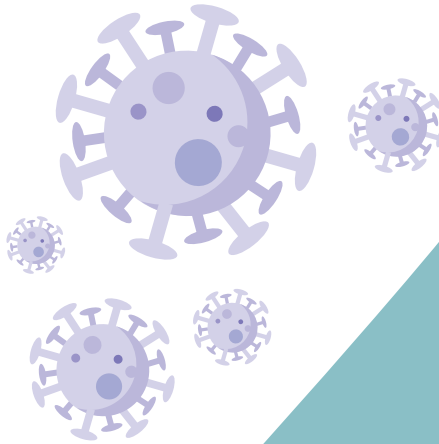




Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR)
المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان

GAZA STRIP WORKERS UNDER THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



January 2021

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INTRODUCTION

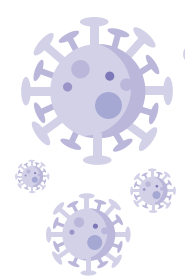
This report addresses the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on workers in the Gaza Strip, whose living conditions witnessed an unprecedented deterioration due preventive measures and restrictions imposed by the local authorities to curb the spread of Covid-19, such as evening curfews, and total lockdown on Fridays and Saturdays.

These restrictions paralyzed the Gaza Strip and caused hardship to thousands of workers, mostly their daily workers who earned a living through daily work in organizations and facilities that had shut down or reduced operations due to the Covid-19 pandemic, mainly factories, shops, schools, universities and daycares, as well as, wedding halls, restaurants, coffee shops, popular markers and in transportation.

This report documents the damages sustained by workers. Some workers were let go or their hours/workdays were reduced, others had pay cuts inflicted on their already low wages; most of the workers received wages below the minimum wage in Palestine. Additionally, these workers do not enjoy the rights ensured for them in the Palestinian Labor Law, international conventions relevant to labor and workers such as regular pay, social security, pension fund, paid annual and sick leave.

Through the statements of affected workers, PCHR shed a light on the deterioration of their living and humanitarian conditions in this report,





as they lost their sources of income and their means to support their families' minimum needs.

The report assesses the government interventions to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic on workers in the Gaza Strip, which are deemed inadequate and short of fulfilling workers' minimum needs. Also, government interventions did not support all affected workers. The government offered a one-time payment which did not support workers' livelihoods, especially that they have been out of work for a lengthy period. Even more, this stimulus package was not distributed on a clear criterion and thousands of workers, although in need, did not receive any aid.

The report offers recommendations to limit the violations of workers' rights under the Covid-19 state of emergency and urges the government to protect workers' rights and urgently intervene to ensure they enjoy a dignified life.

The report gathered the data of affected workers in different economic sectors across the Gaza Strip's five governorates: Northern Gaza, Gaza, Central Gaza, Khan Younis, and Rafah. Additionally, our researchers engaged with duty bearers in the West Bank and Gaza through interviews, and when the restrictions on movement prevented immediate contact, PCHR resorted to email, phone calls and social media platforms to collect its data.

I. COVID-19 IMPACT ON GAZA STRIP'S WORKERS

Conditions of male and female workers in the Gaza Strip have unprecedentedly deteriorated since March 2020, coinciding with the spread of Covid-19 all over the world and its arrival in Palestine where the Palestinian Authority (PA) declared a State of Emergency. Although this step is deemed necessary for the sake of public safety, it has partially paralyzed the Gaza Strip and deepened crises of thousands of day workers; most of them are day workers who are paid for their per-day work at organizations and facilities that were closed due to the State of Emergency (factories, stores, schools, universities, kindergartens, NGOs, wedding halls, restaurants, cafes, barbershops, clubs, gyms, weekly markets and transportation. Since May 2020, the Gaza authorities have eased the State of Emergency restrictions in the Gaza Strip and allowed the public and private organizations to return to work but limitedly and according to certain measures.

This has worsened the suffering of workers in the Gaza Strip that has faced successive crises due to the Israeli-imposed closure on Gaza for the last 14 years and repercussions of the political division as well. These crises have inflicted catastrophic consequences on all economic, social, and cultural rights of the Gaza population, particularly workers who were mostly affected due to the economic collapse and its impact on the private sectors' industrial, commercial, and service facilities. As a result, the unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip increased to 46% (i.e. 211,300 unemployed workers) and was very high among youth recording 63%.¹

¹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics PCBS: Labor Force Survey Preliminary Results First quarter (January–March, 2020), 31 May 2020. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?lang=en&itemID=3748>





In August 2020, Covid-19 spread in the Gaza Strip and outside the quarantine facilities; thereby, the Gaza authorities imposed a curfew and suspended work at public and private institutions in addition to closing educational organizations, mosques, markets, clubs and industrial and commercial installations, to curb the pandemic, identify areas with infected cases as well as following up contacts.

Around a month later, the Gaza authorities eased their restrictions, but keeping the situation as it is in red-marked areas (where Covid-19 widely spread); moreover, they imposed a curfew on Fridays and Saturdays of each week across the Gaza Strip. Despite the eased restrictions, many organizations, and facilities, which were allowed to return to work, had shut down or reduced operation hours paralyzing the Gaza Strip. This has worsened the already poor conditions of the workers in the Gaza Strip, who have lost their source of living to support their families' minimum needs.

According to the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) in Gaza, at least 160,000 workers were affected by the Covid-19 preventive measures and restrictions. Some workers were let go or their hours/workdays were reduced, others had pay cuts that inflicted on their already low wages; 80% received wages below the minimum wage decided in the Council of Ministers decision No. 11 of 2012, which set the minimum wages at 1,450 ILS/month, and minimum wages for daily workers, especially those working on ad-hoc basis, to 65 ILS/day.

Sami al-'Amasi, Head of PGFTU in Gaza, emphasized that the lockdown imposed

to curb the Covid-19 Pandemic has unprecedentedly aggravated the suffering of Palestinian workers in the Gaza Strip and created a disastrous and tragic reality for them, who has already been suffering under the Israel-imposed closure and Palestinian division. Al-'Amasi added that the number of workers affected and recorded reached 160,000; around 55% of them have become unemployed and 70% under the poverty line.

Al-'Amasi said that since the declaration of the State of Emergency in March 2020, the workers' conditions in the Gaza Strip got worse, during which the economic, service and commercial sectors shut down and workers were mostly affected for being the weakest link and a vulnerable group. This group is in constant need for aid as they only receive daily/per-hour wages and any disruption in production would lead to collapse of this laboring class and thereby exposing their families to hunger.

Al-'Amasi said that since August 2020, the outbreak of Covid-19 in the Gaza Strip and outside the quarantine facilities has unprecedentedly worsened the conditions for the workers, especially after the Gaza authorities have imposed a curfew and declared shutdown of public and private institutions as well as educational organizations, mosques, markets, wedding halls, clubs and commercial and industrial institutions to curb the pandemic, identify areas with infected cases as well as following up contacts. This has nearly paralyzed the Gaza Strip and contributed to the aggravation of the already poor economic conditions of the Gaza workers; around 90% of them were let go from work and lost their sources of income to support their families' minimum and basic needs.²

² An interview with Sami al-'Amasi, Head of PGFTU in Gaza on 27 October 2020.





II. WORKERS AFFECTED ACROSS VARIOUS ECONOMIC SECTORS:

Following the Covid-19 State of Emergency declared by the PA and its preventive measures in March 2020 and the Gaza authorities' declaration of the curfew and separation of the Gaza governorates in August 2020, most of workers in the different economic sectors, including industry, trading, travel and tourism, contracting, transportation (drivers), private education, fishing, hairdressing, hotels, restaurants and agriculture.

1. Industrial workers

The industry sector includes food industries, plastic industries, paper industries, leather tanning industries, chemical industries, engineering and metallurgy industries, wood industries, construction industries, clothing, and textile industries.

