

STEELWORKERS HUMANITY FUND UPDATE

DECEMBER 2024



TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS, PERMANENT EXPLOITATION

Mexican farm workers in Northumberland County receiving the traditional Day of the dead bread from Horizons of Friendship. Photo credit: Horizons of Friendship.

Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) in Canada are trapped in an unjust labour system that favours employers and erodes workers' access to proper wages and occupational safety because of their immigration status. Under a "closed" work permit, their contract binds them to one employer, a situation that makes them at risk of being deported to their countries of origin if they dare demand better conditions or are injured at work. In the meantime, Canada has never been as reliant on this workforce.

Last fall at the USW National Justice Conference, the Steelworkers Humanity Fund (SHF) organized a panel on the rise of migrant workers and precarious work in Canada. Participants explained why these problems must be tackled to ensure all working people can benefit from the gains of the labour movement.

"Labour standards are not respected, migrant workers have their right to unionize taken away, making them even more vulnerable" expressed Denise Gagnon, representative of the Réseau d'aide aux travailleurs et travailleuses migrants agricoles du Québec (RATTMAQ), a community

partner of the SHF. She shared the stage with Bessie Hodder, staff at Horizons of Friendship, an organization dedicated to supporting migrant farm workers in Ontario. Their message was echoed by Ronald Carvajal, a union activist from Local Union 9471 in District 5, who told the audience about his challenging journey from a TFW to a Canadian citizen.



RATTMAQ providing guidance to a Guatemalan migrant farm worker in Saint-Rémi, Quebec. Photo credit: RATTMAQ.



Through USW members' contributions, SHF is supporting advocacy on behalf of migrant workers and funding local outreach efforts by organizations such as RATTMAQ and Horizons of Friendship. Their work is necessary to ensure that temporary immigration programs are not used to lower the bar on labour standards at the expense of workers.

The actions to demand changes to the TFW program are directly tied to ending the exploitation of vulnerable workers and ensure that all workers in Canada enjoy fair wages, good benefits and safe workplaces. This can be achieved in large part by creating a clear pathway to permanent residency for those workers who often return year after year – reflecting that the need for workers in Canada is permanent, not temporary.



Mexican farm workers in Northumberland County celebrating Mexican Independence Day in Cobourg, Ontario. Photo credit: Horizons of Friendship.

To learn more about the
Steelworkers Humanity Fund

[USW.CA/SHF](https://usw.ca/shf)

Steelworkers Humanity Fund

234 Eglinton Ave. E., Suite 800
Toronto, ON M4P 1K7

Phone: 416-487-1571

Email: humanityfund@usw.ca

Website: www.usw.ca/shf

