinian public healthcare system is crumbling, like the rest of the services provided by the PA. The services it does offer are partial and at a very basic level. The Authority could have defined those workers as unemployed and allowed them free insurance coverage as long as they are banned from entering Israel. In fact, at first the PA announced⁹ that it was implementing this clause on Palestinian workers who were banned from their work places in Israel since Oct. 2023, but many workers complained that this promise was not kept.

Moreover, many Palestinian households rely on bank loans for major expenses, such as university tuition children, buying vehicles, or building homes. Clearly, someone who has lost their job and income cannot continue making loan payments. In many cases, ordinary citizens those genuinely unable to pay. However, no such steps were taken, deepening the sense among workers that both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have utterly abandoned them.

⁸ See above footnote ³

⁹ See the statement of the Labour Minister Inas al-Atari (May 2024) where she said that workers who lost their jobs inside Israel will be covered by the Health Insurance until the end of 2024: <https://bit.ly/3l2qIMC>

Chapter 2

Israel revokes Gazan workers' permits - thousands arrested and tortured

Between 3,000 and 4,000 workers from Gaza with valid work permits were present in Israel on October 7, 2023. These individuals were employed in Israel under official permits. Meanwhile, approximately 15,000 other workers were in Gaza that weekend. Within days of the Hamas attack, nearly all Gazan workers who remained in Israel—were arrested, as their permits were immediately revoked. Moreover all of them were interrogated in a brutal manner on allegations of espionage and transferring information to Hamas. A month later, it became evident that these accusations were baseless, and all the detained workers were released.

Back in September 2021, an agreement between Israel and Hamas had allowed 20,000 Gazan workers to enter Israel. These workers were employed under various permits. However, just hours after the Hamas attack, Israeli security authorities announced a blanket cancellation of all these permits, instantly rendering all of them as illegal “infiltrators”. This was a stark contrast to the treatment of West Bank workers, who could still view their valid permits on mobile apps, even when denied entry to Israel¹⁰. For Gazan workers, the permits were permanently revoked.

Hundreds of these workers became stranded in the West Bank and were housed for months in camps run by the Palestinian police¹¹. Others, arrested in the early days of the war, were held for four weeks in two military detention camps near Jerusalem. They were cut off from all outside contact, and neither lawyers nor Red Cross representatives were allowed to visit them. Upon their release in early November, several testified to experiencing brutal and degrading treatment. According to *Times of Israel* report,¹² the detainees were interrogated by Israeli security services, partly to determine if they had shared intelligence with Hamas used in the October 7 attacks. *Times of Israel* report from March 2024 made it clear that these accusations were baseless.¹³

¹⁰ See Chapter 1 that explained the the contradictions in Israeli policy on this issue.

¹¹ See an article on the tragic plight of Sameh Asali, a Palestinian worker from Gaza who was killed in October 2024 as a result of the second Iranian missile attack on Israel: <https://en.daam.org.il/?p=1524>

¹² See the article in *Times of Israel* from March 2024: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-shin-bet-debunks-idea-that-gazan-workers-spied-en-masse-for-hamas-pre-oct-7/>

¹³ Prominent Israeli Journalist Nahum Barnea reported later that he found out from information gathered by the Israeli Security Services (Shabak) that after Israel interrogated Hamas intelligence officers it was totally clear that Gazan workers were not involved in information gathering for the terror group: <https://bit.ly/3IoWFJB>

On November 3, over 3,000 Palestinian workers were released and transferred back to Gaza. As of yet, Israeli authorities have not disclosed how many Gaza workers were in Israel on October 7, how many were arrested, how many remain in custody, or whether any have been charged with crimes¹⁴.

During the detention period, several human rights organizations in Israel, led by Gisha, pressured authorities to allow lawyer visits to the detainees, citing health concerns. On October 22, 2023, six organizations—HaMoked, Gisha, the Public Committee Against Torture, Physicians for Human Rights Israel, Adalah, and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel—filed a High Court petition demanding a Habeas Corpus order for the Gaza residents held without legal authority.

The petition called on the military, police, and prison authorities to disclose the names and locations of all Gaza detainees and to release anyone held unlawfully in the West Bank. The petition highlighted concerns about severe detention conditions, threats to detainees' lives, and the basic right to legal representation and human dignity. According to a *Haaretz* investigation published on November 6, 2023¹⁵, two detained workers died in custody—one at Anatot and the other at Ofer camp. The report included testimonies of abuse, poor conditions, and denied medical care. Journalist Hagar Shezaf also noted that the Red Cross's request to visit the detainees was rejected.

Human Rights Watch published similar findings based on interviews with four Gaza workers detained after October 7. One recounted being arrested at a checkpoint, blindfolded, handcuffed, and transferred from Ofer Prison to an unknown facility. There, he said, "They forced me to strip completely and photographed me. They beat me severely while I was naked. It was humiliating. The worst part was when the dogs attacked me. My eyes were covered, my hands cuffed in metal, and I didn't know if anyone was controlling the dogs or had let them loose. I was terrified."¹⁶

It's worth noting that during the early weeks of the war, Israel's Ministry of Justice urged security agencies to ensure humane treatment for Gaza detainees. According to *Haaretz* (October 26, 2023)¹⁷, Deputy Attorney General Gil Limon warned the Ministry of Defense about the workers' conditions and personally contacted a senior security-political figure. The Justice Ministry clarified that the Ministry of Defense and the IDF were responsible for the workers and were awaiting decisions on how to proceed.

¹⁴ The Israeli human rights group "Gisha" that worked for years before the war to enable Gazans to travel to the West Bank, Israel and abroad, led the effort to defend the rights of the Gazan workers – see: <https://gisha.org/en/testimonies-by-two-brothers-workers-from-gaza-about-their-unlawful-detention-by-israel/>

¹⁵ See *Haaretz* journalist Hagar Shezaf's article: <https://bit.ly/4epQYag>

¹⁶ See HRW report from January 2024 on the plight of Gazan workers after the war: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/03/israel-gaza-workers-held-incommunicado-weeks>

¹⁷ On the intervention of the Israeli Justice Ministry see: <https://bit.ly/44JfWOI>

On November 2, 2023, the Israeli government decided to release the workers. They were bussed to the Kerem Shalom crossing in southern Gaza, even as fighting and aerial bombardments continued in the area. Haaretz reported on November 3 a quote from Jamal Ismail, a worker from Al-Maghazi refugee camp: "We served them, worked for them—in houses, restaurants, and markets—for meager wages, and yet we were humiliated."

Background: Employment of Gaza workers in Israel until October 7

Before Hamas seized control of Gaza in June 2007, working in Israel had been the most important source of income for many Gazans. At the peak of economic ties in 1986, 46% of Gaza's labor force was employed in Israel. Gaza's textile and agriculture industries were also heavily dependent on Israel. The Erez Industrial Zone employed around 4,000 Gazan and 350 Israeli workers, with half of its 201 factories being Israeli-owned.¹⁸

This situation changed starting in 2000 with the Second Intifada, followed by Israel's disengagement from Gaza (2005) and Hamas's takeover. Attacks in and from Gaza led to a sharp decline in the number of Gazans working in Israel. The Erez Industrial Zone closed in 2004¹⁹, and after Hamas's rise to power, the crossing for people between Israel and Gaza was completely sealed, although goods and agricultural exports continued.

In 2014, Israel began issuing "trader permits" to Gazans, eventually numbering around 5,000. In practice, these were labor permits disguised as permits for "trade". At the end of 2021, following an agreement with Hamas, Israel allowed about 20,000 workers to return to Israeli employment. Reuters Report from October 10 2023 indicated that allowing workers to enter Israel was part of Hamas's deception strategy. However, the number of workers permitted to enter Israel was small and did little to address Gaza's chronic unemployment, which hovered around 50% in the summer of 2023. This was still an improvement over late 2020, when unemployment reached nearly 80%.

¹⁸ Information here is based in part on the research of Hagai Etkes and Wifaq Adnan published in August 2022 by the INSS: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/workers-from-gaza/>

¹⁹ In preparation for the unilateral disengagement from Gaza, Israel decided to close the Erez Industrial Zone. See a report by *Haaretz* from April 2004: <https://www.themarket.com/misc/2004-04-21/ty-article/0000017f-ed59-d4cd-af7f-ed79d6b80000>

Chapter 3:

Uncertainty drove workers to risky options

At the R.S. (Rajwan) food factory in the Atarot industrial zone, operations continued even after the outbreak of war. Despite the full lockdown, workers were still allowed to enter under "essential work" permits. The Qalandiya checkpoint was intermittently open during the first weeks, enabling factory employees to arrive each morning.

Rajwan was not alone - other food factories, hospitals, and services were also classified by the Israeli government as essential. The criteria for receiving the coveted "essential worker" status included: contributing to national defense, ensuring public safety, supplying water, food, and electricity, and maintaining critical services for the economy.

What began as a short list of essential businesses, expanded in the first months of the war. By March 2024, it included 2,396 companies.²⁰

Yet, the number of Palestinian workers officially employed in Israel—with valid permits, including in the Atarot industrial zone—stood at just 8,000. In contrast, on October 6, 2023, that number was 120,000. All attempts by construction and agricultural contractors to have their sectors reclassified as "essential" failed²¹. As of April 2025, no Palestinian workers were legally employed in construction or agriculture for over 18 months.

