

The September newsletter highlights some of the hidden ways in which the State bureaucracies', policies and procedures rob the poorest workers of their livelihoods. So what do we have? Hundreds of so-called volunteers from third world countries are employed for agricultural work at a third of the legal minimum wage. After 100,000 NIS was stolen from a Chinese construction worker, KLO and the Association for Civil Rights (ACRI) submitted a joint petition to repeal regulations that deduct monies from the social rights funds of foreign workers who overstay their visas for any reason-even a legitimate one. And also: the appeal of KLO and WAC Ma'an (a labor union for Palestinian workers in Israel) is trying to finally enable Palestinian workers to unionize as they wish. Let's start...



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Hundreds of "volunteers" from third world countries are hired for agricultural work at a third of the minimum wage. We exposed this situation through our joint application with The Hotline for Migrants and Refugees submitted to the Ministry of the Interior as well as to the Ministry of Labor and Welfare, requiring them to provide clear and standardized regulations on this topic. According to the Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA), the number of volunteer workers in kibbutzim coming from third world countries has risen in recent years: they now account for half of all foreign volunteers in Israel. The experience of these "volunteers" in Israel can be chilling. Some cases we reviewed included a ban on the worker's freedom of movement, a reduction in already meager wages when a worker fell sick, and work under constant threat by the employer. In fact, three "volunteers" KLO assisted were officially recognized as being held under slavery conditions. KLO attorney Michal Tadjer said in an interview with Galei Tzahal radio station: "There are hundreds of such cases. This is not a new invention—to bring people from poor countries and call them volunteers. We have to stop this neglect." [For the full interview \(Hebrew\)](#).



KLO and ACRI joined together in an appeal to cancel a law allowing PIBA to appropriate accumulated social rights of migrant workers once they stay in Israel a few months past the period allowed by their visa. As of today, the Foreign Workers' Law and the Interior Ministry's regulations stipulate that money for migrant worker's pension funds are to be deposited in a fund managed by PIBA and released to them upon their departure from Israel. In the event that a migrant worker stays beyond their allotted visa period, the money in this account will start to be deducted incrementally. KLO and ACRI filed petitions on behalf of two employees in the construction industry, which maintained that this regulation is unconstitutional and should be canceled.

One of the petitions was filed on behalf of Zhu Longjun, a worker who was brought to Israel to work in the construction industry on a visa that was renewed for 12 years, until the renewal process was abruptly cancelled. He was unaware of the regulations in place around overstaying a visa and by the time he understood his legal situation and prepared for his return to China, he had already been stripped of 100,000 NIS from his deposit fund, hard-earned money from his many years of work in Israel. The second petition was filed on behalf of a Moldovan migrant who was injured in a serious work-related accident. While waiting for the medical committee to review his case, his visa expired and a quarter of his social rights were deducted. The petitions filed by KLO and ACRI demanded that PIBA return the social rights funds to these workers and to treat the regulations that allow such theft as null and void



In an application to PIBA, KLO and WAC Ma'an demanded that Palestinian workers be allowed to unionize as they would like. For decades, Palestinians working in Israel have had very limited freedom of association - through the Histadrut Workers' Federation alone - whose help to these workers in protecting their rights was almost nil. Union fees were automatically transferred from the salaries of the Palestinian employees to the Histadrut by the PIBA payment department and the workers had no choice in the matter. As part of the changes that are currently taking place in the employment of Palestinian workers, PIBA's payment department has published a new option for employees - to transfer payment of their dues to another organization called the National Workers' Federation. But what about the employees' ability to really choose how they want to organize? In June, a group of ten Palestinian construction workers tried to transfer their dues to WAC Ma'an instead, but that option did not technically exist for the employer. The only two organizations that could be chosen were the National Federation and the Histadrut, which so far have not shown any real assistance to workers - although they have been content to collect union dues from them. Kav LaOved and WAC Ma'an appealed to PIBA to demand that Palestinians have the right to unionize where they choose and to allow the payment of dues to other labor unions besides the National Federation and the Histadrut

Help us show workers they are not alone in their fight for just employment! A monthly donation to Kav LaOved will assist workers in standing up for their rights. Any new donation of at least **300 NIS** (approx. \$85.00 USD total) - or donations that triple previous ones - will be matched by one of our funding partners

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