Democracy & Workers' Rights Center-Palestine
مركز الديمقراطية وحقوق العاملين -فلسطين
WORKERS' RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

Labor & Trade Union Newsletter in Palestine – January + Feb. 2020 # (4)

Facts and figures about the Palestinian Labor Market

In 2019, PCBS indicated a decrease of unemployment rates compared to 2018, as it reached 25% among labor force participants (15% in the West Bank & 45% in Gaza). Meanwhile, women's unemployment rates continued to double men's, reaching 41% for women and 21% for men. The unemployment rate was highest among young graduates (19-29) years old, reaching 52% (68% for young women).

30% of wage workers in the private sector were paid less than the minimum wage of 1450 NIS (about 414 USD). The percentage of workers not obtaining the minimum wage increased significantly in Gaza, from 72% in 2018 to 80% in 2019. When it comes to workers' fundamental rights in the private sector, 48% of workers do not have any work contracts, only 29% of them obtained severance pay, and less than half of female workers had paid maternity leave (48%).

About 133 thousand Palestinian workers were employed in the Israeli labor market, 71% of them with work permits. The number of Palestinian workers working in Israeli settlements reached 23 thousand workers in 2019, compared to 22 thousand in 2018.

Perspectives for a reform of the Palestinian minimum wage in 2020

Achieving a reform of the minimum wage is one of the Palestinian Labor Ministry's priorities for 2020. In 2019, the Ministry launched a review of the minimum wage and has engaged in dialogues and consultations with representatives from governmental institutions, employers, workers and the civil society in view of raising the minimum wage and improving its implementation mechanisms. Since its adoption in 2012, the minimum wage has not been increased, nor adjusted to the increase of living costs. It falls short of the national poverty line and does not allow workers to meet the basic needs of their families. Consultations have been based on an ILO study, but the Ministry also invited submissions by all concerned parties. DWRC has participated in several meetings and submitted recommendations to the Minister, in particular regarding legal and administrative interventions that would support the implementation of a fair minimum wage.

Respiratory Care Technicians Union holds its establishing conference

In December 2019, respiratory care technicians established a union in Ramallah, representing 53 workers in this field. The union aims to organize the profession with the Ministry of Health, regulate professional licensing and obtain its inclusion in the list of health professions recognized by the Ministry, thus improving employment perspectives of graduates in this field. During the conference, members discussed and approved the internal statute of the union, and elected 9 board members, including 3 women.

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The General Union of Electricity Sector Workers discusses organizing their profession with the Palestinian Energy and Natural Resources Authority

The Secretariat of the General Union of Electricity Sector Workers met with the general manager of the Palestinian Energy and Natural Resources Authority to discuss the issuance of a unified national license to practice the profession. This meeting was essential, because electricians' union in each governorate currently issue licenses based on their own standards. The General Union aims to unify standards for all electricians determining working conditions and skills related to this profession. This would contribute in preserving workers' safety, and ensure better control over the professional licenses granted to electricians, thus reducing the percentage of professional errors, and risks for workers and society.

Health sector workers are demanding improvement of their work conditions

The first two months of 2020 have witnessed a joint mobilization of Palestinian health sector unions in the West Bank based on a long list of demands to the Ministry of Health, some that concern the situation and work conditions of governmental health workers, and others related to legislation. Mobilized professions and unions include physicians, pharmacists, dentists, labratory medicine, nurses, pharmacy assistants, radiologists, lab technicians, anesthesia technicians, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, dental technicians, opticians, nutritionists, respiratory care technicians, environmental inspectors, and health service workers. The demands include the necessity of amending the structure of the Ministry of Health to encompass all health facilities, permanently employing contract-based workers, increasing staff numbers in proportion to workload, amending the nature of work allowance, amending the educational qualification and job title of those entitled to, as well as the need to adopt a law that protects medical personnel from attacks and harassment, as recently these attacks have increased. Lack of progress through dialogue has led unions to announce escalating measures, including strikes. However, the High Court of Justice issued a decision on 19/02/2020 ordering the physicians' union to stop their strike actions, as these are illegal under law by decree no 11 of the year 2017, which prohibits medical professionals employed in the public service from striking. After this decision, and due to the emergency situation related to the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, health sector unions have suspended their actions, pending the results of further negotiations.

DWRC signs cooperation agreements with municipalities to improve work conditions & compliance with OSH

The Democracy and Workers' Rights Center signed an agreement on 23/02/2020 with Rafah Municipality in Gaza, in the presence of representatives from the Labor Ministry, Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Local Government. The agreement includes steps to improve work conditions for Rafah Municipality workers employed in the cleaning and sanitation department, as well as those operating and maintaining water wells. It aims to foster the implementation of fundamental rights and standards stipulated by the Labor Law, especially when it comes to occupational safety and health (OSH). Based on the agreement, DWRC will implement awareness programs and activities targeting municipal workers, and will prepare and hang OSH guidelines in workplaces. The municipality will provide the required medical examinations for workers. DWRC signed another cooperation agreement on January 2020 with Al-Nuseirat Municipality related to the compliance with occupational health and safety standards for workers.