²⁰ See the report by Channel 13 March 21, 2024 that characterized the entry of workers through the "Essential Companies" list as a corrupt procedure that allows employers with "good" connections to get permits while others in the same category did not get the permits to employ Palestinians (Hebrew): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5Z8QvdfbRY>. See also the directive of Industrialists Association from Sep. 2024 that explains its efforts to help employers to get more Palestinian workers and prolong the period of employment (Hebrew): https://industry.org.il/index.php?dir=site&page=union_articles&op=item&cs=9023&category=3562

²¹ In July 2024 the Ministry of Agriculture published a new directive that allowed farmers who used to employ Palestinians before the war to submit a request to hire them again. Unfortunately, this directive was blocked eventually by the military authorities and came to nothing. MAAN was involved in the efforts of an owner of an olive oil press house in the Galilee to hire workers that ended in failure: <https://wac-maan.org.il/palestinian-workers-25/>

Permit renewals: The illusion of a temporary suspension

Unlike the sweeping cancellation of work permits for Gaza residents at the onset of the war, work permits for residents of the West Bank remained valid. When workers checked their permits after October 7, 2023, they found that they had not been revoked. Despite a blanket ban on entry into Israel via checkpoints, no formal move was made to cancel the permits.

In the weeks and months that followed, workers repeatedly discovered that once their six-month permits expired, they were automatically renewed for another six months. The contradiction between the closure policy and the ongoing renewal of permits sparked public debate in Israel. In late May 2024, a report on Channel 11 revealed²² that some Palestinian workers, caught entering Israel without authorization, presented valid work permits—effectively shielding them from deportation or prosecution.

From the workers' perspective, this ambiguous policy was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it allowed a limited number of workers to work and avoid penalties by showing a valid permit. On the other hand, the ongoing renewal of permits—despite the fact that they couldn't be used—created a slow, torturous illusion that the situation was only temporary. Many workers were led to believe that returning to their jobs was just a matter of days or weeks.

False rumors circulated constantly on social media, sometimes spread by Israeli contractors or acquaintances, and sometimes born of simple wishful thinking. Messages claiming that workers would be allowed back after the next holiday, the start of a new month, or after Ramadan or Passover gave false hope and prolonged uncertainty.

The collapse of this hope, combined with mounting financial hardship, drove thousands of workers to either sneak into Israel or purchase false permits for health treatment or legal procedures and use it for a long stay inside Israel so they could work (albeit illegally) and earn some money.

A breaking point: From patience to desperation

By March 2024, a breaking point had clearly been reached. Many workers, who had previously considered themselves law-abiding and had avoided risking their permits, could no longer wait. After several

²² See the report from 28.5.24 by Michael Shemesh in Channel 11 on what he called "the bluff of Israel's ban on employment of Palestinian workers": <https://www.kan.org.il/content/kan-news/defense/754850/>

months—and yet another deadline that failed to bring any change—thousands began heading toward the border fences, desperately seeking temporary or forged permits in order to return to work²³.

It is important to note that contact between Palestinian workers and Israeli contractors never completely stopped. A survey conducted by the Organization of Renovation Contractors in December 2023²⁴ found that half of the contractors supported the return of Palestinian workers to their jobs. While it's difficult to track and document workers who enter without valid permits, it is hard to imagine that thousands could cross into Israel without someone on the other side waiting to employ them—offering work, wages, and even housing.

Methods of entry into Israel

Palestinian workers seeking to enter Israel without valid permits rely on several risky and often degrading methods:

1. Crossing through gaps in the barrier or climbing the separation wall: workers using this method face the risk of injury and even the possibility of being shot by border police or military forces. (More on the dangerous entry of tens of thousands of undocumented workers is detailed in Chapter 8.)
2. Hiding in vehicles driven by Israeli citizens authorized to pass checkpoints: in these cases, workers may have to lie hidden for hours in cars under harsh conditions—sometimes inside foul-smelling garbage trucks²⁵. Many are subjected to humiliating roadside arrests in full view of passing traffic.
3. Purchasing forged or temporary entry permits: for example, a fake medical appointment permit—often purchased for around 1,500 NIS—can allow a worker to pass legally through a checkpoint for one day. These permits are then exploited for months of non formal employment, without pay-slips, regulation, or oversight.

Another common option is the so-called “double zero” (00) permit—long-term permits often associated with Palestinians who collaborate with Israeli security services. Many workers refuse to purchase such permits due to the heavy stigma attached. Others, desperate for income, pay as much as 12,000 NIS or more for them, believing they offer protection from arrest inside Israel. However, several workers reported being detained within days despite having such permits, resulting in significant financial loss and dashed hopes for long-term income and stability.

²³ Beginning in the spring of 2024 reports appeared on a growing number of workers who infiltrate into Israel to work. See this article from June 2024 that puts the number of “Shabahim” (workers who enter Israel without legal papers) at 40 thousand: <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/hyrfukyisc>

²⁴ See the results of this survey Dec 2024 (Hebrew): <https://www.ynet.co.il/economy/article/ryw1wwwxua>

²⁵ See this report from Sep. 2024 on workers who were caught in a failed attempt to cross into Israel while they were hidden in a Garbage truck: <https://bit.ly/45pqKCI>

Chapter 4:

Palestinians are working in the settlements again, so why not in Israel?

In the settlement areas, and particularly in their industrial zones, the employment of workers unfolded in a blatantly different way. After only a brief freeze lasting three weeks, employers in these areas were gradually permitted to bring back their Palestinian workers.

Under the newly established conditions, the previous permission granted to Palestinian vehicles to enter industrial zones was revoked. Mishor Adumim, the largest industrial area in the West Bank, attracts workers from all over the West Bank. As a result of the new restrictions, workers are required to leave their vehicles at the entrance to the entry zone and proceed on foot to the security checkpoint. For the hundreds of vehicles left for hours at the entrance, the local authority of Ma'ale Adumim has not provided any designated parking arrangements or security services²⁶.

To manage the situation, employers had to arrive at the checkpoint in their own vehicles to pick up their workers. In addition, every employer had to hire armed guards, at the ration of one guard for every 15 Palestinian workers. The new regulations also strictly prohibited Palestinian workers from moving freely within the industrial zones. Whereas up until October 2023, factory workers in Mishor Adumim would, for example, go to the “Rami Levy” supermarket during or after work to purchase groceries, they are now completely barred from leaving the premises of their workplace or from spending time in the adjacent public spaces near the factories.

Over the course of this period, the criteria for employment were revised and gradually relaxed. As far as we know, throughout this entire time, no unusual incidents were recorded—no arrests of workers, and no violent or other altercations took place. Against this backdrop, the murder of a foreman by a worker with a permit, which took place at a factory in the Braun industrial zone near the settlement of Kdumim, appears to be an exceptional and isolated case. This murder occurred in August 2024—ten months after Palestinian workers had been allowed to return to the settlements—and no similar cases have been recorded since²⁷.

During a routine visit of MAAN team to the Mishor Adumim Zone in March 2025, we encountered a group of approximately 15 Palestinian workers who were inside a production hall in one of the settlements,

²⁶ The lack of facilities to park workers' cars at the entrance of the Mishor Edomim Industrial Zone made these cars an easy target for racist attacks. See this report by MAAN on the attack and damage done to workers' cars in October 2024 (Hebrew): <https://wac-maan.org.il/car-sabotage/>

²⁷ See a report on this event: <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/b1xwukjsr>. See also this research by INSS that shows that over the years the number of workers with permits who were involved in criminal or terrorist activity was very low: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/palestinian-workers-data/>

without a guard or supervisor present. The entrance gate to the factory was wide open, and the atmosphere inside was calm and stable, with no apparent signs of tension. Based on reports we received in the following months, it became clear that at least in the Mishor Adumim area, transportation arrangements had been put in place: buses now run in the morning and at the end of the workday, shuttling workers between the checkpoint at the entrance to the industrial zone and their respective workplaces.

Internal dispute within the settlements

As previously mentioned, the re-entry of Palestinians into the industrial zones of the settlements began within the first few weeks of the war. However, the question of whether Palestinian workers would be permitted to enter the settlements themselves—for construction, renovations, gardening, and various services—sparked unresolved debates and internal disputes.

Each settlement or local municipality addressed the issue through its local authority's decisions within its jurisdiction. In the large settlement of Efrat, for instance, the council head issued a directive in June 2024 permitting Palestinian workers to enter for the purpose of carrying out specific projects inside the settlement. Yet on the first day the workers arrived, they were met with a violent protest by several dozen residents who physically blocked their entry.²⁸ The matter eventually reached the court, and considering the judge's apparent inclination to support the workers' right to enter, the parties reached an agreement, and the workers' entry was renewed²⁹.

In Ariel, considered the largest settlement in the West Bank, a group of contractors living in the settlement petitioned against the local council's decision to prohibit the entry of Palestinian workers. The court in this case ruled that the Ariel municipality could not be forced to allow Palestinian workers to enter³⁰. This ruling represented a victory for extremist elements advocating a policy of complete separation between the two populations.

²⁸ See a report on the settlers who blocked the way to workers entering Efrat settlement following the decision of the local authority in June 2024: <https://bit.ly/4lwcMDO>

²⁹ See this report from September 2024 on a decision reached by the court to allow Palestinians to enter Efrat: <https://www.jns.org/courts-judea-and-samaria-towns-cannot-bar-palestinian-workers/>

³⁰ See a report on the Court decision from April 2025: <https://www.jns.org/in-first-ariel-court-rules-community-allowed-to-ban-palestinian-workers/>

The contradiction between permitting entry into settlements and prohibiting entry into Israel

The Israeli political leadership has refrained from holding any serious discussion regarding the return of Palestinian workers to sovereign Israeli territory³¹. In contrast, responsibility for Area C—where the settlements are located—rests with the Commander and the Head of the Civil Administration - not with the government. As early as November 2023, these military and administrative authorities adopted a different policy than that of the government, motivated by both security considerations and economic necessity.

