

## Israel Set to Deport Dozens of Filipina Migrant Workers and Their Children

Lee Yaron, HAARETZ, Feb 18, 2019 5:09 AM

'I am an Israeli child, just let me stay in my home': Children facing deportation were either born in Israel or spent most of their lives in the country



Children of migrant workers - Alex, Lamuel, Anton, Tomer and Azriel - all expected to be deported from Israel by July, credit: Moti Milrod

The Population, Immigration and Border Authority has arrested dozens of children and their mothers who are Filipina [migrant workers](#) in recent weeks, and has informed them that they will be deported in July or August.

The children facing deportation were either born in Israel or have spent most of their lives in the country, and Hebrew is their first or only language. Last week three mothers from the Philippines were forced to sign pledges to leave Israel with their children by July.

Authority officials deny any policy change regarding mass deportations, but a Haaretz investigation found that at least 18 mothers and two fathers have been arrested since October ahead of deportation with their children. Filipino community heads, social activists and staff members from the Bialik-Rogozin school where many of the children learn, say there had barely been any such deportations of Filipino workers and their children for years until the recent uptick.

Four of the arrested mothers were sent to Givon Prison [with their children](#) - two of the children are four, one is nine, and another is 12 - and were deported after a week in jail. The others were released the same day they were arrested after signing delayed deportation orders for July or August.

"Mom told me we need to leave on Tuesday," Alexander, a 10-year-old fifth grader at Bialik-Rogozin, whose mother was arrested last week, said on Sunday. "I've had nightmares every night since then. I can't speak Tagalog, only Hebrew, and don't know anything about the

Philippines. I am an Israeli child. I know all the songs and holidays. Just let me stay in my home.”

Tomer, 11, a sixth-grader, added: “They caught my mom a long time ago. I worry about her and always tell her to be careful. She’s been in jail for a while. I don’t understand why they just pick up Filipinos from the street.”

“I want to ask Bibi what’s the problem if we stay, who does it bother?” says Azriel, 11, also a sixth-grader. “I don’t want to fly to the Philippines. It is [dangerous](#) there, and there is no good internet.” Anton, 9, a fourth grader at the school, said: “We will need to fly back to the Philippines because we don’t have a visa. I will miss my friends and school.”

“My son doesn’t know anything outside of Israel. He won’t eat pork and only talks about how much he wants to be drafted into the army,” recounts B., a Filipina migrant worker and member in the organization of mothers seeking to protect their children from deportation. “He only speaks Hebrew. He is 13 and has never been in any other country. It’s a shame that state he so much wants to protect won’t protect him.” Another mother tells: “The children are traumatized. They see police and are scared. We came here legally to work, and we have lived here peacefully for years. Our children are Israelis. They want to stay in their home.”

In D.’s case, fear of coming deportation has replaced the fear of arrest. Immigration Authority inspectors arrested her a few weeks ago while she was on her way to pick up medicine at the central bus station. “I worked here over a decade with a valid permit until I had a girl, who is now 10. It made me illegal. I have another boy, four. They put me in jail and told me that if I don’t sign that I would leave Israel, I won’t be able to go back to him. I had no choice but to sign.”

Inspectors arrested one of the mothers last October at the entrance of her four-year-old son’s kindergarten. They waited for her to pick him up and took both of them to Givon Prison, from where they were deported after 20 days in jail. Two weeks later, they arrested another woman with a nine-year-old boy and deported them after eight days in jail. In October, a mother of a sixth grader at Bialik-Rogozin was arrested. Her son was in an Israel Scouts meeting when he was arrested. She recalled that she signed a document pledging to leave within a month after being pressured by shouts and intimidation. After several requests, she received a deportation postponement until July so her son could finish the school year.

Another mother was arrested in January with her 12-year-old boy, who goes to a special education school. Because she had been previously arrested and had defied a deportation order, she was taken to Givon Prison with her son, who was diagnosed with functional limitations, and was deported two days later.

In wake of the deportations, migrant workers and mothers from the Philippines have formed the United Children of Israel and have decided to hold next Saturday a public event called “[Filipino Shabbath against Deportation](#).” The organization made an appeal for public support in a statement issued following the arrest wave. “We came to Israel legally many years ago, and have been taking care of the elderly and people with special needs with great dedication,” the organization stated. “Our children were born and grew up in Israel. Don’t let the deportation happen. Join the fight.”

“There have been numerous incidents recently of people being arrested and having to leave the country with their children,” Eli Nehama, the principal of Bialik-Rogozin said. “Every such incident bears severe emotional repercussions for the children, and for other children who feel that they are the next in line. It creates anxiety, depression and learning difficulties. I am a civil servant whose job is to educate these children, and I am doing what I can to protect them. In the past, there have been arrests in the dead of night, and children would disappear without saying goodbye to their friends and the school, so I came to an arrangement with the Population and Immigration Authority by which deportation of families would only happen in the summer so the child could finish the school year.”

Nehama says he tells parents to call him immediately when something happens. “Just last week I had three cases of school parents being arrested,” he said “It’s very complicated. There is an impossible situation here that can’t go on, a situation of fear, uncertainty and enormous poverty. This behavior is hurtful to us as a society. It is immoral and inhumane. Such things should not happen in Israel in 2019.” Some 1,478 children of Filipina workers study in the Israeli educational system, according to statistics the Education Ministry provided Haaretz.

Migrant workers employed in Israel are forbidden from bringing children and other relatives with them. Migrant workers who gave birth were previously required to leave the country with their babies, and were permitted to return without them.

The High Court of Justice overturned the regulation in 2011, allowing mothers to remain in Israel until the expiration of their permit, during which time the child received a temporary permit. The children facing deportation were born in Israel to migrant workers whose permits have expired.

The government made two decisions, in 2006 and 2010, granting residency to certain children of migrant workers. Now, the children who weren’t granted residency but were educated in Israel, are asking the government to recognize them as well and not to deport them to their parents’ country of origin, which they’ve never visited.

The Immigration Authority commented: “The administration’s enforcement activity is ongoing. One of our stated goals, with the authority invested in us, was to enforce the law regarding illegal residents. So, we are stunned by the inquiry to know why Israeli authorities enforce the law against those that break it. Let it be clear that illegal residents live in Israel knowing they are breaking the law. They should know that sooner or later they can expect to stand before law enforcement. In light of what was said, your inquiry is unclear and is particularly astounding.”