- Food industry workers

During the State of Emergency, most food factories in Gaza were closed, affecting their productivity; only 15 out of 82 factories operated. This has aggravated the crisis the food industry has been through due to the Israeli-closure imposed on the Gaza Strip, where the number of operating factories reduced only to 50% of the total number of factories before 2007. The number of workers on duty during the State of Emergency is 500 only out of 2200 workers working in these factories. After easing the curfew restrictions, the number of workers who went back to work has become 1200 workers in 40 factories. The Food Industries Union tried

as possible to offer aid for all the factories under its umbrella in such difficult circumstances by coordinating with the government to obtain permits in order to move freely between the governorates within the curfew hours for the importance of the factories' work to meet the local market needs in such circumstances.³

Therefore, the workers' conditions deteriorated, particularly the daily workers.

Akram al-Anzi, married and supports a family of 13, works in a food factory in the Industrial Area of Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza Strip. Al-Anzi said to PCHR's fieldworker:

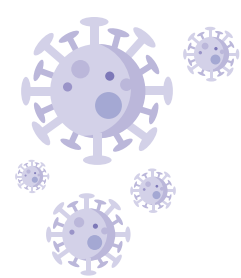
"I have been working at the factory for 6 years. I work from 7:00 to 19:00 and earn ILS 40 per day to support my family and meet their daily basic needs. On 25 August 2020, I was let go from work, and since then, I have been in a poor economic situation and do not even have the basic daily needs at home, especially that I have not received any financial aid during my at-home stay without work."

- Plastic industry workers:

During the State of Emergency, most plastic industrial activities were suspended, except for those relevant to manufacturing materials used by the food and chemical industry sectors. Many workers were let go and the production line work was reduced. Moreover, only 5 out of 65 factories registered at the Plastic Industries Union. After easing the

³ An interview with Mohammed Ayesh, Representative of the Food Industries Union on 06 October 2020.





lockdown restrictions, 45 factories gradually returned to work with 20% production capacity. Before the outbreak of Covid-19 and the lockdown restrictions, around 800 workers worked in the plastic industry sector while in the lockdown, the workforce decreased to 100 workers. This is due to limiting work to production lines and factories which manufacture plastic materials for the food and chemical industry sectors as they are goods necessary for the public during the curfew.⁴

Due to reducing work at the plastic materials factories, their workers' conditions deteriorated, especially that most of them earns a per-day wage.

Alaa' Abu Samak (33) is married with 3 kids and supports his parents. He lives in al-Saftawi neighborhood, north of Gaza City. He said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"I have been working as a technician in a plastic industry factory located in Padico Industrial Zone for 9 years and earns ILS1500 monthly in normal circumstances; however, following the outbreak of Covid-19 and declaration of the State of Emergency and curfew, I was let go from work along with other workers, and for a month, I have not received any wage. After going back to work due to easing the lockdown restrictions, I work only 2 days a week, so I receive a reduced wage which fits with my working days. The 1500 shekels used to be almost enough to meet our basic needs, and I was receiving a payout of USD 100 within the Qatari Financial Aid. However, my family and I live now in poor conditions and lack the

⁴ An interview with Khader Shanyourah, Director of the Palestinian Federation of Industries, 15 October 2020.

minimum requirements of life."

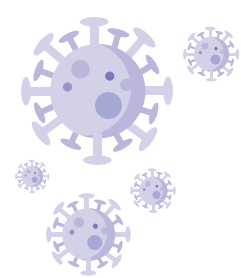
Hasan Abu Nada (18), single and lives in his family house in Beit Lahia Housing Project in the Gaza Strip. Abu Nada, the only breadwinner of his family comprised of his mother and 4 siblings, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"I work at a plastic industry factory located in the industrial zone in Beit Hanoun. My shift lasts for 8 hours daily, and I earn ILS 200 weekly. I did not work for 2 weeks due to the State of Emergency declared in March 2020; during which I had not received any money for I work per day. On 25 August 2020, when cases infected with Covid-19 were declared in the Gaza Strip and the curfew was imposed, I was let go again from work for more than a month. During which, I did not receive a wage and did not even have any savings, so my family and I lived in very harsh conditions. I could not meet my family's basic needs or pay my house rent (ILS 500 monthly), so I had to borrow money to support my family and pay part of the house rent. I also did not get any aid from any organization. I am afraid now that I would be expelled out of my house because I owe the house owner rent payments and I cannot afford paying regularly."

- Paper industry workers:

During the Covid-19 State of Emergency, most of the paper industry activities were suspended; 6 out of 45 installations operated with 5% production capacity, which used to be 55% before the State of Emergency





due to the Israeli-imposed closure and poor economic situation in Gaza. During the State of Emergency, 40 out of 680 total paper industry workers kept their jobs and amounted to 95 workers in 24 printing houses, which return to work with only 20% production capacity following the Government's easing of restrictions.⁵

Due to reduced operations at the paper industry installations, conditions of workers deteriorated, mostly daily workers who earned a living through daily work.

Mohammed al-Madhoun (36), married with 4 children living in Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"I work in a printing house along with 9 other workers from 8:00 to 18:00 in normal times and sometimes more than that during the school seasons and occasions. Since the State of Emergency was declared in March 2020 after the outbreak of Covid-19 in Gaza, the work has been critically affected as well as the workers' wages at the printing house. My wage has become from ILS 1300 to ILS 800 while the number of workers were reduced from 10 to 6. Following the outbreak of the pandemic in Gaza, the printing house was completely closed, and I did not receive any wage throughout the lockdown and my stay at home because I earn a per-day wage. I have not also received any aid from any organization and have become unable to support my family or meet their basic needs; moreover, I support my sick father."

⁵ An interview with Khader Shanyourah, Director of the Palestinian Federation of Industries, 15 October 2020.

- Leather tanning industry workers:

The number of installations working in leather tanning in the Gaza Strip before the Covid-19 crisis is 120 workshops and factories with 12% production capacity due to the deterioration of economic conditions in the Gaza Strip and the Israeli-imposed closure. However, during the State of Emergency, most of the leather tanning factories and workshops shut down for a month.

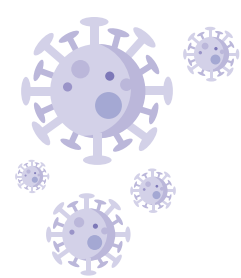
This has affected the daily leather-tanning workers as only 3 factories in this field operated with 30 workers out of total 120 leather-tanning workers.⁶

Khaled al-Joujou (32), married and a father of one child living in Gaza City, said to PCHR's fieldworker:

"I have been working in my own workshop in Jabalia Refugee Camp Market, northern Gaza Strip, for around 8 years. I sew and fix shoes from 8:00 to 17:00. I have workers who earn daily wages ranging between 15-20 shekels depending on the daily revenues. Since the State of Emergency was declared in March, the shop has seen low turnout due to suspension of schools, weddings, and festive occasions. As a result, the shop's daily revenues have even affected, thereby forcing me to reduce the wages of the three workers as I had to pay a 700-shekel monthly lease on the shop. After Covid-19 cases were detected in the Gaza Strip and the curfew was imposed in August, I closed my workshop and stayed home for 40 days; during

⁶ Ibid.





which I could not meet my house's basic needs, most importantly the expensive medication for my wife, who underwent a kidney transplant few months ago. During this time, I have not received any relief except for a USD 100 within the Qatari Financial Aid. After easing the emergency measures and the curfew, I reopened my workshop, but in vain as the vegetables market is still closed, and shoppers usually come to the workshop after buying from the vegetables market. If the situation remains the same, I will not be able to serve my basic needs of the workers'."

