



**JUSTICE FOR  
WAGE THEFT**

## APPENDIX I

### Q&A with William Gois, Regional Coordinator, Migrant Forum in Asia

*Q: How many migrant workers are there around the world? How many are estimated to be suffering from wage theft amid the COVID-19 pandemic?*

A: There were more than 164 million migrant workers around the world as of 2017, according to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO). We believe this number is much higher today as many countries around the world have increased their demand for migrant workers in recent years. More than 40% of all the workers in Arab States were migrants, according to ILO's 2017 data, making them the regions with the highest share of migrants in the labour force.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruptions. Up to millions suffered from wage theft.

*Q: What is wage theft? How serious is the situation?*

Wage theft means migrant workers were faced with job loss or non-payment of wages, forced by employers to take unpaid leave or reduced wages, sometimes below the minimum wage, confined in poor living conditions, and with little or no engagement in the work options before them.

Many migrant workers struggled with the dilemma of exercising their right to return in these circumstances, while others remain stranded in cities without access to services or support, or in border areas, living in precarious conditions posing as quarantine facilities.

The Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) recognizes wage theft as a part and process of modern slavery.



*Q: Which type of migrant workers are affected the most?*

Many migrant workers moved to work overseas in the hopes of supporting their families and education for their children. Once they experienced wage theft, they were unable to do so and their families were deprived of living support. While wage theft is a grave issue that occurs across almost all sectors and groups of migrant workers, it is very rampant among vulnerable groups such as undocumented workers and women migrant workers particularly in the domestic work sector. It is also very pervasive in the construction, hospitality, manufacturing, and fishing industry.

*Q: What are the dire situations that they are facing right now?*

Migrant workers and their families are struggling to survive on a daily basis without a stable source of income while also experiencing issues such as repayment of debt incurred from recruitment fees and other loans. Due to the lockdowns, repatriated workers are also unable to secure a new job in the country of origin and destination, as deployment of workers are on hold and borders are closed off.

*Q: Why don't these migrant workers return home?*

Although hundreds of thousands of migrant workers have already been repatriated, lockdowns and restrictions remain in place; many migrant workers are forced to live without jobs, without their earned wages, and remain stranded in countries of destination, waiting to be repatriated.

*Q: Why is it such a great challenge to get migrant workers to report their employers or the dire situations that they are facing?*

Many migrant workers have reconciled to the situation of wage theft in the form of unfair or unpaid wages for months and years even before the COVID-19 pandemic. They have accepted it and refrained from complaining because they are afraid of losing their jobs under the threat of contract termination, becoming undocumented at the countries of destination, and in fear of retaliation of their employers. They also do not have the necessary support to file cases in court due to the lack of access to justice.



*Q: Are countries of destination taking any action or any coordination with countries where these migrant workers come from?*

Some countries of destinations such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Thailand, Singapore and Australia have taken various degrees of actions, from setting up a multi-ministry task force and relevant laws, to courts ordering unpaid wages to be compensated to migrant workers.

However, there were not any significant coordination plans between countries of origin and countries of destination. Both also do not have the necessary procedures to ensure the monitoring and documentation of abuses experienced by migrant workers before they are repatriated, therefore the workers return home without any means to express their grievances, including issues of wage theft.

*Q: What is Justice for Wage Theft? What has the campaign achieved so far?*

Justice for Wage Theft is a campaign launched by a large coalition of civil society organizations and trade unions on June 1, 2020, appealing to governments to establish an “Urgent Justice Mechanism” that addresses the plight of millions of migrant workers whose wages have been unjustly withheld by their employers.

Subsequently, four more appeals were issued focusing on actions to be taken by UN bodies, governments and businesses to take concerted action in engaging with existing cases of wage theft and lack of justice as well as the creation and maintenance of effective mechanisms for continued progress.

Achievements:

- Endorsed by over 30 organizations and networks of civil society and trade unions and 1 prominent individual (Shahidul Haque, former foreign secretary of Bangladesh)
- Supported by NHRCs in Nepal and the Philippines
- Active wage theft-related case documentation in India, Philippines, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Indonesia using Uwazi (through independent case documentation system established on JFWT website)



- Organised 3 webinars so far in relation to the campaign to break down the issue and see how governments, international organizations like the ILO, IOM, and WB, and the private sector can address the issue. It also aimed to create more publicity and provide space to discuss the topic.
- National launch of the campaign to highlight the issue at the national level in India and the Philippines
- Created materials such as policy briefs, news articles, research papers, campaign video, and podcast video as well as launched the Justice for Wage Theft Campaign poster competition and requested members and partners to develop infographics on the issue given the limited number of materials on wage theft. As partners of the ILO in this year's Global Media competition, MFA was able to incorporate the issue of non-payment of wages as a thematic issue to be taken up within the competition.
- Partnered with IOM Regional Office (BKK) and the ILO to exchange data related to wage theft since they are undertaking Rapid Assessments in different origin countries to assess the situation of repatriated migrants.
- Planning to conduct a study on wage theft in India and Bangladesh in partnership with the World Bank.
- Organizing side events and parallel sessions and strong engagement on the issue in intergovernmental processes among multi-stakeholder participants and delegates including international organizations, private sectors, governments, NHRIs. Speakers involved key stakeholders from civil society, trade unions, parliament, and NHRIs, etc.
  - Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) Migration Lab Discussion Group on Wage Protection and Transnational Justice: we were able to get the participation of Nepal, Bangladesh, and Indonesia as well as a number of civil society organizations, trade unions and UN agencies.
  - GFMD Side Event on Non-Payment of Wages



- GCM Regional Review of the Asia-Pacific – Side Event: Migrants, Wages, and the Pandemic: Where are We Now on the Issue of Wage Theft?
- Raised the issue of non-payment wages at the recently concluded Abu Dhabi Dialogue Sessions – Senior Officials Meetings
- UAE United Nations Network on Migration (Inter-Agency Working Group) taking up the issue of non-payment of wages
- Partnership with the UK and Swiss governments on their Initiative, Call to Action on Remittances: Webinar on Unpaid Wages and Remittances
- In March 2021, the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), a coalition of long-term institutional investors representing USD 2 Trillion in assets under management, formally endorsed the JFWT campaign voicing their support and urging companies to implement human rights due diligence in their supply chains and to support the campaign.

*Q: As an individual member of the general public, how can I contribute to Justice for Wage Theft and fight for justice for repatriated migrant workers?*

You can submit cases of wage theft through our online form

<https://justiceforwagetheft.org/en/page/fn5yqy10evw>

You can also sign our petition to urge your government to establish/set-up an urgent justice mechanism to address wage theft and give back the workers' salary and benefits that they are owed.

<https://justiceforwagetheft.org/en/page/jthmnoje9ul>

Follow our campaign on social media and on the website, engage online to help raise awareness about the issue of wage theft experienced by migrant workers globally and to gain traction and draw the attention of stakeholders such as governments, international organizations, businesses, the media, etc.

Instagram: @justiceforwagetheft

Facebook: Justice for Wage Theft

Website: [justiceforwagetheft.org](https://justiceforwagetheft.org)

Twitter: @mfasia\_

Use the hashtags: #JusticeForWageTheft #SayYesToJustice and #WageTheftIsAGlobalIssue