

רשות האוכלוסין וההגירה
Population & Immigration Authority
سلطة السكان والهجرة



The Call Center for Foreign Workers

Established in the
Framework of Bilateral
Agreements for Foreign
Worker Recruitment

Data for **2021**

Introductory Statement by the Director of the Bilateral Agreements Division

Dear Readers,

It is our pleasure to present the annual report with data on the work of the Call Center for Foreign Workers in 2021.

In 2021, we took steps to increase accessibility to information for foreign workers; we opened up the Call Center to those in the caregiving sector who had come to Israel through the bilateral agreements; and made preparations for the arrival of auxiliary workers in nursing homes. At the same time, we made the necessary adjustments to respond to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

During the pandemic period, the foreign workers enhanced their digital skills, which enabled the Call Center to strengthen ties with them and provide them with essential information. In 2021, the Call Center disseminated digital information and online links with information about the workers' obligations and rights in various areas. In addition, orientation programs tailored for foreign workers in the caregiving sector as well as other sectors were developed and delivered to the workers using remote technology. The orientation program provides workers with tools to help them adjust to working in Israel, introduces them to Israeli culture, and helps them to understand their rights and obligations. The programs were generally provided during the quarantine period when the workers first arrived in the country. Furthermore, over the course of the year, the Call Center sent text messages to foreign workers in the various sectors to help them access information, to encourage them to get vaccinated, and so on.

With the implementation of the bilateral agreements in the homecare sector, the Center's activity was extended to workers in the caregiving sector who had come to Israel through the agreements, and as of the end of 2021, we are preparing to open the Center to workers in a new sector – auxiliary care in nursing homes.

Respectfully yours,

Shirly Raisin Sasson

Director of Bilateral Agreements Division

Foreign Workers Administration

Population and Immigration Authority

2021 in Figures

10,024

foreign workers arrived in Israel through the bilateral agreements

2,543

foreign workers contacted the Call Center

3,913

inquiries were received at the Call Center

798

workers for the home based caregiving sector arrived in the framework of the bilateral agreement with the Philippines, which began implementation in mid-2021

\$ 117,177,035

in illegal commission fees are estimated to have been saved thanks to the bilateral agreements

Activities of the Call Center as an Information Center for Foreign Workers

In addition to responding to inquiries, the Call Center also works to expand data sources concerning various subjects relevant to populations of foreign workers.

- It conducts surveys among the workers in order to learn about various occurring trends and to develop responses to them.
- It increases the accessibility of important information about employment and stay in Israel, as well as workers' obligations and rights, by translating the information to relevant languages and disseminating it through text messages and the social media.

Background: Bilateral Agreements for the Recruitment of Foreign Workers¹

The bilateral agreements signed by Israel for the recruitment of workers are intended to enable recruiting professional and skilled workers, while putting an end to the phenomenon of illegal recruitment fees. The bilateral agreements contribute to the protection of workers' rights, and the prevention of modern slavery and human trafficking. Over the years, Israel has signed bilateral agreements with a number of countries.²

The Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA), which is responsible for the implementation of the bilateral agreements, has cooperated with the respective countries to recruit some 75,000 professional and skilled workers, while protecting their rights. In 2021, PIBA implemented agreements with five countries in three different employment sectors, and negotiations with additional countries are currently in progress.

The bilateral agreements significantly reduced the illegal recruitment fees and, consequently, the illegal recruitment costs formerly paid by foreign workers arriving in Israel dropped from tens of thousands of dollars to a few hundred dollars, which cover permitted payments (flights, medical tests, paperwork). To date, an estimated \$515,415,435 in illegal recruitment fees have been saved through the agreements in the sectors for which there are agreements (agriculture, caregiving and construction).^{* 3}

The Center for International Migration and Integration (CIMI), founded by JDC-Israel, operates in collaboration with PIBA as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations in the countries of origin. As part of its role, the organization assists PIBA and the sending countries to carry out their responsibilities under the agreement concerning widespread publication of conditions of work in Israel, skill testing of applicants, and coordination of arrival in Israel. CIMI also provides guidance and information to workers regarding their rights.

* The calculation of the recruitment fees saved does not include the fees that would have been saved for 2,434 workers from Moldova and Ukraine, since no data are available on the amount of fees that workers paid prior to the implementation of the agreements.

Year of Implementation of Bilateral Agreements between Israel and Other Countries**



