



Entangled in a Web of Exploitation and Solidarity

*Latin American Undocumented
Workers in the Greater Toronto Area*

Denise Gastaldo, Christine Carrasco & Lilian Magalhães

Developed in partnership with:



Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples (CSSP)



Centre for Support & Social Integration Brazil-Canada (CAIS)

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“

Yes, I am illegal, but I also generate revenue to this country because I eat here, I buy clothes here, I pay rent here, and I pay taxes on all these things. Also, my work is not paid like other people (...) I understand, I am breaking the law, but I think that I – and many other people – are not stealing from Canada because we don't receive any financial assistance from this country, and I am not a bad person either. In my case, and in the case of other good people I know, we don't steal, we don't go out committing any crimes.

(Elena)

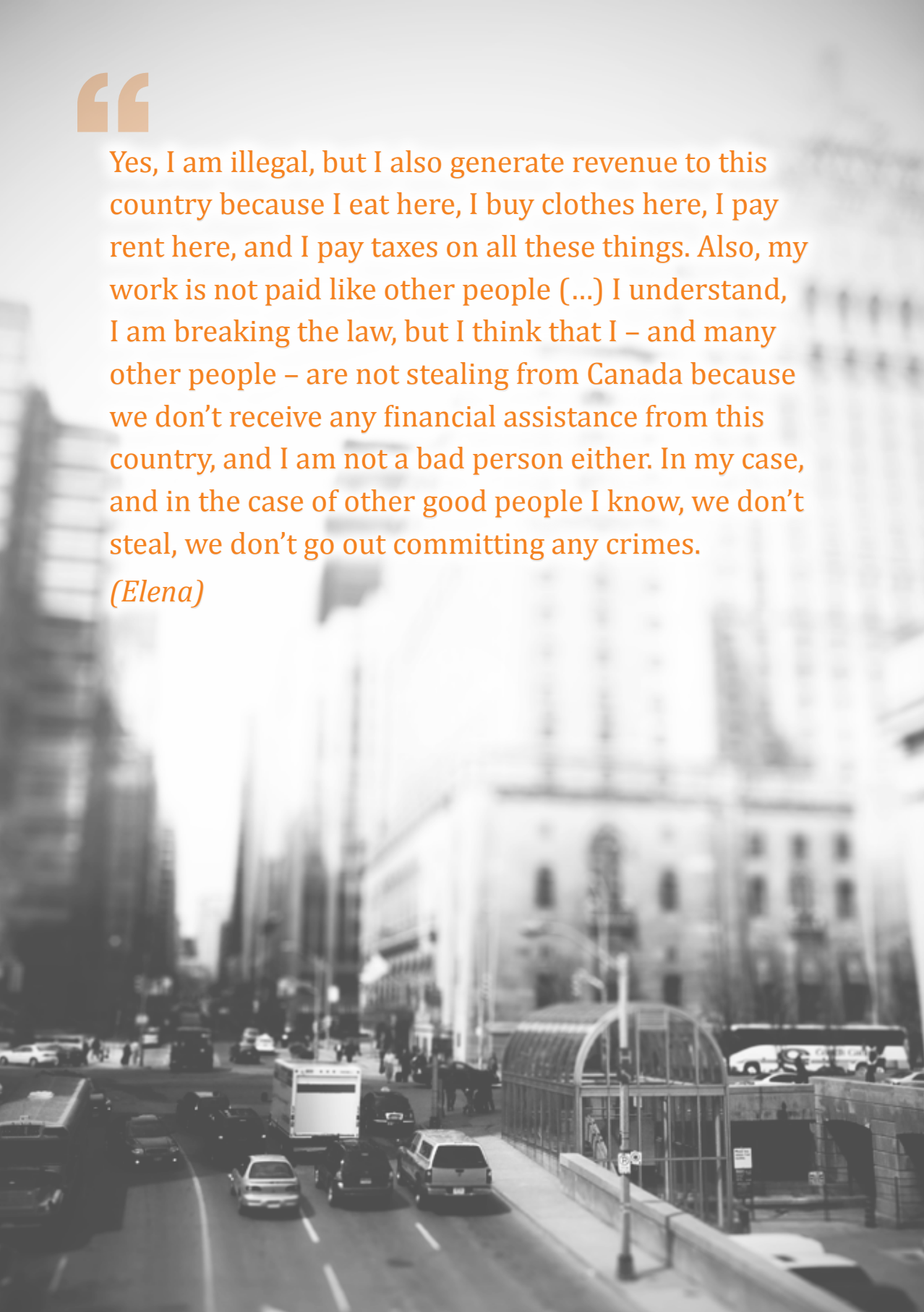


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Executive summary

This e-book describes key findings of a three-year research project on the health consequences of undocumented work in the largest urban area in Canada – the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). This report has been written to reach a general audience and includes several features of workers’ trajectories because most aspects of people’s health are socially constructed through everyday life. In doing so, we hope to contribute to a social dialogue informed by research findings, that moves beyond moral arguments regarding “deserving and undeserving migrants” which frequently characterize discussions on migration issues.

We propose that the experiences of undocumented workers in Canada are embedded in a complex web or matrix of simultaneously oppressive and supportive structures that transcend the sphere of home, work, and community. Several international and national players are intertwined in this web which ultimately functions to create a flexible and cheap workforce for Canadian businesses and constrains workers’ physical, economic and personal mobility once in Canada, with severe consequences for their health and well-being. We explore this central concept through four interrelated chapters and conclude with key messages to stimulate dialogue among a range of stakeholders.

In Chapter 1, we explore the reasons why people migrate to Canada, the conditions that make such journeys possible, and the material and subjective reasons for why they stay, despite having limited legal and social protections. We also illustrate the complex pathways in which people fall out of status, and examine the manner in which undocumented migration, as a global phenomenon, is simultaneously created and maintained by global and national level policies, macro-economic and labour market trends and personal level interests that are deeply entrenched in dominant structures of power.

In Chapter 2, we untangle the ways in which undocumented migrants report going about their lives in Canada and link their everyday life circumstances to their precarious employment relations and working conditions. We advance the notion of the existence of a web of solidarity and exploitation to characterize the daily life of workers and the challenges they face as they try to resettle and obtain work in a new land.

In Chapter 3, we discuss the “tactics” they employ for coping and resisting exploitative conditions, and for functional aspects of their lives such as keeping a job and staying busy. We explore the role of workers’ individual agency and the much related role of hope and spirituality in the coping process.

Finally, in chapter 4, we discuss some of the impacts of lack of status of citizenship. We examine the impact of fear on mental health and the production of institutional and interpersonal forms of social exclusion that exacerbate poor health among this population. We also explore the linkages between the types of jobs held by these workers and their health needs, including emergency care and long term health. We explore workers’ experiences of (in) access and to health and social services and critique the role of citizenship in the provision of rights and entitlements.

How this research was done

“(...) we need research which is able to get a full sense of how people think about their own lives and identities, and what influences them and what tools they use in that thinking, because those things are the building blocks of social change.”

Gaunlett & Holzwarth (2006, p.8)

How this research was done

Introduction

It has been estimated that one out of every 33 people in the world is an international migrant, some 214 million have moved looking for a better life (UNDESA, 2008). This is equivalent to about three percent of the world population. According to several sources, these figures are expected to rise significantly as gaps widen between poor and rich countries and globalization processes as well as environmental challenges increase migration pressures. Already in the last decade, undocumented migration has become the fastest growing form of migration, with an estimated 30 to 40 million undocumented workers worldwide (Papademetriou, 2005) or an estimated 2.5 to 4 million people per year who migrate without proper authorization (UNFPA, n.d.). In the Canadian context, estimates suggest that half a million workers are currently undocumented (Papademetriou, 2005). Although there is consensus of the vulnerability of undocumented work, little is known about the experience of undocumented workers in Canada, including who they are, why they come, the particularities of their working conditions, and the strategies they employ for coping and resisting exploitative conditions in various realms of their transnational existence.

In national and international research, undocumented workers have either been a forgotten group or they have been a point of reference to illustrate globalizations' effects. Very rarely has the focus been on undocumented workers' diversity of occupations and circumstances or resistance and ingenuity in the face of hardship, like explored in this study. This e-book contributes to a terrain where few Canadian researchers have chosen to venture – it presents findings on the migration journeys, working conditions, access to services, and health consequences of undocumented work among migrants performing a range of occupations for a minimum of 18 months in Canada, but more typically for a few years. Focusing on the case of Latin American undocumented migrant workers in the GTA, we contest popular understandings of who is undocumented, how undocumentedness is produced, and the impact of undocumentedness on several key determinants of health. While we recognize that some of the issues identified herein are not *unique* to un-

documented workers, we argue that they are *present in* undocumented workers' experiences and *unfold in* ways that are different to that of other precarious status groups as a direct result of undocumented workers' minimal-to-no legal and social protections in Canada.

The research for this e-book was informed by a pilot study carried out in 2007 which focused on two typical occupations for undocumented workers living in the GTA, construction work for men and cleaning for women. Preliminary findings from the pilot have informed this research study and include: construction work being related to greater social isolation, greater health impact, and substance abuse as a coping mechanism; cleaning work being related to different (i.e. less physically demanding) working conditions but much lower earnings; and women as having much richer social networks that promote their well-being.

Based on these findings, this research project focused on the impact of social exclusion and working conditions on undocumented workers performing a variety of occupations in the GTA. We also aimed to explore how the social position of being undocumented intersects with several social determinants of health such as gender, type of employment, social support, and access/lack of access to health and social services. In summary, in this e-book we take a social determinants of health approach to explore the interconnectedness of individual experiences of work and health to the larger processes by which power relations, political and economic trends shape individuals' experiences, and vice versa.

Definition of undocumented worker

In this project, we defined "undocumented worker" as any woman or man working in Canada who had:

1. legally entered Canada but remained in the country after their visa/ permit expired ("overstayers");
2. experienced changes in their socioeconomic position (e.g. loss of visa-dependent job or early divorce in the case of sponsorships) and could not renew their residence permit but remained in the country;
3. received a negative decision on their refugee application but remained in the country;
4. used fraudulent documentation to enter Canada; or
5. unlawfully entered Canada, including those who were smuggled

Guiding framework

Social determinants of health and health equity

According to the World Health Organization (2005), the “social determinants of health are the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. These circumstances are in turn shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics” (WHO, 2005). For those who migrate, social inclusion and social participation, employment and income, housing and environmental conditions, as well as access to health services are of particular importance.

It is the individual’s social position that articulates these multiple social determinants of health. The lower a person stands in the social hierarchy, the less control she or he has over events and the worst social determinants of health they are exposed to. In other words, people’s social standing is intimately related to their chances of health and disease (e.g. low household income is linked to food insecurity and poor housing). However, in a globalized economy, one’s social position is created in a complex interplay of local, national and international relations. As WHO (2005) explains it:

“The global context affects how societies prosper through its impact on international relations and domestic norms and policies. These in turn shape the way society, both at national and local level, organizes its affairs, giving rise to forms of social position and hierarchy, whereby populations are organized according to income, education, occupation, gender, race/ethnicity and other factors. Where people are in the social hierarchy affects the conditions in which they grow, learn, live, work and age, their vulnerability to ill health and the consequences of ill health”.

Given the relatively poor availability of jobs in other countries and the socio-political instability of many countries of origin, migrant workers often leave their challenging social positions behind in the hope that their economic status (and many times, that of their families) will improve through migration. This is done in an attempt to increase one’s objective social economic status, but most do not realize that being an undocumented worker is also an experience of great social exclusion and vulnerability. We know from studies about other social groups that low

social status alone is associated with mortality, morbidity, and the progression of disease, but “people who are socially integrated live longer” (Berkman & Syme, 1979; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Kawachi, et al., 1996). By contrast, the socially isolated die at 2-3 times the rate of the well connected (Kawachi & Kennedy, 1997).

Such loss in life expectancy and quality of life (e.g. due to debilitating chronic diseases) among those lower in the social hierarchy is a phenomenon described as *health inequity* – differences in health status among population groups that are systemic and significant, but also preventable, unfair and unnecessary (Whitehead, 2000). Health inequities should be of interest to all members of a society because greater inequity represents poorer health to all, rich and poor. The healthier societies in the world are those that have the least economic differences among its members, that is, more equity and less relative poverty (Marmot & Wilkinson, 1999; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

People who conceive health to be a purely a biological event, rather than a mainly social one, struggle to understand how socio-economic circumstances are converted into physical and mental health. Nancy Adler (2006) suggests that studies on health inequity should respond precisely to the question: how does socio-economic stratification get into the human body?

Recent research reveals that the accumulation of social, physical, and material stressors, resulting from low social position (i.e. inequities), impacts health. Under normal circumstances, stress responses (reactivity, coping, and recovery) are regulated by the brain through an adaptive process called allostasis (McEwen & Gianaros, 2010). Recent studies have used the concept of allostatic load to explain how chronic overuse of the brain’s stress response, which utilizes neurotransmitters and hormones, affects numerous downstream physiological systems in the body (e.g. cardiovascular, metabolic, and immune systems) (McEwen & Gianaros, 2010). Empirical studies have shown that lower social status exposes individuals to a combination of acute and chronic stressors, which results in a faster accumulation of allostatic load over one’s lifetime. Allostatic load can help explain detrimental health conditions, such as cancer, hypertension, and hyperglycemia, which underlie observed gradients in morbidity and mortality that parallel socio-economic gradients (N. E. Adler & Rehkopf, 2008; Hill, Ross, & Angel, 2005; McEwen & Gianaros, 2010; Seeman, Epel, Gruenewald, Karlamangla, & McEwen, 2010).

For this reason, it is important to study the social position of undocumented workers in Canadian society and their everyday living and

working circumstances. Through the concepts of social determinants of health and health equity we can explore this radical case study of social exclusion.

Community partnership

In order to create a study that is congruent with the principle of social inclusion, since the onset of this research, we have collaborated with community partners to produce meaningful information to those working with undocumented workers as well those interested in advocating for health equity in Canada. In preparation of an earlier pilot study, we organized a community consultation session where we spoke to experienced professionals who served undocumented migrant workers in the GTA and to undocumented workers themselves. We hoped to get a realistic understanding of the feasibility of the study and to enhance its social and professional relevance. This consultation process was also conducted in collaboration with several community advisors and community organizations (Centre for Spanish Speaking People and the Centre for Support and Social Integration Brazil-Canada) with experience serving the Latin American community in the GTA. Our partners played an active role in the development of research questions, study design, and recruitment, as will be further explained in the ethics section below.

The development of the study

Ethical considerations

The research project obtained ethics approval by the University of Toronto's Research Ethics Board in November 2009. Given the social and legal risk of participants' self-disclosure of their undocumented status in Canada, the investigators of this study took several measures during the recruitment, data gathering, data management, and data analysis phases of the study to maintain strict participant confidentiality, as outlined below.

a. Ethics during recruitment

We faced several challenges in recruitment given the foreseeable risks of doing public outreach for a largely hidden and vulnerable population. Public outreach strategies were inappropriate and potentially harmful for this group given that participants would have to publicly

disclose their legal status. Confidential sampling strategies such as cold-calling were also inappropriate, since we knew from service providers that this population lived in constant fear of exposure to authorities and would refrain from disclosing their status to a stranger over the phone and much less agree to participate in a face-to-face encounter. Our final recruitment strategy relied heavily on our community partners; who are knowledgeable service providers who had established relationships with undocumented populations. They served as trusted gatekeepers into this hidden community of workers, which was further expanded through snowball recruitment, whereby one contact suggested another to be included in the study. It is important to note that the recruitment and data generation phase was an iterative (back and forth) process in order to ensure that we reached a diverse sample of participants and life trajectories.

Potential participants were instructed to contact the research team through a confidential university phone line (i.e. without call display) and were asked to choose a pseudonym to be used throughout the course of the project. During the initial telephone communication, research staff orally explained the consent process and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. If participants agreed to participate, details for the first interview were immediately arranged and no further contact was made with the participant until the scheduled interview time. Partner organizations were at no point aware of who ultimately accepted to participate in the research study, unless participants disclosed this information.

b. Ethics during data gathering and management

At the start of the first interview and prior to audio recording, participants were given an oral and written explanation in their native language (Spanish or Portuguese) of the study and their rights as research participants. The consent form clearly outlined how their information would be used, how it would be handled, who would have access to it, and their right to withdraw at any time or refuse to answer questions without penalty. Participants were asked to provide oral consent. Interviews were then digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim in the original language they were conducted.

During the one-to-one interview and the body-map storytelling process, participants were reminded to make use of their pseudonyms and to refrain from disclosing any potentially identifying information (e.g.

names, address, phone numbers, affiliation with an organization, work address, etc). In the case that such information was unintentionally collected, the research team made sure to alter or omit such information from all transcripts and body maps. Digital voice recordings were destroyed immediately following final verification of transcripts and the research team took special care to ensure that each body map was stripped of any potentially identifying information. Finally, with respect to data security measures, all digital data was stored on a password protected computers and in a secure server environment at the University of Toronto.

c. Ethics during data analysis

In addition to the use of pseudonyms and stripping any potentially identifying information from interview transcripts and body maps, special care was taken to make sure that all presented research data did not link specific socio-demographic characteristics, such as age and country of origin, to participants' life stories. Socio-demographic information is therefore presented in this e-book in an aggregated form, where possible. Finally, community partners only had access to data once it had been anonymized, coded, and analyzed by the investigators and research staff.

Participant recruitment

Participants were recruited mainly through our established community partners (CAIS and CSSP), but a few learned about the study through a local ethnic newspaper article featuring the research study. Interested individuals contacted the study coordinator by calling a confidential phone number, who then explained the study in more detail and determine their eligibility.

To participate in the study, participants had to be Latin American undocumented workers, over 18 years of age, who spoke Spanish or Portuguese as a first language, and who had been living and working in the GTA for a minimum of 18 months. It was essential for participants to have at least 18 months of lived experience for the following reasons: (1) participants would have experienced all four of Canada's seasons (often undocumented workers' are employed in outdoor settings having important occupational health consequences); and (2) would have experienced several aspects of working conditions and forms of social exclusion related to seasonal work cycles. However, exceptions were

made if participants had 18 months of combined experience living undocumented in Canada and another country.

Those who met our eligibility criteria and agreed to participate after initiating the first call were scheduled for the first of three interviews. The initial telephone call also helped arrange childcare needs and helped ensure that special language needs were addressed. The time and date for the second and third interviews were always made at the end of the first interview so that no further contact would be required between researchers and participants. Therefore, only participants could initiate contact with the research team outside of scheduled interview times.

Data generation

Data gathering for this research project occurred within a two-year period between 2009 and 2011. Data were generated through three semi-structured interviews with each participant, observation and analytical notes, a socio-demographic questionnaire, and a body-mapped story for each participant. Interviews averaged two hours each and were conducted in Spanish or Portuguese by one of the principal investigators and two research assistants at the University of Toronto.

Each participant met with the same interviewer three times, generally over a two month period, and each interview was divided into two sections. The first hour consisted of a semi-structured interview and the second hour used a body-map storytelling technique to create life-size body images or “body-maps” that represented visually (e.g. drawing, painting, collage) key interview themes explored in the preceding hour (Gastaldo, Magalhaes, Carrasco, & Davy, 2012). The first interview explored the reasons why participants migrated to Canada, the conditions which facilitated or made it difficult for them to migrate, how they fell out of status, and their settlement process (e.g. how they found work, housing, etc.). The focus of the second interview was on their working conditions, employment relations and the combined impact of work and having no legal status on their health and wellbeing. Finally, the last interview aimed to explore their access to health and social services, their health promotion practices, social support structures, and plans for the future.

Data analysis

The data generated were analyzed in two parts. First, an inductive process of coding ensured that the data offered a thorough description of undocumented workers’ experiences. This followed a thematic cod-

ing approach, whereby interview transcripts were read in the original language they were conducted and thematic codes were developed. The second, deductive process of analysis, was based on the theoretical perspective of the study, and aimed to address consolidated analytical categories and new conceptual ways to explain health issues in this context (e.g. transnationality, subjectivity, etc.). QSR NVivo 8 analytical software was used to code de-identified data.

Participants' body-mapped stories were analyzed in their integrity according to a reflexive perspective, including data from the process of creating it (verbatim and field notes), the body map itself, and the narratives that accompany it. The purpose of the analysis was to gain insight into certain aspects of participants' logic, aspirations, desires, material circumstances, and ways of handling particular issues in the context of undocumentedness. For instance, visual representations appearing on body maps of physical and psychosomatic diseases were very helpful in describing the health consequences of undocumented work in a straightforward manner. At the end of the body map sessions, participants were asked to summarize their migration stories. Next, researchers added contextual and complementary information to their stories, creating short stories called *testimonios*. To help the general audience understand the meaning of the symbols, images, and colours appearing on the body maps, a key was also created.

The key themes that emerged from this analysis are presented throughout this e-book, and body maps, testimonios and keys appear in the [Study Gallery](#). Body-mapped stories have also appeared in public exhibitions and are available for viewing online (<http://www.migration-health.ca/undocumented-workers-ontario/body-mapping>).

Profile of study participants

We recruited 22 undocumented workers working in range of occupations across the GTA, while trying to balance for gender, sexual orientation and other participant characteristics to reflect the complexity of recent migration trends and processes. In practice however, there were numerous challenges in capturing a representative sample of this hidden population mainly because there is no clear picture of its composition, and second, because their precarious legal situation in Canada forces most individuals to avoid public exposure, thereby making them an inherently “hard-to-reach” population.

In the end, a total of 20 undocumented Latin American workers completed the study, with ages ranging from 23 to 50 ([see Table 1 for detailed socio-demographic characteristics by sex](#)). The sample consisted of 11 women and 9 men from 4 Latin American countries (Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, and Brazil)⁸. All spoke Spanish or Portuguese as a first language, were living and working undocumented in Canada, with 6 months being the shortest amount of time and 9 years being the longest. Five out of the 20 participants also had previous experience as an undocumented worker in another country.

Workers held a range of jobs in Canada, which in most cases differed substantially from their work and educational experience back home. In Canada, their work mostly included low skill manual labour jobs such as: construction work, factory work, painting, landscaping, cleaning, cooking, dishwashing, coat-checking, waitressing, and child-care giving⁹. Yet, prior to migrating, most participants held mid-to-high level professional jobs (e.g. bank staff, administrator, customer service representative, public servant, graphic designer, etc.); some were also business owners or licensed professionals such as occupational therapists ([see Table 2 for a comparison of pre and post migration occupations](#)). Participants were also highly educated, with 25 percent having at least a high school education, 35 percent having college level training, 20 percent having some university level education, and 20 percent having completed university degrees.

⁸ In our pilot study (2007), which focussed on 2 occupations (construction and cleaning), we had workers from many other countries, such as Uruguay, Chile, and Venezuela. In this study, our purposeful sampling strategies (i.e. search for diverse representation of occupations and length of time in the country) and our snowball method for recruitment, limited our recruitment to these 4 nationalities.

² It is important to note, however, that even among undocumented workers there exist further layers of vulnerability, which made it difficult to recruit a diverse sample of workers. For instance, we know from information obtained by undocumented workers themselves and community workers that there are several undocumented men and women engaging in sex work but we were unable to recruit them, as it remains a taboo occupation. A double criminalization process is a likely explanation for the difficulties our team experienced in trying to recruit these individuals.

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics by sex

Total Sample Size = 20		Male (9)	Female (11)	% of Sample	N
Sex		45%	55%	-	-
Sexual Orientation					
	Heterosexual	9	9	90%	18
	Homosexual	0	1	5%	1
	Bi-sexual	0	1	5%	1
Age					
	20-24	1	2	15%	3
	25-29	2	5	35%	7
	30-34	0	2	10%	2
	35-39	1	0	5%	1
	40-44	3	1	20%	4
	45-49	1	1	10%	2
	50-55	1	0	5%	1
Education					
	High school or less	2	3	25%	5
	College or Trade	3	4	35%	7
	Some university	2	2	20%	4
	University Graduate	2	2	20%	4
Marital Status					
	Single	3	4	35%	7
	Married or cohabiting	2	4	30%	6
	Separated	4	3	35%	7
Parental Status					
	Has child(ren) abroad	5	1	30%	6
	Has Canadian born child(ren)	0	3	15%	3
	Has no child(ren)	4	7	55%	11
Monthly Income in Canada					
	\$500-1000	0	2	10%	2
	\$1000-1500	2	4	30%	6
	\$1500-2000	5	3	40%	8
	\$2000-3000	0	1	5%	1
	\$3000-4000	2	1	15%	3
Time lived in Canada ³					
	Less than 1 year	0	1	5%	1
	1-2 years	3	6	45%	9
	3-4 years	4	2	30%	6
	5-6 years	1	1	10%	2
	7-8 years	0	1	5%	1
	More than 9 years	1	0	5%	1
Number of participants who lived undocumented in another country		2	3	25%	5

³ Refers to the total time lived in Canada and not the time spent undocumented (i.e. without legal immigration status). For most participants this did not vary by much, except in the case of 2 workers who submitted in-land refugee claims and had health coverage and permission to work in Canada for a period of 2-3 years.

Most participants in our study cited better financial opportunities as their primary reason for migrating to Canada, yet this often intersected with several other factors which motivated migration. For instance, some participants also migrated for personal development opportunities (e.g. formal education, language training), freedom from a personal crisis (e.g. family problems, divorce) or escape from violence and persecution (e.g. drug-related or urban violence, based on sexual orientation). The forms of entry to Canada were also quite diverse and ranged from having come to Canada with a valid work permit, tourist visa or student visa, to being smuggled, or crossing the border. As will be described in later sections of this book, participants’ reasons for falling out of status were complex and often resulted in a combination of situations such as overstaying their visa permitted time, inadvertently breaking the terms of their work permit or being denied their in-land refugee claim.

Table 2 Comparison of pre- and post-migration occupations by sex

	Pre-migration occupations (in country of origin)	Post-migration occupations (in Canada)	Additional income- generating activities (while in Canada)
MALES	Administrator, banker, business owner, customer service representative, manager, public servant, student	Cleaner (residential and industrial), construction worker (carpentry, fram- ing, roofing, demolition work), dishwasher/busboy, factory worker, painter	Factory work through temp agencies, property manage- ment, small business back home
FEMALES	Aesthetician, business owner, cook, legal assist- ant, occupational ther- apist, sales representative, student, telemarketer	Child caregiver, cleaner (residential and indus- trial), cook, factory worker, homemaker, landscaper, painter, server, store/busi- ness manager	Factory work through temp agencies, food sale, private cooking lessons, partici- pation in clinical trials, child caregiving, bookkeeping, freelance work, coat-checking

The production of undocumented migration



“Cast the first stone the person who has never had marks of emigration to taint his/her family tree (...) if you did not migrate, your father did, and if your father did not need to move, it is because your grandfather, before him, had no other way but to go elsewhere, carrying along his life on his back, seeking the bread that his homeland denied him.”

José Saramago (2009, translated from Portuguese original)

Chapter 1: The production of undocumented migration

"... They (the bosses) used to say... that no Canadian would work in the same way a Mexican person or a Latino person works. Perhaps because they are in more need or because they don't have papers." (Elena)

First and foremost, the reasons propelling workers to migrate thousands of miles away from their home and loved ones needs to be distinguished, yet understood, in the context of the factors that shape and make such journeys possible. Castles and Miller (2009) refer to such factors and interactions as the migratory process. Existing social networks and transnational linkages are at the foundation of the migratory process and play an important role in determining the course of migration and its outcomes for individuals. Yet, migration is complex and the causes for migration should not be reduced to simply push and pull factors, where individuals freely weigh the potential costs and benefits of migration. In most cases, our study participants did not have realistic information on their potential earnings in Canada, the cost of living, or an idea of the physical toll working in jobs distinct from what they were used to would have on their bodies. In many other cases, participants had distorted perceptions of life in Canada which was reinforced by other migrants' biased accounts of their experiences.

In this chapter we offer an alternative reading of why people migrate and illustrate how the process of falling out of status or becoming undocumented involves more than just the immigrant worker as an active player. We then explore the processes by which undocumented migration, as a global phenomenon, is simultaneously created and maintained by global and national level policies (health and immigration laws), macro-economic and labour market trends (e.g. recession, rise in casualization of work) and personal level interests that are deeply entrenched in dominant structures of power.

1.1. Who comes and why?

Institutional factors as well as socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, class, and education invariably shape migratory trends. As [Table 1](#) illustrates, most participants in our study had some form of technical training or higher education and rarely belonged to the lowest socioeconomic group in their respective countries of origin. In many cases, their intermediate social status granted them student and tourist visas that would have otherwise been denied to poor individuals that lacked secure jobs or assets needed to convince immigration officials that they were not here to stay. Belonging to a higher socioeconomic group also meant having the economic means to invest in migration, while those participants from lower social standings often relied on family loans or informal avenues of credit which they were required to pay back with high interest as soon as they arrived. For instance, one participant in our study who migrated with her family described having to sell their small home, furniture and all immediate assets just to pay for their airfare to Canada.

Kinship ties, friendship and shared community origins also contributed to participants' migration decisions and shaped the conditions of their arrival. For instance, out of the 20 participants in our study, only one had direct family members already living in Canada, but almost all others had friends, acquaintances or strong affiliations with an existing organization. Knowing someone in Canada was often the tipping point for migration, since these network connections constituted valuable social capital that some participants used to secure employment and other needed resources such as housing prior to or upon arrival to Canada. As Victoria, a recent university graduate, described:

"Even though I had a job, I felt the need to find a job in my field... So I decided to come to Canada. I have a friend here. I contacted him. He introduced me to a friend who still lives here and she helped me do a lot of things, like get a 'cash' (paying) job... she has been here for 10 years." (Victoria)

Although migration often depended on these conditions, it can be clearly seen through the example above that participants' rationale for migrating was usually guided by a comparison of their current life circumstances, whether financial, affective or professional, to that of al-

ternative opportunities for advancement or improved quality of life that Canada could offer them and their families.

Economic migration

While migrating for better economic opportunities was often cited as the main reason for migrating, participants' accounts of their pre-migration conditions elucidated how economic disadvantage is inextricably linked to social and political problems. Despite being highly educated or having years of work experience, participants commonly spoke of the impossibility for occupational advancement or job security in their countries of origin which often intersected with age and gender-based discrimination. Other participants reported leaving their home countries because of drug-related crime, political instability, and other types of violence and systemic discrimination. For instance, after years of working in his respective field and then being 'let go', Roberto noted:

"Back in my home country it is very common that after 35, you're considered not useful anymore. When you turn 36 you already know they're going to give you the well-known "voluntary retirement" treatment. They tell you: 'Roberto leave voluntarily, sign here'... and if you don't sign you're gone after a single mishap. That's what happened. The first mistake I made... they let me go." (Roberto)

Fabio, who worked as a business administrator for several years, similarly experienced targeted dismissal and spoke about the difficulty of finding a job thereafter because of the credentialist mentality of those hiring. Given that most of his education had been "on the job" and his previous position superseded his educational qualifications, he could not find a job: "the cost of living was very high... And [to find] work was very difficult due to my [limited] studies."

For other participants, the global economic recession took a major toll on their independent businesses which forced them into bankruptcy, unemployment, and massive debt that had a crippling effect on their livelihood and personal safety. As Rafael described:

"After living as low-middle class, we had an economic problem and we plunged to the bottom. We fell into poverty... My family has no money. We lost it all. Everything I earn goes to them, so they can eat and move forward." (Rafael)

As [Rafael's case study](#) below further illustrates, coming to Canada was a choice made under limited alternatives in the face of growing drug-related violence in his country of origin. Yet this type of systemic violence and threat to personal safety faced by so many immigrants is rarely recognized by immigration officials in Canada as a reason for admissibility.

Case Study 1 Why did Rafael migrate?

Rafael is a single young male who has lived in Canada for 2 years. After the market crash devastated his business he had no choice but to come to Canada to support his aging parents and pay off his family debt. Staying back home would have been his death sentence since drug trafficking, kidnapping for large ransoms, assault and political insecurity had become so pervasive. As Rafael described, *"all I owed, everything, I am taking two years to pay off [here]. There [back home] I could pay it in a month, but I'd become an assassin and end up in prison, dead, or fleeing for my life. I'd end up psychologically tormented. And so, the best option is to do it well...search [for opportunities] in another country, where you can live in peace"*. So Rafael came to Canada through a recruitment agency that claimed to provide workers with work permits and accommodation upon arrival in return for a flat pre-departure fee of \$3500. Upon arrival, Rafael was given a visitor's visa rather than a work permit, and was dropped off at a guest house where he had to pay for a one-bedroom basement apartment that he was forced to share with several other male migrant workers who came through the same recruitment agency weeks before. Although no work arrangements had been made, Rafael quickly found construction work and better housing through advertisements in Latin American newspapers and by connecting with other immigrants. Since his arrival, Rafael has worked in demolition, roofing and framing and has been to other major cities in Canada in search for better work opportunities. Rafael is continuously exploited by his employers who underpay and undertrain him while providing unsafe working conditions. He has also been deceived by employers who promise work permits or opportunities for learning new skills in return for low pay. On the weekends, Rafael does factory work through a temporary work agency, which he says is a useful distraction from the loneliness he feels at times. He has very little friends in Canada and although he wants to start a family, he feels that he has nothing to offer a woman. Rafael consistently turns to his faith for strength and perseverance. He thanks God for giving him the opportunity to come to Canada and help his family.

