

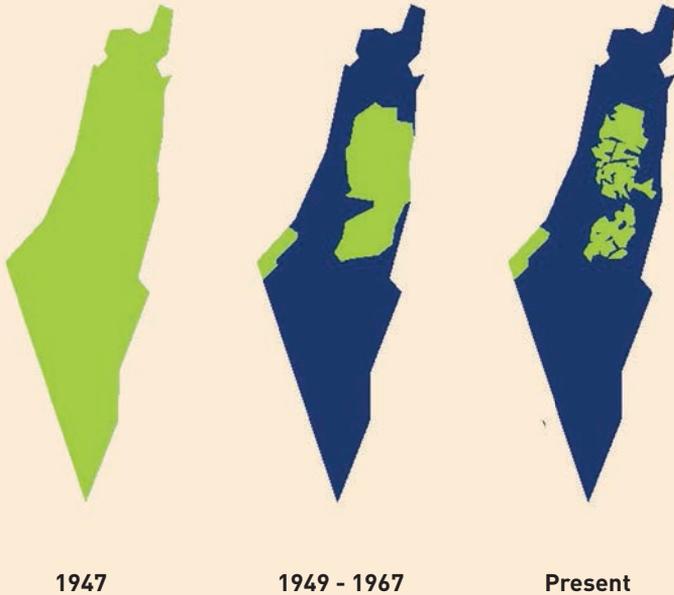


**ABVV**  
Algemene Centrale  
Samen sterk



# Work under Israeli occupation

## THE EVOLUTION OF PALESTINE



## PALESTINIAN POPULATION

- **2,8 million** in the West Bank and East-Jerusalem
- **1,8 million** in the Gaza Strip
- More than **5 million** Palestinian refugees in neighbouring countries

# Fifty years of occupation take their toll



**Since half a century Palestinians are suffering under Israeli occupation. Crops and infrastructure are destroyed, a separation barrier is installed... What used to be Palestinian territory gets more and more dispersed throughout the years.**

Since the 1967 Arab–Israeli War territories from the West Bank and Gaza Strip are under full Israeli military control. Palestinians are not only deprived of the right of self-determination, also human rights are systematically infringed.

Their access to land and water is limited; freedom of movement in and between West Bank and Gaza Strip and East-Jerusalem is completely restricted. Check points, roadblocks, a separation barrier of 708 ki-

lometres and Israeli settlements, declared illegal by International law, make normal life simply impossible for the Palestinians. This Israeli policy of colonization hampers the two-state solution promoted by the international community.

The blockade put in place by Israel after Hamas's 2007 electoral victory made the population in the Gaza Strip even more vulnerable. Moreover the military violence of the last years destroyed the lives of thousands of Palestinians and takes an enormous social toll to this day.

# Disrupted social, political and economical life

**Today Palestinians face tremendous challenges. With Hamas governing the Gaza strip and Fatah the West bank, the country suffers complete political division.**

Long years of occupation caused Palestinian economy to be nearly completely dependent on the Israeli economy. All export from products originating from the Gaza strip or West bank goes through Israel that controls the external borders. Agriculture and industry deteriorate continuously: 89 % of the Palestinian companies employ less than 5 people. A lot of people work in the informal sector.

The economic and social situation in the Gaza strip is exceptionally harrowing. Due to the blockade more than 60 % of the population lack food security and 80 % of the Gazans is depending on humanitarian help. The private sector grinded to a halt because benefits from trade through the tunnels have collapsed and import and export of goods are subject to stringent limitations.

Important sectors like agriculture and fishing are completely paralyzed due to military attacks on fishing boats and confiscated agricultural land.

In the Israeli settlements on the West bank a strong economy developed in recent years, including industrial activities and large-scale agricultural production. It is no coincidence that most settlements are located on fertile Palestinian soil, controlling and exhausting water resources and other natural assets.

In the Jordan valley e.g., a very important agricultural region, dates, olives, figs etc. are cultivated by Israeli enterprises using cheap Palestinian labour. These export goods from Palestinian soil support the Israeli economy. Thus the Palestinian population misses out on huge possible incomes.





## ISRAEL'S OCCUPATION IS STRANGLING PALESTINIAN ECONOMY

According to international law Israel as occupying power should guarantee the Palestinians an adequate standard of living and the right to work.

However Israel wilfully rendered the development of an independent Palestinian economy impossible and takes advantage of Palestinian products, raw materials and labour force. Due to this the Palestinian state lacks power and financial strength to pursue its own economic policy; therefore its dependency on overseas donors remains a structural problem.

# Increasing unemployment and intolerable working conditions in the Palestinian territories



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**The difficult economic situation in Palestine weakened its labour market completely.**

The check points, roadblocks and random checks make it difficult for Palestinians to go to their work, doing business is not evident at all.

Unemployment has exploded these last years and the financial shortage causes

enormous pressure on developing social protection and social security.

Violation of labour rights are commonplace. Frequent infringements are: payment under the statutory minimum wage, discharge without compensation, discrimination against women, unsafe working conditions...



## UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

- **25 % unemployed**  
15.5 % in the West Bank – 42 % in the Gaza strip
- **High unemployment rate among youth**  
42 % among youth aged 20 to 24
- **Huge difference between men and women**  
40 % women compared to 21 % men

(International Labour Organisation – 2015)

# Looking for work in Israel or the settlements

**Palestinian labourers sometimes have no other possibility than to look for work in Israel or its settlements. Their number had doubled over the last years.**

At the moment about 110,000 Palestinians (16.2 % of the economically active population) work in Israel or the settlements, 1 out of 3 works without a permit. They mainly work in agriculture, heavy industry, construction or services

According to Israeli labour law Palestinian workers have exactly the same rights as Israeli workers. However employers use numerous loopholes to circumvent the law. Statutory minimum wages are not respected. Palestinian labourers are exploited and discriminated by their Israeli employer. E.g. they earn much less than their Israeli colleagues for the same job. Measures for a safe working environment are hardly taken, often resulting in accidents.

Often Palestinian workers are deployed in the most dangerous and unhealthy jobs. Employees usually end up paying medical costs themselves or left completely to their own devices although they legally are entitled to health care. The number of victims is the highest in construction industry, where most Palestinians work.

## LONG WAITING LINES AT CHECKPOINTS

For those who have a work permit this means long waiting lines at the checkpoints. Controls and military capriciousness cause that workers can never be sure whether they will reach their work that day or not. For security reasons Israel only grants a limited number of work permits therefore many Palestinians work without a permit.

## EXPLOITATION IN THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS ON THE WEST BANK

More than 20.000 Palestinians work in Israeli industrial areas and farms on the West bank.

Israeli employees in the settlements usually do not hire the Palestinian workers. Often this is done through Palestinian intermediaries, responsible for recruitment, transport and payment of the wages. These 'wasit' (Arabic) or 'kablou' (Hebrew) is paid by the employer but also takes a part of the employers' daily wages for transport and other costs. This constitutes an extremely precarious and dependent work situation for the Palestinian workers. Anyone who protests, risks being subjected to intimidation and resignation.

High unemployment rate and low wages in Palestinian territories force families sometimes to also let their children work on Israeli farms. The poor educational system reinforces this trend. According to a Human Rights Watch report some 500 to 1,000 children work in the Jordan valley in extreme heat, exposed to pesticides, while packing tomatoes, eggplants, dates ... for Israeli export. Some of them are even younger than 12 year. They receive poor payment and suffer health problems from pesticides or dehydration.

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## PALESTINIAN WORK IN ISRAEL

Day by day thousands of Palestinian workers cross the border with Israel on the way to their work.

Palestinians who have a job, await difficult times. Many of them sleep in improvised camps close to the working areas, unprotected from military controls or violence. Employers gratefully make use of their vulnerable situation. Therefore low wages, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions are daily occurrences.

Palestinians working without a permit, cross the border illegally thus risking to be caught by Israel's security service. It gets more and more difficult to safely cross the border with Israel. From the Gaza strip this has become nearly impossible. Who tries, gets shot. Also on the West Bank the barrier and border controls hamper the attempts of desperate Palestinians without work permits. As Israel continues to diminish the number of work permits and Palestinians without a permit can hardly cross the border, a very uncertain future is imminent.

# Struggle for decent work = struggle against occupation

**Palestinian workers often suffer twice:  
not only from the occupation but also from their employers.**

The struggle for decent work is a struggle against occupation at the same time. Decent work, reliable labour legislation and social protection strengthen societies. Therefore Palestinian trade unions play a very important part.

Yet is not exclusively a topic for trade unions. Everyone is part of this struggle: youth, women as well as unemployed. Both in the West Bank and in the Gaza strip trade unions, social movements, organisations for youth and women do all they can to realise this.





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## TRADE UNIONS FACE A HUGE NUMBER OF CHALLENGES

- Labour legislation is still in a preliminary stage
- The context of occupation and weak economy puts respect for labour rights under pressure
- The population is poorly informed on labour rights
- Difficult access to sectors, e.g. construction and industry, using informal labour
- Trade unions do not have access to the settlements or Israel to assist the workers there

# International action for the Palestinians



**Solidarity! In order to put an end to 50 years of occupation and exploitation of Palestinian territories, international pressure is necessary.**

International solidarity is an important part of the trade unions' work. Social movements and trade unions in Europe and elsewhere in the world are campaigning against the occupation and pleading for a

boycott of products originating from the settlements. They summon governments to pursue an unequivocally policy against Israel's policy of colonisation.

Decent work for everybody is only possible if we collaborate across borders. Therefore FOS, together with Algemene Centrale (General Central) of ABVV (socialist Trade Union, n.o.t.) supports trade unions' work in the Palestinian territory.



## A consequent policy!

Belgium, but also the European Union and the other member states, have to take measures against Israel's policy of colonisation and the occupation of Palestinian territories. Though they condemn Israel's policy on a regular base, they maintain economic relationships with the Israeli settlements that are illegal according to the International Court of Justice.

### FOLLOWING MEASURES ARE NECESSARY

- A complete stop on all economic connections with the settlements
- Cease all arms trade and military relations with Israel
- Suspension of the European association agreement with Israel
- A just solution for the 5 million Palestinian refugees
- Immediate stop on the building of the settlements
- End the siege on Gaza

# Do you want to know more?

**FOS- socialistische solidariteit**

[www.fos.ngo](http://www.fos.ngo)

**Algemene Centrale- ABVV**

[www.accg.be](http://www.accg.be)

**Made in Illegality**

[www.madeinillegality.org](http://www.madeinillegality.org)

**Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions**

[www.pgftu.org](http://www.pgftu.org)

**B'tselem**

[www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)

**Kav LaOved**

[www.kavlaoved.org](http://www.kavlaoved.org)

**Human Rights Watch**

[www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

**Internationale Arbeidsorganisatie**

[www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

# Do not hesitate to contact us

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