

# Enhancing Decent Work & Working Conditions in Jordanian Agricultural Sector

## Policy Paper





## Phenix Centre for Sustainable Development

Phenix Centre for Sustainable Development is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to independent policy research and measuring public opinions on impactful current and emerging issues in areas of economics, society, and its legislative environment in Jordan. The Centre was founded in Amman, Jordan, in 2003. It works to promote a sustainable developmental paradigm in Jordan, rooted in human rights and the principles of democratic governance by focusing on reforming the labour policies, lifting restrictions on freedom of association, and strengthening social protection policies. The Centre specialises in promoting inclusivity in development processes. It compiles databases of relevant actors and stakeholders, develops research, studies, papers and reports, conducts conferences and advocacy campaigns, and empowers several actors to take part in steering development through capacity building.



## Action Against Hunger – ACF

Action Against Hunger is an international non-governmental organization founded in France in 1979 by a group of scientists, doctors, and writers committed to ending hunger and malnutrition worldwide. In 2013, the organization established its office in Amman, Jordan, as part of its regional response in the Middle East. Since then, it has been working to support vulnerable Jordanian communities and refugees through programs in food security, water and sanitation, health, livelihoods, and psychosocial support.

The organization's work in Jordan is rooted in the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence, and non-discrimination, aiming to strengthen resilience and dignity among individuals and communities. As part of the global Action Against Hunger International network, which operates in more than 50 countries, the Jordan office benefits from extensive expertise in emergency response, sustainable development planning, and advocacy to influence public policies and achieve lasting impact in the fight against hunger and poverty.

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# Grow Economy Project

Enhancing Decent Work & Working Conditions in Jordanian Agricultural Sector  
Policy Paper

A Collaborative Policy Paper by:  
Phenix Centre for Sustainable Development  
Action Against Hunger – ACF

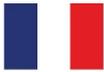
This policy paper was developed as part of the “Grow Economy” project, an initiative dedicated to fostering decent, inclusive, and sustainable economic opportunities for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians within the agricultural sector. The policy paper specifically examines the status and application of decent working conditions and OHS standards on small and medium-sized farms across four Jordanian governorates: Irbid, Balqa, Ajloun, and Madaba.

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This policy paper was prepared for research purposes only. Phenix Centre bears no responsibility for the views, information, or statements disclosed by interviewed participants, as they reflect their personal opinions and do not necessarily represent the Centre’s views or positions.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Jordanian agricultural sector constitutes one of the vital pillars of the national economy, in addition to its fundamental contribution to food security. It provides livelihoods for thousands of households, particularly in rural areas. The number of workers employed in the agricultural sector is estimated at approximately 400,000; however, the majority of workers (64%)<sup>1</sup> are engaged as daily wage or seasonal laborers, highlighting the precariousness and lack of job stability that characterise employment in this sector.

The agricultural sector encompasses a wide range of workers, including Jordanians, Syrian refugees, and migrant labourers, who operate in a complex environment where economic, social, and environmental challenges intersect. Working conditions are often precarious, with widespread exposure to occupational and health risks. Physical hazards (such as operating sharp machinery and working at heights), environmental hazards (including extreme heat and dust), and chemical hazards (notably pesticides and fertilisers) are common. The limited provision of protective equipment and training further increases the likelihood of injuries, accidents, and chronic diseases such as asthma, allergies, and cancer.

Based on gender analysis conducted in Jordan by ACF, women are among the most at-risk and vulnerable to marginalisation in this sector. They face systemic barriers such as unequal access to resources, limited participation in decision-making, and disproportionate exposure to protection risks. Integrating a gender perspective is therefore essential to uphold rights, reduce disparities, and promote resilience across all communities. By embedding gender equality into this policy paper, we can move from short-term interventions toward long-term structural

change that benefits all women, men, and youth in Jordan.<sup>2</sup>

These risks are compounded by weak enforcement of national occupational health and safety legislation, insufficient oversight and inspection mechanisms, and Jordan's failure to ratify key International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, namely Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No.155), Occupational Health Services Convention (No. 161), Safety in the Use of Chemicals Convention (No. 170), and Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention (No.184). These conventions provide internationally recognised standards for worker protection, including risk assessment, training, and the provision of safety equipment.

