קו לעובד ⁄ـ Worker's Hotline عنوان العامل /ـ



Kav La0ved

ANNUALREPORT

LETER FROM THE DIRECTOR



On 1 January 2024, after years of community lawyering assisting marginalized grassroots communities, I stepped with great enthusiasm into the role of Executive Director at Kav LaOved.

I am deeply honored to walk in the footsteps of our former director, Adi Maoz. Her steadfast leadership and unwavering commitment have not only fortified our organization but also set a robust foundation for us to continue our mission.

Starting my role amidst the turmoil of war, I am acutely aware of the immense challenges confronting marginalized workers: low-income Israelis, Palestinians, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and those without status. The onset of this war has intensified their struggles and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities. Job security and protection have become distant memories for many as businesses shut down, livelihoods vanish, and economic opportunities evaporate in the face of disruption, depriving many workers of their agency, and leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and gross violations of their labor rights.

In the current challenging context, all our energies at Kav La Oved's are focused on generating a tangible and meaningful difference in the lives of vulnerable workers affected by the ravages of this war.

KLO is a beacon of support to vulnerable workers in accessing their rights, and a driver of policy reforms. It amplifies the voices of workers, safeguards and protects their basic rights, and upholds their dignity.

Let's forge ahead with renewed assurance, championing the cause of vulnerable workers' rights, striving for real, positive change locally and globally.

Adv. Ohad Amar Executive Director Kav LaOved

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ABOUT LAOVED

Kav LaOved/The Worker's Hotline is an Israeli civil society organization committed to the defense of workers' rights within the framework of Israel's labor law and international standards, irrespective of nationality, religion, gender, or legal status.

Established in 1991, Kav LaOved supports the most disadvantaged populations in the Israeli labor market: migrant workers, refugees, asylum-seekers, workers with no status, Palestinians, Arab citizens of Israel, and low-income Israelis.

KLO provides labor rights guidance as well as legal and paralegal assistance to individual workers. We also monitor the labor market, document violations, and carry out policy and legal advocacy directed at policy improvements.

KLO employs a staff of 24 professionals in various fields and engages over 49 trained volunteers. The organization is governed by a seven-member board of directors.



2023 IN NUMBERS

We assisted over

5,786 individual workers from more than 40 countries.

We produced over

reports, policy papers and

newsletters in Hebrew, English

and Arabic.

We reclaimed over

of withheld wages and benefits, ensuring they were returned to workers by their employers.

We continued to provide face-toface reception hours to workers at our two offices as well as in the field and online, in

languages.

We managed

strategic petitions for the protection of workers' rights, including 5 in the High Court of Justice.

We facilitated more than

workshops and online awareness raising meetings for workers.

156,000

people followed our 8 Facebook pages in 6 different languages.

We disseminated

"Know Your Rights" information sheets in 6 languages.

On, and immediately after, 7 October 2023, we helped more than

migrant and Palestinian workers reach safety.

We were mentioned by over

media publications locally and internationally.

In 2023, our team was formed of:

staff members

trained volunteers.

We achieved all this with an annual budget of

equaling about 1 million USD.

Israel entered 2023 in a state of upheaval, witnessing the return of Prime Minister Netanyahu to the premier's seat, and the emergence of new coalition partners whose actions actively worked to undermine the democratic system and erode human rights, including equality and protections. In May, a draft bill proposing a 65 percent tax on foreign government donations to Israeli civil society organizations was introduced, but quickly faced criticism both domestically and internationally and was put aside. Also, the government fervently pushed for a comprehensive judicial reform aimed at diminishing the powers of the Supreme Court. The ensuing months saw the country enveloped in a pattern of weekly protests, escalating in intensity and frequency.

