

Statement on Work Accidents

Earlier this week, a Nigerian construction worker in Edremit fell from a height of 8 meters and fractured his back and ankle. A few days later on November 3rd, another young Nigerian suffered a terrible accident while working on a construction site in Lefkoşa. His fall caused damage and bleeding to his face and left a deep open wound on the back of his neck. In response to this, his employer left him at Kolan Hospital and departed without any further assistance, financial or otherwise. Given the 7,000 TL cost of his treatment, he has had to resort to donations from the international/student community.

When it became known that he was working without a permit, and hence staying here illegally, he was arrested and now faces deportation. Foreign nationals in the TRNC have the right to work if they have acquired a work permit through their employer, who must carry out the required payments and paperwork. Such cases, however, are the rule, rather than the exception: A comprehensive survey by VOIS Cyprus found that a startling 63.6% of student workers did not have a permit. While we strongly encourage all internationals to demand and acquire permits from their employer—which is an assertion of our basic rights—we also recognize that this does not change the unfortunate reality.

As the facts show, harsh governmental responses toward foreigners in such situations do not lead to any widespread compliance with the regulations; the recent case demonstrates that these laws often punish internationals for, as well as discourage them from, seeking basic medical attention. What are the benefits of immediate deportations? If it is merely a matter of following the laws, does not this prove that legislative change is warranted? What of the employer, will there be any punishment for the violation on his part?

In a recent statement, the Minister of Labor and Social Security, Hasan Taçoy, stated that his ministry's inspections of illegal workers are not intended to be punitive and seek only to protect the rights of employees; a just outcome in the aforementioned case can demonstrate the sincerity of this commitment, as we hope it will. In light of all this, VOIS Cyprus calls on the TRNC government and Minister Taçoy—who has previously met with VOIS and expressed concern for the rights of internationals—to ensure that foreigners are not immediately punished without recourse when they find themselves in such life-threatening situations, and that employers share an equitable burden of the costs of such injuries and violations.