

The Call Center for Foreign Workers

Established in the Framework
of Bilateral Agreements for
Foreign Worker Recruitment

Data for 2023



רשות האוכלוסין וההגירה
Population & Immigration Authority
سلطة السكان والهجرة



Introductory Statement by the Director of the Bilateral Agreements Division

The Foreign Workers Call Center (hereafter "the Call Center") was established in 2012 by the Population and Immigration Authority in collaboration with CIMI as part of Israel's bilateral agreements, with the aim of providing foreign workers with professional and efficient responses to their various inquiries during their stay in Israel.

Over the years, the activities of the Call Center expanded to include workers recruited under bilateral agreements from additional countries and employment sectors, as well as foreign workers recruited to work in Israel outside its bilateral agreements. In the course of 2023, the Call Center undertook several initiatives to improve responses to inquiries and complaints, including a transition to an innovative system that shortens response times and enhances monitoring. In addition, we expanded the dissemination of information on workers' rights to new arrivals.

The events of October 7 impacted the entire population of Israel, including foreign workers. The Call Center realized the great importance of providing services at this time of crisis and created tools allowing immediate response to types of inquiries we had never previously encountered – requests by workers to be evacuated from settlements where a massacre had taken place, requests for basic equipment for workers who had fled, provision of emergency psychological support, requests to leave Israel, and more.

Beginning in the morning hours of October 7, the Call Center opened a hotline for workers in the Gaza Envelope region, as well as in the rest of the country, and put out rules and safety regulations while expanding the Call Center work hours.

The ability of foreign workers to turn, in the midst of this crisis, to the Call Center and receive immediate assistance was roundly praised by the various countries whose nationals work in Israel, again demonstrating the dire necessity of our services.

At this time, we continue to pray for the welfare and return of all the hostages, both Israeli and foreign, and for the restoration of peace and security to our country.

Respectfully,
Shirly Raisin Sasson

2023 in Numbers



16,548 foreign workers arrived in Israel as part of the country's bilateral agreements



7,504 inquiries were fielded by the Call Center



4,394 workers contacted the Call Center



361 new workers entered the country in late December 2023 as part of the agreement with Sri Lanka in the agriculture sector



\$173,000,000 in illegal recruitment fees are estimated to have been saved thanks to bilateral agreements

The Call Center as a Source of Information for Foreign Workers

In addition to fielding inquiries, the Call Center seeks to broaden the knowledge base of foreign worker populations on a number of topics.

1. Conducting proactive surveys among workers with the aim of learning about various trends and phenomena and in order to improve response services;
2. Providing workers with important information in their native language regarding their employment and stay in Israel, as well as their rights and obligations in the workplace, through text messages, customized apps, and social media networks;
3. Meeting new workers arriving at Ben-Gurion Airport;
4. Providing orientation for new workers in Israel through customized apps.

Background: Bilateral Agreements for the Recruitment of Foreign Workers¹

The bilateral agreements signed by Israel for the recruitment of foreign workers are intended to promote the recruitment of skilled and professional workers while putting an end to the phenomenon of illegal recruitment fees, protecting workers' rights, and preventing modern-day slavery and human trafficking. Over the years, the State of Israel has signed a number of such agreements with various countries.²

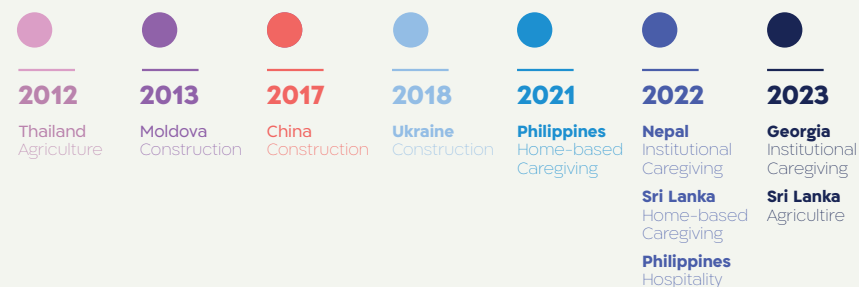
The Israeli Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA), responsible for implementing the bilateral agreements for recruiting workers, collaborated with these countries to recruit about 109,500 skilled and professional workers, while protecting their rights. In 2023, PIBA implemented agreements with eight countries in five employment sectors. At this time, negotiations are ongoing with additional countries.

The bilateral agreements have significantly reduced the collection of illegal recruitment fees, and, as a result, the cost of arriving in Israel has dropped from tens of thousands of dollars to several hundred dollars paid legally (covering flight expenses, medical examinations, and documents). As a result of the agreements, to this day a sum of nearly \$722,000,000^{3*} has been saved in the sectors covered by the agreements (agriculture, construction, and caregiving).

The **Center for International Migration and Integration (CIMI), founded by JDC-Israel**, operates in collaboration with PIBA and other governmental and non-governmental organizations in the countries of origin. As part of its role, the organization assists in advertising the possibility of coming to work in Israel under bilateral agreements, selecting suitable workers, and coordinating their arrival in Israel. CIMI also provides guidance and information to workers regarding their rights.

* The computation of recruitment fees saved under the agreements does not include fees that could have been saved by 3,431 workers arriving from Moldova and Ukraine, due to a lack of data on the fees paid by such workers prior to the agreements.