- Chemical industry workers:

The chemical industry installations reduced their operations during the State of Emergency, affecting around 310 workers at 43 licensed factories in the Gaza Strip, particularly after the curfew was imposed and all these factories were closed. Following the easing of Covid-19 Emergency restrictions, around 240 workers returned to work in 30 factories for manufacturing cleaning chemicals and alcohol-based sanitizers necessary to combat Covid-19.”⁷

Mohammed al-Shandaghli (25), from al-Mukhabrat area in the northern Gaza City, is married, a father of one child and supports his mother. He said to PCHR's fieldworker:

“I have been working in the cleaning chemicals industry since 2007 in a small plot of land near my house and then peddle in Gaza City's neighborhoods to sell them, earning 30 shekels a day. After the

⁷ An interview with Marwah Murtaja, Director of the Federation of Chemical Industries, 07 October 2020.

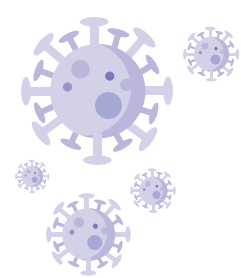
State of Emergency was declared in March, the sales significantly increased for 2 weeks ranging from 350- 450 a week. A month later, the demand decreased again, and became only high in the first week of the month when employees get paid. The curfew was later declared after many cases were detected in the Gaza Strip last August; thereby restricting my movement to peddle as usual. I had to sell only in front of my house, but the turnout was very low (around 15 shekels in some days), noting that I received USD100 allocated for workers affected under Covid-19 pandemic within the Qatari Financial Aid; however, it is a small amount of money and does not suffice my family needs of food and drinking.”

- Engineering and metallurgy industry workers:

Engineering and metallurgy industries operate with low workforce even before the Covid-19 crisis due to the deterioration of economic conditions primarily resulting from the Israeli-imposed closure and as this field is linked with the regularity of power-on hours and depends on other industries such as the food and construction industries. The metallurgy industry is also considered the infrastructure for all facilities and factories as it provides maintenance for the machines needed to operate these factories and everything related to metalwork or lathe work.

Due to State of Emergency declared following the outbreak of Covid-19, 250 registered installations suspended operations, affecting 1500 per-day workers, which is the total number of workers in the engineering and metallurgy industries. However, following the easing of Covid-19





restrictions, the metallurgy industries started to return gradually, especially those mentioned within the lockdown easing; 305 workers returned to work in 51 workshops which provide maintenance services to other sectors such as the construction and food industries and what is relevant to metallurgy works.⁸

Mohammed Hamad (53), who supports his family of 8 and lives in al-Shat'a refugee camp, said to PCHR's fieldworker:

"I am a blacksmith and have my own workshop in a building for which I pay an annual lease of "JD 1600". My 3 sons and 2 brothers work with me in the workshop and I pay each 200 shekels per week while the workshop weekly expenses are 300 shekels. Last March when the Covid-19 crisis started, I closed my workshop for two weeks, and after Covid-19 cases were detected in the Gaza Strip last year, the workshop was closed for a month. My sons, brothers and I stayed at home without any other source of income and spent all our savings. I support all my married sons and their children who have basic needs that was difficult to meet during the ongoing closure of the workshop; therefore, I had to borrow from the grocery and the pharmacy to meet our basic needs. I have not received any financial aid that would help us in fulfilling our needs while staying at home without work. After I was allowed to re-open my workshop as part of the easing of the lockdown restrictions, the crisis continued due to the poor economic conditions as most people could not pay

⁸ An interview with Mohammed al-Mansi, Director of the Engineering and Metallurgy Industries, on 09 October 2020.

instantly, negatively impacting work and the only source of income for my sons and brothers."

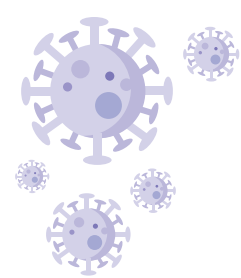
- Wood industry workers:
During the State of Emergency, all factories, and workshops for wood industries (796 carpentry shops) in the Gaza Strip were closed except for 4 factories which had goods to export. After the Government eased the restrictions, 250 workshops returned to work with a 20% production capacity, which was already low before the Covid-19 crisis due to the Israeli-imposed closure and different economic crises in the Gaza Strip.

There are 8500 workers in the wood industries; only 50 of them returned to work during the lockdown in 4 factories. Following the government's easing of restrictions, the number of workers who returned to work reached 1350 while thousands of workers in this sector were affected as well as their daily wages due to the deterioration of the economic conditions and ongoing partial lockdown. As a result, thousands of workers lost their only source of income as the carpentry sector's landlords are known for employing their relatives and sons, affecting other workers, who were let go due to the poor conditions resulting from different crises, including the Covid-19.⁹

Mahmoud 'Abdel Ghafour (34), married with 4 children living in Khan Younis, is a law and sharia graduate. Due to lack of job opportunities, he worked in carpentry, which was the job of his father. He said to PCHR's fieldworker:

⁹ An interview with Mohammed al-Rayyashi, representative of the wood industries on 08 October 2020.





“In the beginning of July 2020, I opened my own carpentry shop and rented it after taking a loan. After Covid-19 cases were detected in the Gaza Strip and lockdown measures, I closed my shop and stopped working regularly during the lockdown period which lasted for a month, rendering me without any source of income that would meet my needs, except for USD 100 I received once from the Qatari Aid that do not suffice the daily life needs of a married person with children. In October 2020 when restrictions were eased, I re-opened my shop amid people’s concerns and prevention measures that have significantly disrupted the demand for carpentry. The first installment of the loan, with which I established my own business, is due now, risking my work due to being unable to continue paying my loan and in the same time fulfilling my family’s basic needs, including food and medication.”

Ahmed al-Ramlawi (22), married and a father of a newborn living in a small house owned by his father and sheltering 16 members al-Zawaydah, said to PCHR’s fieldworker:

“I have been working in a carpentry shop for around 7 years. I work around 11 hours a day with a weekly wage of ILS 120. Since March 2020, I have worked only 2 weeks a month due to the Covid-19 crisis and accompanying conditions that have worsened my situation and made me unable to meet my family needs and supporting my father. This situation aggravated after Covid-19 infections were found in the Gaza Strip and lockdown measures were imposed to prevent the

spread of the pandemic. The shop was closed for a month, during which I did not get any money, and my debts accumulated, other than those that I should pay since I got married a year and a half ago. I also borrowed money from the neighbors to meet some basic needs for my house and baby while the owner of the shop where I work provided me only once with food supplies during the lockdown. Now, I returned to work for 2 weeks a month.”

- Construction industries’ workers:

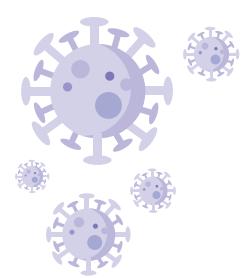
All the construction industries have been stopped working during the complete shutdown which continued for a month after founding several cases of Covid-19 inside the society, and then a limited number of these companies returned to work in low production capacity. 5,640-workers are working in the construction industries’ field; all of them were affected after declaring the state of emergency, as they were receiving per-day incomes. After reducing the shutdown procedures, 2,095 workers continued working in 575 organizations gradually within a total of 820 registered organizations, including manufacturing concretes, manholes, concrete pipes, stone blocks, tiles, interlocks, front stones, marbles, granites, and asphalt’s concretes, as well.¹⁰

Mostafa Daif Allah (25), a father of 3 children, from Bait Hanoun, north of the Gaza Strip, works at a stone blocks factory in the industrial area in the city, said to PCHR’s fieldworker that:

“I have worked in the factory for 2 years, and sometimes my

¹⁰ Interview with Eng. Farid Zaqout, Director of the Union of the Construction Factories, on 15 October 2020.





working hours may extend to be 11- working hours, in normal conditions, as I start working from 4:00 to 15:00, for 30-NIS per day. Since the complete shutdown declared, in August, the factory was completely closed, as Beit Hanoun was described as a red area “endemic area”, where curfew and shutdown imposed in most of the factories. However, after reducing the curfew’s procedures, the factory returned to work after a month, where I did not receive any income, I only received a 100-USD from the Qatar scholarship for the workers once. The 100-USD was not enough to fulfill the basic material needs of my family in addition to accomplishing the dept accumulation of the grocery, which caused the grocery’s owner to stop giving me my needs.”

