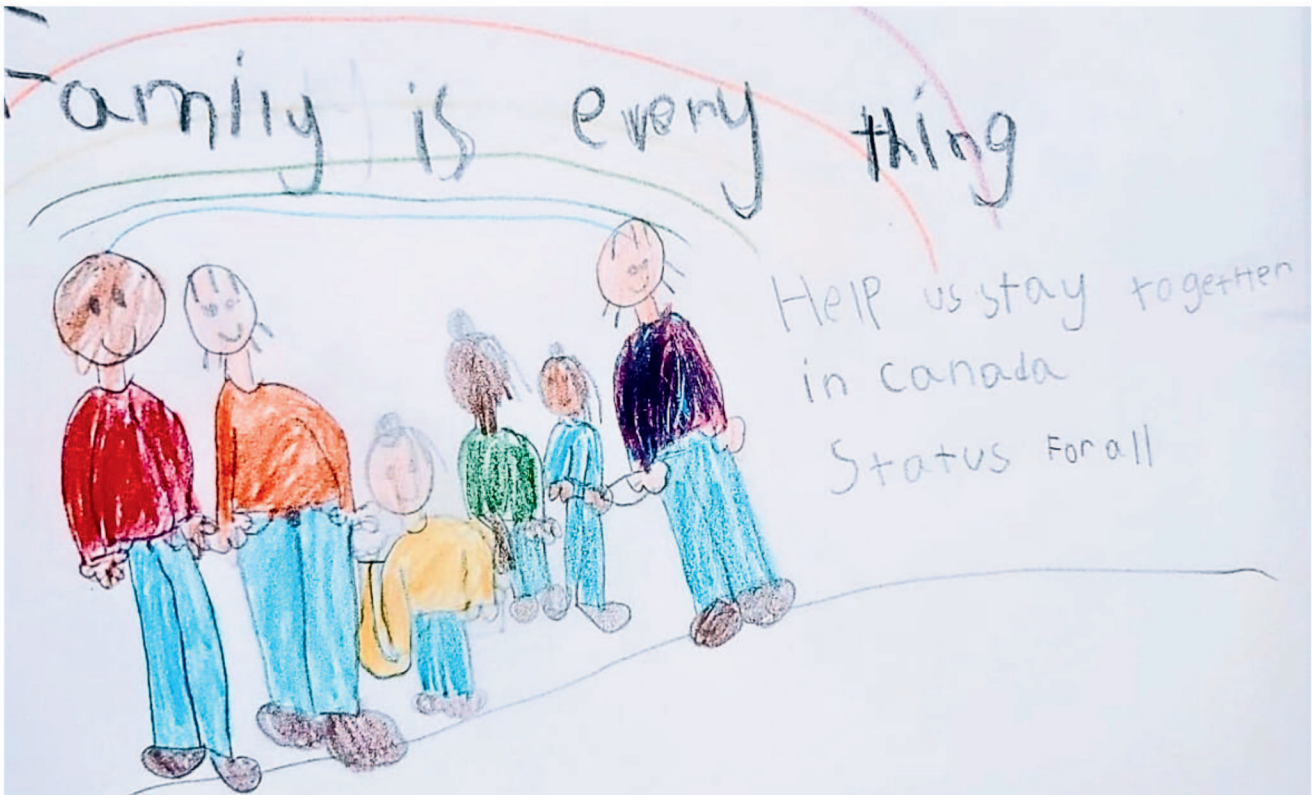




Migrant Workers  
Alliance for  
Change



# FAMILY WORK PERMIT FOR AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

AUGUST 2023

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1279 migrant farm workers participated in a survey on family work permits.

**98.30%** of survey respondents said that the government of **Canada should allow all migrants, including those in agriculture, to be together with their families and receive work permits.**

**93.45%** believe seasonal workers (8 months or less contract) should be able to have family with them in Canada. **There should be no exclusion for seasonal workers.**

**89.53%** of survey respondents said that they would **rent accommodations for their families.**

Workers clearly know the options available to them and the potential difficulties they may face. **58%** of respondents noted that finding housing would be difficult, and **55.16%** noted difficulty with the high cost of rent. Just under **50%** of respondents were also concerned about getting jobs for spouses and children. Over **40%** were also concerned about access to healthcare, and access to schooling and cost of travel.

