

Welcome to the Strawberry Harvest!
Your Minimum Wage is ...

Union Organising and Migrant Labour
in Agriculture: International Perspectives

Eds.: Sezonieri Campaign for the Rights of Harvest Workers
in Austria & European Civic Forum

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There is a lot more to do!

Preface by the Industrial Manufacturing Union (PRO-GE)

Translation from German by Susi Haslinger

Austrians enjoy their regional fruit and vegetable: it's of good quality, the transport distances are short. However, we hardly ever wonder about the work that is necessary to deliver fresh and affordable quality to our plates. We don't think about the indispensable role of thousands of harvest workers, who dig our

Seasonal work in agriculture is a completely new challenge to us as a union

asparagus, cut our cabbage, and pick our strawberries. In recent years PRO-GE learnt more and more about the miserable labour conditions of the harvest workers: unbelievably long working hours, wages way below the collectively agreed minimum wage, dreadful living quarters.

It quickly became clear that in Austria seasonal harvest workers are one of the most frequently exploited groups. Most are migrants, they are rather sceptical about institutions (even trade unions), their average stay in Austria only lasts a few weeks, and they have almost no knowledge about their rights. We as the union of industrial and agricultural workers soon knew that there was a need for action – and we knew immediately that we are confronted with completely new challenges. Challenges we can neither address with our traditional methods nor alone.

In 2014 together with other NGOs and activists we launched the campaign to support harvest workers in Austria, now known as »Sezonieri«. We provide free and anonymous counselling in the native language of the workers: via posters, folders that are directly distributed in the fields, a website (sezonieri.at), and info-hotlines. In May 2016

we hosted the forum »Welcome to the Strawberry Harvest! Your Minimum Wage is ...« in Vienna. At this conference we had the opportunity to exchange our experience on an international level and to learn from each other. The current brochure gives an insight into the world of migrant harvest workers, the challenges for the activists, and for us as a union, as well as possible solutions. The success stories portrayed give us the courage to continue the fight: because there is a lot more to do!

Glück Auf!

René Schindler,
Executive Secretary for Legal
and Social Affairs of PRO-GE

Susi Haslinger,
Legal department of PRO-GE/
Focus Social Policies

Moving forward in solidarity

Autumn 2013: About 70 landworkers from Romania and Serbia decided to down tools in October. With the help of highly visible protest, they drew public attention to their unbearable working conditions. Over a month earlier, in August, Romanian and Hungarian landworkers had got in touch with the trade union PRO-GE in order to struggle against their exploitation. About a year later, the Sezonieri Campaign for harvest workers in Austria kicked off: »Sezonieri« stands for »seasonal worker« in Romanian. What does the campaign aspire to? Why has it become necessary to run this campaign? And what preliminary conclusions can be drawn from three years of campaigning work? An editorial on an **activists' view of the Sezonieri Campaign, its activities, goals and obstacles. Translation from German by **Alexandra König****

The examples of struggles for land workers' rights raised above highlight what seems to be a widespread practice in this sector: wages being driven considerably below collective bargaining agreements, violations of legal maximum working hours, withholding of special allowances for overtime, accommodation of workers in substandard housing – partly under forceful conditions – raising the suspicion of the prevalence of human trafficking. All of that is happening

right next door – in the realm of the production of our highly praised local vegetables. However, both earlier cited examples are somewhat striking, especially since these groups that fought for their rights are hardly being ascribed any ability to organise and struggle. To say the least, seasonal and harvest work range among the most precarious forms of migrant employment. Both cases underline that the enforcement of rights is possible, despite highly unfavourable conditions: in Burgen-

land the workers represented by PRO-GE reached a settlement agreement of more than a few thousand euro. Likewise the other workers, represented by the Chamber of Labour, concluded an out of court agreement in which the employer in Tyrol guaranteed additional payments amounting to roughly 110.000 euro.

Harvest, seasonal work, and the labour market in agriculture

The legal constructs »harvest work« and »seasonal work« (described officially as »temporarily admitted foreign labour forces«) are temporary work relations which do not offer any long-term perspective for employment. Harvesters and seasonal workers (from outside the EU) require work permits; their issuing of which is limited to regulated contingents specified for each federal state. Meanwhile the majority employed in agriculture are mainly (temporary) migrants and commuters originating from so-called new EU member states of Eastern and Southern Europe who, currently with the exception of Croatian nation-

als, benefit from free access to the labour market. During work-intense periods agriculture and forestry is the sector ranking highest with regard to the share of employees of migrant origin. According to official statistics 17.287 out of 29.697 persons employed in agriculture and forestry at the end of June 2015 did not hold Austrian citizenship. The situation is even more complex with

Seasonal workers and harvest workers are hardly ascribed any ability to organise and struggle

regards to collective bargaining agreements. Depending on the federal state, as well as the type of business (farm, garden centre, winery etc.), different types of collective bargaining agreements apply. However, they all share a commonality: the legally binding – but in practice all

too often violated – minimum wage for unskilled agricultural work is low, ranging from 6,70 to 7,30 euro gross – meaning prior to deduction of taxes and social insurance contributions.

Thinking about agricultural politics and labour struggles together

Not only is Austria characterised by a vicious circle in agricultural production, price pressures generated by wholesale are pushing agricultural businesses to

**»Fair Trade«
should also
apply radish from
Tyrol or grapes
produced in
Burgenland**

produce for less money, there is also little organised resistance, mainly initiated by small-scale actors. European and national agricultural policies are primarily about increasing cultivated land, however the disastrous price policy for agricultural products leads to a systematic

over-exploitation of labour forces – be it of relatives working in the family enterprise, or of employees. Whereas large businesses manage to maximise profits by adopting this strategy, the smaller ones can hardly sustain their economic survival.

Moreover, »organic« and »regional« production does not guarantee fair production. »Fair trade« is an established term when it comes to importing products from overseas, but such discussions are completely absent when turning to the apple of Styrian origin, radish from Tyrol, or grapes produced in Burgenland.

The Sezonieri Campaign aims at addressing the inclusion of labour rights and anti-racist debates in the realm of agriculture and, conversely, at the inclusion of agricultural concerns in the sphere of trade union work.

Sezonieri Campaign – activities and goals

The Sezonieri Campaign is a joint initiative run by a range of actors based within the trade union, migrant, and agricultural contexts. The main goal is to raise awareness about existing collective bargaining rights, la-

20. & 21. MAI 2016: FORUM ZU
GEWERKSCHAFTEN, (MIGRANTISCHER)
LANDARBEIT UND ORGANISIERUNG.
EIN INTERNATIONALER VERGLEICH



**Willkommen bei der
Erdbeerernte!**

Ihr Mindestlohn beträgt ...



DISKUSSIONSVERANSTALTUNG:
FREITAG, 20. MAI, 18:00 UHR
IM BILDUNGSZENTRUM DER AK WIEN
THERESIANUMGASSE 16-18, 1040 WIEN

WORKSHOPTAG:
SAMSTAG, 21. MAI, 9:30-17:30 UHR
IM ÖGB-CATAMARAN
JOHANN-BOHM-PLATZ 1, 1020 WIEN

WWW.SEZONIERI.AT
WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/SEZONIERI

MIT

IRENE PEANO, WALTER IANNUZZI,
LAMIN CAMARA
CAMPAGNE IN LOTTA (ITALIEN)

PHILIPPE SAUVIN
L'ALTRE SYNDICAT (SCHWEIZ)

VLADIMIR BOGOESKI
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GERRY McCORMACK
SERVICES INDUSTRIAL PROFESSIONAL
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AUS ORGANISATORISCHEN GRÜNDEN
ERSUCHEN WIR UM ANMELDUNG BIS
15. MAI UNTER: SEZONIERI@GMX.AT

AM WORKSHOPTAG (21. MAI) WIRD KIN-
DERBETREUUNG ANGEBOten. BITTE
BEDARF BEI DER ANMELDUNG VERMER-
KEN.

DIE TEILNAHME AN DEN VERANSTAL-
TUNGEN IST KOSTENLOS. FÜR DAS
LEIBLICHE WOHL IST GESORGT VOR
ALLEM DER WORKSHOPTAG SOLL
ALLEN INTERESSIERTEN DAS MITMA-
CHEN BEI DER SEZONIERI-KAMPAGNE
ERMÖGLICHEN.

**»WELCOME TO THE STRAWBERRY HARVEST!« VIENNA (AUSTRIA),
MAY 20TH/21ST, 2016: Why are there still so many examples of ex-
treme exploitation in the agriculture sector? Of what use is a trade
union to landworkers? And how can they fight simultaneously for
their labour and residency rights? Activists, agricultural workers,
grassroots unions and big trade unions gathered in Vienna in May
at the invitation of the Sezonieri Campaign in order to exchange
strategies. Photo: Karl-Friedrich Brenning**

BIERE VER-
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WELCHER
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MOHR AN

bour and social law, as well as to offer support in enforcing these rights at the individual and collective levels. Secondly, the Sezonieri Campaign supports labour struggles and processes of self-organisation. Thirdly, the campaign aims at improving the living and working conditions of employees in the agricultural sector in significant and sustainable ways, rather than on a temporary basis.

We circulate information in a range of languages, offer a phone line, proactively get in touch with workers in the fields, campaign with large banners in the border regions, give legal advice and support, and do media work. The collaboration between members of trade unions, employees of NGO's, and activists is crucial for our work. Although the diversity in organisational cultures and working styles may be challenging at times, it is precisely this mix in competences that makes this campaign successful. Being activists based in various social and anti-racist struggles, the Sezonieri Campaign represents a concrete practice of standing up against precarity and enabling a context that enhances our capacity to act in solidarity.

Sezonieri Campaign – successes and challenges

One and a half years after these 70 harvesters had pulled out of their workplaces in Tyrol, we visited some of them in their home district Sibiu, in Romania. We were interested in documenting, some time having passed, how they had fought for their rights and learning what conclusions they retrospectively drew. All warmly welcomed us; the reflection on this struggle however could not have been more different: some considered they had lost their chance to work in Austrian agriculture because of their militant reputation; this was considered problematic especially since they were facing economic hardship without any revenue from working abroad. Others were happy being finished with seasonal work and considered it a better choice to stay at home with their children. Some would advise others to stand up for wages and social rights anytime; others were reluctant to advise others to struggle since they considered it to be a great effort with an overall dissatisfying result. A more lengthy exchange with Sorin Oprișiu, who was involved

at the frontlines of this protest is featured in this brochure (see also page 13). Two former harvest workers (see also page 72), who had filed a court case for another struggle (equally located in Tyrol), are now active members of the Sezonieri Campaign.

Throughout the campaign PRO-GE successfully managed to struggle for wage claims that were denied by employers (a harvester shares her ongoing case on page 19). In part, the campaign achieved further, but more indirect improvements – for instance through strengthening the negotiation powers of harvesters by providing legal information; or by raising public pressure and thereby forcing employers to give in to workers' demands. Workers in agriculture are now using the knowledge disseminated as part of this campaign on minimum wages, maximum working hours etc. in order to achieve some punctual improvements in their work relations.

But even so, challenges persist: our lack of competence in various languages creates occasional hurdles; we are facing the difficult tasks of building

trust and continuous organisation in a sector characterised by the permanent movement of its workers; we have so far not found enough points of leverage to exercise pressure

How do you reach continuous organisation in a sector characterised by the permanent movement of its workers?

more systematically in order to move beyond successful singular case work and achieve enduring changes in work and social relations. Finally, the goal to create social spaces for, and supporting, the self-organisation of workers in trade unions is yet to be reached.

Welcome to the Strawberry Harvest ...

Against this background we hosted a forum on trade unions, (migrant) agriculture work and

unionising entitled »Welcome to the Strawberry Harvest! Your minimum Wage is ...« at the end of May 2016. Throughout two days colleagues from trade union, activist, and agricultural backgrounds based in Germany, Ireland, Italy, Austria, and Switzerland exchanged experiences and discussed unionising work in agriculture. In order to analyse and compare challenges and strategies, and to learn from international best practice, we aim to share and spread this knowledge and a few contributions more in this brochure.

**Lisa Bolyos, Cordula Fötsch,
Markus Griesser, Iris Hanebeck,
Karin Jović, Traude Kotek,
Daniela Koweindl, Sónia Melo**

We protest!

On October 1, 2013, approximately 70 harvest workers protested in front of Tyrol's largest vegetable farm demanding the payment of their pending wages. »We protest«, read the banner they were holding. 40 year-old Romanian Sorin Oprișiu had painted the neon green letters on the banner. He is one of four workers who initiated this important self-organised labour protest of harvest workers in Austria. Sorin Oprișiu in conversation with Sónia Melo. Translation from German by Megan Saperstein and Henrik Lebuhn

Looking back at your protest at the Schotthof, the farm run by Josef Norz in Thaur, what memories come to mind?

If we had all stuck together, we would have achieved a lot. That's actually how it was on the first day of the protest. But then everyone started to negotiate individually with the boss. That's not good. The only good outcome was that hopefully the people who work there now are better off. Maybe they got something out of it, but we didn't.

Why didn't you stick together? After all, 70 out of 120 workers on the Schotthof

walked out. So there must have been quite a group dynamic ...

After the walkout, the boss used these tactics to weaken us as a collective: he secretly called people into his office, like at 3 am, and offered them money so that they would stop protesting and quickly go home.

How did the protest start?

