Canadian Council for Refugees

Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés

Voices of Resistance: Shaping the Future of Migrant Work

National Migrant Workers Forum Report

November 16, 2026

Land Acknowledgement

The Migrant Workers Forum took place on Treaty One Territory and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis, in Wiiniibak (Winnipeg), Manido Abi (Manitoba). We acknowledge these are the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anisininew, Ininiwak, Dakota Oyate, and Michif (Métis) Peoples. This territory is also a place of significance for the Denesuline and the Inuit, some of whom have been living here for generations. We recognize and give thanks to Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, in Treaty Three Territory, which is the source of the Convention Centre's clean drinking water.

We are committed to truth and reconciliation through building relationships with the original peoples of this land, and the stories that bring us together.

Event organizers

This forum was made possible thanks to the support and commitment of its organizing committee:

- **Jovana Blagovcanin,** Anti-Human Trafficking Manager | FCJ Refugee Centre
- **Gabriel Allahdua,** Co-Lead | Migrant Worker Freedom Project
- **Edwin Silang,** Newcomer Settlement Program | Catholic Social Services Alberta and Co-Chair of CCR Immigration and Settlement Working Group
- **Shelley Gilbert Law,** Executive Director of Legal Assistance Windsor and CO-Chair of CCR Immigration | Settlement
- **Lauren Lallemand,** Co-Executive Director | CCR
- **Basel Dakak,** Events Coordinator | CCR

Thanks and Appreciation

This forum would not have been possible without the generosity, solidarity, and commitment of the people and organizations who supported it and helped make space for migrant workers' voices and leadership.

Sponsors

We extend our sincere thanks to our sponsors for their generous support and for helping make this forum possible:

- United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW)
- Mary Ward Centre
- University of Montreal (T Demmers)
- Global College (University of Winnipeg)
- Sisters of St Joseph
- United Church of Canada
- CCIS Alberta
- Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking (CCTEHT)
- Canadian Labour Congress

Allies

To our allies, thank you for standing alongside migrant workers, strengthening our collective efforts, and contributing to a movement for justice, dignity, and rights.

Migrant Workers

Most importantly, we extend our gratitude to the migrant workers who shared their experiences, knowledge, perspectives, and leadership. Your voices are at the heart of this forum and of the movement for migrant justice.

Member Organizations

Thank you to our member organizations for your continued commitment, collaboration, and support. Your work and collective action make this movement stronger.

Volunteers

A special thank you to all the volunteers who contributed their time, energy, and care to making this forum possible. Your dedication behind the scenes was essential to bringing everyone together.

Introduction

Organized by the Canadian Council for Refugee (CCR) in collaboration with several member organizations and allies, the Migrants Workers Forum 'Voices of Resistance: Shaping the Future of Migrant Work' was held in Winnipeg on November 16 at University of Winnipeg campus.

Across Canada, migrant workers face multiple challenges – unsafe working conditions, unfair policies and ongoing threats to their dignity and rights – yet they continue to fight and mobilize with courage and determination. The Forum aims to highlight how migrant workers are organizing, resisting, and building solidarity across the country. Focusing on the voices of migrant workers, this event examined the systemic roots driving exploitation. It created a space where the struggles are shared, and the victories are celebrated.

The Forum took place on Sunday to better accommodate migrant workers and increase attendance. Breakfast and lunch were provided to enhance accessibility.

A. Objectives

1. **Creates a space for action collaboration** in order to develop advocacy and priorities based on political context and strategically strengthen national and provincial strategies.
2. **Expose exploitative practices** in migrant worker recruitment and workplaces, demanding urgent changes through open work permits, stronger protections, and pathways to permanent residency.
3. **Identify the next steps** for sustained and coordinated action among migrant workers, advocates, and allied organizations.

B. Morning Session

1. Opening

Gauri Sreenivasan (She/ Her), Co-Executive Director at Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), opened the event with an engaging speech about the negative effects of Bill C-12 *Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act* on migrant workers, refugee claimants and migrants - It enables deportations without hearings or appeals, grants the Minister of Immigration broad powers to cancel immigration documents without due process, and restricts access to asylum and full refugee hearings. She emphasized that numerous social justice coalitions and community organizations, including the CCR, have taken a clear stand on this issue and reiterated the CCR's call for the withdrawal of Bill C-12.

Diana Gallego (She/Her), President of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), subsequently took the floor and centered her intervention on unity and collective mobilization to challenge to current anti-migrant narrative in Canada and around the world.

