Host-stranger relations in Rome, Tel Aviv, Paris and Amsterdam. A comparison of local policies toward labour migrants
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1. Introduction

Since its establishment nearly a century ago, Tel Aviv has grown rapidly through the absorption of successive waves of Jewish immigrants coming from a widely varied diaspora. Most of today’s Tel Avivis, their parents or grandparents, immigrated from the cities, towns and villages of Europe, Russia, the Maghreb and the Middle East. But in the past decade this city of immigrants has had to cope with a different type of Newcomer. The influx of (non-Jewish) overseas labour migrants has occurred at an astonishing rate: from several thousands at the beginning of the 1990s, labour migrants in Tel Aviv are now estimated at around 30,000-60,000, or anywhere between 8-17 per cent of the city population (in 2001 the official population was 358,800, of which about 95% are Jewish, excluding the labour migrant population in the city).

The rapid growth of foreign workers in Israel, from some 15,000 in 1990 to an estimated 300,000 today, is largely due to their role as substitutes for Palestinian labour in the country’s dual labour market (Schnell and Alexander 2002). Until the 1990s, Israel’s economy was largely independent of international labour migration movements, thanks to the presence of a nearby exploitable Third World labour force in the occupied Palestinian territories. When this source dried up during the first Intifada, the Israeli government had to recruit foreign labourers from overseas. These ‘guestworkers’ joined a small number of irregular labour migrants that had begun to arrive in the mid-1980s. But unlike the Palestinian workers who commuted daily into Israel from the nearby Gaza Strip and West Bank, the overseas labour migrants have remained. Many are concentrated in Tel Aviv, where new communities of mostly irregular migrants from Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe have formed. Israeli society, already fragmented by ethnic and political divides, is not yet prepared to cope with the challenge of a permanent non-Jewish presence in its midst. Government policies reflect this indecision.

The municipality of Tel Aviv, tired of waiting for national-level decisions, has initiated its own policies toward its labour migrant population. In doing so, it has moved within one decade from Non-policy to what might be termed a ‘liberal Guestworker policy’. This process can be seen as a pragmatic reaction within the municipal bureaucracy to the problems posed by a large irregular migrant presence, within a restrictive national migration regime. But it also reveals a gradual change in attitudes and expectations within the local authority regarding these non-Jewish zarim (strangers). The question arises, to what extent have host-stranger relations in Tel Aviv deviated from those at the national level? In addressing this question, the utility of the typology as an analytical framework, and the Guestworker type in particular, will be tested.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 sketches the context of host-stranger relations in Israel: the Israeli ethnocracy; Israel’s ethnically-based dual labour market; the national guestworker

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1 Parts of this chapter were published in earlier versions in Alexander 2001b and Schnell and Alexander 2002.
regime. Section 3 summarizes the local context: Tel Aviv’s immigration history; the labour migrant population and its characteristics; local host-stranger relations; the political and institutional context of policymaking. Section 4 describes the development of local migrant policies in Tel Aviv, in three phases. Section 5 summarizes these using the analytical framework.

2. **The national context**

Two points are crucial to understanding the Israeli migration regime and host society attitudes toward labour migrants in particular. One is the context of Israel as an ethnically-based settler state, which largely determines the difference between attitudes toward Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants, in both civil society and institutions. The other is the political context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its economic aspect: the entrenchment of an ethnically-based dual labour market. This context shapes the expectations and attitudes of the host society toward overseas labour migrants, as elaborated below.

2.1 **Host-stranger relations in the Israeli ethnocracy**

Israel's Zionist ideology and its institutions are still largely based on the "ingathering of the Diaspora", i.e. on Jewish immigration which the state actively encourages and assists. From before statehood (pre-1948) and until the 1990s immigrants to Israel were overwhelmingly Jewish, and most Jewish Israelis were overwhelmingly first- or second-generation immigrants. According to the Law of Return (1950), Jewish immigrants are automatically granted Israeli citizenship upon their arrival and generous government subsidies to help in their settlement process. In regard to non-Jews, Israel clearly defines itself as a non-immigration country. It is almost impossible for a (non-Jewish) immigrant to obtain Israeli citizenship or even permanent resident status, unless s/he marries an Israeli and/or converts to Judaism (neither is easy).

Israeli terminology clearly reflects the polar attitudes toward these Jewish and non-Jewish newcomers. Jewish immigrants are called olim (singular: oleh, literally ‘ascender’, from the Biblical Hebrew ‘to ascend’ to the Land of Israel). This is a social construct (the Jewish Newcomer) as well as an official legal status which confers various ‘oleh rights’. Labour immigrants are called ovdim zarim (ovdim = workers; zarim = foreign, alien). This term too is both a social construct (connoting alienness and transience) and an official category equal to the European gastarbeiter. The neutral term mehager (migrant) is rarely used in Israel outside of academia.

Host-stranger relations have been defined in Jewish-Israeli eyes according to several types of Strangers. The ethnocratic nature of Israeli means that for most Jewish-Israelis, one’s civic-national membership is tightly bound up with his/her ethnic-religious identity. Within Israel the two most identifiable Strangers are: the ‘Israeli Arab’ (for some: the Stranger as an ethnic minority member of

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2 See Smooha 1990 on Israel as an "ethnic democracy" and Yiftachel 1993 on Israel as an "ethnocracy."
3 Eighty-two percent of the Israeli population is officially Jewish, the remainder is Palestinian (Muslim and Christian). In 1995, 39 percent of the Jewish population were first-generation immigrants and an additional 40 percent were second-generation immigrants (Shuval & Leshem, 1998).
the Israeli polity; for others: the Internal Enemy)\(^4\) and the \textit{oleh} (the Jewish newcomer who is expected to assimilate, and in losing his/her diaspora Otherness, becomes Israeli). For the first forty years of Israel's existence, host-stranger relations were therefore defined largely in terms of Jewish-Israeli attitudes toward the Arab minority or toward Jewish newcomers (olim). This description, while grossly oversimplified, covers the two main types of host-stranger relations that provide the context for Israeli attitudes toward labour migrants.\(^5\)

Until the 1990s there was virtually no non-Jewish immigration to Israel (although the last wave of \textit{olim} following the breakdown of the Soviet Union contained a large proportion of non-Jews, see below). But since 1993 the massive recruitment of overseas foreign workers has created the first significant non-Jewish, non-Arab presence in the country's history. The Israeli host society is now contending with the presence of an entirely new type of Stranger: the non-Jewish newcomer. At this point, attitudes toward labour migrants are still in flux and relatively open. The labour migrants who are (apparently) settling in Israel are not yet regarded on a par with new Jewish immigrants nor as a new ethnic minority on a par with the 'Israeli Arab' minority. Instead, Israeli attitudes toward labour migrants appear to be based largely on their substitutive role instead of Palestinian workers, and an expectation of temporariness.

These have led to a generally positive view of labour migrants throughout the 1990s, although there has been a deterioration between 1996-99 as their visibility has increased (Schnell 2001: 18-19). Two surveys (Nathanson and Bar-Zuri 1999 and Kop 2000, cited in ibid.) also reveal the ethno-religious factor in determining attitudes toward the \textit{temporal presence} of the labour migrants, i.e. the possibility of their permanence. The 1995 survey showed that while higher-income respondents responded more positively (ranging from agreement to legalise irregular migrants to living next to them) than lower-income respondents, almost two thirds of the respondents approved of the presence of the labour migrants.\(^6\)

Interestingly, it was the degree of religiousness of the respondents that most closely corresponded to negative attitudes toward labour migrants. The main factor appeared to be the desire to preserve the Jewish character of the state, rather than negative (racist) perceptions about the migrants, i.e. the migrants' non-Jewishness was sufficient. Using the same questions, a later survey in the migrant neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv which are undergoing some gentrification (Schnell 2000) revealed that the veteran, lower-income (often religious) Israeli residents had developed the most negative attitudes toward the labour migrants, while the new, higher-income (mostly secular) residents displayed the most positive attitudes, in relation to the overall national average (see below).

\(^4\) 'Israeli Arabs' (Palestinians, Bedouin and Druze holding Israeli citizenship) make up 18% of the population. Although most speak fluent Hebrew and some even serve in the police and army, they are seen by most of the Jewish population as occupying a halfway position in terms of membership, partly 'insiders' and partly 'outsiders'.

\(^5\) Other ways in which Israelis define Others (and thus identify themselves) follow the Ashkenazi/Sephardi, the Religious/Secular and the Right-wing/Left-wing cleavages that divide Jewish Israeli society. While equally important, they are less relevant in terms of host-stranger relations for this chapter.

\(^6\) Even among lower income respondents, 45% said they would agree to have labour migrants as neighbours (Bar-Zuri 1996, cited in Schnell 2000: 13).
Another insight into current host-stranger relations regarding labour migrants may be gained from the strategy of the only significant labour migrant association in Israel, in its attempts to affect public opinion. The members of the African Workers Union (AWU) are labour migrants whose stay in Israel is illegal (see below). AWU spokesmen have been careful not to raise demands that appear to threaten the Jewish character of Israel, asking only to be treated humanely "as long as we are here" and denying any intentions to settle in the Jewish state (interview N. Holdbrook). Kemp et al. (2000: 108-9) describe the AWU’s strategy of raising "two major themes explicitly aimed at mobilizing Israeli public opinion and support..." First, they depict themselves as a "community of suffering", drawing parallels between the current hardships of the African migrant community in Israel, and those of the Jewish diaspora in the past. Second, they claim some rights that are divorced from national membership (Soysal’s 1994 “valorization of personhood”). In other words, there is no demand for incorporation into the host society or polity, although some have been in Israel for years and show signs of settlement.

This strategy has been quite successful in creating a non-threatening image of the African labour migrants. The relatively benign views of Israelis toward the African community do not necessarily carry over to other migrant communities (e.g. Latinos). Israeli attitudes toward labour migrants are bound to change when the host society perceives their presence as a permanent one, i.e. when they are no longer regarded as temporary substitutes for Palestinian workers. Until now, most Israelis still regard the overseas labour migrants as a non-threatening substitute for the Palestinian workers, rather than as competition for Israeli jobs. However this is based on the expectation of their temporariness. Until the conflict with the Palestinians is resolved. But as their presence assumes signs of permanence (e.g. migrant children reaching higher grades in school), the migrants are seen increasingly as a threat to the Jewish character of the host society.

2.2 An ethnically-based dual labour market

Attitudes toward labour migrants are thus linked to their role as a substitute labour force replacing the Palestinians in the secondary market. From 1956 to 1987 the Israeli economy became dependent on cheap Arab labour, developing an ethnically-based dual labour market in which certain (usually dirty, demeaning or dangerous) jobs were considered as "Arab work". Prior to 1967, this depended on ‘Israeli Arabs’. After 1967, Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip began to commute to work in Israeli cities and towns. By the late 1980s some 120,000 workers, or 9% of the labour force in Israel, was Palestinian -- less than half of them legal workers. The construction and agricultural sectors became especially dependent on Palestinian labour, which constituted 45% and 25% of their workforce, respectively (Bartram 1998, Fischer 1999, Schnell 2001).

In 1987 the first Palestinian uprising (intifada) broke out, leading to frequent closures of the Territories and government bans on employment of Palestinians. Under increasing pressure from employers (especially the powerful construction and agricultural lobbies), the government decided in mid-1993 to allow large-scale recruitment of foreign workers from overseas, as a 'temporary'
solution to the shortage of cheap labour. The detachment of the Israeli economy from the Palestinian workforce meant that Israel effectively entered the global labour market in the 1990s. The total number of annual permits issued for employing foreign workers rose from some 10,000 in 1993 to almost 70,000 in 1995, peaking at about 100,000 in 1996, thereafter stabilising at around 90,000. Of these, 75% are employed in construction (mainly Romanians), 15 per cent in agriculture (mainly Thais) and 10 per cent in domestic services (mainly Filipinos) (Schnell 2001).

Parallel to the increase in legal labour migrants there was an increase in irregular immigrants (without a stay and work permit). Currently there are an estimated 200-250,000 regular and irregular labour migrants in Israel – the second-highest ranking in the world for labour migrants per capita (Friedman 2002). The number of foreign workers with permits in Israel runs between 80-100,000, while the number of undocumented foreign workers in Israel is estimated at around 150,000 or more.8 In effect, overseas labour migrants have largely replaced the Palestinians who now account for only 4% of the workforce. The high proportion of irregular migrants is largely due to national immigration policies, elaborated below.

Figure 7.1 Development of the secondary labour market in Israel, 1956-1998

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Source: Schnell 2001, p.11, Figure 1.

2.3 The Israeli guestworker regime

The national guestworker regime established in 1993 has been extremely restrictive, in keeping with the Israel’s character as an immigration country for Jews only (Rosenhek 1999). The government issues stay and work permits (valid for 1-2 years and renewable depending on the

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7 Government efforts to fill the gap left by the Palestinians in the construction sector, through subsidised recruitment of Israelis, including the new immigrants from the former Soviet Union, did not succeed. Construction work remains the eyes of many Israelis “Arab work”. This further demonstrates the ethnic nature of Israel’s segmented labour market.

