

*The Israeli Public's Attitudes toward Wage Earners from  
Foreign Countries:  
A Comparison of Survey Results, 1995 — 1997*

As result of the 1993 border closings, the number of wage earnings from foreign countries employed in Israel increased substantially. Conservative estimates place their current number at 250,000, half of whom are illegal (i.e., lacking work permits). It is commonly believed that their presence is the direct result of short-term security problems; therefore, the phenomenon can be ignored (for instance, on the municipal level) or eliminated by means of swift deportation.

*צוות ההיגוי  
מר חיים י. צדוק, יו"ר*

*ד"ר וינפריד וייט  
ח"כ יהודה לנקרי  
ח"כ יוסי ביילין*

*מר חיים הרצוג ז"ל,  
יו"ר ראשון*

*בחסות:  
קרן פרידריך אברט*

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Friedrich Ebert  
Stiftung*

International experience has shown that these assumptions are mistaken. Even if the peace process had continued, and the Palestinian economy had developed further, we can reasonably assume that the rate quantity of wage earnings from foreign countries employed in Israel would have grown regardless.

If we look at the industrialised world, we can observe that in the majority of these states about 4.5% of the population and about 10% of the work force are composed of wage earnings from foreign countries. This finding holds true for countries experiencing a higher rate of unemployment and a lower rate of growth than those in Israel.

These trends can be explained as follows:

- A standard of living at which the local population is no longer willing to work in occupations characterised by low added value and low wages; at the same time, those branches remain essential to the local economy.

- Economic globalisation, which guarantees the free movement of goods, services and capital, also applies to labour willing to settle in those countries where wages are higher in comparison to their countries of origin.

In consequence, the majority of industrialised countries have recognised that the presence of a distinctive community of wage earners from foreign countries requires official attention to their individual, economic, and social needs.

In the wake of studies conducted during recent years, three conclusions can be reached: first, in the long term, wage earners from foreign countries tend to establish residence where they work; second, they tend to be joined by their families; and third, they prefer to acquire citizenships.

Accordingly, we should acknowledge that this phenomenon represents a long-term trend, requiring the creation of an environment capable of preventing serious social and economic problems. National and local disregard of these workers will introduce additional irritations into Israeli society.

### **Comparisons of Public Opinion Polls**

In 1995, a public opinion survey was performed in order to examine the Israeli population's attitude toward wage earners from foreign countries. In 1997, an additional survey was conducted on same issue; we can therefore compare changes in trends over time. The following tables present the results of the surveys, conducted by the Israeli Institute for Economic and Social Research, among a representative sample of the Israeli population. The surveys were conducted with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Germany.

**Table 1: Attitudes toward the Employment of Wage Earners from Foreign Countries:  
Distribution of Positive Responses by Region of Respondent's Residence**

Region	Agree: Work permits issued	To accept services	To work alongside	To live in the same neighbourhood	To live in the same building
Gush Dan*	59	61	55	43	36
Northern District	49	48	45	36	27
Jerusalem	50	48	39	32	30
Southern District	47	41	36	37	28
Tel-Aviv	56	62	61	53	53

:Comment

\*The greater Tel Aviv metropolitan area

**Table 2: Changes in the Public Attitudes toward Wage Earners from Foreign Countries****(Percentage of Respondents Expressing Agreement)**

Item No.	Question	Agree 1995	Agree 1997	% and Direction of Change
<b>Social Distance</b>				
1	Should wage earners from foreign countries be given work permits?	61	54	-7
2	Are you willing to receive services from wage earners from foreign countries in restaurants and hotels?	62	54	-8
3	Are you willing to have wage earners from foreign countries live in your neighbourhood?	55	40	-15
4	Are you willing to have wage earners from foreign countries as neighbours in your building?	49	34	-15
<b>Attitudes</b>				
5	Should wage earners from foreign countries be guaranteed access to health services while working in Israel?	87	85	-2
6	Are wage earners from foreign countries exploited by their employers?	75	83	+8
7	Have wage earners from foreign countries saved the economy from its dependence on Arab workers?	79	74	-5
8	Do wage earners from foreign countries provide cheap and reliable labour?	73	71	-2
9	Do wage earners from foreign countries take jobs away from Israelis and increase local unemployment?	45	61	+16
10	Do wage earners from foreign countries contribute to violence and crime?	26	44	+18
11	Does the presence of wage earners from foreign countries cause rent increases in the neighbourhoods where they live?	30	29	-1
12	Do wage earners from foreign countries impede technological development because they are a cheap source of labour?	23	28	+5

**Table 3: Agreement to Government Decision to Deport Wage Earners from Foreign Countries****Not Holding Work Permits (Percentages)**

	Total 100%
Strongly support deportation	63.5
Support deportation	14.5
About average	7.5
Oppose deportation	6.2
Strongly oppose deportation	7.2
Do not know/No opinion	1.1