רשות האוכלוסין וההגירה
Population & Immigration Authority
سلطة السكان والهجرة

CIMI
Center for International Migration & Integration
Founded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

CALL CENTER
FOR FOREIGN WORKERS

DATA FOR 2020

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE BILATERAL AGREEMENTS DIVISION

Greetings,
We are proud to present to you the 2020 Information Booklet concerning the Call Center for Foreign Workers.
Throughout the world, the past year unfolded in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects. Like others, foreign workers in Israel had to cope with the challenges, fears, and consequences of COVID-19. This state of affairs required the Call Center for Foreign Workers [hereafter "the Call Center"] to introduce changes and adaptations in order to better serve the foreign worker population in Israel. The Call Center acted to improve workers' access to information regarding the pandemic and the health precautions it entailed, while continuing to protect workers' rights.
To make the necessary information available to workers, the Call Center translated the new health regulations into languages spoken by foreign workers and distributed the translations among the various worker groups. It also provided information to workers in cases of infection or quarantine. The Call Center cooperated closely with the Ministry of Health regarding inquiries on COVID-19 and, when needed, mediated between the Ministry and workers speaking various languages, enabling the latter to receive swift, focused, and professional responses to their inquiries. It thus fulfilled a vital role in protecting the rights of workers in quarantine, ensuring adequate and appropriate quarantine conditions and initiating contact with workers obliged to enter quarantine in the special hotels set up for such.
The challenges of the pandemic also afforded opportunities for new initiatives, including the dissemination of general information on workers' rights. A newsletter was distributed to foreign workers regarding different aspects of their employment, their obligations, and their rights. The topics in the various editions of the newsletter were selected to close information gaps identified among workers. In addition, the Call Center carried out surveys and data collection in cooperation with workers who gave their consent to such, concerning issues important to the worker's wellbeing and to the operations of the Population and Immigration Authority.
All these activities were undertaken in addition to the Call Center's routine work of referring workers' complaints to the relevant authorities and protecting workers' rights. The option of making inquiries to the Call Center via online forms and the hours of service were adjusted to better suit the needs of the workers.
Looking toward the future, in 2021 the Call Center intends to expand the proactive dissemination of information, improve its means of contacting workers, monitor existing knowledge gaps among workers, and address specific issues requiring attention.

I would like to thank all the bodies and organizations devoting efforts to the protection of workers' rights.

Respectfully yours,
Shirly Raisin Sasson
Director of Bilateral Agreements Division
Foreign Workers Administration
Population and Immigration Authority

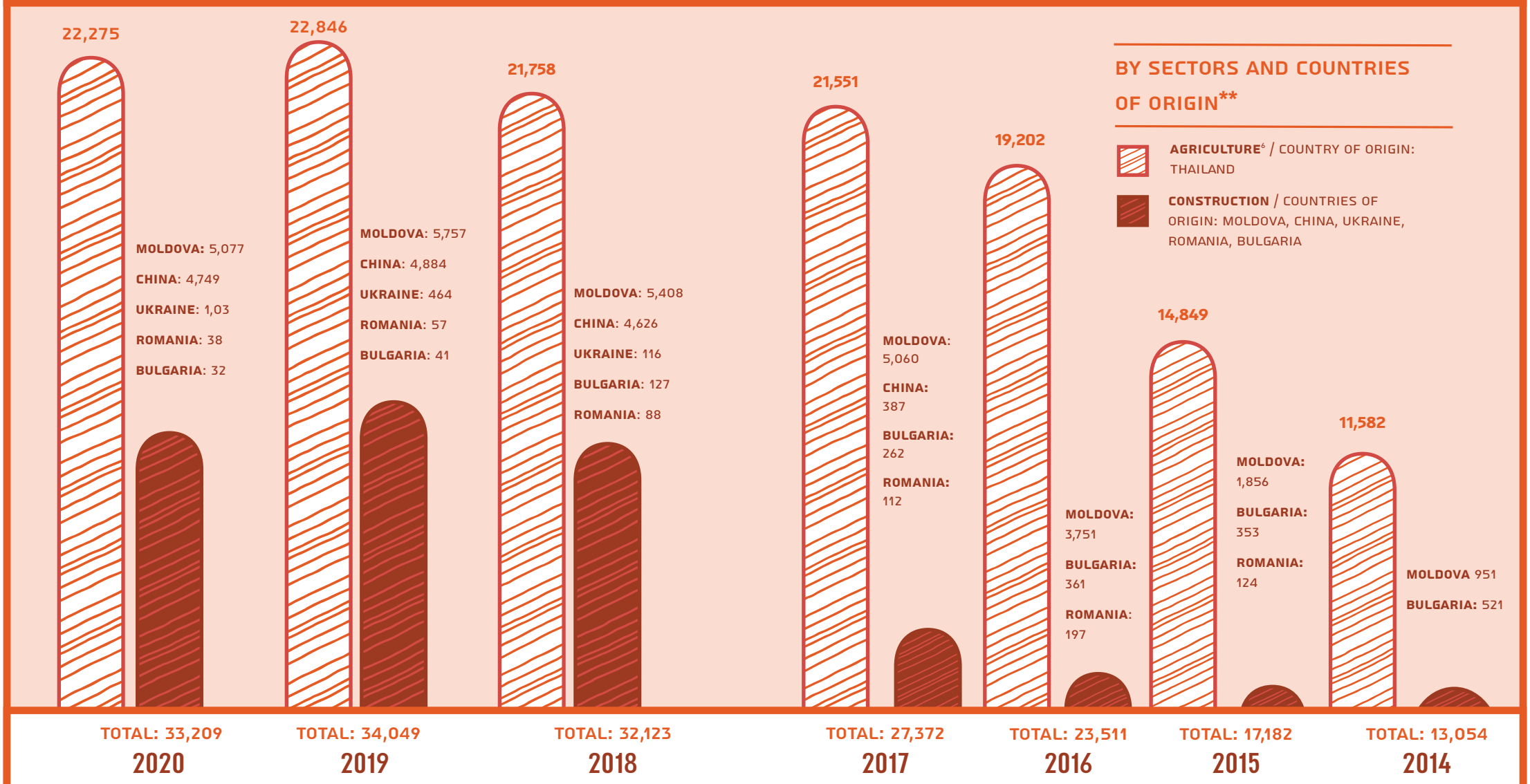
BACKGROUND: BILATERAL AGREEMENTS FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF FOREIGN WORKERS