Yet for nearly all participants who migrated for primarily economic reasons, migrating to Canada was rooted in a clear trade-off between hard work and financial rewards. As Emiliano noted:

"... How many of my co-workers, like me, who sort tomatoes... how many of them do you think have studied to sort tomatoes? NONE OF THEM! Yet, their migration is economic, and when they go back, they want to work in their field but they can't do that here. Maybe if they could they would, but they can't." (Emiliano)

For Elena, migrating to Canada provided a once and a lifetime chance to help her parents pay off their debt and finally save for her own education:

"Nowadays, one Canadian dollar is worth twelve times more than a peso from [country]... What I most wanted to do was to help my parents a bit with their debt... and be able to pay for my own university education." (Elena)

For other participants, like Valeria, migrating to work in Canada provided an opportunity to save enough money to purchase an apartment for her family in her home country – something that would have taken several years, if even possible, to accomplish had she stayed and continued to work for minimal pay.

"I left my job there because I wanted.... I really wanted to have my own apartment. I had a house [shared with relatives]; I would have needed a mortgage from the bank to buy an apartment (...) it would have taken 30 years to pay back (...) So I decided to emigrate to pay for the apartment much faster." (Valeria)

Gendered migration patterns

Unlike trends in permanent migration to Canada, where women traditionally migrate for family reunification purposes, in our study, family considerations rarely motivated migration for women. In fact, as shown in [Table 1](#), a large number of men and women were single, and only one female in our study had children abroad and sent regular remittances to her family. Yet for 4 men in our study, the main purpose for their migration was to provide financial support to their spouse or children back home.

The migration histories of our study participants also highlight how migration is shaped by gendered kinship relations. For instance, household circumstances and organization played a critical role in the process of negotiating resources and making migration decisions, such as who migrates and for what reasons. Pepe for example, was the oldest unmarried sibling in his household after his father passed away, and his migration to Canada was motivated in large part by his new found obligation to provide for his widowed mother and young sibling. As Pepe noted:

“Right now she is not working because I told her, ‘Why are you working if I am sending you money?’ ...They (my oldest brothers) do (help) but not in the way I am telling you, they already have children, they have things to do.” (Pepe)

As a single young male, Rafael similarly came to Canada to help support his aging parents. These two cases, in addition to the four fathers in our study who provided regular remittances to their families, reaffirm the common household expectation that males should, at all cost, fulfill the function of primary breadwinners. Conversely, the majority of women in our study provided only occasional remittances to support their family back home, and kept the majority of their earnings as savings, which further reinforces this gendered migration pattern.

Gender also intersected with other axes of identity such as age and marital status to influence migration. Unlike all the men in our study who came to Canada unaccompanied, 5 out of the 11 women in our study either came with their partners or with direct family members, which may indicate that migration becomes a more viable option for women as the perceived risks of migrating to an unknown place decrease if traveling with someone. The majority of women in our study were also younger than males and tended to be unmarried without children before migrating. This may also indicate that young single women have more personal freedom than females who are married or have children and are more confined to the domestic arena. Overall, our study findings suggest that while participants had varying life circumstances, the undocumented migration of adult married females or single mothers unaccompanied by their children tends to be low in comparison to husbands, fathers, unmarried sons and single daughters.

It is also important to mention that experiences of physical and sexual violence disproportionately affected women in our study, both as a

precipitator to undocumented migration and as a result. For instance, Renata experienced repeated sexual violence in her country of origin, and combined with the financial stressors she and her partner faced, this was her main reason for leaving.

“As a woman, I suffered a lot. A lot of assault, a lot of violence... There wasn’t a single job where I wasn’t sexually assaulted. You go out to the street and feel afraid that somebody will do something to you... not just get “jumped”, but something physical. I mean, THEY TOUCH YOU, it’s horrible! ... You know you cannot live free.” (Renata)

Other participants’ experiences were characterized by sexual migration, a concept recently developed to capture international relocation that is motivated by the sexuality of those who migrate (Carrillo, 2004). Andrea, an openly homosexual female, recounted her experience of being the target for violent homophobic harassment in a large urban centre back home. Andrea also faced social rejection by her family as a result of her sexual orientation, and her reason for migrating to Canada was highly motivated by the search for greater social integration, sexual freedom and rights.

“[There is] people’s rejection, your own family. And, by not being there, it isn’t an issue (...). I look a lot like my sister ... [and] one day my sister was beaten [on her way home] because people thought she was me. [They said] “That girl is a queer!” Moderator: And where you beaten in the streets in [country]? Andrea: I was beaten many times in schools, but also [in the street]... Moderator: And who would beat you up? Andrea: Boys, girls, skinheads...” (Andrea)

For participants like Valeria, sexual violence came as a direct consequence of the undocumented migration journey. Valeria was one of the few undocumented women in our study who had experience with clandestine border crossing, and in addition to having faced a very long and treacherous journey to the United States from her home country, Valeria described being threatened with rape by the male coyotes she trusted in to get her across the border. The vulnerability of migrant females to sexual abuse was also a common thread in other participants’ accounts of the dangers associated with undocumented work. Days after arriving

to Canada with a group of undocumented workers, Fabio was asked by three of his female housemates, who knew he was married and had a daughter, if he could accompany them to a meeting related to a job offer. The people who owned the house where they rented rooms had told some acquaintances about these girls' arrival. Due to lack of concrete details about the job and fearing for their safety, they went to the meeting location with Fabio as a chaperone. There they learnt these men owned a bar where "dancers" were needed. As Fabio explained, the girls were reassured this was not prostitution, that no client would ever touch them, but the job description seemed suspiciously easy and well-paid so they left despite all promises made.

These stories illustrate that women are particularly vulnerable to all types of violence and abuse during their journey and upon arriving to destination countries such as Canada. Anecdotal evidence provided by study participants about such vulnerabilities has also been corroborated by our experienced community partners. Recent literature on sex trafficking in Canada, further suggests that migrant women are repeatedly left in the hands of organized criminal groups or by individuals who take advantage of their vulnerable legal situation in Canada to sexually exploit or rape them (Langevin & Belleau, 2002; Timoshkina, 2011).

Learning and professional development

Beyond economic or personal safety considerations, participants also migrated to seek educational or language training opportunities in Canada. Most often, such participants did not intend to become undocumented workers. For instance, after saving several thousand dollars to cover her flight to Canada and enrolment in private English classes, Victoria described having very little money left over shortly after her arrival to cover her living expenses as a student. She notes:

"Toronto is NOT cheap. It is VERY EXPENSIVE. Luckily I used to pay little rent, let's say \$380 plus utilities...I started working right away! That's why I got into landscaping." (Victoria)

For other participants, overstaying their student visa permitted time or other forms of entry allowed many of them to take advantage of employment opportunities while exploring personal or professional interests that would translate to real benefits once they returned to their home countries.

For the few who had the resources, this meant enrolling in private language courses prior to arriving to Canada or registering in college-level certificate programs to complement degrees they had received in their home countries. For instance, one of Maya's main reasons to come to Canada was the opportunity study English, a language she needed for her future professional development in her country of origin. Victoria, on the other hand, planned to apply to a master's program in Canada but needed additional English training to be able to succeed as an international student. Andres, a recent university graduate, came to Canada on a 3-month student visa to learn English as well:

"...This is what I thought when I first came to Canada... 'I am going to study, meet people, interact with people... people from different cultures'. I drew a magnifying glass because... I was going to discover new things, explore new things, learn new things. So, I think that [the magnifying glass] represents that very well." (Andres)

Right: See Andres' representation of the magnifying glass in front of his face. [Click here to see his entire body map.](#)



It is also important to situate migration within a much broader discourse brought about by today's globalized and increasingly interconnected world, which is a genuine desire to explore the world and feed one's curiosity about countries and cultures. A common thread in participants' narratives, and in their body-mapped stories, was a sincere longing to see the world, learn new things, and be exposed to ways of doing and knowing that were different from their own. As Elena described when speaking about what she expected before coming to Canada:

"I said to myself, 'I am going to... 'get my back tired'... and yes, I will be doing things I've never done before, but I am going to learn how to make that food, do things I've never done here before, and have a chance to be in Canada'. So, it was like... a dream." (Elena)

1.2. *Becoming undocumented*

Most participants in our study came to Canada through legal immigration channels, and for many, the opportunity to enter ‘legally’ was the main reason for coming to Canada versus other neighboring countries (see Table 3). For Mariana, who came to Canada with a toddler, clandestine border crossing to the U.S. posed huge risks that she felt were not worth taking. She noted:

“... Well, it is a risk. A lot of people have died this way, and well no. No, NEVER, EVER, EVER! The idea of coming to Canada was because we knew we were able to travel with a visa. So for sure we could make it to Canada...” (Mariana)

Pepe also referred to the U.S. migration as a dangerous option because migrants can face death attempting to cross the Mexico-U.S. border. Some of his Central American coworkers had migrated to the U.S. this way, and explained that it was very risky. He explained that the open travel policy that existed between Mexico and Canada prior to 2009 gave migrant workers a much safer option. Fabio explained how he was advised that Canada would a better option after inquiring about going to the U.S. first:

“[He told me] ‘Why don’t you go to Canada?’ And I said: ‘What? Is this a joke? Are you a coyote?’ [He answered] ‘If you try to go to the US, the only way is through Mexico with a coyote. He will take you through the desert and you will starve [and] be thirsty... But not with me; with me you have deluxe service [to Canada], you take the plane.’ [So I said] ‘Okay, fine. Let’s see what happens...’” (Fabio)

Table 3 Characterizing undocumentedness

	Males (9)	Females (11)	% of Sample	N (20)
Forms of entry to Canada				
Smuggled ⁴	2	0	10%	2
Work permit	0	1	5%	1
Tourist or student visa	6	10	80%	16
Border crossing	1	0	5%	1
Main pathway to undocumentedness⁵				
Failed in-land refugee claim	1	2	15%	3
Overstayed visa	7	8	75%	15
Broke terms of work permit	0	1	5%	1
Immediately upon border crossing	1	0	5%	1

While these experiences highlight the en-route conditions under which people choose Canada, what is less clear is how the majority of participants in our study shifted from having a relatively secure or ‘legal’ status upon arrival to having no status as undocumented workers. Goldring and colleagues (2009) have theorized the production of illegality and precarious status in Canada, and argue that unlike the American reality, Canadian immigration policy produces various categories of immigrants with varying levels of rights and entitlements. Our research supports this trend, in that several participants experienced an array of legal statuses before becoming undocumented. The multiple pathways to undocumentedness outlined in the second part Table 3 above highlights this complexity. For instance, three participants came to Canada with tourist visas and then submitted in-land refugee claims, which gave them permission to work in Canada and have access to some health and social services. They were then denied their claim, stripped of their refugee-status entitlements and given deportation orders. Two other participants thought they had been granted work permits in Canada, but were deceived by immigration agents and given tourist visas instead. In the next sections, we explore the intricacies of becoming undocumented in an attempt to characterize undocumentedness as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon contrary to mainstream assumptions.

Trusting that Canada will protect you

Consistent among almost all of participants’ initial accounts for coming to Canada was a perception that Canada was safer than the U.S. and that there existed more opportunities for regularizing their status once in Canada. Particularly for those escaping systemic violence in

their countries of origin, coming to Canada provided an opportunity to rebuild themselves in a safe society. Although Rafael did not submit a refugee claim in Canada, his [Case Study](#) reveals that clients of smuggling networks include not only economic migrants, but also legitimate refugees unable to make asylum claims from their country of origin because of restrictive border rules or because they cannot produce the evidence needed to submit a strong in-land claim. As Rafael explained:

“... It is quite difficult [to submit a refugee claim] ... you don’t know what kind of problems you are getting into with the people over there...the people who threaten you. If you provide their names here for protection... you don’t know. Delinquency and money control everything. Sometimes you don’t feel safe talking about your real story back home and about the reasons why you needed to seek refuge. Because, if those people who threatened you ever found out, they could even kill you. So the best thing to do is to remain like this – go on without them knowing until eventually they are imprisoned or they forget about you. It’s better this way.” (Rafael)

Hence for migrants like Rafael, living and working in Canada is a safe haven despite the limited legal and social protections available to them as a result of their undocumented status. Yet for other migrant workers, like Renata ([see Case Study 2](#)), falling out of status was a way of life that she was not prepared to live after living as an in-land refugee claimant for three years.

⁴ Entered with tourist visas but made to believe by a network of smugglers that they would get work permits.

⁵ We refer to workers’ last legal status in Canada as the main pathway to becoming undocumented given that several participants experienced a combination of legal statuses.

Case Study 2 How Renata became an undocumented worker?

Renata is a young female who came to Canada with her partner four years ago. Renata experienced direct forms of sexual violence and because she and her partner could not get stable jobs to pay for tuition, they were forced to drop out of university. They then came to Canada as visitors and stayed with a distant friend who had been living here for years. They started working night shifts as cleaners, but sometimes they never got paid for their work, and when they did get paid, it was far below minimum wage. For months Renata could only afford canned food because she had to pay back her family and friends who had lent them money to come to Canada. Then, Renata's friend started charging lucrative fees for shared rent. Renata saw no way out. She was advised to apply for refugee status. In the meantime, it would give her some job security and an opportunity to learn English. But things didn't get much better. Despite having a valid SIN, Renata could only find undocumented work. No one wanted to hire refugees. They continued to work night shifts and attended language classes during the day. They were socially isolated and sleep deprived, and eventually Renata got very depressed. On one occasion, Renata and her partner had to sleep on a park bench because they had nowhere to go while their apartment was being fumigated for bed bugs. Renata finally saw a counselor who advised her to keep busy, so she began volunteering and getting closer to her church community. Overtime, Renata made strong friendships and started to get better jobs. Then, after three years, their refugee application was denied. Although they feared for their life, they decided to stay and await the decision on their humanitarian grounds application. Canada had become home for them, and they weren't willing to go back without a fight. But the transition was hard. As Renata described: *"[when you fall out of status] you're practically left in blank... the change is drastic, you feel it in all respects... you have to change everything. You have to leave work; you have to move homes ... cut communication with 'certain' people; be careful when speaking; not be so exposed ... [because] you don't know if they can report you. These are things you don't want to face"*.

Renata's Case Study highlights that falling out of status is not a straightforward process, often involving a variety of complex immigration status situations. As her story suggests, depending on the pathway to undocumented status, some workers do have access to services at certain stages in their immigration process. As a refugee claimant, Renata

was able to seek professional help for her mental health concerns, speak to immigration professionals, see walk-in doctors free of charge as a result of her interim federal health benefits, and attend government-sponsored language classes. Yet once her application was denied, Renata had to ‘relearn’ how to navigate life in Canada, but this time with limited access to essential services and near paralyzing fear of deportation. Falling out of status implied several changes: relocating; forfeiting established networks; stigma for staying in Canada unlawfully; unemployment and switching jobs; and being stripped of all identification needed to move around a large city. Regarding the latter point, Renata was required to hand over all pieces of identification to immigration officials when she was given a formal deportation order. This is done to ensure that deportees have a reason for complying with deportation orders or risk living in Canada without any form of identification, including those from their own country of origin, such as a passport, drivers licence and credit cards.

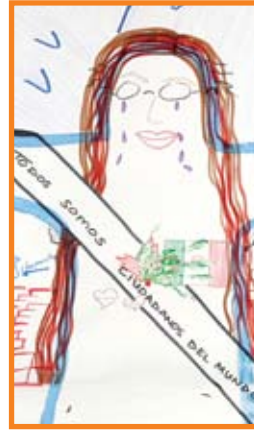
Renata’s immigration story also elucidates how contradictory and incoherent legal statuses can be in Canada. While Renata had submitted an application to remain in the country on humanitarian and compassionate (H&C) grounds, this did not protect her from being removed from Canada. In other words, persons who have a pending H&C claim are still deportable under Canadian immigration law, and processing times for such applications can take anywhere between 30-42 months (CIC, 2012). Frustrated and disappointed with such contradictory policies set up by Canadian immigration authorities, Renata described:

“To me, that word, of being “illegal” in a country - I do not accept that... First of all, I feel that this- everything there is, God created it for everyone. It is very difficult for me to understand how governments can set these kinds of limits – that you are forced to be in a place where you don’t want to be. I can tell you that I don’t want to be in my home country... I don’t feel I am from there...” (Renata)

This global citizenship philosophy, and rejection of the criminalization they faced as undocumented workers in Canada, was a common sentiment among several other participants and was often reflected in their body-mapped stories.



Left: See the ship on top of Nelson's head which represents his desire to see the world and his personal slogan found on his chest, which reads "navegar é preciso" (to sail is necessary). Click [here](#) to see his entire body map.



Left: Elena's personal slogan found written across her chest, which reads "todos somos ciudadanos del mundo" (we are all citizens of the world). Click [here](#) to see her entire body map.

Roberto, one of three failed-refugee claimants in our study, particularly felt that Canada's immigration process purposely divorced itself from emotion by using paper-based accounts of migrants' lives to determine eligibility. He felt these methods of assessment were unfair because they did not adequately capture who migrants were as people and their proposed contributions to Canadian society. Roberto described:

"When you just start applying you have the hope that one day they will acknowledge something. But unfortunately, immigration does not see the personal. I mean, they don't classify you as a person who can be productive for the country... If they had only given me a chance to show them! UUUFFF forget it! I swear to you, if I had papers I wouldn't be here (pointing to the ground). I would be up in the sky. I swear." (Roberto)

Mariana's migration story also points to some interesting nuances in Canada's immigration system. Lacking the education and English language skills to apply through Canada's points based system for permanent residency and lacking the financial means to obtain a student visa to come to Canada temporarily, Mariana was left with very little alternatives but to apply through the only remaining avenue – that is, as a refugee. Not only was Mariana and her family advised to apply as refugees by an immigration consultant back home, but once they arrived, they were also required to regularize their status by the shelter in which they stayed in. Although she and her family lived and worked for 3 years prior to being given an negative decision on their claim, Mariana described

having sold everything before coming to Canada, and being unable to go back immediately because they had limited savings:

"We had NOTHING in [home country]. So we couldn't go back there because that would have been terrible. In [home country] it is very difficult to get up from nothing. So we could not go back there like that." (Mariana)

However, refugee claimants are not the only class of migrants vulnerable to losing status since sponsorship breakdown can also lead to loss of legal status in Canada. For instance, Maya was recruited from her home country to come work in Canada and obtained a closed work permit which was only valid if she worked as a child caregiver for a diplomat. After a few months her employer failed to comply with the work permit conditions and Maya was left unemployed with little chance of finding a new employer that would meet the specific requirements of her permit (i.e. another diplomat). She described:

"(...) I came as a worker, with a valid work permit to work for a diplomat. I worked for four months as her child's baby sitter ... the contract was for a year and a half. [One day] she suddenly told me she couldn't get used to me (...) that she missed the former baby sitter (...). [Then] she called this person back and booked my flight back home. She simply didn't respect the one and a half-year contract. [A lawyer told me] that I could stay in Canada, that I was a free person, that there was no problem if I stayed, but that I couldn't work (...) but I had debt back home, I couldn't go back yet, and I needed to learn English. I found people who wanted to hire me but they were not diplomats." (Maya)

Maya's case also shows how pathways to undocumentedness are also gendered in nature. While there was only one case of this type of pathway in our study, this trend is consistent with a growing body of literature that ascertains how precarious legal status disproportionately affects women and members of racialized communities (Goldring, et al., 2009; Oxman-Martinez, et al., 2005; Timoshkina, 2011).

As this section has highlighted, the process of falling out of status is often complex, involving much more players than the migrant worker alone. It is important to highlight that [Table 3](#) challenges the common

belief that migrants are misusing Canada's asylum system in order to gain regular admission. Only 3 out of the 20 workers who participated in our study applied for refugee status in Canada, and the remaining majority had plans to return to their countries of origin. As we saw in the case of Renata, refugee claimants can remain in limbo for years, and as we saw with Mariana, if their applications are rejected, many workers lack the economic means to rebuild their lives back in their countries of origin. Many failed refugee claimants thus face the combined risk of persecution and undue economic hardship should they go back to their countries of origin. Even those who did not apply for refugee status were afraid of the violence or lack of legal and civil rights back home.

Readily available jobs are hard to resist

While some participants came to Canada with the hope of regularizing their status, like those who submitted in-land refugee claims and held a valid work permit, a large number of participants knew that their sole purpose for coming was to work. Such participants were very vocal about the widening economic and social disparities in their countries of origin, and spoke about the personal, familial and socio-economic pressures they faced to come to Canada for work at whatever cost. Although they were not proud about having to disobey Canadian policies to achieve this, they strongly felt that such policies did not reflect current labour market realities. Nearly all workers knew they needed a work permit to legally work in Canada, yet most were confronted with readily available jobs in the cash economy once they arrived – thus demonstrating a clear mismatch of labour market needs and admission requirements. For instance, Elena was recruited directly from her home country and Valeria found a job less than 24 hours after arriving despite not knowing anyone in Canada. These examples highlight how the high availability of jobs upon arrival is also sustained by an active demand for undocumented workers before they arrive. Thus these experiences suggest that becoming and staying undocumented immediately after arrival, is a prerequisite for obtaining employment, rather than an unintended consequence.

For instance, Andres, who initially came to Canada with the plan to only study English, said:

"I knew I needed a permit. Almost always-everything I read on the Internet said I needed a permit – that I wasn't allowed to work without it and that it would be very difficult. But now that I am here, I know it's not that difficult." (Andres)

In Andres' case, he overstayed his student visa permitted time because readily available jobs provided an opportunity to save money for continued education. For those participants who worked via temporary work agencies (also known as temp agencies), undocumented work was not only available, but also easy to keep given that factories routinely dealt with temp agencies to obtain on-demand labour typically for low-skilled manufacturing assignments. For Luna, signing up with a temporary work agency was quick and she could rest assured that the temp agency would call her for work. She described:

"It was fast. Yes, it was fast. I went there [a temporary work agency] and I applied. Of course, sometimes they ask you for a copy of your ID. Just that...and I started. They would call me and ask, 'Are you available to work?'" (Luna)

Emiliano pointed out that the reason why many temp agencies opt to hire only undocumented workers is because they make more profit by giving these workers below minimum wages. Client companies also benefit from this employment relationship because they get a regular flow of cheap labour and are less accountable for working conditions and employment standards.

"They pay us \$8.50 BUT they are giving a part to our employers [the agencies] for every hour we work so that we are there consistently... I know from a good source that the company is paying them \$13 for each agency worker." (Emiliano)

For other participants, like Valeria and Nelson, finding an undocumented job in key sectors such as hospitality and construction was a very straightforward process. The fact that both had previous experience in these sectors as undocumented workers in another country may have facilitated this process. The usual steps involved reading newspapers and connecting with their ethnic communities. Another participant, who did not speak English, did not know where to start searching, but once he went to church he was introduced to a network of employers in the construction sector and obtained a job immediately.

"[After church, one man said] 'I want to introduce you to these 2 guys here'. I was there with a roommate; he was a student living in the same house as me. 'They need work'. So, someone

said: "Where are you from?" I told him the State I come from and he said: "@#, we are compatriots". I said "Really?" [laughing]. And he said: "You are hired!" (Fabio)*

Despite having no established networks in Canada, after Valeria got her first job, she connected with co-ethnic peers and described that *"In 15 days I had 5 jobs in Canada [to choose from]."* (See Case Study 4).

Interestingly, workers were rarely asked by their employer about their legal immigration status in Canada. For instance, after Maya was let go by her official employer and lost her work permit entitlements, she decided to only look for work that paid cash, and was rarely turned down by employers. As she started to work, she realized why it was easy to find jobs:

Participant: *"They are nice these Canadians, they are good poeple, but I am aware they are doing something wrong, aren't they? (...) because they are giving ME a job (...) they always pay cash. I believe in my conscience that they are doing something wrong. Moderator: Do you think they don't pay taxes? Participant: For sure they don't! (...) They pay cash every day. When he [the boss] registers the price in the machine the workers' money is already out. I don't know much English, (...) but in my country I used to pay income tax really neatly, I have work experience, my relatives have a business, I know he is evading taxes."* (Maya)

Hence, the issue of status in Canada seems to be overshadowed by the growing demand for cash economy workers. Employers benefit from this cheap cash economy because, like temp agencies and their client companies, labour for cash comes without any strings attached such as employee benefits, taxes or liability insurance.

In the most extreme of cases, employers go as far as to actively recruit migrant workers directly from their home countries. This was the case for Elena, who was recruited through a network of neighbourhood connections in her home town to come to Canada to work as a cook for a family-owned restaurant. At the time, Elena did not have the economic means to afford the flight, so the restaurant owners agreed to purchase it so she could get here sooner. Elena described being one of the many Latin American women recruited by this restaurant to come work undocumented.

When asked why the owners did not hire locally, Elena responded:

“Obviously they should declare taxes because the conditions wouldn’t be the same. Well, at the beginning they used to say that no Canadian would work in the same way a Mexican person or a Latino person works, perhaps because they are in more need or because they don’t have papers or... well, because we know about our ethnic foods and so forth. I personally believe that a [Canadian] wouldn’t work so many hours. A person with legal status wouldn’t work so long. I am not saying the pay is low, but there are places where you can work for much more.”
(Elena)

While Roberto did not migrate to Canada under the same conditions as Elena, his experience working as an undocumented cleaner for several years with the same company speaks to a direct preference by Canadian companies to hire undocumented workers versus legal citizens. When the company he worked for was short staffed, Roberto was asked by his boss to find an undocumented worker as a replacement. Roberto noted: *“... She [the boss] doesn’t want people with papers... she wants perfection and she can’t find it. She only finds it among immigrants, who, because of their situation, try to be perfect.”* (Roberto)

Elena and Roberto’s experiences highlight how undocumented workers have largely become Canada’s imported version of offshore labour. Some scholars have called this the “Nuevo Sur” (the “New South”) (Deeb-Sossa & Bickham, 2008) – environments with minimal working conditions not fully regulated by legal and civil rights of the high-income countries where they are located – but in this e-book, we conceive it as being part of the undocumented migration industry, where a vast number of intermediaries play a role, including employers who perpetuate an active demand for undocumented workers while gaining profit and the government that contributes to an ongoing ‘blame the victim’ discourse that criminalizes undocumented workers and further makes these workers unable to defend themselves from exploitation.

1.3. Undocumented migration is here to stay

From our participants’ experiences in the preceding section, it is clear that the demand for undocumented workers is at an all-time high

in Canada and growing. Yet, the rules governing migration to Canada get increasingly tighter and there is a new emphasis on temporary work arrangements that do not lead into permanent residency – this is occurring in an era when the politics and economics governing the flow of money and the global movement of goods continue to proceed unrestrictedly. Thus the complex network of players benefitting from undocumented migration seems to be part and parcel of its continuance. As governments manage migration through multi-level policies, their main purpose for doing so is to regulate the foundation and economic gains of a global migration business (Salt & Stein, 1997). Here, the main apparatuses for managing this industry's business efficiency are government programs aimed to control who is allowed to enter and what each of these categories of migrants are entitled. Maintaining this business enterprise are global labour market trends that promote the continued demand for cheap labour regardless of its source and its consequences on human life. At an individual level, migrants' limited income or difficult personal circumstances make them engage with globalization processes, producing undocumented migration flows to Canada, and maintaining workers in a precarious legal status once they are here.

The undocumented migration industry

Embedded in participants' migration narratives was the recurring theme of what we call, an "undocumented migration industry". This booming industry included a broad spectrum of people and organizations that benefited in overt and covert ways by organizing undocumented migration, advising workers on how to migrate, or by exploiting workers once they were here. These players were both in workers' countries of origin and in Canada, and included: travel agents, labour recruiters, brokers, smugglers (i.e. coyotes), immigration lawyers, unscrupulous landlords, employers, and at times, known acquaintances, family, and friends. Thereby we envision undocumented migration as a monopolistically competitive industry with no end in sight.

Several participants in our study paid to obtain travel information from agents or legal experts or to obtain 'migration packages' in their country of origin. Rafael for instance, trusted in a recruitment agency he found through a newspaper and which eventually persuaded him into thinking that this was a more secure way to travel. Rafael recounted:

"I already wanted to come to Canada. I had planned it. I was going to arrive with friends of friends of mine... but suddenly,

I saw an agency ad in the paper, which said: ‘Do you want to work? Do you want to migrate to Canada?’ So I went there. You go to the agency and they tell you about the jobs. Everything comes out to \$3,500.” (Rafael)

As highlighted in [Case Study 1](#), this was a ghost recruitment agency that did not offer Rafael any of the things it promised once he arrived. Similarly, Mariana and her family spoke to an immigration consultant in their country of origin who offered a free consultation session about the immigration process in Canada. Mariana noted:

“There was this person on TV who said he could get you work permits, Canadian papers and so on... They [my family members] went to talk to him but... he charged a lot of money.” (Mariana)

Mariana later noted that immigration consultants usually provide free one-time consultations as a strategy to gain the trust of interested migrants, and it is common for consultants to work with a broader network of smugglers who charge lucrative fees for getting people to Canada once they agree to work with them. It is also important to point out that ‘expert consultants’ also frequently mislead migrants into believing that obtaining legal status in Canada would be an easy, straightforward process. When asked to provide a message to the general audience through her body map, Valeria included the following recommendation: *“Migrants should get information when they arrive to Canada. I did things wrong for lack of information”*. When Valeria first arrived, she assumed that the best way to obtain Canadian residency was to get a job and later apply for landed immigrant status. In her mind, it made perfect sense that those who were already employed would be excellent candidates to become permanent residents and later citizens. Clearly, Valeria had a flawed understanding of how the immigration system really worked in Canada (e.g. applying from abroad, need for higher education to achieve points, etc).



Top: Valeria's message to others. [Click here to see her entire body map.](#)

The use and cost of smuggling networks to come to Canada have also been highly impacted by increased border security measures which

make it difficult for individuals to come without any assistance. Extra smuggling fees were often imposed against the will of participants which blurs the line between smuggling and coercive forms of human trafficking. For instance, Fabio agreed to pay an organized network of smugglers a set fee to obtain a Canadian work permit, but then found out that the smugglers were assisting other migrants by providing fraudulent documentation. Although Fabio was able to enter Canada with a valid tourist visa, he was forced to pay his smugglers more money due to unexpected costs trying to smuggle the other migrants. Fabio explained:

“He got me a visa for 10 days... By the time I met him to start the trip, I realized there were 19 other people (...). Five out of 20 people had a real passport [with a visa], like me. (...) The other 15, all forged... But the amount he charged wasn’t the same [for everyone] (...) those with the fake passports paid around ten thousand American dollars. In the end, he charged me a bit more, five thousand dollars. It was supposed to be two thousand but he tricked me, as the trip progressed [they passed by more than one country] he kept changing [the amount].”
(Fabio)

While these examples highlight the potential profits made as a single undocumented worker comes to Canada, it should also be noted that several participants in our study experienced “back and forth” migration to Canada and within Canada, highlighting the multiplier effect on profits made by circuitous migration and secondary migration patterns.

Particularly evident upon undocumented workers’ arrival to Canada is that the undocumented migration industry can be further expanded to include legitimate businesses in Canada that thrive off the provision of services or goods related to migrants’ everyday needs. For instance, several participants described purchasing private travel insurance, opening up bank accounts, enrolling in private English classes costing over \$3000 per term, paying hefty service charges to cash-transfer businesses to send bi-weekly or monthly remittances back home. With respect to everyday living costs, all participants used Toronto’s public transportation system (some often purchasing monthly metropasses), paid rent to local residents, and maintained cell phone accounts with major Canadian service providers. The Canadian government also profits from this underground economy because undocumented workers pay taxes on purchased goods, a few pay income taxes using other people’s social insurance number, but

do not use services, paying out-of-pocket fees for essential health and social services. Interestingly, these forms of economic contribution often go unnoticed and are typically overshadowed by conservative practices, policies and national debates which devolve into a discourse of loss; that undocumented workers are a burden to social safety nets, that they take away jobs, and that they abuse health systems.

