



Canadian Council for Refugees  
Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés

# Report: Montreal Forum on Migrant Worker Issues

At the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN)

25 November 2018



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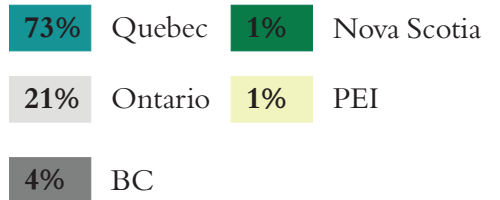
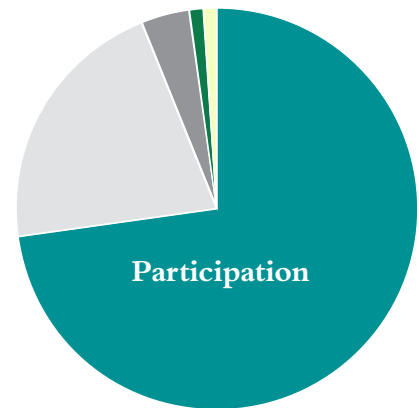
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## Introduction

On 25 November 2018, the Montreal Forum on Migrant Worker Issues was held at the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) in Tiotia:ke (Montreal), on unceded Indigenous lands where the Kanien’kehá:ka Nation (Mohawk) are recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters. Approximately 100 people attended the forum, and half of that number were themselves migrant workers. Other participants included migrant justice advocates, members of the labour movement, settlement workers and community organizers. Participants hailed from Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia.

The forum was co-hosted by the Canadian Council for Refugees and the Immigrant Workers Centre. Representatives of other groups also helped with the planning of the event: PINAY, Association for the Rights of Household Workers (ARHW) and RATTMAQ (Réseau d’aide aux travailleuses et travailleurs migrants agricoles du Québec). The event was held on a Sunday in order to increase the likelihood that migrant workers would be able to attend, and snacks and lunch were offered to make the event more accessible. Meeting documents were available in French, English and Spanish, and whisper translation between these three languages was made available for those who requested it.

The CCR and IWC would like to thank the CSN for hosting the event. We also acknowledge the generous in-kind support of the Association for the Rights of Household Workers, and the financial support of UNIFOR, which helped to cover meeting costs.



CCR forums on migrant worker issues:	
November 2013	Waterloo ON
June 2016	Saskatoon SK
June 2017	Edmonton AB
December 2017	St. Catharines ON
November 2018	Montreal QC

# Meeting objectives and list of sessions

## Meeting organizers set the following objectives for the forum:

- Create a space for sharing and learning among migrant workers, grassroots support groups, social service providers and migrant rights advocates
- Share strategies and solutions for case work with migrant workers
- Provide an opportunity for networking among migrant workers and individuals and groups working on issues related to migrant workers
- Discuss policy advocacy and common campaign strategies

## Sessions:

### Opening plenary

#### Breakout discussion groups morning

- Caregiver issues
- Agricultural workers
- High-skilled temporary workers

#### Breakout discussion groups afternoon

- Caregiver issues
- Support services for migrant workers
- Temp agencies and recruitment issues
- Legal Issues
- Federal government: changing policies and practice

### Closing Plenary

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## What was the most useful part of the event for you and why? Forum participants said:

- “
- The workshops allowed me to hear real life stories from migrant workers and how they need to be supported
  - Break-out sessions, small group discussions
  - Learning about Quebec’s policies/practices on migrant workers
  - Information sharing
  - ESDC presentation on what’s happening and learning about PINAY
- ”

# Plenaries

## Opening Plenary

The opening plenary was designed as a way to hear about news in policy and programs related to migrant workers both at the provincial level (Quebec) and the federal level. The presentations provided information to feed the day's discussions, and offered a rare opportunity for migrant workers to have direct dialogue with a federal government representative.

Jill Hanley (IWC) and Michel Pilon (RATTMAQ) gave an overview of recent policy changes in Quebec regarding immigration and labour. As of August 2018 changes to the immigration rules allow Quebec migrant workers of all skill levels to apply for permanent residence, provided they have a high level of French language knowledge. Changes to the Labour Standards Act include provisions for the regulation of recruiters and temp agencies, and prohibit charging fees to workers. It remains to be seen how the new Quebec government will implement the changes. Joël Lepine of Employment and Social Development Canada gave a presentation on some of the recent initiatives of the federal government, following the 2016 review of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, namely:

- Increased on-site inspections, including \$15 million over three years to support unannounced inspections.
- New housing policy for primary agriculture workers
- Migrant Worker Support Network in BC: 2-year pilot

The presentations were followed by a question period. The government representative did not have answers to all the questions, but offered his direct contact info for participants to follow-up with him directly.

Resource persons:

- **Jill Hanley**, Immigration Workers Centre, Montreal
- **Michel Pilon**, Réseau d'aide aux travailleurs temporaires agricoles du Québec, Salaberry-de-Valleyfield
- **Joël Lépine**, Director, Migrant Worker Protection and Integrity Policy Division, Employment and Social Development Canada, Ottawa

Facilitators: Jasmine de la Calzada (PINAY) and Francisco Mootoo (Temporary Foreign Workers Association)

## Closing Plenary

The closing plenary was a time to reconvene, share the key issues discussed throughout the day and key takeaways from the forum. Workers were invited to share their reflections, and several expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet with other workers and advocates.

Facilitators: Amy Casipullai and Jill Hanley

# Key issues

The discussions during breakout groups were varied and rich, but some key issues stood out.