8 According to government estimates for 1998 the total number of foreign workers in Israel was some 170,000, about half of them legal. Other estimates place the number at 200,000 or more, i.e. approximately 3 per cent of the national population (Ministry of Labor and Welfare, Manpower Planning Authority, 1998). Some consider the government
employment sector) not directly to the worker but to his/her employer, who is responsible for the foreign workers' housing, work conditions and health insurance. In fact, manpower agencies handle most of the process of recruitment and responsibility for foreign workers. This bonding of foreign workers to a specific employer who can make them illegal simply by dismissing them, encourages massive exploitation. Employer responsibilities toward "their" workers are routinely violated and routinely unenforced by the government, due to lack of manpower and lack of will on the part of the government. This actually accords (although formally violating) with the government policy, which has an interest in keeping labour migrants under a tight leash and encouraging rapid rotation (Bar Zuri 1999, Drori and Kunda, 1999, Schnell and Alexander 2002).

The paradoxical result of the Israeli guestworker regime is that conditions for irregular labour migrants are often better than those of regular guestworkers. Irregular migrants face the threat of deportation but are free to choose their workplace, bargain over work conditions, choose their housing, etc. As a result, many legal migrant workers abandon their employer in search of better wages and improved conditions, or following work disputes, thus entering the illegal migrant population.

Despite frequent changes of government and constant pressure from Israeli human rights organisations, there has been little fundamental change in the national guestworker regime. From 1993 to 1996 national policy effectively ignored illegal workers, applying only a symbolic policy of arrest and deportation. In late 1996 the government reduced the number of work permits issued for legal workers and set a target of 1000 deportations per month of illegal migrants. The number of deportations grew, but remained a fraction of the level intended. Since then the toughness or leniency of government policy toward illegal migrants (i.e. the deportation policy) has zigzagged as coalitions (and Interior Ministers responsible for this issue) have changed again and again (Box 7.1).

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estimates to be low. The Israeli NGO Workers Hotline (Kav LaOved) estimates there are 141,000 irregular migrants and a total of 200-250,000 foreign workers in Israel (Kav LaOved Newsletter, May 2000).

9 Common abuses by employers/manpower agencies include illegally confiscating "their" workers' passports upon arrival in Israel, deductions from the salary for various fictitious costs, delays in payment or not paying at all, and dismissing the worker if s/he complains, thus making him/her "illegal".

10 Regular (legal) foreign workers are those with both a valid stay and work permit. Irregular (illegal) migrants are those who arrived on a tourist visa and overstayed, or those who arrived as regular guestworkers and left (or were dismissed by) their legal employer.
Two government ministries are primarily responsible for policy concerning non-Jewish immigrants: Labor & Welfare, and Interior. Conspicuously absent is the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, which deals only with Jewish immigration.

Under the Likud-led coalition government (1996-1999), both ministries were in the hands of the Orthodox party Shas, which is clearly antagonistic to non-Jewish migrants. In the first year of the Labour-led government, the Ministry of Labour and Welfare was still controlled by Shas but the Russian immigrants' party Israel Ba'Aliya controlled the Interior Ministry. In 2000, following the secession of these two parties from the coalition government, both ministries were headed by ministers from the ruling Labour Party.

By the late 1990s, demands were raised from within the government to reform the guestworker regime which was considered unsatisfactory by all concerned, except the employers and manpower agencies who were profiting handsomely. Following pressure from human rights NGOs and left-wing members of parliament (Knesset), a number of changes were made in migration legislation in the year 2000:

The 1991 Employment of Foreign Workers Law was amended, tightening employers' responsibilities for foreign workers' health insurance and housing conditions.

The Health Ministry introduced a formal arrangement to include children of foreign workers regardless of legal status in the national health insurance scheme, on a limited basis.

The Law of Entry (1952) was amended, to regulate the detention and deportation of illegal migrants, introducing a quasi-judicial review into the process.

Nevertheless, in August 2000 Prime Minister Barak ordered an intensification of the deportation policy together with a decrease in the number of work permits issued. The current right-wing government basically continues this policy, with a declared (but never realised) aim of 1000 deportations per month.

Sources: Kemp et al. 2000; interviews D. Alexander and M. Pinchuk.

In sum, the migration regime of the past decade reflects both the ethnocratic nature of Israel and the temporary, substitutive role of overseas labour migrants, as understood by all the governments regardless of their political leaning. The latter assumption is based on the notion that the recruitment of guestworkers is a stopgap measure "until things calm down" (i.e. until Palestinian workers can be re-introduced into the Israeli labour market and their exploitation duly renewed). The outcome is a migration regime which inadvertently encourages a high proportion of irregular migrants, beyond government control. This outcome is similar to that of the Italian case, with the important exception that Israel has no regularisation (amnesty) policy as in Italy, to periodically decrease the proportion of irregular migrants. In Israel, undocumented migrants remain undocumented, and Tel Aviv has become the primary magnet for this population.
Israeli’s particular circumstances may raise the question of comparability between Tel Aviv and the other (European) cases in this book. However, when we look at the local level, particularly in regard to labour migrant settlement and local policy reactions (below), it becomes clear that Tel Aviv is, if not similar, than certainly comparable to European cities. As we will see, many aspects of labour migrant settlement in Tel Aviv in the past decade are similar to processes occurring in new immigration cities such as Rome in the past two decades. Regarding the response of the host society, it appears that ‘Fortress Israel’ is not so different from ‘Fortress Europe’, as far as attitudes and actions toward the presence of these newcomers. This is especially true regarding attitudes in Tel Aviv, the most secular and westernized city in Israel (below). In sum: while Tel Aviv’s policy response to labour migrant settlement may be embedded in a unique national context, the same holds true to a great extent for every other city in this comparison.

3. The local context

3.1 A city built on waves of immigration

Tel Aviv was founded in 1909 as a suburb of Yafo (Jaffa) by sixty Jewish families who wanted to escape the overcrowding of the ancient port town, and to establish the ‘first Hebrew city’. Its spectacular growth was thereafter based on a series of immigration waves, of which the arrival of labour migrants is the latest, and the first non-Jewish wave. In its first forty years the new town of Tel Aviv absorbed Jewish immigrants from Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, growing to 100,000 by 1935 and 200,000 by 1947. Israel’s War of Independence (1947-1949, known to the Palestinians as ‘the Disaster’), involved street-to-street battles between residents of Tel Aviv and Yafo and ended with an estimated 70,000 Palestinians fleeing Yafo almost overnight in 1948. In 1950 the nearly deserted city of Yafo was annexed to the municipality of Tel Aviv and the remaining 4000 Palestinians became Israeli citizens and residents of ‘Tel Aviv-Yafo’.

Today Arab residents constitute about 4% of Tel-Aviv-Yafo’s population. The Russian immigrant wave was the first to include a high proportion of non-Jews, coming as family dependents and under false papers (it is estimated that up to a third or more of the Russian immigrants to Israel are not Jewish). The Russian immigrants first settled in...
Yafo and the poorer, southern Tel Aviv neighbourhoods. Within a few years many improved their economic position and moved to better areas (Menahem 1993).

The southern neighbourhoods abandoned by the upwardly mobile Russian immigrants were soon filled in by overseas labour migrants. The number of labour migrants settling in Tel Aviv can only be estimated (see below), but it appears they numbered only a few thousands from the late 1980s to 1993. With the beginning of the guestworker policy the number increased dramatically, and Tel Aviv’s labour migrant population (regular and irregular) is now estimated at 30-60,000. Taking this into account, the total city population may now approach 400,000 (Figure 7.2).

**Figure 7.2** Population of Tel Aviv-Yafo (1910-2001) and estimate of labour migrant population (1985-2001)

Source: Official population: Municipality of Tel Aviv, 2002, Profil Ha’ir, p. 28, Figure 1.1. Labour migrant population: author’s estimate (see section 3.2, above).

3.2.1 Population and characteristics

Until the 1993 change in government policy, overseas labour migrants were a marginal presence in Israel. Irregular labour migrants began arriving in Tel Aviv in the late 1980s, mostly from Africa. They were followed by irregular migrants from Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Far East and neighbouring Arab countries. The overriding motivation was work, although the “added spiritual value” of living in the Holy Land may partly explain Israel’s attraction for immigrants from Latin...
America. Africa and the Philippines. Most labour migrants from Africa and Latin America arrived on tourist visas and stayed on illegally. Asian migrants arrived after 1993 as legal foreign workers (Thais in agriculture, Filipinas in elderly care). Many became irregular when they left their legal employers. Migrants from Eastern Europe arrived by both routes, as well as some whose olleh (Jewish immigrant) status was rescinded when they were discovered to have false documents. Finally, an unknown number of workers from Arab countries entered through neighbouring Egypt and Jordan and then disappeared within the Arab communities inside Israel (Schnell 2001).

Tel Aviv soon became the focal point of the irregular migrant communities in Israel due to its size and relatively large informal labour market, and later through chain migration. Most irregular migrants found work in house cleaning, geriatric care, restaurants and hotels, and light industry. It is extremely difficult to estimate the size of the labour migrant population in Tel Aviv, of which an estimated 70-80% are undocumented. The Municipality claims that there are some 60,000 foreigners in the city. Among researchers, however, the estimates vary between 30-50,000, while the NGO Workers Hotline believe the numbers are higher than 60,000 (Tel Aviv Welfare Division, 1999; Schnell and Alexander 2002).

As in other new immigration cities (Athens, Barcelona, Rome), Tel Aviv's labour migrant population is extremely diverse and reflects the characteristics of the "new migration" (see Chapter 3). With over eighty countries represented, there is no dominant ethnic group or continent of origin (Figure 7.3). The single largest ethnic group may be the Filipino community (as in Rome), but the irregular status of most labour migrants in Tel Aviv can allow no more than approximate 'guesstimates'. Based on these (from NGOs as well as municipal sources), it appears that migrants from the former Soviet bloc countries (Romania, Poland, Ukraine, Russia) may currently constitute the largest contingent, followed by migrants from Southeast Asia (Filipines, Thailand), sub-Saharan Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, etc.) and South America (Columbia, Ecuador, etc.). Other groups include Turks and Chinese recruited as construction workers. An unknown number of labour migrants originate from Arab countries (mostly Jordanians, but also from Egypt and Maghreb countries).17

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14 For Israel, it is politically difficult to curtail the flow of pilgrimage tourists in an attempt to limit illegal immigration.
15 Workers from eastern Europe are imported by the construction industry primarily from Romania, in organised groups of single men. An unknown amount of foreign workers who arrived with permits have left their legal employers and continue to work illegally. Workers from the former Soviet Union are estimated to have become in recent years the largest group of undocumented workers in Israel (Ha'aretz, 25/2/00).
16 The East Asians are mostly single菲利宾 women and a smaller number of single Thai men and women. They are employed legally as care-givers residing with their employers, or illegally as domestic help and in restaurants.
17 Irregular labour migrants from neighbouring Arab countries cross the border into the Palestinian Authority and infiltrate into Israel, together with thousands of Palestinians searching for irregular work in Israel. Most reside in Yafö (Schnell 2000).
Most research has focused on the African and Latino communities, estimated at around 15,000 altogether, nearly all of them undocumented.\(^8\) Kemp et al. (2000) noted that both communities share several characteristics, apart from their irregular status: a high percentage of families with children, a relatively educated population, well-developed communitarian patterns of organisation. The African community is the most highly organised, with community life revolving around churches, self-help organisations and one pan-African political association (below). Fear of arrest and deportation remains the underlying reason for the underground nature of the African organisations. Dozens of underground churches of various denominations operate in former stores and warehouses in southern Tel Aviv, in addition to at least two dozen ‘kindergartens’ and one African community ‘school’, usually operating in private apartments. The Latino community has developed independent religious organisations, supplementing the established Catholic churches in Yafo, as well as a variety of self-
help, cultural and recreational organisations. Until recently, the central communal event of this community (attracting non-Latino migrants as well as Israelis) was a weekly football tournament at a seaside park, accompanied by Latino music and food stalls. This has now dispersed to several less visible locations in fear of police raids (ibid). The Filipino community is exceptional in having both regular and irregular labour migrants, the majority of them working as caregivers. They too have developed associations, mostly centred around social activities and self-help organisations (Von Breitenstein 1999).