**When asked *Would you bring your family if you were not sure you could support them or afford it?***

**An incredibly high 97.3% of the respondents said No**

This shows that workers will not choose to bring their families if there are any concerns about getting rental properties, or paying for their travel or housing. **Even if a program was created, workers would make individual choices based on their circumstances before deciding to apply for work permits.**

**93.02%** of survey respondents want **permanent resident status on arrival because it's the only way migrants can access essential services and protect themselves against abuse.**

In short, migrant farmworkers are united in their call for family work permits and permanent resident status for all.

These submissions are jointly made by Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC), RATTMAQ: Réseau d'aide aux travailleuses et travailleurs migrants agricoles du Québec, Cooper Institute, Sanctuary Health and RAMA.

For further information, please contact [info@migrantworkersalliance.org](mailto:info@migrantworkersalliance.org).

August 21, 2023

**" I CRY MOST DAYS WHEN I SEE OTHER FAMILIES PASSING ME BY, I MISS MY OWN. "**



All photographs in this report are of agricultural worker members of MWAC

# BACKGROUND

## THE EXCLUSION OF MIGRANT AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

On December 2, 2022, Canada announced:

Starting in January 2023, through a temporary 2-year measure, Canada will expand eligibility to work in Canada to spouses and working-age children through a phased approach for workers at all skill levels. This would include families of workers in health care, trades and hospitality, for example. As a result of this new approach, it is estimated that family members of more than 200,000 foreign workers could begin working in Canada, offering a greater opportunity for both foreign workers seeking to work in Canada and for employers addressing their labour needs.

The temporary measure will be implemented in 3 phases to ensure its successful implementation:

- Phase 1 will enable family members of workers coming to Canada through the high-wage stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program or the International Mobility Program to apply for an open work permit.
- Phase 2 aims to expand the measure to the family members of workers from the low-wage stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, following consultations.
- Phase 3 will include consultation with agricultural partners and stakeholders to assess operational feasibility for expanding the measure to family members of agricultural workers.

In this way, Canada yet again excluded agricultural workers in particular from access to a right that was made available to all others choosing to "consult" instead of committing to inclusion.

While the stated reasoning for this is that agricultural workers live in employer provided housing, the truth is that many other migrant workers also do, including but not limited to aquaculture and fishery workers in Canada's Atlantic provinces; live-in care workers; workers in the tourism industry and often workers in smaller towns and communities.

Families of workers in other seasonal industries, such as tourism, hospitality, construction, trucking and aquaculture, are also not excluded from accessing these work permits even though these industries that are similarly unpredictable, and often just as dependent on the weather.

Rather migrant agricultural workers are being singularly excluded, as they often are, as part of a long-term approach of treating migrant agricultural workers as an exception under the incorrect belief that agriculture is an industry like no other. This exclusion is a direct result of systematic lobbying by agricultural employers and the electoral power of agricultural employers.

Agricultural employers have successfully scuttled attempts to create national housing standards already, which were proposed in December 2020 but then effectively withdrawn in December 2022. And now, the lack of suitable housing is the argument to not allow migrant agricultural workers families to join them.

Considering that no other specific "consultations" were done with "partners and stakeholders to assess operational feasibility" for other groups of migrants - there is no need to undertake one for agricultural workers. All families are equal, all families deserve to be together.

