

WHAT EFFECTS DOES COVID-19 HAVE ON VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

The following are some observations gathered by CATHII from the media and from organizations working with victims of human trafficking.

WHAT THE UNITED NATIONS (UN) ORGANIZATION IS SAYING ABOUT COVID-19: *The UN warns of increased risks to victims of human trafficking*¹

- Confinement restricts access to support resources, whether financial, social, police, etc. "Services to assist trafficking victims are being reduced to a minimum or shut down."
- "The UN calls on countries to "keep shelters and hotlines open" to protect those who are at even greater risk. "Some shelters have even closed because of the virus and others lack protective equipment."
- A survey, initiated by the UN, is currently being carried out among victims of human trafficking and front-line workers, with a view to developing recommendations based on concrete situations in Member States.



The coronavirus increases the risks associated with human trafficking, warns the UN

- "... border closures prevent some victims from returning home. Among other things, victims face delays in legal proceedings and risk their abductors' further abuse or being left to fend for themselves,"² These observations are in line with concrete cases encountered in Canadian provinces and reported by members of the anti-trafficking committee of the Canadian Council for Refugees during a webinar on April 22, 2020.³

¹ https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2020/May/covid-19_unodc-warns-of-increased-risks-to-human-trafficking-victims.html , May 5, 2020

² <https://www.barrons.com/news/un-warns-of-risks-for-trafficking-victims-due-to-pandemic-01588761605?tesla=y> , May 6, 2020

³ Webinar on Vulnerable Migrants, organized by the Canadian Council for Refugees, April 22, 2020

IN QUEBEC AND IN CANADA: SITUATIONS ENCOUNTERED BY VULNERABLE MIGRANTS⁴:

Generally speaking, the conditions of vulnerability experienced by migrant people place them in a situation of exploitation - lack of money for necessities, unemployment, risk of eviction from their homes, etc.

- These very precarious conditions can lead more easily to situations of trafficking, as people are forced to accept just about anything in order to survive. What solutions are available to them? Going into prostitution? Working in dangerous health conditions? What else can they do?

Reducing the conditions of vulnerability experienced by migrants
is one way to protect them from exploitation
that can lead to situations of human trafficking.

- **Access to Federal Emergency Assistance:** In some cases, migrants do not have access to the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or Employment Insurance, and so have no income to live on. This is the case for people who have just arrived in Canada and have not yet earned \$5,000, for undocumented migrants, and for refugees without a work permit. That being said, as of May 20, following a militant mobilization, migrants with a social insurance number, even if it has expired, can now apply for CERB. (Jill Hanley, researcher at the Sherpa Research Institute)
- "The combined effect of COVID-19 and the shortage of workers is leading to new abuses on farms, with some foreign workers having to work up to 18 hours straight," confirms RATTMAQ (Réseau d'aide aux travailleuses et travailleurs migrants du Québec), which has received some 20 complaints from migrant workers recently.⁵

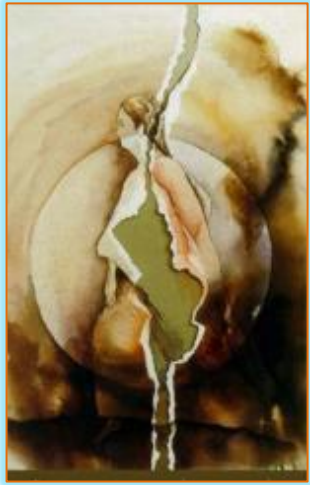


Ultimately, immigration status,
as well as living and working conditions,
are closely related.
(Shelley Gilbert, LAW Legal assistant in Windsor)

⁴ O.P. cit

⁵ Le Devoir May 1, 2020 : Des travailleurs étrangers contraints de travailler jusqu'à 18 heures d'affilée ,
<https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/578058/18-heures-d-affilee-aux-champs?fbclid=IwAR2lrCtivBoH6DKer4OAtoSbqjK6P2m6MGLFilwJkhsZNB13Sd2YPwJGM3k>

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION:



- The Service de police de la Ville de Montréal and the Sûreté du Québec have noted an increase in sexual exploitation on the Internet "since the beginning of confinement due to COVID-19 ". This is explained by the fact that "young people are spending more time online now and are at risk of becoming victims of this type of crime." ⁶
- Women actively engaged in the prostitution system "who have a pimp are always obliged to bring him money and the clients are not less demanding - on the contrary." The women are asked to be even more subservient to the demands of the clients.⁷
- The Polaris Institute in the United States points out that domestic workers are losing their jobs because employers are themselves at home, have no money left, or have lost their jobs themselves.⁸ Thus, domestic workers find themselves in a situation of greater vulnerability to exploitation. This situation can also arise in Canada, where the majority of domestic workers are foreigners. Conversely, some employers may require more hours and extra work - frequent disinfection in all rooms, care of children who are confined, etc. - without improving working conditions or wages. Closed borders also have an impact on those who would like to return home to care for their own children.

POSITIVE STORIES

Despite all this, the pandemic crisis is generating collective initiatives that foster hope and fair treatment of people.

THE GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC is extending COVID -19 testing and health care to all people in Quebec, including refugees with precarious status and undocumented migrants.⁹

⁶ <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1693098/pornographie-juvenile-covid-19-sq-spvm-attention> - April 11, 2020

⁷ <https://www.lapresse.ca/covid-19/202004/22/01-5270525-lindustrie-du-sexe-sadapte-la-police-veille.php>

⁸ <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2020/04/domestic-workers-face-economic-devastation-during-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁹ <https://www.educaloi.qc.ca/en/news/covid-19-rights-people-who-are-not-citizens-or-permanent-residents>

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS are taking advantage of the slowdown in their usual ways of acting in order to work together on the situation of vulnerable people, including victims of human trafficking. They are calling on our decision-makers to act:

- 1) A letter to the Prime Minister of Canada, from the Canadian Council for Refugees, calls for continued access to permanent residence status "for refugee claimants (and) trafficked persons", by means of a clear and expeditious process.¹⁰
- 2) In British Columbia, the Migrant Workers' Center, a migrant workers' rights organization, recently launched a campaign calling on the Canadian government to open a new avenue to permanent residence for migrant workers, both documented and undocumented, and to grant them an open work permit for 12 months, thereby regularizing their worker status while their application for residence is being processed.¹¹
- 3) CATHII called for the full reopening of the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline, which is once again fully accessible, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.¹²
- 4) Kairos Canada has organized several webinars with moving testimonies on the situation of temporary migrant workers (in agriculture, elder care and health care settings, undocumented) and is also calling on the Canadian government to offer them permanent residence.¹³



France Laforge, CATHII Coordinator/ May 20, 2020
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¹⁰<https://ccrweb.ca/en/precarious-status-migrants>

¹¹ <https://mwcabc.ca/press-release-april-2-2020/>

¹²http://www.cathii.org/sites/www.cathii.org/files/Lettre%20Ligne%20d%27urgence%20nationale%208%20avril%202020_0.pdf Letter National Hotline April 8 20_0.pdf

¹³ <https://www.kairoscanada.org/from-disposable-to-indispensable-providing-foreign-migrant-workers-with-a-pathway-to-permanent-residency>