



5 May 2020

The Right Hon. Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
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Call to ensure adequate support: Precarious status migrants should not be left behind

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to call attention to the particular situation of migrants in Canada during the pandemic. Many of the member organizations of the Canadian Council for Refugees assist, advocate for and help organize refugees, migrant workers and other precarious status migrants.

With or without status, migrants in Canada are sometimes in exploitative situations, and are particularly vulnerable to labour violations, gender-based-violence, human rights violations, human trafficking and other types of abuse. Their precarity is amplified during the pandemic crisis, and they are in need of urgent support.

We welcome recent federal initiatives to extend access to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to migrant residents with a valid Social Insurance Number who earned at least \$5,000 in the previous 12 months. However, a number of gaps still remain to address the urgent needs of migrant workers, migrants in trafficking situations, international students, refugee claimants, and other precarious migrants.

While the CCR has broader long-term demands for vulnerable migrant populations, we call on the federal government to take immediate actions in the following areas:

Income

We are pleased that virtually all migrant workers are included in emergency income measures (special EI measures, the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit). However, several groups who rely on employment for survival are currently ineligible. For example, migrants who have not yet earned \$5000 (trafficked persons with newly obtained temporary residence permits, international students) or undocumented migrants, many of whom are simply between statuses. This pandemic is leaving them in extreme precarity and forcing some to work in conditions dangerous to their own and public health, to go ‘underground’ or to stay in abusive situations in order to make ends meet.

Health

We acknowledge the tremendous work health care workers, many of whom are precarious status migrants themselves, are undertaking to keep people in Canada safe during the pandemic. We also know that we are only as safe as our most vulnerable neighbour. During the crisis, it is essential that health care be provided to everyone living in Canada, regardless of their immigration status. We ask all levels of government to provide necessary COVID-related services, including access to testing and necessary treatments in the same manner that all residents of Canada are entitled. Additionally, a person's health status must be kept confidential, particularly in terms of communication with immigration authorities or employers.

Immigration Status

During this crisis, the federal government should ensure pathways to permanent residence in Canada are maintained, including pathways for refugee claimants, trafficked persons, migrant workers, and precarious migrants applying on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. No precarious status migrant should fear deportation at this time.

Recognizing that seeking permanent residence is often a lengthy process, various existing short-term remedies to regularize status must be prioritized during this crisis. A clear and standardized application and approval process, taking no longer than ten days, should be immediately implemented. This would apply to people who apply for Victims of Human Trafficking Temporary Resident Permits, Open Work Permits for Vulnerable Workers, Temporary Resident Permits for Victims of Family Violence.

Community Support

Many community organizations are on the front-line of providing support to migrants at this critical time. These organizations should be consulted in the process of developing policy and community level responses to COVID-19. Organizations that support migrants should receive adequate funding to provide the essential outreach, popular education, and case intervention that is necessary at this time.

Migrant youth are also particularly affected by the current crisis. Youth-led organizations, and front-line organizations supporting youth, should receive adequate funding to provide outreach, mental health support, and appropriate tools to manage the current crisis.

We applaud government statements that no one should be left behind. Human rights and public health standards must be central to policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic at this time. We count on the federal government to take action to protect the rights of vulnerable migrants within the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Yours sincerely,



Dorota Blumczynska
President