

MEMMO

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Israel Celebrates Workers' Rights

Labor Day recognizes the importance of labor rights—a key value shared by the United States and Israel. Labor institutions played an integral role in Israel's founding, and worker protections remain deeply entrenched in law and practice. In Israel, employment relations are regulated by the National Labor Court, statutory rights and individual labor contracts. As a result, Israel not only has a vibrant assortment of protections that grant human rights to its citizens, but has also created a healthy work-life balance that outpaces many Western nations.

A Founding Movement

- At the turn of the 20th century, labor unions played a key role in establishing and operating industries as Jewish immigrants returned to Israel. Jewish workers created the Histadrut (Jewish Workers' Federation), which established factories and co-operatives—such as the communal agricultural kibbutzim—that union members owned and operated.
- After gaining independence in 1948, Israel adopted a comprehensive system of protective labor laws. Current law prohibits terminating workers for their gender, race, religion, marital status, political views, sexual orientation, disability, or whistleblowing. The labor courts also have the power to reinstate wrongfully discharged workers.
- At its peak in the 1980s, union density in Israel was as high as 85 percent of the workforce. In the early 1990s, membership began to decline due to the increasing liberalization and deregulation of the Israeli economy. Today, about 33 percent of the workforce are union members.
- Labor unions remain one of the most influential forces in the state of Israel, able to mobilize large segments of the population in order to defend its members on a wide range of issues.



Israeli employees working in a factory in southern Israel. (Dan Balilty/AP Images).

Labor's Role in Today's Israel

- Today, Israel has one of the highest ratios of female to male labor participation in the world. More than 30 percent of managerial positions in Israel's top 100 companies are held by women. Since the passage of the Employment of Women Law in 1954, employers are prohibited from firing or reducing work hours of pregnant women, scheduling women for night shifts after the fifth month of pregnancy, and terminating women within 45 days of returning from maternity leave.

- Israeli society encourages a healthy work-life balance for its citizens. By law, the Israeli workweek is capped at a maximum of 45 hours and employees are granted a minimum of 14 days of paid vacation, with the amount of guaranteed paid leave increasing the longer an employee is in the workforce. While some Israelis work a six-day workweek, in recent years the five-day workweek has become more popular. Overtime is strictly regulated.
- The right to strike is not specifically protected by law, but Israel's Supreme Court and National Labor Court have upheld that right as an element of Israel's constitutional freedom of association.
- Collective labor agreements in Israel are governed by the Collective Agreement Law of 1957 and the Settlement of Labor Disputes Law of 1957, which set collective agreement guidelines and define necessary conditions for an organization to become a party to one.