The aim of the Bilateral Agreements for the recruitment of foreign workers[1] in various sectors is to put an end to the phenomenon of illegal recruitment fees, while recruiting highly suitable workers aware of their rights and obligations in Israel. The bilateral agreements contribute to the prevention of harm to workers, modern-day slavery, and human trafficking. In 2010, the Israeli Government signed a bilateral (inter-governmental) agreement with the government of Thailand, implemented as part of the Thailand-Israel Cooperation Project (TIC), with the aim of preventing the collection of illegal recruitment fees from foreign workers in the agricultural sector.[2] The terms of the agreement came into effect in 2012. Later, similar agreements were signed with other governments, and among those still ongoing are agreements with Moldova, the Ukraine, and China – all in the construction sector. In addition, in 2018 bilateral agreements were signed between Israel and the Philippines for the recruitments of workers in the caregiving and hospitality sectors. In 2020, agreements were signed with Sri Lanka in the home care sector and with Georgia and Nepal in the institutional care sector. The agreements with the Philippines, Georgia, and Nepal will take effect in 2021. To this day, about 65,000 male and female workers have entered Israel as part of the bilateral agreements.
The 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. As a result of the agreements, to this day a sum of nearly $398,238,400 has been saved in the sectors already covered (agriculture and construction).[3]
The Center for International Migration and Integration (CIMI), founded by JDC-Israel, operates in collaboration with the Israeli Population and Immigration Authority as well as 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.

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 bilateral agreements, as well as foreign workers employed in the construction sector by foreign contractors permitted to operate in the country[4] [as of late 2020, 2,500 foreign workers from China and Turkey were registered in Israel as employees subject to foreign contractor regulations]. The Call Center is operated by CIMI for the Population and Immigration Authority. This booklet presents data collected since the Call Center's establishment, and specifically since the launching of the computerized system in 2014.[5] 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.

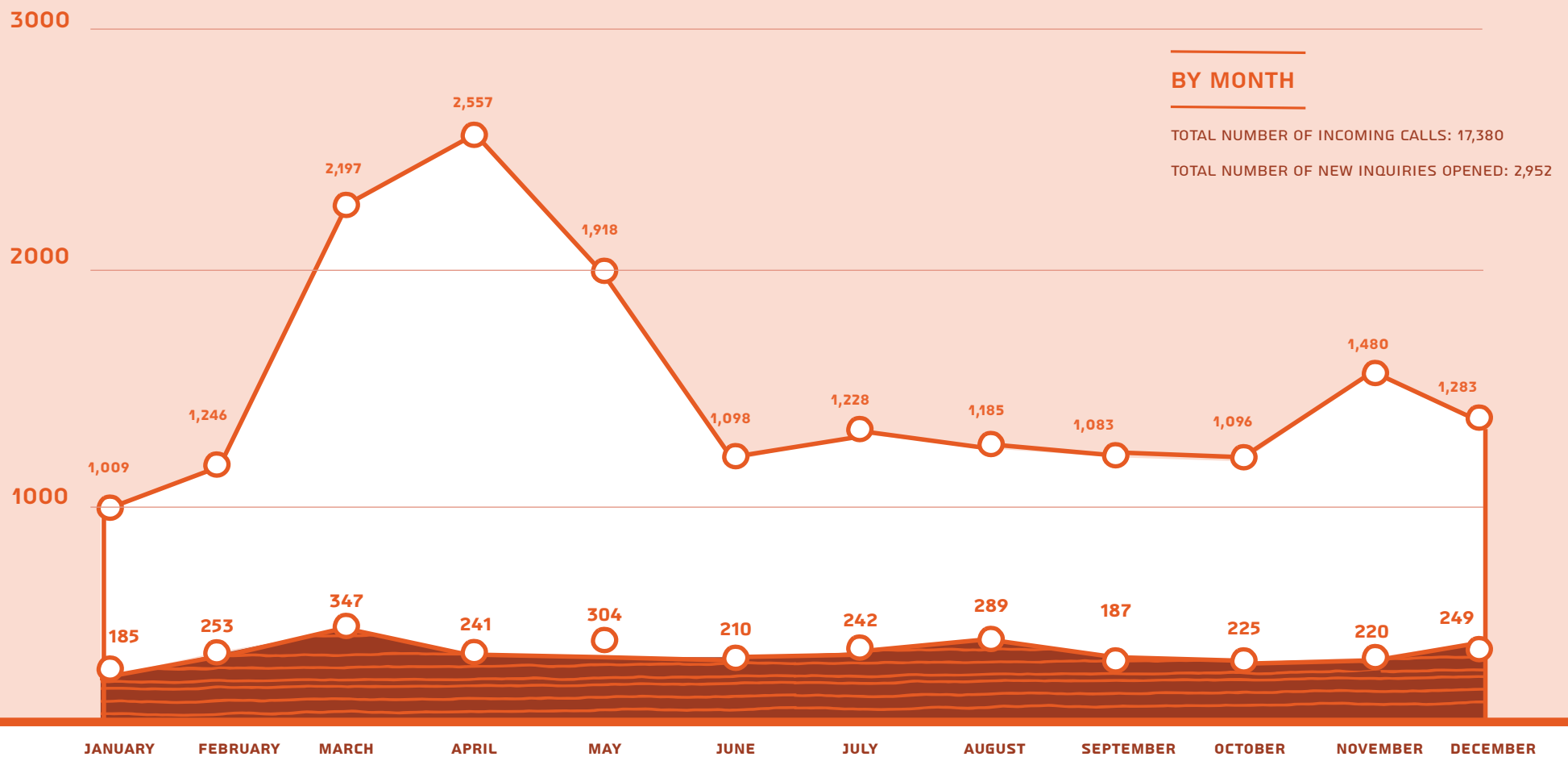
NUMBER OF WORKERS STAYING LEGALLY IN ISRAEL WHO ARRIVED IN THE FRAMEWORK OF BILATERAL AGREEMENTS*