Dates of Implementation of Bilateral Agreements between Israel and other Countries**



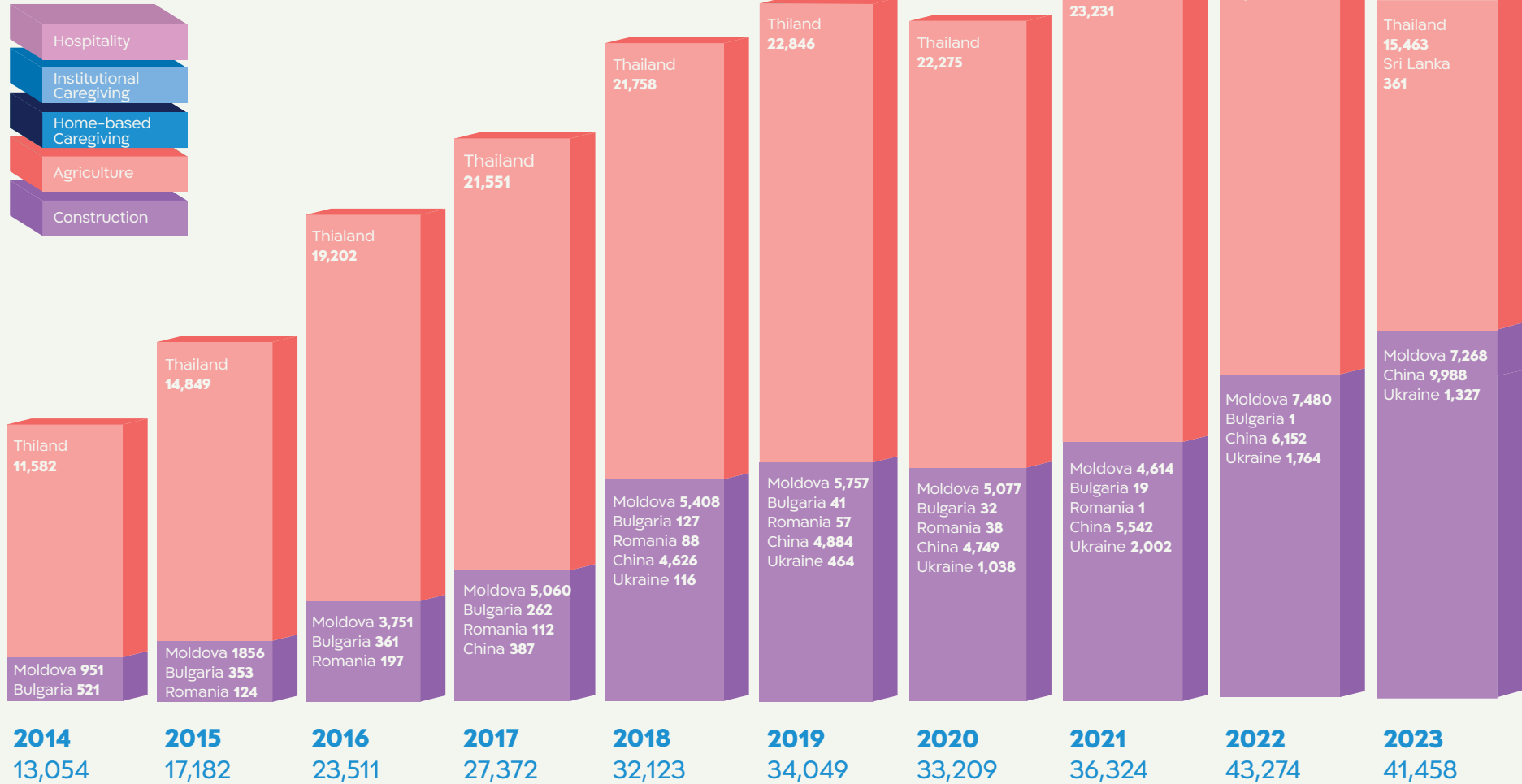
About CIMI

As part of Israel's bilateral agreements, the Call Center for Migrant Workers was founded in July 2012 to provide foreign workers with a channel for filing complaints in their native languages, as well as to keep workers informed of their rights immediately upon their arrival in Israel. The Call Center serves foreign workers arriving in Israel under bilateral agreements, as well as foreign workers employed in the construction sector by foreign contractors* permitted to operate in the country and to recruit workers.⁴ In addition, since the outbreak of the Iron Swords War, services have been provided to foreign workers arriving in Israel through private agencies. The Call Center is operated by CIMI for the Population and Immigration Authority. This booklet presents data collected since 2014, when the computerized system was launched. The system enables the Call Center to route complaints to the different units and government ministries handling worker inquiries and to collect and analyze relevant data.⁵

* As of the end of 2023, about 6,200 foreign workers from China and Turkey were residing in Israel. These workers were subject to the regulations of foreign contractors.

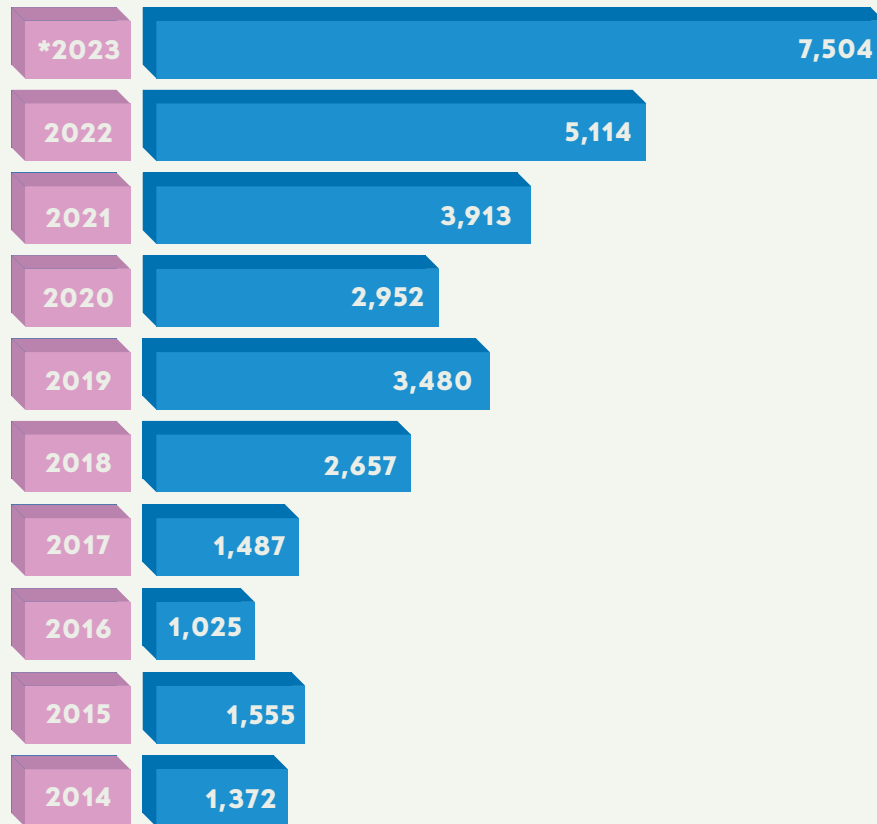
** Israel signed additional agreements and arrangements, but these are no longer implemented. They include agreements with Sri Lanka in the seasonal agriculture sector (2010), Bulgaria in the construction sector (2012), Romania in the construction sector (2015), as well as two pilot agreements in the caregiving sector, with Nepal (2016) and Sri Lanka (2017) which are no longer in effect. There are, however, permanent agreements with Sri Lanka in the homebased caregiving and agricultural sectors and with Nepal in the institutional caregiving sector.