The “American Dream” is stronger than the border

Globalization has generated an increase in worker migration worldwide which has been sustained by widening socio-economic gaps between nations and a concomitant rise in contingent work which now characterizes the global state of the economy. In Canada, the conscious decision to curtail irregular work migration has been largely devoid of discussions about workers’ individual agency, thereby gravely underestimating their capacity and resourcefulness to affect their own social and economic livelihoods in the face of highly conservative politics.

For the majority of participants we interviewed, migrating to Canada was seen as a gateway to opportunity, a chance to realize the “American dream”. Canada in this regard, has been skilfully constructed by returning migrants and others alike as a place where freedom and economic prosperity are possible. As Emiliano noted:

“We had these friends who used to tell us over there [country] about life here and no immigrant wants to tell a life of failure. So they always tell you this fairy tale of wonders and you swallow it, even though you have been to other countries... you swallow it because you want it to be true, right?” (Emiliano)

It is within these deeply entrenched beliefs and hopes for a better life in the ‘First World’, that workers overlook the potential hardships of migration and find the means to keep coming. For women in particular, coming to Canada offers a sense of opportunity, usually not afforded to women in their home country. As Elizabeth noted:

“because I am a woman, here the doors are more open. Here, there isn’t as much discrimination as there is in [country]; even to get a job, I noticed that. If someone was black or [different], they wouldn’t read their resume. They would simply throw it in the trash” (Elizabeth)

Migrating to Canada and staying at whatever cost, is also sustained by the promise of fulfilling material goals and aspirations that would be impossible to attain back home. For some participants, this included the purchase of a home in their country of origin. For others, it included paying off debt, paying their children's primary or higher education, saving enough money to open a business or pay for their own tuition when they returned. One worker spoke about having saved over thirty thousand dollars in 3 years while making less than \$13 an hour. In almost all cases, participants realized the multiplier effect of earning Canadian wages after converting it to their local currency back home, and this often prolonged workers' intended stay in Canada. As Roberto noted:

"I am able to recover \$300 dollars in three days here, maybe in a week if you want, but this is because I am here. There is a big difference. [If I spent] \$300 dollars [in my home country] I'd lose it and never get it back. That is my point of reference, and that's the reason why I am still here." (Roberto)

Similarly, when asked to compare the work she did back home to her current work in Canada, Valeria noted:

"They are different only in financial terms, right?... Because in [country] you work and you get paid in [local currency] (...) I used to work a lot there too, but here I work a lot and I get paid in dollars. So, since the dollar is worth much more than [local currency], you can get ahead [and] buy the things you need. It's like... I'm working so I will buy things now, because if tomorrow I stop working I already have these things I wanted." (Valeria)

Workers also described how, overtime, their families began to depend on regular remittances to sustain their improved lifestyles back home. For instance, the children of undocumented workers were able to attend better quality schools, enrol in paid extracurricular activities, attend private universities, and families were finally able to afford gravely needed health care. Therefore, the decision to go back home, particularly for undocumented men supporting their families, had to be carefully balanced against the potential loss of their family's improved quality of life. As Roberto explained:

"The quality of life my son has, the education... I mean, it is very difficult. I know that the price I am paying is very high... being

apart. I know I am missing out on the best years of my child's life... but I know that one day I am going to sit with my child and we are going to talk, and I am going to tell him the cause, the motivation, the reason I couldn't be with him all this time."
(Roberto)

Imposing visa restrictions on migrant-sending countries, and thereby making migration more difficult, dangerous, and expensive to travel back and forth, has also 'locked' workers in Canada for longer periods than anticipated or wanted. For Julio, this has meant living in Canada for over 9 years without being able to travel to his home country. For others, like Fabio, it has meant forfeiting milestone celebrations with his children in order to meet 'all or nothing' remittance obligations given that migration to Canada often presents itself as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that is either too costly, too dangerous, or too logistically impossible to repeat.

Yet most participants agreed that harsher immigration controls and visa restrictions would only push migrants to find new, and most likely, more dangerous, ways to travel or meet visa requirements. Some alluded to higher smuggling fees being imposed in some countries and others spoke about the rise of trafficking networks. Emiliano also pointed to the power of established social networks in making continued migration possible, even after a recent visa requirement was imposed on his home country:

"I am not afraid of the visa. I think I can get it. I am sure of this because I have many contacts in my home country who could give me a hand to get a Canadian visa... I have a friend here who could invite me to come, right? Whatever the rules they want to set for us, it doesn't matter. I'll come. I'll comply. It doesn't matter." (Emiliano)

In addition to the goals, aspirations, and new found responsibilities that motivated people to come and stay, and the visa restrictions that make it impossible to leave once they are here, participants also described a sense of pride in not going back home until they had accomplished what they came to do. For instance, Elena constantly extended her return date, and when we asked her why she still remained in Canada, she described:

"I could already picture myself there... But then I started thinking and saying to myself: 'When you left [your home country] you said, 'I am going to Canada to learn English and I will come back having learned how to speak English'. You left and now you are going back with no money and with no English". So, it's because of personal pride that I am still here, not because I am stubborn...but rather, because this process has already been too painful and has cost me a lot. This is the last push. I only need to feel satisfied... if it was already so painful and I was able to handle it, I know I can hold on for a few more months..." (Elena)

Simliarily, when we asked Julio why he was still in Canada after so many years, he responded:

"One time in my home country I was assaulted and almost killed. But that wasn't my day to die. This is why I believe in destiny. When you've accomplished your goals, then you are ready to go" (Julio)

As shown by these cases, several participants were propelled to stay in Canada to satisfy their own dignity and self-worth. They wanted to feel like "they had made it" before they left, and that the sacrifices they endured were indeed worth it. Conversely, there were also sentiments of shame and loss among workers who were planning to go back to their home countries because they "had not made it". For instance, when asked how she felt about her migration experience to Canada, Mariana described:

"It has been very hard. Maybe it was worth it –speaking for my parents – since they now have a chance to buy a house [back home]... In my case, maybe it has been the less productive of cases. Maybe we wasted a lot of time." (Mariana)

When Canada becomes home and home becomes nothing to go back to

Particularly for those who had lived in Canada longer or who had escaped personal violence, there was a strong personal attachment to Canada which strongly impacted their reason for staying, even if this meant having limited social protections and entitlements. For instance,

when participants were asked where they felt their body, their heart and their mind was relative to their countries of origin, several called Canada “home”, and one participant said, “I’m 100% in Canada today”. Therefore, for many participants, the opportunity to come to Canada was much more than a chance to gain material things, or improve the livelihoods of the ones they loved back home, it was about a search for belonging and creating anew what had been lost.

Participants also tended to migrate from Latin American countries with limited democratic, social and economic participation and some with fragile political systems, with little enforcement capacity to protect citizens from violence and crime. As [Rafael’s Case Study](#) revealed, his economic migration to Canada was closely linked to systemic violence in his country of origin, and when asked if he would go back, his response indicated a sense of emotional detachment and disappointment with what “back home” had become:

“There is no future in my country. I mean, it is very dangerous. There are no jobs. There is NOTHING. Going back means ending up involved in drug trafficking, kidnapping. The country has really been ruined- there is a very bad economic crisis and there is lots of drug trafficking, murder, and death. Given that I have an opportunity to be here, I am trying to make the most of it. I ask God alot, I ask Him to let me be here, to let me stay here. My future involves me trying to stay here until I get my papers.” (Rafael)

Similarly, for Renata ([see Renata’s Case Study](#)), Canada became a place of refuge from sexual violence, economic and political uncertainty. But more than just a safe haven from a place where she “couldn’t live freely”, Canada became her home. When pressured with the decision to leave once they were given a deportation order or to stay and live underground, Renata described:

“I used to say [to my partner]: ‘Let’s go back!’ But at the same time, we already had strong connections with the community. We felt ‘at home’. We had our church... So it wasn’t easy to leave that behind. We did leave a big part of what we had accomplished, but we said we didn’t want to give up the other piece that was also so special to us”. (Renata)

When combined, factors such as the availability of jobs in the cash economy, currency exchange rate that allows for supporting family members or acquiring a house, living in a place without systemic violence, and experiencing the solidarity of fellow church members, employers or coworkers, can create an entanglement of structural conditions, social and personal circumstances, and subjective desires (e.g. explore the world, learn languages, fulfil the 'American dream') that produce and maintain undocumented work migration.

Life at the edge of a dream

2

“Migrants in an irregular situation are even more vulnerable, particularly with respect to employment. When migrants are afraid of being detected, they are unlikely to come forward to demand fair treatment by employers.”

Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations
(UN General Assembly, 2006, p. 15)

Chapter 2: Life at the edge of a dream

"I don't consider myself to be a criminal. I can tell you I am fighting for a dream, but to think that I'm a criminal? ...Well no, because I have not killed anyone." (Renata)

Workers held a range of jobs in the GTA which often included a combination of full-time or part-time work or additional income generating activities to meet their daily living and remittance sending obligations. Most of these work experiences were rife with several forms of insecurity, including an absence of workers' rights and entitlements, inconsistent work schedules, low wages, poor on-site health and safety, and a range of physical and psychosocial stressors within their work environment which were further exacerbated by common resettlement challenges as newcomers. However, a few participants described work and safety conditions that did not differ much from that of their Canadian counterparts, feeling overall that they had a good work experience.

Three major themes emerged from workers' descriptions of work life in the GTA. The first, and perhaps most substantive theme, was workers' reliance on trust as their only tool for navigating work opportunities and obtaining resources to meet everyday needs. However, this blinded trust in others, quickly turned many workers into easy targets for abuse, leaving them caught in a conflicting web of concomitant support and exploitation. The second major theme that emerged was the broad range of employer strategies, in and outside of work contexts, used to control and subdue workers to menial work and living conditions. Finally, descriptions of the everyday organization and management of undocumented work, reveal that this underground industry provides the very kind of setting where human rights violations can continue to go uncontested and where workers' health and safety are left at the whim of a self-regulating system.

2.1. *Getting caught in the web*

Recent Canadian research suggests that immigrants' first job lays the foundation for future work opportunities despite changes to more secure immigration status overtime (Goldring & Landolt, 2011). Such finding helps to explain how insecure jobs in the short-term lead to a viscous cycle of work precarity in the long-term. In our research, finding a job and a place to live were two immediate priorities for workers upon arrival, and the added pressure of paying for the latter while quickly meeting remittance obligations, often forced workers to take whatever job they could find first. Roberto particularly pointed out that immigrants often do work they are ashamed of in order to survive, and suggested that overtime, many workers come to terms with doing "degrading" or "demoralizing work", because being unknown and not belonging to a community, means that no one will judge them.

"When you are an immigrant, necessity makes you do many things. Sometimes, things you are ashamed of talking about, but it's because of necessity. Only you know what you've done... these are things you keep to yourself...But sometimes, you end up doing very ugly things, demeaning...things you say you will never do again. There are many Latinas here that work in those night jobs, that is, massage and that "kind" of work. I understand them. Honestly. Because it is out of necessity that you say, 'In cleaning I make \$50...there they pay me \$100, \$200 [and] nobody knows who I am.'" (Roberto)

Women are particularly vulnerable and often find themselves in situations of desperate need. For instance, in the absence of welfare state entitlements, pregnant women and new mothers in our study were more economically dependant on family or partners and returned to work immediately after giving birth (see section on "[Pregnancy and women's health](#)"). Furthermore, unlike men in our study, women engaged in extra income generating activities outside their regular work obligations, such as participating in clinical trials, selling cultural food, baby-sitting on evenings, or doing freelance work. For one female participant, participating in clinical trials was first met with ambivalence, but was soon followed by recognition of the extra income potential it could provide.

Anecdotal evidence provided by participant men, also suggests there is a high number of undocumented women engaging in sex work, but we were not able to recruit any former or current sex workers to participate in this study, despite several recruitment attempts.

Expecting substantial change in one's pre-migration job status upon migrating to Canada was acknowledged, if not accepted, by all participants in our study. However, the degree to which participants coped with the change, varied substantially. For instance, some workers described being mentally prepared to do the worst jobs once they arrived. As Victoria described:

"My friend painted a TERRIBLE picture for me. So when I arrived, everything seems easy to me because I came very prepared for all those things. He would tell me, 'you are going to come and work in whatever...cleaning, landscaping, factory work; you name it...you are no one here'. So, he prepared me 'psychologically'..." (Victoria)

Yet for other workers like Julio, second-hand knowledge about work-life in Canada was not enough to prepare him for what he experienced first-hand. Julio described: *"...it's one thing when they tell you how things are like in a certain place... [its something completely different] than you going and drawing your own conclusions... them telling you is not the same as you seeing it."* The next sections in this chapter are concerned with exploring workers' first-hand work experiences and how they differed in most cases from pre-migration assumptions and expectations.

Trust as workers' double edged sword for survival

For various obvious reasons, undocumented work is not advertised publically and the ability or the ease with which workers found work often depended on the extent of their social networks in the city. Pre-established networks often opened the door for expanded relations with business owners or other contacts who could give workers jobs. As Andres noted, *"You always have a friend here who knows someone who works in painting....they connect you, they introduce you. [Then] you say 'I know how to do this. If you ever need me to help, call me.'"* Other workers got a foot in the door as a result of having a strong network in Toronto based on national ties.

Yet for those participants who had limited contacts in Canada, finding a job required more creative strategies. Several workers described searching for work through classified ads in ethnic-specific newspapers or online job banks. One participant even admitted to placing an advertisement in a local newspaper soliciting construction work. Regardless of how workers found work, nearly all workers used trust as a decision-making tool given the highly unfamiliar environments they found themselves in upon arrival. In this respect, workers' generally limited ties in the city, limited language skills and knowledge about existing supports systems, led workers to engage in trusting behavior rather than informed decision-making. In essence, workers commonly trusted that others, including friends, family and co-ethnic peers, would be looking out for their best interest. For instance, participants like Pepe, Valeria, and Rafael all approached strangers who appeared to be from the same ethnic community and trusted that they would lead them in the right direction to find work opportunities. Countless others were robbed of wages by co-ethnic bosses whom they confided in and had been working with for several months to years. Even for those who had pre-existing relationships with individuals before migration, the support they received from them often came with several strings attached, leaving workers caught in a web of simultaneous support and coercion.

Renata was misled by a friend in Canada, who, soon after her arrival began charging her half month's rent despite initially agreeing to help with housing until she was fully settled. Bringing as little as \$180 with them for spending, until they found a job, Renata and her partner were unable to pay the upfront cost imposed by her friend and were instructed to purchase their own food and sleep in the hall instead of the vacant room in the same apartment. Renata's story is not an isolated case. After being lent some money by his cousin to cover migration costs, Fabio learned upon his arrival in Canada, that his cousin would charge him interest on the cash he lent him. Workers' migration experiences were rife with this kind of betrayal. These cases highlight the way in which workers become trapped in this web, since, in the absence of hard-resources and local knowledge, trust is the only mechanism they can use to get by.

Like Fabio, Elizabeth thought that migrating with her relatives was a safe deal. She came to Canada with her aunt and uncle as a teenager, and was made to believe she would be able to attend English language classes and eventually get formal education. Soon after she arrived, her family revealed different expectations. As Elizabeth described: *"... I didn't*

have much freedom. I had to be at home at a certain time. It was church, home, school, home... [They] have three children. [I would] clean the house, cook, take the kids to school, pick them up... my aunt was very rigid. And, she expected me to miss school..."

Other workers' experiences shed light on the nuances of getting caught in this web. As workers trust in others, they also expect that others trust in them. This illustrates the co-dependant nature of trust among undocumented workers, which is needed in order to cope with common resettlement stressors and income insecurity. For instance, upon coming back to Toronto after working in another major Canadian city with little success, Rafael described pleading to his new landlady to trust him by giving him an extension for the first month's rent because he had no savings.

"...'give me a chance to pay you next week. I am going to ask my boss for an advance. Just give me a chance'. She said, 'yes'...she gave me an opportunity, she believed in me and I started working. The first week, I asked my boss for an advance to give her the rent. I'll never forget that because I went nearly a whole month eating lentils in the morning, afternoon and evening. I used to love lentils. Now, I don't like it anymore..." (Rafael)

Learning the way of the land

In addition to finding a job and housing upon arrival, participants also spoke about the difficulty of adapting to life in Canada and identified several "living essentials" that were needed to go about their lives as invisibly as possible. For instance, having a cell phone was deemed an essential "worktool" by nearly all participants, especially those working in construction who consistently received calls about changes in their worksite location or work schedule due to weather. Some workers had registered mobile phone plans, yet most preferred "pay-as-you-go" schemes to avoid papertrail. For the majority of participants in our study, opening a registered business was essential, given that employers often forced this upon workers so they could be paid as independent contractors. In Ontario, employers are required to pay different taxes and costs (e.g. EI, CPP, workers' comp, etc.) based on the wages of a worker that is classified as an employee. However, these same costs are generally not paid by the employer on the wages of a worker classified as an independent contractor (WAC, 2007). Undocumented workers are thereby forcibly misclassified by employers who avoid following basic labour laws and paying employee benefits and other costs.

With respect to housing, nearly all participants described frugal housing and living arrangements to maximize their savings, and several others described spouts of homelessness as a result of unexpected losses in income. As Emiliano noted, “Here with \$8.50 an hour, I can’t really live. It’s little. You have to live with two or three people to be able to save and have something for anything else.” This sentiment was echoed by several participants who described living with complete strangers, or moving homes as much as three to four times in a year as they found cheaper living arrangements. One participant even managed to find three roommates to share his rent with, so he could save extra money, and another took up the offer of renting a room with a double bunk that he would have to share with a co-worker. However, in an effort to remain cost-effective, workers’ shared living arrangements often increased their likelihood of being caught by immigration authorities given that their roommates were most likely to be undocumented as well (see Chapter 4). This can be considered another dimension of living or being unintendedly caught in a conflicting web, in this case characterized by the financial security of having a roommate on the one hand, and a real threat of being deported on the other. Despite these real-life contradictions, renting out single rooms with a shared kitchen and bath was the norm, and the average rent paid by workers in our study was \$300-400 per month. For those who lived with their partner or preferred to live alone in a fully equipped apartment, rent usually cost \$550-\$750 per month, and were usually basement apartments or were located outside the city core.

In addition to these arrangements, workers in our study described a range of sub-standard housing conditions and an overall lack of tenant rights. For instance, soon after arrival, Roberto experienced several weeks of unpaid wages and had no option but to sleep in an unheated basement, he described “... *I didn’t have a place to sleep....a basement, and it was sooo cold. I got my suitcase, all my clothes, I got inside my suitcase and I covered myself with my clothes. Three nights like this because of the cold.*” Renata also spoke about having to get her apartment fumigated as a result of a bed-bug infestation and described the serious financial losses she and her partner incurred as a result of having to throw away newly acquired furniture. Being an undocumented tenant also meant having to deal with unexpected living situations while having no protection through lease agreements, which were avoided in most cases because workers feared making their real identities known. Valeria was only given a five day notice to vacate her room rental, which caused her significant financial and personal hardship given that she had to un-

expectedly pay first and last month's rent elsewhere and still send her month's remittance back home. Other participants spoke about the challenges of having to rely on friends who were legal residents to sign their rental agreements. If their friend moved or if there was a urgent housing issue that needed to be addressed, workers were either forced to find alternative housing quickly or live with housing problems.

Despite having a driver's license and having owned a vehicle back home, most workers perceived public transportation as the safest way to travel, and metropasses were cited by the majority of workers as their main ticket around the city. In one extreme case, one worker noted walking over an hour to and from work, because she did not have enough money for public transportation, and in only one case did a worker in our study cite driving his own car. Yet several workers described getting lost and feeling afraid to ask for directions out of fear that their identity would become known. Limited English language skills also contributed to participants' inability ask for more detailed instructions. After time however, most workers became familiarized with their route to work and felt they could master travel within the city. Interestingly, this highlights another layer of participants' life in "the web". While workers perceived to experience life in the GTA like average residents, their limited participation in life outside of work became ever-more evident by how little they knew about or had been to common places in Toronto despite living here for years. In many cases, travelling to meet with interviewers for this study was their first time in the downtown area of Toronto.

By in large, workers' places of residence, workplaces, and the spaces they would frequent for everyday living needs (e.g. grocery stores, laundromats, malls, etc) were as disperse as ethnic communities are and more frequently located in the peripheries of the city. This finding further suggests that undocumented workers face geographical exclusion that not only constitutes a cause for social exclusion, but is also a vivid expression of it. The limited spatial arrangement of workers' everyday lives in the GTA further constrains who they come to know and trust. This is further exacerbated by the material deprivation various participants faced as a result of barely making an income to support remittances and daily living, let alone having the disposable income to participate socially. For instance, as a result of her work schedule and financial stressors, Elena rarely engaged in meaningful interactions with people outside of work, which limited her to conversations with other immigrant co-workers, thus perpetuating a cycle of insecurity, fear, limited knowledge about rights and available services, and blinded trust in others.

"I didn't know people who could tell me, 'Hey, go that way, to so and so place. There is a school there with a flexible schedule. At this one they don't charge too much'...When I arrived, I started living a block away from the restaurant. At that time, I didn't even use the "subway", nor the bus...I didn't know how. Back then, it was a challenge for me to go to the supermarket [or] the mall to buy something." (Elena)

Lack of English language skills and the inability to accommodate formal language training in their busy worklives further contributed to the struggles faced by participants as they settled in the GTA. Several participants pointed to the mental stress and anxiety they felt from not understanding English or being unable to learn quickly enough. In the case of Rafael, the pressure was so great that after a year of trying to learn, he gave up altogether:

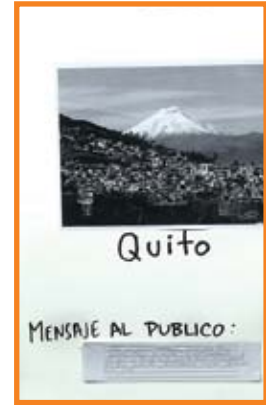
"... at about the one and a half year mark, I did not like speaking English. My head hurt when I heard English being spoken ... I would get home very tired [from work] and whatever I could memorize at night, that was all I had. I got desperate because everyone could speak English. When people asked me something, they would speak to me in English [and] I felt embarrassed for being unable to answer. So then, I tried to study, but sometimes, things just wouldn't stick. I had to study things related to work: how to do carpentry, 'roofing' I got saturated with information ..." (Rafael)

Other workers, like Renata, completely overlooked the fact that migrating to Canada would require her to learn a new language and other workers, like Julio, spoke about how their lack of English skills left them defenceless to verbal abuses and insults during their early work experiences in Canada:

"I'll tell you an anecdote. I [once] went to work in a building. I knew nothing. I had just started [language] school and was barely learning my ABCs. Wow! ... I was vacuuming a floor and a guy came up to me and told me who knows what atrocities. He was probably insulting me...He was in a bad mood and took it out on me ... So what kind of reaction can you have? [You just have to] lower your head and listen. I picked up my things and went to another area." (Julio)

Accordingly, a common sentiment of regret and frustration for not having learned English came through in participants' interviews and a recommendation for other immigrants to learn English before migrating was a common message imparted on their body maps.

Right: See Julio's message to others, found in the handwritten text box, is for people who want to come to Canada. He advises them to learn English before they get here. [Click here to see his entire body map.](#)



2.2. *Their rules, no game*

In addition to the resettlement stressors facing undocumented migrants, there are various other means by which workers were maintained in a state of constant vulnerability. Employers particularly used a range of strategies to control, exploit, and subdue workers to menial working conditions, which were also typically dirty and dangerous (i.e. 3-D jobs: dirty, dangerous and degrading). Employers also excluded workers from participating in everyday life. We discuss some of these strategies or “rules” imposed by employers that left workers with a limited ability to “game” or escape the system.

Capitalizing on inexperience and fear

When asked about their current employment relationship, nearly all workers we interviewed admitted that their direct employers were aware of their legal status in Canada, yet the only prerequisite for employment was their willingness to receive cash payments. What this points to is a clearly intentioned *demand* for undocumented workers, rather than a general need for low-wage workers available through the formal labour market. The fact that several workers were denied official letters of offers by their long-time employers (sometimes as long as 5 years), which if obtained, could help them regularize their status, also points to an active preference by Canadian employers to *keep* workers undocumented.

In keeping with such trends, the experiences described by study participants suggest that employers consistently evade standards and regulations to increase their profit margins and employ a range of everyday

self-protection strategies to hide their hiring practices. As was already discussed, virtually all workers were asked to open a business, so employers could avoid paying taxes, premiums and other dues. In some extreme cases, workers were even asked to rent a social insurance number, so that the employer could be protected from audits. What was less evident was the way in which employers frequently misrepresented how the system worked, and thereby capitalized on workers' inexperience by skimming off their wages, introducing arbitrary service charges or withdrawing "taxes" from their pay (see section on "Wage theft schemes"). When, and if, workers did question such practices, employers tended to evoke a paternalistic work ethic, citing that this was "the way the system worked", that they should "just trust them", and that they should "be grateful for even being given a chance". As one worker noted:

"The people who are here, those who already have papers or are Canadian, they think 'I'm helping [them]'. You can't ask for more money because they think they are already giving you a hand because you don't have papers or anything. That's the way they see it." (Pepe)

Employers also engaged in fear mongering tactics which not only functioned to silence workers from speaking up, but also perpetuated a cycle of mistrust in others, which was useful for gaining workers' exclusive trust and for avoiding unwarranted inspections at their worksite. For instance, Elena and her undocumented co-workers were told by their employer to not tell others where they worked because it could lead to them being traced and deported by authorities. When workers did challenge their working conditions or expressed any push-back to their bosses' demands, some employers threatened workers with deportation and responded with several forms of reprisal. This was most common when workers voiced discrepancies in their pay. Undocumented temp workers were commonly blacklisted from returning to a client worksite if they were deemed too slow for the job, too "chatty", or if they complained about their work conditions, such as the pace of the work or the work environment.

Bonded labour situations and pseudo ties

Some literature has demonstrated positive effects of fictive (i.e. pseudo) kin relationships among newcomer communities (Ebaugh

& Curry, 2000; Kim, 2009). While such relationships can help create a support system that would otherwise be unavailable to those living far from home, other research has shown how such relations, particularly if formed between workers and their employers, can easily blur work and intimate social life by creating an environment where trust can be exploited and abused for financial gain (Ahonen, et al., 2010). Our study findings suggest that bonded labour situations, which includes debt-bondage or live-in situations, create the kind of conditions where economic and emotional dependence on the employer can co-exist, thereby putting workers at risk of being trapped and subdued to poor work and living conditions.

For two participants in this study, work and living arrangements were specifically tied to one another, albeit under varying circumstances. For example, Rafael and his co-worker were persuaded to move into their employer's family home because it could save them money and travel time to and from work. Trusting in the good-faith of his employer, Rafael and his co-worker took up the offer, but were soon required to pay unusually high rental fees. Rafael had very little privacy in his employer's home and because he just rented a room, he was barred from using any kitchen space or appliances, and had very little control over his diet, since his meals were forcibly prepared by his landlord. When he and his co-worker began looking for alternative housing, they were immediately threatened with job loss:

"We would tell her that we were going to leave, but she told us 'If you guys go, forget about work'. So then we calmed down and looked for work somewhere else. The thing was that they got mad and they ended up owing us our week's deposit... They owed me and they threatened me; that if they ever saw me, they were going to rip my face off." (Rafael)

In Elena's case (see [Case Study 3](#)), she became a bonded labourer as soon as she was recruited from her home country to come to Canada, and her labour was demanded as a means of repayment for her flight and initial resettlement costs. What makes Elena's case unique, is that unlike numerous accounts of human trafficking and bonded labour, Elena developed a strong familial bond with her employers, often referring to them as her "Canadian family", and spending intimate moments, including holidays and social gatherings with them. Elena was also grateful because they offered her shelter and constant reassurance that they would

not let anything happen to her. Although her weekly earnings were low, her payments were stable and consistent and Elena often justified and accepted the high intensity of her job by putting her employers' busy schedules and financial struggles into context. Overtime, Elena acknowledged the limited control she had over her work and personal life and how the pseudo-ties she had developed with her employers allowed for manipulation. For instance, Elena did not have to pay for food during work hours, but described the objectifying treatment she received as she was given this "added work benefit":

"Well, you don't have a lunch hour. It is not like, 'Okay go eat', but instead it's at the time in which the person tells you 'Yeah, yeah come. Here, I'm going to give you this'. So, geez, you see 50 different types of meals, and they are giving you a burrito! ... You have to tell yourself, 'Eat it, lower your head, and don't think about complaining'. [Backhome], I would have never taken that!" (Elena)

Elena also became aware of the active forms of surveillance her "family" used to monitor and control her activities outside of work, a practice she initially believed was essential for keeping her safe from ill-intended strangers who could report her to police. But perhaps the most important element of Elena's story is how the strong emotional bond and personal indebtedness she felt towards her employers stopped her from speaking out against the recurring sexual harassment she faced by a co-worker, who was a true family relative of her employers. As Elena described:

"... it got very difficult for me, because on the one hand, you had [this co-worker] and then [my bosses], whom I considered family, and whom I owed my home, my job, friendship, and care to. It was very difficult... they weren't going to believe me... even if they did believe me, I was going to hurt them." (Elena)

Case Study 3 Elena's bonded labour experience

Elena has been living without status in Canada for a year and a half. Unlike most of the participants who had to search for work upon arrival, Elena came to Canada after she and a close friend were recruited to come work as cooks for a family-owned restaurant in Toronto. The restaurant owners paid for her trip, and offered her and her friend a room to stay in that was steps away from their work. Immediately after arriving, Elena began to work 11 hour shifts 6 days per week. Although she would get one day off a week, it was never the same day as her friend because her bosses felt that having two workers off at the same time would slow down production. Elena was paid a daily rate of \$90 which did not fluctuate if she worked overtime or on holidays. When her bosses were away, Elena was forced to work 7 days a week and more hours, but was still paid the same rate. Nearly every day Elena was bullied and sexually harassed by a male co-worker and was consistently ridiculed in front of other co-workers and customers. Whenever Elena tried to address the problem, things only got worse, and she began getting falsely accused for mistakes in the kitchen as a form of payback. Then, Elena found out that her private life was being grossly invaded by the restaurant owners since they had placed a security camera outside her place of residence to monitor their employees' day-to-day activities outside work hours. By then, Elena was living alone and feared for her safety. She also got very depressed. If she moved she would lose her job. She also felt indebted to her employers because they gave her shelter and a job and didn't want to disappoint them by quitting because they were like family. Yet, the sexual harassment kept getting worse, and one day Elena reached her breaking point and left everything behind. Now Elena works as a nanny for less pay, but finally has the time to take English classes and make friends.

Wage-theft schemes

Desperation to keep a job made some workers easy targets for unscrupulous employers. Most workers in our study described at least one incident where their wages were unfairly withheld or outright stolen by their employers. For some, paycheques did not reflect their total hours worked, for others it meant being forced to work overtime hours for no pay, getting "processing fees" deducted from their pay, or having to pay for benefits they were not entitled to receive. In other cases, mostly in the construction sector, workers got paid only after the job was complete

which lent itself to unexpected deductions by employers for any “errors” committed by the worker (e.g. improperly cut wood, dirtying the worksite), or claims by the employer that they had underestimated the cost of the work and had no money to pay workers until they landed another contract. Sadly, many workers in such situations continued to work with the same employer due to limited employment opportunities elsewhere at that particular time or because they empathized with their employer’s misfortune. In Renata’s case, she continued to work for her employer even after receiving late payments because she was afraid that if she quit, her employer would not pay her remaining hours as a form of reprisal.

