

MIGRANT RIGHTS NETWORK

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20 April, 2020

MP Jenny Kwan
MP Peter Julian
MP Daniel Blaikie

Dear Jenny, Peter, and Daniel

Thank you for speaking with representatives of Migrant Rights Network (MRN) on Saturday, April 19, 2020.

The NDP's support for migrant and undocumented people at this time is critical, and we look forward to coordinating our efforts to ensure crisis relief for essential workers in Canada who are facing homelessness, hunger and dangerous work during COVID-19.

Together, we agreed to the following next steps:

1. NDP will raise concerns and solutions identified by MRN regarding income supports for migrant and undocumented residents at the Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)
2. NDP will request that FINA call on witnesses from MRN to present on challenges faced by migrants at this time and MRN's proposed solutions.
3. MP Jenny Kwan will draft and release a joint letter signed on by other appropriate NDP MPs to echo policy needs identified by MRN.
4. MRN will share stories of our members' challenges to support NDP advocacy on this issue (attached in this letter).

The specific policies proposed by MRN in regards to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) are:

1. Residents without Social Insurance Numbers (SIN) must have access to CERB through the expedited provision of Individual Tax Numbers, with a guarantee that information will not be not shared with immigration authorities.
2. Expired SIN holders should be able to apply for CERB.
3. Seasonal TFWP and SAWP workers should have access to CERB for delays in contracts, both inside and outside the country.
4. Migrant workers who are forced to leave jobs should not be deemed to have "quit voluntarily" and access CERB.
5. CERB should be accessible to migrants who did not earn at least \$5,000 in the previous 12 months.

Right now, Canada needs workers who are sick or are potential carriers to stay home. This will simply not be possible for migrant and undocumented workers if they aren't given adequate income supports. Furthermore, undocumented workers are in every sector of work deemed essential in this crisis. To flatten the curve, to protect the economy, and to protect human rights, we need to ensure access to CERB to workers without valid Social Insurance Numbers and others that are being excluded. The NDP's support to further these demands is crucial.

Please also see:

- [Our letter to Cabinet dated April 14, 2020 where we outline these priorities in greater detail](#) and
- [Our detailed memo on Individual Tax Numbers.](#)

In the next few pages, I've included stories of our members who are facing immense difficulties in accessing income supports. You can see coverage from our recent press conference on [Canadian Press / CBC](#), [Toronto Star](#), [Global News](#), [National Observer](#) and [Radio-Canada](#).

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to working with you in our joint efforts to ensure access to income supports for migrant and undocumented people inside and outside of Canada.

Please contact me at hussan@migrantworkersalliance.org or 416 453 3632 to continue our conversations.

Thank you,



Syed Hussan

**Executive Director, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change
For Migrant Rights Network**

Migrant Rights Network is Canada's Migrant Coalition, and includes Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network), Caregivers' Action Centre, Centre des travailleuses et travailleurs immigrants, Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto, Collaborative Network to End Exploitation, Cooper Institute and the Prince Edward Island Action Team for Migrant Workers' Rights, Durham Region Migrant Solidarity Network, FCJ Refugee House, Fuerza Migrante Vancouver, GABRIELA Ontario, IAVGO Community Legal Clinic, Income Security Advocacy Centre, Migrant Students United, Migrant Worker Solidarity Network – Manitoba, Migrant Workers Alliance – Niagara, Ontario, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, Migrant Workers Centre - Vancouver, Migrant Resource Centre Canada, Migrante (Alberta, BC, Canada, Manitoba, Ontario), No One Is Illegal (Toronto, Halifax, London, Vancouver), Migrant Resource Centre Canada, OCASI – Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, OHIP For All, PCLS Community Legal Clinic, Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture (RAMA), Okanagan region, BC, Sanctuary Health, Solidarity Across Borders, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, UFCW Canada, UNIFOR, Vancouver Committee for Domestic Workers and Caregivers Rights, Workers Action Centre and Workers United.

Queen

Tested positive for COVID-19

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Had I not been working as a Caregiver I would most likely be out of a job. Also because I am a caregiver it puts me at risk of making my patient ill or myself because I am traveling outside.

I have no family here; it would depend solely on me to cope with my well being.

If I don't work I don't qualify for any of the prepared packages the Prime Minister speaks off because I don't have a Social Insurance Number.

I cannot acquire welfare because this action will forfeit the fact that I should be able to support myself from my immigration stance.

I spoke with my 71 year old dad tonight. He couldn't sleep after my news today and he was intensely sad. This made me feel terrible.

I put on a bright face on our video call and I assured him I would be ok and not to worry. Do I know if I would be ok? Absolutely not.

When I got the news that I tested positive the nurse on the other end didn't have any information to give other than to say stay in isolation and if my symptoms changed for the worse call 911.

I am doing my uttermost best to stay calm and monitor the fact that I am asymptomatic. Firstly I think a lot more people may be infected than reported simply because they are like me so they won't get tested.