Number of Workers Legally Residing in Israel who Arrived in the Framework of Bilateral Agreements* By Sectors and Countries of Origin



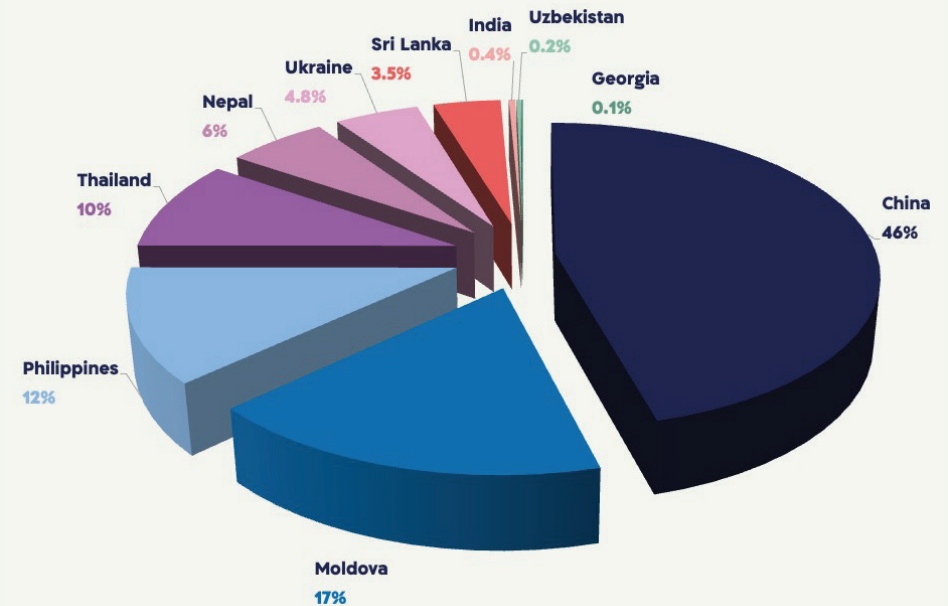
* The data refers to workers with a valid work visa. The PIBA worker quota also includes workers lacking a valid visa. Data does not include additional groups served by the Call Center: construction workers arriving via foreign contractors (6,180) and workers in the caregiving sector arriving from Sri Lanka and Nepal via trial agreements (67). Also excluded are veteran workers in the relevant fields and workers who arrived in Israel from these countries prior to the implementation of the bilateral agreements.

Number of Inquiries Received by the Call Center, by Year⁶



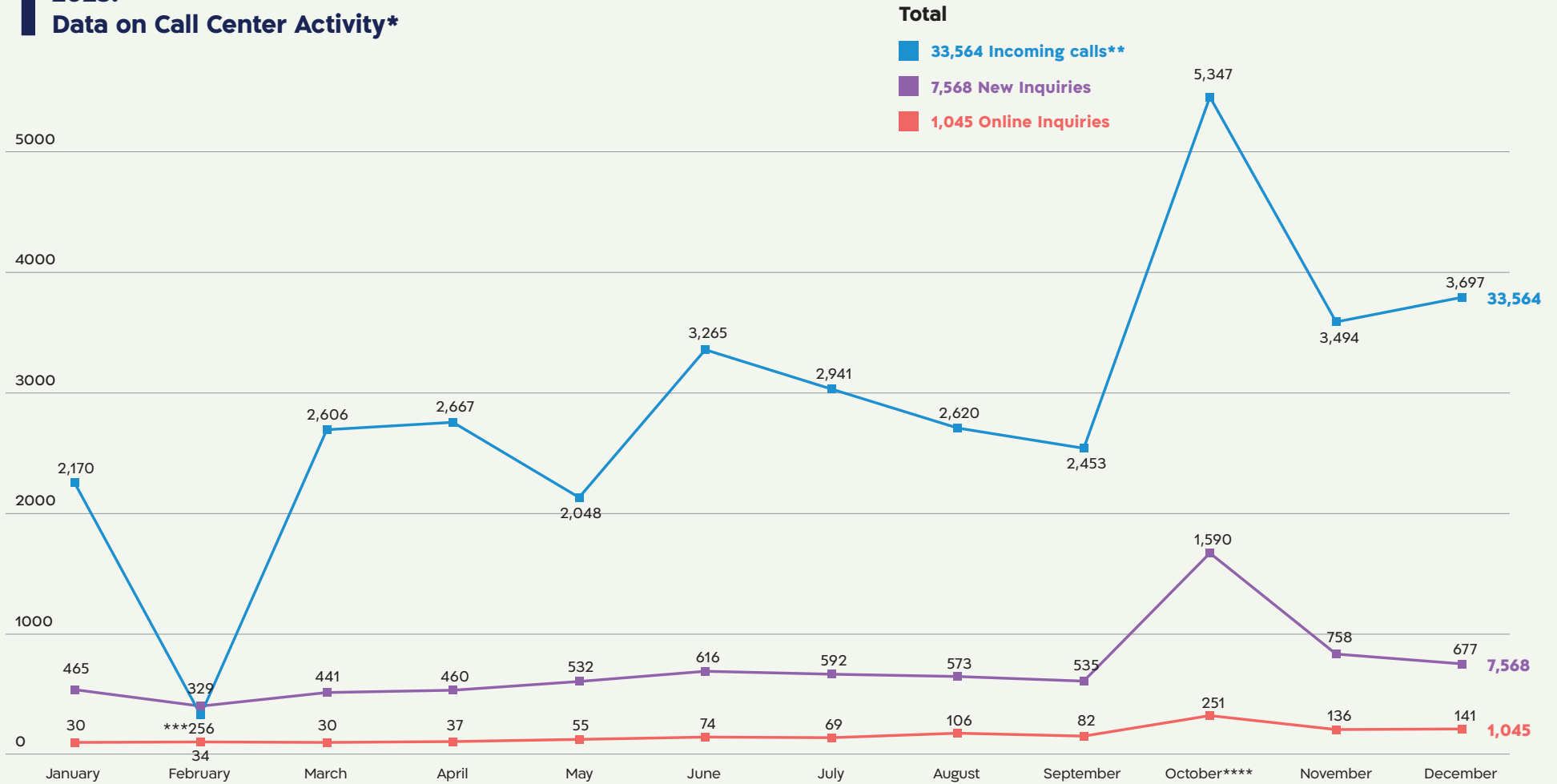
* The increase in the number of inquiries originates, among other things, in the increase in the number of foreign workers arriving as part of bilateral agreements, and the outbreak of the Iron Swords War on October 7, 2023

