



National Meeting on Migrant Worker Issues, June 2016

Highlights Report

On Sunday June 5 2016, the Canadian Council for Refugees held its second National Meeting on Migrant Worker Issues at Station 20 West Community Enterprise Centre in Saskatoon, on Treaty 6 territory. The meeting was held following the CCR Spring 2016 Consultation. Over 50 people from across Canada attended the meeting, with participants from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Prince Edward Island present. Participants included migrant workers, migrant justice advocates, members of the labour movement, settlement workers and researchers. On Saturday June 4 an info-session for migrant workers was held at the same venue, presented by KAIROS and Migrante Canada, and supported by CCR.

The meeting provided an opportunity to share information, experiences and skills among migrant workers and people in diverse sectors across Canada that work with or advocate for the rights of migrant workers. It also supported networking across regions.

The objectives of this meeting were:

- To bring together workers and advocates from across the country to share experiences, exchange ideas and develop partnerships.
- To bring ideas and information on organizing for migrant worker rights to Saskatchewan, with the goal of supporting a nascent migrant worker rights movement locally.
- To create a space where workers and advocates from different sectors and provinces can strategize around advancing the campaign for migrant worker rights in the context of the new federal government.

The day was broken into the following main activities: a) brief introductions to grassroots migrant worker rights initiatives from across the country, b) small group discussions, c) presentation by a representative of the Saskatchewan government.

Highlights

- The opportunity to meet face-to-face with advocates from across the country was unique and important, facilitating significant networking and partnership development.
- The participation of a diverse range of sectors including migrant workers, migrant justice activists and advocates, labour unions, settlement workers and researchers was valuable. The voices of migrant workers from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Prince Edward Island were central to the discussions.
- Meeting attendees discussed barriers and challenges faced by migrant workers around exploitative recruitment practices, access to permanent residence, labour rights and access to services. They shared strategies to mitigate these barriers at the individual level.

- Hearing from the Saskatchewan government about their *Foreign Worker Recruitment and Immigration Services Act* was instructive and informative for many participants from other provinces. Saskatchewan's legislation is the most comprehensive legislation in Canada for the protection of migrant worker rights.

Priorities going forward

Participants raised a number of priorities during meeting discussions. Many of these are not new, and were reaffirmed as priorities moving forward.

- 1) Groups should take a two-pronged approach to advocacy, working at the provincial and federal levels.

Provincial priorities:

- ✓ Make provincial nominee programs (PNPs) in Quebec and Ontario open to workers in low-skilled streams.
- ✓ In provinces where PNP is a pathway to permanent residence for migrant workers, encourage provincial governments to eliminate financial requirements, and to advocate with the federal government to reduce language requirements and restrictions on seasonal labour.
- ✓ Advocate for provincial governments to lobby the federal government to fund settlement services for migrant workers, and in absence of this provide top-up funding themselves.
- ✓ In provinces where this is absent, advocate that the government develop and pass legislation similar to Saskatchewan's FWRISA.

Federal priorities:

- ✓ Access to permanent residence (including an end to the cap on permanent residence applications for caregivers).
 - ✓ Open work permits for migrant workers.
 - ✓ Eliminate the four-in-four-out rule for Temporary Foreign Workers.
 - ✓ Expand eligibility criteria for federally-funded settlement services to all migrant workers
- 2) Coordinate actions nationally especially between CCR, Coalition for Migrant Worker Rights Canada, and the labour movement.
 - 3) Develop a longer-term holistic vision of what a just, inclusive and equitable immigration system should look like, in order to be able to propose a fairer system, rather than simply reacting to existing government policy and changes.