It was not just my idea, although many said that, including the boss because everyone came to me and asked for advice. My colleagues as well as the boss respected me. I never saw myself as a leader. But I noticed that people took my advice seriously, and so I quickly had some sort

of a leadership position. For me it was important that we stick together and act as a group. It was four of us who started the protest. We met several times in order to plan everything and divide up the tasks among us. At the Schotthof, we always got paid on the afternoon of

For me it was important that we stick together and act as a group

the first day of each month. So we thought we should protest before we signed the pay slips. Otherwise the farmer could just send us home.

From the first idea to how it actually played out: What happened?

On October 1st at 6am, we walked into the office and told our boss that we wanted the money he owed us for all the years we had been working there. I said to him: This is our right! He acted like he didn't

understand us. And then he said this infamous sentence: »If I give you the money, I'll go broke.« He also told us to leave, we wouldn't get anything from him. I regret that I didn't record this conversation, because later he denied that he refused to pay us the bonuses for the ongoing year according to the collective agreement.

Did anyone support you? What did the Schotthof do?

Before the protest, we went to the Chamber of Agricultural Workers to get advice. At that point, the head of the legal division, Günter Mösl, told us we should try to solve this within the company, which meant directly with the boss. I quickly realised that he didn't want to support us. On the day of the protest, Mösl was there again, this time with us and the boss in the office. He talked with Norz. They spoke very fast so that we didn't understand them. Afterwards he disappeared for a day and we couldn't reach him. My impression was that he sided with the farmer. He should have advocated for us, encouraged us and given us information. But he didn't.

The same day, Norz said to me I could bring in whoever I wanted, he wasn't going to give us any money. When he realised that it was getting serious, he called me into his office and offered me money. He asked me to make sure that our protest ended. He offered me 60.000 to 70.000 euro. I would have accepted, but my wife said »no« and that we couldn't disappoint the others. We were all protesting for the same reason: we wanted the money we had earned.

Then you found yourself a legal representative?

The next day we went to see a lawyer. But he was more of a divorce lawyer and couldn't help us very much. Finally, the Chamber of Labour in Tyrol provided a lawyer, and on October 3rd we met in the Chamber's main hall to sign the authorisation for the lawyer. But at that point there were only 43 of us left, because some people had taken the money from the boss and had gone home. We left our information with the lawyer and signed the authorisation, and we all headed home to Romania and Serbia the very same day. Two months later, we all came back to Innsbruck

to collect the money, because the lawyer had come to an (out of court) agreement with Norz. When we arrived – and before we even received the money –

The farmer offered me up to 70.000 euro, if I made sure that the protest ended

we had to sign a paper ... I didn't really know what it said, since there was no one there who could translate.

And then? How did the protest end?

When I realised that each of us got 2.600 euro – the agreement turned out to be 110.000 euro total – I left. I didn't even want the money. It was so little, way too little. But many of us didn't have a house or a job. Also, it was December, Christmas, which is why they were very happy and accepted the money. Eventually, I took it, too, but I was very disappointed.



»WE PROTEST!« THAUR (AUSTRIA), OCT. 1st, 2013: Around 70 harvest workers from Serbia and Romania self-organise and go on strike at Schotthof, one of the biggest vegetable farms in Tyrol. They protest against labour conditions and demand their wages according to collective bargaining. Photo: Daniel Liebl, zeitungsfoto.at

You and your wife Monica worked at the Schotthof from 2003 until 2013. What happened that you decided to protest after ten years?

We hadn't been happy at the Schotthof for quite a while. Many others felt the same way. First we were 40, then 70 people. What eventually triggered it was an incident that happened a year earlier. Two workers from Serbia went to the office and claimed their rights. They got several thousand euro. We all knew about this. At the time, we didn't do anything, but it fanned the flames. Also, one of our co-workers went to learn about her rights and she told us about it. In reality, we kind of knew for years that Norz was getting rich at our expense and didn't respect our rights, but we simply pushed it to the back of our minds. And we needed the money, even if it was very little. Each of us also had personal motives, but finally we got together and together we felt strong.

What was your motivation?

For a couple of years, my wife Monica and I had wanted a child. But we couldn't. We worked 14 hours a day, seven

days a week under tremendous pressure. We knew: If we wanted to start a family, we needed to get away from this place.

How were the working conditions?

It was a disaster. It makes me sick to even think about it. I don't like to talk about it. Looking back, I feel embarrassed that I stayed there for so long. I worked 350 to 420 hours a month. I never got any bonus for extra hours, no premium for vacation or Christmas. We had to pay for everything: for the tools, for the rubber straps,

**Norz got rich,
because he
exploited us
to an extreme**

for a small room, for our food, for the laundry machine... for everything. My wife repeatedly cleaned the house for a friend of my boss' wife. She made five euro an hour. Then we found out that the lady actually paid 15 euro per hour for Monica. But our boss' wife only passed on five and kept ten to herself.

How was your relationship to your boss?

On the Schotthof we were only numbers. The boss only knew the names of a couple of workers. He did know mine. The old Norz, the dad, he cried when I left. For him we were family. At least the old man had some feelings, contrary to his wife and to the junior and his wife. When I started at the Schotthof, we were 70 workers. Now there are 140. In the beginning, we were washing the radishes in the wheelbarrow. Now they have modern machines. He got rich, because he exploited us to an extreme.

How was the pay at the Schotthof?

Monica always helped with the harvest and got paid a maximum of 4 euro an hour. So did I for years. During the last two years, I was a foreman, a driver and I operated the tractor. I brought the workers to the fields and earned 5,30 euro an hour.

Do you regret the protest?

No, not at all. Especially because of my health. I now work in Bavaria for a construction company and I asphalt streets. I work

160 hours a month and earn 2.500 euro. At the Schotthof, I made 2.000 euro during the last two years, but for that I had to work 400 hours. My wife and I have a little son, we are happy. The only pity is that they are in Romania, in Şura Mare, and I only see them every six or eight weeks. For Monica it is also not easy, because she is by herself with the child. But they are not short of anything, I mean financially, and that's very good. Of course I would prefer to live in Romania, but there is no work. And if you do find a job, it's paid very badly. If it was different, I wouldn't be here.

Do you also fight for your labour rights and those of your co-workers at your current job?

The question, whether my boss respects my rights or not, doesn't even come up. We are being told about our rights, and not just our duties, and they respect them. But yes, I always have an eye on it (*smiles*).

»It all started when we asked for a certificate of employment ...«

Violeta Popa* has been working on a farm in Lower Austria for seven years, for a contractor under the »Pro Planet«** label. Her working day was characterised by harvesting cabbage, weeding and working hours up to 17 hours a day. She earned a pittance, officially she was registered as a part time worker. When a local shop assistant gave her a Sezonieri Campaign folder, Violeta Popa learned about her rights and contacted the trade union. For one and a half year she's been waiting now for the verdict in the lawsuit she is proceeding. In the interview with **Hans Hedrich** she speaks about the tough issue to enforce your rights via legal remedies. Translation from German by **Susi Haslinger**

You worked in Lower Austria on a farm. How long did you work there, what did your everyday work look like?

An acquaintance put us in contact with the farmers – we arrived on December 26th in 2007. We worked in a small village with only twenty houses and a small shop. We had to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and were driven to the field. We were weeding and cutting the cabbage. We worked in the

fields all day long and at night we continued to work in the warehouse on the farm. There we packed the cabbage into boxes and bags to make it ready for delivery. We worked for 13, 15, 17 hours a day. Every two or three months we even had to work for 24 hours, without any sleep. My husband worked even more than I did. When I went to bed at night, he still had to drive to the central market to unload the trucks.

How much did the farmer pay you?

Until April 2014 we only got 3,50 euro an hour. Then we started arguing with him and told him that we wouldn't return – that's the reason why he raised our wage to 5 euro.

What were your working and living conditions like?

We were living in the farmhouse, in the basement. Well, in the beginning it was really bad. There were four rooms – at the very start there wasn't even a concrete floor, only four metal beds. We had to lay the parquet

We fought for a wage of 5 euro an hour on our own – before that we got 3,50

flooring ourselves and also tile the bathroom walls. We also had to buy our own food, sometimes the farmer would bring some grilled chicken to the field – only to tell us that we had to work longer hours. All our work

gear and the knives we needed for cutting the cabbage – we had to provide by ourselves. I don't want to badmouth about everything though ... on other farms the workers had to pay for electricity, water, toilet paper, etc. – it was deduced from their wage. This was not the case for us because we didn't have any comfort at all. Anyway, we didn't spend much time in the house. The good thing was that we earned some money that we desperately needed. Otherwise why would we have stayed for seven years?

What was your situation in Romania like? Why did you choose to go abroad for work?

Already in Romania, we had been working in a greenhouse and in the cultivation of vegetables. One day a friend told us »come to Austria! You can earn much more money here!« In Romania we made 20.000 lei a year, that amounts to 4.500 euro. We could earn the same amount in Austria within two months, due to the excessive working hours. If we hadn't worked overtime, we would have only made 700 or 800 euro a month.

What happened when you contacted the union?

Well, from Romanian friends and my brother, who had been working in Germany, we had learned that we were entitled to family allowance in Austria. All we needed was a certificate by the farmer to prove our employment. We didn't consider this a problem; why wouldn't he issue such a document? However, he didn't want to do that. There was a shop assistant at the grocery store in the village. She noticed that we came directly from the fields to do our groceries, in our dirty work gear. She repeatedly asked us about our working conditions and how we came along with the boss. We told her that everything was okay. What else could we have said – we were living at his place! She said that she knew we were working hard and didn't want to complain. One day she gave us a leaflet, a little booklet in Romanian language, it included a contact address and a telephone number – the number of Alina Stocker [Romanian language translator of the Sezonieri Campaign]. After coming to Romania in January 2015 we called the union and they offered to

help us. We were seven people at that time. In February 2015 the union started to claim our missing wages from the farmer. In January 2016 they finally filed a claim at the labour court. However, as yet we haven't reached anything.

Did you know your rights as an agricultural worker before?

No, we didn't know anything until the shop assistant gave us the leaflet. For seven years!

Did you every try to negotiate with the farmer yourselves?

When we had returned to Romania in April 2014, we told him on the telephone that we would only return if he paid us 5 euro an hour. He finally agreed, so we returned for work on December 1st.

After that we asked once more for the certificate of employment but he refused again. That's why we called the union. The farmer came to know about our contact with the union and the plans to file a claim, because some of our colleagues told him so – later also the union's lawyer contacted him. Those colleagues

who actually »betrayed« us, withdrew from the proceedings, to be able to continue working for the farmer.

You were seven colleagues to fight for your rights. Now you are only four left – do you know what happened to the other three?

Yes, it's just the four of us – and I'll tell you why the others withdrew: if they had received their outstanding payments by court rule immediately, they hadn't

I never signed an employment contract; the farmer repeatedly made us sign papers in blank – I don't know what he did with those papers

withdrawn their mandate last summer, in 2015. But as they witnessed the long duration of proceedings, they returned to the

farm to earn money. In the meanwhile, the farmer already pays 6 euro an hour and they only have to work for seven or eight hours – because there were controls again and again. On the other hand, they have to pay for their accommodation, the water, etc.

What are your claims? What amount of money are we are talking about?

The farmer has to issue all the documents to prove our regular employment lasting for seven years and he has to pay the differences between the 3,50 euro he actually paid and the regular minimum wage. He told the social security agency that I had been working only part time from 2008 on – two to four hours a day with interruptions in between of two or more days! I learned that from the union. I never signed an employment contract, however, the farmer repeatedly made us sign papers in blank. I don't know what he did with those papers. I saw that he even submitted papers in our name that we hadn't even signed. How can he prove that I only worked four hours a day, if I didn't sign the papers?!

How does the cooperation with the union work?

What should I say? They say, they did something, however, we haven't received any positive results so far. I guess they are busy, too, our case is not the only one.

Where do you work now?

Since August 1st I work in Italy, I nurse an older person. It is a good job; I don't have to »struggle«. I care about the person I nurse, I clean up, and I cook, that's it. The payment is good; I work at the person's home – I enjoy the same living conditions as she does.

How do you feel about your decision to fight for your rights? Do you regret you made all those efforts?

No! Why should I regret it? We should have done it earlier, instead of abandoning our rights! There was one incident: I had worked outside for too long and had a bad cold, so I had to go to the hospital. However, the farmer's wife came up to me and told me I would have to pay for my stay in hospital, which wasn't true at all. She also asked the doctors to discharge me much sooner, so I could continue working.

What do you want to tell other workers who are in a similar situation?

Never sign a contract that is not written in Romanian language! Other than that I hope, they are luckier than we were!

* real name withheld

** »Pro Planet« is a product label of »Rewe Group«. According to their website (www.proplanet-label.com, downloaded on 2016-10-10) the Pro Planet label is not just about product quality anymore – ecological and social sustainability play an equally important role. In Austria the NGO »Global 2000« is – among others – one of the project partners of »Pro Planet«.