“The first month working with him, he took a long time to pay us. At the end, he paid us. Then, for the second month...He swore...he double swore to us that he would [pay]. The second month came and it was the same. He gave us some money, but not the full amount...my partner started looking for work elsewhere, but we also didn’t want to quit because we thought, ‘If we quit, he’s not going to give us anything’. We worked with him for another half month, and at the end he didn’t pay us for what he already owed us and for half month we worked.”
(Renata)

Yet in most instances of wage-theft, workers had little hope of getting the money they were owed because several months had passed, and employers had either vanished, declared bankruptcy (but reopened months later under a different company name), changed their phone numbers, or had threatened workers with reporting them to immigration officials if they persisted. Several others did not know they had some workers’ rights protections despite their status or were too fearful to speak up. For instance, Pepe along with five co-workers were each withheld over \$2000 in unpaid wages by the same employer, and despite having a potentially good case to bring forward to authorities, Pepe described the helplessness he felt to act because of his status:

“Those people [the employers], it’s like they say, ‘You are in my hands and I’ll do as I please...if not, I won’t give you work or I won’t pay you, it’s that simple’. Lots of people like this didn’t pay me. They owed me \$2000 and didn’t pay me. They would tell me, ‘I’ll call immigration...’ If you are illegal, what do you

think? [You think] about your family and everything... It's better to leave it the way it is." (Pepe)

Experiences such as these were quite common among workers and contributed to a common mistrust towards employers and questioning behaviour among participants. For instance, Pepe later described having \$50 deducted from his monthly pay from another employer, but was suspicious that his employer was pocketing this money instead of paying union dues, as promised (this sums up to \$400 a month for 8 workers). Other workers, who were certain that their employers were skimming high percentages off their paycheque, opted to stay quiet and accept some losses in their income rather than risk being completely out of work. For instance, when Rafael was working in another Canadian province, he was told that because his earnings were being paid by an Ontario employer, they would have to deduct \$50 from every paycheque due to money transfer fees and an additional 10% off for "GST". In the end, Rafael reasoned:

"...I'd lose \$100, \$150. But it doesn't matter. Money comes and goes, but [at least] you don't risk losing more money by getting aggressive and saying something to them that gets them upset or gives them an excuse for not paying you the rest. I preferred to keep quiet ... It's dreadful, because you work hard, for them to just steal from you little by little. They think they are going to get rich stealing from people like us." (Rafael)

In addition to the construction sector, temporary work agencies were particularly notorious for deducting several fees off workers' pay and for paying below the minimum wage. It was common for workers working through agencies to be picked up or dropped off at client worksites and to get mandatory deductions off their pay for this "transportation service". Workers also noted being paid much lower than permanent workers for performing the same work; the range of pay for undocumented workers being anywhere between \$7.75 and \$10.25 for assembly line work at food factories. Emiliano also notes that temp workers working at the same worksite could be getting paid different rates for the same work because they were registered with different agencies. When Emiliano asked to be switched to a higher-paying temp agency, his client employer refused. Emiliano later realized that any switch between agencies would compromise the client's business relationship with lower paying

agencies, who would regularly give them perks and discounts that higher paying agencies were not willing to provide.

Suppressing worker development

In addition to working for below minimum wage, experiencing wage-theft, and performing work that was characteristically menial, employers also stunted opportunities for further growth and development that could otherwise improve workers' job prospects. One male worker pointed out that employers, particularly in the construction industry, were reluctant to train undocumented workers because they felt that it was a waste of time and resources given that undocumented workers could get deported at any time or switch jobs. It was therefore very common for workers to get stuck doing demolition work for several months, or work as helpers in construction sites, which involved carrying and loading materials, with very limited opportunity to get hands-on training.

In other situations, employers adamantly refused to give workers time off work or to allow them to make-up hours in order to attend language classes. Upon arriving, Maya worked as a live-in-caregiver and her employer regularly made excuses for why she could not get time off.

"I told her [referring to employer]: 'I have found a school that has classes at these days and times, but for me to attend you have to be at home by 6pm'. But she never arrived at home by 6pm. I never had time to go to school! ... I told her: 'I know you are a very busy person, I will take classes on Saturday (...) morning'. But she didn't clearly tell me that I couldn't study. I told her: 'At least, you could give me Saturdays'. (...) basically, she wanted someone who would work 24 hours a day." (Maya)

Hostile work environments and overt negative treatment to co-workers also seemed to discourage some workers from even requesting some flexibility in their work schedule to attend language classes out of fear of reprisal. For instance, after requesting to get unpaid time off work, one of Elena's co-workers was told by their employer, *"You didn't come here to study. You came here to work."* This immediately discouraged Elena to search for available language classes in her neighbourhood.

2.3. Invisible hazards, precarious work

The workers in our study were employed in mostly low-paid unskilled jobs that carried greater health hazards and often resulted in workplace injuries or related health consequences ([also see section on “Workplace injuries and risk”](#)). Their hourly earnings were, in most cases, below minimum wage and their working hours were generally higher than the standard 44 hour work week, as a result of working multiple jobs simultaneously or doing overtime work. While the triple “D” (i.e. dirty, dangerous and degrading) nature of their work, clearly posed physical and psychosocial risks, it was at the intersection of this type of work and workers’ lack of legal status in Canada that created a ripe environment for a range of abuses to continue uncontestedly. Workers fear of deportation, employers’ general lack of interest in maintaining safety for a transient group, and systemic pitfalls that make it possible for a self-regulating industry to exist, all contributed to the power asymmetries in workers’ employment relationships and the invisibility of their precarious working conditions.

Precarious employment status

All participants in our study described one or more aspects of precarious employment in their current and past work experiences in Canada that significantly diverged from standard, full-time, continuous work relationships. With respect to wage rates, factory workers working through temporary agencies typically made the lowest amount, ranging from \$7.75-\$12 per hour, followed by cooking work (\$8.50-\$13 per hour), cleaning work (\$10-\$12 per hour), and construction work (e.g. framing, roofing, demolition, landscaping) being the highest (\$11-\$19 per hour). In addition to low-wages, workers also described getting deductions off their pay for benefits they would never see or for arbitrary fees imposed by their employers. One worker also described how additional tips made at the restaurant where she worked were kept by her boss.

With respect to forms of payment, nearly all workers got paid cash or through cheque by their direct employer, in which case, they were required to pay additional fees for processing at a cash transfer house. For some workers, like nannies and cooks, payments were made on a per-day, rather than per- hour basis, which made it difficult to get compensated for overtime work. For other workers, like cleaners, they were often paid by a sub-contractor, which meant having limited connection

to the direct employer and receiving substantially less pay as a result of being further down the chain. Temporary workers also experienced an added layer of income insecurity because their hourly rate fluctuated with the type of job they performed and they were never assured a set schedule.

When asked if they were able to negotiate some aspects of their employment relationship, such as their initial hourly wage or a raise, nearly all workers expressed limited negotiation capacity because their precarious legal status made them feel like disposable commodities. The following examples illustrate this sentiment:

"No, no you can't. When you are an employee, you can't try to negotiate your salary. You can't. You either take it or leave it. There are 10 people behind you." (Emiliano)

"In carpentry, it is neither too much nor too little [referring to remuneration]. [If] you have no papers...they pay you what they want. The person who is trying you out, might say, 'You know what? I'll pay you [better] if you have papers'. Most are earning \$17 or \$18 an hour...I was getting paid \$11 or \$12 an hour... They think, 'I'm doing them a favor' ...But you know what? We are giving them a service." (Pepe)

"I'm afraid [to ask for a raise] because they can [say], 'Okay, sure' but then you don't get paid. How can you demand that they pay you, when you don't have a social insurance? You have nothing. For them, it's easy. They can pick up the phone... 'You know what? I have a person here'. Maybe they'll call immigration. For them it's very easy because ... it's easy to replace people." (Luna)

With respect to benefits, nearly all workers lacked regular employee benefits and entitlements such as sick or personal days, and all workers described working while sick, because they feared reprisal from their boss or because they could not afford the financial loss of missing a day of work. While some workers in the construction industry described paying union dues and claiming benefits, the negative cost of union membership often outweighed potential benefits and access to certain union entitlements were limited due to participants' status. Participants also mentioned having to work on statutory holidays for their

regarding food availability as a result of working in unknown locations. Victoria described:

"We'd plant flowers until 7 at night, 10 at night...until it got dark. It was the most terrible heat in the world. I was tempted refresh myself with that water, but it had chemicals....You eat really bad...Burger King, Tim Hortons...whatever you find. But then comes the satisfaction of a pay cheque." (Victoria)

When employed through temp agencies, participants consistently mentioned the general lack of regard for their scheduling needs, with the temporary agency frequently expecting that workers be at their disposal when production demands suddenly increased. Rafael particularly described how temp workers get trapped in a cycle of job insecurity:

"...work slowed down. Then, the next day the agency [would say], 'Come tomorrow at 7am'. I'd go at 7am with my lunch bag and everything and 'No, there isn't work. Come tomorrow. Tomorrow we'll call you'. Saturday. Sunday. Monday would come: 'Come tomorrow'. Tuesday, 'Do we work tomorrow?'; 'No, come tomorrow'. Wednesday would come: 'No, there isn't work'. That's how it was." (Rafael)

Production demands also tended to dictate the frequency (or infrequency) and the nature of workers' break time. Participants, especially those who worked in busy restaurants, often mentioned working full days with limited or no scheduled breaks, and eat standing while attending other areas of the kitchen. For instance, Maya, a kitchen helper, described getting a 10-15 minute break for a 10-hour shift, when the restaurant traffic slowed down around 3pm. For another female cook, washroom breaks depended on other work tasks, like going to the stockroom to get work supplies.

Yet, workers in other sectors also demonstrated precarious break schedules, albeit for varying reasons. In construction, it was common for workers to be told they would not get breaks in exchange for getting off work early. However, "early end-times" often meant 3pm or 4pm with a start time of 6am, illustrating clear worker abuse. Similarly in other sectors, break time was non-existent or built-in fluidly into work days. For instance, Elizabeth, a window cleaner, described getting in-

formal “breaks” on the road as she and her work team travelled to other worksites:

“Well, in the car... you kind of have lunch. If you are thirsty, you take some water or juice. If you are hungry, you eat something. And you also talk a lot... (laughing). You chat a lot, make fun of each other, but this is the only break you’ll get. Because to get to some of these houses it may take half an hour; for others, it takes longer. It could be 45 minutes to an hour driving. But others are quite close, like five to ten minutes away. Moderator: Okay, but when is the lunch break? Well, there is no lunch break.” (Elizabeth)

Psychosocial work hazards⁸

Workers consistently spoke about the stress they faced on a daily basis in their jobs, out of fear that they would be reported to police by their employers, or that their real identity would become known should they be subject to a routine police investigation or safety inspection on-site. For those who maintained jobs in the public eye, dealing the threat of deportation became more real during periods of police raids and warranted searches for individuals that had been given deportation orders. For instance, during the course of this study local news reported raids in several immigrant-dense locations such as malls, construction sites and ethnic-specific establishments. Therefore, for business managers like Renata, living on high alert also meant being on the watch for the safety of other undocumented workers under her supervision. Renata recalled the pressure she faced to provide answers to fearful employees while struggling to keep herself safe and composed:

“Your people begin to ask, ‘What’s going to happen? What are we going to do? Are they going to expose us? What if this is happening?’ So, you get up and say... ‘First, what do I do about myself? And then, what I am going to do with the rest of these people.’” (Renata)

⁶ Taken from ILO (2009) “In the longer term, stress can contribute to peptic ulcers, inflammatory bowel diseases and musculoskeletal problems as well as hypertension, and as a consequence to the development of heart and cardiovascular diseases. It may also alter immune functions, which may in turn facilitate the development of cancer. Taken together, these disorders are responsible for the great majority of disease, death, disability and medical care use in most industrialized countries. They are also significant causes of death in developing countries.”

Conversely, for one female worker who was responsible for managing workers with status, there seemed to be a constant pressure to outperform them while staying on their good side out of fear that they could report her if they found out her status.

In addition to the direct stress of having to hide from authorities while on the job or struggling to “blend in”, participants also spoke about the added pressures of learning a job for the first time and meeting up to their employers’ expectations or risk dismissal. Interestingly, this situation points to a subtle theme in workers’ descriptions of their jobs, that is, while most of the work performed by undocumented workers is deemed “low” or “unskilled” work, workers’ descriptions of their everyday realities starkly refutes this understanding. Particularly for workers in high paced work environments, such as restaurants, this meant skillfully mastering the use of sharp knives and kitchen equipment, and quickly learning a range of dishes to be served. As Valeria recalled:

“My sister was a cook at a Portuguese restaurant and she told me: ‘You will love to cook Portuguese food’. (...) So, I started cooking [with her] and she told me: ‘I need to take holidays. Can you replace me?’ I said: ‘Sure’. Her boss told me: ‘You have 15 days to learn all 40 dishes on the menu for me to let your sister go on holidays.’ (Valeria)

In addition to having to learn quickly, high work demands were also coupled with a lack of influence over the amount of work they were given and how to perform it. For instance, those in temp work arrangements described being unable to predict their work responsibilities, and being subject to the automated demands of a factory environment. As Luna and Rafael described:

“No, there aren’t options. They tell you, ‘Today there is work’ or ‘Get in, and that’s it’. You can imagine the kind of work it is... they are factories. [Interviewer: So it’s never clear to you what you will be doing until you get to the site and they tell you?]. Yes, that’s how it is. They simply tell you, ‘Go there,’ ‘Go sweep,’ ‘Go pick up the trays,’ or ‘Go to the freezers.’” (Luna)

“...at the factory they treat you bad. They put you on a production line where there should be two people, where twenty packages of bagels come out in less than four seconds. I mean,

FOUR SECONDS, TWENTY PACKAGES! You have to grab six and six...and well it's four seconds – one, two, three, four and you already have the other set here [showing the movements]...”
(Rafael)

In addition to the increased exposure to hazards as a result of doing consistently unfamiliar work as factory worker, the discontinuous nature of temp work also seemed to prevent workers from establishing meaningful relationships at one job. Workers who did temp work through agencies also described the stigmatizing treatment they received at client employer sites. For instance, they were not given uniforms like the other workers, not allowed the same length of breaks, were told to clock in and out separately and in some cases, were not allowed to take product home for personal consumption like the rest of the workers. Most temp workers also felt they lacked clarity in terms of the responsibilities they were given and how to perform them, but feared to ask because they could be sent back easily for appearing “stupid”. Temp workers also had multiple bosses onsite in addition to the agency who employed them, and this created confusion as to who to ask for what.

In general, participants also seemed to experience a high level of workplace bullying, verbal, emotional, and sexual harassment and prejudice. Men particularly spoke about ageism in construction work and noted how women in factory work contexts were repeatedly harassed by male employers. [Elena’s Case Study](#) particularly illustrated how co-worker sexual harassment could lead to long-term mental health consequences, given that workers often lack the power to speak up and fear losing their jobs and being deported. As described in later sections below ([see section on “Gendered work organization and occupational risks”](#)), bullying and harassment also tended to fall along clear gender lines within specific occupations.

Finally, with the exception of those workers in management positions or those who were able to achieve some occupational mobility in construction, nearly all workers felt stagnated in their work. Many expressed a sense of loss in personhood from no longer being the professional that they once were back home. The repetitive and menial nature of the work they performed, the fear of being unable to demand anything other than what was given to them and the deep sense of dampened professional development from a lack of education and language training opportunities in Canada, made many workers feel trapped. As Emiliano described:

“A job that’s mechanical, static, where they humiliate you, where you get screamed at, where you cannot talk – they forbid talking – where you count the seconds of your break, where, if you go to the bathroom they tell you, you already went... [This] can do nothing more than grind you. I was going to say “depress”, but “grind” is more appropriate... It drags you completely and you end up accepting (it). This process harms you... you start accepting that you are a damn worker, meager, that everyone can kick you, scream at you, tell you nasty things.” (Emiliano)

This also shined through in participants’ body maps, when discussing how their current work had impacted their body and their feelings.

Right: The image of the man cleaning the window in the cold while others are inside represents Andre’s experience working as a temp worker at a factory. He was expected to work harder while other people, like the supervisors and permanent staff, watched him do all the work. [Click here to see his entire body map.](#)



Such feelings of helplessness were further exacerbated by the extreme social isolation in their workplaces. For instance, those workers working in factories frequently mentioned not being allowed to socialize with other workers or take break together, because it was thought to slow down production. In other cases, the isolation was a direct result of the physically hidden nature of their workspaces. For instance, kitchen work was usually “back kitchen work” which involved no interaction with customers, and cleaning work usually occurred after hours, once office workers had gone home.

Physical and environmental risks

The majority of workers felt they were easily disposable and acknowledged that the significant power asymmetries they faced in relation to co-workers and bosses who had status, inhibited them from speaking up about hazards and injuries when they did happen. Workers also sensed that their employers had no real incentive to provide them with training and equipment because it was much cheaper to replace them with an-

other undocumented worker if they got injured. One worker described how a co-worker, who was also undocumented, was given \$500 cash and told not to come back by their employer, when he cut off his finger on the job. Cases like this were common, and workers often described continuing to work with an injury out of fear that they would lose their job. Several others tried to modify their work practices or purchase their own safety equipment in light of the limited supports they received.

In addition to the lack of preventive measures and the inability to request better conditions due to their status, undocumented workers inherently performed dangerous and dirty work and were exposed to several hazards, often because they worked multiple risky jobs simultaneously. Participants also described being given the hardest work in comparison to co-workers who were legal in Canada, or held permanent positions, as in the case of temp workers.

As for the direct risks and hazards of their work, those who mainly performed kitchen and factory work, commonly described musculoskeletal strains as a result of fast-paced, repetitive, upper body movements such as chopping, reaching for heavy pots and pans above eye level, and adopting awkward postures to keep up with products quickly coming in through the assembly line. One worker developed arthrosis in her hands as a result of repeated chopping and peeling and leg edema as direct result of standing for long hours in the kitchen, and another developed lower back pain from constant pivoting while doing factory work. These work-related strains appeared on their body maps.



Left: Valeria represent her swollen legs and varicose veins developed over the years as a cook. [Click here to see her entire body map.](#)



Left: Roberto shows the tight wrap he wears around his lower back to help manage his pain. [Click here to see his entire body map.](#)

Factory workers also described switching between physically distinct work environments. For instance, they could be working in the industrial oven section of the factory one minute, and then be asked to work in the freezers the next. Hand numbness was often attributed to this type of cold-heat stress.

Those whose work responsibilities involved cleaning, consistently spoke about the lack of training they received on how to handle hazardous cleaning products. Participants' limited English literacy also put them at a disadvantage, given that most labelled instructions were in English. Furthermore, most cleaners worked in small teams or independently during afterhours which limited who they could ask for help. For instance, Mariana was placed to work alone in an office building and was never told how to handle the the unlabelled products onsite:

"There was a small room and there were TONS of products. Then I would say, 'What is this for?' ...The person that hired me, who in reality I never met, told me, 'There's a supervisor that will go check up on you...' So, he would go once in a while, but he would always be in a hurry. I would ask him, 'What can I use this for?' [He would say] 'No, this is for this'. Everything was so fast. They never trained me...You just start learning."
(Mariana)

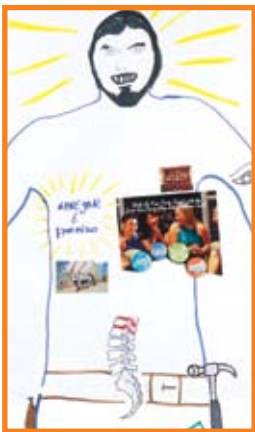
Yet, there was also a gender bias in the perceived danger and the documented health effects from cleaning products. Female cleaners in our study frequently admitted to having acute physical reactions, mostly skin or respiratory, which they attributed to the harsh chemicals they used, such as bleach and ammonia. They described skin irritations and burns, watery eyes and rhinitis. Male cleaners on the other hand, rarely spoke about the dangers of working with chemicals and often gave precedence to the physical dangers of lifting heavy garbage bins, handling heavy cleaning machinery and managing minor repairs. While these differences in perceived risk may stem from a real gendered division of work and therefore a division in exposure to hazards, Lina's experience working with males performing the same work points to a different story. In her experience working with male painters and a male boss, she acknowledged that there was no incentive to use respiratory masks when sanding walls for paint preparation, even though all workers complained of difficulty breathing. As Lina remarked:

"...they should enforce a mask for here [pointing to her mouth] and here [pointing to her nose]. But perhaps they don't see it as protection. If you put that on, they see it as, 'Oh no...what a girlie girl!'" (Luna)

Therefore among the participants we interviewed, there was a clear gendered distinction between “soft” (e.g. chemical or unseen) hazards and “hard” (e.g. physical) hazards. In the male dominated field of construction, for instance, nearly all the hazards described were “hard” in nature. For instance, the risks from falling from heights, cutting off an extremity, getting nailed with a pressure gun, were most commonly cited. However, the risks of not using eye protection, gloves, masks, hard-hats, sunscreen or handling toxic material during demolition work, was rarely mentioned. This also came through in male workers’ illustrations of work hazards on their body map.



Left: in Pepe's body map, the ladder to the right represents the potential danger of falling from a height. [Click here to see his entire body map.](#)



Left: Nelson's waist belt represents how he enjoys his job building furniture and rarely sees any risk involved. [Click here to see his entire body map.](#)

Gendered work organization and occupational risks

As seen from the preceding section, both male and female participants expressed gendered working conditions and organization, although this often was not the main intent of their descriptions. For instance, when asked about gender differences in work, workers most commonly cited gendered wage-differentials, where female participants generally made \$2-3 less than men performing the same work.

Yet, gendered employment relations extended beyond remuneration by directly impacting workers' exposure to workplace risks, sexual violence and psychological harassment, particularly in construction and cleaning sectors. For instance, Rafael consistently spoke about his co-

workers' overt displays of sexism, physical strength, and homophobia which functioned as a way to show how construction workers ought to be as well as what it was to be to a 'Latin American man' more generally. Rafael's life as single male working in Canada to provide for his parents back home did not "fit" this prototype and consequently, he was bullied by his co-workers, often being called "gay" because he was not married and had no children like most of his co-workers. Similarly, Fabio noted that one of his co-workers once commented at work how he had purchased a fancy make-up set for his sister and this turned into an aggressive joke with someone accusing him of being gay and using the make-up himself. Eventually, the situation escalated into violence.

These gendered work role expectations are particularly significant for health and safety, given that the pressures for demonstrating physical masculinity are combined with a lack of protection from bullying, psychosocial harassment and workers being forced to ignore safety procedures in order to prove that they are "man enough" to do the job. For instance, many male participants in our study spoke about refraining from using safety equipment out of fear that they would be singled out by their employers. Others, like Emiliano below, would physically exert themselves in order to prove that they could keep up with the high work pace set by other men:

"Here... while working in construction, I got sick! It was so much work and so heavy! I didn't quit out of pure pride. I came in to work and they brought in a GINORMOUS Brazilian guy and we had to dig a hole. The giant and me. I said to myself, 'I am not going to give up. I don't care. I'll die if I have to'. I ended up working at the same pace as him, but that night, I ended up with tons of knots in my nerves and I got a fever!" (Emiliano)

Sexual harassment was another gendered dimension of workers' employment relations in Canada, and particular hazard for undocumented females. As a woman in an overwhelmingly male industry, Victoria explained how her landscaping co-workers repeatedly made her feel uncomfortable as a result of verbal advances and sexual remarks. As Elena's Case Study ([Case Study 3](#)) revealed, women are also subject to more direct forms of sexual violence and gender-based discrimination in the workplace, and this is particularly sustained through gendered divisions of work that grant men more power in the workplace. For instance, Elena's male co-workers were strictly prohibited from doing any kitchen work:

"...for them [the bosses], it is unacceptable that a man cook. Perhaps it's the way they see things. Perhaps they don't like it if a man cooks or even touches the food....They liked seeing women cook, women serving them. This is why they didn't let the male employees get close to the kitchen." (Elena)

Similarly, Victoria described that the selection and planting of flowers was perceived to be "feminine work", and strictly reserved for female landscapers. In cleaning contexts, both male and female workers noted a clear division of work tasks as well. Men routinely handled heavy machinery, such as floor buffing, carpet cleaning or snow removal machines, and were typically responsible for garbage removal, mopping, and any heavy lifting. Female cleaners, on the other hand, were perceived by male cleaners as responsible for easy work, such as dusting and sweeping. As Roberto noted:

"The ladies only pick up the garbage and put in on their cart. They dust the desks, clean the coffee maker, do a quick clean of the kitchen and sweep the floors. We [the men], then have to come and pick everything up. We take the garbage away. They just put it in the hallway. When heavy things need to be carried, when boxes come in, we do it." (Roberto)

Favourable conditions are the exception, not the rule

Workers in our study rarely described getting a raise unless they switched jobs. However, in a few cases, workers described other forms of compensation. Roberto clearly acknowledged that despite working for his company for over two years, he would never be able to get a raise because it would prompt internal investigations of the company's hiring practices. According to Roberto, his supervisor instead did other things to acknowledge his hard work, he described:

"... I do get a lot of privileges. My original schedule is from 5:30pm to 10:30pm. I come in at 6:00pm, 6:30pm, and 7:00pm. If one day I am not feeling well, that is, emotionally not feeling well, because when you are here alone... the depression and everything, right? So sometimes, I come in at 6:30pm and she asks me, "How are you?" and I respond, "So, So". When I say "so, so" she already knows that something is up. So she says, "Here are the keys. Go. Do whatever you want today, Bye!" (Roberto)

In rarer occasions, workers described having genuinely “good” bosses. For instance, some construction workers noted that they had bosses, who on occasion, would buy them lunch or coffee, or would organize weekend soccer games to bring the work crew closer together. Rafael noted that one of his bosses played a major role in getting him closer to the church, and for Valeria, her boss was a major source of support, often helping her locate and pay for alternative treatments, such as acupuncture for her musculoskeletal problems (see [Valeria’s Case Study](#)). Workers also spoke about having compassionate bosses from time to time, who would give them cash advances to make emergency remittances or to pay for late rent.

Also, workers who worked with the same boss for a prolonged period of time tended to describe more work role independence. For instance, Nelson had only two employers in almost 5 years and felt both valued his skills. While these workers did not get paid more, they often were able to negotiate some aspects of their work, such as getting personal time off, scheduling their own work hours, or negotiating their work load. As Roberto described:

“... Sometimes she [the boss] makes me do lots of things in an hour. She tells me, ‘Clean the tracks of all five elevators’. To which I respond, ‘Sure, but five times twelve? What’s that? I have an hour and you want me to vacuum, mop...’ [She says] ‘Okay fine, three today, two tomorrow’. So, in a way, I’ve earned these kinds of things... At the beginning, I was a slave.” (Roberto)

Having specific work or language skills also gave workers an advantage in their workplaces but in most cases, “promotions” were horizontal in nature and provided no added job security or better pay. Workers recognized the deceit but accepted the added responsibility for multiple, often conflicting, reasons. For instance, Emiliano was offered a forklift operator position for the same rate of pay, and while he recognized that he was chosen because of his advanced English speaking abilities and should be compensated accordingly, he accepted the position because it was less physically demanding and would give him more skilled work experience.

3

Tactics for survival

“The benefits of international migration, not only for migrants themselves, but equally for receiving societies, are contingent on the protection of migrant rights. Labour rights are the mainstay in the prevention of exploitation and ought to be fiercely safeguarded.”

Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations
(UN General Assembly, 2006, p. 15)

Chapter 3: Tactics⁸ for survival

"I've always thought that life without problems is not life because that is the reason why human beings live... to have something to fight for and to get ahead." (Roberto)

In order to provide a real account of how undocumented workers live their lives, it is important to shed light on and understand how they navigate the complex situations and circumstances they are confronted with. While worker "strategies" for coping with adverse and precarious work conditions has been cited elsewhere, we have identified that the precarious legal and work situation undocumented workers face is generally uncondusive for any preemptive planning or strategizing efforts. We therefore depart from this notion of organized coping and identify the range of tactics that undocumented workers employ to confront or deal with their everyday hardships, fear and isolation. We particularly illustrate the ways in which undocumented workers address ongoing job and income precarity and how they adopt a range of tactics to promote their own mental health, overcome fear and isolation, and maintain dignity and self-protection in the face of their ongoing criminalization as "il-legals" and commodification as "disposable" workers.

3.1. Securing and generating additional income

Workers employed a range of tactics to secure work and generate additional income, largely in response the low-paid and insecure nature of the employment possibilities they had. In most cases, workers simply spoke about the need to comply with employer demands and remain flexible in order to keep whatever job they had because this was better than being unemployed altogether. As Renata described:

⁷ Taken from Cleaveland and Pierson (2009, p. 518): "Members of marginalized groups typically develop survival tactics that include identifying and abiding by norms that are defined by those in more privileged positions and figuring out how to attain their own ends by maneuvering within them. Actors orient themselves according to their perceptions of social space, deciding which spaces to avoid and determining how to act in others (Lefebvre, 1991). Consideration of undocumented immigration in relation to spatial practices that benefit dominant groups and classes helps to develop a framework for critiques of policy and economics that acknowledges the tactical agency of subordinated groups."

"...My [work] situation is difficult... because I know that one way or another, it is secure. I know they are going to pay me... [but] if I leave my job there, I don't know. I wouldn't know where to go or who else would be willing to employ me." (Renata)

Therefore remaining complicit was a tactic in its own right, given that workers were not accustomed to accepting low employment positions with little decision-making power. Thus, while negotiating their hourly rate or their working conditions seemed to be off limits, several workers did describe keeping a record of their hours to avoid wage theft, but could only hope that their employers believed them. More creative tactics were also employed by certain workers to balance their precarious work positions and their obvious need for a reliable source of income. After being warned by co-workers that his new employer would consistently pay workers late, Rafael created a persona as a payment assurance tactic:

"I went to my boss and I told him: 'Hey, tell me the truth, are you going to pay me 15 days from now? Because I have a family, I have kids.' I mean, in order to get ahead, I made up a family. I made up that I have a daughter, a son and that I have a wife." (Rafael)

By falsely representing himself as a breadwinner in need of consistent income to provide for his family, Rafael also managed to circumvent workplace bullying associated with being an unmarried male ([see section on "Gendered work organization and occupational risks"](#)).

More traditional tactics for securing an income or for earning additional income were exercised by other participants. Multiple part-time jobs or additional income-generating activities to counteract the temporary, part-time, or low-wage nature of available work or to make extra money were common among participants, particularly among females. For instance, in addition to holding a full-time job as a manager for a local business, Renata would also teach private cooking classes and would sell baked goods. Another female engaged in a range of additional income-generating activities to avoid interfering with her English language classes during the day. For instance, she participated in clinical trials on more than one occasion, did coat-checking at a downtown Toronto nightclub, and did part-time work on the weekends at a banquet hall. Other female participants such as Luna and Maya did babysitting in

addition to their regular work at a factory and a restaurant, respectively. Valeria worked up to 3 jobs at once to maximize her earnings at the expense of sleep, rest and good health (see [Case Study 4](#))

As shown on [Table 2](#), males on the other hand, tended have more than one regular job, but rarely spoke about income-generating activities that were discrete rather than ongoing in nature. For instance, Rafael did construction work during the week, and picked up factory work on the weekends with a temporary agency. Roberto similarly held a regular cleaning job in the evenings, a dishwashing job on the weekends at a local restaurant, and was looking for a third job at the time of this study. Interestingly, because workers picked up many small jobs simultaneously, job-sharing was a common tactic used by workers to not loose their pre-existing employment should they have to miss work unexpectedly. For instance, Roberto shared his dishwashing job at the restaurant when he was offered extra and higher paid work at his regular cleaning job, yet he was still considered the primary worker for the position and was required to pay his replacement.

Another tactic used by workers in our study, was to constantly be on the lookout for new job opportunities and move between jobs if they were offered a better rate of pay or better working conditions. Consequently, there was a high rate of mobility between jobs among workers, so much so, that workers often did not recall how many jobs they had held in the last year, and less so how many they had since first arriving in Canada. It was very common for workers to describe transitioning into new jobs during the course of study or having to rearrange interview times to accommodate new work schedules. As [Rafael's Case Study](#) highlights, relocating to a new city was another job search tactic, which proved to be beneficial for some and detrimental to others. For instance, Mariana's partner had been working in another Canadian province for several months and refused to come back to Toronto because it would mean forfeiting a high paying job and being unable to provide for his family.

Workers also employed a range of microeconomic and transnational tactics to secure, supplement, or top-up the income they already made. For instance, Roberto used his transnational connections and savings to establish a side business back home with a business partner who had once lived in Canada as an undocumented worker. When workers experienced financial constraints, it was also common to receive reverse remittances. Rafael for instance, asked his relatives to send money from his savings account back home to pay for a return flight back to Toronto

when he realized he had limited job prospects in Alberta. Emiliano also relied on his transnational connections to purchase a flight back home for emergency health treatment, and being an unemployed and single mother to-be, Victoria relied on family remittances to prepare for the birth of her first child in Canada.