## MIGRANT AGRICULTURAL WORKERS AS DECISION MAKERS

In a meeting of Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC) and IRCC in May 2023, MWAC learned that no formal consultation would be conducted with migrant agricultural workers themselves despite the December 2, 2022 announcement. This is also not an exception. Agricultural employers and their lobbying representatives have unfettered access to departmental and political staff and elected representatives at all times. Policy makers internalize the perspective of employers, rarely if ever, interacting with the workers. These long-standing relationships sustain the status quo, which is the well-documented abuse and exploitation of migrant agricultural workers. Even where consultations take place, the voices and opinions of employers supersede those of workers. **Employers are at best minor stakeholders in what is a decision that should be made by migrant workers and their families. Employers should not be able to determine federal government policy regarding their employees' families.**



# METHOD

## SURVEY: HEARING FROM MIGRANT AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

To ensure that migrant workers could directly speak to the federal government, MWAC requested the Temporary Workers Policy office of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to create a list of questions for input from migrant workers.

MWAC migrant agricultural worker members and staff converted the questions into a simplified digital survey with a mix of checkbox options for workers to pick from and open ended questions. The options for checkboxes were determined by migrant agricultural worker leaders. Surveys were conducted via SurveyMonkey from June 23 to July 23, 2023. The survey was distributed via WhatsApp and Facebook.

# WHAT MIGRANT WORKERS WANT

**1,279 responses to a digital survey of migrant farmworkers is unprecedented.** This number is higher than other recent surveys even on issues such as housing or the Agri-Food Immigration Pilot that MWAC has conducted. It is clear that this is a issue of great resonance and one that matters a lot to migrant workers.

## OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR WORK PERMITS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

**98.30%** of survey respondents said that the government of **Canada should allow all migrants, including those in agriculture, to be together with their families and receive work permits.**

## SEASONAL WORKERS SHOULD NOT BE EXCLUDED FROM FAMILY WORK PERMITS

**93.45%** believe seasonal workers (8 months or less contract) should be able to have family with them in Canada. **There should be no exclusion for seasonal workers.**

**"I WOULD LIKE NOT TO ABANDON MY FAMILY DURING THE TIME THAT I FULFILL MY EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT, SINCE BOTH AS A COUPLE AND MY CHILDREN SUFFER THE SEPARATION."**



**"WORKERS DESERVE TO HAVE THEIR FAMILY WITH THEM, THEY ARE THE MOTIVATION TO WORK."**



## WHAT WORKERS SAID



**We should be able to go home to our families every day after working so hard. So sad to know a few farmworkers' bodies had to return to Jamaica to their family only after they died.**

*It doesn't matter how many months each person spends away from their family. Life is short every minute counts when the family is not there.*

*8 month work does the hard part of the job, it's best having family members to help ease some of the stress. Families should also get work, study permits when entering Canada.*

*The more families are united the more productivity on the jobs and they too can work along and help improve the economy of Canada*

*It is better to stay focused and have a positive attitude when you're leaving work to go home to be with your family regardless of the length of your contract.*

*If a pet is so important to Canadians, what would it mean for the worker to be with his family?*

*Hopefully the government gives us the opportunity since many of us leave the family to have a job in Canada for more than 20 seasons.*

*Because even though it is season 6 or 8 months, in the family anything can happen.*

*One day separation from family is as painful as one year.*

*Because a man is at his best when he has the love and support of his family.*

*Because eight months away from home and family is a long time.*

*Because being with your family you are calmer and work better because you know that at the end of each day you will see your family.*

*To have a better family union, because we are away 8 months, the time we live in Canada is longer.*

*We'd have better performance at work, since we'd have higher morale and self-esteem, we would perform better at work in less time.*

*Everyone is a part of the workforce so you should include them as well.*

*8 months is a long period of time, countless things happen, for example illnesses, problems of mistrust within the couple and of course missing the children's birthdays, that marks them for a long time.*

*The main reason is that here in Canada we come for about 8 months or even longer and it is necessary to be with the family because a lot of times the work schedules are very long up to 15 hours of work and sometimes there is no time to talk with the family by cellphone.*

*It would be very good since being with the family helps you emotionally and performance at work. There would be fewer problems among the family as is the case with many when distance separates them. Distance affects children and sometimes in eight months the family is lost.*

*Because it is a long time, 8 months, that we are away from our children and partner.*