The contradiction in policy is glaring - while settler representatives in the government and Knesset are leading efforts to prevent the employment of Palestinians within Israel—causing direct harm to many business owners—those same settlers are actively employing Palestinian workers in industrial zones located in Area C of the West Bank. During a session of the Knesset Committee on Foreign Workers convened in early January 2024 to discuss the closure imposed on Palestinian laborers, many employers voiced their frustration over this contradiction. The headline covering the session, as published in the media, summarized the situation starkly: “While there is no approval for Palestinian workers from the Palestinian Authority to enter for agricultural work in Israel, entry into Judea and Samaria is permitted.”³²

In the meeting, MAAN's executive director witnessed the demand of employers in the construction and restaurant sectors to reinstate Palestinian workers they had employed before October 7. They criticized Shira Libman, the settler Council Director when she began to explain why Palestinian workers should not be allowed into Israel. The contractors reminded her that in her own settlements—the Jewish communities in the West Bank, which are strongholds of the Israeli far right—Palestinian entry had already been permitted since November 2023.³³

³¹ For more on the deliberations in Israel, and the positions of different security and economic bodies regarding the need to allow Palestinian workers to return to the Israeli job market, see in Chapter 7.

³² This headline is quoted from a press release of the Knesset Committee on Foreign Workers from its session Jan. 10 2024.(Hebrew): <https://bit.ly/3NTH4Sb>

³³ This report is by MAAN's representative who attended the Knesset Committee meeting and presented MAAN's call to allow workers back to Israel.

Chapter 5:

The Palestinian economy in total collapse



The checkpoint in Tarqumia was closed on Oct. 7, 2023, as were the 14 other entrances from the West Bank into Israel. (Photo from Feb. 2023 taken from the Facebook page “Maabar Taqrumia – Al Khalil”)

The war has inflicted devastating damage on the Palestinian economy. In the Gaza Strip, the destruction is absolute: tens of thousands of people have been killed, and the region’s infrastructure has been completely obliterated. Economic activity there has collapsed to nearly zero. In the West Bank, too, the damage has been extremely severe, driven by a combination of factors: A massive military campaign against armed groups focused in the Jenin and Tulkarm refugee camps; strict restrictions on movement of people and goods in the West Bank; new Israeli-imposed restrictions on the transfer of funds from customs and tax deductions; a significant reduction in donations from Arab countries, the United States, and European nations; and intensified constraints on aid organizations, particularly UNRWA, which has left many essential services without support. To this we must add the drastic decline in revenue caused by the halt of Palestinian labor in Israel.

Significant decline in the Palestinian Authority's budget

These factors have gradually eroded the financial capacity of the Palestinian Authority's public sector, forcing wage reductions for government employees—including teachers, police officers, and healthcare workers³⁴. These workers have been compelled to accept reduced salaries, often receiving only 70% to 80% of their full pay. According to a report published by *Middle East Monitor* in late March 2025³⁵, customs and tax transfers from Israel account for 65% of the Authority's total income. The deep cuts imposed by Israel led to the Authority's inability to pay salaries ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday in early April 2025³⁶.

For several years, the Netanyahu government has pursued a pressure campaign aimed at compelling the Palestinian Authority to end its monthly payments to prisoners and their families. After the outbreak of the war, right-wing factions within the Israeli government pushed for the cessation of payments to Authority employees in Gaza. Only in January 2025 did the two sides reach a compromise³⁷: the funds were transferred via the Norwegian government to the Israeli Electric Company in a way that covered the Palestinian Authority's accumulated debts.

In an April 2025 report, the World Bank estimated that the Palestinian economy had experienced its sharpest decline in a generation due to the war. It recorded a 27% drop in GDP—an 83% collapse in Gaza and a 17% decline in the West Bank³⁸.

³⁴ This *Times of Israel* report from July 2024 indicated that the PA was able to pay 80% of its employees' wages after Israel partially released hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax revenues it had been withholding since April:

https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/pa-pays-80-of-employees-salaries-after-israel-releases-funds-official/

³⁵ See the article: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250327-palestinian-authority-unable-to-pay-salaries-before-eid-as-israel-withholds-funds/>

³⁶ The *Middle East Monitor* wrote on March 2025: "Palestinian Authority unable to pay salaries before Eid as Israel withholds funds" – i.e. clearly the problem of Israel withholding taxes and customs' money that belongs to the PA is still very relevant. See: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250327-palestinian-authority-unable-to-pay-salaries-before-eid-as-israel-withholds-funds/>

³⁷ See the report here in *Times of Israel* (January 2025): <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-pa-ink-deal-to-release-500-million-in-withheld-palestinian-tax-revenues/>

³⁸ See the report by World Bank from April 2025: <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/the-consequences-and-prospects-of-israels-ban-of-unrwa/>

Additional factors undermining the Palestinian economy

Severe restrictions on the entry of Arab citizens of Israel into Palestinian Authority areas have been another critical blow to the local economy. In northern West Bank cities—Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nablus—the purchasing power of Arab citizens from Israel forms a vital part of local economic activity. The head of the Jenin Chamber of Commerce explained in a March 2024 interview the city's heavy reliance on shoppers from inside Israel. According to him, Jenin is home to approximately 5,000 wholesale stores that depend on these Arab Israeli customers. When they stop coming, the local economy grinds to a halt.³⁹

In May 2024, Israeli security authorities began to allow limited entry of Arab Israeli shoppers⁴⁰. However, access was repeatedly curtailed due to ongoing Israeli military operations in the Jenin area. On April 29, 2025, a general commercial strike was declared in Tulkarm by the city's Chamber of Commerce, which criticized the Palestinian Authority for, in its view, ignoring the dire situation of local merchants. However, in interviews with *Radio Al-Hayat*⁴¹, merchants explained that their primary demand was the reopening of checkpoints to allow shoppers from Israel to return.

As previously mentioned, the closure of UNRWA institutions without providing alternatives has led to deepening hardship and a sharp deterioration in educational services. According to media reports, the closure of the agency's facilities in Jerusalem in the middle of the academic year left hundreds of students without replacement options⁴². A report from an Egyptian research center noted that while UNRWA might continue offering some services to the Palestinian Authority in a short time, there are serious concerns that many services previously provided by the agency will be suspended⁴³.

³⁹ See a report by Wafa from Nov. 2023 that calculated the losses of Jenin in the first 1.5 months of the war at \$ 24 million: <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/139590>. See also a *New York Times* report from July 2024 on the damages to Jenin's economy due to war and prevention of Arab citizens of Israel from going to the local markets: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/27/world/middleeast/west-bank-economy.html>

⁴⁰ See this report from June 2024 when Israeli Authorities opened city of Jenin for the first time since October 2023 to the entry of Arab citizens of Israel: <https://www.jns.org/jerusalem-reopens-jenin-for-arab-israelis/>

⁴¹ Al Hayat Radio interviewed merchants in Tulkarm during the commercial strike on April 29, 2025. Their main request from the PA was that it should work with Israeli authorities to allow Arabs from Israel to enter the market in the city: <https://bit.ly/45oLQRg>

⁴² See the *Times of Israel* report on the closure of 6 schools in Jerusalem in May 2025: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-shutters-unrwa-schools-in-east-jerusalem-in-line-with-ban-on-aid-agency/>

⁴³ A report of The Cairo Review of Global Affairs (Winter 2025 issue) describes the risks that come with the downsizing and closure of UNRWA institutions in the West Bank: <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/the-consequences-and-prospects-of-israels-ban-of-unrwa/>

The dramatic impact of halting Palestinian employment in Israel

Before the war, the income of Palestinian workers employed in Israel played a major role in the national economy. As early as November 2023, Israeli researcher Doron Peskin wrote in *Calcalist* that the Palestinian Authority had no viable substitute for its deep economic dependence on Israel⁴⁴. According to data he presented, 72% of the Palestinian Authority's trade before the war was with Israel. This dependency was also evident in the high number of Palestinians who crossed daily into Israel for work—150,000 with permits, and tens of thousands more without them. Peskin noted that in 2019 alone, the wages earned by these workers contributed approximately \$2.5 billion annually to the Palestinian economy, accounting for over 20% of that year's GDP. In the years that followed—especially during the post-COVID recovery—this contribution grew significantly as the number of workers increased.

In the years preceding the war, this situation was aptly captured by a headline from a senior economic editor at *The Marker* in December 2021: “Better to Work as a Construction Worker in Israel Than as a Doctor in PA Institutions.”⁴⁵ The article highlighted the stark wage gap, with average monthly salaries in the Palestinian Authority standing at just 2,500 NIS—far lower than the 5,000 to 10,000 NIS earned by Palestinian workers in Israel.

The employment of 200,000 Palestinians in Israel prior to the war naturally supported the livelihoods of more than a million people—immediate and extended family members—amounting to roughly one-third of the West Bank population, assuming each worker supported at least four dependents. Beyond sustaining their families, these workers—because of their substantial purchasing power—formed a cornerstone of the West Bank economy: grocery stores, furniture outlets, garages, car dealerships, event halls, and other businesses all thrived on the income brought in by laborers working in Israel⁴⁶. The halt in their salaries has thus inflicted severe damage on the broader economic activity of the Palestinian Authority.

⁴⁴ See the article of the Israeli researcher Doron Peskin: <https://www.calcalistech.com/ctechnews/article/hy4cmzhm6>

⁴⁵ See the article by *The Marker* editor Meirav Arlozoroff: <https://bit.ly/3GtHaja>

⁴⁶ This report by the Palestinian Research Centre MAS was published in 2022 when the number of workers employed in the Israeli job market was at its peak: <https://mas.ps/en/publications/6330.html>

Chapter 6

Migrant workers are not a viable alternative to Palestinians

Following the outbreak of the war and the imposition of lockdown measures, the question of an alternative to Palestinian workers quickly surfaced. Leading the initial calls to permanently halt the employment of Palestinians in the Israeli economy was Economy Minister Nir Barkat (Likud), who proposed replacing them with 160,000 migrant workers from India and other countries⁴⁷.

