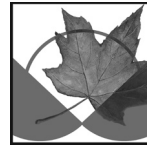


NEWS RELEASE

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CCPA
CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
BC Office



December 10, 2007

False promises for recent immigrants Study reveals low wage job cycle, workplace rights violations

(Vancouver) In spite of high education levels, many recent immigrants to BC find themselves stuck in low wage jobs, with few meaningful protections in the workplace, according to a new study released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Philippine Women Centre.

Workplace Rights for Immigrants in BC: The Case of Filipino Workers reveals that despite a booming BC economy, recent immigrants to the province often find economic security elusive. They frequently work in unsafe conditions with little training or access to information about their rights. The study also finds that enforcement of the Employment Standards Act (ESA) is effectively non-existent. None of the study's interviewees had made use of the English-only "self-help kit" (the only way to report violations to the Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services), despite experiencing ESA violations.

"The provincial government's rollback of employment standards in 2002 means that many basic employment rights now exist only as 'paper-rights,' particularly for recent immigrants," says Habiba Zaman, SFU professor and co-author of the report.

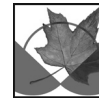
"If no one has informed you of your rights and no one is actively enforcing them, how can you enjoy the protections that are supposed to exist for all workers in BC?" continues Zaman.

"Highly educated immigrants are arriving in Canada with the promise of good employment," says Cecilia Diocson, co-author of the report and executive director of the National Alliance of Philippine Women in Canada. "Instead, they are experiencing a severe transition penalty in the form of low-paying jobs, often with inadequate protections. This is a cycle that stretches into unsatisfactory employment for years and can eventually result in long-term economic hardship."

Based on the report's findings and consultation with immigrant-serving organizations, the study makes extensive policy recommendations, including:

- Eliminate the \$6 first-job wage, and increase the minimum wage to \$10 per hour.
- Institute proactive monitoring teams who would randomly investigate workplaces for employment standards and WorkSafe violations. Increase penalties for violations.
- Eliminate the "self-help kit" and allow workers to bring complaints about workplace violations directly to the Employment Standards Branch. Also, fund a community-based, non-profit system, which would provide assistance, including advocacy, to workers who believe their rights have been violated.
- Substantially increase public education of the ESA through information sessions, translation into appropriate languages, and extensive distribution. Restore the requirement that rights be posted at workplaces.
- Extend the minimum call-in period from two to four hours. Two hours of pay is inadequate, particularly when workers must commute long distances to get to the workplace.

Continued...



Recommendations continued

- Open more Employment Standards Branch offices, and set up a hotline for the Employment Standards Branch. Staff the hotline with people who can answer enquiries in more than one language.
- Provide mandatory information sessions on the ESA for employees and employers. Since 2001, seven of the top 10 immigrant-originating countries (China, Pakistan, the Philippines and others) have been from Asia. Employment standards are effectively nonexistent in most of these countries. These immigrants need to know about their labour rights.

Workplace Rights for Immigrants in BC: The Case of Filipino Workers, by Habiba Zaman, Cecilia Diocson and Rebecca Scott is available at www.policyalternatives.ca

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To arrange an interview call Terra Poirier at 604-801-5121 x229.

The study was produced as part of the Economic Security Project, a joint research initiative of the CCPA and Simon Fraser University, funded primarily by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). This study also received a grant from the Vancouver Foundation, which significantly facilitated the research process.

What are Employment Standards?

Employment standards are part of the broader system of labour laws. They cover issues such as the minimum wage, minimum and maximum hours of work, overtime pay, parental leave and statutory holidays. They are supposed to offer a basic level of protection for all workers — providing assurance that they can earn a decent living under reasonable conditions, protect their personal safety, and balance work and family life. While employment standards matter to all workers, they are especially important for ‘vulnerable’ workers — those who are least able to negotiate fair and decent working conditions with their employer and those not represented by unions. Vulnerable workers are disproportionately women, recent immigrants, racial minorities and young people.

Between 2001 and 2004, the BC government weakened employment standards rules and reduced their enforcement.