The process of getting tested is very daunting, not very informative, and there is a huge fear amongst the workers at the testing station, which you can't blame them for.

At this point my mind is on survival mode with every breath I take. Wondering how and if my body is gonna cope with this. The full extent of this in my life has not completely set in mentally. I don't know how I will pay for any of this.

Liliana Trejo

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My name is Liliana Trejo. I am Colombian and a single mother. I left Colombia fleeing domestic violence. I arrived in Montreal 12 years ago as an asylum seeker. My claim was rejected and I became undocumented. That is when I saw the other face of violence, the invisible violence of immigration policy. When I still had status, I worked as an orderly in an old age home. I experienced sexual harassment in that workplace. Wherever I turned for help, no one helped me and I fell into a deep depression and became suicidal. Once I lost my status I went from one exploitative and precarious job to another through temp agencies.

That is how I found the Immigrant Workers' Centre in Montreal and the women's committee of the Temp Agency Workers' Association where I am now active in defending my labour rights.

Like many of my other fellow women without status, we have lost our jobs because of COVID19. The impact on us like thousands of undocumented people in Canada has been serious. We are invisible, no one - not the government or society - wants to see or hear us. If this virus does not kill us, hunger will.

The government has provided economic support for many workers and employers. There are reports every day about how this pandemic is affecting different sectors of work, and even how it has impacted women and gender inequality - but no one is talking about undocumented women. The level of stress, anxiety and fear we are living is intolerable, even worse than before. The police have more power than ever, and they can stop you on the street for any reason. In the name of public health we could end up in a detention centre. This suffering and anxiety, we are forced to live it in silence and in the shadows, because this society does not want to accept that we are a part of it, and the government refuses to protect us.

I lost my job because of COVID19. Who is going to pay my rent and my basic needs? How am I supposed to support my daughter who has also now fallen into a deep depression? Who is helping us?

Undocumented people are also human beings. We work, we contribute in tremendous ways to this economy. Our labour keeps this machine running. We clean other women's houses, we take care of children and old people. We clean offices, hospitals, supermarkets. We work in fields and factories. Our labour is everywhere. We work when and where we can but we are always working because the bills don't pay themselves and because we have families to take care of. Many undocumented people work on the frontlines in this health crisis, putting themselves at risk,

working in essential services without any rights or protections. It is time that we be counted and we be treated with the importance and respect we deserve as part of this society. It is time for the federal government to regularize us and give us all status.

We need the government to assume its responsibility for us and give us access to all the protections and supports it has put in place. And above all, we want guaranteed access - safely and securely - to federal emergency benefits. Otherwise, if we don't die of COVID19, we will die of anxiety, depression, isolation, and hunger.

Danilo Dee

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My name is Danilo Dee. I'm a temporary foreign worker, I came to Alberta in 2009. I'm currently residing in Edmonton-Centre. I was initially hired as a cleaner when I came here. I left my family, my two lovely daughters. They are the reason why I am here in the first place. Last time I saw them was in 2013. It's been 7 years since I last saw them. They are now 10 years old and 19 years old. I missed them.

I worked at a cleaning company cleaning at the University of Alberta when I got here in Edmonton. I was also involved in the unionization of that company in 2011 because of exploitative working conditions. We were successful but after my work permit expired I had to look for another LMO (it was LMO at that time) Everything was going well. In 2014 I received my AINP certificate and I applied for PR in 2015 and in that year I was approved for a one year Open Work Permit and in 2017 of January my application for extension of Open work Permit was refused with no clear explanation.

I was told by a lawyer that the officer was not convinced. I didn't know what that meant. I've been trying for other pathways since. I have spent thousands of dollars. When I got my denial and notice of removal, I made a very hard decision to stay. I made that decision because I want to make sure that my daughters will be able to live and go to school. I have no future back home. I have invested so much here in Alberta already.

I have been non-status for 3 years now and it's not easy. I have made lots of adjustments. For 8 years since I came in 2009 until 2017. I have diligently paid my taxes. I'm a good Albertan, I still am. I volunteered in different organizations to help the community. I wanted to prove that I belong here and I deserve to be here. I have done nothing wrong. I needed to continue to work cash jobs because my SIN is not valid anymore. But does that mean I don't pay taxes. I live in Edmonton, I pay rent, I shop and do my groceries. I did not steal anything. But this Covid19 virus made it harder than it is for me and people like me. I still need to eat and live. I believe we also should not be left behind. We contribute to Canada, to Alberta's economy I believe we also deserve to get some income support during this time. I'm not asking for handouts, I'm ready to work and ready to do what it takes to be a resident here. That also includes fighting for my right as a worker regardless of my status. We need income support for all precarious low wage workers regardless of our status. That includes access to health care. We are workers like anybody else we don't deserve to be left behind.