Less than two weeks after the war began, *Israel Hayom* reported: “Due to the severe shortage of workers caused by the outbreak of Operation ‘Iron Swords,’ Economy Minister Nir Barkat (Likud) is urgently promoting the arrival of 160,000 migrant workers from India. The plan is expected to be brought for government approval in the coming days. The shortage is a result of the cessation of Palestinian workers’ employment.”⁴⁸

Barkat had visited India in March 2023—seven months before the war—and announced agreements with the Indian government to bring 30,000 workers for the construction and caregiving sectors in Israel. A *Calcalist* journalist reporting on the visit described it even then as “a promise skating on thin ice.”⁴⁹ Indeed, in the months leading up to the war, Barkat’s project failed to materialize. However, in the wake of the trauma caused by the Hamas attack, he viewed the crisis as an opportunity to push forward the change he had long sought.

Drastic measures to remove oversight from the import of foreign workers

Buoyed by inflammatory rhetoric that equated all Palestinians with Hamas, Barkat succeeded in mobilizing a broad coalition within the Israeli government to support the massive importation of workers. To facilitate this, sweeping regulatory changes were enacted at record speed, under the banner of reducing

⁴⁷ Minister Nir Barkat made it clear in the days just after the outbreak of the war that Palestinians would never come back to work in Israel and that blue-collar workers would henceforth come from India: <https://thejudean.com/index.php/news/40-finance/1962-economy-minister-seeks-160-000-indian-workers-to-switch-palestinian-labor>

⁴⁸ See the original article (Hebrew): <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/business/article/14737524>

⁴⁹ See the article in *Calcalist* (Hebrew): https://www.calcalist.co.il/local_news/article/sy007w911x2 See also *Washington Post* article that explains the complexity of this huge project that aims to move 160 thousand workers from India to Israel in times of war <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/01/24/israel-india--workers/>

oversight over foreign labor and granting contractors and manpower companies a green light to import workers without clear criteria or supervision⁵⁰.

The **first step** was a dramatic increase in the number of corporations authorized to import and employ migrant workers. From the start of the war, the number of manpower corporations surged from **49 to 280**. The implications were clear: while oversight might have been possible with 49 firms, the sudden increase to 280 made it impossible to thoroughly and rigorously vet each company seeking a permit⁵¹.

The **second step**, equally concerning, was the decision to exempt thousands of workers from the requirement that their employment be subject to a bilateral agreement between Israel and their country of origin. As early as November 2023, the Knesset's Foreign Workers Committee held a hearing on this issue. Committee Chair MK Eliyahu Revivo explained that the goal was to streamline the process and remove bureaucratic barriers. During the hearing, a Kav LaOved *representative* warned that the proposed changes would open the door to excessive brokerage fees charged to workers, leaving them vulnerable to extreme exploitation and restrictive employment arrangements⁵².

Government Decision 1752 – a nadir of negligence

A further escalation of the irresponsible foreign labor policy came with **Government Decision 1752**, which permitted the employment of 330,000 migrant workers in the Israeli economy. This decision eliminated sector-specific quotas and lifted bans on the employment of migrant workers in nursing homes, the cleaning sector, and industry⁵³.

⁵⁰ See this report from Foreign Policy that explains the dangers of the Israeli Government's approach after October 7: "labor advocacy organizations scored a major victory in 2012, when Israel and Thailand established a bilateral agreement that eliminated predatory fees for Thai workers. The post-Oct. 7 scheme, which has no such provision, threatens to undo this progress": https://www.reddit.com/r/india/comments/1cq762g/israel_is_desperate_to_replace_palestinian/

See also the article from *Calcalist* published in April 2025 that gives a very disturbing picture of the situation of the newly arrived workers from India and Sri Lanka (Hebrew): <https://www.calcalist.co.il/real-estate/article/by62ndlyel>

⁵¹ The Israeli Government published in 2022 legal and procedural guidelines for employing foreign workers through a manpower contractor company. These guidelines have been updated in light of the war and the fact that the number of Manpower Companies was more than six times higher than before the war: <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/employment-through-manpower>

⁵² See this statement by Law firm Kan & Tor global immigration law firm from Dec. 2023: "The Israeli government examines options to remove barriers and allow bringing in foreign workers from countries that do not have a bilateral work agreement": <https://ktalegal.com/foreign-workers-to-arrive-without-bilateral-agreements/>. See also the report of Labor Blog Davar from Nov. 2023 that warned that MKs are working to cancel the need for bilateral agreements as a precondition to allow importation of workers (Hebrew): <https://www.davar1.co.il/469324/>

⁵³ The Directors-General Committee, formed as part of this dangerous government decision in May 2024 was authorized to act on behalf of the government to bypass red tape and facilitate the mass arrival of foreign workers. Labor rights

The fundamental flaw in this approach was articulated by Prof. Zvi Eckstein, former Deputy Governor of the Bank of Israel and chair of several governmental committees on non-Israeli labor. In a January 2024 interview with *Calcalist*, he described the government's discussion on the issue as "superficial, because it's a discussion led by people who lack knowledge about how to bring Palestinian workers into Israel without compromising security."⁵⁴

In July 2024, MAAN joined Kav LaOved and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel in filing a petition to the High Court of Justice⁵⁵. The petition challenged the operation of the Directors-General Committee⁵⁶ and its lack of transparency. Petitioners warned of the devastating impact of unchecked mass importation on the Israeli labor market, the severe harm to Palestinian workers' livelihoods, and the adverse consequences for the Palestinian economy and regional security. They accused the government of making these momentous decisions in secrecy.

By August 2025, 86,000 migrant workers had arrived⁵⁷. Compared to 110,000 workers (mostly in caregiving) before the war, Israel now employed 196,000 workers. Recruitment and deployment delays persisted even after workers' names had been approved. These delays stemmed from a mix of bureaucratic hurdles typical of the authorities in India and Sri Lanka—the two main countries slated to supply workers to

organizations, including MAAN, worked tirelessly to curb the committee's powers and prevent implementation of the broad authorities it was granted. See the government decision here (Hebrew): <https://www.gov.il/he/pages/dec1752-2024>. See also the statement of MAAN that said: "The government's decision to massively import overseas workers is social lawlessness, a disaster for both the economy and security. It must be revoked and Palestinians must be allowed to return to their jobs in Israel": <https://wac-maan.org.il/foreign-workers-3/>

⁵⁴ The economic daily *Calcalist* published on January 2024 an important analysis by Shlomo Teitelboim on the crisis in the Construction Industry that resulted from the policy of replacing Palestinians with migrant workers. The article describes the wide damage caused by it to the Israeli economy at large. The article quotes extensively Prof. Eckstein. (Hebrew): <https://www.calcalist.co.il/real-estate/article/h1kxuimqt>

⁵⁵ See MAAN's report on the joint petition: <https://wac-maan.org.il/palestinian-workers-18/>. This petition was discussed in the High Court of Justice in December 2024 and a final decision of the Court was given on March 9, 2025. The decision rejected even the procedural complaints of Kav LaOved, MAAN and ACRI and gave the government committee full authority to continue its irresponsible and damaging course based on the pretext of an emergency situation (Hebrew): <https://bit.ly/46FJhLf>

⁵⁶ The Committee of Government Ministry Directors General, chaired by Prime Minister's office director General Yossi Shelley, was charged by the government to set up the rules for the speedy flow of tens of thousands of migrant workers to Israel. The stated aim was to quickly overcome regulation and bureaucratic restriction on the process of mobilizing and employing workers. The ultimate result of this break of rules and total submission to "the needs of the market" was, as predicted extreme forms of exploitation of these workers. See here on one of these decisions: <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/spoke-committee120924>

⁵⁷ The official figures were published by the Immigration and Population Authority, Tuesday, August 5 2025 – See : <https://www.jns.org/more-than-85000-foreign-workers-have-arrived-in-israel-since-start-of-war/>. It should be mentioned that this number is still very far from the government goal of 330,000 migrant workers.

Israel. Moreover, significant dysfunctions were uncovered among the new recruitment corporations, some of which failed to pay the necessary fees on time⁵⁸.

Yet the main obstacle was Israel's continued state of war since October 2023, with ongoing rocket and missile attacks. The death of an Indian worker in a rocket strike near the Lebanese border discouraged Indian nationals from coming to Israel⁵⁹. A month later, an Iranian missile barrage halted 11 flights that were scheduled to bring thousands of Indian workers, prompting the Indian government to threaten the cancellation of the bilateral labor agreement with Israel⁶⁰.

Despite the evident failure to bring in the promised hundreds of thousands of workers, the rapid increase in migrant worker importation revealed itself to be a breeding ground for exploitation and grave violations of labor rights. In April 2025, Kav LaOved published a damning report titled "Spare Parts"⁶¹, detailing the abusive employment system, including the exorbitant sums workers were forced to pay as de facto ransom to secure permits to work in Israel.⁶²

⁵⁸ See a report by the Histadrut labor union – Jan 2025 - that deals with this issue: <https://bit.ly/4IRa7EO>. See also an article in *Calcalist* from Jan 2025 on the same problem (Hebrew): <https://www.calcalist.co.il/real-estate/article/hkmi7k3u1x>

⁵⁹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/indian-worker-killed-in-hezbollah-missile-attack-leaves-behind-daughter-pregnant-wife/>

⁶⁰ See the article in The Marker that reported a few days after the April 13 2024 massive missile attack from Iran on Israel that "the first of 11 charter flights initiated by the government for the expedited arrival of Indian workers to the construction sector was supposed to take off on April 18, but the plan was suspended due to the security threat. Following the attack on Saturday night, the Indian government informed Israel that the suspension is temporary until the end of the week, after which it will reassess its policy." (Hebrew): <https://www.themarker.com/realestate/2024-04-17/ty-article/.premium/0000018e-ec90-dd51-a79e-fe91327b0000> . See also: <https://www.indiandefensenews.in/2024/04/air-india-suspends-flights-to-and-from.html>

⁶¹ The link to the full text of Kav Laoved's Report: <https://kavlaoved.org.il/en/spare-parts-orit-ronen-and-aelad-cahana/>

⁶² In July, 2025 MAAN reported a move by Israeli Hotels' company "Fattal" that began a process aimed at replacing qualified long-time Palestinian workers with migrant laborers, which was a result of directions from the Israeli Tourism Ministry. The effort to replace Palestinians with Migrant workers from Sri Lanka reflects the absurdity of Israel's policy in this regard. See MAAN's report: <https://wac-maan.org.il/palestinian-workers-50/>

Chapter 7

Israeli construction industry is reeling from worker shortage

In March 2025, the Bank of Israel released its annual summary report for 2024, highlighting the severity of the crisis Israel has faced as a result of the war. The report identifies the shortage of "non-Israeli" workers as a major factor hindering economic recovery—particularly in the construction sector⁶³. According to the Bank, the Israeli economy has not yet returned to its pre-war state, and the war's repercussions are expected to linger for many years. The marginal annual GDP growth of just 0.9% represents a real decline in output per capita.