> We must put our voices together, because by bringing our voices together we will find the way to stop the anti-migrant sentiment a minority want to impose.
>
> -Diana Gallego, president of CCR

2. Panels

a. Lessons from National & International Resistance

Danilo De Leon (He/Him), Chair of Migrante Canada, introduced this first panel by sharing his own experience as a survivor of labour abuses in Canada and later as an advocate for migrant workers rights. His intervention centered the grassroots perspective of his organization and focused on the exploitative system behind the Temporary Foreign Workers program as well as the various actors implicated in facilitating abuses - employers, recruiters and particularly unscrupulous immigration consultants. He emphasized the substantial contribution of migrant workers to the Canadian economy and denounced existing and new immigration policies that make them increasingly vulnerable and facilitate exploitation, discrimination and abuse. Greater recognition of the value and contribution of these workers is essential, through stronger protection of their rights.

Christopher Sorio (He/Him), Secretary of Migrante Canada, began his presentation with a historical overview of migrant workers lives throughout Canadian history to demonstrate their importance in the country's political, economic, and social development. He highlighted a concerning trend- the racialization of Canadian policies - especially immigration policies, which are responsible for increasing exploitation and unfair work conditions of migrant workers as well as deportations carried out by Canadian Border Security Agency (CBSA). He called for a collective fight for change through a bottom-up movement to put an end to unfair deportation, exploitation, and systemic injustices.

Gabriel Allahdua (He/Him) is a Senior Education and Mobilization Officer at the Association for the Rights of Household and Farm Workers (DTMF), and he previously worked as a migrant temporary agricultural worker for several years. DTMF is leading a Constitutional Class Action against the Canadian government to end closed work permits for migrant workers and to obtain financial reparation for the harm done. Across the word, Canada is portrayed as a welcoming country with a strong human rights-based policy approach. The reality is quite different for temporary migrant workers under the closed permit system as labor abuses and human rights violations are associated with this program. Several actions and events led by the International Migrant Workers' movement have denounced harsh working conditions and abuses when it comes to temporary migrant workers – consequences from systemic exploitation under capitalism.

Marisa Berry Méndez (She/Her) is a Campaign Manager at Amnesty International (Canada Francophone). Her intervention focused on The Open Work Permit Campaign led by Amnesty International that strongly advocate for the abolition of closed work permits and their replacement with open work permits and a better access to permanent residency for migrant workers in Canada. In collaboration with civil society organizations, grassroots organizations, migrant workers and national unions, Amnesty International denounced the exploitative nature of the Temporary Foreign

Worker Program in Canada which enables systemic discrimination and abuse. Bill C-12 and Bill C-2 are posing major challenges and concerns for stronger protection of migrant workers' rights as they directly scapegoat migrants.

b. Workers Empowering Workers

- Journey from Macau to Canada - A Filipino worker experience
  JmillsonSantos(He/Him) is a former migrant worker from the Philippines who came to Canada full of faith and hope. Unfortunately, he experienced labor abuse while working in a hotel in Thompson, Manitoba. Santos subsequently filed complaints with other colleagues in Winnipeg before the Canadian Human Rights commission, the Workplace Safety & Prevention Services and Service Canada. After months of sustained efforts and facing difficult challenges, justice was achieved. They won their Labour case, and the Canadian Human Rights Commission opened a new case against the hotel. He called for migrant workers to speak out for their rights.

- Union experience with migrant workers - United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)
  Santiago Escobar (He/Him) is Â!ÑÂ×ÌÒÑÂÏ!õÇÓõÇÖÇÑ×Â×ÌÙÇ!Â×!6 ' $ 8 ƀ!) Ç! ÓõÇÖÇÑ×ÇÆ!×ËÇ!ÇÛ×ÇÑÖÌÙÇ!ÚÒõÎ !×ËÇ!6ÑÌÒÑ!ÌÖ!ÆÒÌÑÉ!ÚÌ×Ë!ÐÌÉõÂÑ×!ÚÒõÎÇõ! ÂÅõÒÖÖ!$ÂÑÂÆÂ!þ!5ËÇ!-ÇÂÐÌÑÉ×ÒÑ!ÅÇÑ×Çõ!ŤÐÌÉõÂÑ×!ÚÒõÎÇõÖ!ÅÇÑ×ÇõÖťƆ! ×ËÇ!ÂÆÙÒÅÂÅÜ!×Ò!ØÑÌÒÑÌÝÇ!ÐÌÉõÂÑ×!ÚÒõÎÇõÖ!ÂÑÆ!ÈÒõ!ÓÇõÐÂÑÇÑ×! õÇÖÌÆÇÑÅÇ!ÓÂ×ËÚÂÜÖƀ!6 ' $ 8 !ÌÖ!ÂÏÖÒ!ÂÆÙÒÅÂ×ÌÑÉ!ÈÒõ!×ËÇ!" ÉõÌÞ ' ÒÒÆ!1ÌÏÒ×! ÓõÒÉõÂÐ!ÇÛÓÂÑÖÌÒÑ!×ËõÒØÉË!ÂÑ!ÂÅ×ÌÙÇ!ÒÑÏÌÑÇ!ÓÇ×Ì×ÌÒÑƀ!!