* The data refers to workers with a valid work visa. The government worker quota for each sector also includes workers staying in Israel but lacking a valid visa.

** Not including additional groups served by the Call Center: construction workers arriving via foreign contractors and workers in the caregiving sector arriving via the pilot program. 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.

2020: NUMBER OF INCOMING CALLS RECEIVED BY THE CALL CENTER AND THE NUMBER OF INQUIRIES OPENED*



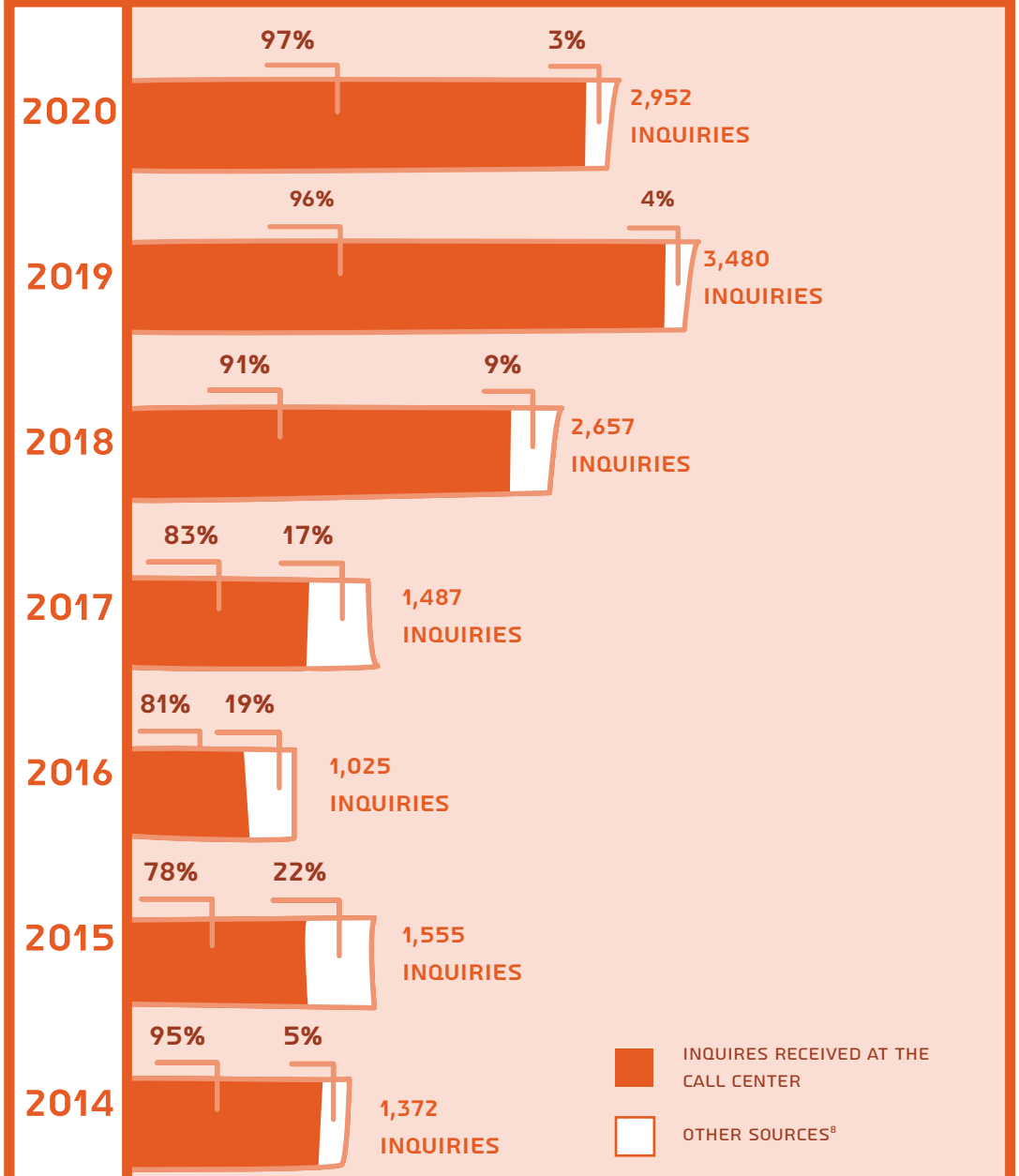
NUMBER OF INCOMING CALLS

NUMBER OF NEW INQUIRIES