Inquiries to the Call Center in 2023* (%) by Worker's Country of Origin



* In addition, the Call Center received calls from workers in the home-based caregiving sector who arrived in Israel through private agencies:
 - 17 Indian workers
 - 10 Uzbeki workers
 - 20 Moldovan workers
 - 6 Ukrainian workers
 In 2023, 38 calls were received from Chinese workers employed by Chinese contractors in Israel (private sector).

2023: Data on Call Center Activity*



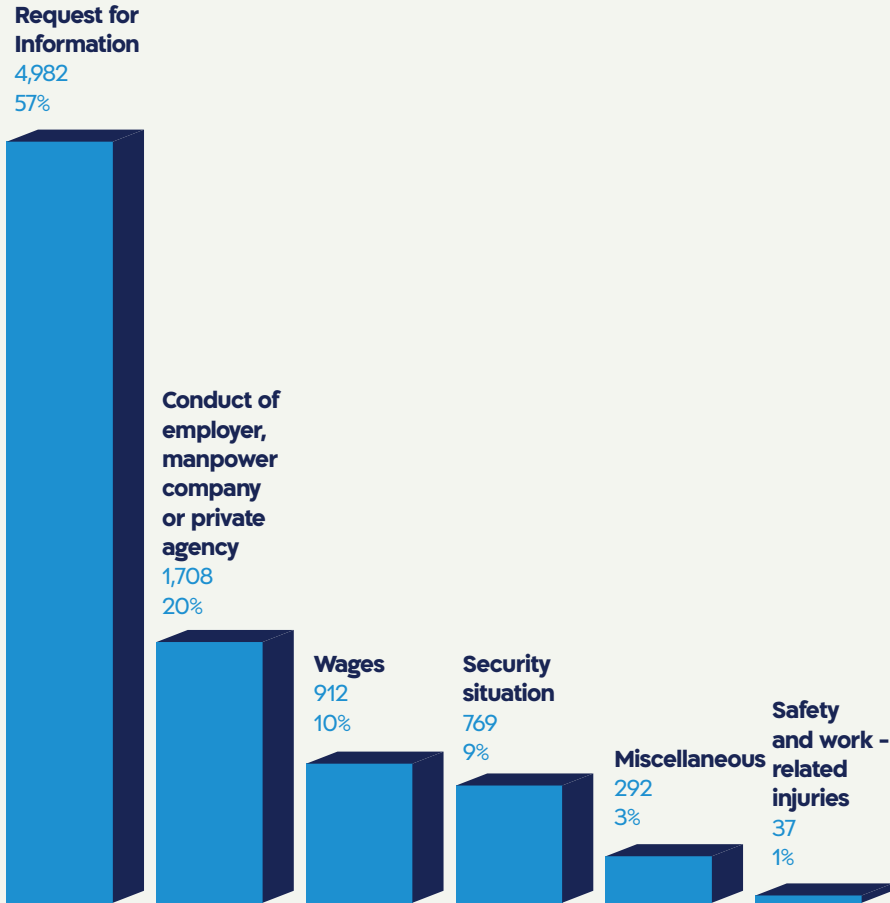
* These figures represent the number of incoming calls to the Call Center. An incoming call differs from an inquiry that is opened in the system for further investigation. Thus, there may be several incoming calls from the same worker regarding one inquiry, complaints that have already been addressed, and more. The Call Center's activity also includes outgoing calls to the worker as part of the handling of his or her inquiry, for example, to receive additional information, to follow up, and in response to an inquiry. In 2023 the Call Center made 23,288 outgoing calls.

** The past year has seen a marked increase in the number of inquiries made by foreign workers to the Call Center through chat apps (WhatsApp, Viber, WeChat, etc.) to follow up on existing inquiries.

*** In February 2023 the Call Center transitioned to the Squaretalk computerized system. Due to technical delays, we were not able to receive incoming calls from foreign workers. Inquiries were received via online forms and phone apps.

**** In October 2023, the number of calls increased significantly due to calls received during the first days after the outbreak of the Iron Swords War. Thus, the number of incoming calls in this month was double that of the monthly average; the number of new inquiries tripled; and the number of online inquiries was almost four times the monthly average.

