

The situation of the Palestinian Labor Market (2nd quarter of 2022)

PCBS's labor force survey for the second quarter of 2022 indicated a 0.5% increase in the number of employed people (*from about 1.108 million in the 1st quarter of 2022 to about 1.114 million in the 2nd quarter of the same year*). The number of Palestinian workers working in Israel continued to increase, while there was a decrease in the number of employed persons in the local market from 904 thousand employed persons in the 1st quarter of 2022 to 903 thousand employed persons in the 2nd quarter of 2022.

PCBS indicated that 8 out of 10 persons (76%) are wage employees, while 20% are employers & self-employed, and 4% are unpaid family members. One fourth of labour force participants were unemployed in the 2nd quarter of 2022. The unemployment rate among labour force participants (15 years and above) was about 24% (*14% in the WB compared to 44% in the GS*). There was a slight improvement in relation to women's employment. Women's unemployment rate decreased to 38% during the 2nd quarter of 2022 compared to 41% in the 1st quarter of 2022. Men's unemployment rate remained at 21%.

When it comes to fundamental rights; 65% of wage workers in the private sector do not have a work contract, 76% are deprived from their right to receive retirement/end-of-service indemnities, and 47% of women obtained a paid maternity leave. As for wages, 41% (*20% in the WB & 88% in the GS*) of workers in the private sector received less than the minimum wage of (1,880 NIS). There is a huge wage gap between the WB & GS, as the average monthly wage of workers paid less than the minimum wage in Gaza was (710 NIS) compared to (1,412 NIS) in the West Bank. **On the occasion of the International Youth Day**, PCBS highlighted the high unemployment rates among youth graduates aged (18-29 years) which reached 53%. Young female graduates are affected the most by unemployment; as 66% of them are unemployed, compared to 39% of young males of the same category. In Gaza, unemployment rates among youth reached 65% compared to 24% in the West Bank.

Why Palestinian workers employed in Israel protested against the decision to transfer their wages to their accounts in Palestinian banks

For the first time in many years, Palestinian workers employed in Israel declared a strike action in August 2022 and organized sit-ins at various West Bank checkpoints, where they usually wait for hours to cross to their workplaces in Israel. Yet the strike was not against the degrading treatment at the Israeli checkpoints, nor against the many violations of their labor rights by their employers and poor safety and health conditions in Israeli workplaces. The strike was a collective protest against an Israeli decision to oblige Israeli employers to transfer their wages to bank accounts in Palestinian banks, instead of paying their wages in cash.

In a statement made on August 14th, Palestinian Minister of Labor, Nasri Abu Jeish, considered this step as a new arrangement that would contribute in upholding workers' rights, noting that there was no plan for imposing additional taxes. However, many workers involved in the protest expressed their fear that this action may lead to hidden fees and new taxes. Although the Palestinian Cabinet announced that banks would take no fees & there would be no additional taxes, and the Palestinian Monetary Authority issued a directive to banks, and asked them to facilitate the procedures of opening bank accounts for workers, this seems to have done little to alleviate workers' fears. Another underlying issue also motivates the protest. About 30% of Palestinian workers "legally" employed in Israel still pay fees amounting to up to a third of their wages to labor agents to obtain a work permit, which is illegal. The long overdue reform of the work permit system, which entered in force last year, has not been successful in ending the traffic in work permits, as it has not been accompanied by repressive measures against labor agents, nor by measures ensuring that workers understand the new system and can easily find employers without the need for an intermediary. Thousands of Palestinian workers continue to rely on a "bought" work permit and might work for several employers in the same month, in addition to those who obtained a merchant's permit, but actually work as laborers. In both cases, they fear that that the new payment system will deprive them and their families of their source of income.

Female youth in the Gaza Strip continue to face discrimination in accessing study programs in a number of higher education institutions

DWRC and several other CSOs denounced the continued discrimination between female and male youth, when applying to higher education programs in universities in the Gaza Strip. A joint letter was submitted to the Ministry of Women's Affairs calling for their intervention in this matter. Three universities in Gaza continued to set higher grades thresholds for girls than boys for acceptance in a number of fields of study in the school year 2022/2023. Higher education institutions should respect and fulfill the right to equality and non-discrimination enshrined in the Palestinian Basic Law, and international human rights conventions in their education programs. Furthermore, among its numerous priorities, the Palestinian Education Sector Strategic plan 2017-2022 includes *“reinforcing technical and vocational training and education, university and other higher education, as well as adult education and training, with special attention to gender equality. This necessitates the need to remove gender-based barriers affecting vulnerable categories”*.

Emergency Medical Services Union signs a collective agreement with PRCS ending a 12-day strike

On August 3, 2022, the Emergency Medical Service Union ended a 12 day strike upon signing an agreement with the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) stipulating that both parties would end escalating measures and resume dialogue on some of the union's demands, sanctions taken against employees to date in connection with the labor dispute would be rescinded, temporary contract-based employees would obtain permanent contracts, and shifts of paramedics would be reorganized. The union had already undertaken several strike actions earlier this years due to a protracted labor dispute with their employer to ensure decent work conditions and had signed a tentative agreement in May 2022, then ultimately launched a new strike and protests in July as they considered that PRCS had not engaged in dialogue to resolve the dispute as required by the said agreement. Under the new agreement, both parties have until the end of the year to resolve pending issues, noting that paramedics in Palestine operate in dangerous conditions.



DWRC signs 6 grant agreements on 31/08/2022 to strengthen local advocacy as part of the EU-funded “Gender Equality in the Economic Sphere: Our Right, Our Priority” project

The grants agreements were signed with 6 Palestinian organizations, whose projects were selected through a call for proposals for grants to third parties to enable women civil society organizations (CSOs) to engage in advocacy at the local level. The objective of these grants is to enhance the capacity of CSOs to engage in joint advocacy for advancing women's labour & socio-economic rights at the local level, including the rights of women with disabilities. The projects will also pay special attention to advancing the rights of women with disabilities.

The Democracy & Workers' Rights Center implements a training course about trade union skills focusing on the right to organize, lobbying and advocacy. The training course took place in Gaza in August, and targeted 29 unionists from various sectors, (21 of them were women). During the first day of the training, participants improved their skills and knowledge about the right to organize, trade unions' freedom, mechanisms to establish trade unions, and national & international legislation related to trade unions. The second day focused on advocacy and the importance of advocacy campaigns, forming coalitions, networking, steps to prepare for campaigns, and trade unions' roles.