* 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. There may be several incoming calls from the same worker regarding one inquiry. The Call Center's activity also includes outgoing calls to the worker as part of the handling of his or her inquiry. On average, the hotline makes about 850 outgoing calls per month. Therefore, the total number of calls made with regard to a specific inquiry can be higher than the figure appearing on the chart.

** Between march and may, a sharp increase can be seen in the number of incoming calls to the Call Center. this increase may reflect the beginning of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel.

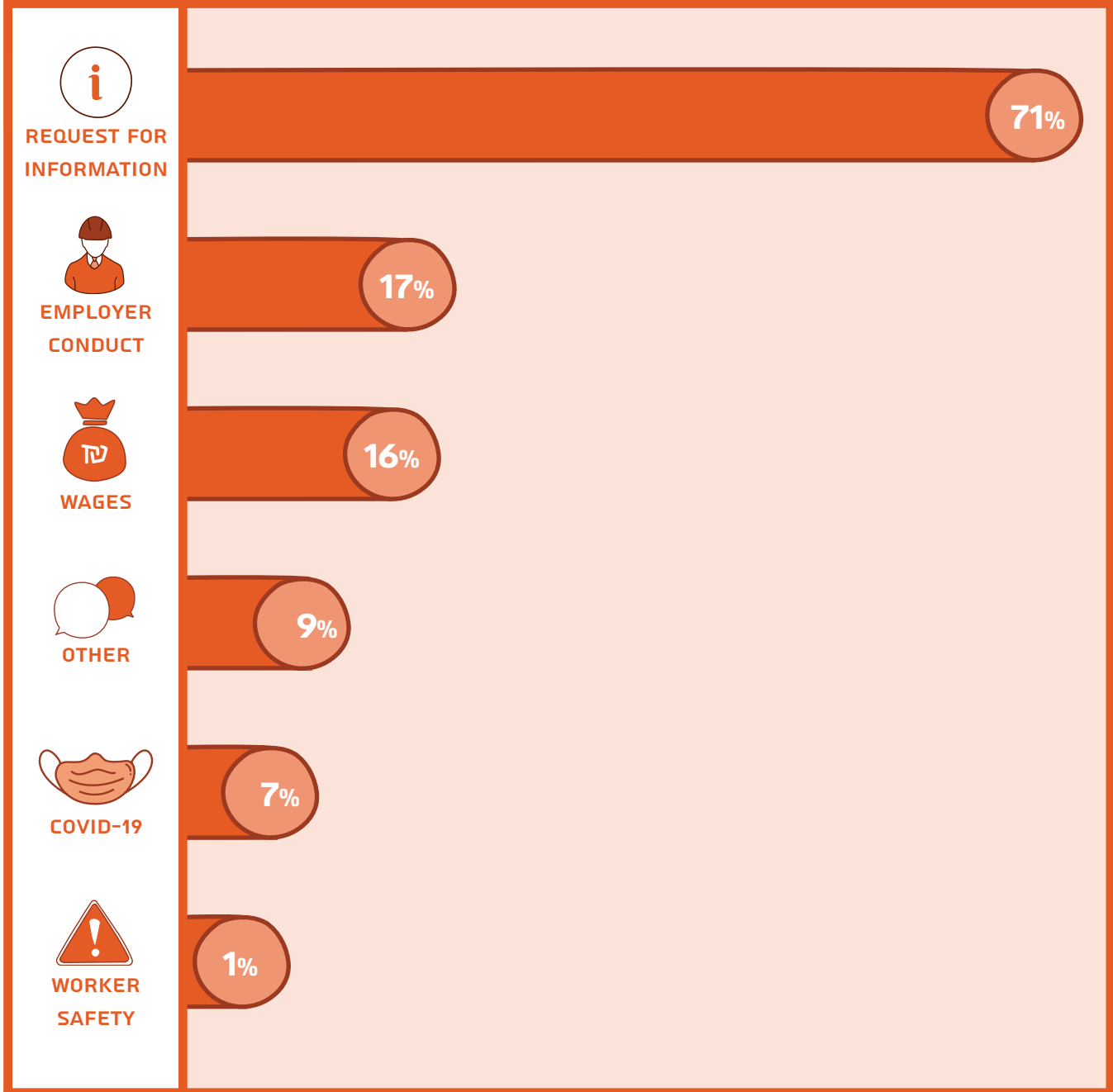
INQUIRIES[7] RECEIVED AT THE CALL CENTER BY YEAR AND SOURCE OF INQUIRY



COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE



SUBJECTS OF INQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS IN 2020



OF INQUIRIES REQUESTING INFORMATION:

71% –LOCATING THE MANPOWER COMPANY EMPLOYER

8% –INFORMATION ON WORKERS' RIGHTS

6% – INFORMATION ON VISAS

OF COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF AN EMPLOYER, A MANPOWER COMPANY, OR A RECRUITMENT AGENCY:

32% - MANPOWER COMPANY CONDUCT

23% - FOREMAN CONDUCT

13% - COMMUNICATION ISSUES WITH EMPLOYER

OF WAGE COMPLAINTS:

47% – UNPAID WAGES

39% – WAGES DO NOT COMPLY WITH THE LAW

15% – WAGES ARE PAID WITHOUT A PAY SLIP

OF CALLS ON OTHER SUBJECTS:

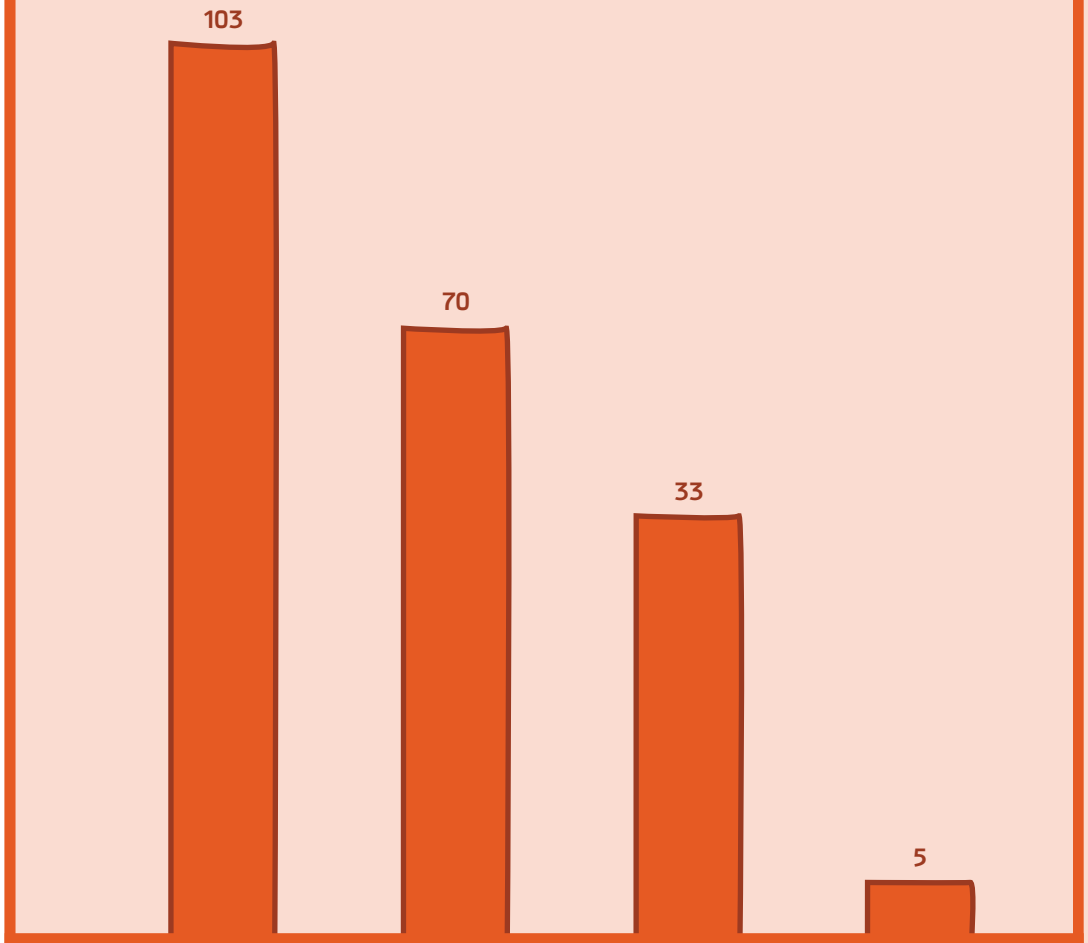
63% – MEDICAL CONDITION

14% – NON-WITHDRAWAL OF DEPOSIT

14% – LACK OF WORK

* The percentage represents the number of times a subject was raised, out of the total number of inquiries and complaints. It should be noted that a complaint may contain more than one subject, and therefore the combined percentages in the diagram are greater than 100% of the enquiries.