Ra’fat al-Sha’er (51), a father of 6 children, living in the Brazil neighborhood in Rafah governorate, said to PCHR’s fieldworker that:

“I work in paving sector, and my daily income was about 70-NIS, even after declaring the emergency state in the Gaza Strip on March 2020, without any changes. But then, when the curfew was imposed on the city at the end of August 2020, I completely stopped from working for a month, and that led to the accumulation of debt, and the disability to pay for the house needs. Even though, I did not receive any income or any financial assist from any organization.”

- Clothing and textile industries’ workers:

Since announcing the emergency state in March 2020, most of the clothing

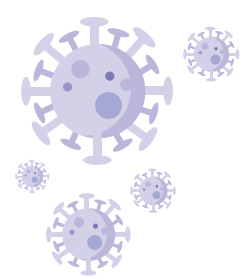
and textile’s factories completely stopped the domestic production, where the contracted factories with Israel continued working to export the protective clothing and masks to the Israeli side. After the spread of Covid-19 in the Gaza Strip, all the factories stopped from working during September 2020, due to imposing the complete shutdown. During that period, some of the factories continued working with low production capacity, as they were committed to export their products in time, but they stopped due to closing borders of the Israeli side to combat the spread of Covid-19 and the holidays.

During the closure period, the productive capacities of clothing and textile’s factories reached only 15%, then after reducing the governmental procedures, the proportion rose to reach 25% from the average of the production capacity which was reaching 40% before the Covid-19 outbreak, due to the Israeli closure and the deteriorating economic conditions in the Gaza Strip.

Before the crisis of Covid-19, 170-factories were working in the clothing and textile production sector with the total number of 6,500-workers, but during the shutdown period, only 70-factories were working with the total number of 3,000-workers, then to 2,000-workers. However, hundreds of workers stopped from working due to the deterioration of the economic situation in light of the inability to provide the operational expenses.

Due to reducing work in clothing and textile’s factories, the situations of





hundreds of workers were deteriorated, especially, when most of them are per-day¹¹ workers.

Anwar Baroud (54), a father of 7 children from Khan Yunis, told PCHR's fieldworker that:

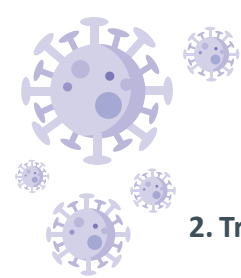
"Since 2008, I'm working in my own sewing workshop at the local free market in Khan Yunis, I pay an annual rent of 1,200-JD for the workshop. I used to own a sewing factory that contained a big number of workers, but I was forced to close it due to the closure and the export bans. Me and my son Mahmoud, a father of 2 children, managed to open this small sewing workshop, to keep our houses open and fulfill our houses' needs. However, after the state of emergency was declared on March, the daily income of the workshop decreased from 70-NIS to 30-NIS, as our work was limited to repair the clothes for the people. After imposing the complete closure in the Gaza Strip at the end of August 2020, and continued for a month, and still closed due to considering it within the scope of the stores, even after reducing the shutdown measures. I am living a financial distress, as I cannot pay rents for the municipality, and I cannot fulfill the needs of my house and my son's. Additionally, I did not receive any financial help from any source, but my son, Mahmoud, once received 100-USD from the Qatar Scholarship for the workers, which was not enough to meet our basic needs."

11 Interview with Rawan Karam, Director at Palestinian Federation Garment and Textile Industry, on 20 October 2020.

'Amer al-Zinati (50), a father of 4 children, provides support to his crippled mother, living in Beit Lahia Project, and owned a women's wear factory, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"In 1997, I opened my own sewing factory, and I passed through highs and lows. In 2007, after imposing the Israeli siege and closure on the Gaza Strip, and the banning the export to the Israeli side, I went through a financial distress as my work was limited to the local market. The daily working hours of the factory was 8 hours, as the workers' wages were within 40-NIS to 60-NIS per day. Since the state of emergency declared in March 2020, the factory was completely closed for two weeks, and then it returned to work but in a low production capacity. However, we had to reduce the labor forces, as only 50-workers out of 150-workers stayed on their jobs. We reduced our work to be only manufacturing supplies to combat the spread of Covid-19 and exporting them to Israel. On 25 August 2020, the complete shutdown imposed in the Gaza Strip, so all the factories were completely closed, and none of the workers was compensated from any source. It should be noted that the factory's monthly loses is 40,000-NIS, and I lost the ability to meet the basic needs of my family and provide help to my mother. Thus, I call upon the governmental entities to ensure the provision of a decent life to the workers".





2. Trade sector workers

The Covid-19 pandemic and its effects deepened the economic crises of the Gaza Strip residents, and negatively affected the stores and the local markets, particularly the business owners “stakeholders” who suffered major financial losses due to closing their source of incomes. Thousands of the workers in such facilities became unemployed, and lost their only source of income, and became unable to meet the major needs of their families. However, the state of emergency, curfew and economic crisis resulted from the Israeli blockade and the internal Palestinian division, caused a sharp rise in the number of the returned checks. Additionally, all of that caused a negative impact in all the economic activities, as the returned checks in the first four months of 2020 were (3,702), estimated at (13.7) million-USD, and then rose to be (6,477) returned checks, estimated at (21.7) million USD.¹²

Naser Abu Nada (59), a father of 6 sons, and has 2 grandsons, living in al-Jnenah neighborhood in Rafah, said to PCHR’s fieldworker that:

“I work with two of my sons in selling accessories in the local markets in the Gaza Strip, after declaring the state of emergency on March 2020, all the local markets were closed for the purpose of combating the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. Me and my sons lost the source of our incomes, as our net profit were between 2,000 to 3,000 NIS per-month, and that number rises in winter, holidays, and school seasons. In august 2020, after declaring the shutdown

¹² Interview with Maher al-Tabba’, Manager of Public Relations & Media at Gaza Chamber of Commerce & Industry, on 30 October 2020.

decision of continue closing the local markets, I became unable to buy food for me and my sons, in addition to the inability to pay for my sons’ education, as an accumulation of dept reached 8,000 NIS for traders that I cannot pay in the meantime. During all this period, I once received a 100-USD from the Qatar Scholarship, which was not enough to cover my needs during quarantine especially that my sons did not receive any aids from any source, and they are under my responsibility.”

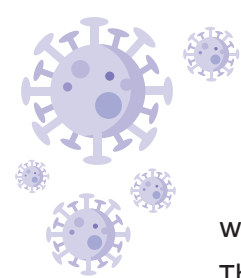
Mohammed Hajj (53), a father of 11 sons, living in Nuseirat refugee camp, and works as a trader of food supplies, said to PCHR’s fieldworker that:

“By the end of August 2020, as Covid-19 spread in the Gaza Strip, I stopped transferring the main goods for restaurants due to closing the restaurants decision, in addition to the inability to move freely between the governments due to the division procedures, so my work was reduced to be in limited areas and for the major goods only. However, my monthly income dropped, as most of the supermarkets were taking goods without paying, due to the critical financial situation and the limited working hours in light of cutting and ceasing the salaries of the PA employees.”

3. Workers in tourism and travel companies sector

Since the state of emergency declared on March 2020, 11 travel companies out of 62 were stopped from working, as 4 companies out of 75 companies,





working in Hajj and Umrah “pilgrimage” field, were completely stopped. Thus, 400 workers lost their jobs and their source of incomes. In August 2020, since the spread of Covid-19 pandemic in the Gaza Strip and imposing the shutdown, most of the companies were closed, and their activities were completely stopped, but some of them returned to work after reducing the shutdown measures.

