



Migrant Worker Issues: Some International Context

The CCR has had an active [campaign for the rights of migrant workers](#) in Canada for the last ten years. The campaign has focused on the protection of migrant workers' rights in Canada, and their access to permanent residence and to services. Since temporary labour migration is a global phenomenon, the CCR is beginning to get involved in migrant justice activities outside of Canada's borders. Let's take a closer look at the global dynamics of labour migration...

Overview of migration:

Each year thousands make the decision to leave their family and community to seek work overseas and provide for those back home. The movement of workers and their earnings has become a key factor in the economies of both sending and receiving countries. In 2010 total remittances from migrants to their home countries reached some US\$440 billion (Asian Development Bank, 2012). At the same time, receiving countries depend on migrant workers to fill labour shortages, often in low-paid positions with sub-par conditions that local workers aren't willing to take.

Issues and concerns:

- Global inequalities in income distribution and access to employment cause thousands of people to decide to migrate for work every year
- Canada is not a neutral actor in the global dynamics of temporary labour migration. Canadian business interests (e.g. mining and resource extraction) and foreign policy (e.g. free trade agreements) play active roles in displacing people, creating unemployment and exacerbating poverty in the Global South. This in turn forces people to go abroad to seek employment in order to provide for their families.
- Migrant workers who have organized themselves say migration should be *an* option, not *the only* option. However many international actors as well as migrant-sending governments have made labour export a policy strategy, rather than focusing on developing the domestic economy and creating job opportunities at home.
- National governments and international institutions have international forums where they discuss "managing" migration for development. Migrants themselves are seldom represented.
- At these forums migration is seen as a solution for underdevelopment, rather than a result of underdevelopment. Other development initiatives have been marginalized.
- At these forums temporary labour migration is discussed as a "triple win" (for sending governments, receiving governments and migrants benefit). The meetings fail to acknowledge that governmental shortcomings have created the need for large-scale South-North labour migration, and that many migrants would not choose to migrate if it were possible to make a living in their own communities.
- Temporary labour migration has considerable negative psycho-social impacts on migrants and the family members they must leave behind.
- Governments and institutions do not acknowledge that the "triple win" model is unsustainable from a human rights perspective.

- In many countries, including Canada, there is discrimination between “high-skilled” and “low-skilled” migrant workers, where only those in the “high-skilled” streams can migrate permanently, and they often have access to more services and protections than those in the “low-skilled” categories.
- In most migrant receiving countries, there are little to no effective protections of “low-skilled” migrant workers’ rights, and many workers are subject to serious abuses, including economic, labour, psychological, physical and sexual abuse, and in some cases human trafficking.

Some of the actors:

Sending country governments benefit from the foreign exchange provided by the remittances migrants send home, and the economic stimulus of those remittances. Some countries, like the Philippines, have made labour export a national policy, rather than improve conditions and create opportunities for nationals locally.

Receiving country governments and employers benefit from a pool of cheap and willing labour that is generally not in a position to organize or complain about abuse to improve their conditions. They are discarded after a period of time, and replaced by others.

International institutions such as the World Bank, the International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations discuss migration “management”, and look at labour migration primarily as a means to develop migrant sending countries.

International and national migrant rights organizations work for migrant justice. At the international level this includes organizing counter-assemblies around forums such as the UN’s High-level Dialogue on Migration and Development to protest the discourse being used there and lack of migrant representation. Many also demand that governments sign on to the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Some of these organizations are led by migrants themselves, some are coalitions, and some are led by labour.

Where does the CCR fit into all this?

CCR’s mandate focuses on the vulnerability of migrants here in Canada, but it is important for us to learn about the roots of the problem. Canada’s Temporary Foreign Worker Program is part of a global context, in which Canada contributes to push factors for migration from the Global South, and benefits from cheap migrant labour. We may also want to learn from, and collaborate with NGOs in other countries working on similar issues.

What are some things the CCR can do to get involved?

- Connect with migrant justice organizations working in other countries and at the international level
- Hold virtual meetings with such organizations to look for opportunities for collaboration
- Take part in initiatives that seek to develop an international framework to address gaps in protection

Key Issues:

- International labour recruitment reform
- Changing the conversation about “migration and development”
- Building solidarity with, and learning from, migrant justice organizations in countries that send migrants to Canada