As noted above, the Israeli guestworker regime has led to a paradoxical situation whereby the undocumented migrants have greater freedom to mobilise than the legal guestworkers. While the legal workers live in fear of their employer's wrath should they openly organise, undocumented workers are liable to deportation in any case and have more incentives and resources. However, only the African community has succeeded in political mobilisation. The African Workers Union (AWU) was established in 1997, officially registered as a non-profit organisation in Israel, and now has 1.200 card-carrying members, nearly all of them irregular migrants! Through lobbying activities carried out in close cooperation with Israeli human rights activists (appearances before Knesset members and the media as well as events organised by NGOs and the municipality (below)), the AWU has become the public voice of the labour migrant community in Israel vis-à-vis the host society. As noted above, this was achieved by portraying African labour migrants as a responsible, respectable public that is more a victim of, than a threat to, the Jewish state. A similar attempt by labour migrants to create a 'Latin Workers Union' in 1998 (again, with the active support of Israeli activists) was abandoned after two of its leaders were deported (Rosenheck 1999, Kemp at al. 2000).\(^1\)

In contrast to the above, legal foreign workers in Tel Aviv (mostly employed in construction, the majority from Romania with smaller contingents from Turkey and China) have not developed formal social organisations. This is primarily explained by lack of motivation: nearly all the guestworkers are single male adults in Israel on a 1-2 year permit and regard their stay as temporary. Collective grievances about work and living conditions are either settled within the workplace (sometimes by the employer dismissing the troublemakers), or brought to the attention of Workers Hotline, the NGO dealing with these issues (ibid).

The degree of labour migrant concentration in the 'core area' depends in part on the intensity of the deportation policy. Police raids leading to deportations have focused on Neve Sha'anan, which resulting in a marked degree of dispersion from this area in recent years.\(^2\) According to Schnell population in Tel Aviv is decreasing and is now no more than 5.000 (interview N. Holdbrook). Both entities have reasons to exaggerate (maximise or minimise) these numbers. Latino migrants are estimated at several thousands.

\(^{1}\) The Latino community now regards that mobilisation attempt as leading to an escalation in arrests and deportations (ibid). According the the president of the AWU, the Latino leaders made demands that were too provocative to the Israeli authorities (interview N. Holdbrook; personal communication with Barak Kalir).

\(^{2}\) The dispersal of the migrant population beyond the "core neighbourhoods" is reflected in the latest statistics of the neighbourhood health clinics, which show that the percentage of migrants among the total number of cases at the Neve Sha'anan and Florentin clinics decreased slightly (30% and 20% respectively) in comparison to previous years, while
1999, about a third of the labour migrants now reside in five southern Tel Aviv neighbourhoods (Neve Sha’anan, Shapira, Florentin, Hatikva, Ezra/Ha’argazim) plus a neighbourhood adjacent to the city’s central open market (Kerem Hateimanim). Another third reside in secondary concentrations in Yafo (Arab foreign workers in Ajami neighbourhood) and central-northern Tel Aviv (foreign workers in domestic and geriatric care, mostly Filipinas, who live with or close to their employers).

Map 7.1 Labour migrant concentrations in Tel Aviv

rising in the south-eastern neighbourhood of Hatikva (to 20% of all cases) (Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo, Public Health Division, Report on migrants, July 2000).
3.2.2 Geographical distribution

Labour migrants in Tel Aviv reside mostly in the southern half of the city, concentrating around two working class neighbourhoods (Neve Sha’anan and Shapira), located on the southeastern periphery of the downtown business district (CBD) and between the old and new central bus stations. The municipality has defined this as the ‘core area’ of the foreign worker population in Tel Aviv (Box 7.2). According to one municipal estimate, between 8,500-10,000 foreign workers reside in these neighbourhoods, comprising between 50 to 60 percent of their population and up to one third of Tel Aviv’s labour migrant population (Planning Division, 1999 policy draft report).

Box 7.2 Neve Sha’anan: the ‘foreign workers neighbourhood’ of Israel

The ‘core area’ of Tel Aviv’s labour migrant population is located in two traditionally proletarian neighbourhoods, Neve Sha’anan and Shapira. Labour migrants began settling here in the late 1980s due to low rental prices and easy access to public transportation (an important asset for many illegal workers who clean houses throughout the metropolitan area). The construction of the massive New Central Bus Station in Neve Shaanan in the 1980s aggravated the physical and economic deterioration of the district, now known as the ‘bus stations area’. Until the mid 1990s Neve Sha’an and Shapira had among the highest negative migration rates in the city. These neighbourhoods still contain an unusually large percentage of Russian and Ethiopian olim who have not managed to integrate in Israel. From 1993 the settlement of foreign workers in these neighbourhoods became massive.

Neve Sha’an, with its foreign workers’ cafes and meeting places, also serves a broader population of labour migrants living and working outside of Tel Aviv. On weekends and holidays they converge to meet with fellow migrants, some even hiring apartments together to serve as their weekend homes. For many foreign workers lodged in isolated construction sites and agricultural settlements during the week this concentration provides them with a feeling of community and security.

Crucially, the ‘core area’ is adjacent to the central node of Israel’s intercity bus system, creating a peak exposure area of the labour migrant presence for Israelis passing through. In the eyes of the local population, media and politicians, the geographical concentration of the labour migrants magnifies the impact of their presence in Tel Aviv. Neve Sha’an has thus become the symbol of the foreign worker presence in Tel Aviv and Israel.

Recent municipal plans for renovation of the southern neighbourhoods devote special attention to the ‘foreign worker problem’ but have also raised its potential as a springboard for urban renovation (see section 4.3.6, below)


3.3 Local Host-stranger relations

Host society attitudes toward labour migrants may be regarded as particularly tolerant in Tel Aviv, the most secular and cosmopolitan city in Israel. The image of labour migrants as a threat to the Jewish state, played on especially by Orthodox and conservative politicians, is probably
somewhat weaker in Tel Aviv. Here also, human rights organisations are most active and have done
much to raise local awareness of labour migrant rights. All but one of the relevant NGOs -- Kav
La'Oved (Workers Hotline): the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Physicians for Human
Rights (PHR) and Hotline for Workers in Detention -- are based in Tel Aviv. The local press and
particularly the popular weekly Ha'ir (The City) also served as a major factor in creating public
empathy toward the labour migrant population. In a series of articles published since 1996, Ha'ir
raised this issue in local public discourse by presenting the human face of the foreign worker
population, their precarious living conditions and exploitation by Israeli landlords and employers.21

However, the relatively tolerant attitude that first characterised the local response to labour
migrants is changing. Tel Aviv's population is becoming increasingly polarized. As noted above, the
labour migrants are concentrated in the city's southern neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods are
also becoming poorer and more religious, as the socio-economic gap in Tel Aviv widens, between
survey of attitudes among residents in Neve Sha'anan and Shapira revealed a clear divide between
lower and higher income residents. The latter ("yuppies" who have followed recent gentrification
trends in those neighbourhoods) provided the most positive responses, in a clear example of
'embracing strangers': This was also demonstrated in interviews conducted during the 'public
participation' stage of the new scheme for redevelopment of the Stations Area (see section 4.3.6
below):

Question: How do you feel living with foreign workers as neighbours?

Answer: It's nice to have heterogeneity. They don't harm me, everyone does his own
thing. Visitors tell me "Listen, it's like living abroad here!" There's really a positive
atmosphere. But I wouldn't want Neve Sha'anana to be defined as only a foreigners'
neighbourhood.

(Interview with Yuval, 36 year old bachelor, economist, purchased his flat in Neve

In sharp contrast, lower income residents in these neighbourhoods feel entrapped and in
competition with the labour migrants (Schnell 2000: 13-14). A sign of rising xenophobic feelings
may be found in Hatikva, a traditional right-wing neighbourhood in southeast Tel Aviv which has
experienced a substantial inflow of labour migrants in recent years. Following a Palestinian suicide
attack in October 2000, anti-Arab riots broke out in several working class neighbourhoods, most
famously in HaTikva, where cries were heard to the effect: "First we'll take care of the Arabs, next
time will be the foreign workers' turn" (interview E. Altar). According to the journalist covering the
labour migrant issue in Tel Aviv, "its amazing there is so little anti-migrant feeling in Tel Aviv,
considering the Israeli context...of ethnic-based fear (of Arabs) and insecurity about the future
character of the Jewish state" (interview E. Fishbein).

3.4 Political and institutional context

Local politics in Tel Aviv are linked to national politics insofar as most of the local party lists are linked to national parties. Nevertheless, the coalition-building that follows local elections and the day-to-day politics do not necessarily follow the common divides in Israel, of Right versus Left, Religious versus Secular. Traditionally, Tel Aviv's generally centre-left and secular population meant that its mayors were liberal (by Israeli standards) regardless of their party affiliation. Tel Aviv-Yafo is formally governed by a mayor and city council totalling 31 members, elected for five-year terms. This case study covers two mayoral terms. From 1993 to 1998 the city was ruled by a mixed (right-left) coalition headed by Mayor Ronnie Milo. Milo is a professional politician and left-leaning maverik from the right-wing Likud party. In the November 1998 municipal elections he was defeated by Ron Huldai, a former Air Force pilot and school director, who ran as an independent candidate (adopted by Labour at the last minute) on a campaign to improve the quality of life for local residents. In 1999 Mayor Huldai set up a wall-to-wall coalition, meaning that there is virtually no opposition in city council.

Municipal policy is decided by the mayor within the broad lines of coalition agreements. A majority vote in the city council can oppose the mayor's policy, but this is rare. Mayor Huldai replaced the previous system in which the different divisions of the municipal bureaucracy were headed by aldermen (representing different coalition factions), with top civil servants who report directly to the mayor and his appointed advisors. City councillors were left with chairmanship of committees, whose influence is questionable. This means that it is the mayor and his advisory team, together with the top civil servants, who effectively make local policy at least in the issue areas affecting labour migrants.

The main restraints on local migrant policies come from the national government. Israel is a highly centralized country where ministers and civil servants in Jerusalem routinely meddle in local matters. Although local authorities in Israel are weak vis-a-vis the national government, the municipality of Tel Aviv is relatively autonomous due to its size and economic importance. This translates into a high municipal income from local taxes which gives Tel Aviv's mayors more room to maneuver. As we shall see, this made it possible for the Huldai administration to not only espouse but also implement an independent migrant policy since 1999.

4. Local migrant policies in Tel Aviv

As noted above, overseas foreign workers became significant in numbers and visibility from 1993 onward. During the past decade (1993-2002) the municipality 'awoke' to the fact that it had a labour migrant population, tried to grasp its meaning and searched for ways to cope with this new

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22 The municipal bureaucracy is now composed of 'Administrations' (minhalot, e.g. Social Services Administration, City Engineer, etc.), which include 'Divisions' (e.g. Welfare, Planning) subdivided into Departments (e.g. South Tel Aviv Welfare Department, Long-Term Planning Department). Specific service units are found in various Divisions (e.g. MESILA within the Social Services Division, below).

23 Government payments accounted for only some 12% of the 1997 municipal budget.
challenge. The changes in Tel Aviv’s policy reaction can be seen as a result of shifting attitudes and expectations regarding the migrant presence within the local professional bureaucracy, followed by a change in mayors. This process is described below in sub-sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, corresponding to three policy phases. Sub-section 4.4 summarizes and analyses this process in terms of the model and typology.

4.1 Non-policy, late 1980s to mid-1990s

4.1.1 Informal provision of basic services

It is fair to say that prior to 1993 the municipality was largely unaware of the irregular migrant population in its midst, numbering perhaps several thousand and nearly all undocumented. From the mid-1990s municipal workers began to provide access to basic health, welfare and educational services to this population, especially migrant children. This practice developed as a bottom-up response by 'street-level bureaucrats' to concrete needs they encountered. In lieu of a formal municipal policy toward the migrant population, the services provided to labour migrants during this period were determined by those directly responsible for their provision and approved post-facto by their superiors. Their criteria were based on professional ethics and their interpretation of Israeli laws and international agreements (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), which they chose not to ignore. This phase is described below.

Health services are largely provided in Israel through the national health insurance system, however, the local authority manages a network of neighbourhood ‘Family Health clinics’ which provide preventative treatment to pregnant women and infants. In Tel Aviv the nurses at several clinics began treating migrant women and infants. By 1995 an informal practice had formed in two clinics serving the main migrant neighbourhoods, whereby nurses remained at the end of the day to provide corrective medicine for migrant children, since they were excluded from the national health insurance system and could not afford private treatment. By 1996 (the first statistics on the treatment of migrants), the clinics were treating 543 migrant families, including 400 babies, 225 infants and 25 pregnant women. In the Neve Sha’anan clinic half of all cases at this time were migrants. This norm was condoned by the director of the Public Health Division (Dr. Nehama, a pediatrician), who later reported it to the political level (Director of Public Health, letter to the Deputy Mayor, “Re: Foreign workers in Tel-Aviv-Yafo”, 16.7.96).

Dr. Nehama described Tel Aviv’s Non-policy toward the labour migrants:

...we knew then [ca. 1995] that they were being treated, but we didn’t yet know the breadth of the phenomenon […] At that time there was no written policy regarding them. My attitude is that medical treatment should be given universally, without regard to status. We had also admitted Israelis who for some reason are not covered in the National Health Insurance scheme, so admitting [the labour migrants] was a natural continuation of this…I was aware of the practice and did not give a directive for or

24 The Family Health clinics are managed by the city’s Public Health Division and their staff are municipal workers. The Ministry of Health covers 70% of the local authority’s costs. Israeli law requires them to treat residents covered by the national Health Insurance scheme, i.e. Israeli citizens but not labour migrants.
against [treating migrant children]...The non-intervention [of the political level] and the fact that they did not try to stop this practice, is also a policy (interview H. Nehama).