Jordan has not ratified the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention 1948 (No. 87), which limits workers' and especially women's ability to organise, advocate for better working conditions, and access collective bargaining mechanisms. In addition, other International Labour Organisation (ILO) Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184) relating to occupational health, agricultural work, and gender equality standards also remain pending. Addressing these gaps would strengthen legal protections, improve occupational health and safety for women and men alike, and align Jordan's labour standards with international best practices.

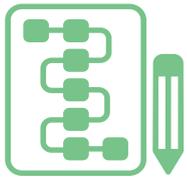
As a result, agricultural workers, especially women, children, and informal labourers, remain highly vulnerable to serious violations that jeopardise not only their physical and mental health, but also their livelihood and social stability.

## POLICY PAPER OBJECTIVE



This paper analyses policy-related causes of weak occupational health and safety conditions in Jordan's agricultural sector, including weak governance, lack of oversight, and limited awareness and training programs on safety procedures. Additionally, the paper presents actionable policy recommendations to improve legal frameworks, strengthen monitoring and inspection, and build stakeholder capacities.

## PAPER METHODOLOGY



This policy paper is based on a field study by Phenix Centre under the Grow Economy project, titled "Occupational Health and Safety of Workers in the Agricultural Sector in Jordan".<sup>3</sup> The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research. Data sources included literature reviews, statistical indicators, national and international reports, and the National Food Security Strategy (2021-2030).

A brainstorming session was held with 24 key stakeholders, including representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Ministry of Labor (MoL), Ministry of Environment (MoEN), Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), Jordan Valley Authority, relevant Unions, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), independent experts, laborers, and farmers. This session aimed to identify critical challenges related to OHS standards and propose feasible solutions

to address gaps in their implementation for labourers. Discussions encompassed suggestions for improving legislation, developing robust monitoring mechanisms, and enhancing training and awareness programs for labourers.

Two structured surveys were developed to collect quantitative data. The first was administered to a representative sample of 215 agricultural labourers, while the second targeted a sample of 195 small and medium-sized farm owners. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method, and data collection was conducted across the governorates of Irbid, Balqa, Ajloun, and Madaba.

Ten Focus Group Discussions were conducted, carefully segmented by gender, age groups, and roles (farm owners, labourers, and children aged 16+ years old) to ensure diverse and representative participation. These sessions facilitated dynamic interactions among participants, enabling the collection of a broad range of perspectives that reflect their unique social contexts. The FGDs also served as a valuable tool for gathering insights into the key OHS challenges faced by labourers, as well as identifying effective mechanisms to address these challenges.

Five Key Informative Interviews were conducted to capture the experiences of experts and gather the perspectives and insights of stakeholders on the challenges associated with implementing OHS standards in Jordan's agricultural sector. These interviews also aimed to identify existing gaps and formulate recommendations to improve working conditions, with particular emphasis on agricultural labourers and vulnerable groups. KIIs were conducted using an in-depth, semi-structured approach. The five participants selected for the KIIs represented key organisations and expertise: the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), International Labour law (ILO), an Independent Expert, and the General Union of Labourers in Water, Agriculture, and Food Industries.

# POLICY-RELATED CAUSES OF WEAK DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS

The fragility of decent work standards in Jordan's agricultural sector is largely driven by policy-related causes that have exacerbated the risks faced by workers. Weak governance and limited field oversight, legislative shortcomings in mandating employer-led preventive training, fragile safety infrastructure, and gaps in social protection have all factors directly contributed to creating a hazardous agricultural work environment. These deficiencies undermine compliance with decent work standards and contribute to higher rates of occupational injuries and diseases, particularly among the most vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and migrant workers. Accordingly, this paper reviews the main policy-related causes that have led to this reality.

## 1

### DISCREPANCY IN ALIGNING WAGE AND WORKING HOUR REGULATIONS WITH AGRICULTURAL REALITIES

The Jordanian agricultural sector suffers from fundamental legislative and implementation gaps regarding wage policies and working hours. These gaps undermine decent work standards and exacerbate the vulnerability of the workforce. Despite the inclusion of agricultural workers under Agricultural Workers Bylaw No. 19 of 2021, the practical application of the minimum wage remains limited. This is primarily due to the seasonal and informal nature of agricultural work, characterised by oral contracts and recruitment via informal intermediaries.

