

Palestinian Rural Workers in Israel: an Overview

A considerable body of data on Palestinian wage-workers has been accumulated in the last ten years by official Israeli sources. Although some of this data, especially that involving employment outside labour exchanges, is of questionable value, there is no alternative source of information for the area as a whole.

The most useful and detailed source of statistics for our subject is derived from the household surveys which are carried out periodically by the Central Bureau of Statistics, monitoring changes in employment patterns, family composition, household items, agricultural production, etc.

One of the most problematic aspects of rural labour in the West Bank concerns the increased marginalization of the family farm associated with work opportunities outside the village. By "marginalization" we refer to the manner in which the income of rural household from agriculture and agriculture-related activities have been superceded by other sources of income. We may mention here, in addition to wage-labour, five other factors acting as determinants of land marginalization: (a) the productive capacity of the land (primarily whether it involves irrigated or dry farming, and the possibilities for mechanization); (b) the fragmentation of land due to demographic pressures (partible inheritance, etc...); (c) increased remunerations from family members abroad; (d) the number of household members who can be "spared" for work in the family form, especially women and children; (e) the stability of the peasant's tenure and potential exposure to land confiscation by the military authorities.