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Migrant Workers respond to proposed Ontario law

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Banning recruitment fees for all migrant workers; removing the arbitrary monetary cap on reclaiming unpaid wages and tougher penalties for employment standards violations announced today means that migrant workers gain a few more protections today, but comprehensive changes are still needed says the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC), Canada's largest migrant worker advocacy coalition.

Changes were also announced today for other workers in precarious jobs, see our member organization Workers Action Centre's update on that [here](#).



"After migrant workers exposed abuses by recruiters in 2009, we won protections for live-in caregivers but other migrant workers were unnecessarily excluded. Today after four years of migrant workers speaking out about their experiences, recruitment fees have finally been banned for all migrant workers.

Unfortunately over two-thirds of the caregivers we surveyed after the law came into effect in 2009 still paid fees. That's because these protections rely on complaints and not proactive enforcement. For there to be meaningful protections, Ontario must follow provinces like Manitoba and implement employer and recruiter registration, licensing and regulation including joint and several financial liability.

Migrant workers are not inherently vulnerable, its provincial laws that exclude us from basic protections that make us so. Many migrant workers are women and racialized people who are being denied immigration status by the Federal Government. Ontario must step up. We are urging Ontario's government to sit down with migrant workers and update labour laws and other legislation. It is high time that migrant worker achieve the same protections and benefits as other Ontarians.

Liza Draman, Caregivers Action Centre

"Today's labour reforms are a result of the advocacy efforts of migrant workers who took to the streets and held politicians accountable for the 19th century working and living conditions that we face in 21st century Ontario. However this victory is bittersweet. Many of our friends who fought for this have been terminated or deported for standing up for their rights. They will not enjoy the fruits of their labour. We owe it to them to continue the struggle and ensure that we are no longer treated as second class citizens."

Kyla Hernandez, Justice for Migrant workers



"I paid \$1500 in Honduras to come work here in Canada. Here I worked in an unsafe job at a mushroom farm for a year to be able to pay back that debt. On top of that, my employer regularly stole my wages and I couldn't file a claim with the Ministry or I would have been fired and sent back home. I had to wait until I finished my contract, went home and came back with another employer but by then I had exceeded the current 6 month limit on claims. Today's changes are an important step, but migrant workers need much stronger protections to ensure we have equal rights on the job."



Juan Miguel, Justice for Migrant Workers

“Getting rid of the unfair \$10,000 limit for employment standards claims and giving workers 2 years to file claims is a significant victory for Ontario workers, especially migrant workers. If these laws had existed a few years ago, I could have claimed the thousands of dollars of my unpaid wages immediately rather

than being forced to go to court.”

Senthil Thevar, Workers Action Centre



“How will the banning of recruitment fees work on the ground if they are not here in Guatemala to enforce it? I paid \$2,000 to come work in a flower greenhouse in southern Ontario but wasn’t able to come back because I fought for my rights. We want to see employers be held accountable for the huge fees we have to pay to get jobs with them.”

Eduardo, Justice for Migrant Workers

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Migrant Workers Alliance for Change Members



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