*Well, because some of us have been living for many years for 8 months each year in Canada and we are very far from the family, having our family will be beneficial for us. I have been in the program for almost 20 years and I would like to have my family with me.*

*Because it is important, 8 months is a long time to be away from my family. There are many opportunities in Canada and if they are with me I will know how to get ahead.*

*It is a long time, 8 months in Canada, it's the majority of the year. Therefore family is needed.*

*Because a day without the family is like spending months, imagine how much is 8 months, the best moments in life are lived next to the family. We separate because of need. If they gave us the opportunity to bring them to live in Canada, it would be much better.*





## FAMILY SEPARATION IS CAUSING A CRISIS



My family is extremely vulnerable without me in Jamaica 😞 especially where I'm from. Recently my little baby boy almost got abducted while coming from school and it's because I'm so far away from them hence, I'm not able to protect and watch over them even though I'm more than able to provide for them due to the fact that I'm here I'm Canada but, what sense does it make I'm I'm able to provide but not able to protect? trust me, it's very hard cause I'm well established in Canada work wise so it wouldn't make any sense for me to go back home to nothing in Jamaica cause there's limited job opportunities and I'm already here working and contributing to the Canadian economy so at least my family deserves to be here with me where they can be properly cared for. I would be honored to see the Canadian government honor our request by granting us farmworkers and our family the opportunity to be together as we're supposed to be. 🙏

My name is Anthony Grant and I'm asking Mr Trudeau and his team to PLEASE LOOK INTO OUR 😞 PLEA 😞 AND GIVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO ONE WITH OUR FAMILY 🙏

My children always wondering if we still are a family

I lost my first wife from being apart for too long

**Seeing my daughter tell me not to come to Canada anymore breaks my heart and then says that she is coming with me, to bring her in my suitcase, is very difficult.**

I have missed graduation for all my kids and their recognition for their accomplishments, and there are also deaths in my family which I wasn't able to attend the funeral to say my last goodbye 📖

Things are not going good with us in the relationship between us so far. We need to see each other every day to grow as a family.

Trying to finance two homes has caused me to become financially unstable.

Unable to just relax and not think about family back home

My wife having problems with the kids because no father figure is around

Having no one to talk to and my mother and siblings being mentally sick due to separation from me.

My wife gets so depressed and often feels like giving up on the relationship. Sometimes she says this is no type of relationship. Many times it almost causes separation.

Almost every day I am stressed. I feel like I'm in prison.

Problems due to being separated from the children and from the wife, for example they feel lonely and stop eating, the children become more naughty and disobey their mother... problems at school due to the bullying of their father not being with them. You are not with them on holidays or important dates, they feel alone, for example, birthdays, etc.

Diseases that my family has had and I have not been able to be there to support my wife and my son, is very hard for a father who is far away.

It is not good to be separated for 8 months from the family. A lot of communication is lost, it is not the same to be in person with them than to talk on a cell phone

Because of the work, they lose respect from the children, they complain that you are not there in the moments that they need you most in graduations and on their birthdays and love is lost, so the father is absent because he is in Canada on the job.

Physical and psychological damage to the partner and children due to the absence of a father, a bad development, emotion, irreversible damage.

My wife had an accident twice... two of my children were burned by leaving the gas open.

My wife passed away, I lost her company and my daughters.

For the 2 years of my contract or more it is difficult not being able to visit the family and losing the love of the children who are growing day by day, they are little ones, they do not understand why one travels and not being able to be close to them for a long time.

Your support network is broken, which in my country is normally my family.





