

Daily Workers: Temporary Unemployment amid the Corona Virus Crisis

Tamkeen- Khaled (an alias) who is a daily worker said: "I have a family composed of 4 members. I am a daily worker and when the curfew decision was announced, I was able to buy my house's needs with the 20 JOD I had. Now, what am I supposed to do?".

Khaled, who was interviewed by Tamkeen Field Team, continued that he and his other daily colleagues are all struggling as a result of the current curfew. He added that they depend on their daily work to secure their daily wage which ranges between 15 to 20 JOD a day after working from 7 am till 8 pm.

The families of these daily workers are economically struggling, as most of them are considered among the lowest- to middle-waged families. According to experts, these struggles arise from various reasons; namely: the increase in prices; the decrease in income, as most of them receive low wages; as well as the rise in inflation. The situation was further worsened by the current Corona Virus Crisis, which pushed the Jordanian government to issue a series of decisions to curtail its spread, the last of which was the curfew till further notice.

Many of the daily workers who contacted Tamkeen said that the decision had extremely negative effects on them as they depend on their daily wages as their only income. Therefore, the current curfew deprives them from their work and makes them unable to secure the livelihoods of their families.

These workers thus demanded the relevant governmental stakeholders find a solution to their current predicament, especially since the majority of them also have other financial obligations, including paying the rent, as well as electricity and waters bills; while other have loans as well.

The economic expert Mazen Marji said: "Daily Workers are one of the categories worst affected. They are expected to suffer the consequences of the current situation, not just now but later on as well. Now as they are unable to secure their basic needs; and then after the crisis ends as they will face great challenges concerning the payments of their accumulated obligations, as Ramadan and then Eid are approaching, among other things. Only those who have some savings or the ability to reach another source of income like the National Aid Fund, the Zakat Funds or receive aid from other sources would be able to meet these demands".

Marji also added that another consequence of this is its effect on the purchasing power as it is expected to decline for this category, among others, in light of the current crisis, the interruption to their work, as well as the increase in the cost of living. "

He also pointed out that once the curfew is lifted, it is expected that the economy will shrink, which will lead to a decline in the demand for workforce, accompanied by an increase in unemployment levels. This economic recession is expected to impact not only daily workers but other various economic sectors as well.

Therefore, Mr Marji recommended that the government should issue an aid package that directly helps workers; not just through delaying instalments or through cashing out the unemployment savings to workers through Social Security like they did before. Instead, the aid package should be dedicated to

cover at least 50% of the lost income during this crisis to the hardest-hit categories. Such a step would lessen the impact of the crisis on them, and would lead to the activation of the Unemployment Insurance like it is applied in more advanced countries, and not in the disfigured way Jordan currently uses it.

Nabil (an alias) told Tamkeen: “I work as an automobile repair worker. I am a daily worker, so if I work, I eat. If I do not eat, I do not have any income and my children need milk and diapers. I do not care about myself or my wife, Allah will protect us but what about the children? You either let us work or you secure the needs of these children and we do not need anything else.”

Nabil’s situation is extremely similar to many other daily workers who do not know their fate or what is awaiting them. Will they be able to meet their obligations? Will they be able to return to work like before?

“If we do not die by the Corona Virus, we will die of hunger. I have 6 kids, what am I supposed to do with them?” Abu Muhammad said, as he agreed with what Nabil said and asked for support to daily workers as they have needs that they cannot meet to them and their families.

Nabila Al Housh, who is responsible for a number of Agricultural Workers in the Jordan Valley, said that the results of the curfew have been negative on workers, as the majority of them survive on their daily wages.

She also added that there are children who have needs like milk or diapers, whose parents are unable to get them due to the difficult financial situation they are currently in as they are out of work.

Contextually, numerous non-governmental organisations have called for cooperation and join efforts to help those with low income as well as the categories who are most vulnerable to this crisis, including daily workers. The NGOs called for the necessity to find suitable solutions to aid them like the establishment of a fund that is financed by the government as well as other actors, including businessmen and international organisations.

Regardless of the current crisis, the daily workers who reached out to Tamkeen all wished that a solution is found to address their issues and would allow them to work, while ensuring that they are provided with the Occupational Safety tools needed to them. Another suggestion was for them to be offered work that is useful as part of the efforts to address the current crisis, through for example employing them to deliver needs to the rest of the residents while they receive wages for that.

Finally, it should be noted that there are no official numbers on how many daily workers there are in Jordan. Available estimates though show that they range between 30,000-40,000 workers, whether female or male.