
New ILO report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories

GENEVA (ILO News) - The [annual report](#) of the International Labour Office (ILO) on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories depicts a much degraded employment and labour situation showing that the plight of the Palestinian people has deteriorated alarmingly in a number of respects ([Note 1](#)).

"Working poverty is rising, genuine employment is declining, and frustration is growing", the report says.

According to the report, only one person of working age (15 years and above) in three living in the occupied Arab territories was employed for all or part of the time, with unemployment hovering above 20 per cent. Over 80 per cent of the population in Gaza is now dependent on food aid as a result of the severe economic siege imposing a closing of all crossings save essential humanitarian supplies.

What's more, about half of all Palestinian households are dependent on food assistance provided by the international community, a situation which has become even more critical with the rise in food prices, the report says.

The incidence of extreme poverty was 40 per cent of the population in Gaza and 19 per cent in the West Bank in November 2007, showing some improvement compared to November 2006 levels though remaining alarmingly high. According to the report, the reduction was mostly due to the resumption of wage payments to civil servants by the Palestinian Authority who regained the financial support of the international community.

The report was prepared for the ILO's International Labour Conference which opens its annual session here on 28 May. The findings of the report are based on missions sent to the occupied Arab territories and Israel and to the Syrian Arab Republic earlier this year to assess the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, including the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan. The ILO mission also consulted with the Arab Labour Organization (ALO) and the League of Arab States in Cairo.

The report evokes the concerns of the ILO mission about the danger of a growing gap between peace talks, which have acquired a new momentum following the Annapolis Conference in November 2007, and the continuing 'facts on the ground' as reflected in closures, military incursions, checkpoints, the permits regime, the endless patience required to cross the Separation Barrier, the continuing construction within settlements, and 'settlers-only' roads, including the separation of East Jerusalem from the Palestinian territory.

"With the devastation of military action, and the continuing fine net of restrictions on movement, there is no doubt that economic and social hardship is mounting in the occupied Arab territories", the report says, adding that "pitting the claim 'security first, then peace' against 'peace as a condition for security' leads to an impasse".

According to the report, the unfolding employment crisis is compounded by systematic disregard of the fundamental right of Arab workers to equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and occupation.

The report also says that institutions representing free and democratic employers and workers are facing interference in their right to organize, leading to considerable difficulties in carrying out their basic functions.

In response to these challenges and in parallel with the ongoing political negotiations, the ILO will continue to support employment and decent work policies and programmes in the occupied Arab territories. In recent months, the ILO took important steps to revitalize its technical cooperation activities and develop a new programme of assistance, which aims to combine short-term job creation initiatives with longer-term capacity development goals.

The ILO remains committed to contribute, within its mandate, to a just and lasting settlement of the conflict in the firm conviction that decent work for all in the occupied Arab territories and Israel is a fundamental ingredient of peace.

Note 1 - *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*, Appendix to the Report of the Director-General to the International Labour Conference, 97th Session, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2008.