## FAMILY SEPARATION IS CAUSING A CRISIS



### **My 2-year-old daughter got seriously ill and I couldn't be with her, my wife faced the situation alone.**

*It is difficult to know when you leave work and arrive at the house where you rent and not find your wife and children. In my case, even for communication it is complicated because where my family lives in my country there is no network coverage, they have to sacrifice to look for a signal to be able to communicate.*

*I cannot help my daughters with their school, it is difficult to make the decisions from a distance. They are not effective and all the time. I am alone missing them*

*Every year that my family separates, because I have to come to Canada to work since there are no opportunities in Mexico, when the time comes for me to leave, my daughters suffer emotionally and suffer physical and verbal attacks by people who know they are alone.*

*My children every time come to me they stay crying, for days my wife struggles to make them eat and they feel sad. And none of that should happen.*

*The loss of my 16-year-old daughter for not being there.*

*The death of one of my daughters in 2017.*

*It is difficult to be 8 months without them. The calls are not enough. We both feel lonely. My daughters have cried a lot.*

*My daughter cries at night saying when I'm going to arrive, and that breaks my heart but it's all to give her a better life and move them forward.*

*I have not been with my son, wife, mother, father on their birthdays. My grandfather passed away and I couldn't be with my whole family.*

*My baby was born while I was not in my country of origin. There are my wife and my daughter alone, my wife without me being able to help her and my baby growing up without the love of her father.*



**How are you affected by not having your family with you?**

**76.20%**

I am missing the best years of my kids

**48.63%**

My children or spouse have bad experiences when we were separated

**46.81%**

I am lonely

**46.47%**

My relationship with my spouse is suffering

**46.47%**

My relationship with my children is suffering

**34.05%**

My mental health is affected

**31.55%**

My mental health is affected



## FAMILY PERMITS WOULD CHANGE LIVES FOR THE BETTER



**We could have a better future. I could give my daughters the opportunity to learn another language that could be useful in their future and I could give them a better education and I would never lose a day without them again. My wife and my daughters are very important.**

*I would be so happy. I love to see my family when I come from work that makes my day. I enjoy being a father*

*It would allow me to be a part of their lives not only vocally but physically and allow us to do a lot of family stuff together*

*It would be so much easier to feel at home and at peace*

*It would be great because we would both fight and work together for a better future for our daughter.*

*More love. I would be able to accompany my spouse to the doctor checkups.*

*I would be able to save a bit more money so that I could take care of them in a more meaningful way.*

*It would make me better at my work and give me a free mind.*

*I could do for my children what my father, who was in the program too, didn't do for me.*

*We would play with our children and spend more time with my wife.*

*I could give better values to my children as a father, being separated with only mom playing the role of dad and mom. If my family were with me my emotional state would improve 100%. The family comes first and foremost.*

*Having them together I would enjoy my children and the couple would be calmer without thinking about how they are or if they are sick being able to care for them or take them to the doctor or and my life would be easier for me like all married couples being together.*

*My performance at work and peace of mind when I see that I am close to my son would be better because I would not be far from him and I would not lose the best moments of being with him.*

*The economic income would be better.*

*We could live like a normal family, and watch my son grow up in his best years!*

*My children could have access to a better education and I could better protect them by having them around.*

*Having my partner here with me would be of great help and importance in our relationship and it would be a great blessing if they gave me the opportunity to bring my partner to Canada.*

*Family union, personal motivation, better quality of life, better health, safety and living conditions.*

*We would be fighting together and we would not neglect our children.*

*They would give me the strength of every day to be working, I would be very happy and knowing that I would also no longer suffer and my partner would not suffer.*

*Joy for being with my family and watching over them if they get sick.*

*I would integrate better with society. I love Canada. Everything would be perfect for me and my family. I miss my wife and son very much.*

*We could have a better time together and be able to enjoy life, start new projects, help in the development and education of my children to make them people with good values, our hearts would be happier.*

*I would have better health without worries that something happens to my family or extortion or threats since in Guatemala there are many of these things here in Canada we would live better and with more work.*

*Every day I would get up strong and I would look forward to leaving work to come and see my family 🤗 and eat together watching movies or games as a family I would be the happiest man I would not mind working in the rain ☔ or having a bad time telling to see my family at the end of the day.*