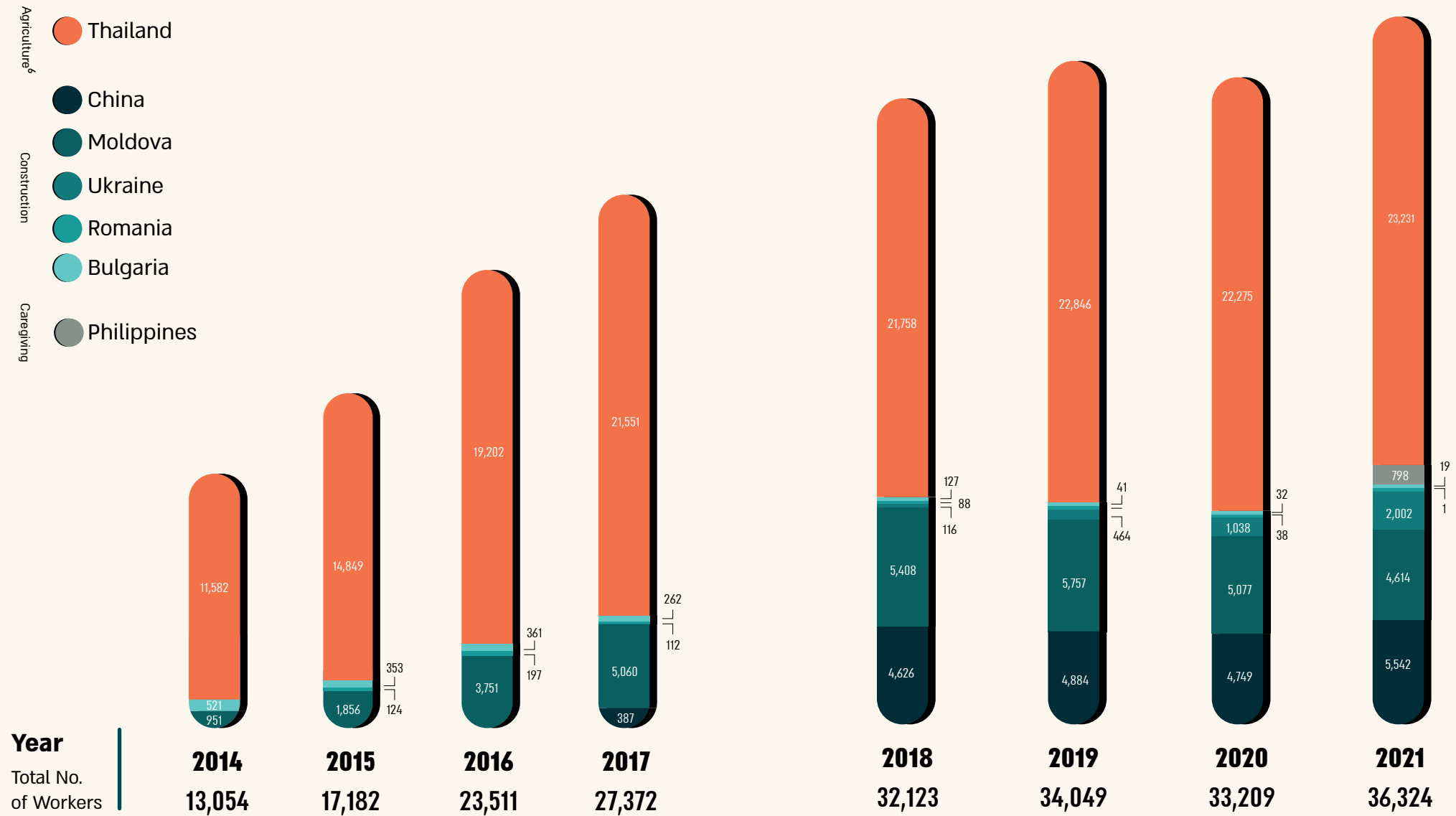
About the Call Center

In the framework of Israel's bilateral agreements, the Call Center 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 these bilateral agreements, as well as foreign workers employed in the construction sector by foreign contractors^{***} permitted to operate in the country.⁴ The Call Center is jointly operated by CIMI and the Population and Immigration Authority. This booklet presents data collected since the launching of the computerized system in 2014. The system enables the Call Center to route complaints to the different units and government ministries handling worker inquiries and to collect and analyse relevant data.⁵

** Israel has signed additional agreements and arrangements which were not implemented in 2021. These include agreements with Sri Lanka in seasonal agriculture (2010), with Bulgaria (2012) and Romania (2015) in the construction sector, as well as two pilot agreements with Nepal (2016) and Sri Lanka (2017) in the caregiving sector. Additional agreements have been signed and their implementation is forthcoming. These include Nepal (2022) and Georgia (2020), both in the sector of institutional care. The implementation of the agreement signed with the Philippines (hotel sector – 2020) was postponed in 2021 due to the pandemic.

*** As of the end of 2021, there were about 4,700 foreign workers from China and Turkey legally employed in Israel as foreign contractor employees subject to PIBA's procedures concerning such foreign contractors.