Editor's note:

The court proceedings are pending since January 2016. The claims include the remaining difference between the wage actually paid and the collectively agreed minimum wage, as well as overtime surcharges, Christmas and holiday allowances, and a compensation for the vacation days the workers couldn't spend. Only the outstanding claims of the last three years are actually actionable, older claims

are time-barred. Also the higher wage of 5 euro still is significantly lower than the minimum wage laid down in the respective collective agreement. Despite greatest efforts there was no possibility to settle the case out of court. Violeta Popa and her colleagues understandably refused to accept a derisory offer their former employer made. In summer 2016 the court asked for an expert opinion about the working time actually necessary to fulfil all the routine tasks on the farm, since the farmer and his wife impugned most of the working hours the workers claim to have worked. Although the expert opinion approves most of the working time as stated by the workers, the court still hasn't fixed a date for the hearing of Violeta and her col-

leagues and the discussion of the expert opinion (effective October 2016).

In Austria it is very common for court procedures to last months, if not years. This constitutes a big obstacle for workers to enforce their rights and has repeatedly been sharply criticised by the unions.

»Agriculture is one of the sectors most vulnerable to labour exploitation«

In spring 2014 PRO-GE started a campaign to promote the rights of harvest workers in four regions in Austria. From the beginning the campaign included the involvement of activists and NGOs with significant experience in that field. Three years on the campaign has exposed a pattern of systematic exploitation and denial of basic labour rights and standards. What are the specific results of the campaign so far? Has it changed the way the union works? **Lilla Hajdu and Susi Haslinger**, both employees at PRO-GE, in conversation with **Daniela Koweindl**. Translation from German by **Susi Haslinger**

Why did PRO-GE start the campaign?

Susi Haslinger: Along side our main target group – industrial workers – our union also organises workers in agriculture. However, we have a lot of pending issues in that field. The field is poorly organised. At the same time, we know that agriculture is one of the sectors most vulnerable to labour exploitation.

What is the legal framework concerning labour standards and social rights in Austria?

Susi Haslinger: Labour law in agriculture is not a federal matter but subject to the legislation of the nine federate states (»Laender«). There is a federal framework law and nine different state acts. Also collective agreements by sector are concluded separately for every state. PRO-GE is only entitled to negotiate such collective agreements in some states, in some others only the Chamber of Agricultural Workers is allowed to do so. In other words: there are some states where we simply cannot influence the

general working conditions. We are reduced to being able only to enforce workers' rights, but we cannot negotiate them. Something that is very uncommon for a union.

Well, who picks the vegetables we buy?

Lilla Hajdu: Most of the workers don't have an Austrian passport. In the regions close to the border of other EU member states there are a lot of daily commuters – in Burgenland they come from Hungary, in Lower Austria from Slovakia, and in Styria from Slovenia.

Susi Haslinger: Quite a large group comes from Romania, a smaller one from Bulgaria. A lot of workers have an EU citizenship. However, we still observe third country residents, such as Serbs and Ukrainians.

Lilla Hajdu: I recently was in touch with two workers who spoke Arabic and French. They told me they earned 3,50 euro per hour and live in a shelter for asylum seekers. The sector is rather mixed; also concerning gender, it is not male-dominated.

Speaking of wages, how about the working conditions?

Lilla Hajdu: The collective agreement for agricultural workers in Burgenland stipulates a gross minimum wage of 1.162,80 euro. Hardly any of the workers actually ever receive that minimum wage, however, the extent of the underpayment differs greatly.

Susi Haslinger: The common hourly wage ranges between 3,50 and 5 euro. However, depending on the region the obligatory minimum wage is between 5 and 6 euro after deductions. I've also never seen any overtime wages paid. Depending on the crop, it is quite common to work on the weekend too.

Lilla Hajdu: At peak periods it's quite common to work for thirteen hours or more a day. On the other hand, it is possible that there is no work at all, due to bad weather conditions for instance. In that case the workers don't get paid whatsoever. The same is true for holidays or other periods of absence. We have noticed increasingly that seasonal workers are being treated as day workers, something that is hardly compatible with Austrian labour laws. We have also noticed that the employment is almost always immediately terminated when a

worker gets pregnant or sick, or as the result of a work accident.

For appearances' sake there are a variety of tricks, to hide labour law violations.

Lilla Hajdu: Yes, it's quite common to have two sets of records, for example, concerning working hours. The informal record includes the actual working hours and is very often the basis for the actual amount paid. The other one, the formal record, is supposed to be submitted to the authorities in case of an inspection.

Susi Haslinger: We have observed this practice so many times that we are certain that there's a pattern behind it. We are confronted with records of working hours of allegedly part time employees. The records are supposed to make us believe that the workers start their work every day at the same time in the morning and leave the fields just before the factory whistle blows. There are no anomalies to the schedule – apart from some even shorter working days. In reality, labourers may work up to twelve or thirteen hours a day, five, six or even seven days a week.

How about social insurance – are the workers officially registered and insured?

Susi Haslinger: In the case of social insurance seasonal workers profited a lot from the opening of the labour market. Before

Pregnancy, accident or sickness – all good reasons to dismiss a worker

the opening Romanian citizens had to have a specific permit, for which special conditions and quotas were applicable to seasonal agricultural workers. The result was a lot of un- or underdocumented workers. Now they have full access to the labour market, which helped to improve labour conditions. However, many workers don't even know that they have been officially and fully insured, because their employers fail to provide the necessary documents, paper work or social insurance information.

How do you enforce the labour rights?

Lilla Hajdu: If seasonal workers come to my office and tell me their story, I try to figure out how best to help them. If they desire the active involvement of the union, for example a confron-

Those cases are characterised by a degree of stubbornness and a lack of insight I've not seen in other sectors

tation of their employer, they must first become a union member. However, within the scope of the campaign we don't ask for a minimum duration of membership; we are actively involved from day one of the membership [the general minimum duration to enjoy full legal protection is six months; ed. note]. I then contact the employers and confront them with the outstanding claims – in 99% of the cases something is not paid or not paid correctly. I

try to reach an amicable agreement. If this doesn't work out I forward the file to our legal department.

Susi Haslinger: ... that's when I take over. If all attempts to reach an agreement have failed, I file a lawsuit. Those cases are characterised by a degree of stubbornness and a lack of insight I've not seen in other sectors. In court those employers do their utmost to criminalise the workers and to cast them in a fraudulent light.

Lilla Hajdu: ... or they act fraudulently themselves. I recently had a case of two workers who worked for the same employer. He claimed that the workers had signed a waiver of their outstanding claims – only the respective paper was dated on a day they weren't even at work. I confronted him with the fact – in the end he paid. For the workers this meant a subsequent payment of 9.000 euro.

Can you tell us more about your success stories?

Lilla Hajdu: Currently I support a pregnant harvest worker who was dismissed on very duplicitous grounds. As a first step we ensured that her employment

– and therewith her insurance – would not expire. Now we are in the process of claiming the money her employer still owes her.

Susi Haslinger: Court procedures often are very lengthy. If we file a lawsuit it can take months, sometimes even years. This is a very difficult situation: in the meantime, the workers concerned have often already returned home. I also get the impression that some judges don't know a lot about agriculture and some might also have certain prejudices against foreign workers. However, most of our lawsuits end with a mutual agreement, which is also acceptable for the workers. Most of them are rather surprised if they are paid the total amount of the claim. But if they've been employed for a longer period their open claims can soon amount to thousands of euro.

Lilla Hajdu: I remember a case, where you helped a harvest worker after he had an accident. He broke his leg during a football game. The employer just dismissed him and wouldn't pay a cent. PRO-GE brought the employer before court and helped the worker get all his sickness allowance.

It seems that often the union is contacted after the employment is terminated. What other reasons might lead to the point that harvest workers start claiming their rights?

Susi Haslinger: We often experience that workers already have been carrying around our leaflets for quite a while. So they already have the knowledge about their rights and what they are supposed to get paid. Some just confront their employer with their knowledge and demand a higher wage – some are successful, others not. This can be a breaking point: very often the demands of the workers are seen as unjustified and lead to grave controversy with their employer. Still it's not even like they demanded »pay our due!«, it's more like »pay us more than you do now!«

Lilla Hajdu: There is always a certain moment when enough is simply enough: for example personal offenses, insults or aggression towards the workers.

Susi Haslinger: I remember a case, where the workers successfully negotiated for a higher hourly wage: instead of

3,50 euro an hour, they got 5 euro an hour. Still they got this wage as a kind of »flat-rate« for all kinds of working hours, even for overtime hours that are supposed to be paid with a surplus of 50 or even 100%. However, the farmer kept on holding the wage increase against the workers. So at a certain point they just said: »Okay, in this case we won't return for the next season. Instead we'll now call the number on this leaflet.«

You mentioned recurring patterns of exploitation. How can we fight them in a more structured way?

Susi Haslinger: I think that cooperation with the authorities is a crucial thing. This can be the inspectors of the health insurance carriers, financial police, or the so called agricultural and silvicultural inspectors, i.e. the agricultural labour inspectors. However, you have to be aware of the status of the workers. We don't want workers to have troubles with immigration police. But if you talk about EU citizens, this is a good option. The authorities can react quite quickly.

You go out into the fields, in the streets, to reach the workers.

Lilla Hajdu: This past spring we had three activities at the Hungarian border. Different unions cooperated and offered information and advice. We also started a different kind of activity and distributed our leaflets in a village that is situated between several farms and agricultural businesses.

Susi Haslinger: Depending on the region we have tried different things. In Tyrol for instance, we have had good experience contacting the workers directly in the fields. However, those activities are run by activists, not the union itself. Another curious example comes from Lower Austria: through friends of friends, a shop assistant in a small grocery got hold of our leaflets. She knew that some of her customers were working on a nearby farm, so she just passed on the leaflets. The workers finally contacted us. The shop assistant, however got into serious trouble with the farmer and his wife – they threatened her.

As a union – what are the new approaches within this campaign?

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»WELCOME TO AUSTRIA!« OBERPULLENDORF (AUSTRIA), JULY 2015:
»Minimum wage for seasonal workers in agriculture: net 6 €/h«. The Sezonieri Campaign welcomes harvest workers on large-format advertisement in Hungarian, Romanian, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian and Slovak along the commuter routes to Austria. The German version reminds the employers themselves: »Paying below the legal wage is a criminal offence! Minimum wage for harvest workers net 6 €/h«. Photo: Lisa Bolyos

Susi Haslinger: It is a challenge we can only tackle step by step. We are forced to go beyond our traditional thinking and acting as a union – and we knew from the beginning that we depended on the support of others who have other experience than we do. Each union has a traditional

It is a duty of solidarity for every union to fight labour exploitation wherever it occurs

approach that lies in the nature of unionism: we support our members – even if we support non-members on a large scale we still have our members in the back of our head: we can only ensure labour conditions for our members, if we can ensure them for all workers in the sector. If workers are exploited, sooner or later you will witness a race to the bottom that affects everyone. However, we must remember that it is a duty of solidarity

for every union to fight labour exploitation wherever it occurs.

Lilla Hajdu: I believe it's a huge challenge to develop new strategies of organising. Sooner or later we will need them in other areas as well.

What are the future goals of the campaign?

Susi Haslinger: In this regard we really profited from the international exchange of experience at the Sezonieri conference. It was very exciting to talk to Gerry McCormack from the Irish union SIPTU about their experience in migrant organising. A lot of things we learned during the conference strengthened our previous thoughts: the need of native speakers, and cooperation with activists who themselves have been working in agriculture – like we do in Tyrol, with the help of two colleagues who worked for a vegetable farmer and who successfully claimed their outstanding money with the help of PRO-GE. However, I think it's important not only to cooperate with those people, but to include them into the union structures, also in decision making processes, and to offer them union membership.

Lilla Hajdu: And we have to communicate our success stories. That's what first attracts people. Solidarity comes one step later.

Susi Haslinger: I'd like to see our leaflets »travel around«, I want them to spread in the communities. I want our pool of activists to grow.

How can I get active in the campaign? What can I do?

Susi Haslinger: Just get in touch with us! We regularly go out into the fields, we meet each other in frequent meetings. We talk about our further plans in these meetings: what are the specific cases we know about, what are the current problems, what do we have to do? We also offer legal training.

Lilla Hajdu: We have wonderful folders, very presentable. Unfortunately, they are not gender balanced at the moment [refers to the pictures of male workers, ed. note], but they are worthy of distribution.

www.proge.at

www.sezonieri.at

E-mail: sezonieri@gmx.at

»Before filing a lawsuit, we try to negotiate«

Sara El Guoual is an activist at the Spanish trade union for agricultural workers SOC-SAT (Sindicato Obrer@s del Campo – Sindicato Andaluz de Trabajador@s) and responsible for running a programme for advanced trainings and trade union activism for female workers employed at the packaging factories of Níjar, El Ejido and Almería. In an interview with Tobias Zortea she shares insights from a labour struggle with the wholesaler for organic fruit and vegetables »Bio Sol Portocarrero«. Translation from German by Alexandra König

What kind of company is Bio Sol?

Bio Sol Portocarrero is an important player in the organic agricultural sector of Almería. More precisely, the company is a wholesaler of organic fruit and vegetables supplied from their own production as well as 15 other farms. Their produce is grown in greenhouses on approximately 100 hectares of land mostly located around Níjar in the province Almería/Andalucía. The output amounts to 7.000 tons, 98 per cent of which is exported to countries within the EU. Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, eggplants,

watermelons and honey melons are being cultivated successively, thus upholding the production cycle throughout the year.

What was the labour law related problem with Bio Sol ?

The trade union already had various conflicts with Bio Sol in 2008, these were due to the unlawful dismissal of Moroccan female workers, who were at that time employed in the packaging sites of the company. At the beginning of the harvesting season of 2010 Bio Sol dismissed 13 female workers. The reason being the women's seniority in the company, which

would have entitled them to obtain permanent contracts. A complaint filed at the labour inspectorate confirmed this legal entitlement.