**We would be fulfilling our dreams together.**







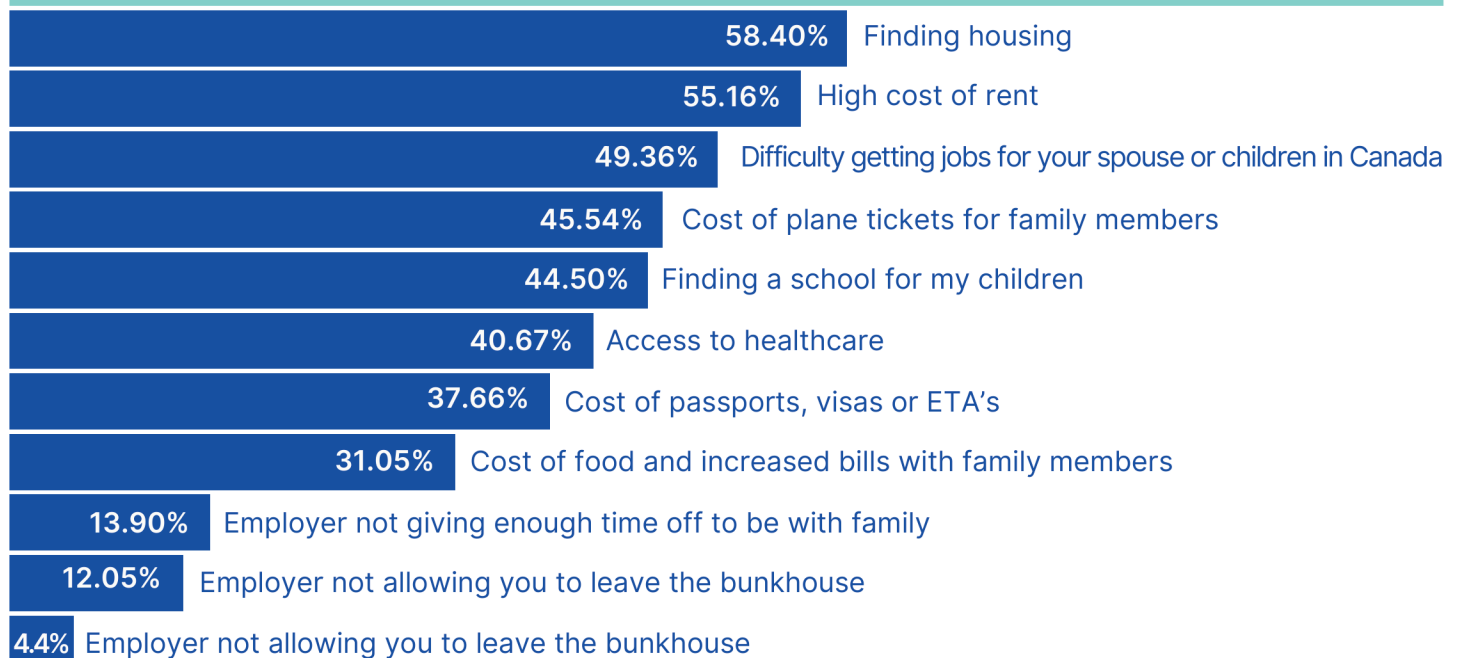
## MIGRANT WORKERS HAVE A PLAN - THEY WOULD RENT FOR THEIR FAMILIES

89.53% of survey respondents said that they would rent accommodations for their families, 11.85% said they would rent a house with their co-workers, and 2.53% said they have family in Canada that their spouses and children could live with.

Workers clearly know the options available to them and the potential difficulties they may face. 58% of respondents noted that finding housing would be difficult, and 55.16% noted difficulty with the high cost of rent. Just under 50% of respondents were concerned about getting jobs for spouses and children. Over 40% were also concerned about access to healthcare, and access to schooling and cost of travel.

This shows that workers are quite thoughtful about their situation and are well aware of the challenges they may face if their families join them.