Topics of Inquiries in 2023*



Breakdown of inquiries by subject: Inquiries requesting information:

- 69% Locating the manpower company
- 7% Information on work visa
- 7% Information on transfer to a different employer

Inquiries on the conduct of the employer, manpower company, or private recruitment agency:

- 27% Treatment by employer/manpower company/site manager
- 21% Lack of assistance from agency/corporation
- 6% Working without/before completion of registration

Inquiries on wages:

- 36% Unpaid wages
- 22% Wages do not comply with legal requirements
- 15% Wages paid without a pay slip

Miscellaneous inquiries:

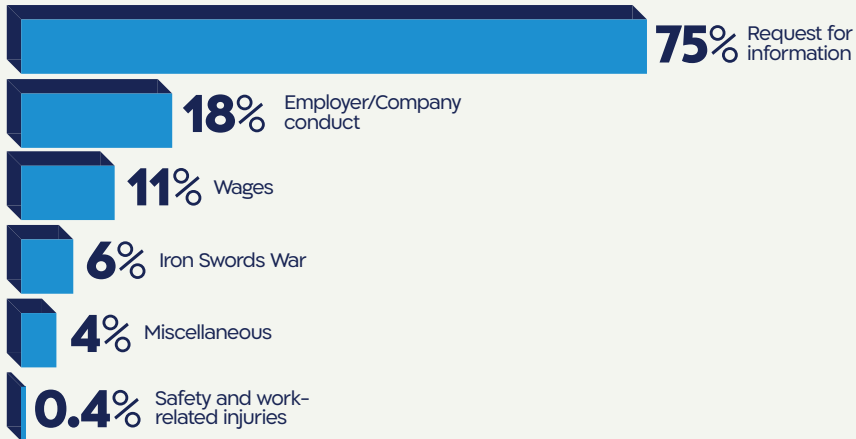
- 59% Assistance with deposit withdrawal
- 20% Medical condition
- 19% Worker without work visa / unemployed

* An inquiry can include more than one subject, therefore the categories above are not mutually exclusive. Accordingly, while the percentage refers to the number of times a subject was raised out of the total number of calls, the percentages in the diagram do not add up to 100%.

Inquiries by Sector Construction

| | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|
| Number of inquiries | 3,289 | 3,956 | 5,438 |
| Number of workers residing in Israel who arrived through bilateral agreements | 16,910 | 21,345 | 18,583 |
| Number of workers who made inquiries | 1,963 | 2,067 | 2,958 |
| Percentage of callers out of total resident workers | 12% | 10% | 16% |

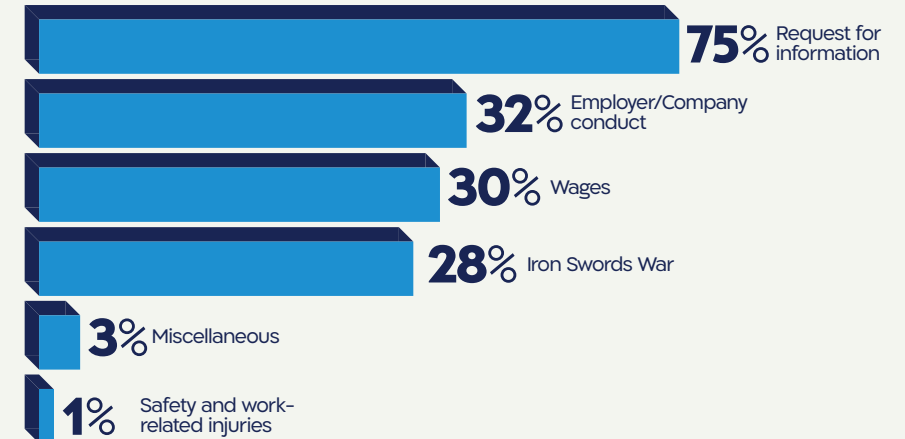
Main Topics of Inquiry for 2023 (%)



Inquiries by Sector Agriculture

| | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|
| Number of inquiries | 502 | 291 | 523 |
| Number of workers residing in Israel who arrived through bilateral agreements | 23,231 | 21,860 | 15,824 |
| Number of workers who made inquiries | 465 | 250 | 423 |
| Percentage of callers out of total resident workers | 2% | 1% | 3% |

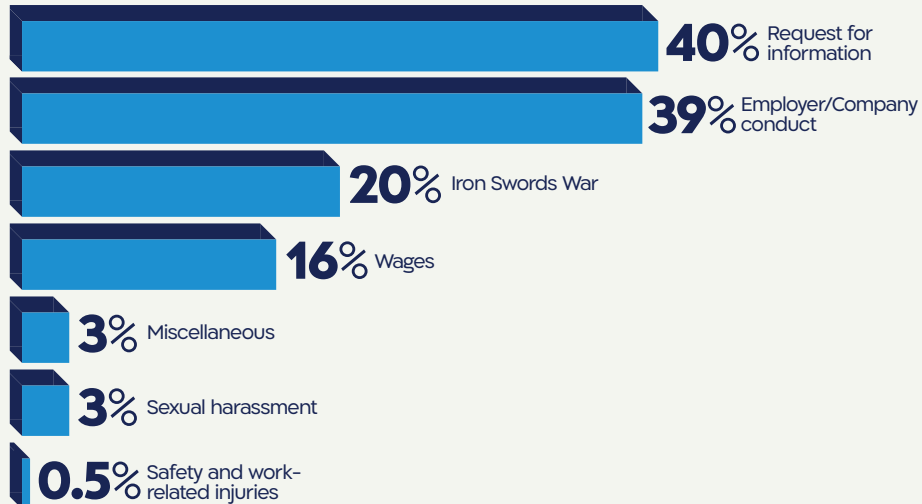
Main Topics of Inquiry for 2023 (%)



