



Migrant Students United
Suite 223, 720 Spadina Avenue
Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2T9
msu@migrantworkersalliance.org

The Right Hon. Justin Trudeau
The Hon. Chrystia Freeland
The Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos
The Hon. Navdeep Singh Bains
The Hon. William Sterling Blair
The Hon. Patricia Hajdu
The Hon. Mélanie Joly
The Hon. William Francis Morneau
The Hon. Carla Qualtrough
The Honourable Kirsty Duncan, Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons
The Hon. Marco Mendicino

April 2, 2020

Dear Prime Minister and Ministers,

International Students Need Specific COVID-19 supports

Migrant Students United is a cross-country organization of current and former migrant students. As you are aware, there are more than 721,000 study permit holders in Canada, as well as an estimated 500,000 post-graduate work permit holders. This is a significant number of people who, like millions of other workers affected by COVID-19, require urgent support.

Over the last few weeks, we have surveyed 2,300 current and former migrant students, held two online information sessions with 1,200 students registered, and conducted focus groups and polling to determine migrant student needs and priorities. We have spoken with current and former students in each province, as well as the Northwest Territories. We are summarizing here concerns and priorities of migrant students that must be addressed as part of the COVID-19 response and beyond.

1. Ensure access to healthcare.

Currently, current and former migrant students in many provinces do not have access to COVID-19 testing or treatment. A patchwork of private insurance companies exist at public post-secondary institutions, but do not include private educational institutions. Students in between permits, those that have recently moved provinces, and those awaiting a full-time job, are not covered. Many students are removed from their support systems, don't have

access to social networks they can rely on, and are in many cases without work. Extending universal coverage to these people is an essential public health measure.

The federal government must work with provinces to guarantee access to healthcare for all regardless of immigration status or health card. As time is of the essence, in the absence of provincial changes, the federal government must extend Interim Federal Health coverage to all migrants.

2. Provide guaranteed comprehensive income support.

Many current or former migrant students have lost income. Campus closures and the overall economic downturn means that either jobs have been eliminated or hours of work drastically reduced. We have heard from hundreds of students forced to turn to food banks and religious spaces for basic necessities. Income supports that have been announced already are inaccessible to many students. In some cases, migrant students have not accumulated enough hours for Employment Insurance or have not been paid \$5,000 in the previous 12 months. Many students do not have adequate documentation for wages they have been paid. Some are without an active Social Insurance Number because of immigration rules that require renewal (such as having a work permit renewed first). Students are working at reduced hours just to survive. Migrant students who are recent graduates report extreme difficulty in finding jobs in the current climate. Students who are still enrolled and need employment for program or co-op placements are struggling to get income. Some students and post-graduate work permit holders travelled abroad to take care of their families and are unable to access incomes, while their jobs here have laid them off.

The federal government must create a special delivery mechanism to ensure income support of at least \$2,000/month to all migrants, including those outside Canada, who have lost income due to COVID-19 without a requirement for an active SIN or evidence of having paid taxes. This should include job loss, as well as reduction in wages.

3. Provide open and extended work permits, and permanent resident status on landing.

Permit restrictions pose a myriad of challenges for migrant students that are simply insurmountable in this climate. Public post-secondary students are only allowed to work 20 hours off-campus, but campuses are closed. Students with applications in process are reporting delays and are falling into "implied status", where their SIN and health cards are expiring but cannot be reviewed because of Service Canada closures. While the exemption of migrant students from border closures is a critical step, many spouses and family members of students haven't been allowed to enter because of lack of clarity on rules. Post-graduate work permit holders have been turned back from flights in various countries despite having active permits. Private college students don't have access to post-graduate work permits. Many are still in the country even if their courses are done because of closed borders or flight restrictions. The economic downturn has made it difficult for students to find work that can be counted towards their eventual permanent residence applications. Hundreds of post-graduate

students are reporting that they won't be able to get enough points for permanent residency by the time their current work permits expire. Current and former students are also facing deportations, often to places without healthcare support or where travel is shut off.

The federal government must automatically extend study permits and post graduate work permits during COVID-19. All study permit holders must be allowed to work off-campus without hours of work or industry restrictions. Study permit and post-graduate work permit holders should be allowed to bring their families to Canada. Post-graduate work permits must be issued to all, and extended so that students can work now and get appropriate work experience. Points for Express Entry in the next three years must be lowered to respond to the long-term effects of this economic downturn. All deportations must be stopped.

4. Provide support with rent, tuition, bills and quarantine.

Migrant students and post-graduate work permit holders arriving in Canada are required to enter quarantine but many are reporting they have nowhere to go, as campuses are closed, emergency accommodations have fallen through, and long-term rentals are unavailable. Many students suffering from job loss or cuts in wages are reporting difficulty paying high tuition fees. Many colleges and universities have reduced course offerings and cancelled Spring classes, but are continuing to charge fees. At the same time, remaining enrolled full-time is a requirement of the study permit.

The federal government must take action to freeze tuition fees, or at minimum offer domestic tuition fees to international students for the next three terms. A moratorium on evictions and rent, utilities, and other bills (such as credit cards and transportation) should be put into effect federally for the duration of the crisis.

These demands are in line with and in support of the full list of demands issued by the Migrant Rights Network for a just response to the COVID-19 crisis, available at migranrights.ca/Covid19.

We look forward to a swift and comprehensive response. Please contact me at sarom@migrantworkersalliance.org for any questions and to continue this conversation.

Thank you,

Sarom Rho
Migrant Students United Organizer