## Caregiver Issues

Due to the mobilization efforts of some CCR member organizations, the forum became a venue for about 40 caregivers living in Quebec to connect with representatives from support and advocacy organizations. Workers shared some of their challenges and questions, and organizers were able to provide information to them regarding their rights, and strategies for getting their employers to respect them. It was an important opportunity for these workers to meet with local Montreal support organizations that they can keep in touch with.

Caregivers were frustrated about the 2018 reforms to Quebec immigration rules, which make immigration possible for all skill-levels of migrant workers, but only for those with an unattainably high level of French language skills. Caregivers in the Montreal area have access to 3 hours of French language instruction weekly, but this is not enough to get them to the level required to be able to access permanent residence via the provincial programs.

There is a real sense of uncertainty and urgency to act about the closing of the current federal caregiver streams in November 2019, with no indication of whether there will continue to be a pathway for caregivers to work in Canada and access permanent residence after that.

## Access to services and information

Migrant workers still have little to no access to funded services in many provinces (including Quebec), and where they do have access in theory, there is often little access in practice due to isolation and transportation barriers. Service provision is in many cases left to volunteer-run organizations with few resources, who are at high risk of burnout because of the high demand and difficult cases. The BC Migrant Worker Support Network pilot project seems very promising, but those doing volunteer-based support for migrant workers in other provinces are frustrated that the workers in their region can't benefit from this type of initiative.

Forum participants raised that all workers should have access to support services, including those with work permits for "low-skilled" and "high-skilled" work, as well as undocumented workers. It was also underscored that settlement agencies should be playing a role to move forward advocacy around service provision for all workers and all newcomers, by talking to their Local Immigration Partnerships and elected officials.

## International Recruitment Practices

Advocates continue to push for regulation and licensing regimes for recruiters in Canada, and there are some good models: legislation in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and now British Columbia. However, much of the predatory recruitment activities (such as the charging of fees, often very high) targeting migrant workers who come to Canada is carried out in the country of origin, where Canada doesn't have jurisdiction.

Participants felt that we need to move forward with advocacy for Canada to take responsibility for recruitment practices used to bring workers to Canada, and consider recommending that the SAWP model of government-to-government recruitment be extended to the TFWP. Participants were interested in following up with the federal government about its involvement in the International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS).

## Key issues

### Creating safe spaces for migrant workers to share their experiences

There were many migrant workers who attended the meeting and sought space to share their difficult experiences. It was recognized by organizers and facilitators that there need to be safe spaces for workers to share these experiences and to be heard. It was recommended that organizations should support migrant workers to meet and connect, as well as to organize, and that organizations must find ways to create this sort of sharing opportunity within organizing spaces, while still allowing discussions that are focused on strategy and information-sharing to move forward.

### Enforcement – CBSA role

It was encouraging to hear from the federal government representative about the increase in unannounced on-site inspections of employers who hire migrant workers, following the allocation of a dedicated budget for this in the 2018-19 federal budget. However, participants reflected on the continuing criminalization of migrant workers, many in situations of labour exploitation, who have fallen out of status for a variety of reasons. It was felt that CBSA should have a reduced role in enforcement regarding migrant workers and their employers, since their enforcement style is often very heavy-handed (e.g. expired work permit leading to deportation), and their involvement often results in the detention and/or removal of workers in vulnerable situations.

## Evaluations

Participants came from a variety of different sectors and realms of experience, and with a variety of expectations for the event. Many said they came in order to learn about the issues faced by migrant workers, and the different measures in place to serve and protect them in different provinces. Others hoped to network with other advocates and migrant workers, and to stay updated and informed about news related to migrant work issues.

Of those who filled out a participant evaluation form (20%), the feedback was very positive.

- 100% of respondents said that their expectations for the event were met.
- 94% said they felt they were able to participate and that their opinion was respected during the event
- 100% said they found the forum helpful in identifying issues and practices related to migrant workers in their community
- 94% said the forum was helpful in creating a space to exchange information and strategies and to connect with others involved in migrant workers issues
- 94% said the forum was successful in fostering partnerships and developing strategies

Participants appreciated the overview of recent changes in Quebec policies, which was very practical information for some of the migrant workers present who reside in Quebec. Several respondents mentioned appreciating the way the day was organized, that it was divided in half between plenaries and smaller group discussions. Participants also reported valuing the opportunity to hear directly from migrant workers about their experiences, and the rich discussions that took place in the breakout groups.

Suggestion for future events included getting simultaneous interpretation (it was suggested that ESDC should pay for this), and asking facilitators to manage the time better.

# Future directions

Feedback about the event reaffirmed that the fora on migrant worker issues organized by CCR are popular and that they fill a gap. Migrant workers and the people who serve them and organize in solidarity with them don't have many opportunities to connect with others doing similar work in different places, and to exchange information and strategies. Migrant workers themselves are usually working, and don't have a lot of opportunities to share their experiences.

It is clear that CCR and our member organizations and allies will continue to advocate for migrant worker rights in Canada at the federal and provincial levels, and this forum helped bring out some priorities for new directions, such as increasing advocacy on international recruitment issues.

Following suggestions of some of the participants, it is time to consider initiating a formal list-serve to foster exchange and communication among migrant workers and advocates. This idea will be discussed by the CCR subcommittee on migrant workers in the new year. There is also support to have the next forum in British Columbia on June 2nd, on the heels of the CCR Spring Consultation in Victoria.