

Agricultural Workers: Increased Difficult Working Conditions due to the Corona Virus Crisis

Tamkeen- The Agricultural Sector is considered one of the most vital sectors in Jordan. It is the basis of the Kingdom's food safety. Nevertheless, it is one of the most affected sectors by the current crisis, which only aggregated on an already difficult situation; as the sector was already struggling prior to the Corona Crisis as a result of the continuous lack of a legal umbrella that regulates the sector and protects its workers.

The Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights conducted several interviews with Agricultural Workers. In one of the interviews, a female Agricultural Worker said: "We had to stop working as there was no transportation available to take us to the farms. I do not know what I am supposed to do as I take a daily wage and I have 3 children. If I work, then my children and I eat, if I do not then we sleep hungry. With the current situation, I do not know what tomorrow has in store for us".

Agricultural Workers, whether male or female, are currently struggling economically. These workers are neither covered under the umbrella of Social Security nor provided with Occupational Safety and Health tools. These conditions continue despite the dangerous materials that they deal with as well as the difficult working conditions in this sector. These conditions are further compounded by external factors, like the weather conditions which greatly affect the sector; the last of which was the Dragon Storm that hit Jordan which negatively affected the harvesting process of crops. The storm was directly followed by the current Corona Virus Crisis, which now prevents workers from harvesting the crops of fresh green almond and beans. The result of such a step is that farmers are expected to register losses between 10,000-30,000 JOD, and thus would be unable to pay the wages of their workers.

Ahmad (an alias), who is a worker in Irbid, said: "The employer told us not work and that he will be giving us our wages in instalments, which is all he can do due to the current situation. God helps him, he is also badly affected by this." Another worker in a Poultry Farm said: "Usually our employer is good with us. However, with this closure, his work was also stopped. So, how will he be able to pay us when he himself is affected?"

Due to the current crisis, many agricultural workers are facing difficulties in terms of securing their livelihoods. The governmental procedures to stop the spread of the virus meant that many of them are unable to secure their basic needs, while others cannot maintain their normal purchasing powers.

These struggles began after the government announced on March 17th a number of precautionary measures to curtail the spread of the Corona Virus. The most prominent of these procedures was the Official Holiday for workers in the public and private sectors. The decision was then followed by a curfew on movement that led to the suspension of public transport, which in turn led to workers being unable to go to work and to the start of their struggles as the majority of them depend on their daily wages.