A similar practice developed in the main municipal hospital, Ichilov. Ichilov’s doctors tended to be more flexible in defining 'emergency treatment' and extending hospitalisation days provided to uninsured migrants (interviews H. Nehama, R. Adout). By 1997-98 the treatment of uninsured migrants had cost the municipal hospital 1.5 million shekels (interview R. Zafrir).25

Similarly, social workers from the Welfare Division treated cases that they defined as 'critical', following criteria established in Israeli law regarding adolescents. In 1998, some 250 cases involving migrant families were reported (by migrants, neighbours or police) to the Welfare Division, of which 42 were defined as critical and treated by the social workers (Welfare Services Division, Southern Bureau. “Foreign workers – welfare” report 11.4.99). The city’s Homeless Unit also dealt in a limited way with labour migrants who were without shelter.

Another bottom-up initiative occurred at the Bialik School, the main municipal primary school in Neve Sha’anan. While some other public schools refused to enroll migrant workers' children (in violation of Israeli law which requires all children to be enrolled regardless of their parents’ status), the director of the Bialik School adopted a policy of welcoming migrant children. This policy received the post-facto approval of the director of the Education Division. In 1994 the first four migrant pupils enrolled, the following year the number quadrupled and then doubled again the year after, reaching over 60 pupils by 1999 (interview A. Yahalom).

4.1.2 Urban policies regarding labour migrant concentrations

By the mid-1990s the presence of labour migrants in several neighbourhoods of central-southern Tel Aviv was noted by municipal planners, who regarded it primarily as an obstacle to urban development (see below). In the Neve Sha’anan area, the concentration of foreign workers was seen as one more disadvantage in a neighbourhood characterised by physical deterioration, drugs and prostitution and out-migration of indigenous residents. However, this area remained largely neglected under the Milo administration. As most of the municipal planning efforts were oriented to attracting business and office development in the new Central Business District developing northward. In two nearby neighbourhoods where municipal 'Rehabilitation Projects' were already underway (Florentin and Kerem Hateimanim), the 'intrusion' of labour migrants was seen as a distinct threat to municipal renovation and gentrification plans. But as shown below, the Planning Division did not do more than raise the problem before City Hall and call for a long-term strategy to be prepared. No actual policy response was taken on the ground or in the city's development plans for the remainder of the Milo administration.

In short, the first half of the 1990s can be characterised as a Non-policy phase, in terms of the municipal response to the migrant presence.

25 273 migrants were admitted in 1997, 305 in 1998, with an average hospitalization of 5-6 days.
4.2 From (informal) Non-policy to (formal) Guestworker policy, 1996-1998

4.2.1 Awareness at the professional level

The first comprehensive attempt to understand the phenomenon of labour migrant settlement in Tel Aviv occurred in the Planning Division. This was connected to the development of a Master Plan for the city, coordinated by the Long-Term Planning Department. A 1995 draft report for the Master Plan included a subsection on “Foreign workers in Tel Aviv-Yafo” which presents an interesting snapshot of how labour migrants were then perceived by municipal ‘street-level bureaucrats’. Based on interviews with social workers, nurses at the Family Health Clinics and managers of neighbourhood renewal projects in the two main “foreign worker neighbourhoods”, the report summarises their view that the migrants had become a dominant presence in these neighbourhoods; that the social problems arising from their presence prevented any chance for redevelopment in these neighbourhoods, and that a municipal policy on services for this population was lacking (Long-Term Planning Department, City Engineer, “Population and Society – current situation, problems and recommendations,” 1995, Master Plan for Tel Aviv Yafo, Stage 1. Report #3 (draft) by Orly Hacohen, pp. 42-45).

Interestingly, the municipal workers interviewed for this report described the irregular African community in positive terms (“a quiet and gentle population trying not to stand out”) while the legal guestworkers, mostly Romanians, were described as a “nuisance” due to their consumption of alcohol and prostitution, and the overcrowded conditions in which they were housed by their employers. Relations between the migrants and the local population were not described as problematic as the environmental effects. The report concluded that the massive presence of a ‘foreign worker population’ would have wide-ranging detrimental effects on the development of the weak neighbourhoods, and that the municipality must prepare a long-term strategy to cope with the phenomenon.

These findings appeared as part of a draft report for the Tel Aviv Master Plan which was later shelved. However the section dealing with labour migrants was later distributed by the City Engineer (the Planning Division’s director) to the professional and political leadership within the municipality. The points it raised would later re-appear in additional documents and discussions on the issue, serving as the basis for how labour migrants were perceived in the municipality: as a phenomenon which could undermine the efforts to renovate Tel Aviv’s southern neighbourhoods.

In 1996 a specific report was prepared in the same department on the labour migrant phenomenon. The report focused on the urban consequences of the development of ethnic enclaves in the southern neighbourhoods, based on similar experiences in European cities (Long-Term Planning Department, City Engineer, “Foreign worker settlement in Tel Aviv-Yafo – urban consequences”, 15.10.96). With this report, the City Engineer again distributed a letter to the professional and political leadership in the municipality, urging them “to cope with the issue at the

26 I authored this report together with Arch. Adi Rose from the Southern Tel Aviv & Yafo Planning Department, during my work in the Long-term Planning Department, City Engineer.
city level. to think of solutions to the short-term and the long-term problems (City Engineer, memorandum to Deputy Mayor, “Re: Foreign workers in Tel Aviv-Yafo – the phenomenon and its urban consequences,” 27.11.96).

The City Engineer raised several points: Tel Aviv’s migrant population will not diminish significantly in the foreseeable future; the neighbourhoods currently housing the migrant population will continue to serve as “foreign worker neighbourhoods” in the future; the appearance of migrant families will lead to greater pressure on municipal services. The document noted the expected short-term negative impacts of labour migrants’ settlement but also their positive potential for weak neighbourhoods in the long term, concluding that “realization of this potential (positive or negative) depends on local authority policy” (ibid).

During 1996-97 the director of the Welfare Services Division arrived at similar conclusions. According to the director, Ze’ev Friedman, his awareness of the migrant phenomenon developed incrementally “as the migrant presence reached a critical mass that could no longer be ignored”:

> When I thought of this phenomenon...thousands of people, without rights, existing but not existing...I thought to myself, what can such a situation lead to if it gets out of control? It’s a kind of developing chaos...” (interview Z. Friedman).

A religious man, Friedman based his stand regarding the labour migrants on professional as well as Jewish ethics:

> “We [the Jewish people], after such a long journey in the Diaspora during which our rights were denied us, for us to return to the Land of Israel and to do to them exactly what others did to us?? Is this how we are [supposed to be] ‘a light unto the nations’?...These are not just pretty words...The Bible mentions 36 times the responsibility of Israel towards the gentiles living among us” (ibid.).

From this point on Friedman took the lead in emphasizing the moral responsibility of the municipality in raising awareness toward its new population. In his own words, he used the Welfare Services Division as “an agent of social change in the public agenda of Israel” (ibid.) However, at this stage the Welfare Division lacked information on the labour migrant population and had not yet “ideologically internalized” the policy implications (ibid.). The following two years (1996-98) were thus a period of learning the phenomenon at the professional level22 and alerting the political level in City Hall.

4.2.2 The policy response in City Hall

The warnings raised by the City Engineer led to several meetings at the political level in mid-1996, but these did not lead to any concrete actions. The issue was also raised for the first time in a memorandum distributed by a prominent council member, however, there was no follow-up within city council.28 At the first meeting in City Hall the ‘foreign worker problem’ was defined in terms of overcrowded housing. Two directions were discussed: to “check the possibility of coordinated

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22 As a first step, a report was prepared summarizing the extent of services being provided to the migrants (Welfare Services Division, “Foreign citizen workers in Tel Aviv-Yafo” draft report, 4.7.96).
28 M. Roeh, “Foreign workers in Tel Aviv – background memorandum to Tel Aviv-Yafo Council members”, 9.6.96. This was based on the draft report prepared in the Long-Term Planning Department.
action" with the governmental agencies responsible for this population, and to check the legal/administrative means available to the municipality for limiting overcrowded housing ("Meeting re: Foreign workers in Tel Aviv – overcrowding", 26.5.96). In June a 'Committee on Foreign Workers' was established with two task forces. The political task force, including representatives of the police and relevant governmental ministries, was meant to discuss the issue with representatives of national government. The professional task force, composed of municipal officials (Planning, Welfare, etc.) was meant to propose solutions to the 'foreign worker problem'.

The Committee on Foreign Workers met in August 1996. Preliminary investigations had shown that the administrative means available to the municipality were insufficient to prevent or even limit the subdivision of apartments to foreign workers (by employers or private owners) causing the overcrowding. Secondly, services already provided by municipal workers to the mostly undocumented migrants (health, welfare and education) were required by Israeli law and international treaties, although the government was unwilling to cover its share of the costs. At this point, the committee reached three conclusions regarding the labour migrant population in Tel Aviv ("Summary of meeting of Committee on Foreign Workers" 19.8.96):

First, the labour migrants were *defined as a long-term phenomenon*, their presence in Tel Aviv an outcome of global processes and government policy. The committee noted that their number might increase in the future and "the local authority has almost no possibility for action" in regard to their arrival, settlement and concentration in certain areas. Nevertheless, "[t]he citizens of Tel Aviv see the municipality as the address to the solution of these problems."

Second, the labour migrants were *defined as an urban problem*. The concentration of labour migrants was described by the director of Welfare Services as "the most difficult problem facing the municipality" at present. The possibility was raised of "foreign ghettos" developing in southern Tel Aviv: "This is a daily problem which may result in our ‘losing’ half the city," according to the Deputy Mayor. The massive presence of labour migrants in the southern neighbourhoods was seen as obstructing municipal plans to rejuvenate these deteriorated neighbourhoods. However, a distinction was made between the negative environmental impact of the legal workers (mostly single men housed in extremely overcrowded conditions), and the undocumented migrants (mostly Africans and South Americans with families) who were described positively.

Third, the labour migrant presence was *defined as a humanitarian problem*. It was noted that hundreds of children were kept in cramped private apartments during the long hours their parents worked. The importance of continuing the de-facto provision of welfare, health and education services was emphasized, especially regarding children. According to the City Engineer, the city must show that "the municipality cares about the fate of the migrant workers."

At this stage, what determined Tel Aviv's policy for the remaining two years of the Milo administration was the stance of the mayor that the 'foreign worker problem' was the responsibility of the national government. According to Milo, the government should assume its responsibilities, to repatriate the illegal foreigners residing in the city and ensure suitable conditions for the legally
resident foreign workers, as required by law. This included covering the local costs resulting from their presence in Tel Aviv. The municipality could not and would not offer solutions to the problems created by national policy.

The committee’s policy recommendations followed this line of reasoning with a two-pronged strategy (“Sub-committee on foreign workers in Tel Aviv-Yafo – intermediate report”, 5.9.96). First, City Hall must raise the problem before the central authorities with the objective of changing national policy. Specific recommendations to the national government included setting up a “transition camp” for illegal foreign workers to ensure their repatriation, and requiring employers to house legal guestworkers in sanitary conditions. The committee recommended changing the legal criteria for overcrowding and requiring employers to set up guestworker lodgings on construction sites. Second, the committee approved “the continued provision of services as required by law and international treaties,” and recommended that City Hall demand from the government that it cover the costs of these services.

For the remainder of the Milo administration, the efforts made by top officials were limited to lobbying the relevant ministries and the Knesset (parliament), together with attempts to obtain governmental funding for local services to migrants. In its lobbying effort the municipality avoided any linkage between the recognition of certain rights for the labour migrant population and the extension of any permanent status or possibility of citizenship. Instead, municipal officials claimed that fulfilling these rights was required by law and international treaties (e.g. government financing of primary education for migrant children regardless of their parents’ status), and in order to protect the interests of the indigenous population (e.g. provision of preventative healthcare) (Director of Public Health Services, letter to the Deputy Mayor, 20.1.97). These efforts produced no significant changes in government policies (Kemp and Reichman 2000: 91-92).

In summary, this phase saw the municipality acknowledging the migrant presence, and within the professional level at least, realising its potential long-term impact. But the political level retained characteristically Guestworker-type attitudes and policies: the ‘foreign worker problem’ was considered a temporary problem that must be solved by the government.