Despite these illegitimate dismissals the judge decided in favour of Bio Sol; the company had made the workers sign plain contracts, which the judge assessed to be valid. So in fact, the company wanted to get rid of these workers in order to avoid their permanent employment. After a long struggle, seven women could finally return to their workplace while six could not. After a journalist from Switzerland reported about the case and with the support of Swiss retailers we were able to exercise some pressure on Bio Sol. The big success resulting from exercising pressure through the retailers was that the six women who had been dismissed received compensatory payments.

Further success followed with the twenty people holding permanent positions within the company. They provided sufficient power to found a trade union branch.

Soon after this female workers started complaining about

excessive working hours, underpayment, irregularities in payment methods, discriminations within the labour division, abusive behaviour from superiors, permanent mobbing,

The company had made the workers sign plain contracts, which the judge assessed to be valid

pressure and violations of security and transport policies. Moreover, Bio Sol did not want the trade union SOC to be present within the company, which ultimately resulted in them threatening workers in order to prevent them from joining the trade union.

The threat consisted of what?

The company attempted to change the twenty employees' contract from permanent to fixed term contracts. The compa-

ny threatened to dismiss the employees, should they fail to sign the fixed-term contract. This was how the second conflict started.

Fearing for their employment, thirteen of these female workers agreed to change their contracts. Out of the seven who refused to sign, five had been fired, allegedly because they were featured in a documentary of the television channel »Arte«. The company used this as a pretext to fire these women, claiming that their participation in the documentary had damaged the company's image. In fact they had merely given accounts of their experiences of the reality of fruit and vegetable packaging factories, in more general as well as personal terms.

After the dismissal of the female workers SOC filed a complaint on their behalf on grounds of unlawful dismissal. This time the court case was won; the workers received compensatory payments and were entitled to return to their workplace.

I would like to mention that after their first dismissal, the workers could only take up work again thanks to the support of Bio Suisse (Federation of Swiss

Organic Farmers). SOC and the workers of Bio Sol could always count on Bio Suisse's help.

What were your strategies throughout this conflict?

Our strategies and methods are always the same. Before filing a court case we try to communicate, to mediate between the workers and the company. If no agreement can be reached we take the case to court, which may sometimes bring justice and sometimes not. If the court case is not a success, pressure is exerted through direct action such as hunger strikes, demonstrations – all non violent interventions, as our ultimate goal is justice and rights for the workers.

You equally exercise pressure through food retail.

We aim to expand the conflict to countries in which products made here are being consumed. Our goal is that consumers and related organisations pick up the issue so that supermarkets feel pressured to act and in turn, push the producer to negotiate with us. For this purpose we investigate commodity chains: is there a way to trace back the



»WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO HAVE RIGHTS!« SAN ISIDRO (SPAIN), MAY 1ST, 2007: Hundreds of migrant workers and trade unionists take to the streets for the 1st May demonstration in the Andalusian village of San Isidro. Andalusia in the south of Spain is infamous for its deplorable working conditions in the vegetable fields as well as in the processing and packaging factories. Following the pogrom-like attacks against Moroccan landworkers in 2000 in the small town of El Ejido the SOC landworkers union set up a local branch to enable migrant and mostly undocumented workers to get organised. Photo: Lisa Bolyos

commodity chain? Are there any social certificates? What marketing strategy does the retail sector adopt? Switzerland, the Federation Bio Suisse and the

We aim to expand the conflict to countries in which products made here are being consumed

supermarkets back there are good examples of this strategy of increasing pressure. We have also achieved some successes with Rewe Bio in Germany and Tesco in the United Kingdom.

What is your position within the trade union?

Within this trade union I am now coordinating jointly with the support of my colleague Carmen Cruz a programme for women, which kicks off in early September. It will offer advanced training and counseling for women as well as workshops on trade union activism for female employees of packaging

factories in the regions of Níjar, El Ejido and Almería.

Since I am fairly new to this trade union I first started by supporting colleagues in basic tasks such as photocopying and filling out membership applications. I looked into cases in order to learn what are appropriate and inappropriate practices and I accompanied my colleague Spitou Mendy on his trips for trade union work in the region of Níjar. Currently I am working for the women's programme which essentially means that I am carrying out coordination tasks: inviting women to participate in the programme that we will run and providing information they need.

What are the current struggles of SOC Almería?

Currently SOC is especially involved in struggles for fair wages for agricultural workers and workers in packaging factories as well as for more equitable payment of day labourers.

Can you negotiate collective bargaining agreements?

Collective bargaining agreements can only be concluded at the provincial level. In Almería

they are lower level, less ample agreements than in other provinces. SOC-SAT has no mandate to negotiate collective bargaining agreements as we do not have any representatives appointed throughout the trade union elections; this is the terrain of big trade unions.

And what is the current state of affairs at Bio Sol?

The situation at Bio Sol has improved: the workers receive their wages and are entitled to one month of annual leave. They work solely for the amount of negotiated hours, there is none of the poor treatment as in the past. And before I forget to mention: SOC can now also hold

meetings at the workplace without problems from the company.

European Civic Forum (eds.), 2000: Anatomie eines Pogroms. – z. B. El Ejido. Bericht einer Delegation europäischer Bürgerinnen und Bürger über die rassistischen Ausschreitungen vom Februar 2000 in Andalusien

Research on Bio Sol was conducted amongst other by the journalist Shelina Islam, »Das Gütesiegel – Arbeitsbedingungen in einer zertifizierten Welt«, 2013, www.shelina-islam.de

www.civic-forum.org/de/artikel/spanien-biosol-wegen-entlassungen-gerichtlich-verurteilt

Unpaid wage labour on the idyllic farm

l'autre syndicat – French for »the other union« – is a trade union that was established in western Switzerland in 2003 and that is involved in organising employees in a variety of sectors. One of their points of focus is in the area of agriculture, whose work force, even in Switzerland, largely consists of migrants. As a member of the small farmers association *La Via Campesina*, **l'autre syndicat** follows an integral approach, which covers classic union- and agricultural policy topics as well as food sovereignty. **Philippe Sauvin**, union secretary of **l'autre syndicat**, in conversation with **Sónia Melo**. Translation from German by **Juri Wawra**

How did l'autre syndicat come into being?

The original trigger was a merger of trade unions that now excluded agricultural workers. A few dozen members felt dissatisfied with this and decided to form their own trade union. This is how **l'autre syndicat** was formed in 2003 at Lake Geneva. We have around 300 members. The monthly membership fee is approximately 0.7% of their gross salary, which amounts to 20 to 22 francs on average. Even though this is not a huge expense in Switzerland, this

amount is still not insignificant for many people.

You represent farm workers. What sort of experiences have you had in the course of your work?

On an individual level we were repeatedly able to successfully defend workers – all the way up to court. One advantage of labour courts is that the cases tend to be relatively uncomplicated in their process, at least up to a litigation value of 30.000 francs. **l'autre syndicat** is fairly locally established in

western Switzerland. A large part of Switzerland is completely disinterested in the situation of labour conditions for farm workers. Then there is of course resistance from the side of producers or large farmers, which can be incredibly tough, almost violent. We have often been chased away from farms. Getting access to housing and workers is often not easy.

... and how about the representation of sans papiers?

Sans papiers have the right to call a juridical court. The problem is that during the last few years the situation in many cantons has become worse meaning that court officials will at best pass on a report to immigration police. In Geneva and Waadt this is not the case. Seven or eight years ago the judiciary here declared »we are independent and work related conflicts are indeed our business; but it is not our business to file reports to immigration police.« The backstory is that, particularly in Geneva and Waadt there are different organisations active in the defence of sans papiers and refugees. This has had a positive impact.

How is agriculture structured in Switzerland? And what is being produced in the region of Geneva?

The area around Lake Geneva is a wine-growing region. Also fruit, especially apples and pears are cultivated. There are several vegetable growers, open-air as well as under glass. And then

The department of justice has declared: we are only concerned with work-related conflicts; we will not report anything to immigration police

there is wheat, livestock and dairy farms. Based on European standards, Swiss agriculture is undertaken on relatively small areas. The average farm is around 20-22 hectares. However, as the number of farms reduces, average size tends to

increase. 20 hectares is nothing compared to Germany or France. Simultaneously many farms are labour intensive. Especially when growing vegetables, one can end up employing comparatively many workers on a small area of land.

Well, people live in cities and it is probably difficult for them to imagine many things

Is there a minimum wage in Switzerland or any other legally binding regulation for the compensation of agricultural work?

No minimum wage has been determined. There is a wage recommendation by the association of Swiss farmers, which is 3.200 francs per month. Some of the cantons have established a minimum wage in their ordinary cantonal labour contracts. The highest wage is in the canton of Waadt with 3.420 francs, that is around 3.000 euro. However,

one has to compare this to common wages and account for the cost of living in Switzerland.

What role do consumers actually play here?

Many consumers are not even aware that people who are dependent on earning a wage produce the products, but instead choose to believe in the idyllic farm. The reality of today's agricultural production is usually not perceived or a subject of discussion. Well, people live in cities and it is probably difficult for them to imagine many things.

... and the retail sector?

Retail is at least to a degree also responsible, this cannot be denied. Two players dominate the retail sector in Switzerland, these are Coop and Migros and they do have a degree of influence. At the same time they are in competition with discounters such as Lidl and Aldi. At the end of the day we have a capitalist society and this society determines the thinking and acting of the retailers. Retailers such as Migros and Coop could play a major role in imposing better working conditions and fairer



»CHRISTMAS MONEY FOR ALL!« LAUSANNE (SWITZERLAND), DECEMBER 15TH, 2009: l'autre syndicat (a small grassroots union) handed over a petition with 2.455 signatures to the Chairman of the parliament of the canton of Vaud. Their demands: a 13th month's wage for landworkers and stronger protection of their rights. The Vaud canton is Switzerland's second biggest agricultural region with 4.600 landworkers. The petition was, however, rejected by a large majority of the canton's parliament on 31 August 2010. Photo: l'autre syndicat

product pricing, but they do not want to get their hands dirty. The credo in Europe is that trade is free. The Swiss retail trade is rarely criticised on a domestic level, but instead when there are scandals they focus on the purchase of strawberries or veg-

It is a class struggle between those who are »only« offering their labour power and those who are using it

etables from Spanish Andalusia, or when asparagus is imported from Peru in the wintertime. That is when consumers and organisations attack them. Even the Swiss farmers association has its privileges with the retailers, so it is in their best interest that everything runs smoothly and no big waves are being made. The large farmers want to avoid showing solidarity with the workers at any cost. At the end of the day it is a class

struggle between those who are »only« offering their labour power and the others who are using it. That is what it is like around the whole world.

How are you trying to promote the fight for fair working conditions in the agricultural sector?

Early 2000 we established a platform for socially sustainable agriculture to which several migration groups, unions and farming organisations also subscribed. Within this platform we managed to establish the constitutional initiative for food sovereignty. This concept has been promoted by Via Campesina and basically says that agriculture should not compete beyond national borders, that working- and production conditions should be fair, that genetic modification should not take place, that one should consider short production and supply chains, etc. Within this initiative for food sovereignty, which is mainly carried by UNITERRE (a Swiss farmers union for sustainable agriculture) we have also anchored the union aspect. Via Campesina is continually grappling with this situation. This

has slightly changed the general composition of Via Campesina, at least in Europe. Via Campesina was originally a small farmers organisation. Today the situation of migrant workers is slowly entering the discussion.

To lead a supportive fight for small farmers and good working conditions for agricultural labourers sounds like a contradiction at first: One is unable to afford the other.

Agriculture is under pressure, because international competition leads to imports around which the competitive struggle occurs. Can we bring small farmers onto our side to fight for better working conditions? I believe this should be possible. However there is a rigidity of thought: most small farmers do not have any employees outside of the family. Nonetheless there is an almost comic solidarity by small farmers all the way up the industrial production chain. This is at least what it is like in Switzerland, and this is also politically instrumentalised by the Swiss farmers association and the Swiss Peoples Party, the political right wing, that repre-

sents a dominant force within the agricultural sector.

What sort of impression did you get from our event in Vienna »Welcome to the Strawberry Harvest! Your minimum Wage is ...«

Honestly, I thought that event was great! Just the fact that people actively and militantly got together and stood behind the cause. I also found it great and interesting that the union had offered financial means and that locations, telephone lines and print possibilities were made available. I really thought this was great. What made me especially happy was that you guys went into the fields, that the campaign is not being directed from top-down but that it is being carried by activists that do not shy away from uncovering different adversities and contradictions. I think that is remarkable.

www.lautresyndicat.ch
www.agrisodu.ch

Harvesting asparagus, waiting for wages

In 2011, the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) has launched, in cooperation with partners such as the European Migrant Workers Union, the Fair Mobility project. In view of the increasing transnationalisation of the labour market and the rising numbers of (temporary) migrant workers from Central and Eastern European countries in Germany, Fair Mobility tries, through contact centres in six different locations, to offer advice and support to migrant workers. In addition to that, Faire Landarbeit (Fair Agrarian Labour) was initiated in 2014, a special programme for migrants in the agrarian sector. Of the currently around 1.1 million agrarian workers in Germany, the programme estimates that roughly 300,000 are seasonal labourers, of which about 75 percent come from Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European countries, especially Romania and Poland. **Vladimir Bogoeski** from the Fair Mobility contact centre for the DGB Berlin-Brandenburg district talks to **Markus Griesser** about the background of the initiative. Translation from German by **David Mayer**

How did it happen that you launched a specific initiative for the agrarian sector?

