

WINTER NEWSLETTER

2023

- Concerns about labour trafficking increase amid higher demand for migrant workers in Canada.
- La inquietud por la trata laboral aumenta al tiempo que existe una mayor demanda de trabajadores migrantes en Canadá.



**IT HAPPENS
HERE**

Labour Exploitation
Among Migrant Workers
During the Pandemic



FCJ Refugee Centre
Walking with Uprooted People

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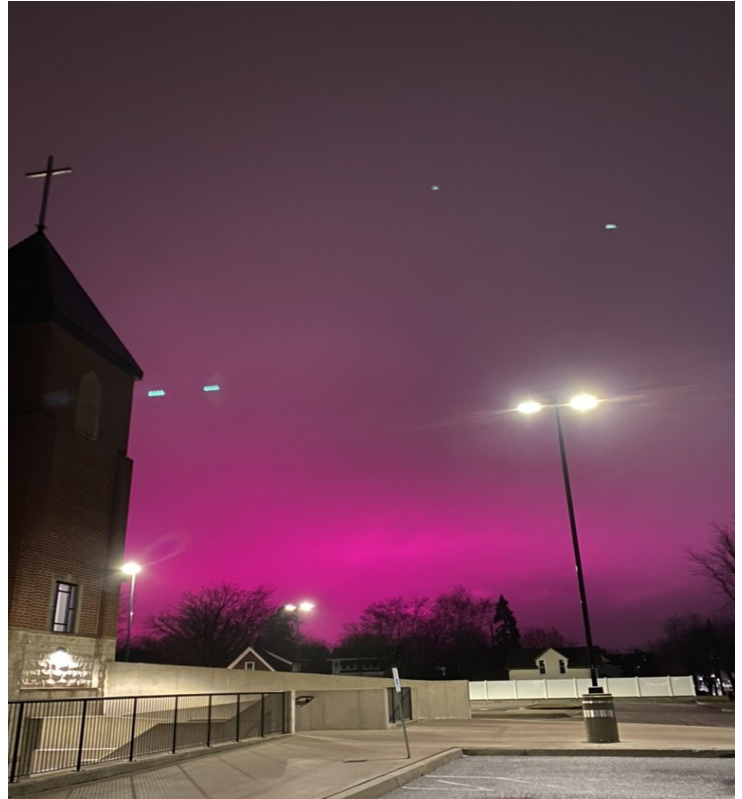
It Happens Here: Labour Exploitation Among Migrant Workers During the Pandemic

On February 15th, FCJ Refugee Centre and Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking published a report named “It Happens Here: Labour Exploitation Among Migrant Workers During the Pandemic”. This report was based on the findings from a series of focus groups held with migrant workers in Ontario.

In March and April 2022, FCJ Refugee Centre organized 7 focus groups with a total of 77 migrant workers. Our goals were to learn more about what challenges migrant workers were facing in Canada, how the pandemic has impacted their experiences in Canada, and how we can improve our human trafficking awareness campaigns to reach more migrant workers.

We asked about what their initial plans were in Canada, and how those plans may have changed now after their experience in Canada. Our team worked in partnership with the Legal Assistance of Windsor (LAW) and other community advocates; Erik Vasquez and Kayla Potts hosted these focus groups in Leamington, London, and at our centre in Toronto. Our first 4 focus groups were in Leamington with LAW, and we were able to meet with migrant workers working in greenhouses and farms. Leamington is full of greenhouses, and that night we saw the sky glow purple from all the greenhouse lights. We were happy to be able to hear from workers that could speak about their experiences working here.

Our team heard from women and men from diverse backgrounds in Leamington. Participants came from various countries but the top three



were; Mexico, Grenada and Thailand. We met with women and men of various ages who entered as visitors, students, refugee claimants, or workers.

