

Minimizing the Use of Foreign Workers: Alternative Approaches to Elderly Care in Israel

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Senior care in Israel is largely dependent on the employment and use of foreign workers. It follows that in practice, this care leads to the loss of jobs and lowering of wages for unskilled Israeli workers and raises serious legal and ethical questions. For many years the field of elderly care has been excluded from the overall trend and effort to minimize the number of foreign workers in Israel, by virtue of the justification that there is no way to adequately care for the elderly in another manner. In fact, when compared to other countries, Israel is shown to display a clear and substantive preference for foreign workers over Israeli workers in the field of senior care.

Today, the foreign worker provides the senior for whom she is employed with continuous 24-hour care, a service that the Israeli worker is either unwilling or unable to provide. Thus, in order to implement a model that both satisfies the needs of the elderly community and reduces the number of foreign workers in this field, the current model of care must be modified.

This article presents a summary of the consequences of the over-employment of foreign workers and explains the factors preventing the modification of such a care-giving model. It then presents three alternative approaches – adopted by various countries worldwide – that tackle the need for senior care, while employing a local work force: (1) the development of a care-giving profession; (2) the establishment of an integrative model of care; and (3) the phasing out of senior care companies by providing families with direct funding for care.

As this article will describe in detail, the establishment of an integrative model of care – in which a counselor, together with the senior and her family, establishes a personalized model of care tailored to the needs of the senior – provides the most

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significant and far-reaching results within the Israeli paradigm. While this model serves as a highly accessible option for most seniors and offers a comprehensive provision of services, it also drastically minimizes the need for foreign workers as caregivers.