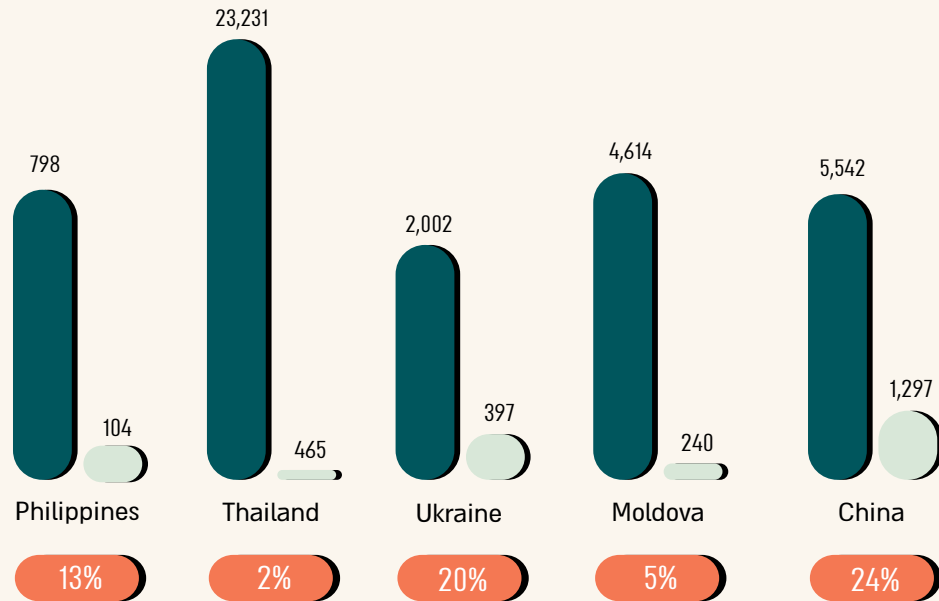
Number of Workers Legally in Israel who Arrived in the Framework of the Bilateral Agreements* By Sectors and Years



* The data refers to workers with a valid work visa. The government quota for workers in each sector also includes workers staying in Israel but lacking a valid visa. The data does not include additional groups served by the Call Center: construction workers arriving via foreign contractors (4,732) and workers in the caregiving sector who arrived via the pilot programs with Sri Lanka and Nepal (117). 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 Workers that Contacted the Call Center of the Total Number of Workers in Israel in 2021*

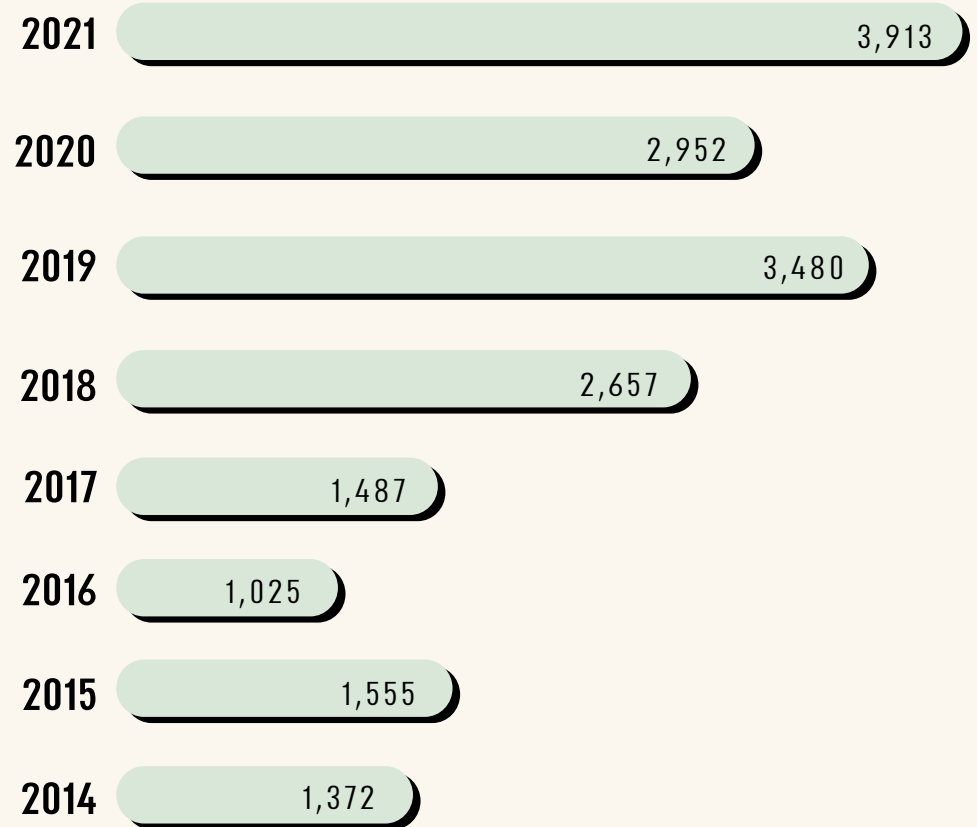
By country of origin



- Number of workers in Israel
- Number of workers who contacted the Call Center
- Percentage workers who contacted, of the total number of workers from country of origin

