

# Protection from human trafficking key for Canada's migrant workers, say students



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Metro Ottawa



Horacio Gallegos, a Mexican migrant worker harvests tomatos in Leamington, Ont. on Thursday May 30, 2002.

CP/Jason King

Migrant workers in Canada are often victims of slave labour conditions, says a group of Carleton University students who insist more needs to be done to ensure workers aren't pulled into human trafficking schemes.

"It surprised us just how systemic the abuse is," said Teodora Tellieva, a student at Carleton's Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs, of migrant workers. "The control over every aspect of workers' lives is incredible."

Tamara Lauzon, who worked with Tellieva along with three other Carleton students to investigate the topic, said even her Mom in Prescott was astounded when she began looking into the issue. "She lives in a rural area and sees these workers everyday," said Lauzon. "There is not enough advertisement or awareness about the problem."

Earlier this month, two Ottawa embassies were banned from bringing domestic servants to Canada because of workplace abuses and labour violations, including unpaid wages, surprise changes to contracts and extended hours. Yet these aren't isolated incidents.

Reports of abuse are collected in [Made in Canada](http://metcalfoundation.com/publications-resources/view/made-in-canada/) (<http://metcalfoundation.com/publications-resources/view/made-in-canada/>), a September report documenting workers' stories of 70 hour work weeks, squalid living conditions for agricultural workers on farms, \$100-a-month wages for live-in-caregivers, employers skimming off large chunks of employee wages for "taxes" and invasions of privacy.

In 2000, 89,746 migrant workers were brought in to Canada on work Visas under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program which includes live-in-caregivers and seasonal agricultural workers. Today this number has bloomed to 300,111 workers annually, outstripping the 156,077 economic immigrants who came to Canada in 2011.

Some migrant workers feel trapped and there is more the government needs to do to ensure their rights, said Tellieva, noting there is "no overarching program to investigate working conditions," and "most migrant workers are uneducated about the rights they have."

The work of the group will be presented to Public Safety Canada Tuesday, as part of a report prepared by Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking in Humans.

Still, Canada has been doing more to protect migrant workers' rights, said an email Monday from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Changes to immigration and refugee protection regulations in 2001, a spokesperson wrote, "ensure that job offers are genuine and that employers who don't pay proper wages and provide working conditions consistent with Canadian standards are stopped."

Already, all sex-related businesses such as strip-clubs and massage parlours are barred from hiring migrant workers, the email said.

Right now employers can have their cake and eat it too, said Lauzon. "They don't have to tell the workers what their rights are. There has to be accountability for the employer to actually educate the employee," she said.

The beginning of finding a solution, she said, would be to create a national welcome program for all migrant workers which educates them about their rights on arrival to Canada. An advisory board should also be set up to investigate which job postings for migrant work are legitimate and which run afoul of the law.

“The employer can withhold crucial information about that employees legal rights,” she said, “which opens them up to further exploitation.”



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