The losses of the tourism and travel companies were estimated at two million USD including cancelling Hajj and Umrah season of 2020, in addition to cancelling the visas of traders and students. 100 visa-applications were submitted every day, but due to closing borders in purpose of combating the spread of Covid-19, all these transactions were stopped.

Expectations of Hajj and Umrah season of this year were about the travelling of 15,000 people compared with the season of 2019, when 12,000 travelers went for Umrah. Furthermore, 3,300 travelers were expected to travel for Hajj season before it was cancelled¹³.

Abdullah al-Balbaisi (53), father of two sons; one of them got married and have a child, living in Rafah, said to PCHR’s fieldworker that:

“I own a tourism and pilgrimage office in Rafah, and I pay a rent of 2,000-JD every year. After declaring the state of emergency in March 2020, my work was completely stopped, as the borders were closed, Hajj and Umrah seasons were cancelled, resulted in huge

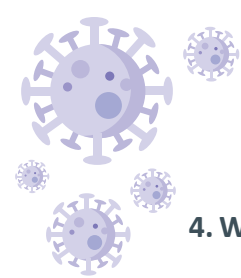
material losses which forced me to stop paying the salaries of the workers in my office, in addition to the inability to pay the rent and the annual license of the office. In the meantime, I lost the ability to meet the basic needs of my family in light of losing the one and only source of income and did not receive any financial aid. However, I am surprised that none of the governmental bodies is showing any responsibility for the pilgrimage offices in light of this economic crisis.”

Kamal Tafish (32), director of tourism and pilgrimage company in Jabalia refugee camp, contained 6 employees, salaries between 700-1000 NIS, said to PCHR’s fieldworker that:

“Since the state of emergency was declared in the Gaza Strip, the work of our company was stopped, and the salaries of the employees were cut, due to closing borders and cancelling the pilgrimage seasons of this year. After declaring the complete shutdown and curfew in August 2020, the company was completely closed and that caused financial losses of thousands of dollars. During that period, we were not compensated or even receiving any financial aids. However, this year is the worst ever, due to the lack of income; as the bad seasons that we passed through over the years were, at least, could cover the worker’s salaries.”

¹³ Interview with Waseem Mushtaha, **Head of Palestinian Tourism and Travel Agency**, on 01 October 2020.





4. Workers in contracting sector:

Contracting companies were stopped after stopping all the construction projects during the state of emergency and shutdown, which obstructed the financial cycle of all companies, as 14,000 workers were affected due to the inability of their companies to cover their salaries and wages.

Before the Covid-19 outbreak, the production capacity in the contracting sector reached 20%, but the shutdown worsened the situation of the construction sector and contracting companies.

As all contractors and sector employees are registered with the government for licensing purposes, they were deprived aid for being employees in the construction sector, which employees roughly 14 thousand workers. Works were suspended for at least a month where workers did not receive any wages, and upon the partial return to work their wages suffered deductions.¹⁴

Khaled Nofal (53), a father of 10 sons, living in al-Nuseirat refugee camp, owns a general trading, contracting, and selling building materials company with his brother, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"My brother and I pay an annual rent of 3,000 JD for our store, and 2,000 JD for our stone blocks factory as our weekly sales in normal days reached 1,000 NIS. We work in the factory with our sons and two workers: their daily wages range between 20-50 NIS,

depending on the sales. After the state of emergency was declared in March 2020, the weekly sales were decreased by 50%, which caused a large deficit in covering the payments and rents. During the complete closure, from August 2020 until the end of September, our living conditions were worsened as never before, as my brother and I remained incapable to meet the needs of our families due to stopping our one and only source of income. Furthermore, we did not receive any financial aid from any source."

Diaa' Aqel (22), married and living in al-Nuseirat refugee camp, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"I work in a general trade and contracting company, which included a building stones factory in al-Zawayda area, and a store in al-Nuseirat, in total rent of 8,300JD per-year. After the state of emergency was declared in March 2020, the sales were significantly decreased. In August 2020, the company was completely stopped, and the wages of the workers were declined, as my weekly income became 150-NIS out of 250-NIS. The sales are still low even after reducing the curfew procedures, as the sales do not exceed 60% of the sales before the Covid-19 crisis. My father, the owner of the company, cannot cover the wages of the workers, payments, fees, checks and rent of the company".

¹⁴ Interview with Eng. Osama Kuhail, President of the Palestinian Contractors Union, on 22 October 2020.





5. Workers in transportation sector (drivers)

Across all the Gaza Strip's governorates, 20,000 Palestinians are taxi drivers, and most of them were affected by Covid-19 outbreak and the separation between governorates in order to combat the outbreak of the epidemic. In August and September, 90% of the total number of drivers stayed at home, as they were working on cars and buses that they don't own, so some drivers who owned their cars just started working only inside their regions with limited financial returns which did not meet their personal needs, car premiums, or even fuel.

This kind of workers did not receive the proper support, which formed the most prominent category of those affected. Some workers once received \$100, as aids from the Qatari scholarship, and some workers did not receive the planned assistance to those affected by the Coronavirus, so they demanded the Ministry of Transport in the Gaza Strip to reduce the license fee for this year, as they did not work most days of the year. Additionally, most of them became poor and incapable to meet the basic needs of food and medicine for their families.¹⁵

Ahmed al-Neirab (30), a father of a child, and providing help to his parents, living in Jabalia, and works as a taxi driver for 8 years, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"I work as a Taxi driver on a car that belongs to someone else; my daily

¹⁵ Interview with Eyad Mughafel, member of the Board of Directors of the Drivers Syndicate, on 23 October 2020.

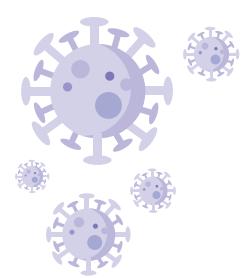
income was 50-NIS per day in 16 consecutive working-hours. My work was abstracted for 2 weeks after declaring the state of emergency in March 2020, which financially affected me, as I am supporting my parents and my disabled brother. In addition to that, I don't have a fixed or stable income and I have payments of 50-JD monthly debt, for 6 years, for an organization that facilitated my marriage. After the imposing the complete shutdown and governments' division in August 2020, all the Taxi drivers were prevented from working, which worsened our situation. After reducing the shutdown measures, I returned to work only 12 hours for only 20-NIS per day, which is not enough to fulfill the basic needs of the house.

I once received 100-USD as aid from the Qatari scholarship to those affected by the Covid-19, which is not enough to cover the daily living expenses. I call upon the governmental bodies to provide a compensation fund for the workers of the daily wages to support them and enable them to live in dignity."

Ahmed Abu Dgheim (18), a father of a child, living in the administrative district of Rafah, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"I work as a taxi driver on a car belonging to someone else, between Rafah and Gaza, from Saturday to Thursday. My work continued normally until declaring the state of emergency in August 2020, when the shutdown and separation procedures were imposed. My work was completely stopped for more than a month; I stayed at





home with no income to cover the needs and expenses of my family, the most important of which was the medicine of my ill father and my sister with Down syndrome. I did not receive any financial aids during that period, which forced me to debt purchase the needs of my house from the grocery and the pharmacy.”

6. Workers in private education sector:

Since the state of emergency was declared in March 2020, all the kindergartens and private schools were stopped, which affected 15,000 workers in 723-kindergartens and 25-private school. 32 kindergartens were completely closed due to inability to pay the rent, as some of them were forced to sell the furniture to cover the rents.

Private schools and kindergartens were affected even before Covid-19 crisis, due to the deterioration of the economic situation in the Gaza Strip, Israeli closure imposed 14-years ago, the internal division and the cutting the salaries of the PA employees; which created a crisis in covering the wages of the workers, where the parents only pay 30% of the annual payments in 2019. It should be noted that the monthly payments for the child estimated between 80-150 NIS in most of the kindergartens.