4.2.3 Formulating a new policy

In the absence of initiative from the political level, the formulation of a local long-term migrant policy shifted back to the professional level. At this point the focus shifted to the Welfare Services Division, whose director (Zeev Friedman) stated that Welfare Services must take the lead in formulating a migrant policy offering “solutions at the community and structural level” and could no longer limit itself to ad-hoc provision of informal services to the migrant population (“Summary of meeting on foreign workers, chaired by the Director of Welfare Services”, 8.1.97). At the beginning of 1997 Friedman appointed a social worker to deal full-time with the labour migrants. Her role included establishing relations with the foreign communities who until then had steered away from

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29 Municipal costs for these services were estimated at over 9 million shekels in a report submitted by the Deputy City Manager to the chairman of the Knesset’s Labour and Welfare Committee, 10.1.1977 (Kemp and Reichman 2000: 92).
any unnecessary contact with Israeli officialdom. This laid the basis for cooperation in the coming years between migrant leaders and the municipality (interview N. Holdbrook). In addition, two discussion forums were established, chaired by Friedman and the director of the Welfare Division's Southern Department.[30] These were meant to coordinate between municipal and other agencies dealing with the migrant population (e.g. Police, government representatives), and to formulate policy solutions. These two forums effectively replaced the Committee on Foreign Workers, which ceased to function after 1996.

During 1997-98 a perception crystallized within the Welfare Services Division regarding the labour migrant presence in Tel Aviv. This was expressed in a model defining three concentric “spheres of vulnerability” (Figure 7.4). The first "sphere of vulnerability" was the migrant population, whose main problems were identified as sub-standard housing, difficult work conditions and exploitation, insufficient or no health insurance, alcoholism, children in danger, and homelessness. The second "sphere of vulnerability" was the “foreign worker neighbourhoods”. The problems here related to the Israeli residents, including out-migration by the stronger residents and lack of personal security and fear among those who remained. The third “sphere of vulnerability” included the rest of the city. Here the main problems were defined as medium- and long-term, including migrant dispersal to new neighbourhoods, emigration of Jewish residents, crime, second-generation foreigners, communal-ethnic tensions, xenophobia and "mixed marriages". This model was presented together with an estimate (later considered exaggerated) of the migrant population, of between 60-80,000 persons (Welfare Services Division, Slides presentation).

**Figure 7.4** The "Spheres of vulnerability" model

![Diagram](image)

Source: Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo, Welfare Services Division, 1999.

[30] Friedman’s right-hand man in the formulation of the policy described below was the director of the Southern Tel Aviv Welfare Department, Yehiel Mahdoun, in whose area the labour migrants were concentrated.
The analysis of the Welfare Services Division, while mindful of the migrants, defined their presence *above all in terms of host-stranger relations, as a threat to social order in the city*:

In essence, we have here a population that is isolated, a Fourth World within a modern city, disconnected from all the welfare systems, and they have to survive somehow...so they create their own networks, and we end up with a city within a city, a community within a community. We saw this situation as one in which they endanger themselves, but they also endanger others. They affect the residents in the area...those residents who cannot escape, who are trapped. And then we end up with an area of chaos (interview Z. Friedman).

This attitude, which was to become predominant in the municipality, displays an apprehension regarding not only the objective problems of the migrant presence, but especially of the reactions to the presence of these Others among "those residents who cannot escape, who are trapped". Using Bauman's terms, City Hall feared that the residents of the southern neighbourhoods would feel they have to "defend the territory under siege" should they feel abandoned by the authorities. Here is a clear example of how (anticipated) host-stranger relations could influence local policymaking toward migrants.

The policy response to this situation was formulated in the Welfare Division around the end of 1998. It included providing information and incorporating the migrant population into existing services that could meet their immediate problems. Concurrently, information on their needs must be systematically collected for longer-term solutions, and efforts must be made to prevent conflict between migrant and indigenous residents. To meet these ends, it was proposed to establish a municipal centre that would serve as a front office of the municipality, serving the labour migrant community as well as liaising with their Israeli neighbours. The centre should be located within the migrants' neighbourhood, to cope with the immediate problems identified in the first two “spheres of vulnerability” (Welfare Services Division, draft report by Varda Dickstein, Community Social Worker for the Foreign Population, 14.4.99). According to Friedman,

the idea of an information and aid centre came up at this time as the perfect instrument to do this: it did not overcommit the municipality, it dealt with a limited area (welfare and education problems, children), and allowed us to act autonomously without depending on other actors, i.e. government agencies (interview Z. Friedman).

Regarding the long-term problems, the need was raised again to formulate a long-term national immigration policy that would limit the number of foreign workers and solve the problem of irregularity of most of the labour migrants in Tel Aviv.

From 1997 to 1999 the Welfare Services Division propagated its model within the municipality and beyond, "feeding the press" and using various opportunities to raise the issue. For example, the annual meeting (1998) of the City Social Welfare Council (a professional-academic forum) was organised around the labour migrant phenomenon. Toward the municipal elections in November 1998 Friedman met with the mayoral candidates and told them that “Tel Aviv cannot have an ostrich

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31 Speakers included Mayor Milo, Friedman, a government representative and the spokesman of the African Workers Union (Summary of Annual meeting of the City Social Welfare Council, 9.3.1998).
policy, we must deal with the issue” (ibid.) These efforts bore fruit in 1999 when the new Huldai administration adopted Friedman's recommendations. The “spheres of vulnerability” model became the official vision of the municipality in its renewed efforts to persuade government agencies to subsidize municipal costs related to service provision.

4.3 Toward a 'liberal' guestworker policy, 1999-2002

4.3.1 Mayor Huldai declares independence

Labour migrants were not a major issue in the 1998 municipal election, however they did appear on the local agenda thanks to the local media (above). In their attacks on the incumbent mayor, Huldai and other candidates promised to stop ignoring the issue. Ron Huldai's personal commitment to deal with the labour migrant phenomenon before he was elected mayor remains debatable, but after the election he followed up on his pledge. Two months after the Huldai administration took office (beginning of 1999) the Welfare Services Division organised a public seminar on the “foreign worker phenomenon”. On this occasion the Mayor Huldai repeated his promise to turn City Hall’s attention to its resident foreign population, but his newly appointed City Manager (Arieh Kapon) delivered some unprepared remarks on the foreign workers as a “ticking time bomb” (Seminar Day on Labour Migrants in Tel Aviv, Social Services Division, February 1999). The reaction to Kapon's remarks caused a minor scandal in the local press, after which the City Manager took up a pro-migrant stance and became a key player in the new migrant policy.

From this point on the Huldai administration committed itself to the formulation of a long-term migrant policy. In effect, it adopted as official policy all the proposals formulated in the Welfare Division in the last years of the Milo administration. The new migrant policy became visible in July 1999 with the opening of the "Aid and Information Center for the Foreign Community in Tel Aviv-Yafo" (MESILA in its Hebrew acronym), in an official ceremony led by the mayor.

The establishment of a municipal centre to specifically serve the (mostly irregular) labour migrant population was, beyond its practical impact, a symbolic gesture of autonomy. In this and other ways, Mayor Huldai has signalled that he has no political commitments to national-level party politics (in sharp contrast to his predecessor) and is looking out for the interests of his city. MESILA has since become the flagship in Tel Aviv’s challenge to the national guestworker regime. This was

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33 During the election campaign, the newspaper interviewed each candidate, posing similar questions on the main public issues concerning Tel Aviv which the paper defined as: education, welfare issues, planning issues, the neighbourhoods, and foreign workers. According to the journalist who covered the foreign worker question, candidate Huldai gave the "wrong answers" on how Tel Aviv should deal with its foreign workers and appeared unfamiliar with the issue (interview, E. Fishbein). But Amira Yahalom, the director of Bialik School and an old friend of Huldai "from our kibbutz days," claims that Huldai was 'pro-immigrant' before he took office. According to her, Huldai's liberal stand regarding the labour migrants originated in his earlier contact with migrant children during his tenure as director of a high school in Tel Aviv. At that time the city introduced an integration scheme that allowed students to choose their preferred school. According to Yahalom, Huldai at first opposed this but then changed his mind and thereafter advocated integration of children from the southern neighbourhoods, including children of undocumented migrants, in his school. (interview A. Yahalom).

31 The City Manager declared that in case of another missile attack on Tel Aviv (evoking the traumatic memory of the 1990 Gulf War when Iraqi missiles landed in Tel Aviv), the foreigners would compete with local inhabitants for space in bomb shelters and even fight over gas masks.

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expressed in the mayor’s opening speech in which he proclaimed that the city would extend services to all its foreign residents, regardless of their legal status. In a potent gesture, an African church choir of undocumented migrants was invited to sing at the opening ceremony. Government representatives were also invited, but pointedly failed to attend. Huldai’s opening remarks appeared on MESILA’s publicity brochure, summing up City Hall’s new stand toward the labour migrants:

Approximately 200,000 foreign workers reside today in Israel, many of them without permits. This disturbing statistic requires a policy response at the national level, however, until such policy is formulated the municipality of Tel-Aviv-Yafo must assume responsibility for the estimated 60,000 foreign workers in the city. We can no longer stand aside. We can no longer turn a deaf ear to their cry. The men and women here came to Israel alone with the aim of making a living (often to support their family back home). They got married and set up families, and some are parents to infants or small children here. [...] Their residual status deprives them of minimal personal security and several basic rights. If we continue to turn a blind eye, these problems will only increase and a deterioration of the situation may endanger us all. The creation of MESILA...is a necessity, not a luxury (MESILA brochure, July 1999).

4.3.2 Institutional changes: the Forum on Foreign Workers and MESILA

The institutional expression of Tel Aviv's new migrant policy, in addition to MESILA, is the advisory Forum on Foreign Workers. The Forum was established prior to MESILA in April 1999, as an advisory body to the Mayor, chaired by the City Manager. Its purpose is to oversee the new policy and specifically to coordinate local and national policies toward the migrant population, by bringing together representatives of the relevant city agencies, governmental ministries, NGOs and academic advisors. Reflecting the top-down managerial style of the Huldai administration, it does not include representatives of the migrants nor the Israeli residents in the migrant neighbourhoods. Forum meetings have been held on average twice a year, but invited representatives of government ministries and NGOs are usually absent.

At the first Forum meeting the City Manager stated two “fundamental assumptions” behind the new migrant policy:

-- the foreign workers are a permanent, not a transient, phenomenon;

-- beyond the economic consequences, we are talking about human beings. We must provide quality of life that will find the optimum between their needs and our capability to answer those needs (Long-Term Planning Department, summary of Forum meeting, 18.4.99).

At this meeting the establishment of a centre for labour migrants was officially adopted as a main objective. A second objective was to raise the municipality’s priorities at the national level and specifically to obtain government funding for local services provided to the migrants, for which a series of meetings between Divisional directors and their counterparts in the government was set. Two task-forces (Social and Urban) were established to formulate further actions. Within a short time the Social task force (headed by the Welfare Services director) presented the operational plan for the establishment of MESILA.
The municipal aid and information center for labour migrants is the first and only one of its kind in Israel. MESILA is located in the heart of Neve Sha'anan in a small building which also houses the local Family Health Clinic. MESILA operates as an autonomous unit within the Social Services Division (previously Welfare Division), under supervision of the director of the Southern Tel Aviv Welfare Department. It has a small professional staff (equal to five full-time positions) and some thirty volunteers. Since its establishment MESILA's annual budget has remained the same, approximately 500,000 shekels allocated by the municipality (some 100,000 Euro in 2001).

MESILA’s objectives were defined as follows (MESILA brochure 1999):

- to provide information, counselling and guidance services to the labour migrant population;
- to provide "preliminary intervention in critical situations involving foreign individuals/ communities"
- to serve as a link between "the foreign community and the Israeli residents in contact with them"

An additional aim was "to collect information and understand the foreign community phenomenon in a systematic and organised manner". This was meant to serve as the basis for developing future migrant policy.

MESILA’s activities over the past 2.5 years can be divided into two periods (interview E. Altar). The first year (1999-2000) was a period of outreach to the migrant population and establishment of working relations with various entities (municipal, governmental and NGOs). In effect this continued the work of the community social worker assigned to this task two years earlier, whose wide-ranging contacts with the migrants “broke the ice” and laid the basis for MESILA’s activities (interviews Z. Friedman, N. Holdbrook). During this period the centre focused on dealing with individual requests for assistance. In the second period (2000-ongoing) the centre streamlined the treatment of individual requests (volunteers now do most of this work, freeing the professional staff) and increasingly focused on community-related work. The latter includes activities aimed at specific migrant communities (see below), as well as outreach to Israeli communities in the neighbourhoods with migrant concentrations. In addition, MESILA increasingly tries to incorporate Israeli entities such as insurance companies and unions in the treatment of migrant-related problems.

As in Rome (see Chapter 6) most, but not all, of the municipal actions in the new migrant policy occur within the framework of this service, established specifically to deal with this issue. The following sub-sections describe the various actions undertaken by the municipality since 1999, summarized by policy domains and issue areas.

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14 MESILA's original staff included three full-time positions divided among five staff. In 2001 this was increased effectively to five full-time staff.