The statistics about our advisory activities consistently showed that we had very few enquiries from the agrarian sector or agrarian labourers. At the same time, we knew with certainty that many migrant and mobile

workers from Eastern European countries were active in this sector. Moreover, the media regularly featured reports about exploitative practices in agriculture. Together with a partner of Fair Mobility – the Alliance against Human Trafficking for Labour Exploitation, another project under political auspices

of the DGB – we offered advice to migrant and mobile workers in the region of Brandenburg. In more concrete terms, we established a contact centre in Potsdam and offered advice in the languages of the main migrants' groups once a week. At first, not many workers sought our advice. We thus decided to make our activities better known, to contact different trade unions and other advice centres in the region. In this way we gradually got a clearer picture about these rural workers.

So, you arrived at the conclusion that it is apparently not enough to wait in the union offices until workers find their way to the advice centres but that you had to get out to the countryside and the fields ...

Yes, that's how it happened. We made our analysis and everything and came to the conclusion: in the case of these seasonal workers it was first necessary to reach out and to organise a kind of »itinerant« advice centre. We thus found ourselves driving out to the countryside and searching for the fields and the residences. There we would

try to establish contact with the workers and see if they wanted our advice. Our aim was to make at least a preventive intervention – inform them about working conditions, minimum wages, etc. Shortly after this, in 2014, we organised a pilot activity

We concluded that it was first necessary to reach out and to organise a kind of visiting advice

where we again established that these people from Eastern Europe were there, working on the fields as seasonal workers – and that we needed more planning and structure in our activities, and that we urgently had to find partners for this. With these conditions met we would be ready.

What's more, 2015 seemed to be the proper moment, because it was when the most recent generally binding wage agreement for agriculture came into effect. This also meant a new



»NEW REGULATIONS IN AGRICULTURE«, BRANDENBURG (GERMANY), SUMMER 2016: activists went out into the fields in Brandenburg to meet landworkers and distribute information leaflets by »Fair Agrarian Labour« in different languages. Foto: Faire Mobilität

minimum wage – in 2015 it was still 7.20 euro per hour in east Germany, rising to 7.90 euro in 2016. We wanted to see if these wages were actually paid or if they were still undermined by practices such as piece rate payments.

That means that in order to make, quite literally, the step into the field, you started by establishing contact to various organisations and institutions in the region?

Exactly. Based on our own networks at the time we first thought of the PECO Institute, a small institute of IG BAU (IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt, the fourth largest German industrial union, covering different areas from construction to agriculture) that realises various projects involving both ecological and socially sustainable agriculture. We knew that there we would find people familiar with the topic and, what's more, connected to IG BAU. That's why we launched our first steps as a collaborative project with Fair Mobility, Alliance against Human Trafficking, and the PECO Institute, which was in on it immediately. Next we addressed our requests to a

number of colleagues within IG BAU, especially the officials for the so-called green sector, i. e. agriculture and forestry, vegetable production, etc. This way we were

We wanted to see if these wages were still undermined by practices such as piece rate payments

also able to enlist the support of trade unions, not least from officials who had already retired.

And this was the setting which eventually allowed you to produce packets in several languages with information about collective wage agreement and labour laws and to distribute it among seasonal harvest labourers.

Exactly. The packets were intended to be as simple and straightforward as possible, focusing on the main points to be kept in mind. By now, these

packets have been produced in Polish, Bulgarian, Romanian, Croatian, and Hungarian, and we have distributed them in really high numbers – distributed in all kinds of locations where we knew that workers from these countries could be found: at their residences, directly at the fields, at the supermarkets where they shop, etc.

Of late some unions have more colleagues who speak East European languages; this is still relatively uncommon, but I think it is the right direction

We were clear about the fact that, on the days we were around these places, time was too tight for any further advice or even for resolving specific problems. These excursions thus mainly served as a way of establishing

contact – after that, we hoped, workers would call us by phone or contact us by any other way.

You have pointed to the critical importance of language skills for directly communicating with the workers.

Yes, the initiative has worked out so well because advisers of Fair Mobility were fluent in both German and at least one East European language. That's also why many found our initiative more helpful than previous ones in which, for instance, unions tried to work by engaging interpreters. But communication is completely different when there is no interpreter – it is much easier to establish trust.

I have heard quite often now that of late some unions have more colleagues who speak East European languages. Though this may still be relatively uncommon, I think it is the right direction for.

One of your strategies is to systematically involve the media.

In our campaigning activities it is important that we gain some media presence for creating sensitivity among a broader public about the fact that these people

work under very hard conditions and that there are consistent issues with underpayment, wages in arrears, undocumented overtime, lack of transparency in the record of hours worked and on wage slips, etc. Our aim is that this is discussed in a serious way as a real problem – and not by merely highlighting single sensational scandals. We have thus sought close cooperation with a number of journalists hoping to positively impact working conditions. That is, by getting the message across that we are campaigning for fair working conditions and a commitment to quality in agricultural production – and against, as it is now, one which is based on the lowest possible price for labour.

What is your perspective for the coming years?

First of all, we are quite glad that the intervention is better organised and structured with every passing year. After all, we are out and about only for a few months: we start in May and end in September. Our interventions start with asparagus, after that come strawberries, followed by cucumbers, and we end with apples. By now things are going

much better also because we know exactly of which farms we want to be present, where the residences are located, etc.

**We start with
asparagus,
after that come
strawberries,
followed by
cucumbers,
and we end with
apples**

This way we can handle a greater number of fields and sites in one day. What we hope for is to be able to draw up a kind of typology of the production sites we have visited, i.e. to have an overview of the conditions found, the most common violations, etc. in order to better highlight the grievances. The idea is that we will be able to eventually present this more elaborately by publishing a survey. And finally we want to organise an event which brings together the social partners – i.e. both the unions and the farmers associations – and where we can share our ex-

periences with them and discuss the whole situation. Further plans should then be devised after that.

So far Fair Mobility is a project only. Are there any chances for permanent structures and initiatives?

Not just us but also many of our project partners run for a limited period of time and are conceived as projects. That, of course, is problem for the sustainability of our work. We don't know what is going to happen to Fair Agrarian Labour once these projects come to an end. It might thus be better if these initiatives and contact centres were integrated into the unions in a permanent way – also so activities can be developed from within the unions themselves.

www.faire-mobilitaet.de

»La vostra lotta è la nostra lotta« – Your struggle is our struggle

Since 2011, activists in Italy in the network Campagne in Lotta have been actively supporting day labourers working in industrial agriculture – predominantly migrants – with self-organisation. Networking with activists and collectives, knowledge workers, volunteer supporters and small manufacturers is meant to further self-determined (labour) struggle. Three activists, **Lamin Camara, Irene Peano and Walter Iannuzzi**, discuss the network's concerns and challenges. Interview: **Dieter A. Behr and Lisa Bolyos**. Translation from German by **Sam Osborn**

How did Campagne in Lotta come about?

Irene Peano: There were two incidents of riots in Rosarno (a town in Calabria known for the production of citrus fruits) - in 2008 and a more radical one in January of 2010. They were the African workers' reaction to physical aggression on the part of some locals. Even before, there was a long series of physical aggressions against people who are severely exploited and live in situations of extreme precariousness – in abandoned buildings,

without water or electricity. After the riots, the government intervened, however they reacted by deportating many of the workers. About a hundred were sent to Rome, where they were able to leave the train stations and – with the support of comrades from the social center eXSnia – began to mobilise for protests. They were successful: they all obtained permits to stay, due to the acknowledgement of their previous conditions of exploitation. This fight also led to the creation of our network.

Lamin Camara: I am from Gambia and have been a farm worker in Italy since 2014. The people from Campagne in Lotta saw that the conditions we live under are hell. I met them through some translation work I did for them. The experience of fight which we made together in Campagne in Lotta taught us to be conscious about our rights, that we need health care and all these things we legally deserve in Italy. Together, we fight for our housing, our contracts and for better transport possibilities.

Where do you meet the workers? Which interests could they have in organisation? How did you approach these challenges?

Irene Peano: Well, I think I would speak of two main difficulties: on the one hand, the workers' confidence in what we are doing, and on the other, the mechanisms of control in the work structures. We mainly organise with West African migrants, who are - for different reasons - more inclined to struggle, since they have been in the country for longer. They are kind of trapped in Italy, they can't go back home for a little bit, like Romanian seasonal workers,

for example. It wasn't easy for the workers to differentiate between us, the charity initiatives, NGOs, journalists, researchers and everyone else who, in the end, profit from marginalisation and poverty for their own personal gain and leave nothing but empty promises. That took quite a while.

The other challenge has to do with the control mechanisms I mentioned, and here, a lot of violence also comes into play. Here, we can really see how the state and the mafia flow into one another. Workers are often threatened and warned against organising, or else lose their job and thus their source of income.

A constant challenge is also that we are a totally self-funded network. We often struggle against our limits in terms of time, resources and energy.

What does the exploitation specifically look like?

Walter Iannuzzi: The working conditions in agriculture are very hard: 10 to 12 hours a day of work, under the scorching sun; piece wages of 30 to 35 euro a day, at best. There are also difficulties in terms of access to water and food during breaks, if there are any. Those are the biggest

forms of violence: the work itself. **Lamin Camara:** I am currently in Rosarno. Both working hours and wages are catastrophic here, they pay maybe 2,50 or 3 euro an hour. There is a spot where we wait for the farmers every day.

But you have to be lucky, there are always more people than work.

You have to pay for transport and placement. When you come home after work, then it's a tent. Especially in the winter the water is freezing, you have to pay 50 cents for a bucket of warm water for a shower. Let's say you earn 25 euro one day, then you buy water, maybe something to eat, maybe you want to call home, and in the end, the money isn't enough for your weekly expenses if you only found work for one or two days.

The issue of papers is also very difficult. Some people have papers that are valid for six months, some for two or five years, some don't have any papers at all. There is no work contract, regardless of whether you have papers or not.

Irene Peano: Especially as far as the Eastern European workers are concerned, their passports are often taken away. They are beaten in many cases. There are often reports from women who face sexual harassment and rape

as well. Romanian women often tell us that they are forced to sleep with their bosses. There are various shades of violence. There are also bosses who touch women or comment on their short pants and t-shirts. In the end, these are

Let's say you earn 25 euro one day, you buy water, maybe something to eat, maybe you want to call home and in the end, the money isn't even enough for your expenses

the same experiences that Italian women would also report, when they used to work in the farms until the 1990s. Some of them still do, but mostly it is Eastern European women now.

How do you fight for your goals?

Lamin Camara: This year, on May 9, I was at a demonstration

in Foggia (Apulia). We made posters that read »La vostra lotta è la nostra lotta« – your struggle is our struggle, meaning: Rosarno comes to the demonstration in Foggia and shows solidarity. Because good organising in Foggia means good organising in Rosarno.

**The workers said:
let's block the
streets; either
we make a real
problem for the
city and those in
charge, or they
won't listen to us**

Walter Iannuzzi: We lead struggles for very basic rights, such as residence permits, transport, housing, work contracts and everything that concerns work, and on the other hand for very specific cases of individual workers or small groups. In the past years, we carried out various mobilisations – demonstrations, street occupations, symbolical occupations of various places.

Could you describe the direct action and blockade strategy in more detail?

Walter Iannuzzi: It was the workers who pressed for a higher conflict level at these demonstrations. We met with the police commissariat and the prefecture regarding certain unresolved conflicts and when there was no response from the regional government, the workers were the first to say: let's block the streets, either we make a real problem for the city and those in charge, or they won't listen to us. It really worked.

Irene Peano: We want to spread strategies for self-defense and empowerment. We managed to build more worker coalitions who demand their wages together. Our experience has shown us that workers come off badly when they take their conflicts to court. The direct actions had a much bigger effect, as did demonstrations – especially when they were about residence permits. Since September 2015 we have organised five demonstrations and two pickets. We reached a kind of agreement with the police department concerning papers for undocumented



»YOUR MADE IN ITALY IS SOAKED IN OUR BLOOD!« FOGGIA (ITALY), AUGUST 25TH, 2016: 400 migrant landworkers blocked the gates of two of Europe's biggest tomato-processing factories for six hours. They demanded residence papers for all workers and strict adherence to collective agreements. Many lorry drivers reacted in solidarity. They succeeded in obtaining a meeting with associations of farmers and of lorry drivers as well as with the police chairman of the province of Foggia. Photo: Comitato Lavoratori delle Campagne

ed migrants. They now also grant residence permits for people who don't have proper housing and a rental contract – they too have a right to residence.

Walter Iannuzzi: The largest part of the workers we are in contact with are employed in tomato growing. We do a lot of research in this area, not only about production conditions, but also about transport routes, processing factories and sales. This is an effort to understand how everything works on the transnational economic level. We begin this in Foggia and are expanding into other provinces. We ask ourselves, how could we organise strikes that would block the entire production chain, the strategic points of the logistics chain and could thus really do harm, in order to guarantee a better balance of power for the workers.

Campagne in Lotta is based on very broad networking.

Who do you cooperate with?