Findings from surveys and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted during the baseline assessment of the Economic Development Project indicate that the prevalence of informal and seasonal labour, coupled with a heavy reliance on migrant workers and Syrian refugees, has suppressed

wage levels and weakened workers' bargaining power. These groups often accept lower pay and more hazardous conditions compared to Jordanian workers, adversely affecting the overall prospects for fair compensation and decent employment. The assessment further reveals that a significant portion of the workforce receives low or irregular wages, often without legal safeguards, hindering their ability to meet basic needs and increasing the risk of poverty and livelihood instability.

Furthermore, widespread violations of statutory working hours have been documented. Many labourers work extended hours exceeding the legal ceiling, particularly during peak seasons, without receiving overtime compensation or adequate rest periods. This situation is compounded by weak field oversight, as labour inspections are often complaint-based rather than proactive.

The absence of mandatory, accurate systems for documenting work hours allows employers to circumvent legal obligations.

According to the project's assessment, these violations disproportionately impact women in agriculture, who are frequently assigned longer hours for lower pay, while lacking flexible arrangements or protections that account for their unpaid domestic and care work.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) analyses, as cited within the Economic Development Project framework, confirm that the poor alignment and enforcement of wage and hour policies remain primary obstacles to achieving decent work. These deficiencies are directly linked to high rates of exploitation, physical exhaustion, and occupational hazards, particularly in a sector so heavily dependent on seasonal and informal labour.

## 2

## WEAK GOVERNANCE AND LACK OF OVERSIGHT

Poor working conditions in Jordan's agricultural sector are directly linked with the absence of effective government oversight. In the absence of labour inspectors, farm owners' practices go unregulated, resulting in deteriorating occupational health and safety standards and leaving workers vulnerable to exploitation.

Although the Jordanian Labour Law sets standards for safe working conditions, weak governance and limited field oversight in the agricultural sector leave many adult workers exposed to unsafe conditions. Inspection campaigns often focus more on industrial establishments than on farms, reducing the effectiveness of enforcing occupational health and safety standards in agriculture.

There are clear gaps in monitoring work permits, as some workers face delays in obtaining or renewing their permits, while others work without valid permits. Inspections often focus on the legal aspect of work permits without fully verifying whether working conditions comply with occupational health and safety standards.

In addition, weak coordination among relevant authorities, such as the Ministry of Labour (MOL), the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), creates gaps in implementation and follow-up. Furthermore, the lack of updated data on the number of workers, their permits, and their work locations makes field oversight more difficult and limits the ability of authorities to effectively protect workers.

In many farms, recruitment and supervision are handled through informal intermediaries known as Shawish, who act as labour brokers between farm owners and workers. While they facilitate access to seasonal labour, the absence of regulation over their practices often results in wage deductions, excessive working hours, and limited access to social protection or safety training. This informal arrangement further weakens direct accountability between employers and workers, complicates the enforcement of occupational health and safety standards, and contributes to the exclusion of agricultural workers from formal social protection systems, as their employment relationship is not officially registered or recognised by relevant authorities.

### 3

## LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO TRAINING AND PREVENTION

The absence of binding provisions in the Labour Law and the Agricultural Workers Regulation regarding preventive training reveals a critical legislative gap, compounded by a weak oversight mechanism. With no organised or mandatory training system, workers rely heavily on self-learning in a high-risk environment, significantly increasing their exposure to occupational injuries. This lack of preventive planning underscores broader institutional weaknesses in ensuring safe agricultural practices.

The Labour Law does not explicitly require farm owners to train workers on safety procedures or the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Similarly, executive regulations lack clear monitoring mechanisms that obligate employers to document or provide evidence of worker training. This undermines the

practical adherence to Article 78 of the law, which requires employers to take all necessary measures to protect workers, provide personal protective tools, and raise awareness of occupational hazards.