Amid this turbulent political landscape, KLO continued assisting workers, supporting them in accessing justice and reclaiming their withheld benefits and rights. The vulnerability of the Supreme Court placed us in a delicate position, prompting caution in our approach to principle cases, to avoid worsening the precarious policy status quo and potentially harming our beneficiaries. Nevertheless, we continued actively engaging in raising awareness among the public, government, and media regarding systematic violations, insufficient enforcement, and lack of protection in areas such as occupational safety and health, Palestinian labor rights, healthcare entitlements for migrant workers, unjust deductions from migrant workers' deposit accounts, exploitative employment practices of international students in a griculture, and more. We drafted and disseminated dozens of position papers, legal queries and policy reports, and were also invited

to speak in numerous Knesset committee hearings, conferences, and roundtable meetings. Throughout the year we played a crucial role in advocating for, and spotlighting, the rights and needs of vulnerable workers in the face of evolving challenges.

And then, the gloomy 7th of October war hit us all with its barrage of unprecedented challenges. Many migrant workers residing in the areas around the Gaza Strip were also killed, wounded, and abducted, with many casualties amongst Thai agricultural workers, Nepalese workers/students in international programs, and Filipino caregivers. KLO was forced to become a rescue and emergency response force over an almost three-week period, assisting hundreds of migrant and Palestinian workers reaching safety.

Large swathes of the country were evacuated of their population and displaced workers were left in limbo regarding their labor rights. Parents of young children were unable to attend work due to temporary school closures. Many workers were called up for reserve duty, while others faced job losses as their workplaces shut down. Amidst the crisis, many employers exploited the situation and terminated employment contracts through noncompliant means. Many Arab Israelis were also illegally dismissed based on political considerations.

On 7 October the government decided to bar all Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza from entering Israel, resulting in more than 120,000 Palestinians workers remaining without a job, with

no income or access to livelihoods for them and their families. Many banned Palestinian workers also did not receive their wages for the months of September and up to 7 October, adding financial strain to an already tumultuous situation. Over 4,000 Gazan workers were detained in Israel and later sent back to Gaza, while thousands of others escaped to the West Bank seeking shelter.

Many migrant workers faced job losses due to the disruptions caused by the war, while others chose to leave the country for safety reasons, often having to leave their benefits behind. The war and the banning of Palestinian workers created profound voids and an urgent need for new workers, particularly in the construction and agriculture sectors. Following the government's approval of new emergency quotas, migrant workers were recruited in developing countries through private agencies, outside of any organized or supervised labor rights' safeguarding mechanisms. Some newly arrived migrant workers were immediately and illegally sent to work in war zones near the borders with Gaza and Lebanon.

Despite many adversities, the positive impact of our work resonated strongly in 2023, evident in the expressions of gratitude we received from many workers through various channels. They described Kav LaOved as a beacon of professionalism and compassion amidst tumultuous times, emphasizing the organization's role as a source of support and protection within the stormy seas of the prevailing circumstances.









Immediately after 7 October 2023 Kav LaOved started issuing regular social media updates in several languages updating workers on the situation and advising on new measures adopted by the government.

ISHAEL IN 2023





IN 2023, AGAIN, VULNERABLE WORKERS IN ISRAEL CONTINUTED TO EXPERIENCE WIDESPREAD VIOLATIONS OF THEIR LABOR RICHTS AS STATE ENFORCEMENT AND DETERRENCE MEASURES FELL SIGNIFICANTLY SHORT OF WHAT WAS NEEDED TO PROTECT THEM.

MIGRANT WORKERS:

- Migrant Agricultural Workers Around 29,000 Thai citizens employed via a bilateral agreement as well as 3,000 students from developing countries who came for one-year work/study programs in agriculture. Agriculture remained one of the most PALESTINIAN WORKERS: the isolation faced by workers on farms. Many migrant agriculture workers were victims of labor trafficking.
- Migrant Caregivers More than 73,000 caregivers, mostly women from Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe, who cared for older people and people with disabilities, expected to be available debt-bondage.
- Migrant Construction Workers Over 23,000 construction workers, largely from China, Turkey and Eastern Europe were employed livelihoods or income.

in Israel in 2023. Many workers in this sector lacked protection and were at high risk for work-related injury and death as well as labor trafficking.

