

Lifting the Floor

We need decent, permanent and well paid work for all. Migrant Workers Alliance for Change calls on Ontario to:

- increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour;
- provide paid sick days; and
- provide vacation and overtime pay to all workers.

Precarious, temporary, and migrant workers should all be provided equal rights at work. Other Ontario laws around workers' compensation, particularly WSIB deeming, health and safety provisions, health-care, housing, social assistance and provincial access to permanent residency must be overhauled to ensure real rights for migrant workers.

Support your neighbours: Migrant workers in Ontario

Get in touch with Migrant Workers Alliance for Change!



The Ontario government is reviewing labour laws in the province. It's important that these changes support all workers, including migrant workers.

Increased rights for migrant workers benefit us all!

Migrant workers are part of our communities where they live, work, shop and build relationships. They are not "foreigners", they are part of Ontario's workforce, and they are part of our labour market.

Migrant workers participation in a decent work movement is crucial to our ability to win rights for all. Unfortunately, bad employers and some journalists have pitted migrant workers against unemployed and underemployed Ontario workers. But instead of fighting at the bottom of the barrel for bad jobs, we must unite to increase rights for everyone and improve all our working conditions.

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Who are migrant workers?

Migrant workers are our friends and neighbours that live and work in Ontario without permanent resident status. They grow our food, work in restaurants and factories, and they take care of children, the sick and the elderly. Ontario works because they do.

Migrant workers on tied work permits:

- Are only allowed to work for the single employer who is listed on their permits.
- If they are laid off and work in the agriculture sector, they are almost immediately deported.
- If they are in another sector, they have 90 days to find a new employer willing to pay a \$1,000 processing fee and have the government process their papers. Most can't do so.
- Permits are time-limited, anywhere from a few weeks to four years.

Work permit rules are part of immigration law made at the Federal level. Migrant workers deserve permanent immigration status on arrival, and that's the Federal government's responsibility.

But Ontario also has a major role to play. Today, migrant workers live in fear, with fewer rights, and are forced to pay huge fees to work in Ontario. It's time for fairness, full protections and work without fees.

Fear

“The government should encourage that workers are not scared. They should say whatever the problem, come right away to us. Because as an employee I am scared of the government, and I am scared that if I complain, I will get deported.”

- Maria, Filipina Live-In Caregiver

We all know how hard it is to speak up when we have a bad employer, or if we are not getting our full wages. Imagine how much harder it is when speaking up doesn't just mean losing your job, it means being forced to leave the country. Imagine how hard it is when your employer controls your housing and when your contract isn't enforceable. What's worse is that employers know this, and bad bosses will push workers to work harder for lesser pay, knowing they won't complain.

Fairness

- Labour laws must be proactively enforced.
- Community members must be able to complain about bad bosses.
- Migrant workers must be able to stay in the country while their complaints are being processed.
- No harassment or bullying at the workplace.
- Make contracts enforceable.



Fewer Rights

“You as a farm worker you do like 60 hours a week. What it comes down to it, you are doing overtime, you don't get overtime. You are doing all of the stuff because there is no rule or there is no law there for we to get that. You don't have no holiday, no time off, no day off. You have to do it. That is what is the system is set up for we and it's not right.”

- Chris, Jamaican farmworker in Canada since 2006

Many agricultural workers don't get minimum wage, overtime pay, time to eat, or even bathroom breaks. Agricultural workers and caregivers can not organize into unions nor bargain collectively. So not only are workers afraid to speak up, even if they do, they don't have a lot of rights.

Full Protections

- Migrant workers deserve the same rights as everyone else.
- There should be no special rules and exemptions by occupation.
- Agriculture workers and Caregivers must be able to unionize, and bargain collectively and sectorally.



Paying to Work

“I paid \$1500 in Honduras to come work here in Canada. Here I worked in an unsafe job at a mushroom farm for a year to be able to pay back that debt. On top of that, my employer regularly stole my wages and I couldn't file a claim with the Ministry or I would have been fired and sent back home.”

- Juan Miguel

While Juan paid \$1,500, workers from Thailand and the Philippines are paying close to \$10,000 to recruiters to get a job. Recruiters abroad work with recruiters in Ontario who liaise with Canadian employers. To pay these sums, many workers take on debt before they arrive. With this debt hanging over their heads, many are less willing to speak up or complain when faced with employer or recruiter abuse.

Work without Fees

- License recruiters, and register employers.
- Make recruiter and employer registries public.
- Hold employers and recruiters jointly financially liable for all fees paid to work by migrant workers.
- Joint liability must include any fees paid at any point in recruitment process.