## WHAT WOULD MAKE IT HARD FOR YOUR SPOUSE AND CHILDREN TO JOIN YOU IN CANADA?



## WORKERS WOULD NOT BRING THEIR FAMILIES WITH THEM IF THEY COULD NOT AFFORD IT OR ENSURE DECENT HOUSING

*Would you bring your family if you were not sure you could support them or afford it?*

A whopping **97.3%** of respondents said **No**

This shows that workers will not choose to bring their families if there are any concerns about getting rental properties, or paying for their travel or housing. This means that even if a program was created, workers would make individual choices based on their circumstances before deciding to apply for work permits.



### REASONS FOR NOT BRINGING FAMILIES



*My only reason for not bringing my family to Canada would have been if my wife wouldn't be able to work and or my children wouldn't be able to attend school, also if we were not able to access health care.*

*If I bring them to Canada and I can't get time off to spend with them and for them to see my poor living condition*

*If I can't take care of them and there is nothing in place for them how will they live?*

*That the employer does not give time off or there is no work to maintain the cost of feeding my family.*

*If there was no access to long-term residency.*

*I don't want them to come to suffer.*

*I would not bring my family if there is no equal rights or improvements in wages.*

*Lack of immigration status, low wages, and lack of education.*

*Make them suffer from climate change.*

*If I only had a 6 or 8 month contract, I wouldn't do it.*

*Not having stability for them, the expenses are exaggerated with respect to visas, plane tickets, passports.*

*Because I come for very little time, and the children would lose school. Also if the employer didn't support me.*

*That the employer does not give time off or there is no work to maintain the cost of feeding my family.*

*Due to lack of a home to offer my family, not having the right to medicine or even a doctor and not being able to have a good salary to be able to feed my family.*

*If the pay is not right for me to help them out until they get a job.*

*If we have a good life in my country.*

*That the boss does not allow me. Not to have a good salary or that the bosses are racists.*



## MIGRANT WORKERS WANT PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS FOR ALL

**93.02%** of respondents **want permanent resident status on arrival.** 1.6% said no, and 6.18% were not sure.

**It's the only way migrants can access essential services and protect themselves against abuse.**

This response is consistent with all other surveys done of migrant workers where permanent resident status is the priority demand.



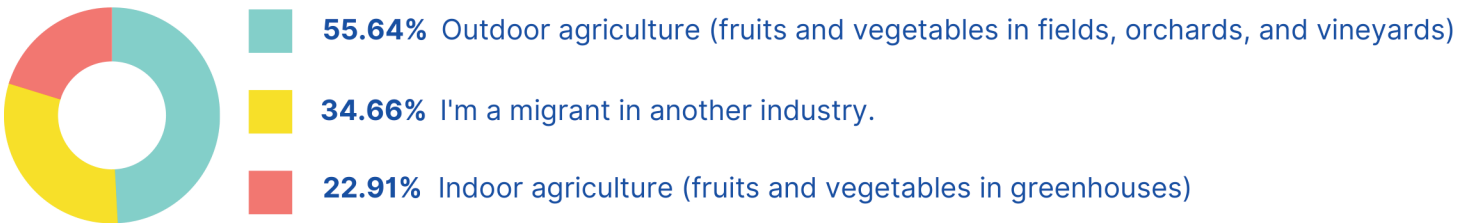
# THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Of the 1,279 surveys respondents:

## AGRICULTURAL AND ANIMAL WORKERS

About 73% of the respondents are indoor or outside agricultural workers. 34.66% respondents indicated that they were migrants in another industry - almost all of them were in dairy, or animal husbandry including cattle ranches, poultry. Some of the ones that indicated "another industry" are actually working in agriculture but as machine operators, tractor, forklift and truck drivers - these workers are in "primary agriculture" but are misclassified and being underskilled.

Some respondents were from fisheries and meat processing - as those are not part of the primary agricultural stream, all their responses were removed from the survey analysis and are not reflected in this submission.



## MAJORITY SEASONAL WORKERS

Over 65% of the respondents are on seasonal work permits, while 29% are on one or two year permits. This is consistent with the overall division of workers in the primary agricultural stream of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program.