While the government's ability to address war-related damage in sectors such as tourism is limited and the need to cover costs stemming from civilian evacuations and other wartime losses created budgetary burdens that cannot be avoided, it does have full control over the employment of Palestinian and foreign workers. This is a matter of policy. In the early months of the war, the government promised that the closure of the West Bank would not harm the economy, as Palestinian labor would be replaced by migrant workers. It is now clear that this ambitious project has failed.

The consequence has been a severe and prolonged shortage of construction workers, resulting in the bankruptcy of hundreds of contractors and serious knock-on effects for the broader economy. The Contractors Association brought this crisis before the High Court of Justice in May 2025, demanding compensation from the government for the massive financial losses suffered by the construction industry. According to the petition, contractors lost 98 billion shekels (US \$ 29 Billions) in 2024 alone—equivalent to 4.9% of GDP and roughly 45% of the sector's output. Including losses from the last quarter of 2023, total cumulative damages since the war began are estimated at 131 billion shekels (US \$ 38.5 Billions)⁶⁴.

Amit Gottlieb, Chair of the Tel Aviv Region Building Contractors Organization, reported that 730 construction companies collapsed in the past 18 months. In an interview with *Ynet*, Gottlieb stated⁶⁵:

⁶³ Chapter 8 of Central Bank Report specified that in comparison to the pre-war situation Israeli workers' number rose from 224,000 to 250,000 while migrant workers reached 63,000 in comparison to 32,000 before the war. Still this increase of Israelis and migrants of 57,000 workers did not compensate for the 109,000 Palestinians who had been employed: <https://bit.ly/4IOazU5>

⁶⁴ See this report: <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/israels-building-industry-petitions-government-over-gaza-war-report/> See also a report on this petition in the Israeli leading news website *Ynet*: <https://www.ynet.co.il/economy/article/byq63robge>

⁶⁵ See the original Hila Zeon article in Hebrew: <https://www.ynet.co.il/economy/article/yokra14349548>. This article by H. Zeon specifies that "In 2024, there were 730 bankruptcies in the construction and infrastructure sector, compared to only 441 in 2022. In the first quarter of 2025 alone, around 210 bankruptcies were recorded – an annual pace expected to surpass 800, marking a new negative record in the market."

“About 87% of contractors report a critical shortage of skilled laborers. No government official yet understands the scale of the disaster that is unfolding.” Eli Avisrur, Chair of the Contractors’ Organization in the Negev, described in February 2025 how the closure has crippled the sector: “Many projects were left without skilled and available manpower, and construction activity nearly ground to a halt. Even now, a year and five months after that dark Saturday, many contractors are struggling to fulfill their obligations and are unable to deliver housing units and projects committed to before the war. Additionally, the bureaucratic process for bringing foreign workers into Israel remains inefficient.”⁶⁶

Growing pressure to reintroduce Palestinian workers

Against this backdrop, since December 2023, a steady stream of reports and expert recommendations have urged the government to allow Palestinian workers back into the labor market. Interior Minister Moshe Arbel (Shas) appealed to his fellow ministers in March 2024—and on several subsequent occasions—to adopt a policy enabling the regulated entry of Palestinian workers. Arbel described the current state of affairs as irrational⁶⁷: “Many construction sites have replaced vetted workers—those who passed Shin Bet security screening—with unauthorized laborers, due to the lack of oversight and regulation. The situation we’ve created is far more dangerous than the alternative: controlled and supervised entry of Palestinian workers.”

Raul Srugo, President of the Israel Builders Association, echoed this call in May 2024: “If we can’t bring foreign workers,” he said at the Eli Hurvitz Conference for Economy and Society hosted by the Israel Democracy Institute, “then let’s bring in the Palestinians.”⁶⁸

Srugo added: “In construction and infrastructure, coexistence is a reality. Some contractors have been paying their workers—many of whom have been working for them for decades—even though they cannot

⁶⁶ Original Hebrew text is here: <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/business/real-estate/article/17434209>

⁶⁷ Minister Moshe Arbel first declared that he supports the reinstatement of Palestinian workers in the Israeli job market in March 2024 see: <https://bit.ly/3lqx1EE>. He later repeated this call on many occasions. It is clearly a unique rational and pragmatic voice in a Government where ministers compete each other with extreme anti-Arab statements that should in their opinion raise their popularity among their base.

⁶⁸ Mr. Srugo’s statement in this important economic conference was quoted in *Calcalist* the next day with the headline: “we have to allow Palestinians to go back to the building sites. In the construction industry we have co-existence” (Hebrew): https://www.calcalist.co.il/local_news/article/bjyqfgoxc See also *Jerusalem Post* report from the conference: <https://www.jpost.com/business-and-innovation/all-news/article-802226>

currently come to work, simply so they have something to live on. I don't recall any licensed construction workers being involved in terror attacks."

Security and economic experts align

In June 2024, the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) published a significant study on this issue. It found that Palestinian workers employed under regulated permits had not been involved in any acts of terror. The study's conclusion was unequivocal:⁶⁹ "Palestinian workers should be allowed to enter Israel in order to support both the Palestinian and Israeli economies with viable employment opportunities."

If we put together these positions and papers by a variety of economic experts including The Bank of Israel, we can summarize that they all affirm the urgent need to reintegrate Palestinian workers into the Israeli labor force⁷⁰. True, there is a clear recommendation to reduce reliance on Palestinian labor and to balance the employment of non-Israeli workers between Palestinians on the one hand and migrant laborers arriving from countries who signed bilateral agreements with Israel on the other. But the overarching conclusion of all major economic institutions and think tanks is that the employment of Palestinians is crucial and that there is no alternative to it.

⁶⁹ Prof. Estvan Klor's report under the title "Is there a connection between Palestinian workers in Israel and terrorist attacks within the Green Line?" was published in June 2024 by the prestigious INSS, see:

<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/palestinian-workers-data/>

⁷⁰ It is important to note that influential government and public institutions added their voice to the call for allowing Palestinians to go back to their work places in Israel. See for example the statement of then Defense Minister Yoav Galant from Dec. 2023 who called to deal with 99% of Palestinians in a proper way (Hebrew):

<https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/syrtpvit>. See also Editorial of *Haaretz* from Dec. 2023 that clearly supported this option and quoted the positions of Israeli Security Service - Shabak that called to allow workers to return to Israel:

<https://bit.ly/44pMhKm>

Chapter 8

Economic hardship forces workers to enter Israel without permits

The combination of severe economic hardship and the lack of employment opportunities in the Palestinian local work market has compelled thousands of workers to seek ways to return to work in Israel—even without valid permits. After a brief period of waiting, the beginning of 2024 saw thousands of workers return to their former workplaces or areas of previous employment, searching for jobs.

It is estimated that approximately 40,000 Palestinian workers are present in Israel at any given time⁷¹. This figure reveals a stark contradiction: despite official policies aimed at preventing workers from entering Israel, thousands of Israeli employers continue to employ undocumented Palestinian workers—choosing to take the legal risk in order to stay afloat economically.

Workers risk their lives to support their families

Palestinian workers resort to various methods to enter Israel. Many cross through breaches in the separation wall; others conceal themselves in the cargo compartments of commercial vehicles and trucks operated by smugglers, who charge substantial fees. Additionally, there is a growing trade in permits not intended for work—such as those issued for medical reasons. These permits enable workers to pass through checkpoints, after which they remain in Israel for extended periods to earn a living⁷².

Those attempting to climb over the wall in neighborhoods like Al-Ram or Tulkarm, or to cross mountainous terrain in southern Hebron, are fully aware of the dangers⁷³. These journeys often end in injury—or even death—due to Border Police gunfire. Some have also fallen from great heights while attempting to

⁷¹ Yossi Yehushoa, the military correspondent of *Yediot Ahronot*, wrote in July 2024 a report on the issue and quoted security officials that approved this number: <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/ry4wlztpc>

⁷² This information was gathered by MAAN through numerous meetings and phone calls with workers during the long period since the beginning of the war.

⁷³ See this AP report from the town of Yatta, south of Hebron, where the journalist who works closely with MAAN followed the tragic case of Iyad Al Najar's killing while he tried to cross the green line to seek work in Israel: <https://apnews.com/article/jobs-palestinians-israel-barrier-economy-west-bank-2971f01fd6fd878399911cef00bfa087>

scale the wall. According to a December 2024 report by the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, 55 workers have died in such circumstances⁷⁴.

Those who succeed in reaching work sites are employed “under the table,” as the entire arrangement occurs without legal documentation. This inevitably leads to exploitation, and a total absence of labor protection in cases of injury or accidents. Israeli employers often evade responsibility, fearing prosecution for hiring undocumented workers. Injured workers are frequently dropped at the nearest checkpoint and left to seek medical care in Palestinian hospitals. The absence of legal status not only places workers at physical risk but also exposes them to extreme labor exploitation and the denial of basic rights.

Arrests and humiliating treatment

A further risk faced by undocumented Palestinian workers is the constant threat of arrest by Israeli police and Border Police forces. Whether at construction sites or in rented apartments within Israeli towns, the fear of a raid is ever-present. Workers often flee arrest to squeeze in a few more days of income—sometimes turning these pursuits into deadly chases⁷⁵.