Microeconomic tactics within the household were also common. As already described (see section on “[Learning the way of the land](#)”), participants’ applied several tactics to save on common household expenses such as food, rent and bills. Yet, those with dependent children in Canada, employed additional generated tactics to deal with their childcare responsibilities while still having to meet their work obligations. For instance, Mariana was primarily a homemaker, but would occasionally do cleaning work to help support her family when their work was slow. To balance her responsibilities in light of the high costs of private childcare, Mariana would work night shifts so that her children could be cared for by her mother. Elizabeth, on the otherhand, described staying home instead of looking for additional work during the winter months when she was off her regular work, in order to take care of her son and manage regular duties she could not do while she was working full-time:

“From December 23rd to early March it’s [the business] closed due to winter (...) many find other jobs, work in other areas, but I prefer to stay at home with him [her son] (smiling). [Money-wise] it’s Okay because my husband is working in construction, which is helpful. Moderator: Do you like to be at home? Elizabeth: Not really (...) sometimes I baby sit the children of my husband’s relatives and (...) I run errands, take my child to the clinic, I use this time to do these things.” (Elizabeth)

3.2. Work pride

Despite the strenuous and often demoralizing working conditions participants were subjected to, workers in our study generally shared a sense of dignity from being hard workers. This sense of fulfilment or work pride seemed to function as a buffer against the negative psychological effects of engaging in continuously low-paid, dangerous and sometimes, low-skilled and menial work. For instance, many participants spoke about striving to “be the best”, even if this meant being the best at doing the worst jobs, like cleaning. Some workers reasserted that

it was through their hard-earned dollars alone, and not anybody's sympathy that they were able to get by, as Emiliano explained:

"When I go to a place to work, I don't like anyone telling me that they are giving me money. I earn it. I work, I work hard. What I get paid, I really earned." (Emiliano)

Other workers kept artifacts or keepsakes for when they returned back home, that would serve as a reminder to them and to their families of the hard work they endured. These often included remittance receipts and diary notes, but also included marks on the body. For instance, when asked why she had not gotten treatment for the several burn marks on her arms from working in a kitchen, Valeria noted that she wanted her children to see what their new life back home had physically cost her.

Yet work pride also served as a tactic for workers to confront or come to terms with the nature of the work they would be doing. For Elena, accepting to come to Canada to work as a cook specifically required reframing the experience as a respectable learning opportunity rather than simply low-skilled work she was not accustomed to:



Top: Valeria's burn marks on hands and arms are an accurate representation of the number of scars she physically had. [Click here to see her entire body map.](#)

"My mom always used to tell me how was I going to come to Canada to work at a restaurant when [back home] I never helped her wash the dishes, I never chopped an onion, or lettuce! These were things I had never done; it's true. But in (my home country) I had this idea that 'Okay, but I am going to go there to learn something'... I've always believed that whatever you do is never demeaning in any context." (Elena)

For other workers, work pride took the form of inner self-confidence when confronted with limited job-prospects. Emiliano described:

"I meet lots of Latinos who say: 'It is pretty hard to find a job' and yes, I believe them. Then, the media talks about the global crisis, so you end up feeling pretty panicked. But then when

I lay in bed, I say to myself: "But, I am pretty good. I am an awesome writer. I am a really good journalist, so TOMORROW they'll know about me, for sureeee!" (Emiliano)

Workers' self-confidence and pride also had a clear utility when it came to securing work and resisting their disposability as undocumented workers. By demonstrating a "hard worker" work ethic (e.g. doing overtime, performing heavy work, willingness to do anything asked of them, etc), several workers were able to build a good reputation with their employer and improve their job security. This was the case for several factory temp workers who consistently had to out-perform permanent workers in order to secure ongoing placements at the client employer worksite. Valeria also recalled how her hard work in the kitchen resulted in her boss depending solely on her for the business to run. She explained:

"What can the restaurant owner do? I am the only cook. I cook lunch and dinner. Who would cook? I can't just think about myself! When you have a profession, when you graduate with something, you have to deliver. I know how to be a professional; I don't have a Canadian diploma, (...) but I know about my responsibilities." (Valeria)

In addition to helping workers keep their job, this "hard worker" tactic also seemed to reduce workers' competition for new jobs since employers would only hire undocumented workers to get the job done right. This is clearly tied to the production and maintenance of the undocumented migration industry as described in [Chapter 1](#), and highlights how workers themselves reproduce an undocumented worker stereotype, one that reinforces that such workers are willing and able to do hard cheap labour at whatever cost. Several participants in our study described this unintended effect:

"They bring or connect with Mexican people... first, because they have this idea... that Mexicans are people with a lot of grit; hard-working people, who always put up a fight... They also do this with young people... because they think they are more productive at work; they are healthier and they get less tired." (Elena)

Yet it would be an incomplete picture to suggest that workers passively evoked a hard worker ethic and work pride to simply secure jobs

and promote their self-worth. Data from our study also suggests that workers' willingness to work hard and comply with employers' demands also had its limits, highlighting yet another realm of tactics workers employed to resist exploitative conditions when they reached their tipping point. [Elena's Case Study](#) particularly revealed how undocumented workers can be pushed to take drastic measures to escape situations that threaten their personal safety. After experiencing months of sexual harrassment, surveillance, and violence in her workplace, Elena made the spontaneous decision to cut all social ties with people at work and quit without notice.

Although not frequently done, some workers similarly took matters into their own hands, often putting at risk their employment and their stay in Canada for the sake of resisting abusive treatment. Emiliano recalled threatening to rip apart a former employer's car if he didn't pay him his unpaid wages. When he was threatened with deportation, as commonly occurs in cases of confrontation, Emiliano noted:

"It doesn't matter what status I have. Even though I came in with a tourist visa, I had no right [to work], no work permit. Abusive people take advantage of that. I know a lot of cases like this that people have told me about. But I said to him [the boss], 'I don't care, you'll do it [i.e. pay him], and it will be the last time you do it because after this you'll see that not all of us are that stupid'. He quickly paid me." (Emiliano)

Although small in number, courageous accounts such as these highlight how workers consistently engaged in outward tactics to reaffirm their self-respect and human rights. Many other participants resorted to less risky and more personal forms of maintaining their self-dignity and respect as workers in Canada. For instance, while several participants recognized they were transgressing some aspect of the law by working without papers, they often reasserted their economic contribution to Canadian society as a way of demonstrating their work pride and resisting being conceived as a "criminal" or as a "parasite" that feeds off Canada's safety net. As Julio noted:

"...the only thing I've done here is work for the country, even though it has been cleaning. I provide certain commodity to people who need it. I have never stolen, I've never cheated anybody, and I haven't lived off the government. I haven't paid

“taxes” directly, but I have, indirectly, by buying food, clothing... I’ve put hard effort into my work. The fact that I am not qualified [for status] does not mean I am a parasite here. I’ve proven that I am not a parasite.” (Julio)

3.3. Good citizen acts

Nearly all the workers we interviewed felt that everyday activities like working, driving, and going to school, or crossing the street, were at risk of being transformed into criminal or questionable acts with severe consequences like detention and deportation. Therefore many workers transformed themselves into the most extreme ‘law-abiding’ citizens while going about the city, avoiding minor transgressions of the law such as jay-walking or loitering. For instance, Julio who had lived undocumented in Canada for nearly a decade and had an impeccable driving record, noted that if he got a parking ticket, he would pay it well in advance to avoid having his name entered in “the system”.

Upon having their refugee application denied, one participant described having to transform their relatively open and trustful way of living to now having to become more alert and watchful of potentially dangerous situations that could make them a target to police. For instance, they would not accept casual car rides from people unless they were familiar with their driving habits, would immediately put on their seat belt and be “more alert”.

While participants adopted these ‘good citizen acts’ for self protection against being caught, they also seemed to adopt similar strategies to promote their mental health and dignity and to resist the criminalization they faced as “illegals” who “cheated” the system. For instance, our research found that many workers filed annual income taxes for their business. When asked why they did this, Renata explained that it was about being honest and wanting to belong like everyone else.

“First of all, I am a HONEST person. And if I am living in a country that...well...I want to respect that country’s laws. I WANT TO BELONG. The reason I am here is not only because I want to receive. I want to belong and I want to do things the best I can. I don’t want for later in the future for them to come to me and say, ‘You haven’t been [a part]’.” (Renata)

Other participants also spoke about trying to regularize their status in the most “honest” and “frank” way as possible. For some workers, like Emiliano, this included forgoing opportunities to submit a false refugee claim even though everyone advised them that should. As Emiliano explained:

“Look, many friends [have advised that I use]...my history as a Journalist, which has to do with ‘guerrillas’, terrorism, military and gangs. I could have a wonderful story to make up and be able to stay...Why don’t I do it? Because IT’S NOT TRUE... I’d feel extremely ashamed if I’d happen to get paper based on lies I made up from MY job.” (Emiliano)

In more extreme cases, this also meant actively refusing to marry someone for papers, even though they received multiple offers by Canadian residents, and recognized that this was becoming the only plausible way to regularize their status. As Rafael described:

“Well...I would like to be as honest as possible. I want something normal. I don’t want to get married to someone – get married without love, just for papers, and then have a child in between and destroy the life of the person who I got married with...and destroy the life of that child. I wouldn’t like that. I would like it all proper. I would only marry someone, if it were for love and about sharing our lives together.” (Rafael)

This sincere longing to belong to Canadian society by taking part in regular citizen acts or by exhibiting an honest character was a cross-cutting theme that also took on other forms. For instance, Tania enrolled in a college level certificate program to gain specialized knowledge in her profession from her country of origin, but also to have a more ‘normal’ experience of Canada and be like the rest.

Finally, among many workers there was an overall sentiment that no matter what they did, they would still be criminalized. As Valeria explained, Canada had not given workers a chance to formally contribute, and if given that chance, most undocumented workers would voluntarily comply because it would validate their work contribution and give them the flexibility to go and come back:

“All the undocumented people I spoke to are willing to pay [taxes]. For all these people, as soon as you mention this situa-

tion (...) they say: "If we could pay taxes, we would be able to go and come back [referring to going back and forth between countries]." (Valeria)

3.4. Staying busy and having hope

While the fear of deportation expressed by most workers in our study functioned to paralyze any meaningful establishment of friendships or participation in social life, workers in our study did express some notable tactics to counter the everyday social exclusion they faced. These mostly revolved around maintaining ties with their home country, keeping busy through a range of activities, and building trustworthy support mechanisms locally to support their psychological well-being and to meet their everyday needs such as finding a job and other resources. Participants' descriptions of social life also reveal the ways in which their social exclusion is related to their socioeconomic status, gender and other contextual factors such as age, marital status and occupation. Finally, several workers highlighted the importance of belonging to a faith-based organization or maintaining a strong belief in God as a source of strength and protection.

Staying connected and maintaining supports

Nearly all participants spoke about the significant hardship they endured in the absence of a strong social support system in Canada. For these reasons, nearly all workers, especially those who migrated alone, maintained strong ties with family and friends from their country of origin or other places that had lived and worked via the Internet or the phone. Purchasing long distance calling cards or buying a laptop with wireless connection was a common feature of participants' early settlement experiences in Canada which came through in their body-mapped stories.

For those participants that did establish social support networks in Canada, which mostly included other immigrant groups or co-workers, they described these as mostly serving a tangible function, like providing job search or housing



Top: Luna draws a large phone line to represent keeping in touch with close friends and family abroad. [Click here to see her entire body map.](#)

help. Victoria particularly noted how these were “conditional friendships”, and this was a common sentiment among participants, who felt they had acquaintances in Canada, but not true friends they could rely on for moral support and comfort.

Participants’ social relations were also gendered in nature, with women exhibiting wider social support networks motivated by their affective value rather than their male counterparts who often only focused on establishing ties for networking purposes. Mariana who was a homemaker, tended to socialize with other mothers who she met at her child’s school or at the park and described the emotional support these relations provided especially when she travelled away from her Toronto-based network to reunite with her husband in Edmonton. According to Mariana:

“Here [in Toronto]... we go to the park with their kids or we make arrangements to see each other another day, but not always since they have their own children and husbands. We go out for coffee or something like that... [But] my social life [in Edmonton] used to be through the Internet... From the moment I got up I would have the computer and my MSN on, always talking to my mom about any little detail. My family, my friends...they were always there.” (Mariana)

For participants who actively transitioned from having legal status as a refugee, to having no status once their claims were denied, having a close network of friends and supports was invaluable for staying “under the radar”. Renata and Mariana were quickly able to relocate homes to avoid being apprehended by authorities as result of having trusted friends who could sign their lease agreements. Renata was also able to receive more thorough legal advice through friends who had connections with immigration specialists, and counted on her network to look for a new job.

Volunteering also gave participants an opportunity to expand their social support networks and get some form of distraction from their mundane work activities. A few participants (5 out of 20) did some form of voluntary work, usually within their faith-based community or with organizations working with the Latin American community. Some people volunteered regularly and many of these organizations depended on their volunteer labour to keep functioning. For instance, Renata worked several hours per week cooking lunch for a community program

for seniors, while Nelson and Fabio were occasionally involved with an organization that provided language and resettlement support to other newcomers.

Religion and hope as a tools for getting by

Religion, spirituality and hope were also powerful resources in the provision of comfort and reassurance for participants during their migration journeys and after they arrived. One female participant recalled actively praying while attempting to cross the border, and several others described asking God for protection and strength when they faced interrogation by immigration officials. One participant noted, *“You learn to love God in foreign land”*, and this was a common sentiment among participants as they progressively got closer to their faith-based communities as a means of coping. Nearly half of participants interviewed, attended religious services on a near regular basis or expressed a genuine belief that God was their source of strength and support. Representations of God and religious faith also appeared in several of participants’ body-mapped stories, sometimes as a crucifix, in others as the lyrics to religious music or as pictures of places of worship.



Left: In Valeria’s body map the sun represents God and her slogan on her back are the lyrics of a religious hymn. [Click here to see her entire body map.](#)



Left: See Elena’s large wings and the green hand print on the top represents God watching over her. [Click here to see her entire body map.](#)

For the majority of these participants, religion particularly played a role in helping them come to terms with their lived reality as undocumented workers in a place that did not recognize their labour or their human rights. There was an inherent belief in “God’s plan”, that is, that both the hardships and the successes they experienced in Canada were part of a larger life lesson. This tended to offer those participants a deep-

er connection to their life's and migration's purpose, make them more appreciative for the things they had, and more accepting of the hardships and exploitive conditions they could not change. As Rafael explained:

"Yes, it is hard. It angers you that they take your money ... [but] money comes and goes. If they take my money while God gives me more health, I am thankful for that... just having a chance to see another day. ...That alone I would be a reward. I can't ask for more... I already had wealth. I have my parents. I was once very happy. I already know what love is like. I have a religion, I breathe, I see. I have my five senses. That is my reward. I can't ask Him for more." (Rafael)

Concrete descriptions or examples of how God protected them in Canada were also common. For instance, Rafael once endured a major hand sprain while handling a power drill and felt that in the days following his injury, God had kept watch over him because coincidentally, he wasn't required to do any heavy lifting at work which gave his injury sufficient time to heal without having to take time off work. Similarly, Elena described getting help from a stranger named "Angel" while being transferred from hospital to hospital for emergency care. When representing this story on her body map, Elena decided to place angel wings behind her back to figuratively represent the belief that God always watched over her, and had sent a guardian angel to help her that day. Valeria similarly explained that God had protected her from a much more serious burn in the kitchen where she worked:

"One day, I was very busy (...) there were many clients... I was frying dough. When I realized, I had already thrown a scoop of boiling oil on my hand. Moderator: Did it burn the whole hand? Valeria: It didn't burn much... it got the way you see it now. My boss came in to check because a co-worker had told him about the accident. (...) He said: "Let me see how is your hand?" I said: "It wasn't much". He said: "Not much?!? This is boiling oil." And I replied: "God has placed a handkerchief on my hand." Nothing happened... that could have damaged my hand forever." (Valeria)

Becoming closer to the church also seemed to connect participants to trusted networks of support that proved to be indispensable when it came to looking for a job or receiving emotional reassurance. Renata was

overwhelmed by the support she received by her church community, where she found people who were willing to give her their “*half month’s wages, if she needed it*”, and where her pastor provided advice on how to deal status issues in Canada. Other participants spoke about material supports available through the church, like food basket donations.

Yet while several participants expressed a belief in God as a source of protection or in their church communities as an invaluable source of support, several others described “hope” more generally, or “inner strength” as a means to get by. When asked to map out where on her body she got her personal strength, Luna explained that it was purely “*mental strength*” that got her by, and decided to represent this on her body map with a picture of a person doing yoga (see [Luna’s body map](#)). For Roberto, his strength came from having something worth fighting for:

“I believe that life without problems is no life because for human beings that is the reason to live for... having something to fight for and move ahead.” (Roberto)

Other participants simply evoked a “positive outlook” personality which helped them get through life and see hardships differently. Frequently this involved comparing their life circumstances to those in worse situations, or simply, to how far worse life would be, back home. For instance, Nelson compared his previous job experiences to his current occupation and thought it was much healthier and more gratifying to be a carpenter than a sales person always pressured by increasing sale targets or a small business owner living at the mercy of economic shifts. He described himself as a person with a positive attitude whose children were old enough to understand his distance and as lucky man because he was appreciated for his craftsmanship, worked with good people, and was paid a fair amount. Finally, several participants spoke about the need to believe or have hope that their situation was only temporary.

Leisure time

Leisure time was a rare commodity for participants in our study, mostly due to lack of time off work and because as many people remarked, “*Going out is expensive here...*”. On their days off, workers commonly spoke about catching up on their sleep, reading news from back home over the Internet, or doing low-cost activities such as renting movies.

For the most part, everything was measured up against fear of exposure and financial cost. Workers were generally afraid to expose themselves publicly at bars or clubs, out of fear that they would be asked for identification to get in or that they would find themselves being “at the wrong place at the wrong time”. Participants also acknowledged that social outings were expensive and carried hidden costs, such as time away from work or sleep. For these reasons, participants were far more likely to spend quiet evenings indoors with their co-workers, partners or friends, and when the weather was better, backyard barbeques were common.

The kinds of leisure activities performed were also tied to participants’ work schedules and their age. Older workers such as Valeria, Julio, Roberto, Nelson and Fabio were primarily concerned with staying connected to their children or spouses back home, and rarely spoke about having the time or interest in participating in social outings. As Valeria described:

“Some people tell me: “Rather than a heart, you have a stone in your chest”. (...) But this is not true; I have left my children behind, also my parents and my siblings. I came here to work. So, I work as much as I can. I won’t look for a bar to drink; I won’t look for a man to date. By working this hard, how can I have time for parties or relationships?” (Valeria)

Younger workers, on the other hand, were more amenable to going out for coffee, drinks or dancing with friends, one participant even called it a “safety valve”. With respect to work schedules, night shift workers or early morning workers rarely spoke about going to nightclubs, while daytime workers commonly spoke about the nocturnal lifestyle they adopted:

“You leave the restaurant, go home quickly, take a shower and get to their house by 11:30pm, midnight. My life became much more nocturnal. That was the only time I was available.” (Elena)

For a small number of workers in our study, their time off work was an opportunity to focus on their passions and hobbies. Emiliano described himself as a journalist at heart, and frequently spoke about his adventures around the city, snapping photos of Canadian life and documenting events such as the G20 protests and city festivals such as Pride and Caribana. He described:

“... The little free time I have, I sometimes use it for resting or reading. Many times, I read or listen to music at home or at some place I like – a coffee shop or an outdoor space... or I go out and take pictures of society.” (Emiliano)

Several others such as Andres, Andrea, Lina, and Renata also spoke about sightseeing around the city or going to parks, usually by foot or bicycle, taking pictures they would later send to their families back home. Participants' leisure activities also revealed the ways that education, gender, class, and ethnicity interacted to ultimately shape their lived experiences in the city. While a few participants, particularly those who came from affluent backgrounds, spoke about attending free outdoor concerts, going to museums, professional sports games or skating at City Hall, the majority of participants seemed unaware of these alternative spaces for engagement and spent their time almost exclusively within their neighbourhood, visiting ethnic-specific or mainstream establishments. For instance, one female described taking her children to McDonald's playgrounds in the winter because she didn't know of many free places where her children could play, and Emiliano noted that many of his undocumented Latin American co-workers, who had been living in Canada for several years, still preferred to buy food at ethnic food locales, as a kind of hobby.

4

The impact of lack of status

“Unauthorized im/migrants’ lack of access to necessary health care services thus constitutes a burgeoning yet insufficiently addressed global health challenge.”

Willen, Mulligan, & Castañeda (2011, p. 332)

Chapter 4: The impact of lack of status

"...you don't even want to go out. You're afraid. You feel the uncertainty of going out. You think, 'Someone will find me...I'll be seen'. You live with that in your heart." (Renata)

The experiences of undocumented workers in Canada can best be understood as a complex web or matrix of simultaneously oppressive and supportive structures that transcend the sphere of home, work and community. We refer to this as a web of exploitation and solidarity which ultimately functions to constrain workers' physical, economic and personal mobility and exclude them from meaningfully participating in Canadian society. Workers in our study experienced a combination of linked problems – precarious employment, low incomes, poor housing, health breakdown, and lack of access to services, among many others. Therefore the vulnerability of undocumented workers is characterized by the inter-relatedness of problems that are mutually reinforcing. Combined, these issues make up a complex web, which is difficult to escape or disentangle because of the evolving nature of those participating, or at worse, benefitting from their exploitation. Some workers learn the rules of living in this web, which they describe as surviving in sub-spaces. They live and work in Toronto, but they never experience it the way others do. Many others use trust and informal networks as a means for survival which provides only weak social security for workers.

In this chapter, we present findings related to the health and everyday impacts of living without status. We preface this discussion by first outlining the embeddedness of social exclusion and fear in the lived realities of undocumented workers, and how such conditions lead to immediate and long-term material and subjective consequences which negatively impact their physical and mental health. We then discuss health outcomes which include both psychosocial and physical health concerns, women's health issues and workplace injuries and risks. We briefly discuss long-term implications for health, and end the chapter by identifying key barriers, facilitators and experiences of access, including undocumented workers' health seeking behaviours. Throughout, we draw from participants' body-mapped stories to illustrate how participants embody and situate such experiences in relation to their transnational lives.

4.1. *Living with fear and exclusion*

Several scholars have noted in recent literature that the immigration process itself contributes to losses in social networks and support systems, and the impact of which is compounded by layers of social exclusion and marginalization resulting from language barriers, under-employment, substandard housing, and different forms of prejudice (Crooks, Hynie, Killian, Giesbrecht, & Castleden, 2011; Guruge & Collins, 2008; Guruge & Humphreys, 2009).

Living on high alert

For undocumented workers, however, the anxiety of living without status began almost immediately upon arrival, particularly for those that had limited social supports and English language skills. Participants spoke about the moment they got off the plane from their respective homelands and feeling tremendous angst when passing through immigration inspection where their motives for visiting Toronto would be called to question. For some, such experiences were so engraved in their migration experiences that they represented such moments on their body maps.

Right: The wiggly lines on Roberto's knees represent the fear and nervousness he felt when going through immigration questioning. The floor plan on the left represents his arrival at the airport. [Click here to see his entire body map.](#)



The anxiety that marked their initial entry to Canada continued to overshadow workers as they went about their lives in Toronto. Participants in our study consistently spoke about the need stay hidden and on high alert for their own safety. This is despite the fact that Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) virtually has no record of them and no specific program in place to locate “visitors” who overstay their visa permitted time. Yet the majority of workers we interviewed seemed to internalize this criminalization and became hypervigilant of being exposed to authorities. As Emiliano pointed out “[we believe] that somehow people will recognize us. We think we have it written here (pointing to forehead)”. Similarly, Valeria described that at one point she felt intense fear while crossing a street intersection because she thought the police

had put up cameras to photograph suspicious pedestrians to locate undocumented migrants. Later she realized this was a psychological symptom of her condition.

Thus unlikelihood of being located by immigration authorities seems to be largely unknown to most of the undocumented workers we interviewed, and so the perceived fear of arrest and deportation is very real and reinforced by narratives of deportation among the Latin American community in Toronto. For instance, several workers spoke about having to be weary of ‘informers’ which could be other immigrants or co-workers who could turn them in for monetary rewards. Luna particularly spoke about trying to stay on her employers’ good side because they could use deportation as a form of payback.

Also consistent among participants’ narratives was a perceived sense of mistrust in everyone which contributed to their overall lack of social participation. For instance, when asked if they had sought legal advice, many participants described actively avoiding consultation with lawyers or legal experts out of fear that they would be taken advantage of or that they would be immigration officers in disguise. For instance, after being asked why he had not sought legal help for over \$2000 in unpaid wages, Pepe recounted the story of an undocumented co-worker who had complained about unpaid wages:

“He went to complain. The same lady told him, ‘What do you come here to complain about? ...You know what? Give me you number, I’ll take care of it.’ ... He gave her his home phone number and three days later, immigration went to this guy’s house and took him....You see things and you hesitate [to act] for the same reason.” (Pepe)

These real accounts of betrayal therefore promote mistrust even towards organizations or institutions that provide advice and support to non-status workers. Workers also felt reluctant to provide their real addresses to strangers. For this reason, many workers described keeping two sets of addresses; one which they would put on forms and a second, which they would only give to close friends or relatives, which was where they actually lived. For other workers, staying under the police’s radar meant trying to “blend in” as much as possible and avoid characteristics that seemed to trigger profiling by police. For instance, many would stay away from Latin American establishments, would bring a change of clean clothes to work so as to not appear as low-wage construction

worker on their way to and from work, or would try at whatever cost to speak English in public.

Yet for those living with other undocumented migrants, like Elena, this meant having close encounters with immigration officials. In one particular instance, two immigration officers came to her home with an arrest warrant for one of her roommates and requested to see identification from the rest of those living in the home. At the time, Elena and another undocumented roommate were not home, but were informed of the incident and quickly decided to relocate.

Becoming socially excluded

Social exclusion can be provoked by normalizing attitudes about citizenship in both personal and institutional contexts. For instance, programs and services rarely consider status as a potential barrier for participation because there exists a “universalist” ethic for the inclusion and incorporation of everyone, but in practice, eligibility for inclusion is continuously verified in ways that would pass unnoticed to most. For instance, one participant described the alienation she felt when asked to provide proof of residency through a bill statement to enroll her daughter in school:

“They force you to present some documentation, a bill, whatever it is, but it has to have your name and the address of where you live in order for you to prove [that you reside here]. I didn’t have anything...I don’t get any bills in the mail, not even a cell phone bill, nothing! So it was very tedious. I tried to explain, ‘I can’t because I don’t have anything. I don’t have any paper to show.’ They would say, ‘You don’t have a bank card?’ [I would say] ‘No, I don’t have anything.’ [They would say] ‘Why don’t you go open a bank account so that you can get a bill, and then come [register] with us’” (Mariana)

At other times, normalizing attitudes about status are initiated inadvertently in interpersonal contexts. One participant described avoiding social gatherings because one of the main subjects of conversation among immigrant groups is their legal status in Canada and travelling back home for vacation.

“When you are at social gatherings a lot of people start talking about how they went to such and such place, to do such and

such thing, that they are citizens, or residents, blah, blah, blah. In those situations I feel excluded.... It's better if I go to another place and find other points of conversation.” (Julio)

For those participants with young children, normalizing attitudes about eligibility for child benefits were particularly hard to escape. Spending time in public spaces with their children meant that non-status mothers had to continuously interact with other mothers who would share information about available government sponsored benefits. As Mariana explained:

“For me, it is really uncomfortable because they start asking, ‘Do you go to such and such program?’ ‘Did you apply for that thing that provides some child care assistance?’ These are things, that obviously, I can’t do right now. So, it bothers me to have to be lying. ‘Ah, yes, yes, I went’ or ‘I did this and that’” (Mariana)

Right: The two women speaking to each other represent Mariana’s discomfort in having to hide her status situation from other mothers who always ask related questions. [Click here to see her entire body map.](#)



In other cases, social exclusion is self-mediated to avoid unnecessary public exposure, particularly during times of heightened immigration enforcement. Upon finding out that immigration raids were happening across the city, Renata recalled opting to stay indoors and cancel plans to go out with a group of friends.

“It was very sad to have to say the day before, ‘You know what? We won’t be able to go with you because we can’t go out in public.’ Our friends have status, we don’t. So, we have to be very discreet. We must be very careful, and that’s horri-ii-ble.” (Renata)

Emiliano on the other hand expressed a sincere longing for spaces to culturally and socially engage, but was cognizant of the fact that even if they did exist, the fear that undocumented workers have over being exposed and potentially being detained would prevent them from participating.

"...there aren't spaces for social interaction. There are none. And if there were, many of us are afraid [to participate] because we are illegal immigrants... We aren't going to risk going to this amazing place because they'll send me back [referring to deportation] and I still haven't saved the 10 pesos that I need." (Emiliano)

Emiliano's quote also captures the fact that economic goals often supersede personal goals for belonging and socially engaging.

The impact of social exclusion and lack of rights

Undocumented workers experience heightened job insecurity which in many cases led to greater workplace stress, tension, exhaustion and signs of depression. Whether due to working multiple jobs, conflicting work schedules, working long hours or spending free time looking for work, most participants had little time to interact with others outside their job. In many cases this created negative feelings of self worth and personal integrity resulting in their withdrawal from meaningful non-work social relationships. Emiliano particularly noted that being undocumented is progressively "limiting". For him, this didn't mean that you couldn't *"using public buses, or the subway, or that you couldn't go downtown or to Dufferin Mall to shop, or to drink at someplace and go out in a cab"* but rather, the impact of having no status was more about the emotional toll of living an uncertain life, thinking at every step of the way that *"they are going to find me"*. This sentiment was also felt among other workers such as Renata, who said that, *"[as an undocumented worker] you don't even want to go out. You're afraid. You feel the uncertainty of going out. You think, 'Someone will find me...I'll be seen'. You live with that in your heart."*

Social isolation also has material consequences in addition to impacting the mental and emotional health of workers. As illustrated in [Case Study 2](#), Renata and her partner slept on a park bench when their apartment was being fumigated for bed bugs, and this experience not only points to workers' constrained economic situation to afford temporary housing in times of crisis, but also suggests a severe absence of supportive social networks that workers can rely on in times of hardship. Pepe, who had no social networks in Canada also, described experiencing several days of homelessness upon arrival, which suggests a clear link between network connections and much needed resources for survival.

Social isolation and lack of rights also has varying effects based on gender. Particularly among homemakers the loss of social networks upon migration and the inability to participate socially due to care-giving obligations and fear, seemed to have a more negative impact on women than on men. As Mariana described, *“work absorbs you terribly here...You don’t always have that much communication with people. Yes, I have my friends but [between] work, the kids, and other things, I’m almost always alone at home.”*

For females with Canadian born-children, several right-based issues emerged. For instance, Victoria felt that her lack of citizenship based rights in Canada would put her at real disadvantage if she had to fight for custody for her Canadian-born child. For Elizabeth, not having legal status in Canada excluded her from being able to participate in government-sponsored savings programs for her child’s education. As Elizabeth noted, *“Because I don’t have documents here, I can’t register [for children’s programs]. In order to do so, I should have a SIN card; they ask for your social insurance number.”*

Maya was hurt by a co-worker who grabbed her arm with such strength that caused hematomas and needed immobilization for several days, after she complained the co-worker was being rude to her. She described how an incident of this kind was an acute reminder of her powerlessness and her inability to defend herself in Canada. She said she felt humiliated and, to make it worse, she could not go to the police or to the hospital and she was not sure her employer would not punish both of them for the incident.

4.2. Health consequences

To capture participants’ change in health upon migrating to Canada, we asked participants to self-rate their current health on a 5-point scale ranging from very good, good, neither bad nor good, bad or very bad. From the socio-demographic data collected, nearly 75% of participants rated their current health as good (50% of participants) or very good (25% of participants) (see Figure 1). Yet, when asked to compare their current health to that before migrating, 60% of all participants indicated their health was worse (see Figure 2). While females cited worse mental health as a main factor contributing to their declining health, men tended to attribute their loss in health advantage overtime to the physical strain on their bodies and aging.

These findings support growing evidence showing immigrants’ deteriorating ‘healthy immigrant effect’ overtime, reflected in poorer long-term physical and mental health (Hyman & Jackson, 2010; Ng, Wilkins, Gendron, & Berthelot, 2005). But more importantly, this data contributes to new evidence suggesting that undocumented workers in Canada follow a similar trajectory than that of established newcomers, without the accompanying rights and entitlements to health care as that afforded to other immigrant groups, thus making their health outcomes potentially much poorer.