While Article 11 of Agricultural Workers Regulation No. 19 of 2021 obliges farm owners to provide occupational health and safety conditions, it does not set enforceable standards for supplying protective equipment or mandate periodic or proactive training. Employers are also not required to document compliance with safety standards or report hazards regularly. These omissions weaken the regulation's effectiveness, especially in an environment dominated by seasonal and informal work arrangements.

### 4

## FRAGILITY OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORTING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY

High rates of injuries among agricultural workers highlight the severe weakness of basic infrastructure supporting occupational safety on farms. The near-total reliance on civil defence for emergency response, combined with the lack of minimum health and safety standards at work sites—such as safe rest areas, clean drinking water, first aid equipment, and adequate sanitary facilities, which are often not gender-segregated—reflects a structural deficiency to ensure a safe and dignified working environment. These deficiencies heighten workers' vulnerability and expose them to serious health and physical risks.

The absence of safe and organised transportation further illustrates the safety infrastructure. Agricultural workers often depend on dilapidated and unlicensed vehicles, with no monitoring system in place to ensure roadworthiness or regular maintenance. This unregulated transport system not only endangers the lives of workers but also restricts access to employment for women, people with disabilities and people with low income, who face heightened barriers in unsafe or inaccessible transportation conditions.

Gaps in social protection within the agricultural sector are among the most significant policy-related factors undermining the effective implementation of occupational health and safety (OHS) standards for agricultural workers. Despite the amendments introduced to the Agricultural Workers' Regulation in 2025, which mandate agricultural employers to enrol their workers in the social security system even if only one worker is employed, the practical enforcement of this regulation remains extremely weak. Consequently, the majority of agricultural workers continue to fall outside the coverage of social security and are only granted access to voluntary enrolment schemes. Such schemes are largely

unattractive to agricultural workers due to their high cost relative to the low wage levels prevailing in the agricultural sector.

Migrant workers face even greater exclusion. To qualify for social security, they must hold official employment. However, many employers avoid hiring documented workers to evade financial contributions and social security registration requirements. As a result, large numbers of migrant workers remain excluded from social protection, with voluntary social security contributions often prohibitively costly. This systemic exclusion perpetuates vulnerability among the sector's most marginalised groups.



# ALTERNATIVE POLICIES & LEGAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Protecting the rights of workers in the agricultural sector and strengthening occupational health and safety requires a comprehensive review of Jordan's legislative and regulatory framework. The following policy and legal reforms are recommended:

## ADAPTING WAGE REGULATIONS AND OVERTIME PAY TO THE NATURE OF AGRICULTURAL LABOR



- Introducing legal provisions that mandate the regulation of wages for workers in the agricultural sector in a manner that aligns with the nature of their employment (daily wage and seasonal work), while ensuring that such wages do not fall below the minimum wage.
- Regulating employment modalities by mandating the documentation of all labour contracts, including short-term and seasonal agreements, and imposing a ban on undocumented oral contracts.
- Incorporating legal provisions that hold farm owners fully liable for wage standards and working hours, regardless of the involvement of informal intermediaries or supervisors (subcontractors).

## STRENGTHEN LAWS AND ALIGN WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS



- Amend the Jordanian Labour Law and the Agricultural Workers Regulation to include binding provisions on mandatory training for workers on occupational safety, provision of personal protective equipment, and systematic reporting of risks and accidents.
- Ratify relevant international conventions on occupational health and safety, especially ILO Conventions No. 155, 161, 170, and 184 and align national legislation accordingly.

## ENHANCE INSPECTION SYSTEMS



- Updating inspection procedures to adopt a proactive approach that assesses the effectiveness of risk prevention plans on farms, rather than limiting inspections to the mere identification of violations.
- Include provisions mandating periodic specialised training for inspectors on occupational hazards in agriculture, and develop specialised inspection tools, checklists, and technical guides for the sector.

## IMPROVE FARM-LEVEL SAFETY STANDARDS



- Develop and mandate updated national technical legal standards for agricultural machinery and equipment, requiring the replacement of unsafe tools, especially on small farms.
- Incorporate heat stress management protocols into regulations, obliging farm owners to provide water, shade, and adjusted working hours during extreme weather events, in particular heatwaves.
- Legally require farms to provide safe, sanitary facilities separated by gender and equipped with basic hygiene requirements.
- Activating Article (5) of the Occupational Safety and Health and Prevention of Occupational Hazards Regulation within the establishment, which stipulates that “the employer shall take the necessary measures to respond to any emergency situation in a manner commensurate with the nature of the economic activity, in accordance with the relevant legislation or codes, through the development of an emergency plan, including fire-fighting measures and the prevention of fire spread.”

