



Facts Sheet: Overview of the trade union movement in Palestine

Updated September 2015

Professional and trade union affiliation rates:	Available official statistics for union affiliation concerns employed persons aged 15 years and above. Unemployment is high, especially in the Gaza Strip. 25.5% of employees in Palestine were affiliated to professional unions or trade unions in the 2 nd quarter of 2015, 14% in the West Bank and 54.8% in Gaza Strip. Overall affiliation rates for employed men were 24.4% compared to 30.7% for employed women. 54.7% of employed men in Gaza and 12.2% of employed men in the West Bank compared to 55.4% of employed women in Gaza and 22.4% of employed women in the West Bank were members of unions ¹ . Levels of organizing are particularly low in the industrial sector and sectors with high level of informality, such as the construction sector.
Collective bargaining & social dialogue:	In the 1st quarter of 2014, only 0.2% of private sector wage workers were covered by collective agreements (0.1% in Gaza Strip and 0.2% in West Bank ²). Obtaining effective recognition of the right to organize and collective bargaining is an ongoing struggle in the public sector (right to strike is severely restricted, and dialogue has been difficult) and private sector (several union leaders have been arbitrarily dismissed and legal protection is insufficient). December 2011 marked a major change in official policy towards trade unions in the West Bank: recognition of the General Federation of Independent Trade Unions – Palestine (GFITUP) by the Ministry of Labor (MOL). The MOL conducted an assessment of trade union representativeness, upon which it put an end to the monopoly of PGFTU on workers' representation in tripartite dialogue mechanisms (until the end of 2011, only PGFTU participated in tripartite dialogue reactivated from 2009). In addition to tripartite dialogue committees (the labor policies committee and the wages committee finally created at the beginning of 2012), the government has also formed a number of committees for dialogue with public sector unions and the Federation of University Professors and Employees Trade Unions (a GFITUP member). The MOL also plans to establish a social and economic council composed by stakeholders including trade unions. However, all these committees have only been operational in the West Bank, even after the formation of the national consensus government in 2014. Since November 2014, freedom of association and the right to organize has been denied to a majority of public sector employees. The Union of Public Employees, has been declared "illegal" and banned by Cabinet decision in November 2014, depriving 40,000 governmental employees from union representation

¹ PCBS, Press Release on the Labor Force Survey, April-June 2015 (Q2/2015), August 2015, Ramallah-Palestine

² PCBS, Press Release on the Labor Force Survey, January-March 2014 (Q1/2014), May 2014, Ramallah-Palestine



Legislation:	<p>A unified trade union law has not been adopted yet.</p> <p>In the West Bank, freedom of association and the right to organize are guaranteed by Basic Law and some dispositions of Palestinian Labor Law no 7 of the year 2000. After the ban of the Union of Public Employees in November 2014, the Cabinet re-launched the discussion of a draft trade union law.</p> <p>In the Gaza Strip, a restrictive Egyptian law from 1954 was replaced by the Union Law no 2 of the year 2013 adopted by Hamas lawmakers that entered in force on 12/6/2013. This law applies to professional unions and trade unions, and violates international standards for freedom of association and the right to organize. According to the law, the Minister of Justice must approve the "registration" of any union.</p>
General trade union federations:	<p>The three main general trade union federations³ are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- General Federation of Independent Trade Unions in Palestine (GFITUP): general secretary: Mahmoud Ziadeh; last congress: 15-17 December 2011; it is considered as the general federation that is most active in collective bargaining and most representative of both men & women.- Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU): general secretary: Shaher Sa'ed; last congress: December 2011- General Union of Palestinian Workers; general secretary: Haider Ibrahim; last congress: 2012 <p>In the Gaza Strip, after seizing power in 2007, Hamas took over the offices & structure of PGFTU, appointing its own affiliates as "union representatives"</p>
Public sector unions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Union of Public Employees: general secretary: Bassam Zakarneh; last congress: 2011 (this union had been banned)- Another governmental employees' union in the Gaza Strip, representing the employees hired by Hamas after the political split in 2007- Federation of Governmental Universities and Colleges Employees (member of GFITUP)- Governmental Health Service Employees Union (member of GFITUP)- Palestinian Teachers' Union- A number of professional unions representing medical professions are also active in defending the labor rights of their affiliates in the public sector, including the Federation of Allied Health Professionals (includes 9 professional unions) & Palestinian Nursing and Midwifery Council
Other unions & non-traditional forms of organizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- UNRWA Area Staff Union (this union represents Palestinian UNRWA employees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria & Lebanon)- Independent Labor Committees Union in the Gaza Strip (started out as a popular movement of unemployed workers in 2003)- Federation of Women Committees in the Informal Economy, Gaza Strip, established in 2011

³ As per Ministry of Labor / General Directorate of Labor Relations annual report 2011; annex on unions



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Other independent unions in the Gaza Strip are: Kindergarten & Day-Care Centers Workers' Union, Electricity Distribution Company Employees' Union, Civil Aviation Authority Employees' Union, NGO Workers' Union, Petrochemicals Workers' Union <p>There are also a number of workers' committees and unions that are not affiliated to any general federation or sectorial union</p>
Some of the obstacles to the expansion of unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Restrictions of unions to organize in the West Bank and Gaza Strip- Most Palestinian enterprises are small and micro-businesses and a large part of the Palestinian economy is informal- Political factions continue to interfere in trade union work and attempt to maintain their control on trade union leaderships- Democracy deficit, lack of effectiveness and accountability of some of the unions- Low awareness of labor and trade union rights among workers