Our facilitators asked multiple choice questions, and then opened up the floor for open discussion. Here we learned that workers were unsure of what immigration program they entered Canada, and were unaware of what their labour rights were. We also learned that workers were frustrated with the lack of options available for them to regularize their status, and become permanent residents. Some workers shared with us that they worked in Canada for years and now have very few options to stay in

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Canada. They now had to return to a country they had left, where they have to start all over and will be entitled to very little pension when they are set to retire. Some workers were very happy with the current employers but others spoke about being purposely misled about their jobs with previous employers. One worker who came to Canada with his partner said,

“Our former employer deprived us of having higher skilled. Back home we were higher skilled, from school and we have experience. Me and her both, let’s say I have 10 years of agriculture and working in plantations and she was in the government. When we came here they generalized us as general labourers, no schooling required. But when we came into the greenhouse, actually we were doing supervisor jobs. So it’s unfair to us because supposedly if you do that, you can apply for the Express Entry or other skilled programs and we could easily obtain our regularization. But since they did the opposite, we were deprived from getting easily our regularized status. They do that, their main reason is to pay us cheaply and save money.”

Many workers also shared about the discrimination they felt from their employers. Interestingly, each group of workers felt that they faced more discrimination than the other. Each had their reasons of why they felt this way, but it came down to employers favouring certain workers and creating divides between the migrant workers instead of uniting them.

We held another focus group in London, Ontario where we met with workers working in different sectors such as construction, factories, or cleaning. We heard from workers who have been in

Canada for years out of status working cash jobs, and from workers who have been able to regularize their status. They all spoke about the psychological impacts they faced working in Canada and the need for mental health supports for migrant workers. One worker said:

“The emotional and mental exhaustion that we experience at the farms is a lot. There’s a lot of pressure that comes with being in a new country where you don’t even know the language, you don’t know your rights as a temporary farm worker, you can’t even tell your family that everything sucks because you don’t want to worry them. You bottle up all these things and in the long run, it affects your body and emotional state. I know that what you guys do here, providing free legal aid, is a lot; but maybe you can incorporate people that can provide mental health support.”

Our last two focus groups were held at the FCJ Refugee Centre in Toronto, where we held one session with only migrant women and another with migrant workers in construction. In the focus group with the migrant women, we heard from a sex trafficking survivor who spoke about her experience and the cultural shame she felt after. She felt she had nowhere to turn, and could not speak to her family overseas at the risk of disownment. She was able to find support through another survivor, and organizations such as FCJ Refugee Centre.

The construction workers spoke about the difficulties of being separated from their families for so long. Many workers were out of status, and had not seen their children for their important milestones. They hoped to one day be able to bring their children here where they could be reu-

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nited as a family. While there is a temporary pathway for permanent residency for Out of Status Construction Workers in the GTA, there are arbitrary requirements such as either having a spouse or child with the applicant in Canada or having a family member who is a Canadian permanent resident or citizen. This often leaves many otherwise eligible applicants to fall through the cracks as they have left their families in their country of origin to work in Canada in hopes for a better future for them.

In the context of the pandemic, workers shared some insights about services they were and were not able to access. Most workers worked throughout the pandemic, and most had access to vaccines. However, many workers spoke about their limited access to general healthcare such as a doctor visit. Some workers work in rural and remote areas that make it difficult to access a doctor, and others did not have access due to their status and lack of health coverage.

This experience allowed us to collect the quantitative and qualitative data to raise awareness of the challenges migrant workers face in Canada, and the different forms of exploitation they face. However, it also allowed migrant workers to voice their concerns, share their stories and opinions and advocate for change. Participants shared their gratitude for the space to speak and to be listened to. We are grateful and beyond appreciative of all the participants for giving us their time and sharing their stories. We hope to see more efforts and spaces for migrant workers to advocate for their

Below are the 5 key findings summarized, and our recommendations:

1. **Migrant workers have limited understand of their rights:** many workers disclosed they would have benefitted from having information about their rights before they arrived in Canada.
2. **Many migrant workers are not aware that labour trafficking occurs in Canada:** 48% of participants were not aware that trafficking was an issue in Canada. They believed Canada was a safe country where this was not a risk. Migrant workers wish to see more awareness campaigns through social media, particularly Facebook along with Whatsapp, Service Canada, media and Canadian embassies in their home countries.
3. **Migrant workers are frustrated by policies that make it difficult to acquire permanent residency status:** migrant workers said they are unaware of immigration pathways available and feel defeated that few, if any, exist for them to become citizens.
4. **Migrant workers' primary concern is family separation, followed by low wages and employer discrimination:** Family separation places more stress on workers than high recruiter fees, illegal wage deductions, inadequate housing conditions, or harassment. Many workers feel they are paid very little, and face more discrimination than other ethnic groups.
5. **Many workers had access to COVID-19 vaccines during the pandemic but employers jeopardized workers' safety by failing to implement other public health measures:** While most had access to vaccines, only a third had equitable access to healthcare.

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The following policy recommendations are proposed to help address the challenges identified in the focus group discussions:

1. The federal government should establish open work permits for all migrant workers in Canada, regardless of their occupation or national origin.
2. The federal government should ensure migrant workers have greater access to information on their labour rights before, during and after their arrival in Canada.
3. The federal government should update Canada's immigration legislation to provide a pathway to citizenship for low-wage migrant workers in all sectors, including seasonal workers. Information on available pathways should be shared with migrant workers before, during and after their arrival in Canada.
4. The federal government should expedite the process to relocate migrant workers' families to Canada; Ottawa should also examine how to make this opportunity available to younger families.
5. Provincial and municipal government should work with community organizations to fund more on-site services, including healthcare, labour rights education, legal support, language training and social activities.

We encourage you to read the full report to hear more from migrant workers and how we hope to see these recommendations implemented.

<https://www.fcjrefugeecentre.org/2023/02/concerns-about-labour-trafficking-increase-amid-higher-demand-for-migrant-workers-in-canada/>

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Concerns about labour trafficking increase amid higher demand for migrant workers in Canada.* (Press Release)

New research shows that employer discrimination, unsafe working conditions and gaps in government policy put migrant workers at risk of being exploited once they arrive in Canada.

FCJ Refugee Centre and the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking's newly released report, *It Happens Here: Labour Exploitation Among Migrant Workers During the Pandemic*, reveals that migrant labourers' precarious immigration status makes them vulnerable to exploitation by recruiters and employers. The report summarizes findings from a series of focus group discussions that convened 77 migrant workers in Ontario in early 2022, with the support of Legal Assistance of Windsor (LAW). It highlights that many migrant workers are not aware that they have labour rights while working in Canada.

Some participants shared that they had been exploited in their home country and saw Canada as an opportunity to escape this form of abuse. As a result, many were surprised to learn this danger exists here. "I am still in shock because in Mexico I have heard about human trafficking, but I never thought I would be in this situation [in Canada]. I would always think: how could people fall into these situations? After this happened to me, I saw that it can happen to anyone," said a focus group participant.

The report's other findings include:

- Migrant workers, especially those working in the agricultural and low wage sectors, are frustrated by policies that make it difficult to acquire permanent residency status and relocate their families to Canada.
- Migrant workers' primary concern is family separation, followed by low wages and employer discrimination.
- Migrant workers' safety was jeopardized due to limited healthcare access and COVID-19 testing, as well as by their inability to socially distance.

The report recommends that the federal and provincial governments implement additional safeguards to protect migrant workers from being exploited. More specifically, it calls on governments to:

- establish Open Work Permits for all migrant workers;
- ensure that migrant workers have greater access to information on their labour rights before, during, and after their arrival in Canada;
- increase investments in on-site social services for migrants, including language training, legal aid,

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Concerns about labour trafficking increase amid higher demand for migrant workers in Canada.

healthcare, and information on labour rights, and;

- accelerate the federal government's new family reunification policy for low wage and agricultural workers, and extend this policy to workers with young families.