While entering Israel without a permit is classified as a criminal offense, authorities are aware that most workers are law-abiding individuals pushed to desperation by economic necessity. As such, a police directive stipulates that workers not involved in other criminal activity should be released. A March 2024 police report states that of the 2,134 workers arrested in the early months of the year, just close to 10% were actually charged with crimes. The rest were released and returned to the Palestinian Authority territories⁷⁶.

This relatively lenient policy is also a result of severe overcrowding in detention centers. As of March 2024, over 21,000 individuals were held in facilities built for only 14,500. MAAN issued a statement in December of 2024 calling the Police to stop draining its meager resources in a useless chase of hungry workers. If Israel would have allowed workers to enter to their work places legally there was no need for the police to harass workers in vain⁷⁷.

⁷⁴ See the report of the PGFTU (Arabic) published in the Arab48 website: <https://bit.ly/3ZHUGL1>

⁷⁵ See this report on the tragic fate of Rifat Abd El Aziz Hamed (35) (March 2025) who jumped from a Jerusalem apartment to his death fleeing a police patrol that was looking for workers without licenses: <https://zoha.org.il/135988/>

⁷⁶ See a report in *Ynet* that shows that many workers were sent back to the West Bank without being charged or put to a trial due to the extreme shortage of prison beds (Hebrew): <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/bymlyrnaa>

⁷⁷ See MAAN's statement: <https://wac-maan.org.il/palestinian-workers-33/>

Support for detained workers

In many of these cases where the news of workers being arrested reach family members, MAAN was contacted to help in gathering information on where that detained worker was held and later on the legal proceedings in the case.

One such case involved a lawyer from Daharieh, whose brother was arrested in Eilat along with 14 other workers. Their detention hearings were held in the Eilat Magistrates' Court, which appointed a public defender to represent them. However, due to language barriers, neither the workers nor their families could understand the legal proceedings or the court's decisions.

MAAN reached out to the appointed attorney, who responded positively and provided us with all relevant updates. We translated this information and shared it with the workers and their families, helping to bridge a critical communication gap during an extremely distressing time.⁷⁸ In many cases where family member requested MAAN's help to locate a detainee who is a resident of the West Bank or Gaza, MAAN referred people to HaMoked: Center for the Defence of the Individual⁷⁹, which operates a system for locating detainees. In addition, MAAN was in contact with the official responsible for Palestinian detainees at the Public Defender's Office, and when necessary, this office assists in locating detainees or clarifying legal issues related to the extension of detention of arrested workers.⁸⁰

During the war MAAN has received numerous testimonies from workers who were arrested solely for being in Israel without permits—and were nonetheless formally indicted and sent to detention centers. These individuals, while not accused of security threats or other crimes, reported being subjected to abusive and inhumane treatment by police and prison staff⁸¹. (See below two such testimonies gathered by MAAN's team during the second half of 2024).

⁷⁸ This case and several other cases where MAAN's team helped detained workers were reported in MAAN's database. The 14 workers who were detained in Eilat were set free after 1.5 months in jail but their case remained pending in court later in the year. For more about the workers who were detained see Chapter 8.

⁷⁹ See here on Center for the defense of the Individual: <https://hamoked.org/>

⁸⁰ It is worth noting that despite the war, and even during the fighting, the Public Defender's Office—that is a branch of the Israeli Ministry of Justice—continued to monitor and report on the situation in prisons and provides legal defense to all detainees, including Palestinian workers arrested for illegal presence in Israel. The Public Defender Office issued in July 2024 a very critical report on the situation in prisons since the war where it called on authorities to respect the human rights of prisoners see: <https://bit.ly/4IBwEFF>

⁸¹ It is significant to note that many workers who were detained under the charges of “unlawful” entrance to Israel and put to trial, reported to MAAN that as they approached the court session they were able to meet with lawyers nominated by the court and funded by the Public Defender's Office i.e. the Israeli Justice Ministry. Workers reported that in contradiction to the treatment by prison guards and policemen their lawyers – many of them Arab citizens of Israel but a few Jewish ones as well – took care of their cases with seriousness and responsibility.

Testimonies from detained workers

R.A. (36) – Imprisoned Despite Valid Permit

R.A. had worked in Israeli construction for 13 years. Following the closure of crossings after October 7, his access was revoked—despite the fact that his permit was renewed several times and still valid at the time of his arrest. He was detained in an apartment in Dimona on July 2, 2024, after just one day of work. Along with four other undocumented workers, he was taken to the Dimona police station and later transferred to Be'er Sheva prison. Following several court hearings, he was indicted for entering Israel without a permit and sentenced on August 5 to 35 days in prison, a 1,500-shekel fine, and a three-year suspended sentence.

During his detention, R.A. and others suffered insufficient food—one daily meal at noon consisting of a plate of rice, a plate of noodles, and eight slices of bread shared among four people. He lost over 10 kilograms during his imprisonment. Even upon release, R.A. faced indignity: removed from his cell at 7:00 a.m., he was left without food or water for eight hours before being transferred to the Meitar checkpoint and sent home.

A.K. – Threatened, Humiliated, and Starved

A.K., from the Hebron area, had long worked in Israeli construction. After more than six months of unemployment, he paid a broker 450 shekels for a fake permit and returned to work in May 2024. He was arrested on June 1 by Border Police at a southern worksite in an Arab town.

When he asked what would be done with him and his colleagues, an officer chillingly replied: “We’ll cut you into pieces and eat your flesh.” He was held in Ofakim and Rahat police stations, where he reported discriminatory treatment—Israeli detainees received food and water, while Palestinian detainees were left for hours without either.

In prison and during transportation to court, guards used verbal abuse, threats, and physical mistreatment. Detainees were housed in filthy cells and fed just once a day—a small portion of rice or pasta shared among four people, with minimal water. Ultimately, A.K. received a sentence of 30 days in prison, a 1,500-shekel fine, and a three-year suspended sentence.

Chapter 9:

MAAN's unique stance in support of workers

On December 2023⁸², as it became clear that the ban on workers was going to become a prolonged Government policy MAAN condemned this measure and called it "a drastic and unjustified measure with no valid security or economic rationale". The organization emphasized that this closure inflicted severe and disproportional harm on both Palestinian workers and the Israeli economy.

As a joint Israeli-Palestinian organization, MAAN strongly opposes rhetoric that equates all Palestinians with Hamas or calls for the wholesale destruction of Gaza. It is essential, MAAN asserted, to distinguish between the Palestinian people—who suffer under the Occupation and Hamas, alike⁸³.

The deafening silence of the Histadrut

While MAAN consistently voiced its position in public forums and the media, the Histadrut—Israel's largest labor federation—remained conspicuously silent all throughout this period. Although certain senior officials in the Histadrut's construction workers division held informal discussions with government representatives about the possible return of Palestinian workers, the organization refrained from adopting any official or public stance on the matter.

Moreover, the Right wing National Labor Federation (Histadrut Le'umit) —historically linked to the Likud party and previously claiming to represent Palestinian workers—took a more extreme approach. In a public statement issued in December 2023, the federation called for the war in Gaza to be used as an opportunity to permanently end the employment of Palestinians in Israel and replace them with foreign migrant labor⁸⁴.

⁸² MAAN statement from Dec. 28, 2023 (Published in English on Jan. 3, 2024) called to allow Palestinian workers to go back to their jobs in Israel: <https://wac-maan.org.il/return-to-work-2/>

⁸³ See MAAN's statement on the war issued October 12, 2023: <https://wac-maan.org.il/october-7th-eng/>

⁸⁴ For a review of the positions of both the Labor Federation Histadrut and the Histadrut Le'umit on the issue of Palestinian workers see: <https://wac-maan.org.il/palestinian-workers-19/>

It is important to recall that for decades, Palestinian workers were required to pay non-member “service fees” to the Histadrut. In 2019, the National Labor Federation also began collecting dues from thousands of Palestinian workers who registered as members through arrangements imposed by the Payments Department of Israel’s Population and Immigration Authority.

Following a precedent-setting petition submitted by MAAN to the National Labor Court in 2020, this arbitrary deduction (both by the Histadrut and the National Labor Federation) was halted and replaced with a transparent system, enabling Palestinian workers to decide for themselves whether to join a union and pay membership fees accordingly⁸⁵.

The union dues that Palestinian workers have contributed over many years should have compelled these labor organizations to take a more principled and equitable stand. Their current abandonment of those workers stands in direct contradiction to the foundational principle of solidarity that underpins labor unions worldwide.

Emergency relief proposal via the Amitim Fund

In light of the prospect of a prolonged conflict, MAAN initially focused on identifying urgent, practical solutions to the crisis facing Palestinian workers⁸⁶. As described in Chapter 2, MAAN was part of a coalition of organizations that advocated for the release and repatriation of approximately 4,000 Gazan workers who remained trapped in Israel following the outbreak of war.

As early as November 2023, MAAN, in collaboration with *Kav LaOved*, approached both the Payments Department (MATASH) of the Population and Immigration Authority and the Amitim pension fund with a proposal. The organizations requested that Palestinian workers be granted access to a portion of their accumulated savings in the Amitim fund, without affecting their entitlement to continuous pension benefits⁸⁷.

It is worth noting that Amitim took responsibility for the savings of Palestinian workers who were employed in Israel after a significant reform that began operation in May 2023. This move aimed at rectifying

⁸⁵ On MAAN’s successful appeal to the National Labor Court in 2020 on the issue of Palestinian workers union dues see: <https://bit.ly/4kOKuDI>

⁸⁶ One of the issues MAAN helped to solve related to complaints that came from workers who did not get their wages for the work they did in September 2023. Most workers were aware that they had a legal case against their employer but preferred to reach out for an agreement even if it meant compromising on their case – thinking that their interest was to keep good contact with the employer. One such case where MAAN intervened involved a group of workers from Dura (south of Hebron) who worked for years for a contractor from Netivot. MAAN reached out to this contractor, who confirmed the debt and agreed to pay it although there were disagreements on the exact sum of the debt.