Irene Peano: We come from social movements, meaning we are really fighting against increasing precariousness of our lives in general. We've worked with many different partners, from

priests to anarchists. Even if we approach things in a non-prejudiced manner there are various difficulties, we risk being misunderstood because we don't quite fit in any box. Discussions around gender issues keep coming up, of course. We also rely on a very mobile form of organising because we are mainly dealing with seasonal labour. In the last few years, however, roughly since the Libyan war, the shanty towns we mentioned before have been getting bigger and are inhabited all year long. This helps us establish a more permanent presence in these places. In the past year we have been very active in Foggia and were able to see that self-organising processes are taking place in the main African and Roma settlements – and there are a lot of these settlements in Foggia. Workers are organising meetings, discussing their issues, forming their own organisations. This is the purpose of what we are doing: we don't want to stand in for them in their struggle, we want to support them to stand up for themselves.

www.campagneinlotta.org

If you don't have density, you don't have power

Ireland's largest trade union – Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) – has put effort into migrant (self) organising and networking for more than ten years. This has radically changed the way the union works and has opened up new opportunities for action in the low-wage sector of agriculture. Lisa Bolyos talked to Gerry McCormack, head of the Manufacturing Division within SIPTU, about learning processes and migrant organising in the agricultural sector.

Could you briefly describe the agricultural production of Ireland?

Agriculture is the 2nd biggest industry in the country, it employs about a 170.000 people and contributes around 13 billion euro a year to the economy. Our union is organised in all of the major plants – dairy industry, beef, poultry and horticulture –, it's a well-organised industry.

How many members do you have?

SIPTU has about 180.000 members. It is a general union, we have two divisions in the public sector and two private sector divisions – manufacturing

and services. We have 37.000 members in the manufacturing division that covers agriculture, food and drinks, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, medical devices and electronic engineering.

What was the »mushroom campaign« about?

SIPTU commenced a campaign to organise and improve the pay and conditions of migrant mushroom workers during 2009. Workers in the mushroom industry were highly exploited – they were 95% migrant, 95% female and almost zero could speak English. They were working 70, 80, 90 hours a week, living in caravans, and of course the mushroom



»RESPECT THE REC(OMMANDATION)!« BIRR (IRELAND), AUG. 26TH, 2013:
Milne Foods workers went on strike two days a week for three months. The company, which packs fruit and vegetables for hospitals and public service industries, refused to negotiate with the union on pay and conditions of employment and refused the implementation of a Labour Court Recommendation. 90 % of the operatives were migrant workers, most from Lithuania and Latvia. The dispute was settled when the company implemented a pay increase for the workers. Foto: Evelina Saduikyte

industry is seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. So it's weekend work, night work and so on. After entry into the EU, we were able to organise a number of migrant workers because they had the freedom to move from one employer to another. Some of them who could speak English then started to come to our union. Some of their stories were horrific. So for us there was a moral obligation to get involved in a campaign. At that time we already had officials in our union from Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Estonia. First we did almost exactly what you are doing here in Austria, which is to provide the workers with their employment rights. Mushroom farms are supplying big companies like Tesco, so we approached the »Ethical Trading Initiative«, and we also approached migrant groups based in Dublin, and they also became part of the campaign. We met the workers in their homes. We did not go to the farms to meet them. When we had enough of them organised in the union, we approached the main employers' organisations and started to issue statements to the media. The companies were afraid they

would lose their business, so they set on doing a collective agreement for the industry, a legally binding agreement.

Aren't collective agreements always legally binding?

In Ireland collective agreements are normally voluntary. But in this situation it was a legally binding one because there were enough people joining the union and the employers agreed. We agreed on minimum hours; they had to be employed for a minimum of 40 hours and could only work for a maximum of 48, which was the law. We improved their way to pay and health and safety, and we offered proper trainings. We are now on the second stage of negotiation on a new collective agreement with the entire industry.

Do you have to be a union member to get legal support?

You have to be a member, and legal support is provided from day one.

SIPTU has two fulltime employees for migrant organising.

Evelina Saduikyte from Lithuania is in the manufacturing

division and she looks after the Migrant & International Workers Support Network. Joanna Ozdarska, who is Polish, is the equivalent in the services division. The Migrant & International Workers Support Network was created to enable migrant workers to support themselves and their communities and to ensure that migrant workers fully participate in union activity. Evelina's and Joanna's role is to promote and organise the network; but they are not organisers.

We have an independent organising department in our union, the Strategic Organising Department. Their role is to organise workers; we organise as well, everybody is supposed to organise, but the Strategic Organising Department has campaigns in each of the divisions. In the manufacturing division at the moment they are organising migrants in the poultry industry.

Does migrant organising have a tradition in SIPTU?

There is an obligation to organise migrant workers. Where workers are exploited, I think it is our duty as a trade union to make sure we do what we can to protect them.

We have been organising for the last ten years. We have officials from Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and they were specifically employed for organising migrants. The problem we have faced is that lowest union density is in employments where we have the highest density of migrant workers. So we knew that we were not organised the way we should be. And even though the mushroom campaign was successful, it is not the answer, because you continuously have to do the same thing over and over again. The workers leave the country, our communications disappear, and we have the exact same problem again. So we decided we'd have to do it a different way. And hence – the establishing of the network.

What made you realise that migrant organising was so important?

During the boom Irish workers left the food industry and went to the construction industry, where there were much better conditions of employment. The red meat industry was almost completely organised in the union; very good terms and conditions of employment. Over

a period of about five years it reduced from an average pay of about 13 euro an hour down to the minimum wage of at that time 7,15 an hour. And that was simply because the unions did not organise workers effectively. It was easier to organise people in the public sector; and that was the big mistake we made.

Is racism within the union an issue?

Yes. There is this view: we pay our contribution to the union, you're here to collectively bargain for us, we don't want you to spend resources on migrants. But this has been a disaster for us, completely. The hotels industry was almost fully organised in Ireland, the red meat industry – fully organised. Now it's mostly migrants working, and it's mostly minimum wage. We are trying to prevent this from happening again. Even if migrants think they'd only stay for an amount of twelve months, if they continue to take low pay, all employers are driving down the pay for every worker. So we are educating them and other people as well. We focus now on density within the union. If you don't have density, you don't have power.

The other point is that you now find a displacement. We found a displacement of Irish workers, and now we find a displacement of our settled migrant workers. The Poles and the Lithuanians have been displaced by the Bulgarians and the Romanians.

We see a second phase of the »race to the bottom«. We are trying to stop it before it starts

We believe that has happened because employers are being able to exploit Southern European workers because they don't know their rights, they can't speak the language. We now see a second phase of what we call the »race to the bottom«. We are trying to stop it before it starts.

How do you effectively reach migrant workers?

First we had to figure out why migrants weren't joining the union at the same level as Irish workers. We organised a con-

ference and brought migrant workers together, we brought the NGOs together, the migrant groups, we invited the ambassadors from the different countries, and we asked them vier simple questions: what is SIPTU doing well as a trade union for migrant workers? What are we

Migrant self-organisation is the key to good organisation

not doing well? What should we do to improve it? What do migrants themselves need to do to improve their own situation? We got about 300 different responses, and from those responses we developed a plan and that plan led to the network.

The problem with trade unions is that we are full of rules and regulations. It's very difficult to bring people into a trade union. So we decided to scrap completely the mechanisms that we were using to organise migrant workers. What we are trying to do now is community based organising. First of all we bring

our migrant activists together. And then we train them up to look after themselves effectively.

Crucially the training is not traditional union training, and it is out of Dublin, in small towns, so we keep our activists over night. We go for dinner so we get to know each other, we break down the barriers between each other which is very important – and sharing a few drinks always helps. So we are building a network of activists throughout the country. We move ourselves out into the communities, whether it is the churches, the farms, the factories. We are going to every place where migrants converge. And what are we hoping to do? We hope those migrants become officials in our union. Because regardless of what country you are coming from, regardless of what the labour laws are, if migrants are organising themselves that's the key, I think, to good organisation.

www.siptu.ie

www.siptumanufacturing.ie

www.facebook.com/SIPTUMigrantAndInternationalWorkersSupportNetwork

Out of the offices!

Providing counselling in workers' native languages

Austria and Hungary have one of the largest pay gaps between two neighbouring member states in the European Union. 80% of the foreign workers in Austria's most eastern province, Burgenland, come from Hungary – many of them are daily commuters. They work in all different kinds of sectors – in the trade sector, gastronomy, transport, public services, and agriculture. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain the unions from both sides of the border have been improving their cooperation. **Bertold Dallos**, who has been working for the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) since 2007, is the administrator of the project »Mehrsprachige Beratungsstelle im Grenzraum« (MIG, Multilingual Counselling Centre in the Border Region), the successor of the former Interregional Trade Union Council (»Interregionaler Gewerkschaftsrat«, IGR). Interview: **Lisa Bolyos**. Translation from German by **Susi Haslinger**

There are about fifty »inter-regional trade union councils« (IGR) all over Europe. What's the history of the IGR in the Hungarian-Austrian border region?

After the fall of the iron curtain in 1989 the first Hungarian workers started to work in Austria. Many did so without any documents. At that time the unions in Hungary and Austria established their

first contacts. Ten years later the cooperation was institutionalised by founding the Interregional Trade Union Council. The IGR not only had the task of providing a platform for cooperation and exchange of experience, but it first and foremost was established to monitor the developments on the labour market and to develop instruments to prevent negative impacts.

What are those impacts?

We are talking about a huge pay gap between Austria and Hungary, one of the biggest ones in the whole European Union. The ratio is between 1:3 and 1:5, depending on the sector. Of course this is a huge motivation to

It's always the employers who actively drive down workers' wages

work in Austria – even if you are underpaid as compared to the Austrian collective agreements. Moreover, a lot of workers don't even know the amount of the respective minimum wage and the corresponding surcharges, or the existence of additional payments such as holiday and Christmas allowances. There is also little knowledge about admissible working hours. A lot of the workers don't speak German – still they are forced to sign documents that they don't understand. Employers just tell them »Sign this paper or you

won't get any money!« Only later does it become obvious that they unknowingly signed a waiver or agreed to a mutual termination of the employment. All of this leads to the prevalence of low wages. This in turn has negative consequences on the Austrian labour law and social security standards as a whole, as well as on Hungarian economic development, which remains stagnated because of the migration of qualified personnel.

This sounds a little bit like it was all the workers' fault.

A lot of people think – and that is also how media portrays it – that the foreign workers are the problem because they offer their labour at a very low price. Of course this is not true. No one accepts a payment below the agreed minimum wage because he or she wants to do so. There's always pressure behind it. It's the fear of losing one's job or the immediate pressure of the employer who makes it clear that he won't pay more, but that the workers are free to leave. It's always the employers who actively drive down workers' wages – this is often forgotten, instead people agitate against the workers.

What are the strategies of the unions' projects to combat these problems?

We provide information to the workers about their rights and how to enforce them. One of the most important measures is the native language counselling we have been offering since 2004, it is a big success story. Our recent project »IGR – Zukunft im Grenzraum« (IGR – Future in the Border Region) comprised five counsellors in Austria and two in Hungary. Between 2008 and 2015 we had almost 80.000 consultations. The current project MIG (Multilingual Counselling Centre in the Border Region) is not as well funded, so we focus on labour law counselling and refer the workers to other information centres if they have questions beyond our core focus.

Why isn't native language counselling integrated in the union anyway?

It's not that easy. On the one hand Hungarian-language legal advice plays a very important role, this alone suggests an integration. On the other hand, we have a financial problem: the labour costs of the four counsellors alone would eat up the big-

gest part of our regional organisation's budget. We are quite comfortable with the current situation: the project is funded by the State of Burgenland and the Ministry of Social Affairs. If the external financing comes to an end one day, we will have to face the challenge of maintaining Hungarian language counselling.

Do you offer mobile advisory services?

80 percent of our counselling takes place in our offices in Neusiedl, Eisenstadt, and Oberwart. In addition, we also visit companies and work places. The workers are rather reluctant to talk openly about their problems when we visit them at work, but they get to know us and our work so they know whom to contact at a later date. In recent projects we also held information days in Hungary, in the cities close to the border. We started a kind of »roadshow« right before the opening of the labour market and set up shop round all the border cities. We set up right in the main square and provided information. The goal of this activity was to raise awareness about the conditions

of employment in Austria and to properly prepare the workers. Right before the opening many Hungarians were quite enthusiastic but did not think about any challenges or dangers.

If the unions want to raise density, they have to speak the languages of the workforce

We have to get out of our offices – that’s the type of counselling every union should strive for.