## MAJORITY FROM QUEBEC AND ONTARIO

Respondents came from 9 of Canada's provinces and territories, with nearly 46% from Quebec and over 35% from Ontario.

- 46.74%** Quebec
- 35.40%** Ontario
- 9.49%** British Columbia
- 3.83%** Nova Scotia
- 3.31%** New Brunswick
- 1.00%** Prince Edward Island
- 0.46%** Alberta
- 0.23%** Nunavut
- 0.11%** Northwest Territories

## BETWEEN 1 & 3 CHILDREN

31% of the respondents have 2 children, 22.55% have 3 and 19.25% have 1 child.

- 31.09%** 2 Children
- 22.55%** 3 Children
- 19.25%** 1 Child
- 10.36%** 4 Children
- 10.36%** 0 Children
- 6.49%** 5+ Children

## MOST ARE MARRIED

**89.98%**

of respondents are married with a spouse.

## SPANISH & ENGLISH SPEAKERS

62% of respondents filled out the Spanish survey, the rest (38%) filled out the English survey.



# THE SURVEY

## 1. What kind of work do you do?

- Outdoor agriculture (fruits and vegetables in fields, orchards, and vineyards)
- Indoor agriculture (fruits and vegetables in greenhouses)
- Meat processing
- Fisheries
- I'm a migrant in another industry (Please specify which)

## 2. What type of contract do you have currently?

- Seasonal - 8 months or less
- 1 or 2+ year
- No contract
- Currently outside Canada

## 3. What province do you work in or last worked in?

- Alberta
- British Columbia
- Manitoba
- New Brunswick
- Newfoundland and Labrador
- Northwest Territories
- Nova Scotia
- Nunavut
- Ontario
- Prince Edward Island
- Quebec
- Saskatchewan
- Yukon

## 4. Do you have a spouse (wife, husband, common law partner)?

- Yes
- No

## 5. How many children do you have (including adopted & step-children)?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

## 6. Do you want the government of Canada to allow all migrants, including those in agriculture and food production, to be together with your families?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

## 7. How are you affected by not having your family with you? (Choose all that are true for you)

- I am lonely
- My relationship with my spouse is suffering
- My relationship with my children is suffering
- My mental health is affected
- I am always stressed
- My children or spouse have bad experiences when we were separated
- I am missing the best years of my kids

## 8. Share any other negative experiences you have had as a result of family separation.

## 9. How would your life improve if your spouse and children were with you? (Choose all that are true for you)

- Calm and peacefulness (peace of mind being together)
- More connected to my children
- Better relationship with spouse
- Better physical health
- Better emotional health
- Better integration in the community
- Seeing my children grow

## 10. Share any other positive things that would happen if your family was with you.

## 11. What would make it hard for your spouse and children to join you in Canada? (Select all that you agree with)

- Employer not giving enough time off to be with family
- Employer not allowing you to leave the bunkhouse
- Finding housing
- High cost of rent
- Finding a school for my children
- Access to healthcare
- Family leaving friends and community behind
- Difficulty getting jobs for your spouse or children in Canada
- Cost of plane tickets for family members
- Cost of passports, visas or ETA's
- Cost of food and increased bills with family members
- Other (please specify)

## 12. If you decided to bring your family, where would they live?

- I can rent a home for us near my workplace
- I have family in Canada they can live with
- I can rent a house with other co-workers
- Other (please specify)

## 13. Would you bring your family if you were not sure you could support them or afford it?

- Yes
- No

## 14. Should seasonal workers (8 months or less contract) be able to have family with them in Canada?

- Yes
- No

## 15. Share your reasons for why you answered yes or no in the previous question about family work permits for seasonal workers.

## 16. What would be your reason to NOT bring your family with you to Canada?

## 17. Migrants across Canada are uniting to demand permanent resident status on arrival, because it's the only way we can access essential services and protect ourselves against abuse. Do you believe that all migrants, including you, should be able to come to Canada with permanent resident status on arrival?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