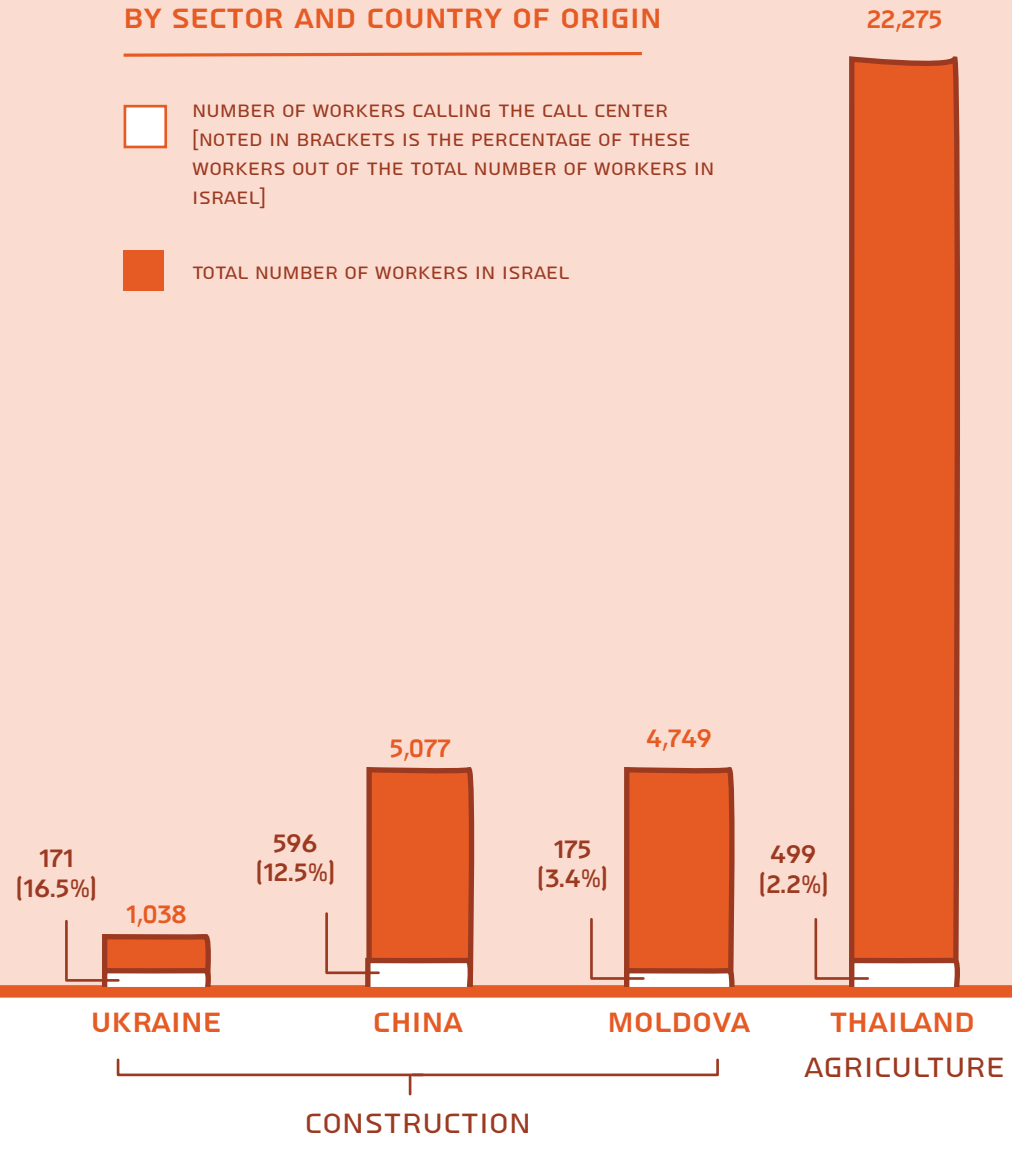
NUMBER OF INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN 2020*



* Inquiries regarding fears of infection with COVID-19 were handled in coordination with the Ministry of Health. The Call Center translated and distributed documents prepared by the Health Ministry providing explanations and instructions concerning the virus.

NUMBER OF WORKERS WHO CONTACTED THE CALL CENTER OUT OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKERS IN ISRAEL IN 2020

BY SECTOR AND COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



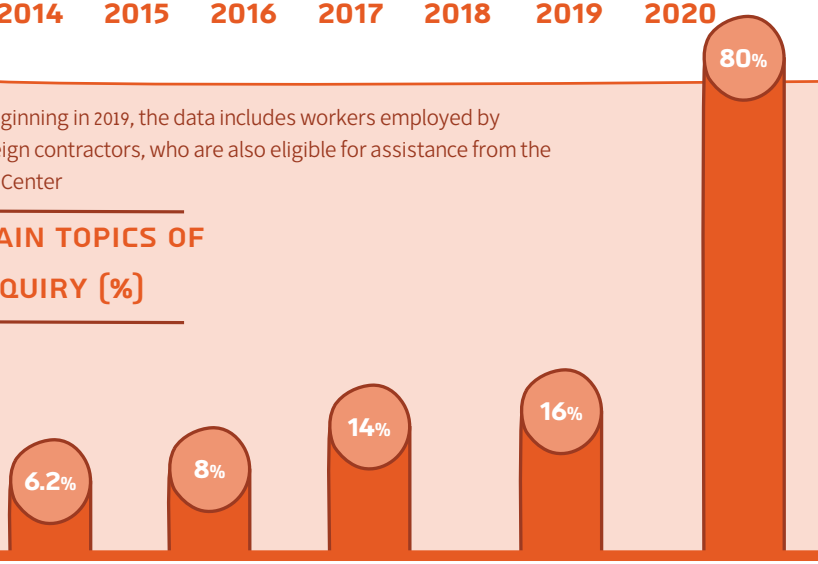
CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