abusive labor environments in Israel, given the hard work and Before 7 October 2023 over 120,000 West Bank Palestinians and about 12,000 from the Gaza Strip came daily or weekly to Israel through lengthy checkpoint crossings, more than 75% of them worked in construction. An estimated additional 40,000 Palestinians worked in West Bank settlements and an unknown number, which may vary between 18,000 and 50,000, worked in Israel without a round the clock as working hour rules did not apply to them. To permit. Palestinian workers in Israel suffered labor rights violations come to Israel, they often had to pay illegal brokerage fees to in almost all aspects of work, including monthly payment of illegal obtain a work visa, making them vulnerable to exploitation and brokerage fees. On 7 October 2023 all Palestinian workers were making it difficult for them to cover their basic needs. During the year banned from accessing their jobs in Israel causing serious economic 2023 approximately one-third of all Israeli workers were employed in distress for over 120,000 Palestinian families left with no access to hourly jobs or through third parties which hampered their job security

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS:

Around 25,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly from Eritrea and other African countries, were employed in Israel in hotels, restaurants and in other subcontract or informal jobs during 2023. Their status remained unstable as Israel in most cases does not recognize the status of refugee. Asylum seekers in Israel had no safety net and suffered widespread labor rights violations such as non-payment of wages and social benefits.

LOW-INCOME ISRAELIS:

Low-income Israeli workers included elderly people, single mothers, LGBTs and members of vulnerable ethnic minorities, who face systematic barriers to economic opportunities, enjoyment of social rights, and access to justice. They typically earn less than the minimum wage, and benefits.

1. SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL WORKERS

In 2023 we assisted over 5,700 individual workers whose rights were violated, recovering for them more than 20 million NIS in unpaid wages and benefits. We also assisted more than 600 migrant and Palestinian workers in their search for safety during and after 7 October 2023.

- Workers reached out to us through our 8 hotlines, 8 Facebook pages in 6 languages, and through our organizational website in 3 languages.
- We provided individual assistance in labor rights assessments; calculations of due wages and benefits; communication with employers and relevant authorities; and referral to labor courts.
- We assisted workers in person in our Tel Aviv and Haifa offices, in the field, and online.
- We identified and addressed recurring violations including unpaid wages and benefits; denied access to healthcare; debt bondage and labor trafficking; infringements of safety at work, including work accident claims; barriers to disability and maternity benefits; violations of immigration law; and discrimination and violence.



We enhanced workers' self-advocacy capacity to decrease the barriers they face in accessing their rights through:

470

informational posts on our **8** Facebook pages in **6** languages (Hebrew, Arabic, English, Russian, Tigrinya and Thai) with more than **156,000** followers.

workers' rights leaflets in **6** languages, made available online and on paper.

workshops and online
webinars in **5** languages
provided to groups of
workers as well as to
grassroots organizations
engaged in promoting
labor rights in their
respective communities.

2. MONITORING AND DOCUMENTING VIOLATIONS IN ISRAEL'S LABOR MARKET

In 2023 our Research and Public Policy Department continued capturing emerging trends in labor rights violations, state failures in implementation and enforcement of existing laws, and gaps in the overall workers' protection framework.

- Our daily updated <u>online database of work accidents</u> was upgraded in 2023 and used by a growing number of journalists and stakeholders.
- In early 2023 we issued our annual <u>report on workplace safety</u>, reviewing the previous year. The report revealed that in 2022 the number of medium and severe work-related accidents resulting in casualties was the highest in the last four years. The report gained significant media attention when the Safety Administration in the Ministry of Labor published their own annual report, presenting markedly different numbers. We welcomed this debate which underscored our longstanding efforts to compel authorities to gather and disclose more accurate and comprehensive data on workplace

accidents. In July we published our <u>mid-year 2023 report</u>, which indicated an additional rise in the number of victims.

