

Point: Canada Should Grant Migrant Workers Permanent Residency

Thesis: Migrant workers do essential work in Canada while facing racism and discrimination. Consequently, the Canadian government should value their contributions to the country by granting them permanent resident status.

Talking Points

- Migrant workers do essential work, which Canada should value and reward.
- Migrant workers face a long history of racism and discrimination in Canada, which has shaped migrant worker programs in the country.
- Canada needs to recognize the contributions of migrant workers by signing the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1990.
- Migrant workers in Canada should be viewed as an investment in the country.

Summary

Tens of thousands of migrant workers come to Canada for several months each year, and yet there is no path to permanent residency for many of them. Supporters of the push to grant all migrant workers permanent residency argue that temporary labourers do essential work, which should be valued and rewarded by Canadians. Agricultural migrant workers are hired to do difficult seasonal labor that many Canadians are unwilling to do. In an interview with *Newmarket Today*, Tim Horlings, owner of Hol-Mar Farms in Ontario, explained how valuable migrant workers are to his enterprise: “These guys do all the ‘grunt’ work: operating harvesting equipment, planting, irrigating, mechanical work, weeding fields. . . . these are our hand labourers and harvesting crew, they do lots of jobs with lots of responsibilities.” This kind of work is essential to Canada’s farm industry, yet it is often dangerous and overlooked, supporters note.

Proponents of permanent residency for migrant workers argue Canada’s long history of racist policies has shaped present-day migrant worker programs. They point out that for many years, Canada’s immigration laws prevented people of colour from having the same rights as other Canadians. For example, the West Indian Domestic Scheme allowed a limited number of Black women from Jamaica and Barbados to immigrate to Canada with limitations on income and employment rights. Even

though this program only lasted until 1967, the restrictions on migrant workers’ rights set a precedent for future programs. Although the federal immigration system in the twenty-first century does not restrict immigration on racial lines, as human rights lawyer Fay Faraday wrote in *The Conversation*, the “system for immigration continues to disproportionately exclude Black and racialized working-class workers from immigrating permanently to Canada”, especially those working on farms, in grocery stores, and as care workers and cleaners.

Labour rights’ advocates, such as the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) Canada, argue that Canada needs to recognize the contributions of migrant workers by signing the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1990. The document outlines basic guidelines for guaranteeing migrant workers’ human rights by promoting freedom from discrimination, the right to health care, and collective bargaining. It has never been signed or ratified by Canada, despite its decades-long existence.

Finally, the UFCW Canada argued in their 2020 annual report that migrant workers should be viewed as an investment in Canada, explaining that “as migrant workers make Canada their home, they naturally become more intertwined with Canadian society, which increasingly, also means more of their money is spent in Canada.” Moreover, the report stated that supporting permanent residency would allow temporary workers to “become part of building the future for the company, their new community, their union, and their new home Canada.”

Ponder This

- The author has presented the fundamental positions for this perspective in the debate. Outline the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective.
- If asking to begin forming an argument for this position, what sources would you need to build your case? What fundamental information do you need? What opinion leaders in this debate would you look to in solidifying your argument?
- What are the weakest aspects of the position outlined by the author? How might those weaker arguments help you prepare a counter argument?

- What additional Talking Points could you add to support this position?

Bibliography

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