⁸⁷ In Nov. 14, 2023 both MAAN and Kav LaOved appealed jointly to Amitim Fund and the Payment Division requesting that they take an emergency measure to ease the suffering of Palestinian workers using the savings of these workers: <https://wac-maan.org.il/jobless-3/>. See also the joint letter of Kav LaOved and MAAN to the head of the Payment Division on Feb. 13, 2024: <https://wac-maan.org.il/palestinian-workers-6/>

decades of mismanagement and lack of transparency surrounding Palestinian workers' pension savings. At the time MAAN viewed the transfer of these funds to Amitim as a vital step toward safeguarding workers' rights.⁸⁸

Now that workers were left with no source of living MAAN and Kav LaOved proposed that each worker receive a one-time payment equivalent to one month's salary to help them survive the period of enforced unemployment caused by the closure. At the time—mid-November 2023—it was believed that the closure would last only a few months. Their joint letter also highlighted the complete absence of a social safety net for these workers, who had been left without any source of income (see Chapter 3)⁸⁹.

Advocacy across forums to spotlight the crisis and workers' plight

Given the urgency of the situation and the risks associated with an extended closure, MAAN took action across multiple fronts to exert maximum pressure on decision-makers to allow Palestinian workers to return. The Knesset Committee on Foreign Workers, chaired at the time by MK Eliyahu Revivo (Likud), held a series of meetings focused on the closure and government plans to import tens of thousands of foreign workers to replace Palestinian labor.

MAAN representatives participated in several of these committee sessions, which were also attended by senior officials responsible for Palestinian and foreign worker policy.

In its advocacy efforts, MAAN consistently pointed government officials and policymakers to the positions of respected security and official bodies that supported the return of Palestinian workers⁹⁰.

MAAN also ran a targeted media campaign—both domestically and internationally—to underscore the severity of the crisis. Starting in November 2023, a wave of media coverage in Israel amplified the voices

⁸⁸ On MAAN and Kav LaOved's view of the establishment of Amitim Pension Fund for Palestinian workers in 2023 see the joint statement from Jan 2023: <https://wac-maan.org.il/pensionfunds-3/>. In this statement we wrote: "This is an important step, which was made following severe criticism that was directed at the Payment Division for the way Palestinian employees' pension funds were managed for over fifty years. While the old system until now kept the funds in a closed, secret manner and without giving employees interest and compensation for increases in the index, Amitim Fund would ensure professional and transparent management like that enjoyed by employees in Israel."

⁸⁹ It should be noted that the appeal by MAAN and Kav LaOved from Nov. 2023 remained unanswered for months. A negative response to the request to pay the workers a one-time grant was received only after more than three months, on February 21, 2024. Both the three-month delay—and even more so, the negative content of the response—illustrated the authorities' complete disregard for the plight of the Palestinian workers.

⁹⁰ See Chapter 7 in this report where we quoted several position papers of security and economic institutions in Israel who suggested the return of Palestinian workers to their jobs in Israel.

of Palestinian workers, bringing their experiences into the public eye⁹¹. MAAN's message was also clearly heard in Arab-language outlets within Israel and in the international press⁹².

Additionally, MAAN engaged with diplomatic and labor missions in an effort to influence Israeli policy and promote a realistic, humane approach to the employment of Palestinian workers. Representatives from MAAN met with diplomatic officials from the United States, Canada, and several European countries, providing them with regular updates and data on the situation⁹³.



MAAN's Executive Director, Assaf Adiv (right), attended several meetings of the Knesset Special Committee on Foreign Workers. On the left, MK Ahmad Tibi and Committee Chairperson MK Eliyahu Revivo.

⁹¹ See Hagar Shezaf's report in *Haaretz* from Jan. 2024 that quoted extensively from the words of MAAN's Executive Director and from workers who are active with MAAN (translation to English was published Feb.2, 2024) <https://wac-maan.org.il/haaretz-2/> - See also a report by KAN (Israeli Public Broadcasting Com.) from Dec. 2023 that brought the voices of Palestinian workers affiliated with MAAN who went back to work in the settlements and explained why the option of employing Palestinians was realistic: <https://wac-maan.org.il/kan11/>

⁹² See the reference to MAAN in The Guardian report from Sep. 2024 on Palestinian workers and the appeal presented to the ILO on their situation: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/27/israel-palestinian-workers-pay>

⁹³ See this report on a brief that MAAN's Exe. Director gave to 15 representatives of the EU member countries in March 2024 (together with ACRI): <https://wac-maan.org.il/palestinian-workers-7/>. See also a report on the meeting of MAAN's Director with a high level representative of the Dutch Foreign Ministry in Dec. 2024: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EwPdsWdxs/>

Chapter 10:

MAAN's relations with its unionized workers during the war

Alongside its public advocacy against the closure imposed on Palestinian workers, MAAN invested significant efforts in maintaining contact with, and safeguarding, workers already employed in unionized workplaces. All five companies employing Palestinian workers—where MAAN either has collective agreements or represents the workforce—continued their operations throughout the war. Three of these companies are located in the Mishor Adumim industrial zone, which resumed near-normal operations by November 2023 (see Chapter 4: Workers in Settlements). The fourth is a factory situated in the Atarot industrial zone inside Israel, recognized as an essential service due to its role in food production. The fifth is a geriatric hospital located within Ma'ale Adumim (Area C), which also continued to operate normally, as it is considered an essential service provider.

At the same time, MAAN achieved a landmark legal victory with a precedent-setting court ruling in a sexual harassment case involving a Palestinian female worker employed at a factory in Mishor Adumim.



50 Workers of Levi Metal and Wood Co. in Mishor Adumim joined MAAN in July 2025 in an effort to guarantee their rights (Photo: MAAN)

Monitoring workers' difficulties and maintaining employer relations in Mishor Adumim

The collective agreement signed at Zarfati Garage in 2017 marked a historic milestone for MAAN, being the first workplace where Palestinian workers were unionized by the organization⁹⁴. Despite the tensions and hardships caused by the recent war, affecting both Palestinian workers and Israeli management, MAAN succeeded in maintaining positive labor relations and ensuring that employers acted fairly and considerately towards the workers. Workers, in turn, were encouraged to return to work as soon as conditions allowed and to uphold professional workplace relations.

One illustrative case where MAAN was engaged with both workers and employers regards deliberate acts of vandalism that workers faced in October 2024. In the incident, workers returning from their work shifts found their cars—parked at the entrance to Mishor Adumim - damaged with smashed windows and slashed tires. This was clearly an act of racist vandalism perpetrated by Jewish extremists. MAAN engaged with several employers regarding this incident. One employer explained his efforts to secure dedicated parking for his workers and stressed that the attack exposed the neglect of both the local area management and Ma'ale Adumim municipality, undermining his ability to ensure his workers' safe commute⁹⁵.

Addressing workers' concerns in Atarot over new checkpoint procedures

At R.S. Food Marketing and Production Ltd. in Atarot, where MAAN secured a collective agreement in 2021⁹⁶, close collaboration with the workers' committee, alongside open dialogue with the management, proved vital during the war. As new entry and exit procedures at the Qalandiya checkpoint generated confusion and concern, MAAN stepped in to resolve misunderstandings and protect workers' rights. These issues stemmed from changes within the Civil Administration, responsible for issuing work permits.⁹⁷ These

⁹⁴ See more on the struggle that led to the landmark collective agreement in Zarfati Garage in this article by the American scholar Ethan Jerome Morton published in the Jerusalem Quarterly of the Institute of Palestine Studies in 2021: <https://bit.ly/4kUae1h>. MAAN published in 2019 an important report on the union's activity in Mishor Adumim Industrial zone see: <https://bit.ly/45aivlF>

⁹⁵ See MAAN's report on the incident from Oct. 2024 (Hebrew): <https://wac-maan.org.il/car-sabotage/>. It is significant that in the 10 months since that incident there was no report of another similar incident. Yet, MAAN's team that visits the area regularly reports of absolute chaos in the entrance of the industrial zone every day.

⁹⁶ On the background to MAAN's signature of the first collective agreement in Atarot in R.S. Foods (also known as Rajuan Co.) see: <https://wac-maan.org.il/atarot-field-report-2/>. This report on Atarot Industrial Zone was written in 2022 by MAAN. Chapter 6 of the report goes into the details of the struggle to achieve the landmark CA with R.S. (Rajuan) Company.

⁹⁷ Two major changes were made by the Civil Administration regarding the workers: 1. Workers were required to report their exit from Israeli territory whenever they crossed the checkpoint back home. Until Oct. 2023 registration in the checkpoints

changes created fear among night-shift workers that they might be falsely accused of violating permit rules and risk losing their jobs. MAAN's direct communication with the factory's management allowed clarification of these regulations, ensuring that workers were not penalized.

Supporting workers at the geriatric hospital in Ma'ale Adumim

At the "Hod Amal" geriatric hospital in Ma'ale Adumim, MAAN initiated unionization efforts in 2023, though formal recognition as the workers' representative had yet to be achieved. Nevertheless, MAAN currently represents over 40 workers and maintains active dialogue with the hospital's management to resolve issues and provide individual support for this group⁹⁸.

One notable achievement during this period was the recognition of rights for long-term subcontracted workers. According to the law that was legislated in 2000⁹⁹, a worker can be recognized as "temporary" for a period not surpassing 9 months. After that he/she become automatically a direct employee of the company. But this was not the case here as employees were registered with the subcontractor for up to 3 years. Now thanks to MAAN's struggle, together with the workers, in April 2024 the hospital's management company, Amal Holdings Ltd., finally and formally acknowledged these workers' rights. Approximately 20 workers who were employed by the subcontractor were hired directly by the hospital, and importantly, the company agreed to recognize their previous tenure under the subcontractor, ensuring full pension and severance benefits upon their eventual departure.¹⁰⁰

was required only on entrance. 2. The Civil Administration stopped issuing new work permits or modifying existing ones. The Facebook page of *AL Munaseq* (COGAT) posted notes on these changes in Arabic for its 1.1 million followers – See here one of them from June 2024: <https://bit.ly/4ouXv8t>. We could not find an official document that specifies the details.