- Many violations of workers' rights in Israel in 2023 were directly linked to the authorities' insufficient enforcement of legislation which resulted in too limited deterrence against violations. For example, Israel regularly increased the numbers of migrant workers over the last few years, but not the number of work inspectors. In 2023 we also produced a report reviewing the Law on Increased Enforcement a decade after its adoption. The report showed that the Ministry of Labor's enforcement activity has failed to curb violations, and pointed at a series of necessary changes, particularly an increase in the number of inspectors, and better data collection.
- In 2023 our 2022 report mapping <u>Palestinian construction workers'</u>
 <u>occupational health</u> and our <u>Work Safety Report</u> were translated
 into Arabic and made accessible on our website



ענף הבנייה משותק, פועלי הבניין ממשיכים למות

December 2023 article in HaMakom titled 'The construction sector is at a standstill, but workers continue dying', reporting KLO's findings on work accidents since 7 October.

3. ADVOCATING FOR SYSTEMIC GHANGE



KLO's Adv. Tamar Niv and Adv. Diana Baron speaking during a Knesset Standing Committee meeting on the issue of supermarket cashiers illegally required to pay money missing from cash registers

In 2023 we continued advocating for increased protection for all workers in Israel, and against exploitive structures of employment. We issued 113 reports and position papers, as well as 6 newsletters in both Hebrew and English. The reports, position papers and newsletters are available in our web pages in <u>Hebrew</u>, some also in <u>English</u>. We were also mentioned in over <u>237 media items</u> in <u>Israel</u> and internationally.

A sample of our advocacy work in 2023:

• We continued to address several persistent problematic aspects of Israeli labor regulations conducive to extreme abuses amounting to labor trafficking. These included: the one year agriculture programs bringing students from developing countries, used by farmers to bring in new migrant workers outside of authorised quotas; the illegal brokerage fees that many migrant workers continued paying to obtain their work visa to Israel, entering huge debts which bonded them to their employers; the possibility given to selected large construction and infrastructure companies from China and Turkey to bring to Israel, largely unsupervised,

workers from their countries; and the illegal trade in Palestinian workers' working permits, depriving many workers of a large part of their wages and bonding them to their employers.

- We continued coordinating the Israeli Occupational Health Coalition initiated in 2021. The Coalition's members included CSOs, government officials, professionals, employers, and journalists, with new members joining in 2023. The Coalition met regularly, participated in events and advocacy meetings, and shared recommendations for change with officials in charge of regulatory work. The coalition continued emphasizing through various channels the necessity for the establishment of a robust Israeli National Authority for Occupational Safety and Health.
- Up to 7 October one of our primary focus was advocating for the rights of the increasing number of workers from Gaza, a few thousands and steadily growing. Our efforts were directed towards securing regular work-permits as opposed to "trader" or "economic needs" permits

High Court strikes down parts of bill that would usurp migrant workers' benefits

he pensions and workers

in their ruling, the bill is un-constructional because the Justice Minister Yan

rent one would be cancele tating, "If anyone had an is needed in the justice sy igm, they got their annuouraging (Negal tramiter tion to Israel, which harms

effectively permit thou gaily. The ruling reflects ractividentity as the matienal Levin's criticism, saying floation (of this law) is the them to do whatever they sands of migrant workers an extreme progressive set bome of the Jewish people," that "the High Court Invalidence proof of why we are like. We remind them that

Haaretz article of 12 July 2023 reporting on a case brought forward by Kav LaOved.

which many regular workers were given, but offered no entitlement to social rights.

• Our legal advocacy was successful in a court case against the government's disproportionate deductions from migrant workers' deposit funds when workers did not leave Israel at the end of their visa, even when their overstay was justified by health related or other reasons. We were also successful in our court case fighting the prohibition for local authorities to hire asylum seekers as street cleaners. In an additional case, the Supreme Court dismissed our request to cancel programs bringing agricultural international students from developing countries to study in Israel for one year. The court, however, asked the government to introduce changes in current regulations, in line with the points we raised in our petition. Finally, our court case on the geographic employment limitations imposed on asylum seekers was rejected by the local court and we appealed to the Supreme Court. The regulation was meanwhile frozen.