TOTAL NUMBER OF INQUIRIES TO THE CALL CENTER, BY YEAR

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	81	151	189	428	1,492	2,490	2,345
	75	128	139	354	1,099	1,163	943
	1,473	2,333	4,267	5,821	10,365	*13,463	13,536
%	5%	5%	3%	6%	11%	9%	7%

* Beginning in 2019, the data includes workers employed by foreign contractors, who are also eligible for assistance from the Call Center

MAIN TOPICS OF INQUIRY (%)

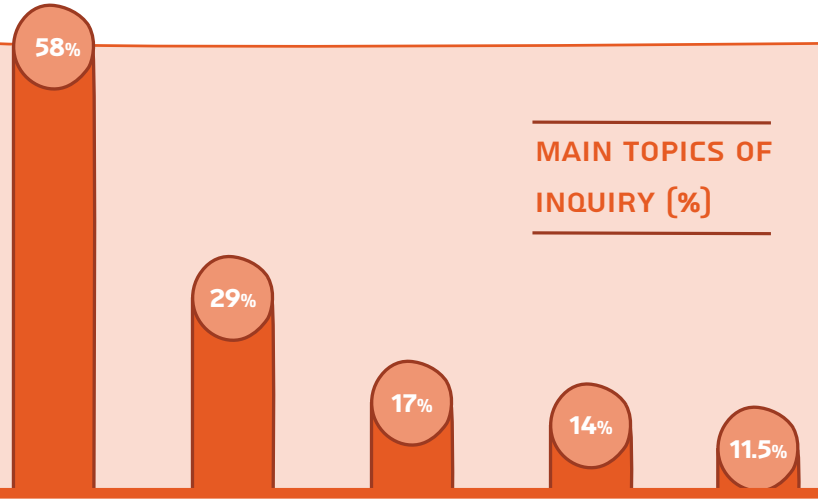


AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

TOTAL NUMBER OF INQUIRIES TO THE CALL CENTER, BY YEAR

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
	1,291	1,402	813	1,036	1,261	971	570
	704	680	434	628	763	663	504
	11,582	14,849	19,216	21,551	21,948	22,846	22,275
%	3%	3%	2%	5%	6%	3%	2%

MAIN TOPICS OF INQUIRY (%)



Number of workers in Israel employed via bilateral agreements in the relevant year

Number of workers who contacted the Call Center

Number of inquiries

% Percentage of workers who contacted the Call Center out of the total number of workers in Israel in the same sector

SUMMARY OF THE HANDLING OF INQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS IN 2020

Inquiries and complaints are referred to the responsible bodies according to topic. The length of time needed to address the complaint varies in accordance with its subject and circumstances. In general, the Call Center assists in providing information, PIBA handles employer/manpower agency conduct and change of employers, and the Ministry of Labor, Welfare, and Social Services handles complaints regarding wages,[10] employment conditions, and work safety.

OUT OF THE **2,952 INQUIRIES** AND COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE CALL CENTER IN THE PAST YEAR

2,446
requests for information were handled by the Call Center or PIBA coordinators

Of them

2,403
were addressed and closed.

348
inquiries and complaints were referred to PIBA,

Of them

341
were addressed and closed by the responsible bodies at PIBA.

OUT OF THE COMPLAINTS REFERRED TO THE PIBA ENFORCEMENT UNIT, VIOLATIONS WERE FOUND IN 4 CASES, AND NO VIOLATIONS WERE FOUND IN **9 CASES**.

158 complaints were referred to the Ministry of Labor, Welfare, and Social Services.

