

# Invisible Workers and Unacknowledged Risks: Voice and Protections for the Mobile Workforce

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# Outline

- What is the «mobile workforce»
- Mobility, voice and regulatory effectiveness
  - Illustrations from the field:
    - Challenges and strategies
- Mobility as a determinant of the determinants...

# Extended daily mobility to more prolonged absences/travel for work

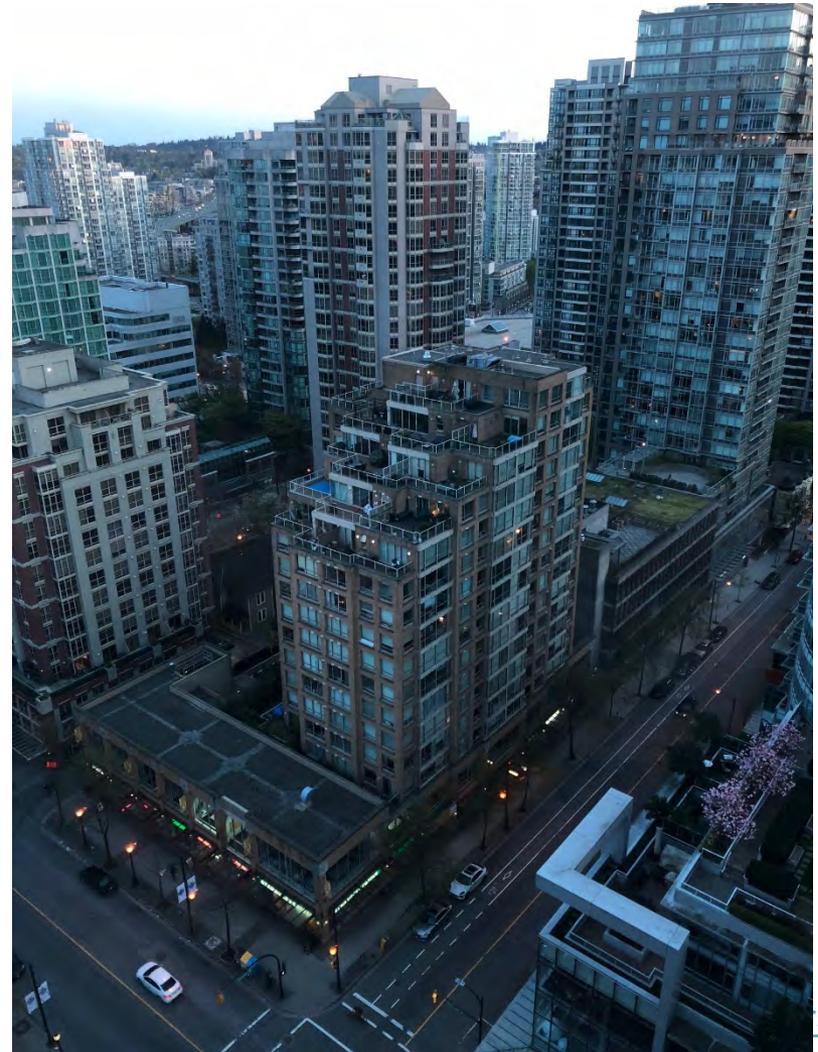


# Canadian & Temporary Foreign Workers

on the move  
partnership 



# Rural & Urban



# Multiple Sectors & Diverse Types of Work



Including work in

1. Fixed workplaces with differently mobile workers
2. Multiple sites (homecare, cleaning)
3. Transient sites (work camps, construction sites)
4. Mobile workplaces (shipping, trucking, airline workers)



# Canada's 'mobile' labour force, 2016



Table 1: Estimated proportion of Canadian employed labor force engaged in extended/complex work-related mobility, 2016

Employed labor force (ELF) <sup>14</sup>	17,230,035	
Commuting, total <sup>15</sup>	15,878,940	
Type of commute / worker	Number	% of employed LF
Total extended/complex work-related mobility	2,837,745	<b>16.46%</b>
Long commutes (> 1 hour one-way) <sup>15</sup>	1,494,830	8.68%
Inter-provincial commutes <sup>15</sup>	158,000	0.92%
Transportation workers <sup>15</sup>	818,110	4.75%
Temporary residents with work permits <sup>16-18</sup>	366,785	2.1%
Temporary Foreign Worker Program* <sup>17</sup>	78,455	
International Mobility Program** <sup>18</sup>	288,330	

\*Given seasonal workers generally leave by December 31st, we used year in which permits were valid.