4. STANDING BYWORKERS DURING WAR



KLO's Adv. Orit Ronen and Adv. Aelad Cahana speaking during a meeting of the Knesset Standing Committee on Foreign Workers on vulnerable workers' rights during the war.



Announcement of a Q&A online meeting for Arabic speaking Israeli workers led by KLO's Adv. Rasha Atawna on labor rights in time of war.

On 7 October 2023, KLO's lines and social media were inundated with plea for help from migrant workers in the Gaza Envelope area and Palestinian workers stuck in Israel. Our migrant workers departments rescued 380 migrant workers by coordinating their locations with the army and the authorities, acting as translators, and following up until the workers were in safe places. Our Palestinian workers department facilitated the exit to the West Bank of 250 Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza who were stuck in Israel. We also assisted hospitalized migrant workers and workers' families abroad who had lost contact with their dear ones. We documented these frantic days in our "War Chronicle."

A few weeks after 7 October the initial emergency passed, but the unusual load of referrals continued. Workers reached out to understand their rights in time of war after suffering unjust dismissals and other rights' violations.

their departure, including illegally holding their passports, or were taking advantage of the chaos not to pay their social rights. Palestinian workers reached out to understand what the new situation meant in terms of their work outlook and their rights. Many also complained that their September salaries had not been paid and their employers were avoiding their calls. Our Palestinian team engaged in extensive negotiations with employers and was able in several cases to return, also to groups of 25 and 50 workers, the wages due to them. Arab citizens of Israel faced a wave of unjust job terminations amidst escalating political tensions. We responded to this new phenomenon by setting up a new hotline in Arabic and recruiting and training new Arabic speaking volunteers.

In the midst of the emergency, to enhance protection and raise awareness to workers' rights in time of war, as well as to newly approved labor-related Migrant workers wanting to leave Israel as soon as possible, in fear for temporary measures, we produced and disseminated a series of leaflets helping them understanding and accessing their rights in relation to the their life, asked for help against employers who were putting obstacles to in six language (Hebrew, English, Arabic, Spanish, Russian and Tigrinya), jobs they had to leave behind.

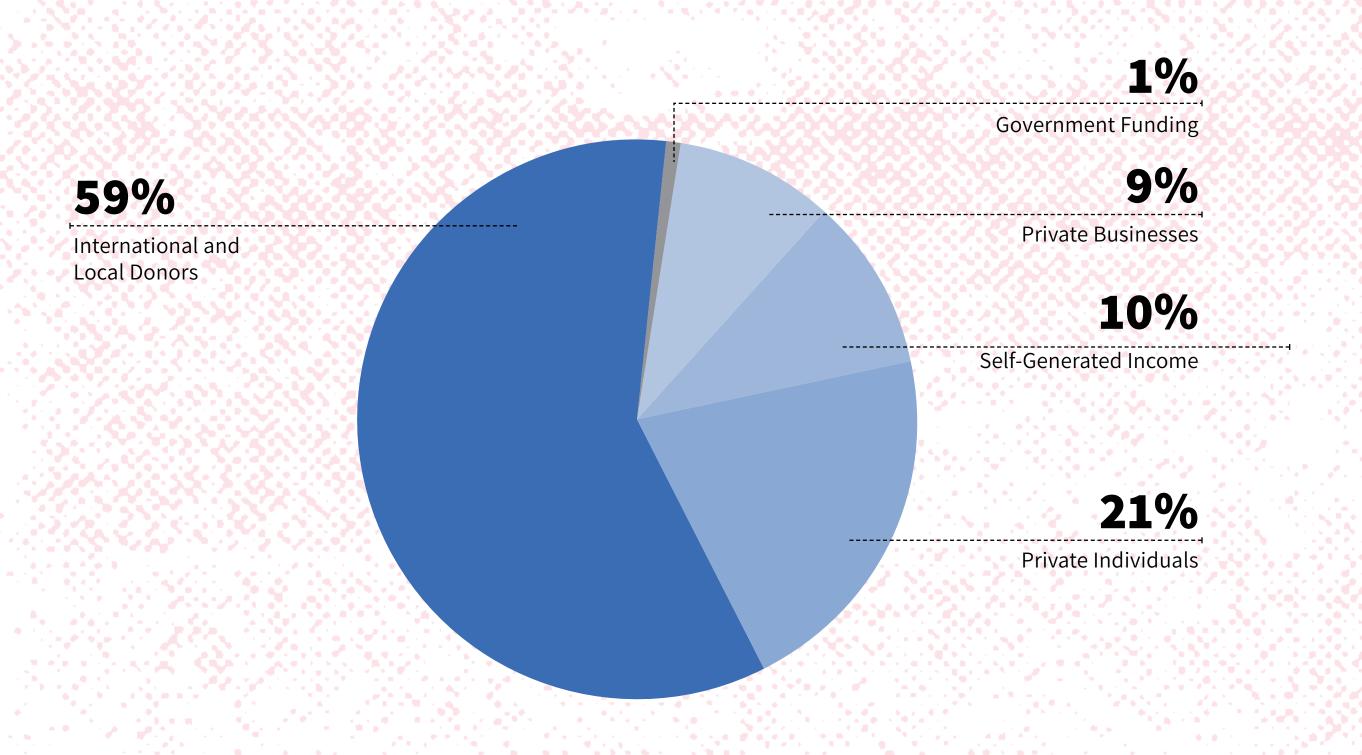
regular Facebook updates, and online presentations.

