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Toronto

Protesters gather at minister's office, demand more rights for migrant workers

Almost 1,000 migrant farm workers have been infected with COVID-19

[Ania Bessonov](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jul 04, 2020 4:32 PM ET | Last Updated: July 5



Dozens of protesters gathered outside Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino's office on July 4, 2020, demanding more rights for non-permanent residents in Canada. (Talia Ricci/CBC)

Dozens of protesters gathered outside Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino's office at Lawrence Avenue and Bathurst Street Saturday, calling on the federal government to give more rights to non-permanent residents in the country — including full immigration status.

"The prime minister of Canada must step in and give everybody status so that everyone in the country has the same rights," said Syed Hussan, executive director of Migrant Workers Alliance

for Change, one of the groups that organized the protest.

"That's what this is about. Equal rights for everyone and that means permanent resident status for all."

The protest comes as the Windsor-Essex region continues to see new positive cases of COVID-19, many among the migrant worker populations working in the agriculture industry.

Given their immigration status, many workers [are choosing not to get tested](#) over fears they might be deported.



Posters of Juan Lopez Chaparro near a protest demanding rights for migrant workers. Chaparro was a migrant worker from Mexico who died after contracting COVID-19 on a farm in Ontario. (Talía Ricci/CBC)

Almost 1,000 migrant farm workers have been infected with COVID-19, and three have died.

Protesters say they hope enhanced immigration rights would allow farm workers to better protect and care for themselves during the pandemic. Their demands include better access to health care, which typically isn't free for non-permanent workers.

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One of the protesters at the demonstration was Khim Smith, who came to Canada to work in hopes of receiving full immigration status.

Smith said she was fired from her job after asking for some time to recover.

"So I know what it is like to be out here," she said. "But we need some action right now. That's why we are here."



Many of Ontario's positive COVID-19 case numbers are among the migrant worker community. Three have already died. (Talia Ricci/CBC)

Hussan said Canada needs a "single-tier immigration status" so that rights are the same for everyone.

Last week, the Ontario government announced a plan to address the outbreaks in the region, including more testing and support for ill workers.

However, the plan doesn't apply to many of the workers because they don't qualify for government assistance.

- **[Protesters call for legal status for undocumented workers, asylum seekers](#)**

A [similar protest was organized by Solidarity Across Borders](#) in Montreal Saturday afternoon, where protesters also demanded more rights for undocumented workers and asylum seekers.

With files from Talia Ricci, Jonathan Gatehouse

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