

Before 1967 some Ras el-Tin farmers used to be sharecroppers in the lands of neighbouring villages, but the opportunities for work in Israel and emigration has ended that. Today all farmers in the village are owner-cultivators, while some of their household members, including those who work in Israel, hire themselves as agricultural labourers during the olive-picking season.

Becoming a Worker in Israel

Official statistics show that more than 70% of West Bank workers are registered through labour exchange bureaus. However, all workers from Ras el-Tin are "illegal" workers; that is, they find employment through local contractors or on their own -- through contacts with work mates or relatives. In all the cases interviewed work was obtained in construction sites in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv through a brother or a cousin who was already employed by a Jewish boss. Husam, one of my informants, has a typical work history. Today at 24 he is barely literate, having left school in the sixth grade. He started work in Israel in 1968 as an apprentice painter and whitewasher, assisting his brother, who was a mu'alleem (master craftsmen) in the trade.¹ He worked for three years with his brother until he "mastered the trade" and made all the necessary connections to work on his own. Now he is a mu'alleem² in his own right and has a team of four workers (two cousins, a younger brother and a distant relative) working with him. His chief employer, off and on, was Solel Boneh -- the major Israeli construction company ("the biggest company in Israel", according to Husam), but he also works for a variety of small and medium-sized construction firms, as well as for private home owners. He establishes his contacts by leaving his name with a Jewish work mate in Tel Aviv who has a telephone, and who arranges new assignments for him