Bringing an isolated voice of concern for migrant and Palestinian workers heavily impacted by the war, but hardly considered in the internal public debate, we were approached by an unprecedented number of media outlets generating substantial <u>international media exposure</u> for our work. We were also widely quoted in the Israeli media and had several op-eds published in the Haaretz daily paper.

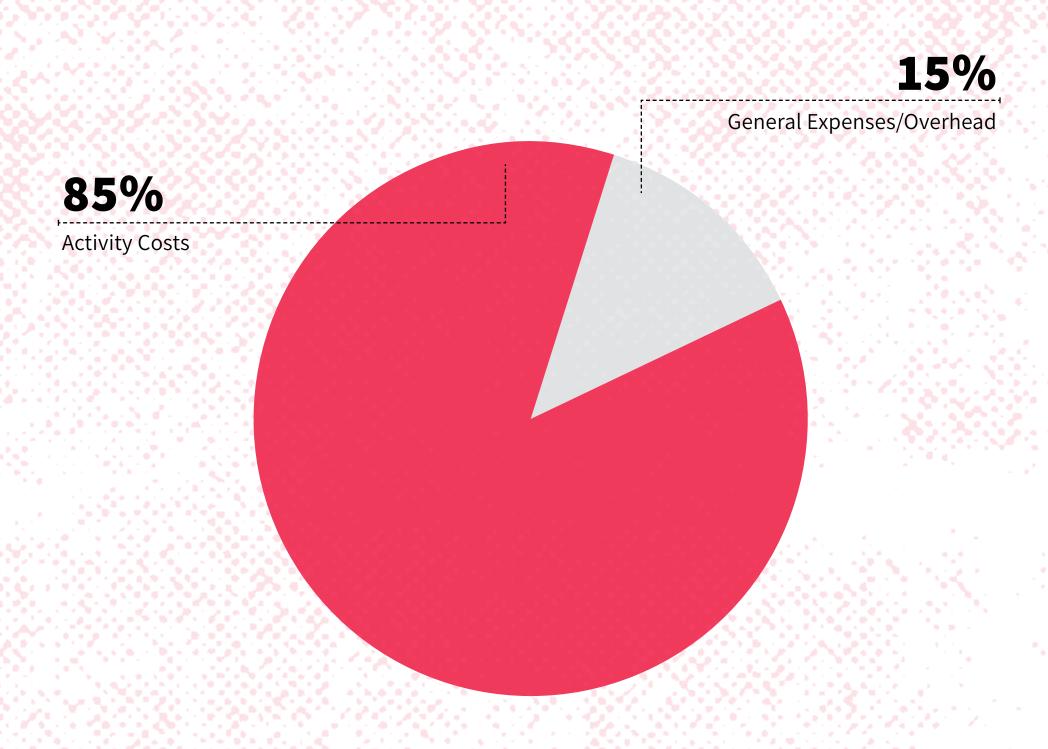
Among various activities we undertook since October 7th, we coordinated the setting up of a mental health helpline with Chula University in Bangkok offering free assistance to traumatized Thai workers; we submitted a request to the authorities to allow Palestinian workers to retrieve part of their pension money without this impacting on their other social rights; we held meetings with evacuated Israelis hosted in hotels on the Dead Sea,