## PROMOTE GENDER-RESPONSIVE OHS POLICIES



- Amend occupational health and safety legislation to address the specific needs of women working in the agricultural sector, integrating gender principles into inspection procedures and safety policies.

## EXPAND SOCIAL PROTECTION COVERAGE



- Developing insurance instruments tailored to the nature of agricultural work (daily and seasonal) to ensure comprehensive social security coverage for all agricultural workers.
- Ensure that social protection schemes explicitly include maternity leave and related benefits for female agricultural workers, recognising their dual role in productive and reproductive labour and promoting gender equality in access to social protection.

## INCENTIVIZE COMPLIANCE



- Introduce legislation offering financial or technical incentives to farms that comply with occupational health and safety standards.

# GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS – PRACTICAL MEASURES

In parallel with legislative reforms, there is an urgent need to implement practical measures that can directly enhance the safety and well-being of agricultural workers. The actions are recommended:

## FIRSTLY: DATA MANAGEMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY REGARDING WAGES AND WORKING HOURS

- Improving the systematic collection of data concerning wages and working hours within the agricultural sector—with a specific focus on seasonal and informal labor—to facilitate the design of policy interventions that are more responsive to field realities.
- Bolstering the capacity of relevant authorities to monitor and analyze patterns of wage and working-hour violations, thereby enabling more effective targeting of awareness programs and structural reform initiatives.

## SECONDLY : GENDER INCLUSION AND PROTECTION MEASURES

- Each farm should be equipped with an emergency kit to ensure readiness and safety in emergencies.
- At least one male and one female per site should receive first aid training to ensure they can provide immediate support during emergencies.
- Support women to take leadership roles within community structures, committees, or farmer groups to enhance their visibility and influence.
- Ensure Safe Access to Resources and Inputs.
- When distributing kits, tools, or resources, make sure women have equal access and that items are appropriate for women's needs (e.g., protective gear designed for women).
- Set up referral mechanisms to specialised services (legal aid, psychosocial support, health services) for women and men who disclose protection or gender-based issues during activities, such as using the Amaali Application.

### THIRDLY: WORKER AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

- Organise regular awareness sessions for male and female agricultural workers about common occupational hazards, methods of prevention, and their legal rights related to a safe workplace. Include discussions and awareness sessions aimed at challenging harmful gender norms, such as early marriage and unequal decision-making in households.
- Use simple and engaging awareness tools tailored to workers' educational and cultural backgrounds, including illustrated posters, short videos, text messages, and mobile applications.
- Continuously update training content to reflect technological advances and climatic changes, linking occupational safety with sustainable agricultural practices.

### FOURTHLY: EMPLOYER AND SUPERVISOR ENGAGEMENT

- Involve employers and supervisors in training programs that highlight the economic and social benefits of investing in occupational health and safety, while clarifying their legal and ethical responsibilities.
- Raise workers' awareness of the reporting channels available through the Ministry of Labour (MOL), especially the "Himaya" platform, and facilitate their access to information on how to report hazards and violations.

### FIFTHLY : SAFER FARMING PRACTICES

- Expand farmres training on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as a safer alternative to chemical pesticides.
- Establish and enforce standards for the storage, transportation, and disposal of chemical residues.

### SIXTHLY: ACCESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- Develop public transportation systems in rural areas to ensure safe and timely access to workplaces, especially in cases of health emergencies.

### SEVENTHLY: DATA AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

- Establish a unified national database for agricultural work injuries, updated regularly and used to guide preventive programs and strategic planning.
- Strengthen institutional capacity by training personnel in relevant bodies and equipping them with the technical and logistical resources needed to enforce occupational health and safety standards effectively.

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## FOOTNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> Gender Analysis (2024): Gender Analysis Report\_ACF.pdf - Google Drive
- <sup>3</sup> OHS REPORT

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