

WHY WE WORK

WORK AS AN EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

“The irony is that before COVID-19 became a disproportionate problem for factory workers, personal support staff, migrant farm workers and other essential personnel, it was an illness carried across the world by those with the means to visit far-away destinations.”

Robyn Urback, Globe & Mail Columnist

IF NOTHING ELSE, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PROVED THAT A HEALTHY, FRONTLINE WORKFORCE IS CRUCIAL TO MAINTAINING A FUNCTIONING SOCIETY IN TIMES OF CRISIS, YET WE CONTINUE TO SEE THESE ESSENTIAL WORKERS FIGHTING AN UPHILL BATTLE FOR WORKPLACE PROTECTIONS, HIGHER WAGES AND BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS.



Lockdowns to “reduce the spread” impacted low-income workers especially, with those in hospitality sectors (retail, food service, and accommodation) losing work, and those in essential services (warehouse, agriculture, grocery, and healthcare) working exceedingly more hours (at increased risk of exposure to the coronavirus) than higher-income earners who were more likely to be able to isolate and work from home.



The Migrant Workers Alliance for Change also logged complaints on behalf of 1162 migrant workers between March 15, 2020 and May 15, 2020, including:

- an inability to assert labour rights due to lack of permanent resident status (437 complaints)
- inadequate access to food (539 complaints)
- inability to socially distance (160 complaints)
- fear of lost income due to infection/illness (110 complaints)
- crowded and unsanitary living quarters (109 complaints)

CIRHR CENTRE FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND HUMAN RESOURCES

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Women, Immigrants and visible minorities are disproportionately represented in jobs with greater exposure to COVID-19, including long-term care where the majority of deaths in Canada have occurred.

The proportion of immigrants employed as nurse aides, orderlies and patient service associates **rose from 22% to 36%** between 1996 and 2016



34% of front-line/essential service workers in this sector identify as visible minorities (compared with 21% in other sectors)



24% of employed Filipino Canadians and **20%** of employed Black Canadians worked in this industry compared with 14% of all workers