Inquiries by Sector Home-based Caregiving

| | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|------|-------|-------|
| Number of inquiries | 122 | 664 | 694 |
| Number of workers residing in Israel who arrived through bilateral agreements | 798 | 4,116 | 4,608 |
| Number of workers who made inquiries | 104 | 516 | 539 |
| Percentage of callers out of total resident workers | 13% | 13% | 12% |

Main Topics of Inquiry for 2023 (%)



Inquiries by Sector Institutional Caregiving

| | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|-------|-------|
| Number of inquiries | 184 | 619 |
| Number of workers residing in Israel who arrived through bilateral agreements | 1,020 | 1,056 |
| Number of workers who made inquiries | 131 | 259 |
| Percentage of callers out of total resident workers | 13% | 25% |

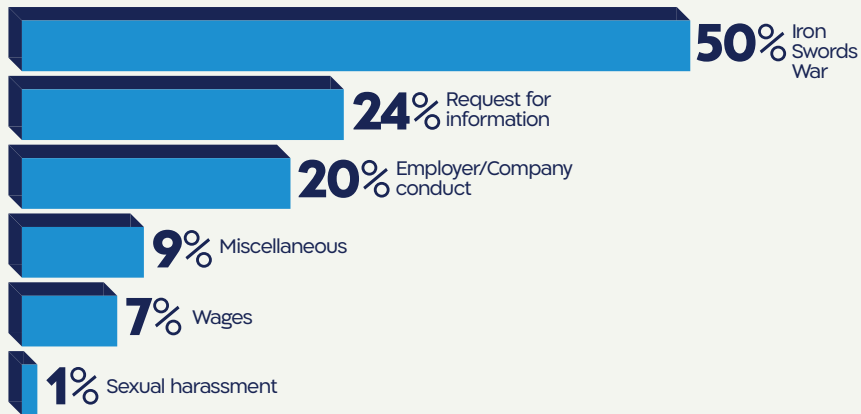
Main Topics of Inquiry for 2023 (%)



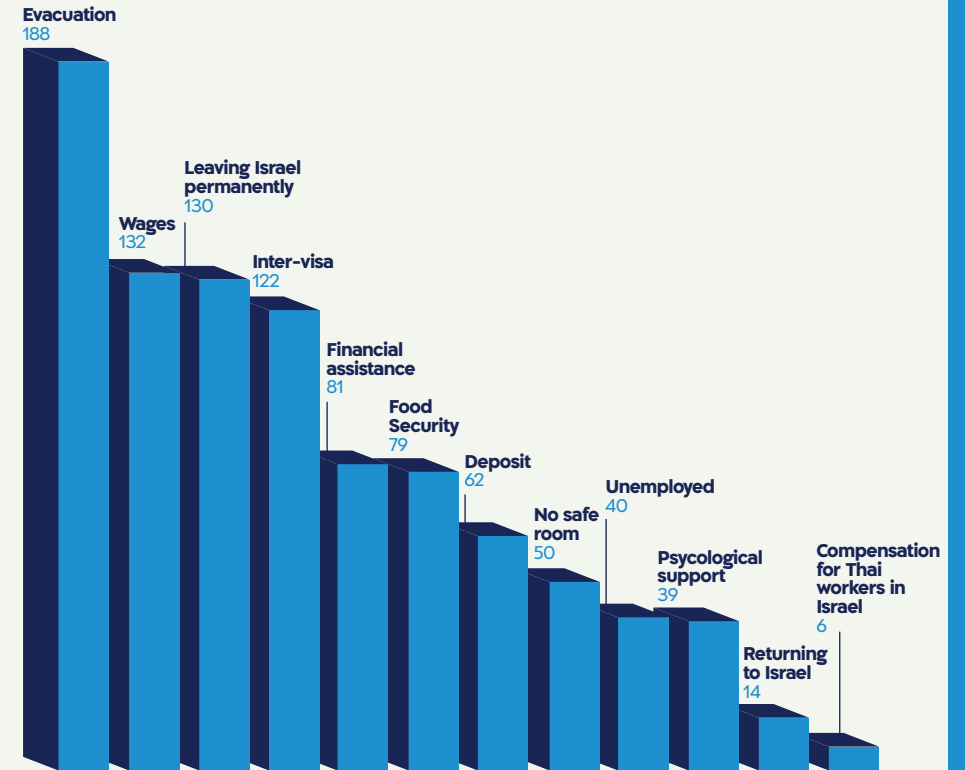
Inquiries by Sector Hospitality

| | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|------|-------|
| Number of inquiries | 19 | 290 |
| Number of workers residing in Israel who arrived through bilateral agreements | 740 | 1,673 |
| Number of workers who made inquiries | 17 | 211 |
| Percentage of callers out of total resident workers | 2% | 13% |

Main Topics of Inquiry for 2023 (%)