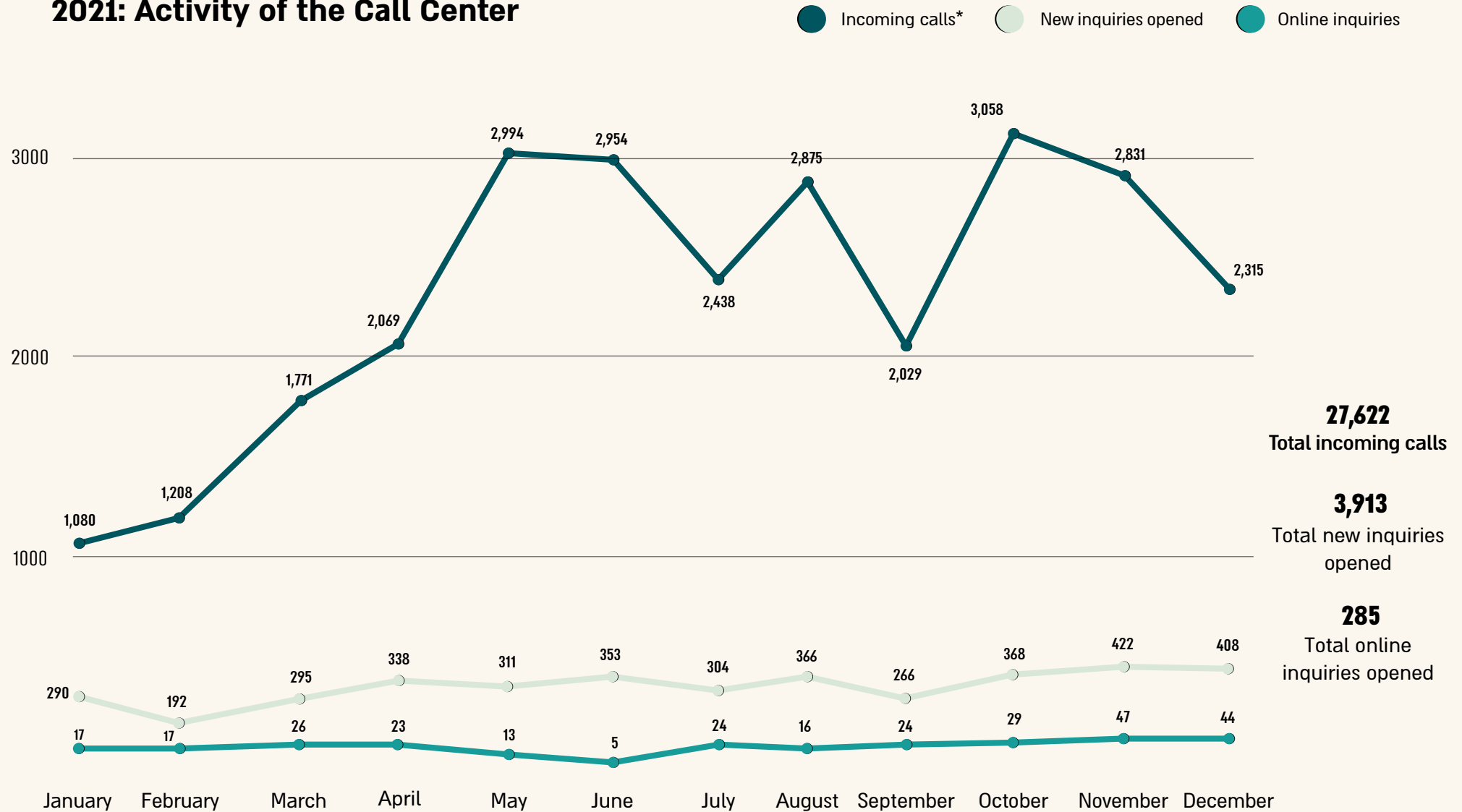
* In 2021, an additional 29 inquiries from workers in foreign contractor companies were received. Of these, 25 were from Chinese workers, and 4 were from Turkish workers.

Inquiries⁷ Received at the Call Center by Year*



* The observed increase in number of inquiries can also be attributed to the increase in number of workers coming to Israel in the framework of bilateral agreements over the years.

2021: Activity of the Call Center



* The number of incoming phone calls differs from the number of inquiries registered and referred for action, due to, for example, the fact that a number of incoming calls may be received from the same worker regarding the same inquiry, or concerning inquiries that had been resolved in the interim, etc. The Call Center's work also includes outgoing calls needed to handle the inquiries, for example calls for further clarifications, or to follow-up or respond to the inquiries. In 2021, the Call Center made 11,348 outgoing calls.

Subjects of Inquiries in 2021*

Request for information

2,717

69%

Employer conduct

938

24%

Wages

681

17%

Other

259

7%

COVID-19

248

6%

Worker safety

43

1%

Of wage complaints:

43% unpaid wages

35% wages do not comply with the law

22% wages are paid without a pay slip

Of inquiries to request information:

82% identifying the employing manpower company

7% information on workers' rights

4% information on visas

Of calls on other subjects:

59% medical condition

27% non-withdrawal of deposit

6% harassment or mistreatment by someone other than employer

Of complaints regarding the conduct of an employer, a manpower company, or a recruitment agency:

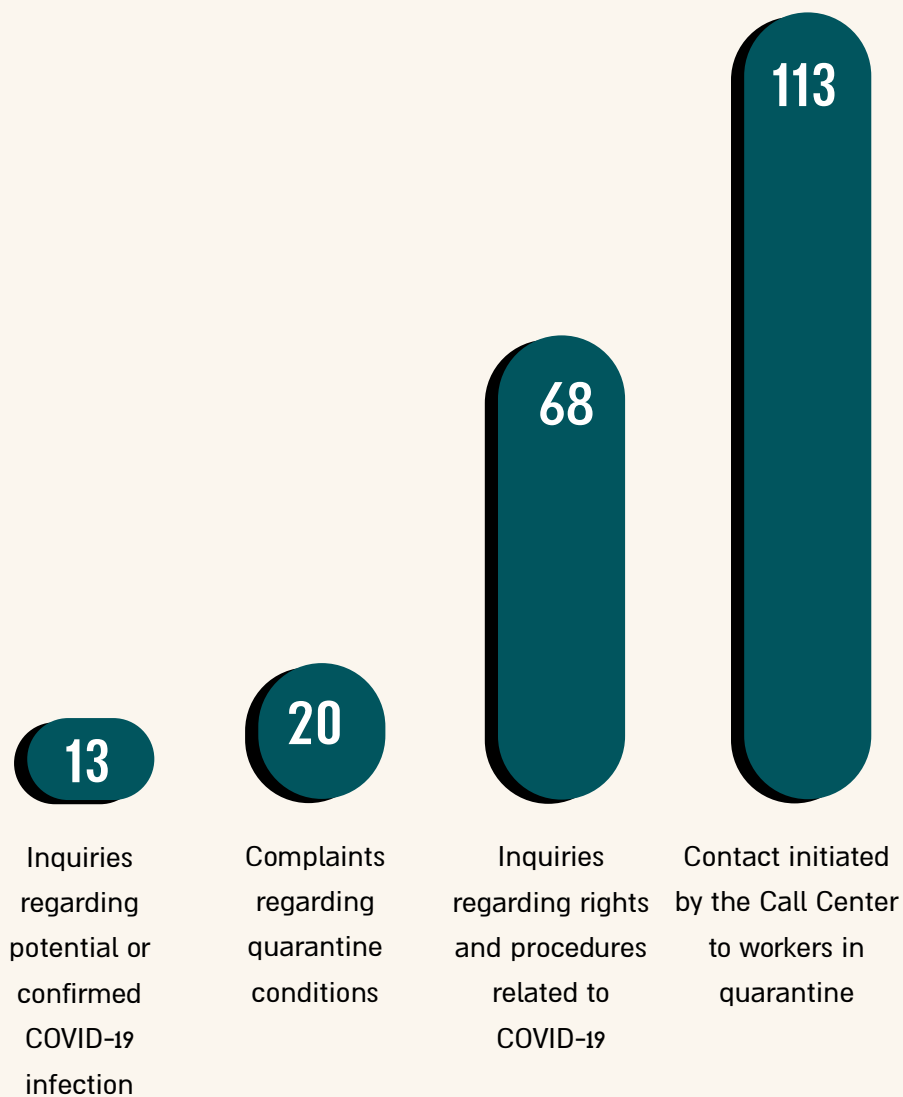
25% manpower company conduct

24% worker denies having absconded contrary to employer's report

14% foreman conduct

* It should be noted that an inquiry may contain more than one subject, so the division into categories is not exclusive. Hence, while the percentage represents the number of times a subject was raised out of the total number of inquiries, the combined percentages in the diagram are greater than 100%.

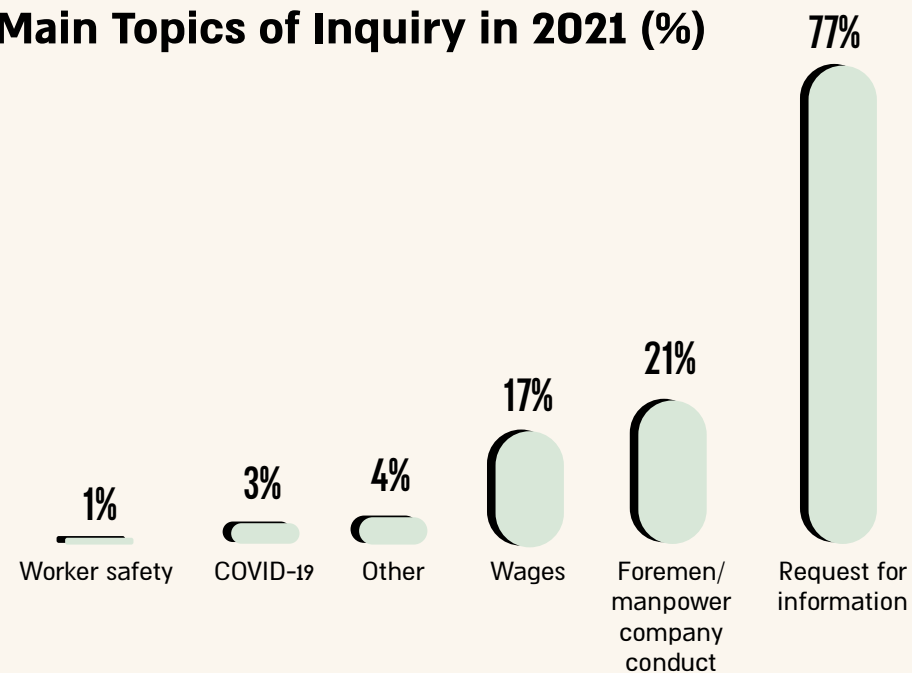
Number of Inquiries Concerning the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2021



Inquiries by Sector – Construction*

	2019	2020	2021
Number of Inquiries	2,490	2,345	3,289
Total Number of Workers in Israel	13,463	13,536	16,910
Number of Workers who Contacted	1,163	943	1,963
% Workers who contacted of total workers in Israel	9%	7%	12%

Main Topics of Inquiry in 2021 (%)