- Danger in the agricultural industry- RATTMAQ experience

VéroniqueTessier(She/Her) is an Assistant Director at RATTMAQ. The agricultural sector is the most dangerous industry for migrant workers. In Quebec, over the past 10 years, more than 40 migrant workers have died under different circumstances. One of them was Ottoniel- a farm worker from Guatemala who tragically died in Quebec in 2021 while repairing a flat tire on his company vehicle. His case shed light about some hidden issues affecting migrant workers in Canada and the ruling by the Quebec Court of Appeal represents a major step toward acknowledgement of the risks and lack of protection faced by migrant workers.

C. Afternoon Session

1. Workshops highlights

For the last part of the Forum, the audience was divided into small groups and took part in three reflection workshops. It was an opportunity for the participants to collaborate, exchange expertise, experience, mobilization ideas, and network.

a. Setting the stage

- Across Canada, migrant workers are increasingly targeted by violent anti-immigrant rhetoric and are getting more vulnerable to experience abuse – bullying, harassment, physical harm, financial exploitation- in the workplace due to lack of protections. They also face multiples challenges when attempting to report it.

> **Even though I am happy doing my work, accomplishing my tasks, the way I am treated and the new policies put me in a level of uncertainty, always thinking what will happen tomorrow? I feel I have no future!**
>
> **- Migrant worker participant from Manitoba**

- Indeed, access to services is a major issue for migrant workers, especially healthcare and legal services. Most of them rely on private insurance, and there are limited available free legal resources due to limited public funding for precarious migrants' services.
- Recruiters and employers are adopting problematic practices with temporary foreign migrant workers: High recruitment fees, high housing fees and contracts in violating labor regulations in Canada.
- Given the exploitation system associated with the closed working permit system and the policies that increase precarity and vulnerability among migrant workers, the Canadian government should be held accountable, on one hand, for cutting public and much needed public services. And, on the other hand, adopting anti-immigration policies while increasing the country's military and security budget.

b. Raising the profile of the struggle for justice

- There is a growing need to raise public and political awareness on migrant workers' current issues, struggles, and human rights violations through advocacy strategies, and campaigns that provide education and awareness workshops.
- An intersectoral advocacy approach needs to be developed and includes a larger range of allies. For example, national unions, good employers, local and national politicians, local settlement offices, and migrant workers.
- Create safe spaces across the country for migrant workers to speak out, share their experience, and organize on a national level through an educational migrant forum.

c. From ideas to action

- To ensure a substantial mobilization, organize a National Day of Action for migrant workers' rights in Canada.
- Develop a communication and media strategy to increase exposure for migrants' workers struggles and break the anti-immigrant narrative.
- Develop a strategy to increase funding to develop a strong advocacy strategy and mobilization activities.

> **When we see Canada's immigration policies on TFW, it's like we are talking about a logic of 'policies for profit'.**
>
> **-Stacy Gomez, Centre for Migrant Worker Rights, Nova Scotia**

D. Conclusions

1. Develop a multilevel advocacy strategy with a strong political communication approach: that would challenge current and new immigration policies, reinforce the open-work permit campaign and address the barriers for services access for migrant workers including healthcare, decent housing and legal services. This advocacy needs to be developed in collaboration with a broad network of allies, including migrants' rights organizations, national unions, responsible employers, local and national politicians, local settlement offices, and various organizations from civil society.

2. Develop educational workshops and campaigns addressing migrant workers challenges and create a National Day of Action for migrants' workers: with specific objectives, including raising public awareness and providing training on human rights and Canadian labor legislation training.

3. Effective pathways for permanent residency: Conduct a thorough analysis of legal, effective and accessible pathways for Permanent residency for migrant workers.

Thank You

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Instagram: www.instagram.com/openworkpermitsnow/

Twitter: www.x.com/OpenWorkPermits