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Arab women

# Israeli Farmers Slam the Door on Arab Women

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Recently we encountered three women representing the state of Arab women in the Israeli labour market. The first, an agricultural laborer from Tamra, is one of a few hundred Arab women placed to work through the Workers Advice Center (WAC-MAAN). She is satisfied with her job and says that the women of Tamra envy her minimum wage salary (NIS 165 a day), as well as the pay slip and fringe benefits she has been receiving regularly.

The second woman used to work through WAC in the past, yet today is employed by a contractor who pays her NIS 90 a day ; as is the case with thousands of other Arab women. The reason for this, as she explains, is that WAC offered her only seasonal jobs. Had WAC been able to offer her a permanent job, she would have rather worked through WAC.

The third woman also used to work through WAC in the past, and today, like 80% of all Arab woman in Israel, is a housewife. She wants to work but not for NIS 90 a day ; there is also lack of job opportunities in the village where she is living.

The current situation, represented by these three women, has grave repercussions on the Israeli economy. In many cases contractors enable women to work in agriculture under- the- counter. The women sign up at the Israeli Employment Service in order to receive income support benefits, thus augmenting their monthly income up to the minimum wage. This way farmers and manpower contractors cut a hefty share at the expense of female agricultural laborers, in addition to causing losses to the Israeli economy. Consequently, Arab families have no money to pay municipal taxes to their local councils, resulting in growing poverty rates and frustration.

A research by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour published recently, recommends on placing some 135,000 Israeli workers in the labour market, of which 60,000 are Arab women. This is part of endeavours to raise workforce participation in Israel from 71% to 74%, thus qualifying Israel to become a member of the leading GDP level countries. In May 2009, nonetheless, the government accepted the demand of Shalom Simhon, the current minister of agriculture, to allow the importation of another 2000 Thai agricultural laborers. Namely, slamming the door to Arab women on the lookout for a job, causing a steep rise in unemployment and poverty rates among the Arab population. Only a year ago did WAC provide Simhon with a list of 1100 Arab women looking for a job, out of thousands listed in WAC's pool ; to date the minister has not even replied.

A government interested in raising workforce participation, while providing adequate care to all its citizens, including Arab women, must put an end to the revolving door policy, a system by which migrant workers are deported to their home countries, allegedly for becoming illegal, in order to import new laborers and cut hefty commissions.

We call on the government to allow those migrant laborers who are interested, to settle in Israel, while terminating the continual importation of additional weak and exploitable migrant laborers, and exchanging them for others after their deportation. Let Arab women make ends meet and improve their socio-economical state.

The writers are coordinators of the Women's Forum at WAC/HPH.

*Post-scriptum :*

See also <http://www.challenge-mag.com/>