

Canada's Laws Fuel Migrant Worker Exploitation: Report

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TORONTO – Canada's reliance on low-wage migrant workers with temporary immigration status is growing but our laws make them vulnerable to abuse, says a new report published by the Metcalf Foundation.

Made in Canada: How the Law Constructs Migrant Workers' Insecurity shows that low-wage migrant workers are brought into Canada on terms that leave them open to exploitation and that present barriers to enforcing basic rights to decent work.

The report highlights that the number of temporary foreign workers in Canada has more than tripled in the past decade. Most low-wage migrant workers in Ontario labour as live-in caregivers; as agricultural workers; and in sectors such as hotels, restaurants, food processing, and construction. They are frequently underpaid, overworked, and denied basic rights like decent housing, and health and safety.

"Since migrant workers don't enjoy the same legal status and protections as permanent residents, they are at higher risk of abuse by employers who take advantage of their vulnerability," says the report's author Fay Faraday, a respected constitutional, labour, and human rights lawyer.

"It's time to put an end to this type of exploitation," says Faraday. "It's a Made in Canada problem – it reflects the way immigration and labour laws and policies fail to adequately regulate Canada's migrant labour market. But there is a Made in Canada solution."

While federal immigration and provincial employment law and policy are typically developed separately, ***Made in Canada*** examines the two systems in an integrated way and recommends our federal and provincial governments do the same.

"At each stage in the labour migration cycle, migrant workers face insecurity that is either created through law or sustained because the law fails to prevent practices that are known to undermine workers' security and capacity to enforce their rights," Faraday says.

Her report documents detailed policy and legal changes that would improve the situation. Sandy Houston, President & CEO of the Metcalf Foundation, calls on federal and provincial governments to take a close look at the flaws in immigration and labour migration policies.

"Cycling a renewable pool of precarious workers in and out of the country is not a model for building a sustainable economy, for building secure communities, or for building a nation," Houston says. "We can do better."

To download the report, visit: www.metcalffoundation.com.