"Migrant workers are essential to the Canadian economy and deserve justice, fairness, and appropriate attention from all levels of the government and employers. Many of them sacrifice time with their families to pursue work in Canada. Protecting them from being exploited in our communities should be a top priority for all of us," said Julia Drydyk, Executive Director, The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking. "Federal, provincial and municipal governments should increase funding to community organizations to provide more on-site services for low-wage migrant workers."

In 2022, the Government of Canada announced a necessary policy change that will allow spouses and working-age children of migrant workers to relocate to Canada. Although this new policy will help address some concerns, additional steps are needed to reduce the exploitation of migrant workers.

"Migrant workers help Canada to fill critical labour shortages. With growing demand for new migrant labours, our concern about their safety and well-being is increasing. Unfortunately, existing policies can't protect landed migrant workers who are already in a precarious situation, and will put new labours at higher risk of being victim of forced labour, discrimination and unsafe working conditions. This shocking reality should change before we welcome new migrant workers," said Loly Rico, Executive Director, FCJ Refugee Centre

The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking operates the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline (1-833-900-1010), a confidential, multilingual service, operating 24/7 to connect victims and survivors of human trafficking, including labour exploitation with over 900 social and legal services nation-wide.



**(Please find Spanish version of thi information on this issue)*

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La inquietud por la trata laboral aumenta al tiempo que existe una mayor demanda de trabajadores migrantes en Canadá.

Una nueva investigación muestra que la discriminación de los empleadores, las condiciones de trabajo inseguras y las lagunas en la política gubernamental exponen a los trabajadores migrantes al riesgo de ser explotados al llegar a Canadá.

El FCJ Refugee Centre (Centro para refugiados FCJ) y el Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (Centro canadiense para la erradicación de la trata de personas) acaban de publicar un informe: Sucede Aquí: Explotación laboral entre los trabajadores migrantes durante la pandemia, revela que la precaria situación migratoria de los trabajadores migrantes los hace vulnerables a la explotación por parte de reclutadores y empleadores. El informe resume las conclusiones de una serie de debates de grupos de discusión que reunieron a 77 trabajadores migrantes en Ontario a principios de 2022, con el apoyo de Legal Assistance of Windsor (LAW). Destaca que muchos trabajadores migrantes no saben que tienen derechos laborales al trabajar en Canadá.

Algunos participantes contaron que habían sido explotados en su país de origen y vieron en Canadá una oportunidad para escapar de esta forma de abuso. Por ello, muchos se sorprendieron al ver que este peligro también existe aquí. "Todavía estoy en estado de shock porque en México he oído hablar de la trata de personas, pero nunca pensé que me encontraría en esta situación [en Canadá]. Siempre pensaba: ¿cómo puede la gente caer en estas situaciones? Después de que me pasara a mí, me quedó claro que le puede pasar a cualquiera", dijo una participante en un grupo de discusión.

Otras conclusiones del informe son:

- Los trabajadores migrantes, especialmente los que trabajan en los sectores agrícola y de bajos salarios, se enfrentan a políticas que dificultan la obtención del estatuto de residente permanente y el traslado de sus familias a Canadá.
- La principal preocupación de los trabajadores migrantes es la separación familiar, seguida de los bajos salarios y la discriminación patronal.
- La seguridad de los trabajadores migrantes se ve amenazada por el limitado acceso a la asistencia sanitaria y a las pruebas COVID-19, así como por la imposibilidad de distanciarse socialmente.

El informe recomienda que los gobiernos federal y provinciales apliquen garantías adicionales para proteger a los trabajadores migrantes de la explotación. Más concretamente, pide a los gobiernos que:

- establezcan Permisos de Trabajo Abiertos para todos los trabajadores migrantes;
- garanticen que los trabajadores migrantes tengan acceso a la información sobre sus derechos laborales antes, durante y después de su llegada a Canadá;
- aumenten las inversiones en servicios sociales locales para migrantes, como formación lingüística, asis-

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tencia jurídica, asistencia sanitaria e información sobre derechos laborales; y

- aceleren la nueva política de reagrupación familiar del gobierno federal para los trabajadores agrícolas y con salarios bajos, y amplíen esta política a los trabajadores con familias jóvenes.