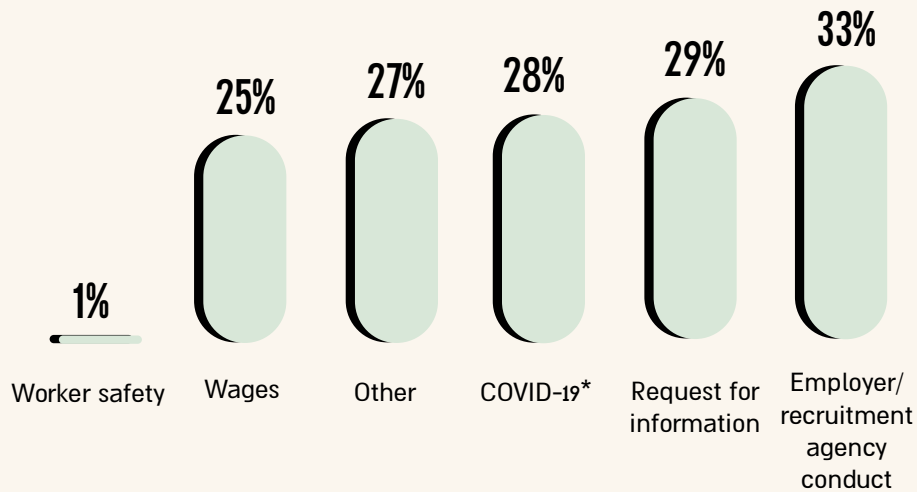


* The data includes workers employed by foreign contractors, who are also eligible for assistance from the Call Center.

Inquiries by Sector – Agriculture

	2019	2020	2021
Number of Inquiries	971	570	502
Total Number of Workers in Israel	22,846	22,275	23,231
Number of Workers who Contacted	663	504	465
% Workers who contacted of total workers in Israel	3%	2%	2%

Main Topics of Inquiry in 2021 (%)

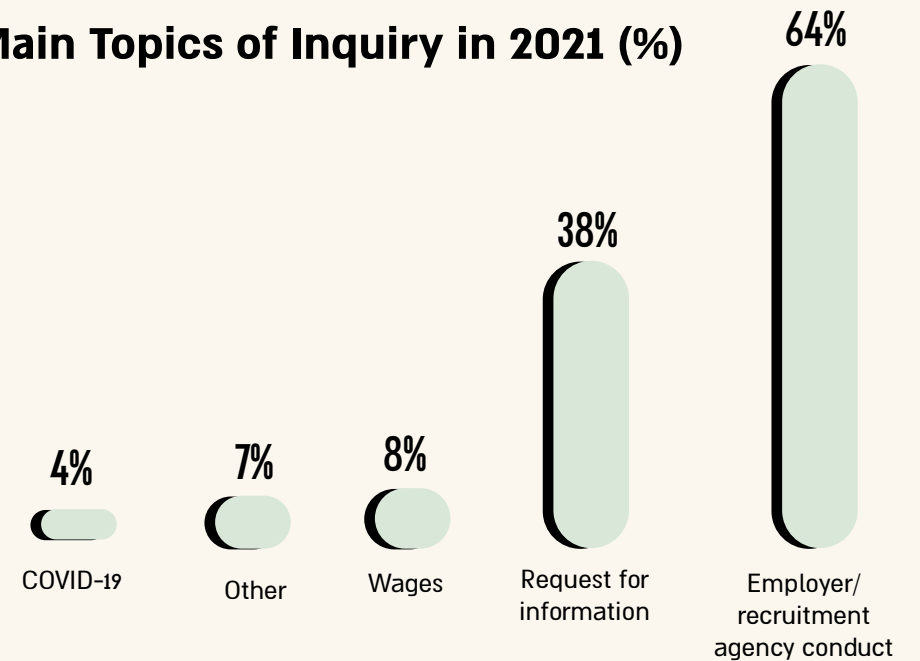


* The majority of inquiries in the topic of COVID-19 were calls initiated by the Call Center to workers in quarantine to ensure they have appropriate conditions at their place of quarantine.

Inquiries by Sector – Caregiving*

	2021
Number of Inquiries	122
Total Number of Workers in Israel	798
Number of Workers who Contacted	104
% Workers who contacted of total workers in Israel	13%

Main Topics of Inquiry in 2021 (%)