Figure 1 Self-rated health status by sex

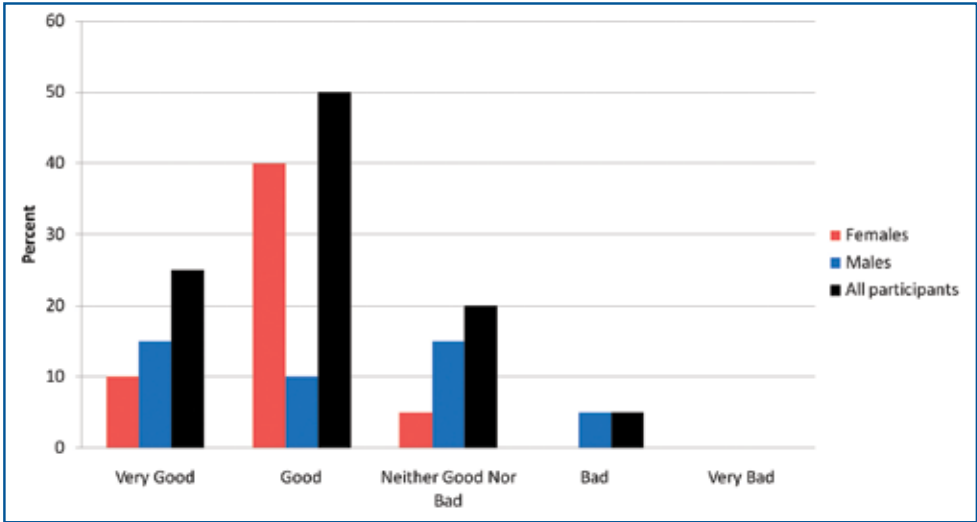
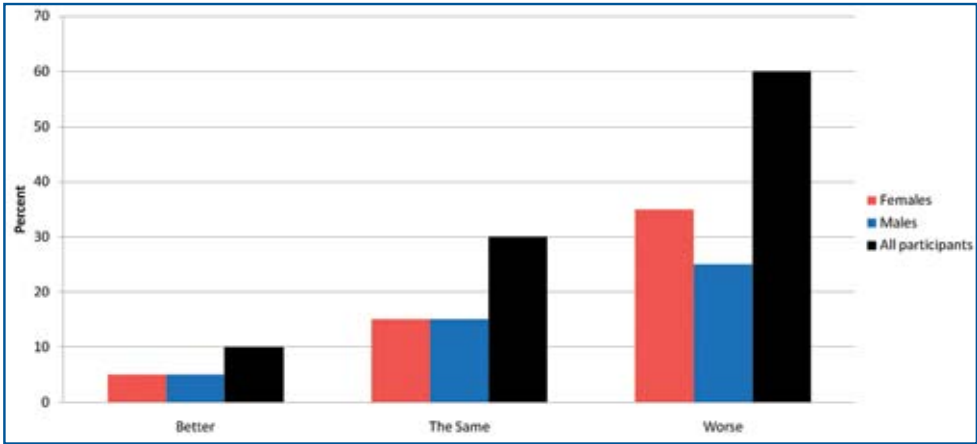


Figure 2 Self-rated health status compared to pre-migration by sex



Undocumented workers' physical and mental health

Many undocumented workers described physical and mental health problems resulting from the enormous stress of living without status and having to cope with the common resettlement stressors such as finding a job, housing, learning a new language and navigating their way through a new landscape with a new set of rules. Focus on survival meant little time to take care of the self.

Several participants showed signs of depression; including reduced appetite, insomnia, fluctuations in weight, unexplained crying, lack of motivation to work, and feelings of helplessness, among many other symptoms. One participant even disclosed seeking professional help after having suicidal thoughts and another participant described self-medicating with anti-depressants she had brought from her country of origin. In most cases, these symptoms had a direct relationship to work and income insecurity. The pressure to send regular remittances or pay off debt in the face of precarious employment, frequently resulted in feelings of failure or disappointment when workers found themselves unemployed. In other cases, poor mental health was directly tied to home-sickness, isolation in Canada, and feelings of guilt for leaving children or family behind.

Unlike men, females particularly bore the burden of close friends or family's emotional or economic hardships which also contributed to their poor mental health. In most cases, female participant's felt indebted to these people and felt a moral obligation to help them by providing various forms of support at whatever cost to them. One participant nearly risked being detained when forced to call police to protect a friend who was experiencing domestic violence. Another worried nearly every day about her family's economic situation back home and felt that she was not doing enough to support them. In the case of males, it was common for them to not talk about their problems, and several participants affirmed that substance abuse, as a coping mechanism was more common among undocumented men.

For some participants, the anxiety and fear of living without status also took on clear physical manifestations. After learning about ongoing immigration raids in their area and trying to avoid public exposure, one participant described losing her voice involuntarily out of fear and stress. Digestive problems, such as ulcers, gastritis, and bile reflux, were also cited by a number of participants as a direct effect of living with long-term stress. As Rafael and Renata described:

"The stress is horrible. You vomit, yellow vomit...and [get] stomach pains – gastritis, from being so upset and helpless... You can't do anything! It's an injustice what they do." (Rafael)

"...the other day I was talking to people at my church and they told me, 'Have faith. With faith you will move forward'. And I told them, 'Well, yes, I have faith, but please explain that to my liver and my stomach'. It doesn't stop having an effect on you, even though you are strong." (Renata)

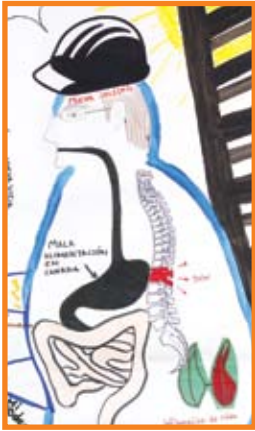
When asked to describe any physical changes they had experienced since migrating, participants' overwhelmingly spoke about weight gain or weight loss, highlighting the potential effect of chronic stress due to overwork and limited access to timely supports. Valeria's experience supports this chronic stress link, given that she gained over 15 pounds in less than a year after arriving. Paradoxically, she described having barely enough time to eat during the day, despite working as a cook in a busy restaurant. She described:

"I've grown a belly, something I didn't have before, all this fat around here. And I didn't sleep much, I was working all the time. I've gained 15 kilos." (Valeria)

For Renata, dirty and unsanitary working conditions as a cleaner led to severe food aversions, which caused significant weightloss.

"There were days when I wouldn't eat because I'd be repulsed from cleaning washrooms all night. In the morning I felt disgust. I wouldn't eat. It had a hard impact on my diet, also emotionally... I lost a lot of weight. Back home, I was a size 13...now, I am a 7." (Renata)

As indicated in [Renata's Case Study](#), her nutrition was further compromised by episodes of profound food insecurity requiring the use of food banks for non-perishable food consumption. The high cost of nutritious foods, or the inability to find culturally appropriate foods in less urban centres, was also cited by other participants, and seemed to be a common feature in participants' body maps. Maya, conversely, lost 7 kilos since coming to Canada and could not explain how it happened.



Left: Pepe's black stomach represents poor eating habits and nutrition in Canada. [Click here to see his entire body map.](#)



Right: The dotted lines near Renata's waist represent significant weight loss in Canada as a result of stress and the purple stomach with the word "stress" represents gastrointestinal problems as a result of prolonged stress (i.e. ulcers). [Click here to see her entire body map.](#)

Workers' health was also compounded by poor sleeping patterns. As was the case for Valeria ([see Case Study 4](#)), as well as for other workers such as Renata and Roberto, sleep deprivation seemed to be a common effect of having to work multiple jobs. Valeria for instance, would barely have time to get home, shower, eat and sleep for 2-3 hours before having to go to work again. As she explained:

"Oh my god, I couldn't chat, I had to sleep. I would sleep until 4:30 am and I would get up and go to my next job." (Valeria)

Case Study 4 Valeria's chronic health problems

Valeria is a middle-aged single mom who came to Canada to save money to buy a home for her and her children back home. Upon arrival, Valeria knew very little English and unlike her experience living undocumented in the U.S. for three years, where she had social ties and could find a job easily through her social network, Valeria didn't know anyone in Canada and stayed at a hotel upon arrival. But this did not stop her from getting a job. She went into the hotel kitchen and asked if anyone spoke Spanish or Portuguese and explained she was looking for a job. A cook took her to a relative's restaurant that same day and, as Valeria described, "I have arrived in Canada at 7am... By 5pm I was already at work". After connecting with her ethnic community, Valeria was able to secure three jobs on the same day, one as a cook and two as an overnight cleaner. For 2 years, Valeria worked a combination of 3 jobs, 7 days a week, and slept 3 hours a night. At first, she was severely sleep deprived and then became insomniac and started taking medication for depression to be able to fall asleep. Beyond working intensively, Valeria spoke to her children daily over the phone and to her parents who were taking care of the kids. She was very worried about being able to explain to her younger child why she spent so much time away and she was consumed by the idea of saving money to be able to go back. She kept submitting herself to a very intensive work rhythm and she began to experience chronic health problems that were only exacerbated by her strenuous working conditions. As the only cook during the lunch and dinner shifts for a busy restaurant, Valeria would stand for long hours lifting heavy pots and pans and chopping meat and bones. Valeria developed arthritis in her hand joints, and the repetitive motion of peeling potatoes for long hours made the pain and the stiffness worse to the point that, after several years, she could no longer do it. Although her boss helped her pay for acupuncture therapy and to purchase socks and shoes to improve circulation, things didn't seem to improve. On her free time, she would contact her family, visit a few friends or go to church on occasions. Finally, Valeria was able to save to pay off her apartment and save money to get surgery for her varicose veins back home.

Pregnancy and women's health

Unlike men, the majority of women in our study expressed the need to have access to a family physician, and the most often cited reason was for gynaecological care and access to birth control. In very few cases did

women know they could obtain free access to women's health centres for routine sexual and reproductive health care. Yet as Andrea, a business manager who knew of such services, explained, these centres were able to meet most her needs – *"in case you need more specific procedures that they can't perform there, they refer you to other services. I've done it [screening] sometimes, I just go and get it done."*

The fact that many women in our study did not know where to go for women's health needs is particularly significant given that additional data from our study suggests that undocumented women may be more vulnerable to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. The experience of one female participant shows how housing precarity, social isolation and a range of other factors may lead to engaging in casual, unprotected sex. Although it was not a direct finding from our study, anecdotal evidence provided by our study participants also suggests that undocumented women working in the service and entertainment sectors may face particular sexual health vulnerabilities.

Two female participants were also pregnant at the time of the study and spoke about the additional challenges resulting from limited prenatal benefits and limited knowledge of how to access child benefit programs for their Canadian-born children. For Victoria, who frequently participated in clinical trials for income, having an unplanned pregnancy meant having to use savings and quickly think of alternative forms of income generation that would not be strenuous on her body. The stress caused by Victoria's economic uncertainty made her very depressed and as a result, she experienced weight loss in her first few months of pregnancy, pointing to undocumented women's risk of experiencing high risk pregnancies. The experience of another woman in our study who returned to work just under three weeks after giving birth, also points to limited postpartum recovery among undocumented women.

Another issue directly related to pregnancy and lack of status was the issue cost, particularly for pre-natal care and the overall cost of labour and delivery. Having opted to have specialist care versus midwifery or community-based care, Victoria noted: *"It is very expensive, super expensive! I tell you, a lot of the money I had saved has gone into...things for the baby. Not medications, but certainly, specialist appointments."* In Elizabeth's case, the hospital covered some medical procedures during delivery such as the epidural, but she was required to pay \$2000 by the end of her stay, mostly due to over-night fees imposed by the hospital. Women also described a combination of cost and status-related barriers related to child planning. One female particularly noted she would like to

have more children, but her precarious legal status, and the uncertainty of her stay in Canada made this difficult to plan.

Other women's health issues mentioned included partner and co-worker violence. One female participant in our study described a long history of intimate partner violence and the fear over more direct forms of aggression against her or her child prevented her from reporting or leaving the relationship. For females who faced sexual abuse and harassment from co-workers, fear of dismissal or not being believed by their employer prevented reporting and resulted in long-term sexual abuse situations at work.

Workplace injuries and risk

(also see section on “Invisible hazards, precarious work”)

Minor workplace accidents were quite common among participants and frequently resulted in workers having to continue working their shift with minimal support from co-workers or supervisors for on-site first aid or follow-up treatment. For instance, while working as a cook Luna suffered a major workplace accident, but refused to tell someone out of fear that she would be forced to take unpaid days off to rest. Luna resorted to self-treatment and resumed her regular work schedule.

“They saw that the water fell on me, but I didn’t tell them what had happened because they were going to tell the supervisor and she would probably make me rest. I didn’t know how many days that would be, and I needed to work.” (Luna)

Workers in particularly hazardous industries such as construction also faced significant workplace risks, several of which resulted in real injuries. For instance, Rafael described that the most common risks in construction included cutting off an extremity, getting nailed with a pressure gun, eye accidents, back injuries due to improper lifting or overwork and falling from heights. Interestingly, many of the reported injuries in our study resulted from working in high pace work environments, with little focus on prevention and training. For instance, Rafael described needing to wear prescription glasses, but preferred working without them because they quickly got sweaty or foggy from the high work pace. One participant also described having his arm hyper-extended as a result of improperly handling a hand drill. Another commonly cited risk of construction work was working outdoors (usually as

roofers or landscapers) with minimal protection from the sun or having limited chances to stay hydrated.

For those participants who worked as cooks or as kitchen helpers, deep cuts from sharp knives and burns from scorching hot oil or water were commonly reported. Participants also described wet floors as a very dangerous workplace hazard in small kitchens. As with factory or assembly type work, repetitive strain injuries were also common among cooks. As [Valeria’s Case Study](#) revealed, repeated heavy lifting, peeling and chopping all resulted in soft tissue damage. Particularly among those workers who worked in bread factories, cold-heat stress was also common and was exacerbated by poor equipment provision and a lack of rotation among workers for hazardous work tasks. For instance, unlike permanent staff, undocumented temp workers were often required to do the most dangerous and dirtiest work, including stocking heavy supplies, working in the deep freezers with limited protection gear, or having to work all-day by industrial sized ovens. While exposure to chemicals was most common among cleaners, one participant who worked in landscaping spoke about working with pesticides and other harmful chemicals and another factory worker spoke about the harmful effects of working with raw food products that had been treated with artificial preservatives and chemicals.

Table 4 Types of health-related effects faced by undocumented workers

Psychosocial	Isolation, limited social participation, pervasive fear, long-term stress, depression, anxiety, low self-worth, loss of dignity, substance abuse, carrying others’ burden, internalized criminalization, stigma, psychological harassment at work
Physical	Poor nutrition/diet, insomnia, sleep deprivation, exhaustion, ulcers, gastritis, vomiting, weight loss/gain, edema, arthritis, chronic medical conditions, dental emergencies
Pregnancy and women’s health	Sexual abuse/harassment, unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, limited sexual and reproductive health access (lack of preventive screening, limited birth control), high cost of pre-natal and labour and delivery costs, limited postpartum recovery
Work related risks/injuries	Cuts, burns, repetitive strain/movements/heavy lifting, long hours standing, broken bones, improper equipment handling, lack of training, lack of protection gear (e.g. masks, gloves, safety boots), improper handling of chemicals, exposure to heat-cold stress, high work pace
Health seeking behavior	Delayed health seeking, emergency care over primary care, lack of continuity in care, limited use of community services, heightened use of: transnational health care, self-medication and over-the-counter medication, alternative medicine, and walk-in consultations

Long-term implications for health

Undocumented workers' need for non-acute medical care is often balanced against more immediate needs, such as food and shelter, leading to chronic problems being neglected until they become emergencies. Emiliano boldly captured this cross-cutting theme: *"Why do you need a doctor? Why you need a dentist? I'm not going to treat my cavities when they are bothering me... I'm going to go when I need a tooth extraction that is killing me, right?"*

As a result, almost every participant in our study had a story of how they ignored ill health because they faced other priorities or because they lacked knowledge of where to access care. For other workers like Luna, Pepe or Rafael, admitting they were sick to an employer meant compromising continued employment and earnings. Therefore, undocumented workers experience cumulative health effects which are in turn exacerbated by delayed health seeking, poor continuity of care and contextual factors such as having a pre-existing injury or aging. For instance, Emiliano worried that the stress and anxiety caused by his precarious and low-paying job as a factory worker would exacerbate his pre-existing medical condition. As a consequence, Emiliano regularly took lorazepam medication prescribed by his doctors' back home to stay calm, despite their recommendation that this drug be used sparingly.

As workers become older, they also suffer from the ramifications of their precarious work arrangements to a greater degree than younger workers. For Roberto, doing cleaning work versus construction was a choice he made after critically evaluating his age and physical limitations:

"I can get hurt more [in construction]. I don't have a social, I don't have health insurance. Going to a doctor is \$200, \$300. So, you say to yourself, 'Well, I came here to make money. I didn't come... to be sick'. So you try to find a job that matches your abilities... My physical ability is not at 100%; when I migrated I came at 75%. So, I prefer to be like this for five years, at 75% and not earn so much for a year, but [avoid] having to go [back home] for treatment [because I got worse]." (Roberto)

However, it is important to stress that the majority of workers do not engage in this critical self-assessment of their health and continue to work past the point at which they would have otherwise slowed down in order fulfill remittance sending obligations and in order compete with

equally willing and abled young workers. Valeria's Case Study particularly shows how older workers are at particular risk of experiencing exacerbated health problems with little chance of health treatment or appropriate recovery due to personal and familial obligations that forces them to keep on working.

4.3. Characterizing experiences of (in)access

For undocumented migrants, the border is not just a physical point at the airport or at land crossings where their identity is verified and their access determined (Berinstein, McDonald, Nyers, Wright, & Sahar Zerehi, 2006). The border transcends these spaces and is ever-present whenever workers try to access social services or a range of needed resources to live about their daily lives. While many participants used a range of community-based or private sector services, several others did not know where to find such services, or that such services existed for people with precarious legal status. In this section we provide a brief overview of the types of services accessed by participants and we propose a model (see Figure 3) for understanding their health seeking patterns which identifies individual level factors, their perceptions of risk and key enablers and barriers to access.

Types and experiences of access

Local public health units were identified by some participants as providing health services, mostly immunization services, post/pre-natal, and Early Years programs for children. One participant described getting his annual flu shot from a local unit and not being required to show identification. When asked about how he knew of such programs, he said he would see public notices in the buildings where he worked and in the newspaper. For two female participants, their community health centre (CHC) played an active role in giving them information about available public health programs, but described that they were not always free.

Overall, only a few participants in our study described using community-based health and social services⁸. These primarily included undocu-

⁸ Community services and supports can be a space of at least temporary safety for otherwise invisible workers who are marginalised, excluded, and isolated within dominant social support systems. However, such spaces can also become spaces of essentialization, reinforcing a "needy" stereotype for workers. The concept of Spaces of Oppression/Representation is useful for analyzing the social relations of (political) oppression and domination which underpin the dynamics of cities. Spaces can be simultaneously inclusive and oppressive.

mented women and their partners, or those who had Canadian-born children and were directed to such services and supports as a result of their pregnancy. One interesting finding that emerged from participants' experience with CHCs was that while they have a Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy in place, this does not always mean that such a policy is as inclusive in practice. For instance, Mariana described taking her child to a CHC for an annual check-up and being given a list of follow-up exams and referrals by the attending physician. It was only upon checking-out with the medical secretary that Mariana learned that nearly half of these recommended follow-ups required out-of-pocket payment. This highlights how DADT policies may not be as sufficient given that they fail to promote sensitive practices among practitioners.

For the remaining majority of participants, the use of community health services and primary care seemed to be very limited. This was a major difference for those participants who had experience as undocumented workers in the U.S, where they felt they had more health care options given the higher concentration of Latin American professionals and immigrant social networks. As Emiliano noted, *"[in the U.S.] the networks that have been established allow you to know which doctor is better than another."* Thus when health concerns did arise for workers in Canada, they typically reported paying out-of-pocket to see an English-speaking physician at a nearby walk-in clinic. Hospital emergency departments were largely avoided out of fear of being reported or denied service. Interestingly, for those few participants who reported having gone to a hospital ER, nearly all had first obtained a written referral to go to a hospital by a walk-in doctor who believed their conditions were too severe for regular treatment. Thereby, some of the reasons participants' sought emergency care included severe abdominal pain, neurological condition, outpatient surgical procedure, and two cases of kidney infection. With respect to cost, one participant described being charged \$700 just for being triaged. This same participant decided to leave the hospital before receiving a final diagnosis out of fear that the cost of medical exams and overnight stay would be too high. Another participant was told by the emergency receptionist "the hospital may fall in love with your credit card" and he left and was taken by co-workers to a walk-in clinic.

Because of these barriers many study participants had to find less formal, more creative avenues of care seeking, particularly for everyday health needs. For instance, Emiliano brought with him large quantities of prescription medication for a pre-existing condition and several others described receiving medication from relatives abroad. Several

participants also gave anecdotal evidence suggesting that undocumented workers regularly make use of the black health market. That is, they received medical consultations and treatment from non-licensed health professionals (usually immigrants themselves) and purchased foreign drugs that had entered Canada clandestinely. When asked why such underground forms of care were sought, Emiliano replied, *"...we believe, not only that this is more economical, but also more effective"*. As seen by Valeria's Case Study it was also common for participants to go back home for medical treatment. All of these practices suggest that undocumented workers' use transnational health care as a primary avenue of care. As will be described in later sections, a few participants also sought care through benefit programs through their union or private insurance which gave them access to alternative medical, dental and optometrist care.

Yet, for more common ailments such as colds, flu's, or muscular pain, participants often described using self-care strategies. As Mariana pointed out: *"not having 'status' gives you limited access to services with physicians, so you often have to delay [care] or find a way to solve [the problem] in a non-medical way."* Therefore, self-care strategies often included home remedies, over-the-counter medication, special food preparations, Internet searches for health-related tips or exchanging treatment options with co-workers and friends. Maintaining healthy lifestyles through diet and exercise was also common among participants, particularly for those who could afford gym memberships or had easier access to healthy food through their work as cooks or dishwashers. One participant even described having quit smoking in Canada as way to stay healthy and to save money.

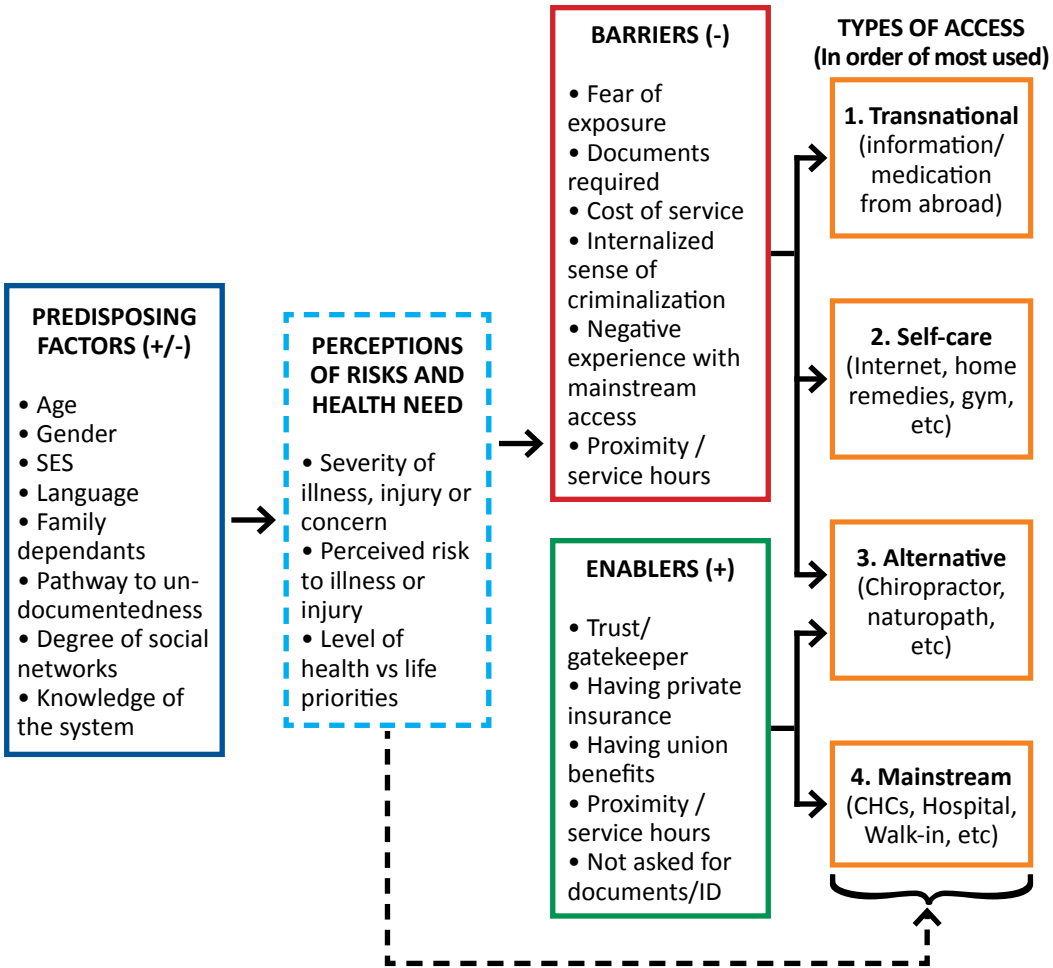
Self-care strategies also included steps participants took to modify their regular work practices to make them safer or to cope with a pre-existing injury that was being affected by their work. For instance, Lina worked for several months painting homes that were still under construction. Since her employer never had enough dust masks available onsite, Lina decided to purchase her own dust mask to deal with her recurring allergy symptoms brought on by her poor working conditions. Other participants similarly described having bought work gloves, safety glasses or safety boots for work when they were not provided by their employer. Roberto, an older worker with recurring back and abdominal pain, described working with a weightlifting belt to reduce the stress his cleaning work placed on his back. Elena and her co-workers also described purchasing first-aid items, such as bandages, tape, and gauze,

because deep cuts were common injuries sustained in the kitchen where she worked.

Undocumented workers’ health seeking patterns

Undocumented workers’ health seeking patterns were influenced by four main factors, which included individual level predisposing factors, barriers and enablers to service which could be institutional, contextual or affective in nature, and finally, participants’ perception of risks, including their perceived susceptibility to injury or illness and their perceived need for health services (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Health seeking model for undocumented workers



i. Predisposing factors

Individual socio-demographic factors seemed to play a role in how and what types of services or care undocumented workers accessed. Having dependents with specific health needs (e.g. child vaccinations), typically promoted access to mainstream health services for the whole family. It is also important to point out the role that gender played in this finding, given that females were generally the ones who initiated a family's or partner's registration at a CHC. Consistent with health literature documenting men's generally low health seeking behavior in comparison to women (Galdas, Cheater, & Marshall, 2005), undocumented men in our study rarely obtained routine check-ups, preventive care or health counselling, and ignored, to a greater degree than women, emerging signs or symptoms of physical and mental health problems.

Data from our study also suggests that participants' socioeconomic status both in Canada and in their home country may be an important determinant of care seeking. As will be described further below under *Enablers of Access*, participants belonging to higher socioeconomic groups could afford private health insurance which granted them access to alternative medical professionals and dental care. For one particular female in our study who had a relatively high social position before migrating, her family would send her remittances so she could access specialized care. Yet for the majority of study participants, the cost of paying out-of-pocket for health services was a major barrier to access.

Interestingly, participants' varying pathways to undocumentedness played a role in their health seeking patterns. In general, those who had gone through the refugee system seemed to have a better sense of how to navigate the system and often received the support of their initial settlement service providers to access available community services. As Mariana described:

"The person who told me about that place [community health centre] was a social worker that I've known for several years... She was the one who told me, 'You can go to this centre and there they can help you. They have to register you, even though your legal situation has changed'. I went, but I was still afraid."
(Mariana)

Similarly, Renata and Roberto knew where they could go to receive health information and free health services. This was largely unlike those

participants who had no prior connection to health or social services and who became undocumented by overstaying their visa permitted time.

Having basic to moderate conversational skills in English played a significant role in participants' health seeking behaviour, particularly because it facilitated participants' ability to inquire about types or costs of services and to effectively communicate their needs. For instance, it was common for participants to explain their symptoms to a pharmacist in order to buy appropriate over-the-counter medication. At other times, participants knew exactly what kind of medication they needed but did not know the name of its English equivalent, so they would describe the needed medication. For instance, when Luna experienced a severe burn at work, she immediately went to the store and described needing an ointment. Participants felt that knowing English also gave them a sense of authority and prevented them from being treated like second-class citizens. As Emiliano explained, knowing English *"also gives you a sense of 'I' to 'I' with them. There is no one translating in between"*.

Yet when participants lacked basic English language abilities, which was most common among recently arrived or older workers, their treatment options became limited and the care they received was also compromised because of their limited understanding of instructions. For instance, one female participant experienced a benign cyst formation shortly after arriving and described going to the same walk-in doctor three times within a week because she needed clarification on the doctor's instructions and because the symptoms became worse. Finally she was referred to a hospital emergency department, which relocated her to two different hospitals until she finally got treatment. Overcome with fear and a limited understanding of the procedures she would undertake, a complete stranger accompanied her and acted as her translator.

Language skills also intersected with participants' overall knowledge or understanding of available services and how the system worked. As Renata described, finding out what steps were needed to file taxes and get returns was complicated because they would explain things using the same legal jargon. Other participants expressed similar sentiments in relation to health and social services. Lack of knowledge about services was also tied to participants' degree of social networks. For instance, when we asked Luna why she had not gotten medical attention after a workplace injury, she described: *"I didn't even know where to go, or how much I would have to pay. I knew nothing, nothing! I didn't know anyone."*

Relocation to another Canadian city also contributed to one participants' lack of knowledge about available services in her new neighbour-

hood. As Mariana described, this was further complicated by this city's relative inexperience dealing with immigrants with special access needs.

"It's a bit complicated. There aren't too many illegal people [there] and there aren't too many people with refugee claims. So, people don't seem to know that there are people without status." (Mariana)

Yet for other participants with extensive social networks in Canada like Victoria or who had direct family members like Julio, accessing available health services and supports was facilitated by these network connections.

ii. Enablers to access

Some participants noted that individual service providers within organizations would provide pro-bono services to them regardless of their immigration status. This was the case for Renata, who continued to receive counseling services and advice from several places after falling out of status. As illustrated by Mariana's case, referrals made by trusted gatekeepers also help ease the fear of going to relatively unknown places to obtain service. One of the problems with this approach is that it puts an obvious and undue pressure on professionals to make personal decisions regarding who to give service to and when to go above-and-beyond their obligations. The result of which may be unfair, inconsistent or unreliable service later on for the same undocumented client or future ones needing equal service provision.

Having private health insurance or belonging to a union also seemed to improve participants' access to services, particularly because these memberships significantly reduced the cost of paying high out-of-pocket fees. For instance, two participants in our study regularly purchased travel insurance from their home countries and used their benefit plan to get routine dental check-ups. As Andres described:

"I already stayed for much longer. Normally, in my home country, I go to the dentist once or twice a year because I don't like ignoring that part [of my health]." (Andres)

However, it is important to point out that for the majority of participants in our study dental care was perceived as a luxury, and took a

backseat relative to more immediate health concerns such emergencies or workplace injuries.

Union entitlements on the other hand tended to afford participants dental care in addition to other entitlements such as vision care, safety training, reduced prescription costs, and alternative medical coverage. However, Rafael pointed out that while belonging to a union provided good coverage it did not result in significant savings given the high cost of membership (i.e. \$500 one-time annual registration and \$25/month). He described:

"I've seldom gotten sick. I mean the receipts...but we didn't have a doctor. We had nothing. I would go to the doctor and I had to pay there. I would get the medication for free. But, 'when was it really free?' I am paying \$25 [a month]. It is cheaper for me to not pay anything at all." (Rafael)

Furthermore, when Rafael became unemployed and wanted to take advantage of his union's job search program and unemployment benefits, he was asked for his SIN. This highlights a major contradiction in how union services are provided using the assumption that all members are citizens and consequently have a SIN and access to OHIP, which excludes undocumented workers. This adds unions to a large list of players benefiting economically from undocumented workers in Canada.

Finally, living close to services or having resources within participants' reach facilitated use of such services. For instance, Andres and Lina each had a gym facility in the building complex where they lived and this promoted free regular physical activity. Similarly, Roberto and Victoria maintained low-cost memberships at their local community gym. For Roberto, this granted him access to exercise therapists who could also give him advice on how to treat his abdominal pain. Proximity and flexibility in service hours primarily offered by local walk-in clinics also contributed to its heightened use by participants.

iii. Barriers to access

Participants highlighted several practice-based, material and psychological barriers to accessing health and social services. A pervasive fear of deportation which commonly intersected with requirements to show identification was the most prominent barrier restricting workers' ability to access needed services or resources. For obvious reasons, many

undocumented workers in our study lacked basic identity documents such as a drivers licence or feared that by showing their id, they would be recorded under a central system of surveillance.