15 This was not mentioned in the publicity brochure, only in an internal document (Social Services Division, "Center for information, learning and activity for the foreign workers community in Tel Aviv-Yafo" draft report, 14.4.1999).
4.3.3 Juridical-political domain

Lobbying the government

The municipality has intensified its lobbying efforts to affect changes in the migrant regime, which it continues to see as responsible for the high proportion of irregular migrants in Tel Aviv. MESILAA has become the main tool in this campaign, hosting visiting Knesset members and ministers, who are invited to see firsthand “the foreign worker problem”. The Center’s director invests a significant part of her time to this representative role. This is part of a broader effort by municipal officials aimed at influencing government migrant policies. The Forum on Foreign Workers is also utilized as a stage for engaging ministry representatives, raising before them alternative policy solutions. In 2000 City Hall sent a formal policy proposal to the prime minister and relevant ministries, outlining changes that should be made in government policy. The document included a proposal to regularise undocumented workers and issue temporary work permits directly to guestworkers rather than to their employers, as in the current arrangement (Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo, “Principles and guidelines for Israeli government policy on the subject of foreign workers”, 25.10.00).

However, the Hulda administration, like its predecessor, does not present these proposals as a step toward extending citizenship to the labour migrants, i.e. membership in the host society. Instead, it bases its reasoning on ‘practical necessity’ (a large undocumented population and the exploitation of documented workers is against Israeli interests), and on humanitarian and Jewish ethical grounds. MESILAA’s lobbying activities also focus on incrementally incorporating labour migrants into welfare services from which they are excluded (e.g. the National Health Insurance scheme), rather than challenging head-on the Israeli migration regime and its ethno-national basis (Rosenhek 2000, Kemp and Reichman 2000). According to Kemp and Reichmann (2000: 94), MESILAA’s staff deliberately “choose to focus, as they claim, on changing the small but important things in [the migrants’] daily life.”

Israeli civil rights organisations claim that Tel Aviv’s lobbying strategy avoids the issue by demanding the extension of rights to labour migrants based on humanitarian reasons and Israeli self-interest in providing certain services. These organisations (Workers Hotline, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Physicians for Human Rights, and Hotline for Workers in Detention) express various degrees of criticism toward the city’s ambivalent position and the incrementalist stance taken by municipal representatives in their dealings with the government. According to ACRI, the Municipality uses humanitarian rhetoric, not anything that threatens the State. Their line [vis-a-vis the government] is: “We are not saying anything about the rights of the migrants to remain, only that they must be taken care of as long as they are here” (interview M. Pinchuk).

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66 MESILAA’s activities include participation in the Knesset Sub-committee on the Foreign Worker Problem and other governmental forums, correspondence with government officials, and hosting visits by Knesset members and government representatives. MESILAA also lobbies semi-governmental agencies such as Na’amat (the powerful women’s organisation within the Federation of Trade Unions).
Migrant representation

In Israel’s current migration regime, any formal representation of the labour migrant population along the lines of a “migrant advisory council” appears out of the question. Less structured forms of migrant participation, such as meetings between migrant representatives and municipal officials at regular intervals, have also not been broached. The Forum on Foreign Workers, could present such a framework, but as noted above it does not include any migrants. Instead, migrant representatives have been invited on several occasions to voice their opinions at municipally-sponsored symposia and the like. Clearly the Municipality thinks any sort of formal participatory structure is unnecessary and/or undesirable. Municipal officials dealing with the migrants appear satisfied with the current arrangement, whereby migrant interests are communicated to the municipality through informal meetings between MESILA and migrant activists. Indeed, this is seen as one of the principal roles of MESILA, alongside its role of service provision (interviews Z. Friedman, E. Alter-Dumbo).

To this end, MESILA initiated a series of meetings with migrant representatives (AWU leaders, pastors in the Latino community, etc.) and continues to maintain regular although unstructured contacts with those it defines as “migrant community leaders”. This top-down manner of informal representation is one reason behind MESILA’s goal of cultivating migrant leadership, or what it calls “community empowerment” (below).

Interestingly, this view is also held by the main migrants association, the African Workers Union. According to its leaders, any formal representative arrangement would be taken as a provocation by the authorities -- something the AWU wants to avoid at all costs. The informal arrangement whereby AWU representatives can present their views in private meetings with MESILA staff and occasionally with other municipal officials, is best suited to their strategy. Thus, when renovation plans were recently formulated for the Stations Area (see below), the planners met AWU representatives (twice at MESILA and once in a private apartment). But while the municipality is interested in understanding the interests of migrants regarding local issues, the migrants themselves take a broader view. According to the AWU president,

The most important thing is to change the government policy, to get the municipality to influence them. For example, the new order to deport 1000 migrants a month. We say, ‘talk with the government, try to leave the Africans out of the deportations’. We know the municipality also has a limit, most of the things they do have to go through the government. Basically what we want is to get legalised... But anytime any small thing comes along, like the health insurance for children, we welcome it. We don't want to be seen as initiators. It's a game (interview N. Holdbrook).

The current arrangement of informal migrant representation is problematic in several aspects. First, it is unclear to what extent the “migrant leaders” actually represent their communities.

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37 When I raised such a possibility in interviews with municipal officials the response was one of surprise and off-hand rejection. This was justified in terms of “the situation we are in” (vis-a-vis national policy).
38 AWU representatives were invited to several such meetings, and were included in the public participation process initiated in the framework of the new Master Plan for Tel Aviv (see below).
Secondly, most of the migrant communities in Tel Aviv are unorganised (with the exception of the Africans, Filipinos and Latinos), so that MESILA has had difficulty finding "migrant leaders" especially for the documented foreign workers, i.e. Romanians and Turks. MESILA also presents the needs of the migrants to the political level of City Hall and other agencies using as its main source of information its own data base. This depends on questionnaires and structured interviews with every migrant applying for help at the centre. MESILA's data base therefore pertains only to the migrants who reach the Centre, and the reliability of the answers given by the respondents is questionable.39

'Community empowerment'

The municipality claims to pursue a policy of outreach to, and empowerment of, the labour migrants at the individual, as well as communal, level. The publication of a "Guide to the Foreign Worker" by MESILA (in cooperation with several NGOs) is an example of the former.40 In regard to what it terms "community empowerment", MESILA initiated "community-based activities" including meetings with migrant activists and religious leaders, a Hebrew course, lectures on preventative health, etc.41 However, community-based empowerment is not a goal in itself for the municipality, but a means of achieving more effective local policy toward migrants in general.

According to the director of MESILA, there are two reasons for this. First, the only way for the municipality to communicate with tens of thousands of undocumented residents is by establishing links with their leadership. If such leadership does not exist, the municipality must try to create it. Second, the existing context in which a significant portion of the migrant population lives an underground existence makes it difficult to impossible to provided services to this population. The most efficient way for the municipality to ensure that services such as childcare reach the labour migrant population is by encouraging migrant communities to provide these services themselves (interview E. Altar). Thus MESILA initiated a series of workshops for migrant women operating the underground "babysitting services", on proper childcare, pedagogy, health, etc.

4.3.4 Socio-economic domain

Under the Hulda administration, the Municipality has more vigorously pursued the policy begun in the previous years of providing basic services to the migrant population in education, health and welfare. The real difference between municipal policy before 1999 and since 1999 lies in the use of MESILA as a 'front office' for municipal services vis-à-vis the migrant population, and its activities aimed at incorporating labour migrants into existing services. MESILA has come to specialize in problems regarding migrant children, education and welfare, filling a niche that was relatively unattended by the NGOs dealing with the labour migrants. MESILA's aid and information service

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39 The migrants regard MESILA questionnaires with some suspicion, resulting in not-necessarily-truthful answers. This point was raised in personal communication with Barak Kalir, a researcher on the Latino migrants in Tel Aviv, and corroborated in an interview with a Latino migrant ("Maria").
40 The 60-page guide, sponsored by a private insurance company, was published in four languages. It includes practical information on foreign workers rights, contacts to various NGOs and public agencies, and short texts on the African, Latino and Filipino communities composed by migrants (MESILA, "Guide to the Foreign Worker in Israel" May 2001).
41 According to MESILA statistics approximately one thousand migrants participated in these activities in the Center's first two years.
now supplements the pre-1999 policy, which was limited to contact with migrants by municipal social workers only in “critical cases” (i.e. child abuse) as required by law. Since its opening, the centre’s staff have responded to some 1500 individual requests for information or help, averaging around 100 requests per month in the past year. Of these, over 95% concerned undocumented migrants.\(^{42}\)

**Health services**

In the area of health, the centre’s efforts included various activities to raise awareness among migrants of the possibility to register children in Israel’s national health insurance scheme, following an amendment to the National Health Insurance Law.\(^{43}\) MESILA lobbied successfully to bring a representative of the regional health office to the centre once a week, allowing migrants to register there. As a result of these efforts, of the 600 migrant children who registered in Israel since the ordinance came into effect, 500 did so at MESILA.\(^{44}\) Also in 2001, MESILA held workshops to acquaint nurses at the Family Health clinics with the migrants’ special needs. The number of migrants treated at these clinics has risen steadily since at least 1996 (when the Public Health Division began tracking migrant patients) reaching 856 families, including 1039 children, in July 2000 (Public Health Division, Report on migrants, July 2000). In addition, the Municipality provides a little money (through a fund supporting various local NGOs) to a health clinic for labour migrants run by Physicians for Human Rights, in the Neve Sha’anan neighbourhood.\(^{45}\)

**Welfare**

The conditions in which hundreds of migrant children are kept during the long working hours of their parents, as publicized in the local press, served as one of the catalysts for municipal involvement with the migrant population. Since its establishment, MESILA has been working to improve conditions in the “baby-sitting services” run by migrants (mostly African, Latino and Filipino women) in rented apartments. The Center held workshops for the migrant “babysitters” on basic childcare, collected equipment and sent volunteer assistants. In the past year MESILA has been searching for a longer-term solution to this problem. Recently, a plan was drawn up for a more organised framework for daycare, similar to arrangements existing for Israelis (i.e. staffed by the migrants but subsidised by the municipality following Education Ministry criteria). However, the

\(^{42}\) According to 6-monthly statistical reports published by MESILA. The recorded requests include visits to the center as well as by telephone. A quarter of the requests concern problems with migrant children (e.g. registering a disabled child in a special education programme), followed by work-related problems (17%) and “welfare problems” (8%) (MESILA, “Analysis report of requests to MESILA July to December 2001”. January 2002).

\(^{43}\) In 2000 the law was amended to include migrant children regardless of their legal status (see Box 7.1, above). But, unlike Israeli children who are automatically included, children of labour migrants must be registered by their parents who must also pay a supplementary fee. The child is then entitled to all the health services.

\(^{44}\) MESILA statistics, updated to February 2002. However, this is only a third of the migrant children estimated in Tel Aviv, as noted by the centre’s director (interview E. Alter-Dumbo).

\(^{45}\) The ‘Open Clinic for Foreigners’ was set up by the Israeli NGO ‘Physicians for Human Rights’. The clinic serves the migrant population in Tel Aviv and beyond, filling a critical gap in healthcare for those who cannot afford private treatment and are not covered by the national health insurance scheme. PHR cooperates with the city hospital and MESILA to find solutions to migrants requiring medical treatment that is sometimes long-term and extremely expensive (interview R. Adout).
irregular status of the migrant babysitters has not made this possible until now (interview E. Alter-Dumbo).

MESILA has used its unique position, as the only governmental agency in Israel specifically engaged in helping labour migrants, to mediate between the largely undocumented migrant population and various governmental agencies, both local and national. The fact that the Center is an extension of the municipality’s welfare section has granted it access that is often denied to the NGOs. Over time, MESILA’s mediation efforts in individual cases (e.g. a migrant child with disabilities) have led to a change in perception in those public agencies dealing with such populations (previously cases involving illegal migrants were automatically rejected, now there is a willingness to consider each one on its merits).

This method of incremental, case-by-case incorporation of migrants into the welfare system differs significantly from the methods used by NGOs dealing with labour migrant problems. The strategy and efforts of the civic organisations are directed at more fundamental changes in the entire immigration regime of Israel, using the courts through precedent-setting cases, raising public pressure through the media, etc. MESILA’s director acknowledges that the Center’s treatment of individual cases, within a context that limits its ability to create large-scale change, is frustrating: “In most requests by migrants we cannot help them beyond directing them to other agencies or NGOs...at most we act as intermediaries (interview E. Alter-Dumbo). When the government accused "the municipality’s independent policy" as running counter to government efforts against the irregular migrant phenomenon (referring to the MESILA course for migrant babysitters) the director of MESILA responded that the local authority was not challenging government policy, only doing the minimum necessary to allow migrant children basic education and a healthy development.