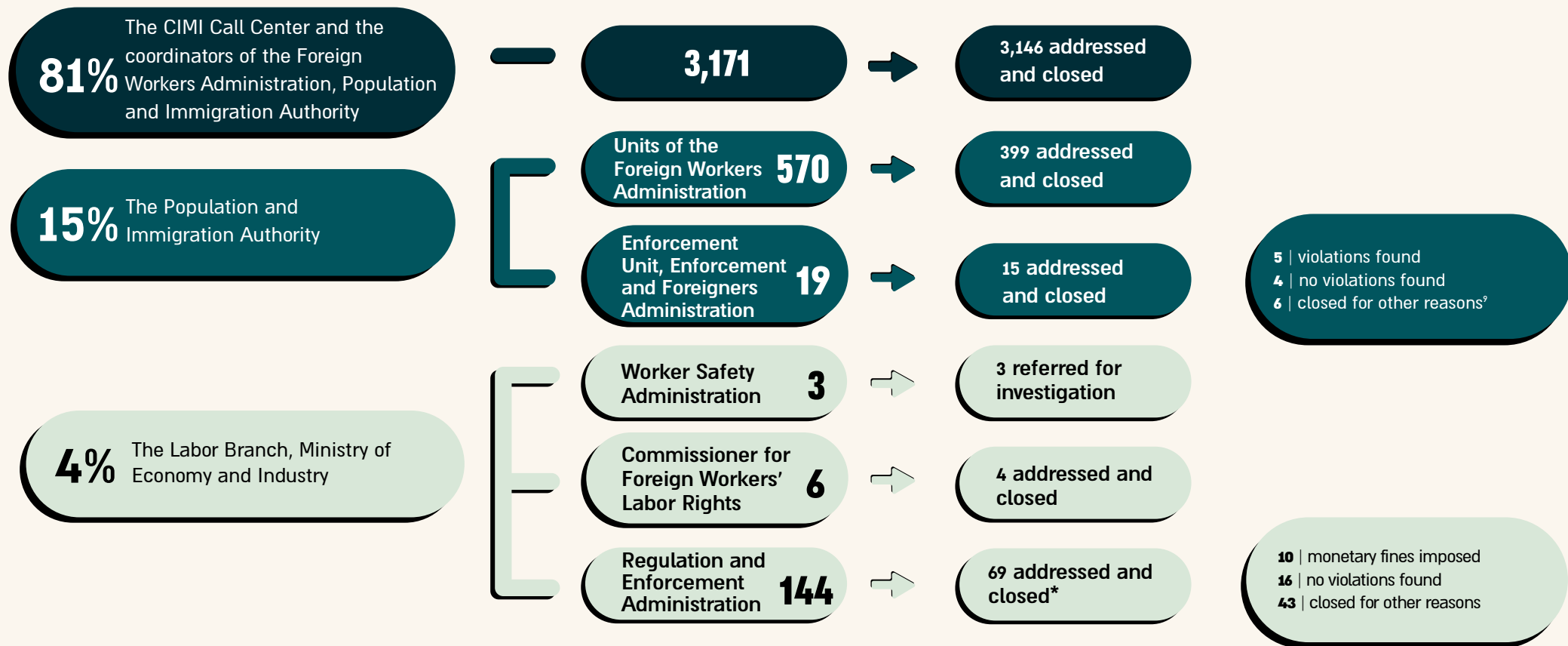


* The data refers only to workers who arrived in Israel in the framework of the bilateral agreement with the Philippines, and do not include workers who arrived in the framework of the pilot caregiving agreements with Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Summary of the Handling of Inquiries and Complaints in 2021

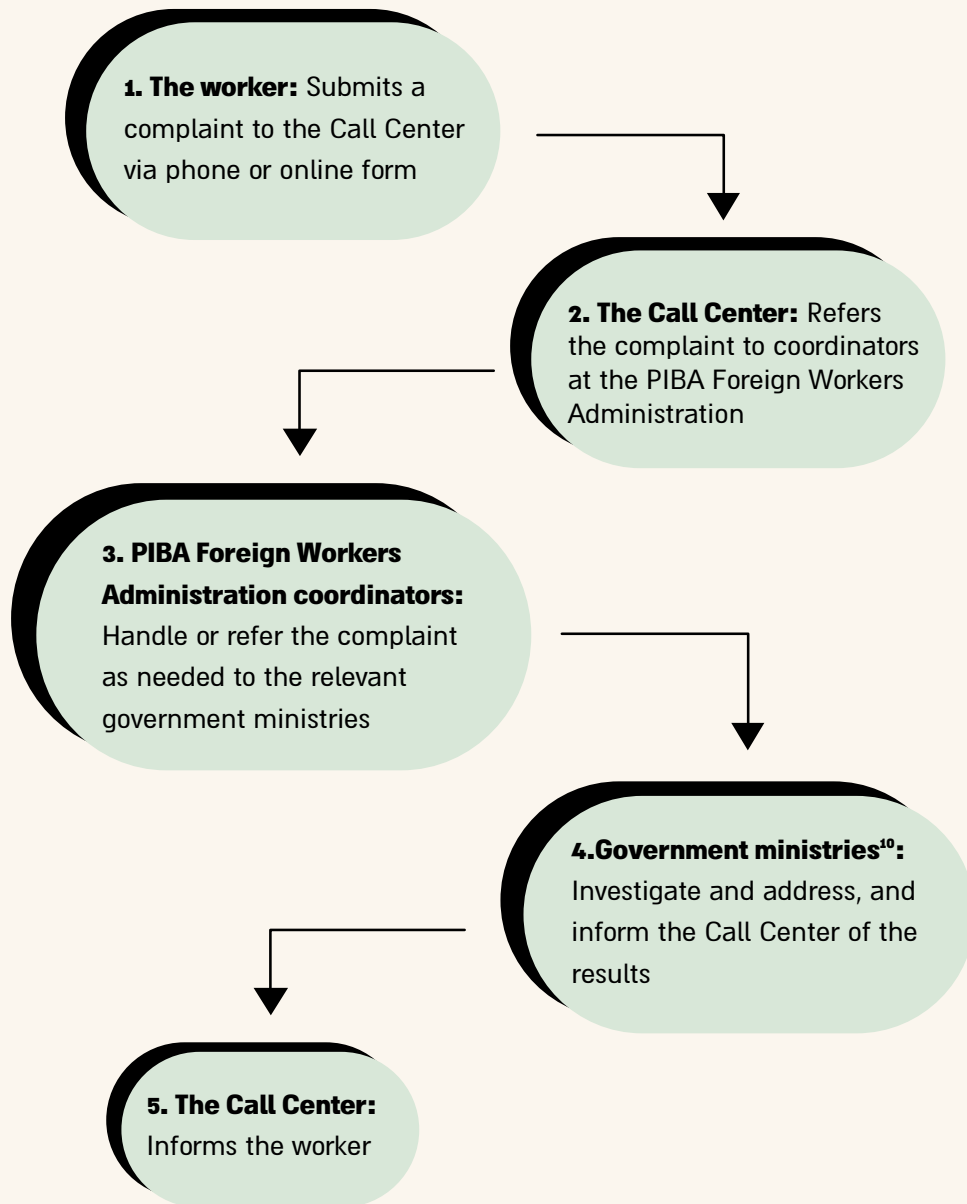
Inquiries and complaints are referred to the responsible bodies according to their subject. The length of time needed to address a complaint varies in accordance with its subject and circumstances. In general, the Call Center and the coordinators at the PIBA Foreign Workers Administration assist in providing information, PIBA handles employer/manpower agency conduct and change of employers, and the Labor branch at the Ministry of Economy and Industry handles complaints regarding wages,⁸ employment conditions, and work safety.

