



Backgrounder: Migrant Workers Deserve Decent Housing

How it's unfair!

- Many migrant workers are living in housing provided by their employers because they are required to by the TFWP (i.e., live-in caregivers, seasonal agricultural workers) or by conditions of work (e.g., other agriculture or hospitality migrant workers).
- But migrant worker housing is excluded from the Ontario Residential Tenancies Act that regulates housing conditions.
- Worker housing is often dirty, too cold or too hot, and overcrowded, with dozens of workers forced to live together in cramped quarters.
- Immigrants without full status are banned from social housing even though they live and work in Ontario.

How to make it right; remember we are in it together!

Going home after work should be a relief but many migrant workers have no relief from the stress of work since they live at or near their workplace. They deserve decent housing and this requires regulation, inspection, enforcement, and viable alternatives. Some simple policy changes Ontario could make:

- a) **Regulate migrant housing and develop comprehensive enforcement of regulations:** The Ministry of Labour regulates the maximum rates for room and board for many migrant workers, but does nothing to ensure adequacy of that housing.



- b) **At a minimum, existing housing guidelines for agricultural workers must be replaced with updated and enforceable regulations** in consultation with migrant workers and community stakeholders and with the relevant Ontario ministries. Housing regulations for migrant workers in other streams must also be developed.
- c) **A proactive enforcement strategy must reflect the realities facing migrant workers** and their fears of reprisal for speaking out about housing conditions. . Fines for violations, damages for workers in substandard housing, multiple inspections per year and anonymous complaints are key components of a proactive enforcement strategy.
- d) **Provide access to rent geared to income housing for migrants without full status:** Currently, the Ontario Housing Services Act restricts rent geared to income housing to citizens, refugees and permanent residents. Removing immigration status as a barrier to accessing social housing will strengthen the ability of workers in coercive employment arrangements to seek support, and assert rights without fear.

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