We benefit a lot from seeking out the workers. The crucial point is, however, to offer advice in their native language. In Burgenland there are two unions who already have employed bilingual trade union secretaries – the Construction and Timber Workers Union and the Industrial Manufacturing Union (PRO-GE). They both witnessed a significant rise in consultations and cases. This is important for all unions in all

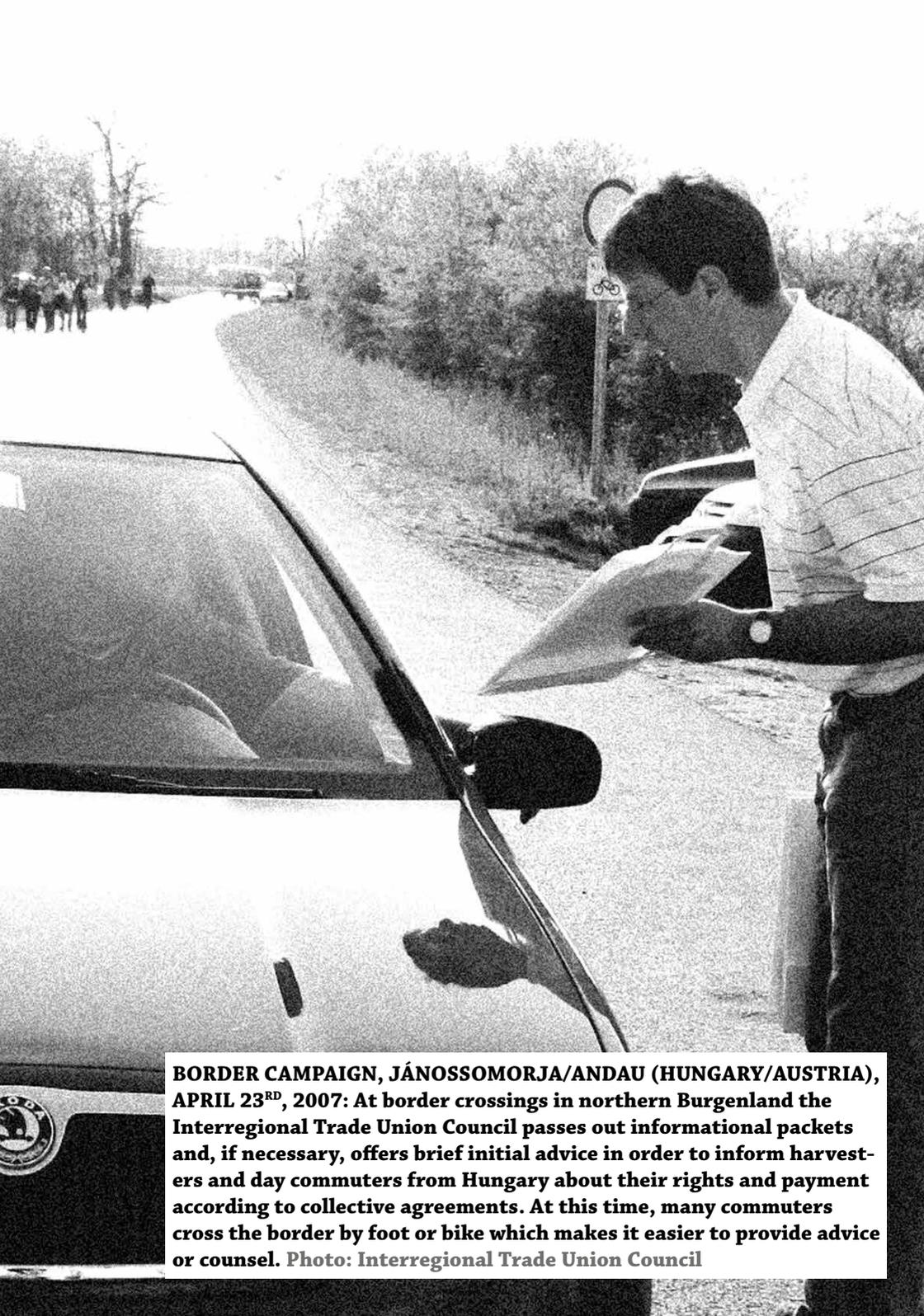
sectors: if the staff increasingly consists of foreign workers, and the union wants to maintain the current level of density or even raise it, they have to speak the languages of the workforce. Next to Hungarian-language counselling we now also offer advice in Romanian. However, at the moment we can only offer it once a month – though it is certainly necessary to expand it.

What are the most frequent problems of your clients?

Working time, correct payment, and the termination of their employment. Many workers see us after their employment has ended. We try to convince them to seek information in advance – since many claims may be forfeited if they wait too long. Workers might lose claims worth several thousand euro because they waited too long.

But isn’t there a legitimate fear of losing one’s job, if one doesn’t wait until the termination of the employment?

That is correct. It is particularly true for sectors like agriculture, where you don’t need any professional training and literally anyone can take your place



BORDER CAMPAIGN, JÁNOSSOMORJA/ANDAU (HUNGARY/AUSTRIA), APRIL 23RD, 2007: At border crossings in northern Burgenland the Interregional Trade Union Council passes out informational packets and, if necessary, offers brief initial advice in order to inform harvesters and day commuters from Hungary about their rights and payment according to collective agreements. At this time, many commuters cross the border by foot or bike which makes it easier to provide advice or counsel. Photo: Interregional Trade Union Council

without any significant instruction phase. Many workers work undocumented or formally only work in minor employment, so they don't have any health insurance or pension rights. Many employers do that systematically. A whole generation has been working in Austria long enough to – theoretically – apply for an Austrian pension. However, a lot of them are not entitled to any pension rights or only to a very small pension, because they've been working undocumented or were only registered with the social security authorities with a small proportion of their actual income. This results in a pension size that is not enough to live on. Our goal is to raise the workers' awareness to recognise the consequences of working for low wages. And of course we support and empower them to fight these situations instead of just bearing them.

How do you reach agricultural workers?

This is the toughest sector, that's why the Sezonieri Campaign is such a good thing. It explicitly addresses the agricultural sector. Prior to Schengen, when there were still border controls, it was

easier for us to reach the farm workers. They were crossing the border by foot and we could easily approach them and talk to them. We could pass on leaflets with information on their way to or from work. The workers had the time and the possibility to describe their situation and to read the information we provided. Little by little, workers began to stop by in our office – in Burgenland. There is a lot of agriculture in the region of Neusiedl, and agricultural workers are amongst the biggest group of workers who seek advice in our regional office there.

Are there also Austrian companies/farmers, who own land in Hungary and take advantage of the legal conditions?

We come across almost every constellation. There are Austrian companies who move to Hungary and then post their workers »back« to Austria. Their goal is to avoid wage and other costs. Something that is very common in the transport sector. On the other hand, there are Hungarian companies who for instance open a restaurant in Austria and hire only Hungarian staff. »Ac-

cidentally« they forget that Austrian law – which now is fully applicable – is slightly different than Hungarian law. The workers effectively receive a wage somewhere between Austrian and Hungarian standards. It's a little bit more than they would receive back in Hungary, but by far not what they are entitled to under Austrian collective agreements.

But isn't that clearly illegal?

Of course it is. But first you have to find out what's going on, then you have to prove it, and in the end you are confronted with the limits of cross-border law enforcement! On the one hand there is still a huge lack of knowledge. Most workers don't know what claims they are entitled to. This gets worse with the cross-border placement of workers: most of the workers don't know that they are entitled to the Austrian minimum wages while they are working in Austria. On the other hand, knowledge alone does not solve the problem: there is a lot of reluctance to make claims out of fear of losing one's job. To fight this fear is the first step.

That doesn't sound too optimistic.

Yes, especially in agriculture the situation hasn't improved as we had expected it to. However, we won't give up, that would be much worse.

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»I thought three euro an hour was normal«

Andrej and Bogdan Oancea, 25 and 20 years old, come from Axente Sever, a small village near the Romanian city of Sibiu. In 2011, the two brothers were separated from each other for the first time in their lives when Andrej, the older one, went as a harvest worker to Austria. Bogdan followed him two years later. Until October 2014, they worked for the fruit and vegetable farmer Strasser in Tirol, where they were heavily underpaid and exploited. They learned about their rights from a Sezonieri folder – and decided to take up the struggle. As part of the Sezonieri Campaign, the union took their case to the labour and social court and successfully claimed part of their pending wages and set an example in Austria. Interview: Sónia Melo. Translation from German by Henrik Lebuhn and Megan Saperstein

What kind of work were you doing at the Strasser farm and what was it like?

Andrej Oancea: We did all kinds of things. We worked from six in the morning to ten at night, sometimes even until one or two in the morning. In the mornings we picked plums, for example, or we helped the farmer's brother-in-law at the Schotthof in the neighboring village of Thaur [Schotthof is the name of Tyrol's largest vegetable farm,

in October 2013, harvest workers on this farm went on strike; see interview p. 13]. There we picked radishes, lettuce and cabbage. We were at the Schotthof quite often. We also cut trees in the forest, chopped wood and built fences – we videotaped this. Furthermore we helped in the house, we cooked and washed dishes in the boss' guesthouse. We really did everything there. **Bogdan Oanca:** Most of the time, I either worked in my em-

ployers' house or restaurant and only sometimes in the fields. I did the household work – ironing, laundry, cooking, watching their child. At some point the child started to call me »daddy« because I always played with him, gave him food and put him to bed. One of my bosses, Verena Norz-Strasser, was not very nice. She grouched at me all the time: »quick, quick,« she always yelled.

Andrei Oancea: The guesthouse is called Bogner and located right next to the farm. When I came from the field in the afternoon, I was not allowed to take a shower and had to go directly over to the guesthouse instead and work in the kitchen. There we cooked, did the dishes and had to stay to the very end and clean the kitchen until one or two in the morning. The next day, we had to get up again at six in the morning. We worked approximately 330 hours per month and made 660 euro. Every Friday, we had to give our boss 50 euro for food and accommodation, that's 200 euro per month of our wage. From June to September 2014, he even took 30 euro from our monthly pay for electricity – those were the last months before we went

to the union. In the house they had a washing machine that worked with coins. We had to pay 50 cents for each load of laundry. If you work in the fields and in a

**The boss
grouched at me
all the time:
»quick, quick,«
she always yelled**

guesthouse, you are constantly dirty and you need fresh clothes every day, sometimes twice a day. So we spent a lot of money on the laundry machine.

Bogdan Oancea: Yes, everything was deducted from our wages. If the plums came back from the clients, because they had gone bad, we had to pay for them. The boss said the plums hadn't been packed properly and that's why they got moldy.

**How many hours did you
work per month and how
much money did you actually
earn?**

Andrei Oancea: We worked 11 to 15 hours per day, seven days

per week, so that makes about 300 hours per month. Not every month was the same, except that we always had one Sunday off. Our monthly wage was 660 euro, sometimes 50 or even 100 euro more, when the piece rate was good. That makes about three euro an hour or up to 3,80 by piece rate. But 660 euro minus 110 euro for the room, 200 for food and then also the money for laundry and electricity ... we ended up with 300 to 400 euro. We never got any bonus for Christmas or vacation and also no extra pay for nightshifts and Sundays. We didn't know that we are entitled to these extra payments. We thought that three euro per hour was normal.

Were you the only ones working there or did the farm have more employees?

Andrei Oanca: When I started in 2011, we were ten workers from May until September, two of these were women. From 2012 to 2014, we were eight and during the summer season nine workers.

Where did the workers live?

Bogdan Oanca: We all stayed with the farmer in his house.

Andrei and I had our own room on the groundfloor. The room had 16 squaremeters and a bathroom. The others stayed in the attic, also in the house. We all had to pay 110 euro per month for our rooms.

Were there any labour inspections or other audits during the time when you worked for the farmer?

Andrei Oanca: During the three years that I worked there, there were never any audits by the agricultural and silvicultural labour inspection. Occasionally we had sanitary inspections, but the farmer always knew beforehand and told us the day before to clean up the storage facilities and the farm.

Bogdan Oanca: Also, not all of Strasser's fields are located in Absam next to the farm. Two of them are a couple of kilometers away and on those fields we didn't have any toilets. It was not possible to wash your hands, for example. But the inspectors never went over there ...

How did the accounting work? Did you sign pay slips? And did you also receive them? Were your wages paid

in cash or transferred into an account?

Andrei Oancea: Whenever we asked, the farmer would always tell us: »there are no pay slips.« That's how it was from the beginning. We had to sign blank papers or a paragraph that was covered by hand and we were not supposed to ask why. Initially we were still asking questions, but he ranted at us until we stopped asking. At some point, signing the blank papers became »routine,« it was »normal.«

How did you come to the point of approaching the union and asking for legal support?

Andrei Oancea: A neighbor gave us a Sezonieri pamphlet in Romanian. In the pamphlet it had information about our rights, minimum salary, etc. We contacted the union, PRO-GE, and we told them about our wages and the working conditions, but we kept working. About a week later, our boss fired us. He told us that he didn't need us anymore and that we should sign a paper. It stated that we received everything and that he didn't owe us anything. We didn't sign and went to the

union instead. That's when it all started. Afterwards we found out that he fired us the day after the union had registered us with the local health insurance in Tyrol. Somehow he must have heard from the insurance about the registration and wanted to get rid of us. That was in mid-October 2014.

Our colleagues also motivated us to keep fighting for our rights

What happened after you got laid off?

Bogdan Oancea: PRO-GE secretary Bernhard Höfler found an apartment for us and the legal protection officer of PRO-GE Tyrol, Xaver Zeilinger, lent us the money for the deposit. They also found us work – and they sued the farmer. First, the union wrote a letter to the farmer and asked him to pay the wages he owed us, over 50.000 euro. But he refused. That's why we went to court.

Andrei Oancea: Until January 2016, we had three hearings

and then agreed on roughly 12.000 euro after tax [both parties agreed on the »voluntary clearance of the employer«]. The union told us that we could perfectly well go for another trial, but we didn't want to be in court anymore. It was very tiring. We would always have to take time off from our current jobs and keep dealing with the farmer, but we didn't want that anymore.

Where do you live now? How are things going for you?