Of the 3,913 cases received by the Call Center the past year



* In 8 complaints the investigation has been completed and decisions are pending.

Complaint Handling Procedure



Examples of Complaint Handling by the Call Center in 2021

- 1** A construction worker from Ukraine who had completed his permitted period of work in Israel reported that he had not been fully paid for the wages he should have received for his last two months of work. The Call Center collected his testimony and documented evidence, and the matter was forwarded to the Finance Unit at PIBA for investigation. The financial review of the company's conduct and payment due to the worker found that in addition to the sum reported by the worker, he was owed additional payments about which he had been unaware. Accordingly, the company was required to pay the full sum owing to the worker.
- 2** An agriculture worker from Thailand contacted the Call Center regarding work with chemicals that did not comply with the required safety procedures. Following his report, the coordinators at PIBA's Foreign Workers Administration referred the matter to the Worker Safety Administration at the Ministry of Economy and Industry, and at the request of the worker he was transferred to a different employer. The Call Center remained in contact with the worker throughout the process, to ensure that he received the assistance he needed, and the Worker Safety Administration submitted a report to the employer including several orders for improvement.
- 3** A group of workers from Moldova contacted the Call Center because, upon their arrival in Israel, the company sent them into quarantine in an apartment with defects that was unfit for habitation. They also reported that the company had not supplied them with meals, despite the fact that quarantine regulations did not permit them to go out and get provisions for themselves. The coordinators at PIBA immediately contacted the management of the company, and instructed them to take care of the defects and provide the workers with food. At the same time, details of the case were passed on to the Division of Manpower companies and Placement Agencies at PIBA, and administrative processes were instigated against the company. A hearing was held and sanctions were imposed against the company that included prohibiting it from employing new workers.

Notes

1. The terms in this booklet refer to the different worker groups 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. The estimation of illegal recruitment fees prevented in each sector is 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", Rivka Reichman and Nona Kushinirovitch (2018), as well as the findings of the report "Black Money, Black Labor: Situation in 2016", by Kav LaOved (2016) which refers to the recruitment fees paid by Filipino workers in the caregiving sector. For regulations on the sums that can be legally collected from foreign workers for services by a recruitment agency in the agriculture and caregiving sectors, see the website of the Israeli Employment Service,
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 this booklet is accurate as of its date of publication.
6. 1,882 entries of seasonal workers from Sri Lanka were recorded. Since in some cases, workers enter Israel more than once, there is no way of verifying the actual number of workers in Israel based on these figures. Therefore, they are not included in the chart.
7. The Call Center receives calls on various subjects. Some of the calls are complaints that are referred to other parties and handled by them. See p.18-19.
8. In the case of complaints regarding wages, the Regulation and Enforcement Administration at the Ministry of Labor cannot return sums of money owed to the worker, but can only issue an administrative or criminal sanction to the employer after completing an investigation into the case. Therefore, regardless of whether the handling of the case vis-à-vis the employer has ended or is ongoing, in cases in which the employer does not return sums owed to the workers, the worker must, in parallel, submit a lawsuit through a civil court in order to receive illegal remedy.
9. Other reasons include: withdrawal of complaint by the complainant, essential details missing in the complaint, lack of cooperation on the part of the complainant, a police investigation is ongoing, the complaint was addressed and resolved without a need to open an investigation file, a worker exited Israel and therefore it was not possible to proceed with the investigation.
10. The relevant units include: the PIBA Foreign Workers Administration, as well as the Regulation and Enforcement Administration, the Worker Safety Administration and the Commissioner of Foreign Workers' Rights at the Labor Branch of the Ministry of Economy and Industry, and the Israel Police.

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: 1-700-707-889

Online: cimihotline.formtitan.com/homepage

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