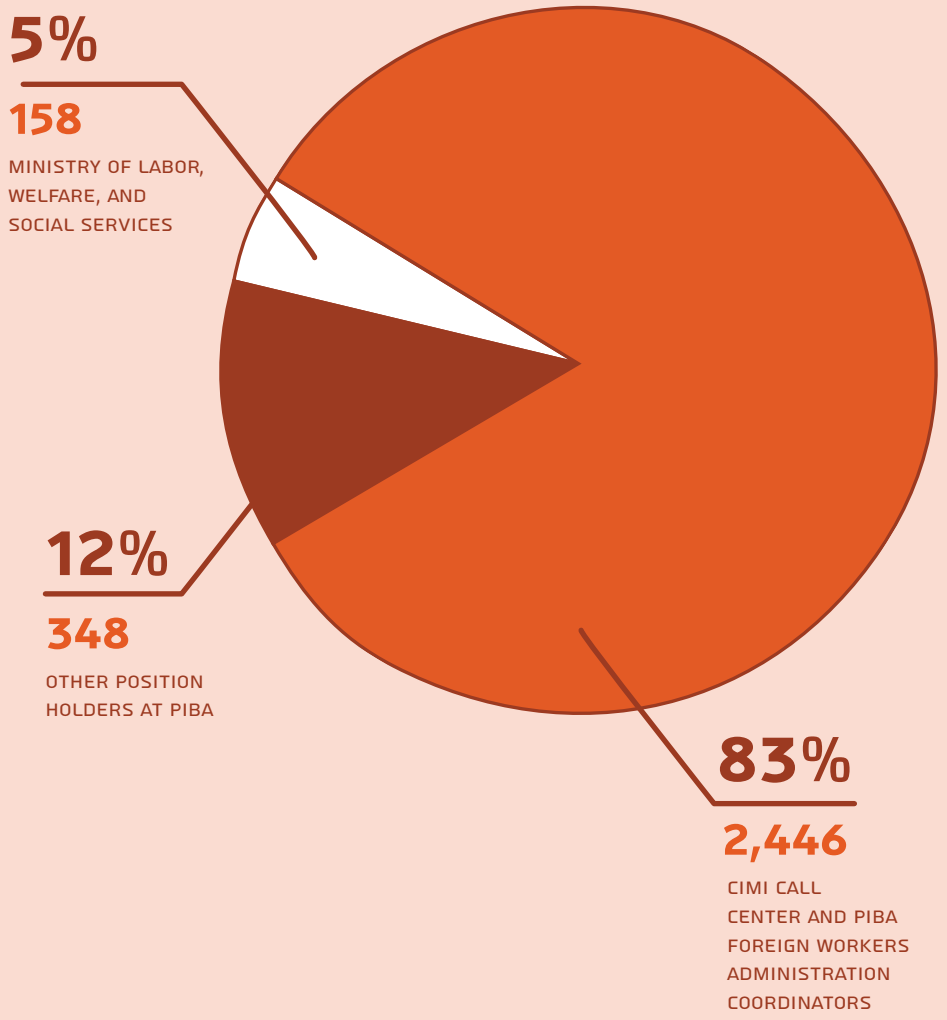
Of them

153 INQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS WERE REFERRED TO THE REGULATION AND ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION AT THE MINISTRY OF LABOR, OF WHICH:

77 complaints were closed, **one** of which had monetary fines imposed; **11 complaints** for which the investigation has been completed and decisions are pending; **38 complaints** were closed without findings; **one complaint** was closed due to an existing procedure against the employer; and **26 complaints** were closed for other reasons.[11] **76 complaints** are still under investigation by the Administration.

5 COMPLAINTS WERE REFERRED TO THE WORKER SAFETY ADMINISTRATION AT THE MINISTRY OF LABOR.

BREAKDOWN OF INQUIRIES BY INVESTIGATING BODY



EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURES OF THE FOREIGN WORKERS CALL CENTER



EXAMPLE 1

A construction worker from Moldova called the Call Center to complain of the accommodations provided by his employer: the apartment was moldy and the roof was leaking. He explained that he'd tried to complain to the manpower company employer but had received no reply. The Call Center transferred the complaint to the Coordinators at PIBA's Foreign Workers Administration, who immediately referred it to the PIBA Enforcement Unit. The Unit contacted a representative of the manpower company, demanding that the flaws be repaired immediately or the workers be moved swiftly to other accommodations. Within a week of the original inquiry, the Call Center was informed that the flaws had been repaired. The Call Center contacted the workers, who confirmed that the issues had been addressed and that the apartment was now in good condition. The manpower company was summoned for a hearing, and a decision was made to impose an administrative sanction.

EXAMPLE 2

A Chinese construction worker called the Call Center after failing to receive January's wages from the previous manpower company that had employed him. He explained that his attempts to directly contact the company's representatives had been unsuccessful. The inquiry was transferred to PIBA coordinators, who immediately contacted the company's representatives. An investigation found that the check for the worker's January wages was at the company's offices. PIBA coordinators, in cooperation with Call Center translators, mediated between the worker and the company. Two weeks later, the worker confirmed that he had received the check and thanked everyone for their assistance.

EXAMPLE 3

Two workers from China, whose visit to their home countries was prolonged due to the COVID-19 pandemic and sought to return to work in Israel, complained that their manpower company representative had demanded a fee for arranging their return to Israel. The Call Center team collected evidence from the workers, including correspondence with the representative, and transferred the materials to the Manpower Company and Recruitment Agency Division at the PIBA Foreign Workers Administration. The workers were issued permits to return to Israel through a different manpower company. In addition, thanks to cooperation between the parties involved, the Manpower Company and Recruitment Agency Division summoned the company to an administrative hearing. At the end of the procedure, a decision by PIBA Director-General was issued limiting the number of foreign-worker permits granted to the company and prohibiting the company from bringing workers to Israel for a period of over six months from the date of said decision.

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. 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/law01/500_818.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. 17.
8. Other sources include: the TIC project in Thailand, the Thai Embassy in Israel, the La Strada organization (Moldova), the Moldovan Employment Bureau.
9. The relevant units include: the PIBA Foreign Workers Administration, the Regulation and Enforcement Administration at the Ministry of Labor, Welfare, and Social Services, the Safety Administration at the Ministry of Labor, the Commissioner of Foreign Workers' Rights at the Ministry of Labor, and the Israel Police.
10. 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 compensation.
11. Other reasons include: the worker rescinded their complaint; the complaint lacked details; the worker failed to cooperate with the investigation; the complaint had already been submitted through other channels.

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GENERAL INFORMATION:

POPULATION AND IMMIGRATION AUTHORITY WEBSITE:
PIBA.GOV.IL

THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION
AND INTEGRATION WEBSITE: CIMI.ORG.IL

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