**Education**

The incorporation of migrant children into the public education system has become a main focus of MESILA. The number of labour migrant children in Tel Aviv is estimated at around 1500, of which an estimated 1,000 children below age six. Israeli law requires enrolling all children regardless of legal status for mandatory education from age six. In designated low-income neighbourhoods (including Neve Sha’an an) pre-school education is available from age three. In the school year 2000-01 there were only some fifty migrant children enrolled in kindergartens throughout the city, while migrant-run ‘babysitting services’ in private flats were spreading. Realizing that the main obstacle to this low enrolment was the scarcity of kindergartens in the areas of migrant concentration, MESILA lobbied the regional office of the Education Ministry to open two new kindergartens in Neve Sha’an an in 2001. on the grounds of the Bialik School. The Center was also involved in their staffing (English-speaking teachers, supplemented by volunteers) to meet the migrant children’s needs. The Bialik School was responsible for enhancing the teaching content with multicultural material. Through outreach activities MESILA encouraged migrants to enrol their children in the public school system and operated a registration service at the Centre in the last

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46 MESILA is conducting research together with an NGO on the number of migrant children, characteristics and needs.
school year (2001-02). As a result, the number of migrant children enrolled in Tel Aviv’s public school system is now over 500, of whom almost half in kindergartens (interview E. Altar; MESILA, “Analysis report of requests to MESILA”, July 2001)

The Centre also initiated activities for older children outside of the public school system, involving other bodies to finance these activities. In 2001 summer camps for 90 migrant children were organised and financed by youth movements and a kibbutz. MESILA also initiated an “adolescents group” for migrant teenagers which meets at the Center with youth counsellors. Amazingly, this project is funded through an anti-crime project in the Ministry for Internal Security!

The other local entity that has played a vital role in this domain is the Bialik School, the only public school serving Neve Sha’ananim. Although it is part of the national education system (supervised and funded in part by the Ministry of Education), policy toward migrant pupils is largely decided by the school director and the municipality’s Education Authority. As a result of the ‘open arms’ policy of the school director, Amira Yahalom, as well as MESILA’s outreach efforts, the Bialik School was “overwhelmed” by an influx of migrant children in recent years, requiring extra resources (smaller classes, multilingual teachers). An early request by the municipality to the Ministry of Education, to grant the migrant pupils the same status as olim (i.e. new Jewish immigrants, meaning extra governmental funding to the local authority per pupil), was rejected.47

The director of the municipal Education Authority then decided that her department would cover the extra costs, in effect granting them the status of olim in the municipal budget.

In content as well as quantity, the Bialik School now serves as the city’s flagship in its education policy toward migrant children. In quantitative terms, 140 migrant children accounted for half of the school’s pupils in the last school year (2001-2). In content, school director Yahalom sees local policy toward labour migrants, like Friedman, in both practical terms as well as a test of Israel’s ability to deal with Strangers. Referring specifically to the Jewish-and-democratic Zionist ideology on which she was raised48, Yahalom says,

This school serves as the fig leaf covering the dilemmas of our state...We never acknowledged ourselves as a country of immigration, a multi-cultural country. We remain a nation-state based on assimilation...Now the foreign workers are holding a mirror up to us, reflecting our incapacity to absorb immigration, to contain Otherness (interview A. Yahalom)

Unlike Friedman, Yahalom appears to have crossed the Zionist rubicon and accepted the permanence of a non-Jewish minority in Tel Aviv. The policy initiated by her (and backed by the municipal Education Authority) is to allow the foreign pupils “to preserve their identity and language on one hand, and on the other hand to offer them everything this country which they have chosen can offer, within our limited resources.” Only thus, she believes, may they perhaps integrate successfully into their new homeland (ibid). Bialik’s classes are therefore smaller than usual, use Hebrew as the

47 Director of the Division of Elementary Education, Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo, "Summary of the Foreign Workers Committee. 19.8.96".
main language and teach the Jewish holidays, but have multi-lingual teachers to help with language problems, provide home-language tutoring and are sensitive to the varied cultural and religious backgrounds of the pupils.

The uniqueness of the Bialik School means that this is not a simple case of incorporating migrant children into the general education system. Apart from the labour migrant children, most of the other pupils are new immigrants from Russia (of which not all are Jewish), as well as children of Palestinian collaborators who were relocated into Israel by the government. Native Hebrew speakers are a small minority in this school. The Bialik School has thus become a symbol of Otherness in the local school system and a receptory for Outsiders within the Israeli educational system. The integration of migrant pupils at Bialik may thus signal their acceptance or their rejection by the host society, depending on how one looks at it.49

However, signs of a multicultural attitude in the educational domain are appearing in a few other schools in Tel Aviv, all located in the southern neighbourhoods and containing some labour migrant children. Again, this depends on the initiative of individual school directors. Other schools remain adamantly assimilationist in their policies and do not welcome non-Jewish pupils. Municipal policy in this regard appears to agree to addressing the dilemma of non-Jewish students by implicitly encouraging their self-selected concentration in a few schools.

4.3.5 Cultural-religious domain

Outside the domain of several schools noted above, there have been very few actions regarding the cultural and religious Otherness of the migrants. The municipality has been aware at least since 1995 of the large number of "underground" churches that are active in apartments and warehouses throughout the migrant neighbourhoods, in addition to the swell in attendance levels at the established churches in Yafo. The sight of African families dressed in their Sunday best walking the streets of southern Tel Aviv to and from church on the Sabbath (Saturday in Israel -- on Sundays they are at work, following the Israeli schedule) is already a part of the local scene, publicised by the media. For some Tel Avivis this is attractively exotic, for others it is shocking. Until now City Hall has adopted a (non-)policy of benign neglect in this area, neither condemning nor condoning. To some degree this has to do with Israeli sensitivity on maintaining religious freedom for non-Jewish minorities in the Jewish state.

In the cultural sphere, one incident throws light on the difficult situation in which Tel Aviv can find itself in any attempts to forge an independent migrant policy. In 2001, it gave permission for a internationally known Nigerian singer to appear in the municipal amphitheatre, located in the city's largest park. The organiser of the event requested an entry visa for the singer, attaching a supportive letter from a municipal official stating that his appearance would hearten the Nigerian migrant

48 Yahalom is a well-known figure in the Israeli educational system and connected by longstanding personal (and family) ties with the old political/military/cultural elite of Israel (including a common background with Mayor Huldai).
49 The irony is that the school is named after H.N. Bialik, Israel's 'national poet' who revived Hebrew in the early years of Tel Aviv, 'the first Hebrew city'!
community in Israel. The Ministry of Interior not only refused to issue the visa, but sent an angry letter noting that the Municipality of Tel Aviv was contravening government policy: the African labour migrants were illegals, not a community that should be entertained. "Do we belong to two different governments?" asked the letter ironically (Ha'aretz, July 30, 2001: E7). The story was picked up by the media, where Friedman (director of social affairs) responded:

We are talking about a clash of attitudes. The State's attitude is one of deportation, non-recognition of elementary rights. We, on the other hand, claim that there is a certain reality, and as long as these people are among us, a universal morality applies to them that crosses borders and nations...There is no basis to the claim that by allowing them to enjoy their own culture we are encouraging them to settle (ibid).

The Hulda administration was not pleased with this public clash between ministry and municipality, especially after its supportive letter was cited in an appeal to the Supreme Court by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, on the ministerial decision to refuse the visa. Following this incident the municipality lowered its profile and has distanced itself from the appearance of cooperation with the struggle of NGOs to extend civil rights to the labour migrants (interview M. Pinchuk).

A more low-key and successful venture is MESILA's support for La Escuelita, an after-school programme run by migrants from South America who want to preserve the Latino identity of their children (some of whom speak better Hebrew than Spanish). Initiated by migrant parents, it first operated in the MESILA office before moving into premises at the Bialik School. The programme runs on Friday afternoons and includes some sixty children divided into three age groups. Migrant teachers teach the children about Latino culture and improve their Spanish skills, while a small group of mothers studies Hebrew. Material and technical assistance is provided by the Bialik School. Municipal support for La Escuelita can be seen as a Guestworker-type or Multicultural-type response. The former seems more probable, i.e. the municipality sees the programme as helping to prepare migrant children for an eventual return to their countries of origin, rather than preparing them to become Israeli citizens with a strong cultural identity of their own (Jerusalem Report, January 14, 2002: 12-17; interview E. Alter-Dumbo).

The ambiguous attitude within the municipality regarding the labour migrant's cultural Otherness, i.e. the possibility of a permanent new non-Jewish minority in Tel Aviv, is expressed in the responses of key players in the new migrant policy, such as that of Friedman (above) and the director of MESILA. According to the latter,

Very few perceive of Tel Aviv as a multicultural city...mostly people in the educational sector. The Municipality makes attempts to take into account the needs of the migrants, but compared to the liberal attitudes existing in European cities – we're still not there. There's still a lot of work to be done in changing public attitudes. The religious issue is all the time in the background. In this, Tel Aviv differs from the European cities.”
(interview E. Alter-Dumbo)

While she spoke of changing public attitudes, it was not clear that she herself accepted the idea of Tel Aviv as a multi-cultural city with a significant non-Jewish minority. She certainly does not
embracing this type of Strangeness, as do some of the civic organisations working alongside MESILA. While professing tolerance, these responses reveal that municipal actions are seen in terms of providing services, meeting needs and preventing crises (below), not in terms of changing the fundamental character of Tel Aviv as a Jewish city.

**Community bridging policy**

In the issue area of affecting attitudes of the local host society toward the labour migrants, the municipality has taken almost no actions in the cultural domain (MESILA did arrange a poster exhibit on the migrant communities which was exhibited in the lobby of City Hall). Instead, municipal efforts are based on averting potential crises between the migrant and Israeli communities in the areas of migrant concentration. This was one of the original aims of MESILA but at first little was done. A first attempt at "community bridging" through the Neve Sha’anan residents committee proved unsuccessful. A second attempt was planned more carefully at the end of 2001 in a belated follow-up to the anti-Arab riots of the year before (above). Together with community welfare workers in Hatikva and other eastern neighbourhoods, MESILA designed a project entitled "The new faces of east Tel Aviv". The aim is to defuse xenophobic feelings, as the migrants disperse from the 'core area' into these neighbourhoods. The programme took place at the beginning of 2002, involving local activists in workshops and encounters with migrants. At the time of writing, local activists are preparing a programme to legitimise the migrants’ presence in the eyes of local residents (interview A. Ezov-Amon).

**4.3.6 Spatial domain**

**Urban planning**

As noted above, municipal planners regarded the presence of labour migrants as a threat to urban renovation plans already in 1995, but no actions were taken. In 1999 the Forum on Foreign Workers set up a task force to analyze the urban consequences of labour migrant settlement, but the results did not go beyond a draft paper. Instead, the Hulda administration began a new 'Strategic Planning Process' for the city, in which the labour migrant issue was to be addressed. At the time of writing, the Strategic Planning Process was in its first stage (information collection and appraisal), based on a year-long series of meetings between municipal planners, residents and other interested parties. Interestingly, in the meetings held for the southern Tel Aviv neighbourhoods, representatives of the labour migrant communities were invited. The inclusion of foreign residents is a precedent in a public participation process that is itself quite revolutionary for Israel, where planning is traditionally a very closed, top-down process.

Concurrently, two non-statutory plans focusing on the southern Tel Aviv neighbourhoods have advanced further in the planning process. Both plans relate specifically to the labour migrant population as a factor that must be considered in the areas’ redevelopment. The “**Strategic Plan for Florentin**” presents a rather ambivalent attitude toward the labour migrant population. The plan was

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50 The Strategic Plan for Tel Aviv is coordinated by the Long-Term Planning Department whose director also headed the Urban Task Force.
prepared using a public-participation process based on “workshops” with various resident groups which included, for the first time in Israel, a “labour migrants group” (2.8.00). Although the planners found that labour migrants make up a higher-than-expected proportion of Florentin’s population (17.3%), they do not appear as a significant factor in the report. Labour migrants are mentioned largely in negative terms, i.e. as one of the “weak and vulnerable populations” in the neighbourhood and as a negative factor in the eyes of the Israeli residents (Final Report, April 2001). The report notes that a continued inflow of labour migrants from neighbouring Neve Sha’anan “may weaken the economic force of the neighbourhood,” without providing further explanations or evidence, but also claims “ethnic heterogeneity” as one of the strengths of the neighbourhood (ibid: 65, 128).

Interestingly, the Florentin plan is the first planning document to use the term “labour migrants” (mehagrei avoda) rather than “foreign workers”. But, any apparent change in attitude on the part of the planners toward this population finds no other expression in the plan’s policy recommendations, which ignore the labour migrant population.

The first urban renovation plan that takes the labour migrants into account as a significant factor appears to be the “Strategic Plan for the Stations Area”. The plan (still in its first stages) covers all of Neve Sha’an an and part of Shapira, thus including the “core area” of labour migrants in Tel Aviv. The Municipality outsourced the plan in 2001 to an external planning team (headed by a former City Engineer of Tel Aviv), but planning decisions are made jointly with the Planning Division. A preliminary presentation of the plan included:

- To transform what is now perceived as a problem into an opportunity for development and growth of the area;
- The foreign population: an opportunity to create a lively and exciting multicultural variety;
- Legitimation and empowerment of shadow populations (presentation slides).

This pluralist rhetoric was repeated in the planners’ presentation before the Forum on Foreign Workers (6.2.02), which emphasised “multiculturalism as characterising the image of the area; transforming the foreign workers from ‘threatening’ to ‘interesting’; integrating the Israeli population into the process of transformation [of the neighbourhood] into a multicultural area.” (ibid.) Recently a second draft report was handed to the Planning Division, repeating this line in further detail, together with examples from Europe of redevelopment schemes in migrant/ethnic neighbourhoods (Tayar/Assif, “Preparation for Integrated Strategic Plan for the Stations Area -- Report Stage 2: Characterisation and analysis of existing situation”, March 2002, draft).

