

COVID-19 made economic and health conditions worse for non-status migrants in Toronto

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A new collaborative report involving researchers from the University of Toronto Scarborough raises awareness about the disproportionate

economic and health impacts of COVID-19 on non-status migrants who live and work in the Greater Toronto Area.

The Citizenship and Employment Precarity (CEP) research team is co-directed by two sociology professors, U of T Scarborough's Patricia Landolt and York University's Luin Goldring. In partnership with the FCJ Refugee Centre, a Toronto-based charitable organization that provides support to uprooted and displaced newcomers in Canada, the group established the [FCJ-CEP COVID-19 project](#).

The [team surveyed](#) 195 current and former non-status migrants, with respondents recruited through the FCJ Refugee Centre from March to June 2021. The results show that loss of employment, housing insecurity and lack of public support programs had a direct, negative impact on non-status migrants' health and well-being.

"There have been a variety of studies about how the pandemic has affected different vulnerable groups. One important group that has received less attention is non-status migrants," says Landolt.

"We wanted to know how COVID-19 was affecting this very vulnerable population that does not have the authorization to live or work in Canada, but are here, building their lives."

The majority of precarious migrants work in essential services—all of which were hit hard due to worldwide COVID-19 shutdowns. During the time of the survey, 31 percent of participants became unemployed due to layoffs. Before the pandemic, 40 percent of the participants' spouses or partners worked more than 40 hours per week. That number plummeted during the pandemic, with only eight percent working those hours. Non-status families lost jobs and income.

The FCJ-CEP report also highlights that migrants faced higher rates of

housing insecurity and evictions during the pandemic, where 53 percent of participants paid their rent late by more than a month, compared to 21 percent who paid their rent late before the pandemic.

A significant—and concerning—result from the report was the decline in self-rated health. When asked about their health before and after the pandemic, only six percent of respondents reported "excellent health" compared to 19 percent before the [pandemic](#).

Participants were highly responsive to public health measures, yet factors such as living in overcrowded housing left limited space to self-isolate. In addition, 61 percent of participants reported an increased risk of COVID-19 exposure during their commute to work, and more than half reported a high risk of exposure at work.

"That insecurity was profound, and their health suffered because they got sick, but also because of the loss of income, inability to secure food and the stress of trying to stay safe," says Landolt. "The risk and vulnerability that migrants live with were heightened, and that had a direct impact on their [health](#)."

Along with no OHIP coverage, precarious migrants were not eligible for government supports such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). They did receive more [financial help](#) from family and friends. Participants also reported feeling isolated and turned to faith-based programs such as food drives and online services for help.

Landolt hopes the report will help initiate and inform conversations at the municipal and federal level about policy change to secure a quick path to regularization for all precarious legal status migrants.

Provided by University of Toronto

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