



MAAN Development Center



Palestinian Child Laborers in Agricultural Settlements in the Jordan Valley

- **10,000-20,000:** number of Palestinians working in agricultural settlements in the Jordan Valley
- **5.5:** percentage of these workers who are children¹
- **13-16:** number of dollars Palestinian children are paid for working 7-8 hours picking fruits and vegetables²
- **21%:** unemployment rate in the Jordan Valley, including Jericho³
- **631:** number of children directly displaced by Israeli demolitions in Area C from January 2011 to March 2012⁴
- **79%:** percentage of Palestinians living in Area C herding communities that lack sufficient food⁵

The phenomenon of child laborers forced to work in the agricultural settlements of the Jordan Valley is unfortunately widespread, yet rarely discussed. Due to deep poverty, few employment options, and a dilapidated educational system, many Palestinian children are forced to sacrifice their childhood to work. While many of these children are from the Jordan Valley, others come from as far away as Tulkarem and Jenin in order to find employment. At any time, between 500 and 1,000 Palestinian children, are deprived of their basic rights and forced to work in Israeli settlements.

Reasons Children Work in Settlements

“I left school because of the bad economic situation...it is better for me to work.”

Omar, 15 years old, Jiftlik.

Two main reasons drive Palestinian children, some as young as 13, to work in settlements. The first arises from their family's socioeconomic position. The economic situation in parts of the Jordan Valley is worse than in besieged Gaza; 79% of Palestinians living in herding communities in Area C lack constant access to nutritious foods.⁶ Consequently, Palestinian families are forced to take any economic opportunity available. Between 10-30% of Palestinians in the Jordan Valley work in Israeli settlements, as often no other employment opportunities are available.⁷ Adult males who work in settlements are paid between 60-100 NIS (\$16-25) a day, approximately one-third the Israeli mandated minimum and nowhere near enough to provide for a whole family. In order to provide for the family, many children are forced help parents in settlement work.

The second reason why many children leave their homes to work in settlements derives from the poor conditions students face in their schools. Schools in the Jordan Valley are underfunded, have inadequate facilities, and are often located far from the children's homes. This situation causes many teenagers to lose hope in the prospect of a good education, leaving them with no alternative but to work. Considering that jobs outside of settlements are scarce, student dropouts are most likely to turn to settlement work. As the parents of many of these children also work in settlements, there already exists a natural precedent for them to follow.

Conditions and Impact of Labor in Settlements

As most child laborers are informally employed, they do not receive any benefits, despite working in generally unsafe working conditions. Most of the children are engaged in manual labor, such as farming and picking produce. In this work, the children face harsh working conditions, picking

under the hot sun and throughout the cold winters, usually from six in the morning until two in the afternoon. As a consequence of the morning working schedule, the children cannot simultaneously remain in school. Thus, the children are forced to drop out prematurely, which is disastrous for their personal and economic development. Without increased employment opportunities that come with a proper education, these children will likely have no other opportunity but to continue working in settlements.

International Law

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is a person under the age of 18. In addition, the law states that “children must be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or interfere with the child's education, health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.” Israeli policies perpetuate a grievous economic situation in the Jordan Valley and actively drives Palestinian children to leave school, give up on their dreams, and prematurely enter the labor force as poorly paid laborers in Israeli settlements; such demeaning labor is unquestionably detrimental to the development of a child. By taking advantage of the poor economic status of the Palestinian Jordan Valley in order to recruit these children, Israeli settlements are actively violating international law through their exploitation of Palestinian children.

Endnotes

- 1 MA'AN Development Center, *Palestinian Workers in Agricultural Settlements (Arabic)*, (2011).
- 2 MA'AN Development Center Interview, 15 February 2012, 23 February 2012. Recorded, intern document.
- 3 ICAHD, *Jordan Valley Matrix of Control; The Path to Annexation*, (2011).
- 4 UNRWA, *Demolition Watch*, <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=1286>.
- 5 “West Bank Poverty Worse than Gaza.” *Al Jazeera – English*, 30 June 2010.
- 6 “West Bank Poverty Worse than Gaza”
- 7 MA'AN Development Center Interview, 15 February 2012, 23 February 2012. It was stated that 60% of Palestinians in Fasayil work in the settlements, 70% of residents of al-Auja work in settlements, and upwards of 45-50% of Palestinians in Zbeidat, depending on season.