Most of these organizations are women-led enterprises with loans. Any interruptions in their function has varied consequences on children, owners, and workers, who often receive wages far below the minimum wage.¹⁶

¹⁶ Interview with Thoraya Ammar, media representative of workers in kindergartens and private schools, on 11 November 2020.

Hiyam Ahmed (30), from Khan Yunis, living with her family of 6 members, said to PCHR’s fieldworker that:

“I work in a kindergarten with an annual contract of 9-Months for 560-NIS per month. Since the state of emergency was declared in March 2020, my work was abstracted, and my salary was cut. During summer months, I worked in giving online classes and following-up with my students through social media, but no wages were received. In August 2020, I returned to work, but after declaring cases of Covid-19 out of the quarantining facilities, and imposing the shutdown, my work abstracted again, and I stayed at home and received only half of my monthly salary of August. However, I did not receive any financial aid during that period”.

7. Workers in the fishing sector (fishermen and relevant jobs)

4,160 fishermen and 700 workers in professions associated with the fishing sector, as manufacturing or boat-maintenance, wholesale and retail sale of fish, and cleaning fish, in all the governorates of the Gaza Strip¹⁷.

After declaring the state of emergency to combat the spread of Covid-19, fishermen were suffering from the Israeli naval blockade, limiting the fishing areas, and the Israeli attacks against them. The naval blockade prevented the fishermen from fishing freely as they allowed fishermen to sail within 03-15 nautical miles and closing the sea for over than 20-times during 2020. As a result, the fishermen and workers in professions associated with the fishing

¹⁷ Interview with Nizar Ayyash, head of the Palestinian fishermen syndicate in Gaza, on 01 December 2020.





sector's social and economic conditions were deteriorated. It is estimated that fishermen and workers in professions that are associated with fishing currently support 27,702 other persons (based on an average household size of 5.7 people in Gaza City). Furthermore, the rare occurrence of fish in fishing zone where Israeli authorities allow fishing caused fishermen not to fish daily. According to estimations of the Fishermen's Syndicate, half of fishermen (only 2,000) registered fish on a daily basis while the other half work sporadically, around once a week or a month, because the income they generate does not cover their operating costs.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the declared state of emergency negatively affected fishing sector in the Gaza Strip and caused heavy losses for fishermen due to the suspension of their work during the curfew, the suspension of dozens of local and international projects supporting the fishermen, the ban of fish export abroad, and the weak purchasing power of fish despite its low prices. It should be noted that 95% of Gaza's fishermen live below the extreme poverty line. Zakaria Baker, Coordinator of Fishermen Committees in the Union of Agricultural Work Committee (UAWC), emphasized to PCHR's fieldworker that fishing is no longer business as usual, in the best case scenario, fishermen earn NIS 600 (\$170) per a month, because the amount of fish production reduced to less than the half compared to years before 2006 and fuel and fishing spare parts' costs increased.¹⁸

Foad al-'Amoudi (58), married with 10 sons and living in Khan Yunis, said to

¹⁸ An interview with Zakaria Baker, Coordinator of Fishermen Committees in the UAWC, on 02 December 2020.

PCHR's fieldworker that:

"I am a fisherman working with 3 other fishermen on the same canoe in the Gaza Sea. Our work was adversely affected due to the restrictions imposed to curb the outbreak of Covid-19, which have had a negative impact on citizen's purchasing power, causing weak turnout to buy fish, in addition to the Israeli- imposed restrictions and their recurrent chasing to us in the sea. In the first wave of Covid-19 state of emergency, which lasted from mid-March to end-May 2020, there was no full restriction on our movement, which enabled us to move and fish freely. This status continued until the closure of restaurants and coincided with citizens' weak turnout to buy fish, which minimized our profits. In addition, our suffering has increased, because Palestinian fishing boats were chased in the sea and fishing area was reduced by Israeli authorities several times during the second lockdown period, which came after Covid-19 cases have recorded in the Gaza Strip. The situation has aggravated, as we became unable to fish or reach the sea due to the imposed-restrictions on movement and the government orders to close the sea. Our work has resumed after easing the curfew measures while citizens' turnout to buy fish was still weak because of the ongoing closure of the restaurants. Due to this, we were forced to sell fish at low prices, which do not meet the minimum requirements of three families."





8. Workers in the Hairdressing Sector

Hairdressers in the Gaza Strip are about 8000 workers; 3000 are working in beauty salons and barber shops. Since the beginning of preventive measures taken by the Gaza government in March 2020 because of the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, hairdressers have suffered from a low level of daily income as people were no longer heading to beauty salons or barbershops fearing of being infected with Covid-19. Compared to previous years, this year has witnessed a recession regarding the income of beauty salons and barbershops, especially in the holidays and weddings seasons, which were considered as a golden opportunity to earn money every year.

After Covid-19 cases were recorded inside the Gaza Strip on 24 August 2020, all beauty salons and barbershops in the Gaza Strip governorates were closed for 20 days. On 17 September 2020, some hairdressers living in areas classified as green were allowed to open their beauty salons or barbershops. Thus, a large number of beauty salons and barbershops were closed, and their work was suspended, because they are located in endemic areas classified as “Red”. Due to this, at least 2000 workers, who were working in beauty salons and barbershops, were let go due to the imposed-curfew and ongoing recording of Covid-19 cases in the Gaza Strip. Also, hairdressers did not receive any support from the government or any other body, noting that they are classified as daily wage earners¹⁹.

Mohammed Abu Halawa, married with 3 sons and living in al-Saftawi

¹⁹ An interview with Mohammed Bakir, the media spokesperson for Beauty Salon and Hairdressers Workers' Union in Gaza, on 06 January 2020.

neighborhood in northern Gaza Strip, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

“My only source of income for my family is hairdressing. I have been working in this profession when I was 16 year old. My daily income is estimated at NIS 70 in normal condition. The last four years have witnessed unstable economic situations due to the public servants' salaries deduction, as some customers used to go to the barbershops but offered postponed payments while others headed to buy a Shaver to reduce the hairdressing costs. As a result, my daily income has reduced to NIS 30. The situation got worse due to the Covid-19 state of emergency, as the expenses designated for sterilizers and one- time use tools have increased in an attempt to encourage the customers to shave in a safe environment, noting that shaving prices are still the same with increasing the operating costs. In the light of the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in the Gaza Strip and the imposed-curfew on 25 August 2020, I closed my barbershop for a month without having any other source of income for my family. I lived in a very difficult economic situation, especially that barbershops are considered the most dangerous places that may spread the pandemic among customers. I received a one-time financial assistance of \$ 100 from the Qatar Aid Grant, which was insufficient to cover my family expenses during the full lockdown.”





9. Workers in Hotels, Restaurants and Tourism Sector

Hotels, restaurants, wedding halls, beach resorts, and cafes have suffered heavy economic losses due to the Covid-19 state of emergency and the imposed-curfew to curb the outbreak of the pandemic. All tourism facilities were closed, but in varying levels, as some of which, such as restaurants, were allowed to resume their work while other facilities are still denied working. As a result, over 8000 workers registered in the hotels and tourism sector and at least 2500-3000 workers in beach resorts were affected. All of them lost their source of income as daily wage workers receiving from NIS 40 to NIS 70 per day. Furthermore, at least 1000 workers resumed their works in tourism sector after easing the curfew measures; all of them are working in restaurants to prepare customers' orders. Since the beginning of October 2020, the number of workers in tourism sector has gradually increased to 5000 after easing the lockdown by the competent authorities.

Furthermore, chalets, which are considered within the scope of the tourism sector, were also affected due the lockdown imposed in its season. At least 1000 workers are working in 430 officially registered chalets. All the tourism sector facilities are subjected to a complete closure and a conditional opening²⁰.