"Los trabajadores migrantes son esenciales para la economía canadiense y merecen justicia, equidad y una atención adecuada por parte de todos los niveles del gobierno y de los empresarios. Muchos de ellos sacrifican tiempo con sus familias para buscar trabajo en Canadá. Protegerlos para que no sean explotados en nuestras comunidades debería ser una prioridad máxima para todos nosotros", declaró Julia Drydyk, directora ejecutiva de The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking. "Los gobiernos federal, provinciales y municipales deben aumentar la financiación a las organizaciones comunitarias para que presten más servicios locales a los trabajadores migrantes con salarios bajos".

En 2022, el gobierno de Canadá anunció un cambio de política necesario que permitirá a los cónyuges e hijos en edad laboral de los trabajadores migrantes trasladarse a Canadá. Aunque esta nueva política ayudará a resolver algunos problemas, se necesitan medidas adicionales para reducir la explotación de los trabajadores migrantes.

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"Los trabajadores migrantes ayudan a Canadá a cubrir carencias críticas de mano de obra. Con la creciente demanda de nuevos trabajadores migrantes, aumenta nuestra preocupación por su seguridad y bienestar. Desgraciadamente, las políticas actuales no pueden proteger a los trabajadores migrantes que ya se encuentran en una situación precaria, y expondrán a los nuevos trabajadores a un mayor riesgo de ser víctimas de trabajos forzados, discriminación y condiciones de trabajo inseguras. Esta terrible realidad debe cambiar antes de que demos la bienvenida a nuevos trabajadores migrantes", declaró Loly Rico, directora ejecutiva del FCJ Refugee Centre

El Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking gestiona la Línea directa canadiense contra la trata de personas (1-833-900-1010), un servicio confidencial en varios idiomas, que funciona 24 horas al día, 7 días a la semana, para poner en contacto a víctimas y supervivientes de la trata de seres humanos, incluida la explotación laboral, con más de 900 servicios sociales y jurídicos de todo el país.





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Walking with Uprooted People
For more than 30 years



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TO REGISTER

INFO SESSION

**Every last Sunday
of the month**

11:00 AM TO 12:30 PM

Information on:

- What are your labour rights in Canada?
- What is labour exploitation and human trafficking?
- Immigration remedies such as the Open Work Permit for Vulnerable Workers, VTIP-TRPs, and other available resources.

* May be available in other languages if requested

MONTHLY MIGRANT WORKER VIRTUAL INFORMATION SESSION

AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH
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CÓDIGO PARA
REGISTRARTE

INFO

SESIÓN INFORMATIVA

**El último domingo
de cada mes**

DE 11:00 AM A 12:30 PM

Información sobre:

- ¿Cuáles son sus derechos laborales en Canadá?
- ¿Qué es la explotación laboral y la trata de personas?
- Soluciones de inmigración como el Permiso de Trabajo Abierto para Trabajadores Vulnerables, los VTIP-TRP y otros recursos disponibles.

* Puede estar disponible en otros idiomas si se solicita

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EN LÍNEA PARA

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DISPONIBLES EN
ESPAÑOL Y EN INGLÉS *

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On this International Women's Day, and beyond, let's all #EmbraceEquity.

A focus on gender equity needs to be part of every society's DNA. And it's critical to understand the difference between equity and equality. The aim of the #EmbraceEquity campaign theme is to get the world talking about Why equal opportunities aren't enough. People start from different places, so true inclusion and belonging require equitable action. Check the messages from FCJ Refugee Centre: https://youtu.be/TcTjHEE_bI



Connect with us



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