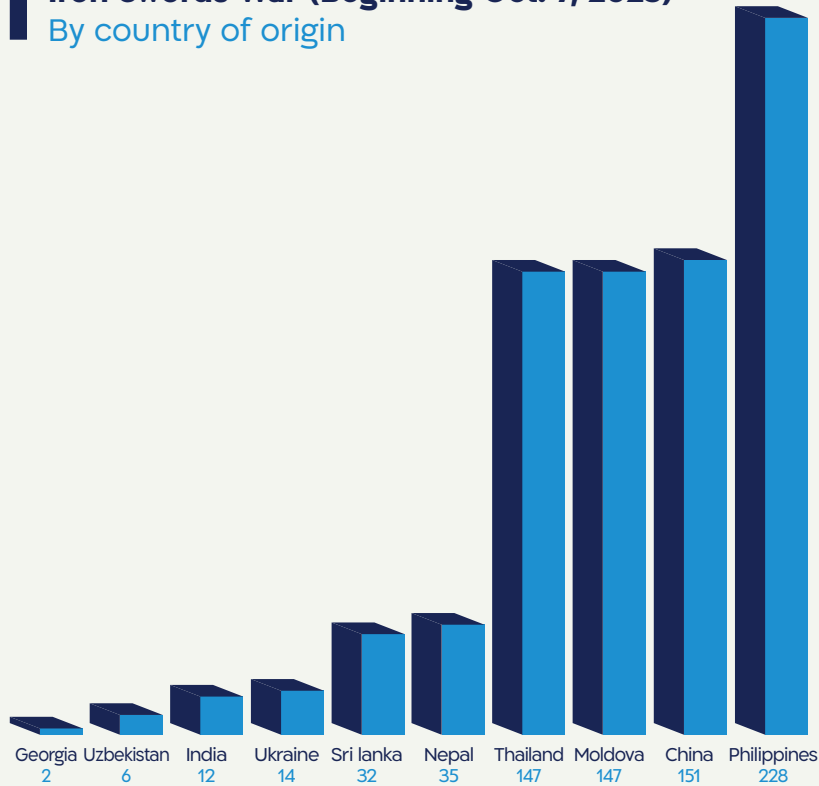


Inquires Resulting from the Iron Swords War (beginning Oct. 7, 2023) Topics of Inquiries



Number of Inquiries Received Following the Iron Swords War (Beginning Oct. 7, 2023)