Fares Enteez (37), married with 4 sons and living in al-Tuffah neighborhood in Gaza City, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

²⁰ An interview with ‹Abdu Ghoneim, Head of the Palestinian Committee for Hotels, Restaurants and Tourism Services, on 10 October 2020.

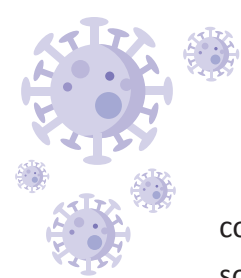
"I work as a manager of a cafe located off Gaza Sea. I rented the land from the Gaza municipality with annual contract and I paid \$ 7000 to the municipality. I have 13 workers in the café and their daily wage ranging from NIS 30 to NIS 50. Before the outbreak of Covid-19, I have earned NIS 4000 per a month. My café was closed for 2 months after the state of emergency was declared in March 2020. As a result, my workers and I lost our source of income. The lockdown coincided with the season that Gazans used to go in it to cafes and sea. I wait summer season every year because people's attendance to cafes in winter is very poor. Now, I am afraid that I will not be able to fulfill the cafe obligations if the situation continues like this. The workers in the café and I became unable to meet our families' needs, because the income is very limited, and does not meet minimum needs. I would like to note that I did not receive any financial assistance during the lockdown."

10. Workers in Agriculture

At least 35,000 workers of both sexes in the Gaza Strip are working in agriculture. Palestinian farmers suffer from difficult and exceptional circumstances even before the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. These are the most affected category by the Israeli-imposed closure in the Gaza Strip, due to the ban on the export of agricultural products abroad.

The losses of Palestinian farmers during the lockdown imposed to curb the outbreak of Covid-19 were estimated at \$ 10 million. As a result, the living





conditions of 60% of farmers have aggravated, because they lost their only source of income after their work was suspended. This situation continued even after the easing of curfew measures by local authorities because Palestinian farmers are unable to export their agricultural products and only sell these products in Gaza's markets. Due to this, farmers were forced to sell with low prices.

Palestinian farmers call upon the government to establish a national fund to compensate farmers, who are considered a cornerstone of the Palestinian economy, and provide Gaza's markets with food and agricultural products.²¹

Akram Abu Khowsa, married with 6 sons and living in al-Sifa area, northwest of Beit Lahia, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"I work in my father's plot of land (15 dunums) located in al-Sifa area, northwest of Beit Lahia, from 30 years ago. Agriculture is considered the only source of income for my father, brothers, and I to meet the needs of our families comprised of 30 persons. Each one of us earns NIS 800 per a month. I closed my farm when the state of emergency was declared in March 2020. I was forced to stay home for 2 weeks without work. After that, our work was resumed with taking into consideration the preventive measures. On 25 August 2020, after the first Covid-19 case was recorded inside the Gaza Strip, my farm was closed again. The lockdown affected the selling of our products and prevented us from planting new crops. The Ministry

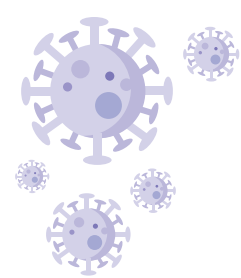
²¹ An interview with Alaa al-Amour, Head of Trade Union of Workers in Agriculture and Farming, on 12 October 2020.

of Agriculture gave us a plan to work in the case of spreading the Covid-19 pandemic in the Gaza Strip. The work plan was activated in the fourth day of spreading the pandemic. We were allowed to go to our agricultural lands, work in specific times and sell our products in specific places. Sales were very limited due to the closure of markets. I also I incurred heavy losses due to the spoiling of a large quantities of frozen strawberries that I kept them in a huge fridges in our farm to sell it in the summer season for resorts, restaurants and hotels, which were closed during the curfew. I had to borrow some materials from the merchants at an amount of NIS 25,000, in a hope that the next strawberry season will be successful, and the strawberry export will be allowed. Now, I hardly meet the need of my family as the income is very limited, noting that I did not receive any financial assistance from anybody."

'Abdul Latif Habeeb (50), a farmer from al-Shuja'yia neighborhood, said to PCHR's fieldworker that:

"I rented an agricultural filed (7 dunums) located in eastern Gaza City, at an amount of JD 350 annually. I plant it with vegetables. After the declaration of the lockdown measures to curb the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, I was in very difficult living conditions as I live in an endemic area and I could not go to my agricultural land because areas were separated from each other. Later, I was allowed to go my land. I suffer now from transporting the crops, because vegetables market was transferred from Feras Market to Tal al-Hawa Market,





which increased the costs of transportation. Also, the daily income was minimized due to the low prices of vegetables compared to the period before the Covid-19. Sometimes, I was forced to sell in low prices. I did not receive any compensation for my losses or financial assistance. I was forced to borrow money to meet the needs of my family.”

III. GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT GAZA’S WORKERS HURT BY THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

PCHR has monitored the government interventions to support workers who lost their sources of income. The Palestinian government, through the “Waqfat Ezz” Fund – Ministry of Social Development, has released a one-time relief payment of NIS 500-700 to 5,000 workers from the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian government, through the “World Bank” has released a relief payment of NIS 700 to 1000 workers, according to Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions data. Also, the Gaza authorities, mainly the Ministry of Labor, released a one-time relief payment of USD 100 for 81,850 workers affected by the pandemic in four installments. According to Eng. Maher Abu-Raya, Director General of Employment at the Ministry of Labor, said that the Gaza government’s relief payment was funded by the Gaza-Ministry of Finance, the Qatari fund, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

1. Relief payments from the Palestinian Government in Ramallah for Workers Hurt by the Coronavirus Pandemic

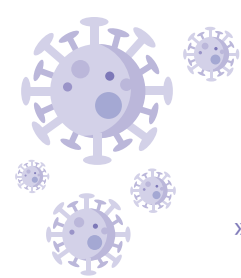
The Palestinian government, through the “Waqfat Ezz” Fund – Ministry of Social Development, has released a one-time relief payment of NIS 500-700 for 6000 workers affected by the pandemic in one installment. The Ministry of Labor, through the “World Bank” has released a one-time relief payment of NIS 700 for 1000 Gaza’s workers affected by the pandemic.

» A one-time relief payment of NIS 500-700 for 5000 workers

In June 2020, the Ministry of Labor, through the “Waqfat Ezz” Fund, has released a one-time relief payment of NIS 500-700 for 60,000 workers affected by the pandemic. This relief payment included all the Palestinian governorates. According to Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions data, most of the relief payments were granted to the West Bank workers (60%), while Gaza’s workers received (4%) of these relief payments (i.e. 5,000 workers were registered through Gaza’s staff working in the Ministry of Social Development-Ramallah.

“Waqfat Ezz” Fund is a national fund that was established on 02 April 2020, by a decision of the Palestinian Prime Minister, Dr. Muhammad Shtayyeh, upon President Mahmoud Abbas directives. The fund aims to mobilize national efforts to contribute to confronting the repercussions of the spread of the Coronavirus crisis in Palestine and its economic, social and health dimensions. The fund is supervised by a board of directors comprised of 30 Palestinian personalities.





» A one-time relief payment of NIS 700 for 1,000 workers

The Ministry of Labor has released a one-time relief payment of NIS 700 for 1,000 workers affected by the pandemic²². In December 2020, the Ministry announced that it will release a one-time relief payment of NIS 700 for 68,000 workers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, who lost their work due to the pandemic. On 21 December 2020, the Minister of Labor, Dr. Nasri Abu Jaish, has announced that the ministry started to release the first relief payment of NIS 700 for 14,000 workers hit by the Coronavirus Pandemic in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Also, the Director General of Employment at the Ministry of Labor Ramy Mahdawi, pointed out in a press statement on 19 December 2020 that these relief payments estimated at \$ 30 million provided by the World Bank within a project in partnership with the Ministry of Finance to curb Covid-19 pandemic. He added that the project will be implemented by the Ministries of Labor and Social Development. According to the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions, the number of Gaza's beneficiaries from the first relief payment was 1000 workers, and this is a limited number compared to the West Bank's beneficiaries.

