

[Opinion](#) | [Haaretz Editorial](#)

Stop the Illegal Trade in Palestinian Work Permits

Jan. 27, 2022 2:05 AM

Some 110,000 Palestinian laborers legally enter Israel to work for their living. They have no other choice. The wages for a plasterer in Israel are nearly three times higher than what someone with a master's degree can earn in his field in the territories. Which is why Palestinian workers will do whatever it takes to obtain an Israeli work permit – including paying commissions to “machers” who illegally trade in them.

The Institute for National Security Studies estimates that the fees for work permits collected by such fixers range from 2,000-3,000 shekels (\$630-\$945) a month, or 30,000 shekels a year. For someone who earns [less than 6,000 shekels](#) a month on average, this means a third of his pay is going to the machers, even though the permits are issued by the State of Israel and Palestinian workers are eligible to receive them at no additional cost.

There is an entire industry based on an illegal trade in government-issued permits that are not supposed to cost money. It's an industry that does an estimated 1.2 billion shekels annually in business – all undeclared capital, a majority of which remains in Israel and only a fraction flowing [into the Palestinian Authority](#). It fosters a black-market economy and evidently a criminal industry, too.

Over the past year, the government has tried to introduce reforms to halt the illegal trade in work permits. One important step was to break the enforced link between Israeli employers and Palestinian workers. Until a year ago, a Palestinian laborer could only work for the employer who was listed on his permit and could not switch to another employer. In effect, the Palestinian worker was the “property” of the Israeli employer, a situation that led to severe exploitation and infringed on the worker's rights. The reform broke this chain, giving Palestinian workers the right to choose their employer. There is no longer any need for them to buy a permit from the machers.

But news of the reform hasn't reached many Palestinian workers, as at least a third of them continue to buy permits from criminally exploitative middlemen and to lose a third of their pay along the way. Meanwhile, the state just rolls its eyes and says it has done its part. No one cares that the situation has not actually improved. Israel has occupied the territories for 54 years and is [obligated to provide a livelihood](#) to the Palestinians who live there without allowing a handful of corrupt folks on either the Israeli and Palestinian side to go on profiting from illegal ruses. Freeing Palestinian workers from the need to buy illegal permits is Israel's moral and legal duty. The government must put an end to this unconscionable practice.

The above article is Haaretz's lead editorial, as published in the Hebrew and English newspapers in Israel.