The Stations Area plan presents the most Pluralist-type attitude appearing until now in any Israeli planning document regarding labour migrants. Indeed, labour migrants will probably be the major “axis” on which alternative scenarios for the area will be developed. These include a “gentrification” alternative which proposes dispersing the labour migrants: a “foreigners city” alternative which makes the most of the multicultural potential of the area; a “foreigners enclave” alternative which proposes a small, well-defined island of labour migrants surrounded by office and commercial
development and Israeli residential areas, and a “business as usual” alternative in which the municipality would allow the concentration of migrants in the area to proceed with only minor public intervention. These alternatives will be developed by the planning team in coordination with the Planning Division. However the plan will have no binding status, rather it is meant to serve as a policy document guiding the municipality in its renovation actions, rezoning, etc. (interview H. Finish).

As noted above, the overall “Strategic Planning Process for Tel Aviv” is still in its first stage, and already the presence of labour migrants has surfaced as an issue that municipal planners will have to deal with (Strategic Plan for Tel Aviv Yafo, Summary of Discussion – Southern Tel Aviv; Summary of Discussion – City Centre, 2002). It is unclear, however, what influence the Strategic Plan will have on urban redevelopment policy in the main neighbourhoods of migrant concentration, where the planning process has recently been completed (Florentin) or is several stages ahead (Stations Area). The other neighbourhoods with a significant labour migrant population such as Hatikva or Yafo already have statutory plans that were drawn up before the arrival of labour migrants in those areas.

**Open spaces policies**

Until now the municipality has not embarked on a policy aimed at dispersing or preventing the presence of labour migrants in public spaces such as parks or squares, nor has it taken their needs into consideration in its open spaces policy. The most prominent case is the pedestrian shopping street of Neve Sha'anan which was opened in 1993. This street is perceived by Tel Avivis as having been ‘taken over’ by foreigners. Neve Sha’an an street has become the centre of the labour migrant community in Tel Aviv (and Israel), with hundreds of migrants congregating on evenings and weekends at its cafes and pubs and engaging in trading (old clothes on the sidewalk, etc.). Despite complaints by merchants and residents and the general image that Neve Sha’anan street has acquired throughout the country, the municipality has taken no action.

The same Non-policy response applies to other areas of congregation by labour migrants. One reason may be that the national policy of deportation is a strong enough deterrent in the long run, at least in the case of regular, well-known concentrations of undocumented workers. A prominent example of this were the weekly football matches organised by Latino migrants in a seaside park. Complete with food stalls and Latino music, they became a regular feature of the local seaside scene in the city. In 2001, fearing police raids, the migrants moved these games to less prominent locations.

**5. Summary**

This chapter focused on the interaction between the “first Hebrew city” and its first wave of non-Jewish immigrants, whose settlement is challenging the basic tenets of Israeli society. Although the Israeli labour market has depended on foreign (Palestinian) labour migrants for decades, the overseas labour migrants who have come to substitute them since 1993 are showing signs of permanent settlement. Today there are an estimated 50-80,000 labour migrants in Tel Aviv, representing over 15% of the city population. Of these an estimated 70-80 percent are irregular and liable to deportation. Over the past decade (1993-2002) Tel Aviv has moved from a Non-policy phase to what
can be described as a 'liberal Guestworker policy'. Local migrant policy has developed in the context of an extremely exclusionary national immigration regime that continues to advocate a strict Guestworker policy at the national level, defining legal labour migrants as temporary guestworkers and regarding repatriation as the only solution to irregular migrants.

The changes in Tel Aviv's policy reaction reflect changing attitudes and expectations within the municipality regarding the labour migrants. Prior to 1995 there was little or no awareness of their presence. From the mid-1990s a de facto policy of service provision evolved, particularly among health and welfare workers and the director of the primary school in the main migrant neighbourhood. These informal procedures received the post facto approval of several higher level officials in the municipal bureaucracy. The latter began pressing the political level for a formal policy of local service provision, as well as raising the need to plan further ahead. Nevertheless, the predominant attitude was to see the labour migrant presence as a temporary phenomenon, resulting from the government's policy of substituting overseas workers for Palestinian workers 'until things calm down'. Despite warnings to the contrary from these officials, the problem was wilfully ignored by City Hall until 1996. This first phase, lasting from the late 1980s until the mid-1990s, displays the characteristics of a Non-policy reaction.

A second phase began in 1996 when, in response to pressures from the professional level, the administration of Mayor Milo acknowledged the migrant presence, but not as a permanent phenomenon. At this point City Hall authorized the provision of some basic services to labour migrants and tried to persuade the government to fulfil its responsibilities under the guestworker regime, including the deportation of irregular migrants. According to the municipality, ultimate responsibility for Tel Aviv's labour migrant population lay in the hands of the national government, and local policy was based on the expectation of temporariness: legal guestworkers would return to their countries of origin within a few years, irregular migrants would eventually be repatriated. In attitudes and actions, this phase marks a change from the previous (undeclared) Non-policy to a (declared) Guestworker policy.

At the same time, however, the basis for a longer term local migrant policy was being prepared within the professional bureaucracy. Demonstrating a practical as well as a humanitarian attitude toward the labour migrant presence, both the Planning and the Welfare Services divisions suggested that Tel Aviv develop its own migrant policy, regardless of (or despite) the national guestworker regime.

A third period began in 1999, when the new administration under Mayor Huldai adopted the policy concept conceived by the professional level in the previous 2-3 years. A long-term local migrant policy was officially declared. Its concrete expression was the establishment of a municipal "Aid and Information Center for the Foreign Worker Community in Tel Aviv" (MESILA). The first years of the Huldai administration can be seen as a period of increasing incorporation of the labour migrant population into the city's services structure, without officially recognising the permanence
of the migrant communities (still largely composed of illegal migrants). This can be termed a ‘liberal Guestworker policy’.

Under the Huldaí administration, Tel Aviv’s espoused policy has openly challenged the government’s migrant policy; its enacted migrant policy often contradicts government policy. This is demonstrated most clearly by the fact that MESILA serves mostly illegal migrants. However, this challenge should not be exaggerated. While Tel Aviv’s new migrant policy criticizes the government’s Guestworker policy, it does not fundamentally and openly challenge the basic assumptions of the Israeli immigration regime, which is based on the temporary nature of non-Jewish immigrants in Israel. Municipal representatives repeatedly stress that their goal is not to turn Tel Aviv’s labour migrants into future citizens or even permanent residents, only to meet practical needs arising from the labour migrant presence. needs that cannot be ignored ‘as long as they are here’. While some officials are aware of the long-term social implications of a significant non-Jewish minority in their city, they consistently refrain from challenging the actual status quo of the Jewish state at its most fundamental level.

It appears that City Hall recognises that it has a permanent labour migrant presence, but has not yet accepted the real consequences of this fact, i.e. the need to integrate a significant new non-Jewish minority in the city. Even the permanence of the labour migrant population remains an open question under the current migrant regime. Most labour migrants recognize this, and many if not most do not expect to settle permanently in Israel, even as they show more signs of permanence. In short, while a significant labour migrant presence in Tel Aviv has become not only a possibility but a probability, it is too early to regard it as irreversible. Municipal attitudes and expectations reflect this ambiguity.

Tel Aviv’s ambivalent attitude toward the labour migrant presence is expressed in its actions (and inactions) across the various policy domains. In the Juridical-political domain, the municipality has not considered any kind of representative or advisory structure for the migrants. The new migrant policy regards informal contacts with ‘migrant leaders’ as the most appropriate means for representing migrant interests. Formalizing the representation of the labour migrants in Tel Aviv is not only inadmissible under the current national Guestworker regime -- such a step would also be too much as far as the local host society is concerned, in terms of accepting the permanence and legitimacy of this new population.

Kemp and Reichman (2000) claim that it is Tel Aviv’s policy of incrementally incorporating (mostly irregular) migrants into the Israeli welfare system that presents the real challenge to the existing migrant regime. Without openly questioning the government’s authority on the migrants’ civic status, the city is blurring the line between citizen and non-citizen, legal and illegal resident. According to them, the City of Tel Aviv has adopted a concept of ‘urban citizenship’ that does not follow the national definition nor is it subservient to it” (ibid: 93). But according to key municipal officials such as the director of MESILA, their reasoning is practical. Their ‘community empowerment’ strategy is seen as a way of improving the flow of information from the migrants to
the municipality. The aim is a more efficient provision of services, not to prepare the migrants as potential political actors at the local level.

In the Socio-economic domain, the informal provision of some social services that evolved under the previous administration has been institutionalised and expanded through MESILA. In many ways, however, MESILA remains primarily a referral and mediation service between migrants and other (governmental or Third Sector) agencies. This can be attributed to lack of resources on the part of the local authority, due to the government’s refusal to subsidise local services to labour migrants. But it is also an expression of the ambivalent attitude of the Municipality itself and within MESILA, regarding the extent to which labour migrants should be incorporated into the Israeli welfare system.

In the Cultural-religious domain, municipal actions have been few, especially when compared to the policies of many European cities that are eager to demonstrate (even if superficially) their ‘ethnic diversity’. In the case of Tel Aviv, this absence of actions cannot be attributed to ignorance of the migrants’ cultural needs. The municipality is well aware, for example, of the growth of ‘underground churches’ in southern Tel Aviv. Again, lack of government support for any municipal actions in this area may mean that insufficient resources are one reason. More importantly, City Hall is unwilling to take actions that would signal a real acceptance of the Otherness of the labour migrant population -- an Otherness that is predominantly expressed through Christianity. Thus, local officials acknowledge the labour migrants’ religious/ethnic Otherness, and even empathise with their status as a religious minority. But this is not translated into intentions to support this Otherness, as a Pluralist-type policy would imply. Neither is assimilation a possible option, since the newcomers are not Jewish. In the Cultural-religious domain, then, Tel Aviv remains largely at the Guestworker policy phase, in which Otherness is tolerated but not supported.

In the Spatial domain, changes have occurred so far on paper, specifically in planning proposals. On the ground, Tel Aviv remains at the Non-policy stage (i.e. it has taken no actions) in areas such as migrant housing needs or regarding migrants’ use of open spaces. This may change if the municipality implements the new redevelopment plans for the southern neighbourhoods, and specifically, if it acts on their recommendations to take into account the cultural heterogeneity of these neighbourhoods. The points raised in the first report of the Strategic Plan For Tel Aviv, to “utilize this heterogeneity [to] strengthen the area as a touristic-ethnic magnet” signal a step toward Pluralist policy -- albeit of the kind that embraces Strangers for their aesthetic/market value rather than being truly sensitive to their Otherness (see Chapter 2, section 3, above).

Seen as a whole, the change in municipal attitudes over the past decade should not be underestimated. Until the mid-late 1990s the presence of labour migrants was perceived by the professional and political levels primarily as a social threat and an obstacle to urban renovation. The first report of the Strategic Plan (2002), which is intended to serve as the basis for articulating the vision of Tel Aviv’s future, now presents the concentration of labour migrants in the southern neighbourhoods as both ”a problem” and ”an opportunity” (ibid.). However, it is too early to know
how and to what extent these general statements will re-appear in terms of specific policy recommendations, and whether they will be implemented.

In sum, the municipality of Tel Aviv appears to have moved from a minimalistic Guestworker policy phase in the mid-1990s to what can be termed a 'liberal Guestworker policy' since 1999. This last phase displays some Pluralist characteristics in espoused as well as enacted policies. However, it cannot yet be characterised as a truly Pluralist policy response, as it remains ambiguous regarding the permanence of the labour migrants and support for their Otherness.

The fact that Tel Aviv remains in a Guestworker policy phase, albeit a liberal version, cannot be attributed solely to the (very real) restraints imposed by the national migrant regime. It is also a consequence of the ambivalent attitudes within the municipality at both professional and political levels, in regard to the permanence of its labour migrant population. A Pluralist attitude implies the acceptance of the migrants’ permanence as well as acceptance of their Otherness as a permanent feature in the city. Such a (post-Zionist) view already characterises Israeli NGOs that are fighting for a fundamental change in the Israeli migration regime. It implies that Israel should open itself to non-Jewish immigration, regularize illegal immigrants and allow eventual citizenship for those that remain.

Such a view is unacceptable to most Israelis, including key actors in the municipality (with the notable exception of the director of the Bialik School). Among the principle policymakers of the new migrant policy there remains a reluctance to accept the full consequences of Pluralism. This would mean that local authority policies would aim at the long-term integration of the non-Jewish labour migrant population, while supporting its religious and ethnic Otherness. Tel Aviv is not yet ready to expand its self-definition as a tolerant and pluralistic city to the point of incorporating a new non-Jewish Other.

1 Municipalities of Tel Aviv-Yafo (2002), Strategic Plan for Tel Aviv, Profil Ha‘ir (City Profile), p. 118.