

SUPPORTING TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS IN CANADA



Temporary Foreign Workers Programs in Canada have evolved a lot since the arrival of the first group of agricultural workers from Jamaica in the 60s. Originally set up to fill some very specific labour or skill shortages in the agricultural sector on a short term basis, the program's scope is much broader today, helping employers profit from a global supply of cheap, disposable labour for a variety of jobs. Unfortunately, the entrenched vulnerability of the individuals participating in this program has not changed much since then.

Rúben Gonzalez is one of the millions of Mexicans and Central Americans who leave behind their lives in search of work: "In Mexico, I work in manual labour and construction. It doesn't pay well, so I come to Canada every year to work in order to support my family. I have a wife and two sons." Each year, he travels to Northumberland County, about an hour East of Toronto, along with between 100 and 300 fellow agricultural workers from Mexico, Guatemala and other Caribbean countries to work on apple orchards, vegetable farms and food processing plants.

This season was Rúben's 11th year in the program working in different parts of Canada. Learning English has been challenging as host communities are usually far from the farms. Access to health is

also challenging so when Rúben needed assistance, he was very thankful to have received help at a free health clinic run by Horizons of Friendship, a community-based organization in the town of Cobourg, Ontario. Part of their Migrant Worker Outreach Program, Horizons of Friendship also provides legal and community support to migrant workers in the region.

Upon arrival to Canada, migrant workers face a number of challenges such as culture shock, isolation and a poor work-life balance, as they work long hours and have very little contact with their family back home. The language barrier also involves a lack of awareness about how to access health, legal, and social services. As such, they are vulnerable to exploitation and some of them fall prey to labour rights violations and scams.





All photos taken by Daniel Quesada-Rebolledo, Community Outreach Officer at Horizons of Friendship

As an organization that supports projects in Southern countries, Horizons of Friendship felt compelled to address issues faced by some of the same populations in its community. This is why it coordinates a variety of services for migrant workers such as free and confidential biweekly health and legal clinics, translation services for Spanish-speaking migrant workers, as well as a variety of social and educational events.

The Steelworkers Humanity Fund has been a proud supporter of the Migrant Worker Outreach Program for four years, ensuring that migrant workers are able to receive timely access to these basic services – its impact being felt much beyond Northumberland County.



To learn more about the Steelworkers Humanity Fund

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