Alina Przybyl

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My name is Alina. I've been in Canada for 3 years and I was born and raised in Poland. I have moved to Canada, because I wanted to live in a stable and safe country and I found a study program that I was really interested in. I am an international student and, before COVID-19 crisis started, I was getting ready to graduate from the Assaulted Women and Children Program at George Brown College in Toronto. I live in Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

When you are an international student, your SIN expires with your permit. My study permit expired at the end of January, but I had applied for extension back in December 2019, so I was just waiting to get the decision so I could extend my SIN number. Because of delays in immigration processing times, my permit extension has not been processed and my SIN has now expired. Now I am on implied status, and I cannot apply for CERB.

To be able to pay for all my expenses in Canada, like rent and tuition, I was working as a waitress while in school. The restaurant I worked at was closed on March 15th because of COVID-19 and me and all my coworkers were laid off. As a result of losing my job and also not qualifying for support because my SIN is expired, I have no idea how I'm going to be able to pay for rent and food, especially in the long term.

As an international student my situation was already challenging before all of this happened. International students can only work 20 hours off campus, and surviving in Toronto on 20h of work a week is so difficult and I was not in a position to save up for a situation like that. During the school year, I was literally living from one paycheck to another, so it's so difficult to get by now. Especially since no one knows how long we are going to be out of work.

It is hard to believe that migrants like me can't receive any support because of a formality like expired Social Insurance Number. It's difficult to process that in a time of a global crisis, when we've been hearing so many times that 'we are in this together', many of us are still facing barriers and there are still people who are considered deserving of help and those who are not. And I think it's so unfair, because we are all affected and we should all be supported. Regardless of our legal status or visa application, especially since that can be affected by processing times that are out of our control. I just would like for me and all the other migrants to be treated fairly - we are not asking for anything we don't deserve.

Gustavo Antonio

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My name is Gustavo Antonio and I am 56 years old. I am from Veracruz, Mexico. I have worked in Canada for 17 years under the temporary foreign worker program, with seasons ranging from 6 to 8 months.

With the current COVID-19 problem, I have not been able to go to Canada to work. Given that our income is solely from the work I do in Canada, I am experiencing tough financial times. I can't pay for the bills to support my family, for example, for my daughter who goes to school which is expensive.

I think it is fair, and that I have the right to receive help from the Canadian government because, like any other worker, I have a SIN. And because we are migrant workers in Canada, we can't have a stable job in Mexico, and the Mexican government won't pay attention to our struggles and needs for now.

For that reason and through this channel, I ask to be considered for financial aid to pay for bills for my family, provided I have worked in Canada for 17 years, which leads me to believe I have the right to access financial aid.

Lili

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I moved to Canada 5 years ago and live in Toronto. I became undocumented after my refugee claim was rejected last year. I was abused by my ex-boyfriend. I have been working in the sex industry to support myself and pay for my legal fee. I have booked the flight ticket to fly back to my home country since March but I am not able to get on the plane because the flight has been canceled.

However, I am not able to get the CERB because my SIN number was expired. I really need income to survive. Although I really want to stop working now, I cannot do so because I have no income to pay for rent and food.

I used to work in an apartment and live in the workplace. However, I was forced to leave that place because my boss has shut down the workplace.

I only have twenty dollars in my pocket. I was not able to pay for the rent.

I have been staying with a few clients in order to have a place to sleep. Even if they are abusive, I still need to accept the mistreatment.

Last week, I was seriously physically abused by a client and ran away from him. I have no money and no place to go. Butterfly (support organization) helped me to call a shelter. But it was all full. I am also afraid that I will get infected in the shelter and I also don't know if I got infected already by my client. This is not safe for others too.

I am not able to be socially isolated even if I want to. I still need to take the risk and keep working and meeting clients and staying with different clients. I urge the government to provide income for all regardless of our immigration status. We need money to survive!

Anonymous

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My husband and I are a young couple from Mexico. We wanted a family but wanted to raise our children away from all the danger that we lived every day there.

Being pregnant for the first time, I was very stressed and worried watching the situation get worse, with the thefts, assaults, kidnapping of children, and shootouts.

Living like that means having very limited options, and with our baby on the way the only thing we wanted was to get our child as far away from all that as we could.

We came here to Canada to Vancouver without knowing anyone or having anything here. We have been robbed, lied to, and cheated. It is difficult to not have status.

We love and have respect for this country; as migrants we want to contribute, we want to show that we didn't come here to take things.

We want to pay taxes, we want to contribute to the economy but we need work permits and permanent residency, even citizenship, because we have dreams of a future here in Canada.

Because of COVID19, it is very difficult for us to pay the rent, for food, diapers, formula, all the day to day expenses.

We don't get any kind of help from the government. We are very concerned and stressed because we have no options and we have a baby we need to care and provide for, provide a home for, so that he can have a good life and not suffer this stress, worry and sadness at seeing what is happening around us.