Some participants also seemed to exhibit an internalized sense of criminalization or felt that they were somehow less deserving than “legal” citizens to use health services or to voice complaints about poor health care treatment. As Emiliano noted: *“With what right [can I complain], if I did not build this hospital? I did not build this country. I do not pay taxes to get treated that way [referring to high quality of care].”*

Being denied service or being referred to an alternate place for care was also common among participants and contributed to delayed health care provision. Emiliano once went to a local health centre for a health condition and after being questioned by the attending staff, he disclosed his undocumented status in Canada in hopes of being attended more readily. The staff member explained that they did not deal with such cases and referred him to another place. Yet as Emiliano explained, *“they were going to give me the phone number [for that other place], but it was Sunday, and I would have had to wait until Monday to call.”* Rafael similarly described choosing not to proceed with union approved services because they were overbooked for three months. Participants had also been told stories about long wait-times for registration at local CHCs which discouraged some workers from submitting an application. In many participants’ view, their health service needs were on-demand in nature, meaning that they only perceived to need care when they were really sick or had an unavoidable health emergency.

Finally, the high cost of health service (both real and perceived) was a significant obstacle to mainstream health-care access for several participants in the study, including for those workers who wanted regular check-ups and for those who were sick or pregnant (see section on [“Pregnancy and women’s health”](#)).

iv. Perceptions of risk and health needs

As already discussed in the long term implications, the participants we interviewed frequently prioritized more immediate needs, such as stable income, food and shelter, rather than their health needs or safety. While this was an active decision for some participants, for several others, there seemed to be dissociation between the potential consequences of illness or injury and how this was managed. Hence, the perception of work-related risks, injuries or general health seemed to be

low in various cases, and this largely affected participants' health seeking patterns. For instance, Luna had described keeping \$3000 available with her at all times in case of a health or unexpected emergency. Yet, when she described having severe molar pain, possibly requiring a root canal, she explained that while this money was indeed "*for emergencies*" she felt, "*[that] she had dedicated so much time into saving it.*" Luna therefore delayed treatment and did not use this money for dental care.

Particularly among younger workers, there seemed to be a perceived sense of invincibility – that is, that they were somehow protected against illness or health problems. Yet for older workers, there seemed to be a heightened sense of vulnerability to illness or further injury. One older worker particularly looked for less strenuous work because he had pre-existing health conditions and was willing to spend money to get specialist care for his undiagnosed abdominal pain.

Gender also seems to impact the manner in which risks are perceived and acted upon by undocumented workers. For instance, Luna took great pride in doing work traditionally given to men, such as lifting heavy bags of flour on her own, which sometimes weighed over forty kilograms. As Luna described, "*I really like heavy work. I don't know... I like it. Besides, it is good exercise*". Similarly, Rafael believed that his health had improved upon arrival because the heavy demands of construction work helped keep him in shape. He described, "*My work in [home country] was office work. Here, I am doing physical exercise which makes me feel better. That is, [I'm] stronger, with more strength*". Rafael's positive outlook on the impact of his work implies a clear gendered risk perception which may influence the steps workers take (or do not take) to address or ameliorate unsafe work conditions.

Final remarks and key messages

“It should be of the highest priority to ensure that government policies do not unfairly increase avoidable health inequalities. What applies to policies of governments should also apply to global decision making whether on trade, overseas development assistance, or financial flows – put health equity at the heart of all policy making.”

Marmot (2012, p. 2034)

Final Remarks and Key Messages

"In principle, access to social services such as health and education is governed by the UN international convention on the protection and rights of all migrant workers, which was ratified in 2007 by 37 (mainly low- and middle-income) countries. High-income countries can be reluctant to sign the convention, because it provides many entitlements for migrant workers. Clearly, the issue of migrants' access to social security is irrevocably linked to politics and the way that political sentiment is used to interpret rules and rights." (Sabates-Wheeler & Taylor, 2010, p. 7)

"...I hope that this study and everything you are doing, in a not so far away future, gives results that will help people and the generations that come after me. I don't think I will be a part of it, but I hope that my participation has been useful" (Roberto)

This study was conducted primarily to document the working and living circumstances (i.e. the social determinants of health) of undocumented workers in the GTA to provide evidence for academic and social dialogue. While we know several structural, policy, and practice changes are required internationally and in Canada to warrant both decent work and supportive social conditions for this group of workers, we recognize that this is a complex and sensitive issue, making it difficult to propose a single course of action to address current exploitative circumstances. In the following three tables we list key ideas people should keep in mind when discussing the issue of undocumentedness, propose guidelines for employers, and recommend potential areas for collective action. We do so subscribing to international agendas put forward by the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and PICUM – Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants.

Table 5 Key messages for discussing undocumentedness

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The fast movement of capital around the globe requires a mobile, flexible workforce. If goods and capital may migrate freely across boundaries, why are obstacles placed on the movement of people? Presently, workers' migration is an unstoppable trend
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We need to rethink the relationship between human rights and citizenship. Migrant workers should be considered occupational citizens
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current economic globalization patterns have created profound inequities for migrant workers mainly due to the restrictions faced by the international labour movement and the lack of social protection which is offered exclusively to citizens of receiving countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most economists see positive economic effects for the countries receiving undocumented workers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National governments have not been able to offer legal solutions to this new social phenomenon and mainly opt to criminalize these foreign workers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Migrants come to work in Canada because jobs are available and/or because they have been targeted and recruited by Canadian employers abroad
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• While some fall out of status as a consequence of rigid immigration rules, most find work due to the availability of cash economy jobs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The cash or informal economy plays a central role in the maintenance of undocumentedness and promotes undocumented work even for those groups with regular immigration status
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undocumented workers do mainly 3-D jobs (dirty, dangerous, and degrading)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Canadians and foreigners who have committed crimes in Canada are not denied access to health care, but people who are criminalized as "illegal" migrants do not have access to preventive and curative health care in Canada, despite their contribution to the economy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Living in social isolation, fear, and without social protections has severe health consequences

Given the centrality of working conditions as a social determinant of health for undocumented workers, our team has proposed guidelines for Canadian employers. We have utilized a code of behaviour one of our participants was given by her employer in the hospitality sector (left column) to produce a code for employers (right column), utilizing similar categories, such as punctuality, cleanliness, communication, and work relations, to envision how employers should act to create decent employment.

Table 6 Comparative code of behaviour for employees and employers

Current Code of Behaviour for Employees Working in Hospitality Services	Proposed Code of Behaviour for Employers of Undocumented Workers
1. Arrive on time. You must be dressed and ready to work at the time that you are scheduled to start. If you start at 5, and you need 10 minutes to get ready, then you must come to work 10 minutes early.	Pay on time and pay fairly. Pay for all the hours workers were on the job and provide a decent wage. When workers work overtime hours or on public holidays, adhere to employment standards.
2. Leave on time. If your shift ends at 5, you leave your work area at 5. Do not leave your work area at 4:45 and spend 15 minutes in the washrooms. Tardiness and leaving early will be deducted from your pay.	Provide a regular work schedule. Give workers a clear picture of their regular work hours. Do not impede co-workers who are partners or friends from having the same day off. Give workers breaks as stipulated by the law.
3. You must be in full uniform. Hat, work shirt, apron, black pants, black shoes and hairnet. Your midsection and back must be covered. Your uniform must be clean and must look clean to the customers. It is your responsibility to take it home and wash it when it is dirty.	Provide safety training and equipment. If work involves chemicals or known hazards, provide protective gear for hands, eyes, mouth, and nose and appropriate training.
4. Be nice and polite to the customers and your co-workers. No cursing, arguing or vulgarity in front of the customers or with the customers.	Be nice to your employees. Do not abuse, harass or bully your employees, threat them with deportation or terminate them without payment. Do not take advantage of co-workers or foment competition or violence in the workplace.
5. Keep your area clean and presentable. When work is slow and you have nothing to do, clean your section and sweep to keep things looking nice.	Keep the worksite safe. Promote a physically, emotionally, and environmentally safe work place. Make sure to notify WSIB of any health problems workers have informed you about or accidents you have witnessed.
6. Use a cart to clean the tables every time. Use liquid soap and a cloth to clean the tables and any dirty chairs after you've picked up the dishes. Sweep when you see dirt on the floor.	Do not think of workers as disposable objects. Offer them working conditions that promote dignity and wellbeing. Do not fire workers because they had an accident, got sick, or felt burnt out.
7. Check your cell phones at the door. Keep your cell phone in the back, and only use the restaurant phone for emergencies. If you need to use your cell phone, wait until you're on break.	Be available for communication. Do not ignore comments about health and safety or abuse. If a worker needs help finding health care or has other needs, refer them to services that you know of or contact your local community centre.
8. Keep busy. There is always something to do. Do not stand around or read magazines if it's slow. Start cleaning. Do prep work. Keep busy.	Run a fair and inclusive workspace. Pay a fair hourly rate. Do not offer incentives such as food or housing for workers in exchange for extra hours creating a workload that can potentially harm their health. Do not discriminate based on nationality, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or gender.
9. You will receive a written warning if you break any of these rules. 3 written warnings and you will be terminated.	If you are concerned about an employees' work performance, give them feedback and an opportunity to improve. Remember, you are your own boss. Examine your practices periodically and look for ways to improve.
Source: Maya's Boss	Source: Research Team and Community Advisors

Finally, we propose an agenda for action. In a globalized world, action at the local, national and international levels is required to address such a complex phenomenon. Our agenda points to some potential avenues for collective initiatives to be undertaken, but it does not encompass all possible ways of addressing these circumstances.

Table 7 Agenda for action

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To adopt a human rights, health for all, and equity framework in search of alternatives to the current criminalization strategy used to shame undocumented work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To address the intersectoral nature of the phenomenon through healthy public policy or interventions (e.g. housing, food insecurity, workers' rights), that consider individual experiences as symptomatic of a larger process and that improvements can also potentially benefit other newcomer groups (e.g. permanent residents, refugees) and citizens.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To promote social integration of migrant workers rather than create groups or services exclusively for undocumented workers which may further reinforce exclusion and stigmatization. The principle of Health for All should be the foundation for health care services policies and programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To consider the unintended negative consequences of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy in social and health services and explore alternatives, such as Access Without Fear, which could also be adopted by unions to enhance the provision of care to its undocumented members
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To engage in social dialogue by taking into account that there are many Canadians who show solidarity towards undocumented workers and conversely, others who benefit economically from their presence, including those who exploit them
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To join the UN agenda for de-criminalizing undocumented work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To send information about undocumented workers' experiences in Canada to countries of origin so that family members and people considering migrating have a better understanding of the hardship and consequences of this process
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To cultivate connections between undocumented workers in Canada and their respective consulates to stimulate a sense of belonging, collectiveness, and to receive the protective effects of their homeland citizenship in a foreign land
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To ensure that the Decent Work Agenda proposed by the International Labour Organization (2005) is implemented in all workplaces across Canada, independently of whom works there
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To ensure access to health care (not only emergency care) and education for children as a human right
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To create a pathway for undocumented workers to regularize their status and bring their skills and training into the Canadian workforce

Additional information

For more information, please consult the following documents:

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Study Gallery

20 Body-Mapped Stories

“Can one land ever really be home to more than one people? To native and newcomer, for instance? (...) Can the world ever be home to all of us? I think so. But not until we have reimagined Them and Us.”

J. Edward Chamberlin (2004, p. 4)

Andrea

I am Andrea and I came to Canada 7 years ago because I am gay and I faced a lot of discrimination in my home country. When I arrived here, my English was pretty bad. So I decided to make friends with people who don't speak my native language. It really worked! My English is much better now and I have tons of multicultural friends. I work 11 hours a day as a manager in a gas station. It is a hard work, but I like my job and I have a great relationship with my boss! He appreciates my work and respects who I am. His attitude and support really motivate me to work hard. What I find most difficult about my job is supervising people who have legal status because they think they're in a better situation than me. This makes me feel defenseless and afraid because they can report me to police. People in Canada accept my sexual orientation and I feel free to be what I want to be, and I am able to go wherever I want to go. I feel totally adapted to Canada now, and can't imagine having the same life that I have here in my home country.



Body posture: I positioned myself standing up with both hands in my pockets because this is my daily posture at work.

Colours: My body map outline is purple because I like this colour and my hands are green, because this is my favourite colour. Green also reminds me of nature and the beautiful places I have been to.

Migration journey: To represent my home country, I placed several pictures on the right side of my body map. The drink represents a traditional beverage from back home as well as national celebrations and parties. I also chose a picture of surfers on the beach to represent the hot weather we get. I also placed a chilli pepper to symbolize my country's warmth as well as my family. The pizza reminds me of how I used to spend my weekends in my home country, since I would always go out with my family and friends to eat pizza. Mango is widely cultivated in my country that is why I included the word. The chemistry flasks represent what I studied back home and the picture of a plantation represents my personal investments in education and my growing financial investments back home.

To represent Canada, I placed several images on the left side of my body map. The picture of a salad explains how I changed my eating

habits here, and the white flowers next to it represent being happy in Canada and how beautiful Canada is, especially in the spring. The word "freedom" on the left side, and the large rainbow over my head represent the sense of liberation I feel in Canada as a lesbian woman. The words "grow up" symbolize how I learned how to survive on my own in Canada; in a way, I grew up and matured. I exercise regularly to relieve stress and this is why I chose a picture of a woman riding a bicycle. The reason I placed all of the images representing Canada to the left, is because this is my right-hand side and should represent my present situation. You will notice that all the images of back home appear on my left-hand side, because these images represent the past.

Finally, to represent the work I've done in Canada, I placed a water hose on my shoulder because I use it all day long to wash cars. I placed it here because it causes a lot of stress on my shoulder. To link my country to Canada I drew orange arrows to show that I matured a lot in Canada and this is linked to my education back home as well as my investments, since I learned how to save money here. I also link the side of my body map representing Canada to the picture of the pepper on the right side to symbolize how my relationship with my family has improved or 'warmed up' since coming to Canada.

Personal symbol and slogan: My personal symbols are the two pink feathers inside my feet. I chose pink because I feel that this is a colour that conveys joy. The feathers themselves represent the urge to be carried away by the wind and be given a lesser burden to carry because of my status. My personal slogan is on my forehead, and it says, "If God is with us, who is against us?" My mother would always say this to me and it continues to give me hope in Canada.

Marks on/under the skin: The two red areas on my forearms symbolize the muscular pain I feel because of a workplace accident I had. The same marks are found on my shoulders because of all of the stress I put on my shoulders to do my work.

Body scan and personal strength: My personal strength comes from my spirituality and faith, represented by the Catholic necklace found around my neck and in my heart. Whenever I feel insecure I hold it in my hands and this comforts me.

Support structures: My main support structure is my cell phone that I placed near my hand on the left side. I do everything with it; talk to my family and friends, do online banking, and even handle work related matters.

Future: I chose to represent my future using two pictures: a graduating woman and a calculator which can be found inside my body in between my hands. They represent the studies I want to pursue, since I am unhappy with my first degree.

Message to others: My message to others, located on my chest in green writing, is for undocumented workers living in Canada in the same situation as me. It reads, "Be hopeful that your goals will be reached with the help of other people".



Click the play button to listen to Andrea's testimonio

Andres

I'm Andres and I came to study English in a private school after I graduated from university. My girlfriend was already here and I now live with her and a friend in a condo. For two years now I have been working as a painter, and when work is slow I pick up factory jobs with an agency to cover my living expenses. But I hate factory work! They treat you like garbage, and I don't stand for that. My family, they are against me being here. They say I should go back and find work in my field. My mom worries about me and even buys me private health insurance. But for the meantime, I am having fun here. I am meeting a lot of people, learning a lot about Canadian culture and practicing my English, which will help me when I apply for a master's degree in another country. I really like Canada, but what's restraining is that I can't find professional work here because of my status.



Body posture: In my body map I have my arms wide open to represent my receptiveness to new learning opportunities in Canada. Coming to Canada has allowed me to mature as a person, learn English, meet new people, and work in different occupations. I live a very relaxed lifestyle in Canada and I believe that I'll be able to get ahead in life, even though the majority jobs available for workers like me, is considered hard labour.

Colours: I chose light blue for my body outline because this colour captures the sense of calmness I feel in Canada. I painted my hands in yellow to represent the financial prosperity that Canada has given me.

Migration journey: When I think about back home, I get vivid memories of my life there, so I have represented some of these images beside my head. The reason for coming to Canada was to meet new people from different cultures and improve my language skills. This is encapsulated in the bubble above my head. I've had a range of jobs in Canada, including painting, cleaning and factory work. I placed these jobs on the bottom left near my foot because I wanted to show that these are low paying jobs and that they are considered "low-skilled" jobs. But, I didn't place them below my feet because these jobs are not necessarily degrading or dirty jobs. They are respectable jobs.

Personal symbol and slogan: I chose a magnifying glass as my migration symbol, and I placed it in front of my face, and enlarged my eyes and ears to repre-

sent why I came to Canada, which was to see and learn new things. I believe that everything in life is part of a process, and I have chosen this as my slogan since my experience in Canada has been nothing more than a stage in my life rather than something permanent. I wrote my slogan on my forehead because this is very central to the choices I make in life.

Marks on/under the skin: My experience as an undocumented worker in Canada has been very difficult because I feel that undocumented workers are expected to work harder than the rest. The image of the man cleaning the window in the cold on the bottom right, near my foot represents my experience working as a temp worker at a factory. Here I was expected to work harder while other people, like the supervisors and permanent staff watched me do all of the work, much like the people sitting indoors in this picture. The people watching from the inside also represent the better job opportunities that would be available to me if I had legal status in Canada or if I went back home to work since I have a university education.

When I compare the jobs I've had, factory and cleaning jobs stand out as the worst ones because unlike painting, construction, or other contracting jobs where you can learn a trade, you rarely have the chance to become your own boss in painting or cleaning, and you don't earn that much money. I represent this occupational difference by placing hardware tools and equipment that are used in contracting sectors above those that represent factory and cleaning work. I also added red ar-

rows from the better jobs towards the image that says *"Every dollar counts"*, and black arrows between the other jobs which limit occupational mobility. Even though I know construction work is better paid, I've never done construction work because they are also very dangerous. I can't afford to get seriously injured here, so I represent staying away from hazardous jobs by placing a poison control sign on my hand. The World Health Organization logo and the medical symbol near my heart represent being in good health and that I have private health insurance.

Body scan and personal strength:
I get my personal strength from my own determination which is related to my slogan. I feel that I am able to overcome barriers in Canada because I know that being here is just one of the many experiences I will encounter in life. I try to see my experience in Canada positively. Canada has given me a range of work experiences, and even though these jobs haven't been in my field, they have given me an opportunity to meet people and a chance to strengthen personal values and goals.

Support structures: I represent the social dimensions of life in Canada using diverse faces to capture multiculturalism, and a fist to capture the struggles that undocumented migrants face, including lack of access to services and unequal gender relations. I place these symbols near the bubble above my head to contrast my lived experience in Canada with what I originally hoped to find. The female near my heart represents me living with my partner and my support system.

The house with the Canadian symbol on the roof represents “feeling at home” in Canada. I feel that Canada is a very welcoming country and although I’ve never personally experienced any direct forms of discrimination, I know that many immigrants use community centres or other forms of support so I represent the availability of such services with pictures of diverse families and a health provider found outside my body near my heart.

Future: It is hard to think about where I will be and this is why I have a question mark over my head. I know I want a professional job and go to grad school. I know that being undocumented in Canada won't make this possible, so I plan to keep traveling for better opportunities. I put a diploma and a graduation hat on my right hand because I feel like the future is in my hands. The flag and the airplane on my right hand represent travelling back home and then to other places.

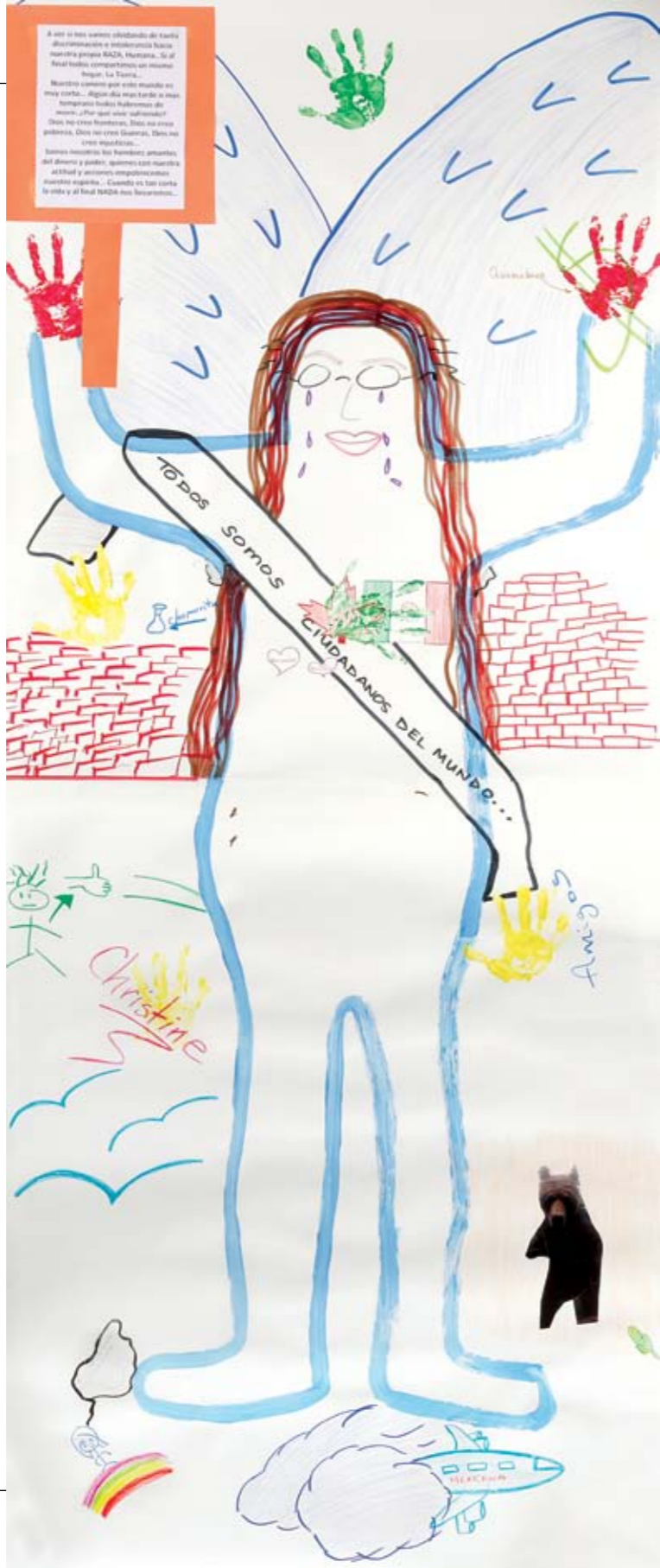
Message to others: My message is for other immigrants in Canada because I feel that most Canadians wouldn't be interested in hearing what I have to say. I placed my message near the bubble by my head which represents my reasons for coming to Canada and it reads, *"It is difficult being undocumented in a country that isn't yours. There are very little opportunities to find permanent employment. But if you have the desire to get ahead, it is a big obstacle, but not impossible to achieve".*



Click the play button to listen to Andres' testimonio

Elena

I am Elena and I came here 2 years ago with a friend to work as a cook for a small family restaurant. This was my chance to help my mother pay her debt and save money for university when I got back. Our bosses paid for our trip and gave us a room to stay in. They were like family. The day after I arrived, I started working 11-hour shifts, 6 days a week for \$8/hour. I never got the same day off as my friend. Then, things got worse. I got harassed at work verbally, sexually, emotionally – even a plate was thrown at me! My bosses then started recording me through a security camera outside my room. If I moved, I would lose my job. I felt desperate and got very depressed. I prayed to God to give me the courage to leave that place and after a few months, I did. Now I work as a nanny. I get paid less but I finally have time to make friends and take English classes.



Body posture: I chose to lie down with my arms wide open because this represents my receptiveness to new possibilities. By facing up, I am also looking up to heaven and paying tribute to God.

Colours: I chose blue for my body outline, and red for my hands because I like these colours. But my hands themselves represent the work that I do– the fruit of my labour. Back home, I only needed my head and my mouth to do the work that I did. Here, I only need my hands.

Migration journey: The woman under the rainbow represents who I was in my home country. I was a happy person, full of dreams, and free-spirited like the birds near the rainbow. But in Canada I changed. Back home I had a professional job as a legal assistant, and I would always go out with friends to social gatherings. I would wear my hair down, get dressed up, and I had tons of high heels and purses. Here, I got used to wearing sneakers all the time and tying my hair up in a bun because my first job was as a cook. Now, I don't even bother leaving my hair down, even on my days off. It isn't about looking beautiful anymore; it's about working hard. The airplane between my feet symbolizes some of the new steps I've taken in life as a result of coming to Canada. Even though I have everything I need to survive here, I still feel like I am in a foreign place. It's not because of the winter weather or the language, it's more than that. I feel like the grizzly bear in the dessert found on the right side of my body map– I've learned to survive in Canada, but this isn't my habitat. I'm not allowed to be here.

Personal symbol and slogan: The two flags by my heart are my migration symbols. Canada carries a special place in my heart because it has been the only country, other than my own, which has given me shelter and I am very grateful for that. Even though I have been living illegally for two years, the hardships I've had to endure have made me develop a strong bond to Canada. If I didn't feel that bond, I could have bought the first flight back home. It is cheaper to buy a plane ticket than to be living in fear and carrying this burden. The banner across my body represents my personal slogan. It reads, "We are all citizens of the world". I believe that all human beings are equal and that we all share a common home – Earth. All the good and bad things we do to this planet will affect us, regardless of the borders we artificially put up.

Marks on/under the skin: When I first got to Canada, I worked in a restaurant as a cook. At first, my bosses were great. They gave me shelter and food in return for work, and through this job I paid off my family's debt. The money I earned is represented by the green dollar symbol on my left hand. But then, one of my bosses started sexually harassing me and made my life impossible. I felt trapped, I felt like I had no other option but to stay there. I was even scared about meeting other people, because my bosses told me that if I talked to anyone, they would know about my legal status. I represent this work experience through the blood, sweat and tears found on my body map and by the stick figure found on the left side trying to sexually harass me. I eventually left that job and started work-

ing in other restaurants. Now I work as a nanny. But kitchen work was very dangerous. The scars on my hips and hands represent the burns I got from a deep fryer while working in a small kitchen.

Aside from work, I have also endured personal struggles. The red wall represents a time in my life here in Canada when I felt completely devastated. My partner had been diagnosed with HIV, and I was sure I would test positive too. I drew this wall to express the pain and fear I felt at that moment. I had surpassed many hurdles and difficult moments in Canada, but I had always found a way out. But I didn't see an exit for this. I was distraught, scared, paralyzed. That was the biggest obstacle I had ever faced. I was lost, and nothing I could do could fix it. I felt sad for my family, sad for my mom. What was I going to do? Go back home defeated, in a worse state than when I had left? God only knows why, but I eventually tested negative.

Body scan and personal strength: I get my personal strength from God, and the wings behind me represent the feeling that God is always watching over me. A few months after I arrived in Canada, I had a health emergency and had to go a hospital. I spoke very little English and barely understood what the doctors were telling me. I desperately got into a taxi and told the driver, in my native language, to take me to the hospital where they had referred me to. To my surprise, he replied in my native language, "My name is Angel". That day Angel drove me to two other hospitals and waited with me until I was admitted. It was like God had sent me a guardian angel. The large

angel wings behind my body map represent this.

Support structures: The green hands on my body map represent God, and I put these on top of the angel wings because God has always put people in my life, to help me in times of need. The other hands represent key people that have given me advice or support.

Future: When I think about my future, I think about how tough it will be to reintegrate myself if I go back home, because I am no longer the same person I was. By coming to Canada, I changed my family, my language, the way I ate, the way I slept, lived, thought, dressed, acted, everything that made me, me. It's hard to capture this feeling and I have no symbol to represent it.

Message to others: My message is for the general public and is captured in the sign I am holding up. It reads, "We should all try to eliminate the discrimination and intolerance towards ourselves, towards the human race because we all share the same place. In the end, everyone – whether rich, poor, or from wherever, will die one day and be unable to take any of this with us. We have to be a little more giving, we have to enjoy life, be happy as long as we are living and not make other people's life more difficult".



Click the play button to listen to Elena's testimonio

Elizabeth

My name is Elizabeth, and I was just a teenager when I came to Canada with my aunt and uncle to take care of my little cousins. My life was very hard at the beginning because I was lonely and I struggled with the language and the cold weather. My aunt was very strict and didn't let me study English or socialize with people outside our church. She became very aggressive, and I finally made the decision to leave when she started beating me. After that, I worked in different jobs. I was a nanny, a waiter, and now I clean windows. Now I am married and have a baby. My pregnancy was really tough. My husband drank a lot and became very violent and jealous. He didn't give me much support and because we were in economic trouble, I had to go back to work 20 days after giving birth. My life isn't easy, but as a black woman, I feel that I have more job opportunities and face less discrimination here than in my home country. I wish I could stay because my son will have more chances of succeeding in life than back home.



Body posture: I choose to lay facing up with my arms down because this posture is the most comfortable for me.

Colours: My body outline is green, because this is my favourite colour. The red down my spinal column represents my back pain and I drew blue tears coming down my face to represent my emotional struggles. I have put little red hands and blue feet to represent my son.

Migration journey: The images on the left depict my home country. The skyscraper represents the big buildings in my home province. The soccer player, the ocean and river picture represent my home country. The ladder in between, is there to link my country to Canada as part of my migration journey. To represent Canada, I chose a picture of a woman dressed with exotic clothes and with heavy makeup because I find it interesting that people here can wear whatever they want and nobody cares; this is really different from what it's like in my home country. The picture of the dog represents

my happiness for being in Canada, whereas the iceberg represents Canadian winters. The chalet picture and the building remind me some places where I work as a cleaner.

Personal symbol and slogan: My personal slogan is a religious hymn placed on my chest, underneath my heart. I chose this as my slogan because this hymn mirrors my struggle of survival in Canada – even though I am undocumented and face a lot of hardships, I am confident that God hasn't brought me this far to just abandon me. I find strength in these lyrics, since I feel that as long as I am fighting for my happiness, I will be okay. I like pictures of landscapes; they make me feel relaxed and calm. These pictures are a good match with my personal slogan.

Marks on/under the skin: The most significant mark on my body is under my skin and cannot be seen from the outside. I drew my entire spine in red to represent my back pain. The blue tears on my face can also be considered marks under my skin, since come as a re-

sult of suffering due my health issues, financial problems and the arguments that I have with my husband at home.

Future: A mother playing with her son symbolizes my future. I link this symbol to my body with a thought cloud, just like the ones they use in comic books. My hope is to work with children in the future.

Message to others: My message is that “No one has been defeated unless they defeat themselves”. I address this message to everyone who goes through a difficult time, not only undocumented workers, but everybody. I wrote this message in red and placed the message over my head to make sure people know it is an important message.



Click the play button to listen to Elizabeth's testimonio

Emiliano

I am Emiliano, a dreamer, an activist, a journalist! I’d much rather read books over eat food. I’ve lived in several countries and I’ve done a range of jobs – from farm work and construction to teaching English to youth at risk. This is my third time in Canada. The second time I was here I got really sick and had to go back home for treatment. I felt like my time was cut short, so I had to come back. The money you can make working here also made me want to come back. But I have a hard time relating to my co-workers at the factory where I work. They’re working machines and very sexist. It bothers me that they have no interest in learning about Canada or engaging in activities outside of work. I want more than that, much more! I want to transform the spaces I live in, I want to learn, and I want to make the world a better place. My status makes this very hard and sometimes I feel like giving up. Unlike most people who come here, I don’t want to become a permanent resident. In my view, the world is too big to be tied down to only one place.



Body posture: I appear face down with my hands chained behind my back and my lips sealed with tape because I feel that my legal status in Canada doesn’t allow me to show the world who I really am. I am here, I exist, but I am silenced and made invisible because of my status.

Colours: I chose the colour red for my body outline because it best represents me as a person. Red represents energy, fire and passion. These things make me who I am.

Migration journey: The last job I had in my home country was in the public sector, managing several community projects. But I’ve always been a journalist, and this is what has inspired me to see the world. I have been to several countries and I’ve lived as an undocumented worker in Canada and the United States several times. Even though I speak and write English very well, I have done a range of manual labour jobs to survive. I’ve worked in oil refineries, construction, and now I work at a factory. But in my heart, I will always be a journalist. For this reason I placed images of hammers to represent the range of jobs that I have been forced to do to survive outside my body, but I chose to represent my passion for journalism in my heart with the picture of a camera, books and a clipping that reads, “*La Passion*”. I included a picture of a mask on the left side of my body map, because I believe everyone has multiple identities and roles to play in life.