\*\*Given work permits may be greater than one year, we used December 31st count.



# How is mobility linked to voice in OHS?

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## Access to unionization

- Canadian industrial relations framework requires specific accreditation for one union per bargaining unit.
- Forming a union can be more difficult when the workforce is mobile

## Ability of union to do its work

- Collective action compromised by time, space, distance between workers
  - Workers with one employer and many worksites
  - Workers with mobile worksites possibly coming from one space going to many...sometimes together
  - Workers with immobile remote worksites coming from many spaces converging on one

# Mobility and OHS

## Regulatory Effectiveness and Voice

- Increases with union density and job security
  - Time and space of work organisation affects the ability to collectively organize, including on issues related to hazards
  - Ability to unionize can be comprised by increasing the «fissured workforce» (Tucker, 2017)
- Increases with migration security
  - Deportability affects voice (Basok, 2014)
  - Hope of permanent migration affects voice (Cedillo et al, 2019)
  - Layers of vulnerability (Sargeant and Tucker, 2009)

# Other factors affecting voice

## Working alone

- Truckers
- Homecare workers
- Mobile health-care providers
  - limits guidance from unions or supervisors,

## Working remotely

- Tree planters
- Mining
- Construction
- Nursing
- ...
- Labour inspectors unavailable
- Union support, if available, is provided remotely
- Employers/supervisors may not be on site

# Mobile health care workers

- Homecare workers in NL
  - Mobility between clients not judged to be part of the job for OHS/Workers' compensation issues.
  - Hazards of mobility entirely assumed by workers and invisible to regulators and union.
  - Fitzpatrick & Neis, 2015
- Health care providers in Nova Scotia
  - Hazards of mobility may be perceived as the price to pay for autonomy: «mobility as freedom»
  - Do workers hesitate to speak out for fear of losing the autonomy associated with mobility?
  - Jackson, et al, 2019



# The ship as a «total institution»

- « One Chief Engineer commented about the selection of the safety representatives, ‘The ship is like a big family. To be a safety representative is like ‘to be a safety mom or dad’ to instruct their “children” to work safely. Not many seafarers like this role. They usually have to take the role in turn”»
- *«The ship tunnel is short. If I wear hard hat, my head will be stuck here and there. Maybe because the ship was built in Asia, and Asian guys are shorter. I chose not to wear a hard hat, but I would never report this to the safety meeting. The morale on ship is important and no one really wants to work with a guy who always complains.» (Edmund, Tunnel Man)*

## Best practices

- Unionized abattoir where collective agreement explicitly includes supports for temporary foreign workers to achieve permanency

## Business as usual

- Temporary foreign workers on precarious contracts tied to one employer
- Those with more stable contracts still dependent on employer for family reunification

Cedillo et al, 2019

# Mobility in «the mining project»

## Mobility as a strategy of industry to reduce voice

- Employers promote recruitment of workers from outside the community in which the mine is situated

Walters et al, *The role and effects of representing miners in arrangements for safety and health in coal mining: a global study.*

Wigston: IOSH, 2018,

<https://www.iosh.co.uk/coalmining>

Union strategy: rent a post-office box in another province





# Union challenges & strategies for OHS

Workers all come from afar:  
challenges for mobilisation

- Key informants told us that remote sites that relied on fly-in fly-out drive-in drive-out workforces were difficult to organise and difficult to mobilize on OHS issues