Andrei Oancea: We live in Rum, near Thaur and Absam, where we were harvest workers. We now have a job in a company in Stubai that produces automobile parts. We are very happy. The bosses are very nice. They know about our lawsuit and always gave us time off to attend the hearings. Our colleagues also motivated us to keep fighting for our rights.

Bogdan Oancea: We work from Monday to Friday, have a regular schedule and get the money according to our contract, about eight euro per hour. Everything is fine. We get our pay slips and everything is stated correctly on them. We always get paid on the same day and the money is

put every month into our bank account. When we work extra hours, we are also getting paid for it. Now everything is ok.

Looking back, what do you think about your decision to fight for your rights?

Andrei Oancea: We have a couple of colleagues from Romania who are harvest workers in Tyrol and things are still as bad for them as they used to be for us. Sometimes we tell them to go to the union, but they don't want to hear this. They need their jobs and they are too scared to even find out about their rights...

Bogdan Oancea: Yes, it is hard when you depend on the money. It makes you think it over twice, before you decide to take up the fight for your rights. But in our case, everything worked out fine. We now live in Rum and from our living room window we can see the fields. When the weather is bad, we sometimes think back to the time when we had to work all day in the rain. And we realise how incredibly underpaid the job was and how well we are doing now.



**»WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW WHEN YOU ARE A HARVEST WORKER!«
THAUR (AUSTRIA), SUMMER 2016: Andrei and Bogdan Oancea, former harvest workers, are today activists in the Sezonieri Campaign. Back on the fields on which they were overexploited, they hand out folders in order to keep fellow workers informed about their labour rights. Photo: Sónia Melo**

You have rights – even if you’re undocumented!

Since 2014 the contact point for unionised support of undocumented workers (UNDOK) offers advice and support for migrants with precarious immigration status and without regular access to the labour market. UNDOK demands equal rights for all employees. Whoever legally lives in Austria should have access to the labour market because discriminating access to the labour market leads to exploitation of undocumented colleagues and furthermore to a disempowerment of the entire workforce. Driving down of wages and social fraud are actually not committed by workers but rather by employers. By **Sandra Stern**. Translation from German by **Juri Wawra**

Ms. C. is standing in the office of the UNDOK-contact point and has a huge smile across her face. Today she finally picked up her wages from the post office, which her employer had owed her for months. She could not believe that she actually received her money because she was working without a permit. Ms. C. had come from Croatia and was not aware that as a Croatian citizen she was subject to a transitional period, which restricted her access to the labour market. She was working in a restaurant without official registration by

her employer. Ms. C. worked for more than six weeks without a single free day. Whenever there was no work, she was simply sent home after an hour. On other days she had to work more than ten hours. She demanded her unpaid wages several times, but her employer avoided her. After some time he accused her of not working and terminated the arrangement without giving a period of notice. Ms. C. approached UNDOK who successfully supported her in securing her labour and social rights. As the company had gone bankrupt

in the meantime, Ms. C. received her unpaid salary, special payments, holiday payments, as well as redundancy compensation from the insolvency fund. »Today is a good day. I am very happy,« said Ms. C. She was visibly relieved before she said goodbye.

Undocumented work has a system

No matter if one is working as a cleaner, a care taker, a nurse in a private household, an agricultural labourer, a sex worker, a construction worker or working in the restaurant trade such as Ms. C; undocumented work is not just unsafe, badly paid and dangerous, undocumented work has a system. Currently there are 28 different residence statuses that deny or restrict migrant's regular access to the labour market, a circumstance that pushes migrants into informal sectors and self-employment. The example of asylum seekers makes the inhuman consequences of this system particularly clear.

Immigrant labour law says that asylum seekers are theoretically allowed to work after being in the asylum procedures for three

months. However, based on a decree from the social ministry from 2004 their access to the labour market is heavily restricted. Meanwhile even unions and employee representatives are demanding access to the labour market six months after the asylum application has been handed in. Even though there have been numerous protests by asylum seekers as well as NGOs and even though various experts

She was unable to imagine that she would receive her money, as she had worked illegally

have categorised the de-facto work prohibition as illegal, it is still valid. As a result, asylum seekers are pushed into the informal sector of the labour market, which makes them more vulnerable to exploitation and blackmail.

This is also demonstrated in the case of Mr. O., a refugee from Pakistan who has been in asylum procedures in Austria for

three years. Due to the fact that as an asylum seeker he can only be employed for seasonal work, he had to become self employed in order to support himself. He was working as a newspaper delivery person. For the dispensation and collection of weekend-newspapers an hourly wage of 4,70 euro had been agreed upon with his employer. But the employer did not keep up his part of the deal. Again and again Mr. O. demanded his unpaid salary, but the employer did not pay.

All employees have rights

Withheld salaries are the most common problem that employees who seek help from UNDOK have. Another typical characteristic of undocumented labour are extremely long work hours: ten to twelve hours per day, six to seven days a week are very common. Undocumented workers generally receive extremely low salaries, that are usually far below the collective labour agreements. In private households hourly wages of up to one euro are no exception. Other problems one encounters are salary fraud, non-adherence to protective standards at the workplace, redundancies during

illness, as well physical or sexual assaults. But independently of whether one works with or without papers, social insurance law, labour laws and collective labour agreement minimum standards are applicable for all employees.

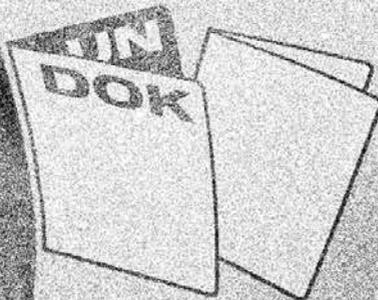
To have rights and to receive rights

Employees need support independently of their residential status in obtaining information about rights and advice, as well as support in making labour- and social-law claims. This is where the UNDOK contact-point comes in, which was established in June 2014 on the premises of the ÖGB Catamaran (Austrian Union Federation). In the meantime around 300 undocumented workers have sought help from UNDOK, including asylum seekers. Two advisors inform them about their rights, free of charge, anonymously and in several languages and support them in making their social and labour law claims, if necessary all the way up to court. This tends to be difficult for employees without regular access to the labour market for two reasons: first, em-



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»REFUGEES WELCOME!« VIENNA (AUSTRIA), OCTOBER 3RD, 2015: A big demonstration for a humane asylum policy. 100.000 people take to the streets to protest against the prevailing racist policies. Among the slogans: »No to Fortress Europe! Open the borders! Stop the Mediterranean from becoming a mass grave! The right to stay for all!« Photo: Daniela Koweindl

ployers do not register migrants for social insurance and neither do they apply for work permits. Undocumented workers therefore need to prove that they have actually worked. Secondly, many undocumented workers find themselves in a precarious situation, where enforcing their claims may lead to risking their rights for residency. For asylum seekers like Mr. O who are in an ongoing procedure, however this does not pose a risk. The UNDOK contact point realised his claims in opposition to his employer. The employer conceded and in the meantime Mr. O. has received his unpaid salary.

Organised against exploitation

Undocumented employees find themselves in a legally complex situation. This is why the UNDOK association, a supporting association of the UNDOK contact-point also offers workshops for undocumented workers and multipliers, alongside advice and support. Here the necessary basic knowledge about labour rights and the possibility to enforce claims are conferred, one of the most important conditions for resisting exploita-

tion. In this way the capacity of undocumented workers to organise themselves is also supported. On the other hand, UNDOK supports the networking between stakeholders at the interface between undocumented workers, unions, NGOs from the migrant- and asylum law sector and anti-racism activists. The discrimination of undocumented workers is not just a one-off case, but rather represents a type of systemic exploitation, which demands collective efforts of resistance.

Sandra Stern is currently working for the UNDOK Drop-in Center and is responsible for PR, networking and enquiring workers. She is also active in unionised adult education.

www.undok.at

Brochure »Arbeit ohne Papiere ... aber nicht ohne Rechte!« (download): www.undok.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Brosch%C3%BCre_ArbeitenOhnePapiere_Auflage-2_WEB.pdf

FAQs on access to labour market for asylum seekers: www.arbeitsmarktzugang.prekaer.at

Towards a radical democratisation of the agricultural and food system

The movement for food sovereignty not only fights to secure food, but also for the radical democratisation of its production, distribution, processing and consumption. This also entails consigning labour rights violations to the past. Brigitte Reisenberger writes of an agricultural system of solidarity and the inalienable right to food. Translation from German by Alexandra König

Europe is the largest food exporter worldwide. A dubious »success« since it is based upon an exploitative agricultural model whose basic premise is to produce food as cheaply as possible. This successively intensified and industrialised agricultural model is kept in place via daily agricultural practices, consumption, corporations, as well as trade and economic policies. This system is subsidised via public funds within the framework of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), notably through instruments such as site-specific subsidies. The ongoing »structural chan-

ge« in agriculture has remained unquestioned and has resulted in the destruction of small scale farming, as well as a transformation of labour relations. Pressures in competition and prices are major contributors to the rise in farmers who find themselves situated in poor working conditions, facing increasing social insecurity, debts and heavy workloads. These pressures are, moreover, passed on to employees of the agricultural sector: the working conditions in the production and distribution of food – in farms, food processing and retail – are increasingly precarious. Extremely low



»WE HAVE HAD ENOUGH!« VIENNA (AUSTRIA), JANUARY 26TH, 2015: During the winter session of the Eco-Social Forum, the platform »We have had enough« (»Wir haben es satt«) demonstrated for a long overdue change of Austrian agricultural policy and against the centrality of growth and export objectives. The platform brings together environmental, development and farmers organisations as well as social movements. Their demands include sustainable, small-scale agriculture, access to land for all, maintenance of seed diversity, the right to food and fair working conditions for migrant landworkers. Photo: FIAN

wages, health damaging working conditions and a perpetual corrosion of basic human rights and labour laws, form part of this dominating agriculture and food system.

Solidaric production chains

An agricultural and food system geared towards competition, growth and competitiveness destroys (small-scale) farming and the livelihoods of farmers across borders. The reasons for, and causes of, migration are often interrelated with the effects of the agriculture and food systems currently in place. Corporate Austrian agricultural groups, for instance, appropriate land in Romania for cultivating monocultures intended for export, thus pushing small scale farmers to the utmost periphery of the market. Since the millennial turn, the price of land in Romania has tripled. Moreover, Romania strongly depends on food from abroad. 70 % of its food is imported. Left without any prospects in rural areas and hoping to escape poverty, these farmers are often the ones encountered as landworkers in countries such as Austria; often working under harsh conditions,

deprived of basic social and labour rights.

A great deal of changes are required, in order to allow for a solidaric, humane and self-determined cohabitation of all people employed in the agriculture and food sector – comprising small scale farmers, landworkers and retailers, etc. In order to allow for this, no less than a radical democratisation of the agriculture and food system is necessary. The movement for food sovereignty fights for the right of all humans to democratically determine how food is being produced, distributed and consumed. Food sovereignty critically engages with the power relations which are inscribed in our food system. The ones actually producing the food do not necessarily hold the power. Instead, power is located with political representatives, lobby and interest groups belonging to the agricultural industry, as well as the food retail sector. The concentration in Austrian retail ranks amongst the highest in Europe; the top 3 companies hold about 80 per cent of the market share. What actually lands on the shelves is subject to their decision-making power.

The movement for food sovereignty pushes for a food and agriculture system that does not rely on the exploitation of humans – neither farmers, processors, retailers nor harvesters. This necessitates a change in the structural conditions and causes leading to this exploitation. The

Let's push for a food and agriculture system that does not rely on the exploitation of humans

aim is that people themselves shape the agriculture and food system. To achieve food sovereignty many people are needed, people who can contribute in manifold ways and in multiple locations, also according to their radius of influence. This can range from the foundation of food cooperatives in Salzburg to lobbying for a different agricultural policy in Brussels – the practical is political too.

The right to adequate food

Food sovereignty means to create the conditions which allow access to sufficient, healthy, ecologically and socially just produced, as well as culturally adapted, food products. In order to achieve this alliances have to be built amongst all people employed in the food sector. The Sezonieri Campaign, which directly intervenes in labour struggles, is an important field of action for the movement for food sovereignty and, conversely it allows for the concerns of the food sovereignty movement to be heard in the working context of trade unions. The shared perspective is an agriculture and food system that is based upon the human right to food and food sovereignty. Food is not a commodity, but a right for everyone!

Brigitte Reisenberger works for the human rights organisation FIAN. She is actively involved into the Food Sovereignty movement on an Austrian and a European level.

www.ernaehrungssouveraenitaet.at
www.nyelenieurope.net

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The European Civic Forum (ECF) is an international solidarity network that encourages self-organisation through the creation of links between emancipatory initiatives and that denounces social abuses with direct interventions. Among other actions, the ECF has been involved for over 15 years in a campaign of solidarity with the Andalusian Landworkers Union SOC-SAT fighting against the exploitation of migrant workers in agriculture. On this topic it published »El Ejido, terre de non droit« (2000), »Le fruit amer de nos fruits et légumes« (2001), »Bittere Ernte. Die moderne Sklaverei in der industriellen Landwirtschaft Europas« (2004), »Peripherie & Plastikmeer. Globale Landwirtschaft - Migration - Widerstand« (2008), »Orangen fallen nicht vom Himmel. Der Sklavenaufstand in Rosarno« (Jean Duflot, 2011). These can be ordered on the ECF's website.