⁹⁸ The total number of employees in the geriatric hospital is 160. The 40 employees who joined MAAN were the Palestinians from the PA. The other 120 include higher professional staff (physicians, nurses, social workers) with blue identity card and migrants.

⁹⁹ In 2012 MAAN led an important legal case against the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) that employed Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem through a Personnel Agency. A precedent case in the National Labor court forced the IAA to hire this group of workers: <https://bit.ly/4mMVrHj>

¹⁰⁰ MAAN filed cases in the name of the workers to guarantee that they get the past savings properly and also be compensated for unpaid overtime work done during their employment period under the subcontractor. For more on this struggle see: https://wac-maan.org.il/hod-amal_eng/

Landmark court ruling on sexual harassment at Maya Food Company

In October 2024, the Jerusalem Regional Labor Court issued a decisive ruling in a first of its kind sexual harassment lawsuit filed by a Palestinian woman worker represented by MAAN. The woman had been dismissed in 2019 after refusing the abusive advances of a Palestinian supervisor. Despite MAAN's early intervention and calls for an investigation into the case, Maya Food Ltd. denied responsibility and failed to act as an employer on its obligations according to the law. MAAN hired an expert lawyer to take on the case who filed a lawsuit in 2020 against both the supervisor and the company. The case concluded in October 2024 with a clear verdict: the court upheld the woman's claims and ordered both the company and the abusive supervisor to pay substantial financial compensation¹⁰¹.

Communication with workers and on-site support

Through dedicated WhatsApp groups managed by workers' committees and ongoing contact with worker representatives, MAAN maintained close monitoring of both general and individual workers' problems across all the companies it represents. The team overseeing Palestinian worker unionization remained in constant touch with representatives, providing assistance in cases of workplace accidents, dismissals, and payroll errors.

For example, at N.A. Metal Industries, MAAN's team met with the factory manager in April 2025 to address a payroll error affecting worker's salaries during Ramadan. Following MAAN's intervention, workers received financial compensation in the following month.¹⁰²

Meanwhile, MAAN's field team maintained a steady monthly presence at the Mishor Adumim checkpoint. Teams of two to three MAAN activists, including volunteers, regularly visited during end-of-day shifts, distributing leaflets encouraging workers to stand for their rights and to unionize. These visits enabled direct engagement with workers and helped to reinforce MAAN's presence and credibility on the ground.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ See here a detailed report on the case: <https://wac-maan.org.il/harasment-2/>. As of August 2025 the case is still pending a final National Labor Court decision. The woman and MAAN filed an appeal on what we saw as a relatively small fine that was imposed on Maya Foods in this case.

¹⁰² See here a report on the activity of MAAN in Mishor Adumim after a visit to two work places and meetings with workers and employers (Arabic): <https://bit.ly/3H6SMc7>

¹⁰³ MAAN's teams' continuous visits to Mishor Adumim and leaflets distribution, calling on workers to organize, bore fruits in July 2025 when a group of workers in a new company joined MAAN. MAAN views this organizing as significant because it is occurring in a time when workers' bargaining power, as a result of the war, was naturally low. See the report (Aug. 6, 2025) by *Radio A-Nas*: <https://bit.ly/427z6fr>

Conclusion:

No progress for workers without deep policy changes on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides

For the past two years, since the lockdown on Palestinian workers began in October 2023, MAAN has served as a clear and consistent voice exposing this destructive policy to both Palestinians and Israelis. Through constant involvement,¹⁰⁴ MAAN became a reliable source of information for workers, as well as for Israeli and international institutions including government representatives, academia, labor movements and the press.

During this long period of extreme polarization, when both Israelis and Palestinians tended to ignore each other, MAAN worked on multiple levels to highlight the plight of workers suddenly deprived of their livelihoods.¹⁰⁵ The organization consistently pushed this urgent issue into public discourse, ensuring the voices of workers were not lost in the wider political struggle.¹⁰⁶

Looking at the situation today (September 2025), we must admit that our efforts have failed so far. The precondition of change in policy that would enable Palestinians to return to work in Israel are not on the horizon. Such a change demands a fundamental shift in Israeli policy. Israel cannot continue the “conflict management” approach it has pursued for three decades.¹⁰⁷ Successive governments—particularly under

¹⁰⁴ One indication to the effectiveness of MAAN's public campaign was the level of response to posts published in its Facebook page. Many posts reached tens of thousands of users. MAAN's spokesperson took part in collective TikTok meetings where up to 1000 workers asked MAAN to answer and clarify particular issues. Another result of MAAN's unique role in raising the issue of Palestinian workers was a significant surge of inquiries from individual workers who had not previously engaged with MAAN. A new group of worker-activists joined MAAN's efforts and in January 2024 a Worker Coordination Committee composed of eight members was formed and published a petition via the international AVAAZ campaign platform—calling for the return of Palestinian workers to Israel: <https://bit.ly/450P3oB>

¹⁰⁵ In chapter 9 of the report, we dealt in detail with the different legal and procedural appeals by MAAN and other groups in an effort to guarantee the workers a source of living.

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter 9 of this report where we wrote about MAAN's Advocacy across forums to spotlight the crisis and workers' plight.

¹⁰⁷ On the failed concept of “Conflict management”, see the article by Professor Yossi Mekelberg, *Chatham House*: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2024-02/israel-palestine-chance-end-cycle-conflict>. See also a review of the policy priorities of the Bennet-Lapid Government in 2021-2022 that were based on a the concept “shrinking the conflict” conceptualized by the writer Micha Goodman who was seen as the court philosopher of then Prime Minister Naftali Bennett: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/16/middleeast/israel-palestinian-conflict-cmd-intl>

Netanyahu, though not only under him—refused to treat Palestinians as equal partners who share this land with Israelis, and worked relentlessly to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Over the past decade, this destructive strategy has had two faces. On the one hand, settlers received a green light for violence and land grabs in the West Bank. On the other, the Israeli government encouraged Qatari monetary transfers to Hamas in order to deepen Palestinian divisions. While Israel's security concerns are real in the absence of a viable Palestinian alternative to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, this does not justify the collective punishment imposed on 200,000 workers banned from their jobs in Israel. As explained in Chapter 7, allowing tens of thousands of Palestinians to return to work could have been a step toward peace and stability.¹⁰⁸

On the Palestinian side, we saw no strong or consistent voice representing workers. For their case to be put on the agenda, Palestinian society—whether within the PA or outside it—must produce a force willing to challenge the nationalist-religious discourse that labels work in Israel as a disgrace and workers as unprincipled and unpatriotic.¹⁰⁹ Workers who communicated with MAAN clearly recognized the need for local and international pressure on Israel to reverse its destructive ban. Yet this demand was almost entirely absent from PA officials' conversations with Israeli and international representatives.¹¹⁰

At MAAN, we understand that the struggle of workers cannot be separated from the larger search for a peaceful solution. Our fight against racism and extremism in Israel will remain limited as long as the coalition for reinstating Palestinian workers lacks a strong Palestinian partner. Only when such a force takes a leading role can efforts for reinstatement succeed.

Recognizing the limits of MAAN's achievements should not be seen as retreat or despair. On the contrary, our activities over the past two years embodied an active stance that encouraged workers to defend their rights and withstand hardships. We rejected the calls to adopt a simplistic "bash Israel and all

¹⁰⁸ We pointed out in Chapter 7 that major economic and security institutions in Israel produced papers that indicated the positive result of a decision to allow Palestinian workers to be reinstated in their jobs in Israel.

¹⁰⁹ On February 2024, the podcast "Al Shar'e" on *Sama News* network explained why Palestinians should no longer accept employment by Israelis, indicating that no decent patriotic Palestinian can accept working for Israelis who are engaged in a genocide against his brothers and sisters in Gaza. See here (Arabic): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UghPEspYsuE>. On the disappointment and anger of workers towards the PA see their response to the declaration of PA Prime Minister at the time, Mr. Mohammad Shtayyeh, who called in December 2023 on workers to "return to tilling the land" and to subsist on home-grown produce. Most workers live in cities and refugee camps and do not own land. See here (Arabic): <http://bit.ly/3K2B4HG>

¹¹⁰ One example of the tendency to avoid raising the demand for the reinstatement of workers in the Israeli economy was the strange denial by Hussein A-Sheikh, a top PA leader, of a meeting he had with senior security officials in Israel to discuss the issue of workers. The meeting took place in Tel Aviv, in February 2024. When news of it leaked to the Israeli press, the PA official denied it altogether and said he had never attended this meeting: <https://wac-maan.org.il/hussein-elsheih/>

Israelis” approach, while remaining firmly committed to exposing and resisting the racist and fascist forces in Israel that aimed to portray all Palestinians as Hamas supporters. This distorted narrative served to justify the brutal treatment of civilians in both Gaza and the West Bank. The ban on all Palestinian workers epitomized the Israeli government’s abandonment of fact-based discussion.

This report is being published in Arabic, Hebrew, and English to reveal the untold story of a major segment of Palestinian society. The fate of these workers has had devastating consequences not only for them personally but for the entire Palestinian economy. At the same time, their reinstatement could have profoundly positive effects, fostering both economic survival and broader stability.

MAAN will continue to serve as a consistent and determined voice for these workers. We will persist in participating in and contributing to any initiative that puts the case of Palestinian workers firmly on the agenda, ensuring that their struggle is recognized as central to any path toward peace and equality.



MAAN activists at a meeting in Beit Sahour before the war (Photo: Ghassan Bannoura)