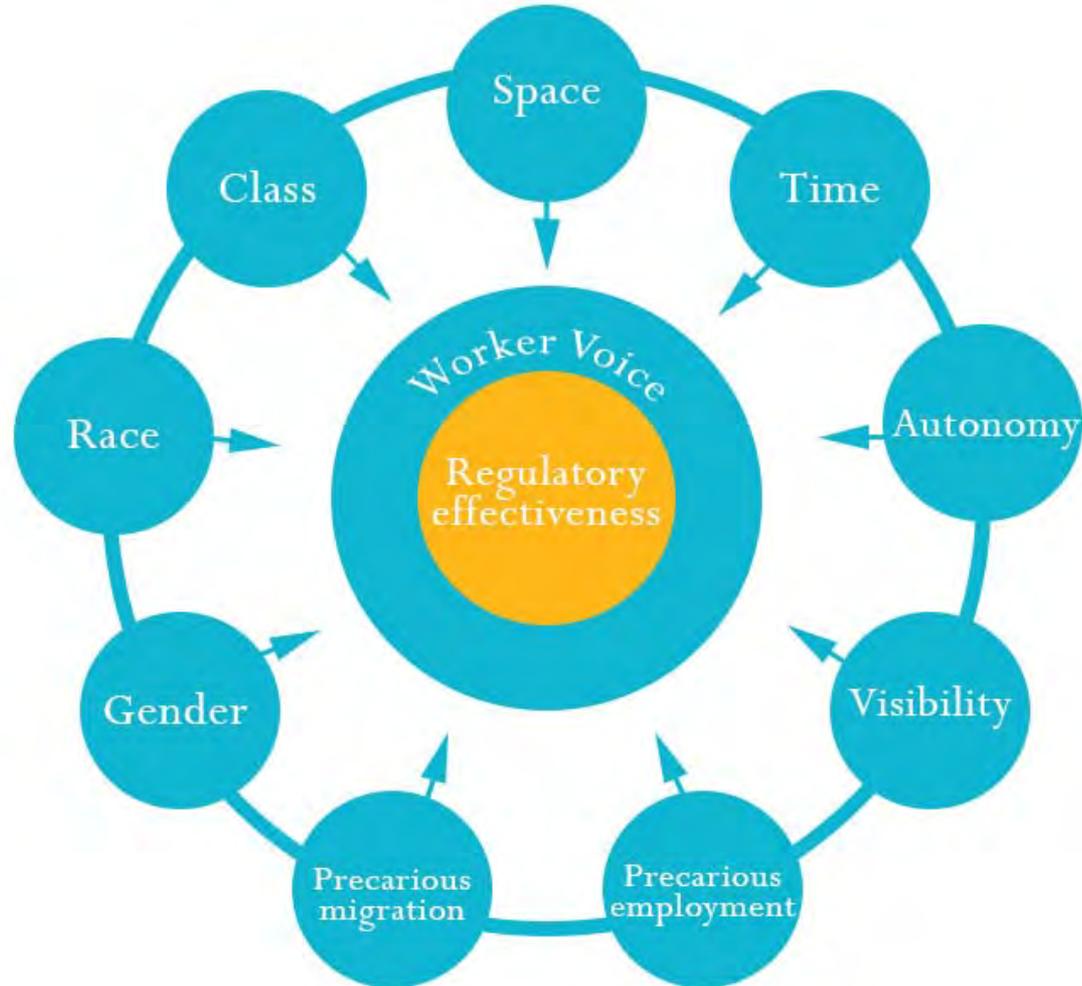
Union strategy: Use the mobility as an organizing tool,  
BC 2016



# Geographically mobile workforce: regulatory effectiveness

- The precariously employed are largely invisible to regulators and traditional OHS actors like unions.
- So are, to some extent, internally mobile workers, while temporary foreign workers are overly visible and overly invisible depending on the context
- If you can't count them, do they count?
  - Tracking exposures
  - Injury data/claims data
  - Injury sustained in non-compensable activities like travelling or living in temporary housing.
  - Invisibility of travel time neutralizes fatigue prevention strategies
- Do employers have incentives to prevent dangerous travel?

# Mobility as a «determinant of the determinants» in OHS-WC



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