

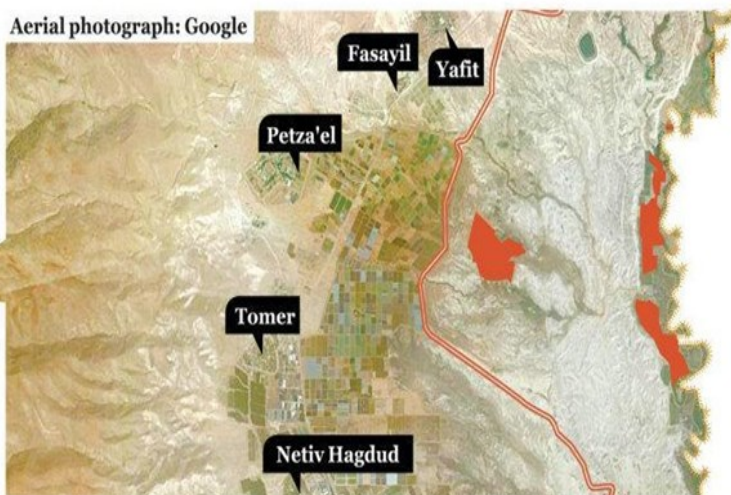
Palestinian Workers Employed in the Jordan Valley

DEMOGRAPHICS

- There are approximately 29 Palestinian communities throughout the valley, as well as small Bedouin villages¹
- 1,800 Palestinians work in agricultural settlements in the Jordan Valley (as of 7/12)
- There are 38 agricultural and civilian settlements with 9,500 Israelis
- Most of the settlements have been built on privately owned Palestinian land
- The number of Palestinian workers in the Jordan Valley can reach up to 10,000 due to the influx of seasonal

GEOGRAPHY

- The Jordan Valley makes up 30% of the West Bank, with 6% allotted for Palestinian labor and development
- As of January 2013, settlers are farming more than 5,000 dunams (1,250 acres) of Palestinian land in the Jordan Valley
- This is a 210% increase compared to the 2,380 dunams farmed in 1997
- 90% of the valley is located within 'Area C,' meaning the Israeli government has full civil and military control of the area
- Most of the settlements have been built on privately owned Palestinian land



High unemployment and few economic opportunities force Palestinians to work in settlements as a means to make a living and support their families

WORK PERMITS

- Palestinian workers rely on employers to secure their work permits, who then submit a request for a settlement work permit through the Civil Administration.
- Security clearance is the most important aspect of the permit application, and the main reason Palestinians are denied one. Workers must have a completely clear background that provides threat to Israeli security (no arrests, no history of crime, etc.).
- Workers involved in disputes with Israeli employers can be blacklisted and denied a permit extension due to security reasons.
- Work permits are used as a bargaining tool; Palestinian workers are more worried to lose their permit than their job as it is the only way to access work in the settlements.
- Employers can threaten to deny a permit to any worker who demands their rights or threatens legal action.
- Because the permit is necessary as proof of legal employment of the worker, recently employers have begun to conceal permits and deny previous employment of the worker once legal action begins.

PALESTINIAN CONTRACTORS

- Employers in the Jordan Valley use Palestinian contractors to hire workers.
- Contractors act as the middlemen between employer and worker; they direct workers to specific projects and are in charge of their payment. Contractors carry out specific tasks that the employer should be responsible for, including firing workers and filling out tax forms.
- There is an identified pattern of employers in the Jordan Valley region taking advantage of workers with the help of Palestinian contractors: when the worker decides to sue the employer, the employers and contractors contact extended family members of the workers and encourage them to pressure the worker to quit.
- Furthermore, contractors may threaten to fire a worker's relatives, who are also employed by the same contractor, as punishment for taking legal action.

AGRICULTURE OF THE JORDAN VALLEY

- The Jordan Valley is a highly valuable region for agricultural as well as strategic purposes.
- Both Palestinians and Israelis use the land for agricultural growth and development.
- **60% of the dates farmed in Israel come from the Jordan Valley, and produces 40% of the world's date export.**
- Work conditions in date farms are extremely dangerous. Workers pick fruit up to 50 feet above ground without protective gear, harnesses, or proper training.

INFRINGEMENT OF RIGHTS

- Palestinian workers are paid an **average of \$2.00-\$4.80 per hour** (although Israel's minimum wage is \$6.00² per hour).
- Workers rarely receive their rights such which include: holidays, over-time pay, transportation costs, health insurance, and sick days.
- There is a growing number of employers who force workers to sign a contract (in an unfamiliar language) that relinquishes all their rights; those who do not sign are fired.



Photo credit: www.ak.picdn.net (Jordan Valley Farmer Picks Dates)

A 2007 Supreme Court ruling stated that Palestinian workers in the Occupied Territories are entitled to the same rights as Israeli workers, although in practice this law is not enforced. Most recently, in July 2013, a Jerusalem labor court again ruled that employers in the Territories must provide benefits and pay minimum wage to Palestinian workers.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

- Agricultural workers in the Jordan Valley are exposed to hazardous conditions in their work environment on a daily basis.
- Proper safety gear such as protective gloves and eye-wear are rarely distributed among workers, putting them in a dangerous position in the workplace.
- Agricultural workers are constantly surrounded by harmful pesticides that are especially hazardous to children.
- Many workers have complained to Kav LaOved of headaches, back aches, sores, rashes, and various physical ailments as a result of their work environment.
- There are no available clinics to treat these specific issues within the Palestinian Authority, and workers cannot access the clinics within Israel proper.
- When a worker is injured on the job, he or she is sent to the nearest Palestinian hospital, although they are entitled to medical treatment in Israel.

HOW IS KAV LAOVED INVOLVED?

- Raising awareness among workers via informational materials, workshops, and media outreach
- Providing consultation during open reception hours
- Representing workers in filing complaints and pursuing legal action
- Guiding workers through the complicated, bureaucratic process of claiming benefits from the National Insurance Institute after work accidents (including representing workers in the face of employers who refuse to cooperate, i.e. signing necessary forms and paperwork)
- Demanding employers pay minimum wage (in several cases, employers only complied to the minimum wage law after legal action was taken by Kav LaOved)

CASE STUDY

Workers in a gas-bottle factory in Nitzanei Hashalom were exposed daily to harmful vapors, chemicals, and dangerous gases. Kav LaOved presented these complaints to the Employment Staff Officer of the Civil Administration. An additional letter was sent to the factory management, who denied the claims and stated that the Employment Staff Officer frequently inspects the factory for safety standards. The Civil Administration has yet to respond and the factory management refuses to acknowledge the dangerous environment for their workers.



Kav LaOved staff consult workers during open reception hours