By country of origin



The call center's reaction to the Iron Swords War



Expanding Call Center work hours in all languages



Providing services on the weekend



Creating online forms for evacuation and psychological support

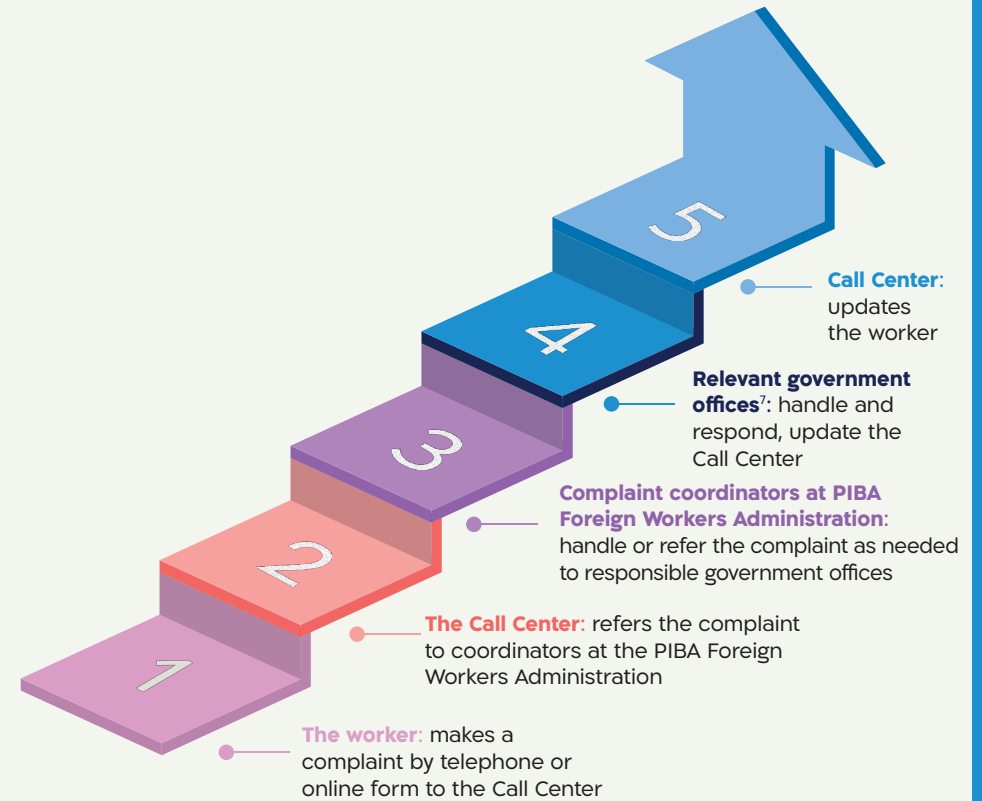


Opening a special group for handling emergencies



140% increase in calls compared to the same month year-over-year

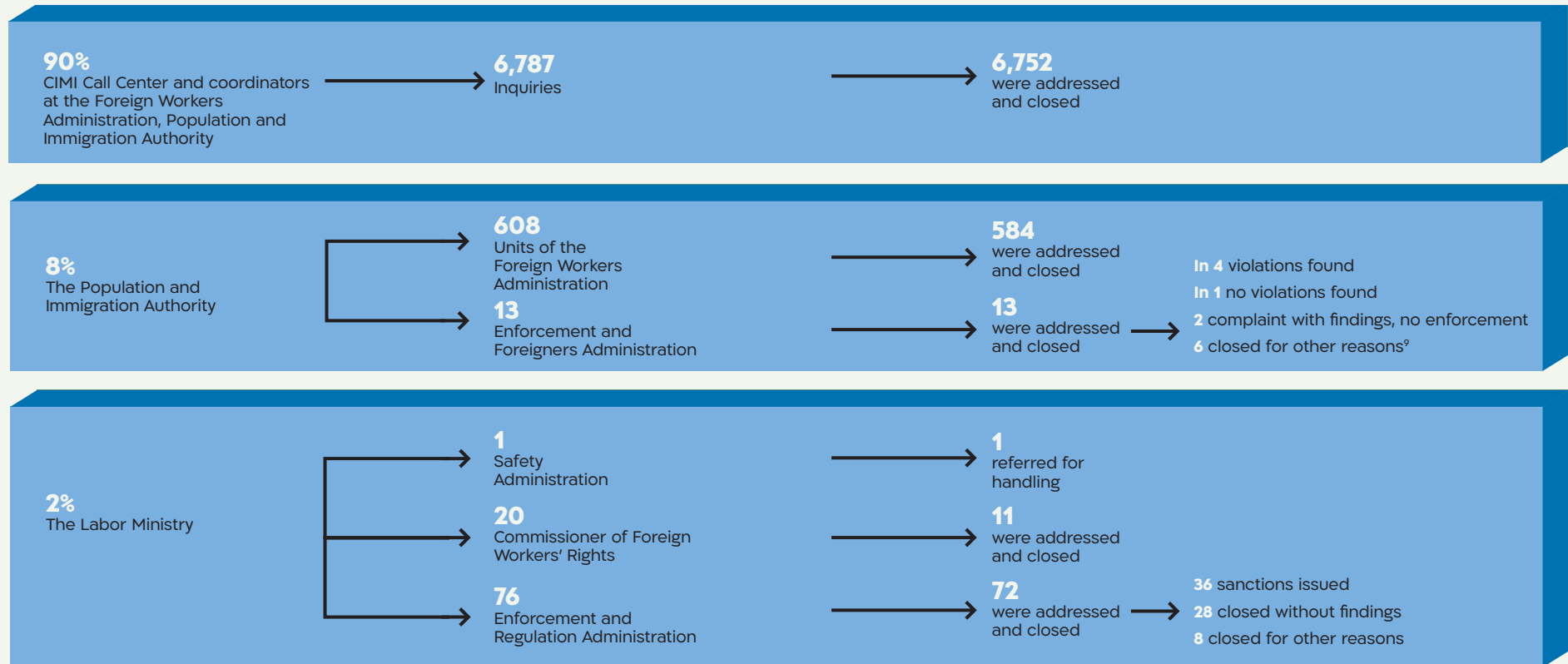
Inquiry Handling Procedure



Handling of Inquiries in 2023

Inquiries and complaints are referred to relevant bodies according to the topic. The length of time needed to address the complaint varies in accordance with its topic and circumstances. For the most part, the Call Center and Foreign Worker Administration coordinators assist in providing information, PIBA handles employer/manpower agency conduct and change of employers, and the Labor Division at the Ministry of Economy and Industry handles complaints regarding wages,⁸ employment conditions, and work safety.

Out of 7,504 inquiries received in the past year



Examples of Complaint Handling Procedures by the Foreign Workers Call Center in 2023

1. A group of Chinese construction workers contacted the Call Center for evacuation assistance from Sderot during the early days of the Iron Swords War. Their residential quarters lacked a safe space, and they had no resources to relocate. After multiple attempts to reach their employer, they received no response, as the company was overwhelmed by complaints and many representatives were called up to military duty. The workers turned to the Call Center, which referred their case to PIBA for an emergency response. Following communication with the company, the workers were successfully evacuated to a safe location in central Israel.
2. A Thai agricultural worker contacted the Call Center after his February wages were not paid. Despite efforts to contact his employer and the agency, he received no assistance, prompting him to seek help from the Call Center for Foreign Workers. After submitting relevant documents, including his timesheet, PIBA took up the case and contacted the employer. Initially, the employer claimed he could not pay the worker's wages because the worker had abandoned his job. However, after discussions with PIBA, the employer agreed to transfer the owed wages. A misunderstanding led to the employer initially paying only part of the wages, as some of the money had been transferred in cash earlier. Following further inquiries by PIBA, the worker received the full wages into his bank account, and the case was closed.
3. A Sri Lankan worker in the home caregiving sector contacted the Call Center for help when her employer demanded that she take care of his baby while the patient's family was away on vacation. She feared losing her job if she refused, but also worried about potential risks to the infant. When she attempted to address the issue with the employer, he reassured her that a family member would be present in the evenings, but she was required to be alone with the child at all other times. The Call Center referred her inquiry for urgent handling by PIBA and the worker's agency. After additional discussions, an agreement was reached, and the worker was not required to take care of the infant.

Notes

1. The terms in this booklet refer to the various foreign worker populations as formulated in Israeli law. They do not necessarily reflect the terms used by CIMI and the way in which the organization views the use of these terms.
2. See government resolution no. 4024, July 31, 2015: https://www.gov.il/he/departments/policies/2005_des4024
3. Savings from illegal recruitment fees across various sectors are estimated based on the report titled "The Effectiveness of the Bilateral Agreements: Recruitment, Implementation of Rights, Living Conditions, and Employment of Immigrant Workers from Thailand, China, Sri Lanka, and Nepal in Israel, 2011–2018," by Rivka Reichman and Nona Kushnirrovitch, 2018. Additionally, findings from the report "Black Jobs, Black Money – Situation Report for 2016" by Kav LaOved, concerning brokerage fees for workers from the Philippines in the caregiving sector, contribute to these estimates. For legal guidelines on the amounts, recruitment agencies can collect from foreign workers in the agriculture and caregiving sectors, refer to: https://www.nevo.co.il/law_html/law01/999_625.htm.
4. See government resolution no. 1321, March 24, 2016: https://www.gov.il/he/Departments/policies/2016_des1321
5. The information presented in the different parts of this booklet is accurate as of its date of publication.
6. The Call Center handles inquiries on various topics, including complaints that may be referred to other parties for resolution (see pages 23–24).
7. The relevant administrative units include the PIBA Foreign Workers Administration, the Regulation and Enforcement Administration, the Safety Administration, the Commissioner of Foreign Workers' Rights at the Labor Division of the Ministry of Economy and Industry, and the Israel Police.
8. With regard to wage complaints, the Regulation and Enforcement Administration cannot recover sums owed to workers but can impose sanctions on employers after investigating. Workers must pursue civil lawsuits for legal aid and compensation.
9. Other reasons include: the worker rescinded their complaint; the complaint lacked details; the worker failed to cooperate with the investigation; a police investigation is ongoing; the complaint was addressed without opening an investigation; the worker left the country and consequentially the investigation could not be continued.

General information:

Population and Immigration Authority website: piba.gov.il

The Center for International Migration and Integration website:
cimi.org.il

Contact details for workers:

Phone number of the Foreign Workers Call Center:

1-700-707-889 / 077-999-85-67