KLO FINANCIALS

KLO FUNDING SOURCES



KLO EXPENDITURES



AFEW WORDS OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:



To our volunteers, team and board: our work would not be possible without the dedication, commitment, experience, professionalism and expertise of our board members, staff, and volunteers. We are extremely grateful to you for all that you do every day at Kav LaOved.

To our friends and partners: We would like to thank all those in Israel and around the world who provide us with various forms of support without which we wouldn't be able to make a difference in the quality of life of Israel's most vulnerable workers. Your contributions showed us the tremendous support we have locally and internationally.

To our supporters: Lastly, we would like to recognize our donors whose guidance, funding, and support sustained our work and made what we do possible:

Kathryn Ames Foundation
Arkin Family Foundation
Bader Philanthropies
Disrupt
Effective Altruism Israel
European Union
Guardian General, Israel
Healing Across the Divides
Izzy Cohen Labor Fund
Guardian General, Israel
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Joey and Carol Lowe

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New Israel Fund

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

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Signing Anew

SIVMO

Social Justice Party

Two Roses, Israel

UK Online Giving Foundation

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UN Slavery

And other private donors

OUR TEAM

Organizational Support Team

Adi Maoz - Executive Director
Ohad Amar, Adv. - Incoming Executive Director
Eva Abraham - Administrative Manager
Ran Vilner - Financial Manager

Outreach and Development Team

Samar Baidoun - Manager, Resource Development

Miriam Anati - Outreach and Resource Development

Assia Ladizhinskaya – Media Relations, Social Media and Website

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Orit Ronen, Adv. - Manager, Migrant Agricultural Workers Department
Tsaga Sahelu - Community Outreach, Refugee and Asylum Seekers Department
Hadas Zamir - Housecleaners Department

Board of Directors

Michal Tadjer, Chairwoman Solomon Abbeba Orly Binyamin Victor Lederfarb Einat Podjarney Hagar Ronen Naomi Stoler Freidman



ENGAGE WITH US

Help Us Protect the Rights of Workers!

If you would like to support our work, there are various ways to donate. Each contribution will be used to provide assistance to workers – whether it be standing up for their rights with authorities and employers, providing legal assistance, or continuing to raise awareness about workers' rights in Israel.

Donate via Check Directly to Kav LaOved

Please send your contribution to:
Kav LaOved
PO Box 2319
Tel Aviv-Yafo 6102201
Israel

Donate via Bank Transfer to Kav LaOved

To make a bank transfer directly to our account, please refer to the following details:
Account Name: KAV LAOVED

Account Number: 431091 Bank Hapoalim, Branch No 170

Swift code: POALILIT

IBAN IL390121700000000431091

Donate Online (relevant to all currencies)

You can donate securely online via credit card or PayPal. <u>Click here</u> to begin the process. Select a sum and payment method and you will be forwarded to a secure site to finish. After donating, you will receive confirmation of payment in your email.

Donate via the New Israel Fund

Donations from the US are **tax-deductible** through the New Israel Fund, and can be processed either through <u>this link</u>, or via check to the following address. "Donor-advised to Kav LaOved – Worker's Hotline" must be written on the check.

New Israel Fund 6 E. 39th Street, Suite 301 New York, NY 10016-0112, USA



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