2. Relief payments from the Palestinian Government in Gaza for Workers Hurt by the Coronavirus Pandemic

The Gaza authorities, mainly the Ministry of Labor, released a one-time relief payment of USD 100 for 81,850 workers affected by the pandemic

²² An interview with Sami Al-Amssi, Head of Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions, on 29 December 2020. The number of Gaza's beneficiaries from this relief payment could not be obtained from official sources in the Ministry of Labor - Ramallah, as some officials refused to provide any information, as well as the Ministry of Labor did not issue any statements with regard to granting the relief payments for Gaza workers.

in four installments. The Gaza government's relief payment estimated at USD 8,250,000 was funded by the Gaza-Ministry of Finance, the Qatari fund, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)²³. The installments were as follows:

» A one-time relief payment of USD 100 for 10,000 workers

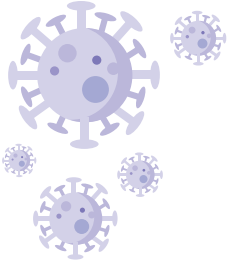
In April 2020, the Gaza Ministry of Labor has published a link on its website for worker hit by the Coronavirus Pandemic to register on it. Through this link, the ministry obtained a database for all affected workers. The most prominent sectors were: kindergarten, tourism, hotels, transportation, and construction workers. The registration of the affected workers was as part of the implementation of the Supreme Committee of Governmental Follow-up and Emergency's efforts to support 10,000 workers, noting that about 130,000 affected persons had registered. At least 38,000 affected workers were nominated after all the names were sorted. The most affected workers were selected according to the Ministry of Labor criteria; 10,000 of them received a one-time relief payment of USD 100. The total amount of the relief payment approved by the government emergency committee was USD one million.

» A three-time relief payment of USD 100 for 1500 workers funded by the ICRC.

In May 2020, the Gaza Ministry of Labor, through the ICRC, has released a relief payment of USD 450,000 for 1500 beneficiaries; each one has received USD 300 over three months. The beneficiaries were selected

²³ An interview with Eng. Maher Abu-Raya, Director General of Employment at the Ministry of Labor, on 10 November 2020.





according to the Ministry of Labor criteria, in addition to those working in the private education sector.

» **A one-time relief payment of USD 100 for 70,000 workers funded by the Qatari fund**

In September 2020, the Gaza Ministry of Labor, through the Qatari fund, has released a relief payment of USD 7 million for 70,000 beneficiaries; each one has received USD 100. The beneficiaries were selected according to the Ministry of Labor criteria, in addition to those working in economic sector and affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic.

» **A one-time relief payment of USD 200 for 350 workers funded by ICRC**

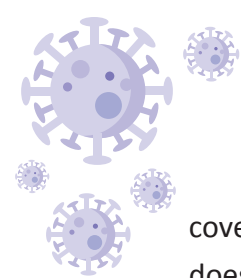
In November 2020, the Gaza Ministry of Labor, through the ICRC, has released a relief payment of USD 70,000 for 350 beneficiaries; each one has received USD 200. The beneficiaries were selected according to the Ministry of Labor criteria, in addition to those working in the private education sector.

Tables shows the Gaza Ministry of Labor’s relief payment installments for workers hurt by Coronavirus Pandemic

#	relief payment	Funder	Beneficiaries	Number of beneficiaries	The duration of benefit (month)	The beginning of benefit	Total of beneficiaries	Funding valuation
1	relief payment of USD 100	Government-Ministry of Finance	Worker Hurt by Coronavirus Pandemic	10,000	1	April	10,000	1,000,000
2	relief payment of USD 100	ICRC	Worker Hurt by Coronavirus Pandemic and those working in private education sector	1,500	3	May	1,500	450,000
3	relief payment of USD 100	the Qatari fund	Worker Hurt by Coronavirus Pandemic	70,000	1	September	70,000	7,000,000
4	relief payment of USD 200	ICRC	Worker Hurt by Coronavirus Pandemic and those working in private education sector	350	1	November	350	70,000
Total cost/ beneficiaries from the relief payment							81,850	8,520,000

It is clear from the above that government action, both by the Palestinian Government and by the Gaza authorities, to relieve the pandemic’s negative impact on the Gaza Strip’s workers during the declared state of emergency to curb the outbreak of Covid-19 do not meet their minimum needs and did not





cover all affected workers. Also, the fact that these were one-time payments does not support workers' livelihoods, especially that they have been out of work for a lengthy period.

Furthermore, there was a significant gap and a clear imbalance in the distribution of relief payment provided for worker by the Palestinian government according to the areas. Less than 5% of the total relief payment was granted to Gaza workers, while over 95% of the relief payment to West Bank workers.

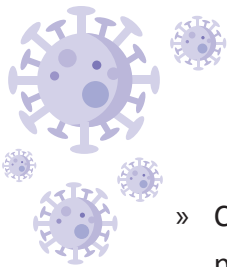
Moreover, government bodies have not clarified a clear mechanism to distribute the relief payment for worker, including identifying clear criteria for the selection of workers who benefit from the relief payment, the body authorized for selecting those workers, and the amount of relief payment designated for supporting workers. Also, when the workers benefiting from the relief payment were selected, there was no coordination with any bodies in the Gaza Strip, such as the Gaza Ministry of Labor, which has a database for all the Gaza workers, trade and labor unions, and civil institutions.

Recommendations

In light of its fear of deteriorating living conditions for the Gaza Strip workers, especially per-day workers, in the case of a prolonged government-imposed restriction to curb the spread of the coronavirus, including nighttime curfew and weekend shutdowns, PCHR:

- » Believes that the Israeli-imposed closure on the Gaza Strip has led to this catastrophic situation, and the international community bears responsibility for the continuation of the closure for 14 years, due to its utter failure to take effective measures to end the closure, which encouraged Israel to act as a State above the law and to perpetrate further violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law;
- » Calls on the Palestinian government to create clear mechanisms characterized by fairness, integrity, and transparency for the relief of the Gaza Strip workers.
- » Calls for expanding the scope of support for workers affected by the pandemic, as the support should include all workers in all sectors, especially daily workers. Thus, we can ensure that workers enjoy a decent standard of living and are able to provide their basic needs.
- » Calls upon the Palestinian government to find alternatives and solutions to help the affected workers; prominently the government should apply the Labor Law as a legal umbrella to preserve workers' rights during these compelling circumstances; also, governmental support should be given to affected companies and organizations to be able to fulfill their duties towards their employees;





- » Calls upon the Palestinian government to follow up on the commitment of private companies and organizations to paying workers' wages during the lockdown, as stipulated in Article 38 of the Labor Law, which remains in force during the declared state of emergency, while underlining the importance of government support to affected companies and organizations to be able to fulfill their duties to their employees;
- » Calls for activating the Social Security Institution and enrolling all workers in private organizations and companies among the beneficiaries to ensure the social security of workers.
- » Calls for the importance of cooperation between the ministry of labor, employers, and workers in order to find quick solutions that reduce losses as much as possible, preserve the continuation of life and eliminate the spread of poverty and unemployment caused by the state of emergency.
- » Calls for the localization of assistance through the establishment of a compensation fund for those affected by the pandemic, whether workers or employers, with transparent criteria to ensure that all affected workers receive compensation; and
- » Calls for reviewing the financial and economic policies followed by the government over many years, drawing on the current experience that has led to this tragic situation. This requires the government to overcome the obstacles regarding the continued employment of workers by employers through reducing or removing tax duties in order to ensure the minimum economic sustainability.