To describe my life here, I included a map of Toronto near my feet because all of my migration experiences to Canada have always been to Toronto. The metro passes I included on the bottom

of my map capture the length of time I have been here this time, and show that even though I take ‘public’ transportation, I am still invisible.

One of the biggest frustrations I feel in Canada is the lack of spaces for expression and the limited interest other immigrants have in learning new things or engaging socially. At the factory where I work, many immigrant co-workers don’t even attempt to learn more than 20 words of English, because that’s all they need to do their work. This is captured by the short message and list of words (“*no good*”, “*rapido, rapido*”) on the right. But I’m different. I speak English when I go out, and at home, I practice French. That’s why near my head it says, “*homme du monde*” (man of the world).

Personal symbol and slogan: My personal symbol is the tape sealing my lips and the chains around my hands. I feel that the work that undocumented workers do silences us because if you speak up about bad working conditions, you can be easily replaced by the next worker, so you stay quiet. But I don’t want to be given voice to complain. I want to be given voice so my existence can be acknowledged, so I can meaningfully participate in society and make the world a better place.

My slogan is, “*Dream. I am ready*” and is found on my arm like a tattoo. I feel that if you don’t dream for something better, you aren’t living. I also think it is important to be receptive to other peoples’ dreams and ambitions. My dream is to live for thousands of years and keep exploring the world. People should be motivated to create their own message and find their own meaning in life. By putting

it on my arm, I am challenging people to find, rather than be told, my message.

Marks on/under skin: The second time I was in Canada, I got sick and I had to go back home for emergency treatment. I am better now and I take medication I brought with me. This doesn’t appear on my body map because I preferred to document the impacts of work on my body which aggravate my pre-existing health condition through stress. For instance, I included images of clocks on top of my head because in factory work, everything is measured by time. Time hangs over our heads. It is the only thing worth anything. Because of that, workers only pay attention to their work and don’t have or make the time to get to know one another. There is no camaraderie. This is also related to the work boots I am wearing and the message found in between, which says, “*Having and using the right equipment is important but...if a co-worker suffers an accident, are you willing help?*” I’ll never forget a coworker who was badly injured and wasn’t given any time off work. When I asked why, he said he couldn’t afford unpaid time off and the factory denied him sick days or workers’ compensation. I suggested that as coworkers, we should raise a week’s wages for this worker so he could rest, but no one agreed to help. The lack of solidarity caused by time pressure, work demands, and fear, limits our ability to collectively demand our rights. As undocumented workers, we worry only about our own survival, and this makes me frustrated and sad.

Another thing that has affected me is the poor treatment of women in my workplace. On the right side of my body

map I included a sign that says ‘*men only*’, a drawing of a boxing glove, and an image of a female being fired from work because my female coworkers experience a lot of sexual abuse and harassment and have fewer opportunities for job advancement. Even for women with legal status, there are few jobs they can get for better pay.

Support structures: I mostly get support from my siblings, my mother, my partner, my friends back home, and a friend who is now a permanent resident. The blue hands on the left side of my body represent each of their support, and I chose blue because it is a colour of strength. Nearly all my friends back home are engaged in community organizing, and I get support and inspiration through their work.

Future: When I think about my future, I think, “*I want to know it, but it has already begun*”. I capture this thought at the bottom of my feet.

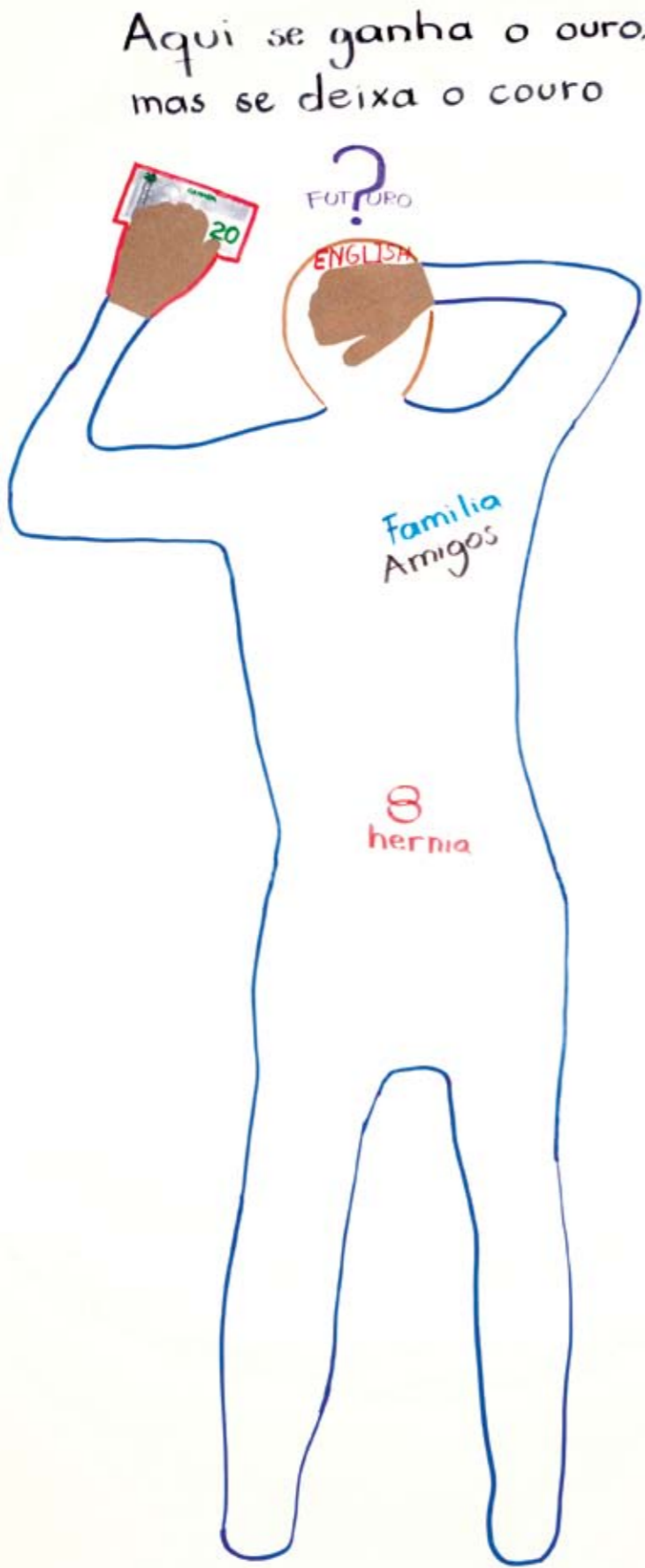
Message to others: My message is to the general public and I chose a message found in between my feet that says, “*We all walk in different shoes*”. I chose this message because I think that people have different life experiences and journeys. But, we need to make an effort to understand each other. The world is full of problems, but we can’t forget that there is always someone supporting you, and that you too, must be a support to others.



Click the play button to listen to Emiliano’s testimonio

Fabio

I'm Fabio. I was a warehouse manager but I became a construction worker in Canada to make a living for my wife and two children back home. After I lost my job, I looked for work for over a year. Even though I had experience, they wanted a degree. So I borrowed money with high interest and hired a travel agent to help me get here. I thought I would get a work visa but I got a tourist visa instead. I felt so betrayed and upset! But what could I do? I had to come. After a group of us arrived, our agent disappeared. He had promised all of us jobs. So with no English I searched for work by myself. My first construction bosses were bad and did a poor job for their clients. It has been almost 5 years, and looking backwards, I am sure those houses are in trouble now. Over the years I got better bosses and they taught me a lot. Now I work for a good company, I have a few friends, volunteer, go to church, and speak to my wife on a daily basis. I just wish she could be here with me. I promised to be back for my daughter's 15th birthday, but I didn't. My family still needs me here so they can study and pay the bills.



Body posture: I don't know how to draw or write well, I never do that, so I chose a simple posture, that of my body resting. My hand is supporting my head.

Colours: For my body outline, I had no strong colour preference, but blue is a colour I like, so I chose that.

Migration journey: My migration story is a complicated one, but in summary, I couldn't find a job for over a year back home, so I borrowed money and paid a travel agent to get me a visa. First, I thought I would get a work visa but when he came back with my passport, I got a tourist visa instead that was only valid for a few days. I had already given him my money, he had bought the ticket, so I thought, "how could I not go?" Once I arrived, the guy disappeared in two days. After some time, I got safety boots and a helmet, and people I met helped me find construction work.

Personal symbol and slogan: My migration symbol is a twenty dollar bill in my hand,

because I believe that it is money that brings us here and we live for the money. My slogan, found on top of my head, is a common saying from the place I come from, it says, "Here you earn gold, but you leave your skin behind". This basically captures the idea that you can earn a lot of money through work migration, but you are never the same person again.

Marks on/under the skin: I wrote English on my forehead because not speaking English is a constant problem for me, a problem for everything I do. As a construction worker, I have to carry very heavy things like wood and drywall sheets, and now I have an abdominal hernia, which I drew in the inside of my body. I also handle cement and other products that are very harmful to my skin. I used sandpaper to represent my rough and cracked hands. On the positive side, construction work has made me physically stronger. You can see this especially in my arms, which are a lot more built now than before.

Body scan and personal strength: In Canada, I get my

personal strength from my arms and legs, because this is all I need to be able to do my job. It's all about strong arms and legs.

Support structures: Keeping in touch with my wife over the phone or internet and talking to my children on a regular basis is very important to me. I hope my wife can come visit me one day. I also have some friends here in Toronto, which keeps me busy. That's why in my heart area I have the words family and friends to represent their support.

Future: I can't really think about what the future holds, so I put a question mark above my head.

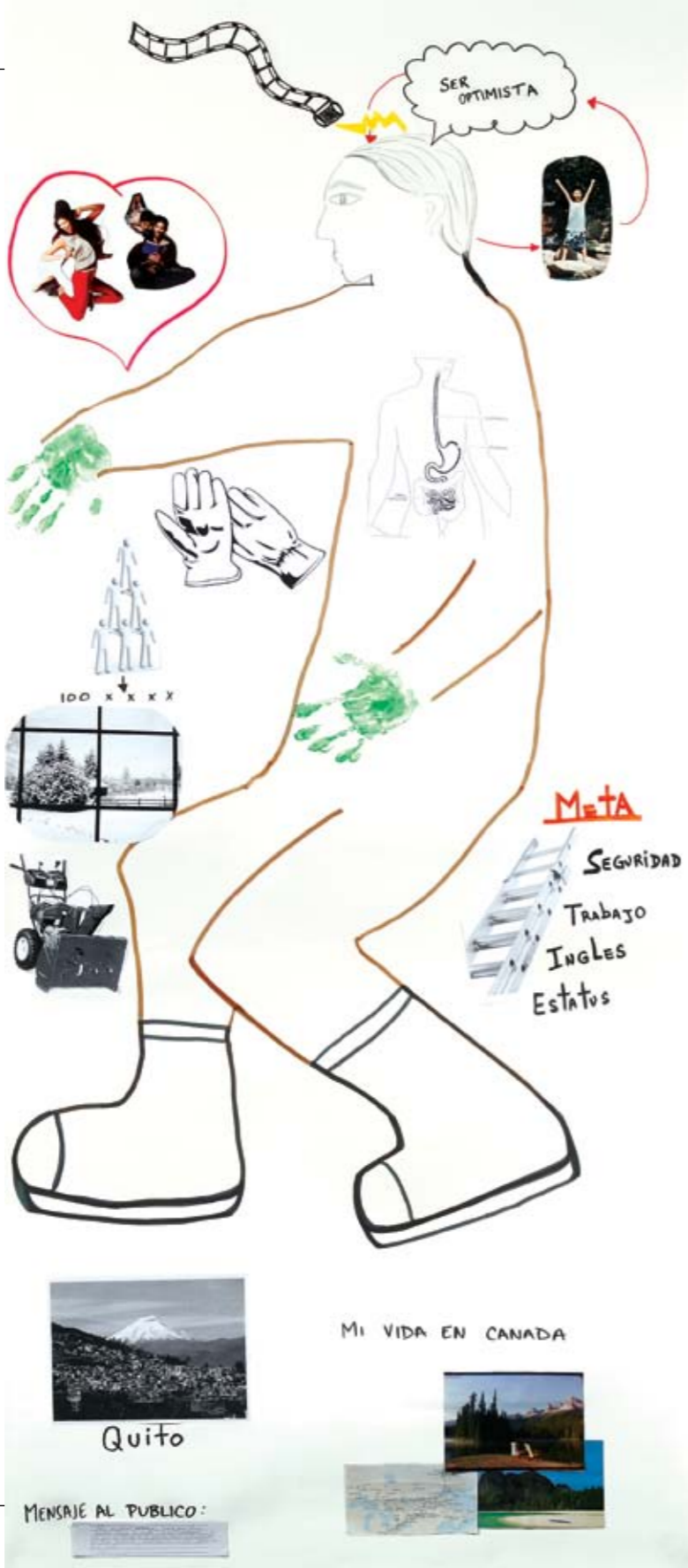
Message to others: I don't have any message for others, I don't want to give people any advice.



Click the play button to listen to Fabio's testimonio

Julio

I’m Julio and I was once a business owner but now I’m a janitor for a residential building. The recession back home hurt everyone and I was unemployed for months. I had a sister here, so my plan was to come work for a few years and save money. It turns out I’ve been here for 10 years! Time really does fly by. But I live a fairly normal life here – I drive, have my own car, and I rent a small apartment. But what really worries me is that I’m getting older and I might get sick. For now, I go to walk-in clinics if I have to and get my flu shot every year. But people always ask me why I don’t take vacations or go see my children back home, so I avoid going to social events and I don’t have too many friends. No one knows the truth except my boss and my sister. My children came to visit once but we don’t have a good relationship. They blame me for leaving them, but I’m proud of what I did because they will be able to go to university now. I hope they’ll understand one day.



Body posture: My body is positioned like someone walking through life, always moving forward.

Colours: My hands are green because I feel that green represents life. Especially when I think about Canada, I didn’t want to use a colour like white to represent life, because it reminds me of snow and long Canadian winters. Yet green is a colour of optimism, and people feel a lot more optimistic in the summer here, when it’s warm and things are growing. My body outline is brown to resemble human skin.

Migration journey: Several years ago, I owned a business which collapsed after a huge economic crisis back home. Even though I had family in Canada, I knew I’d be denied a visa because I had limited assets. I had a lot of debt, had a family to provide for, I was going through a divorce, and I got desperate. My only option was to cross the border. But that was nearly 10 years ago, so my memory of life before migrating is very vague. So I’ve put a picture under my feet of mountains and valleys to represent my home country.

What I do remember about my journey is the huge sense of loss I felt when I arrived. I knew I was going to be away from my children, but it hit me for the first time when I set foot in Canada. The idea of not seeing them, not playing with them, not watching them grow was a huge emotional shock. It was also hard for my kids growing up all these years without a father. I still remember the night I said goodbye to them. I remember telling them to stay at home, because I knew it would be too hard to say goodbye at the airport. The memory is so strong it’s like a series of photographs flashing before me. This is why I have a roll of film and a lightning bolt near my head to represent

the emotional shock and the memories I have of our separation.

To represent my life in Canada throughout these years, I put a map and pictures of nature below my feet. I find the natural environment here to be very relaxing, and in the summer, I always spend time out in parks. I don’t like going downtown because there are too many people and I hate crowds. With respect to work, I’ve had many jobs over the years. I first worked doing contracting type work, and then moved into cleaning. For more than 5 years now, I’ve been working as a janitor.

Personal symbol and slogan: The best migration symbols I can think of are my children, which I’ve represented inside a heart in front of me. The reason they are positioned here, rather than behind me, is because they are the main reason I migrated to Canada. I wanted to give them a better future, and they kept me moving forward. My slogan, found in a thought cloud above my head says, “Be optimistic”. I believe that you always have to move forward, regardless of the challenges you are faced with. You have to believe that things won’t always be bad, and that there will always be a better future. You just have to try to resolve your problems and achieve your goals with whatever tools you are given. The picture of the proud boy below my slogan represents the success that follows after being persistent.

Marks on/under skin: As a building janitor, I make small repairs and I am responsible for general maintenance which includes waxing floors, vacuuming, cleaning and clearing snow. The boots I’m wearing on my body map and the gloves under my arm represent the fact that my boss has never given me this equipment, even though I need it. I buy these things myself,

but it gets very expensive. I included a picture of a snow blower and a landscape full of snow, because in the winter I spend a lot of time outdoors clearing snow as part of my job. Recently, they got a snow blower to speed up the work, but it is much more difficult to use than it looks and I got very little training. I think my boss doesn’t teach me certain things because he doesn’t want to see me get ahead. There is a lot of competition where I work, and the image of a human pyramid on the left side of my body map represents the hierarchy among workers at my workplace.

The other thing that really affects me is being away from my kids. Now we prefer not to talk about it. Why bring up the past? But it does come up sometimes. My children and I were very close before, but not anymore. I speak to them on the phone almost every week and they were able to come visit me a few years ago, but in reality, we are like strangers. They blame me for having left them and on top of that, their customs, their ways of speaking and acting, are different. They weren’t raised the way I would have liked. I still speak to their mother because I think it’s important for parents to communicate.

Body scan/personal strength: Power is mental. Sometimes I don’t feel like getting up to go to work, but I know I have to. Unlike a lot of coworkers who call in sick and miss work frequently, I work even when I’m sick. I believe that strength comes from the mind, nothing else. The red arrows above my head represent that mental strength to keep going.

Support structures: I have family here and a few acquaintances, but I get the strength, more than support, from knowing that I am helping my kids achieve their goals. This is connected

to my personal symbol. If my kids were here, they would see the real cost of their education. Like other immigrants, I have done things that I would have never done back home. I don’t care if I don’t have too many friends because of my status, I am here because of them.

Future: My goals for the future are written in a stepwise manner beside the ladder on the right side of my body map, which says, from the bottom up, “Status”, “English”, “Work”, and “Security”. My primary goal is to get legal status in Canada, then to fully learn English, and then to find a better job as a building superintendent. All of this will lead to my ultimate goal of having personal and income security. But I need papers before I can get a good job. I think I will stay in Canada until my family is able to come again or until my body deteriorates and I am not longer able to work. But I try not to think about that, it scares me.

Message to others: My message is found in the handwritten text on the bottom of my body map and is for people who want to come to Canada. I want to tell them that every change in life has a cost, whether it’s social, familial or economic. I want to advise them to learn English *before* they get here if they can. Being able to communicate in English has a lot of advantages that people often overlook. If I had learned English before I arrived, my experience would have been totally different.



Click the play button to listen to Julio’s testimonio

Lina

I'm Lina, and I have been here for 2 years. I initially came to study, but I decided to stay to save money and practice my English. The truth is, I make less than \$1500 a month working a range of jobs. I even quit smoking because it's too expensive here. Sometimes I work factory jobs through an agency, sometimes I babysit, and lately I've been cleaning. But I hate factory work, I only do it when I have to. The other temps at the factory let the bosses scream at them and give them harder work, but I do the minimum. Cleaning work is also bad. They don't teach you how to mix cleaning products and I always get eye irritation and rashes on my hands. Back home, I worked for a telecommunications company, but my status doesn't let me get a similar job here. I really like Toronto and I feel like I blend in very well. I like going to bars and clubs and, on the weekends, I go sightseeing around the city. I think I might stay a little longer.



Body posture: The position I have put my body in is one that is receptive – ready to experience different cultures and to learn more about Canada.

Colours: I chose the colour white for my body outline because I feel that I blend in very well with Canadian society. White also represents tranquility and I have always been a calm person. My hands are black because they are always dirty from working as a cleaner.

Migration journey: Before I came to Canada, my mind was already here. My plan was to come and study English so that I could go back home and graduate university– I only had a few courses left to graduate. My parents paid for my trip using their savings, and I am still paying them back. But I deviated from my plans by staying longer than my student visa allowed. I wanted to see more of Canada and spend time with my new friends. I have definitely changed since arriving. Mostly, I have learned to value money by doing a range of jobs. Sometimes I am worried that I'll be caught for being here illegally, but I have faith that if you are a good person, nothing bad will happen to you.

My migration journey is represented on the left side of my body map near my hips, by pictures of a plane flying into Toronto, of learning English and of a diagram of finding work (*busqueda de trabajo*) through friends and newspapers. The Calvin Klein photo represents my boyfriend and I. We live together here. Even though I live very comfortably in Canada, I always think about my home country, which I carry

in my heart. I think of the friends I left behind, my family and my studies. I put logos from the university I went to and the company I used to work for inside my heart, to represent my life before Canada.

Personal slogan: My personal slogan is located near my head and says, *"These are not punishments for a warrior"*. I put it near my head because it is something I tell myself daily. It means that if you are strong and intelligent, you can do anything.

Marks on/under skin: The images on top of my hand on the left side represent the range of jobs I've had in Canada like cleaning (*limpieza*), painting (*pintura*), and factory work (*fabrica*). They are above my hands because my hands represent the hard labour I've done. I also included pictures of crossed out gloves and masks with the words "*no protection*" because my employers don't always supply me with these safety items. Safety equipment is seen as a sign of weakness, and as a consequence, I've had to deal with constant skin irritations from using harsh cleaning products and respiratory problems from working in dusty construction sites as a painter. The picture of hand cream represents how I take care of my irritated hands.

The images on top of my other hand on the right side represent the hard time I've had with co-workers. Female co-workers at the factories where I've worked have been the worst, and this is why I included pictures of women fighting and the words "difficult co-

workers". The ones that were there as permanent workers thought that temporary workers, like me, were stupid. They constantly screamed at me and made me do the hardest work. Most factory workers were from a different ethnic background too, which made it very hard to communicate and relate to one another. Painting work is also hard. The image of the male worker repairing a wall represents the male dominated environment I work in as a painter.

Body scan and personal strength: When I think about the things I've overcome here in Canada, I think about the TTC and my health. I included a picture and map of the TTC because I had never been on an underground subway system before migrating. I put it near my head because the TTC map was very intimidating at the beginning, and one of my biggest fears was not being able to find my way around the city. Now I'm a TTC expert!

The picture of a cigarette in my mouth represented how I quit smoking in Canada because it became too expensive. There is a picture of a smile by my mouth as well, accompanied by the words "*lack of dental insurance*" because I there was a time when I needed to see a dentist for an emergency, but my travel insurance did not cover the full cost.

Support structures: I spend the majority of my time on the internet, speaking to family back home about how I'm doing. So, on the right side of my body I included a photo of someone on a computer, as well as images

representing other activities I do when I'm not working like listening to music, sightseeing, going to nightclubs, taking photos, cooking and eating. I also spend a lot of time at home, because my work hours are not very consistent and sometimes I can't to go out. I also get support from my friends, especially with finding work.

Future: The airplane going toward my home country near my feet represents my future. My family wants me to return home and finish university because they know I don't have a future here in Canada without papers. I would continue my studies here if I could, but it's impossible without papers.

Message to others: My message to Canadians, located on the top right corner of my body map, is that a program is needed to make it easier for migrant workers to get legal status in Canada. There are so many immigrant workers in Canada from so many places of the world, and a plan is urgently needed. There should also be more support for people applying for refugee status.

I also have a message to other Latin American immigrants in Canada, located in the same spot which reads, *"Don't forget where you came from and where you are going"*.



Click the play button to listen to Lina's testimonio

Luna

Hi, I'm Luna. I studied to be an aesthetician back home, but now I work at a bread factory through a temporary agency. I've been in Canada for only one year, but before I came here I lived in the United States for three years. I thought it would be the same, but it's not all. Most of my friends in the United States spoke Spanish, my husband's family was there and I really enjoyed my job as a cook. Here, I feel really lonely. Temporally workers are treated differently. We can't take breaks together and we aren't allowed to talk while we work. Because our supervisor says it slows us down. The one good thing about my job is that it keeps me in shape. I enjoy lifting heavy bags and helping the men when I can. Although the pay is bad, I know others are in worse situations so, I try to make the best of my experience. I keep \$3,000 in case of a health emergency or in case I have to go back home unexpectedly. I would need this to start-up again because I don't have the support of my family since I got divorced.



Body posture: I am positioned with my hands over my face, because without status it's as if I am faceless and nameless, without an identity, without anything.

Colours: I chose pink for the outline of my body because I am a woman, so I wanted to use a colour that is soft and delicate. I chose black for my hands because it a strong colour that represents the hard work that I do with my hands every day to make money to send home to my family.

Migration journey: My migration story is represented in chronological order on the left side of my body map, underneath the words "viaje" (travel) and the pictures of a plane, the earth and a laptop. I lived in the United States for several years before coming to Canada. This is represented by a map of where I lived and cooking utensils, because I used to work as a cook there. Below that is my current life in Canada, represented by a picture of a factory to show my work as a bread factory worker, and pictures of top tourist attractions to represent living in "Toronto". I like Canada, but I prefer the United States. I made many friends there who I left behind – people from my home country who, like me, didn't have status. People there were friendlier and I felt more united with my co-workers. People in Toronto are cold and they are always in a hurry. I don't trust people here. I know I need to give myself a chance to get to know people, but it's difficult because I've changed jobs frequently and because I don't have time to go out.

Life for my siblings back home is very different. They are educated and have their own careers. I, on the other hand, have no chance of getting better education because I live here without status. But, I wanted a life that was different. I really like the language here, and working in Canada is a way to earn more money, faster.

Personal symbol and slogan: In my heart there is a picture of a family and a house. When I think of my house, my parents and siblings come to mind. To me, these images represent peace and tranquility. My slogan is found above my head to the left and is a more of a message for me and other immigrants. It reads, "Fight for what you want, don't let yourself be defeated, you can do it! It doesn't matter if you're alone, with different customs and different languages (around you). This is what I want and I have to achieve it. Something good will come". I often say this to myself, and it makes me think positively and gives me the strength to continue living here.

Marks on/under the skin: I included a stomach filled with food because eating well is important for health. I like trying food from different places, but I miss food from back home. I also find the food in Canada to not be so fresh. I added pictures of winter and a thermometer near the middle of my body because Canadian winters were one of the hardest things I had to adjust to. I had to learn to buy lots of warm clothing and learn how to cook nutritious foods to stay healthy. Luckily I haven't gotten sick, but I do have a dental problem that I need help for. To represent this, I included a picture of a smile and mouthwash because It's really difficult to get dental assistance that is affordable. Plus, I don't know who to trust. The words that appear on the right corner of my body map in green point out that undocumented workers lack information about services ("falta de informacion") and face several cost-related barriers ("servicios muy caros") because we have to pay out of pocket for services and supports like, education, medical, dental, and legal.

My work experiences as an undocumented worker have also been tough. Near one of my feet I included a pot of boiling water and the word "burn" ("que-madura") because I seriously burned my

foot onetime I worked as a cook in the U.S. I wasn't wearing proper work boots, and I accidentally spilled boiling water over myself. I developed blisters all over and my foot was so inflamed I couldn't walk. I never saw a doctor because I was afraid I would be asked for papers, so I used home-made remedies instead. Although I haven't had a work accident in Canada, the image of a scale below my feet represents the negative work relationships I have with my co-workers here. The side with more people represents the people who have been working in the factories for a long time, and the other side represents temporary workers, like me. We are treated like second-class workers. There are also a lot of people in Canada who have negative stereotypes about people from my country. They think we are dangerous and bad for Canadian society. The discrimination I've faced is represented by the crossed out country name in blue near my feet on the right side.

Body scan and personal strength: There is a picture near the top of my body map to the left of a woman showing her muscles. I included this picture because I consider myself to be a strong woman, and I enjoy doing hard work. Other women I work with admire how much I can lift, but they tell me that I should be careful because young women, like me, shouldn't work too hard because it may have a negative effect on their fertility. But I prefer to do things on my own, even if it means lifting heavy things – I like a challenge. But it isn't just muscular strength. When I think about all of the struggles I've had to face, I know I get a lot of my strength from my mind. This is why I wrote the words "fuerza mental" (mental strength) and included a picture of a brain and someone doing yoga underneath my arm on the right side of my body map. It was through my mind that I found the courage to come to a for-

eign place, work, and overcome the fear of living without papers.

Support structures: All my key support people, my best friends from childhood, live back home. They are a part of me. They give me strength because I discuss everything with them. The telephone cable on the right side represents keeping in touch with them and my friends in the U.S. I also included pictures of "telenovelas" (Latin soap operas) near the phone cable, because I watch a lot of TV and I often talk about them with my friends. These things keep me busy when I am not working.

Future: The stairs near my head represent me climbing up to my future. There are pictures of makeup above my head because I want to get back to my work as aesthetician. I always keep this goal in my mind, which is why I put it near my head. This will require that I go back home because it is very difficult to do this kind of work here without papers.

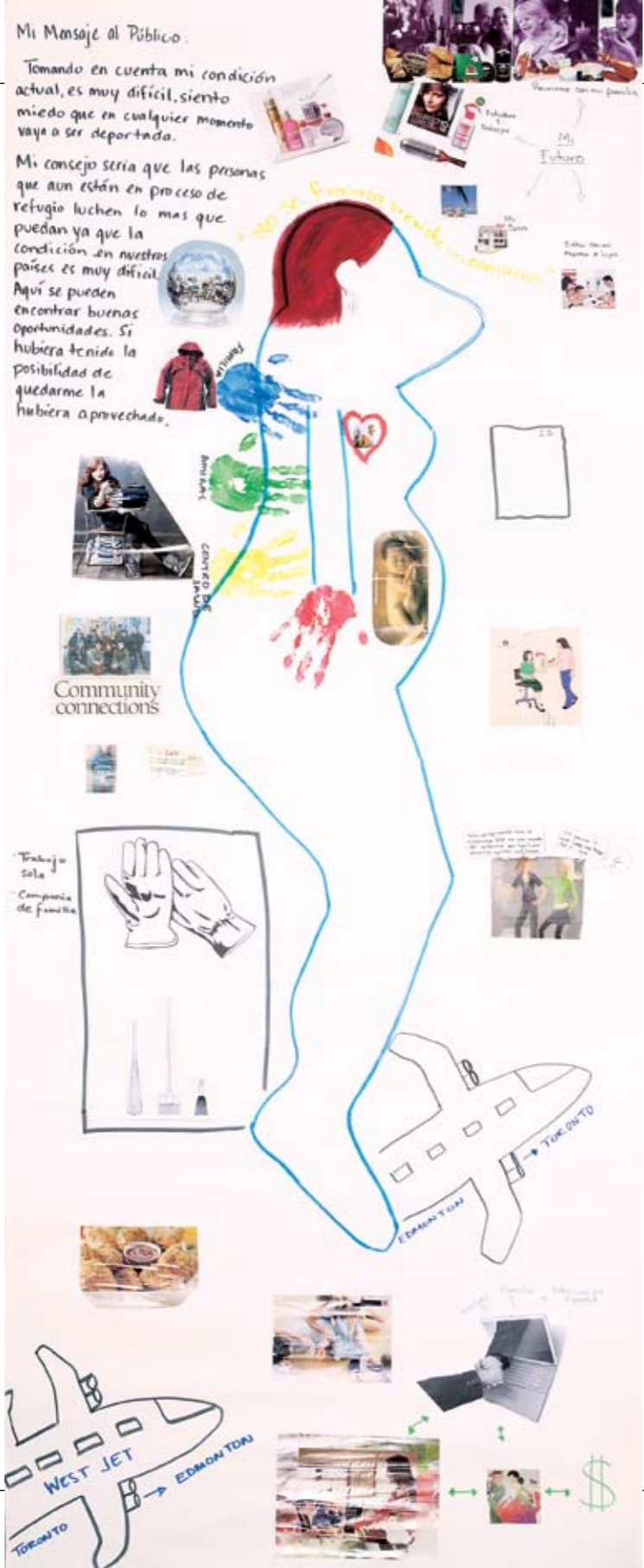
Message to others: My message is to Canadians and to all those looking at my body map. It is typed out near my hips on the left side and reads, "My life has been somewhat different from that of my family's. It has been a fight for a better life. I feel like I don't take anything from anybody – I earn it through my work. As for my jobs, this isn't what I want for the rest of my life, but I enjoy every moment of it. Right now (because of my status), I lack the power to get ahead. That is, to get a good education and study what I enjoy. But, I try to leave the best of me everywhere I go".



Click the play button to listen to Luna's testimonio

Mariana

I'm Mariana and I came four years ago with my family after an immigration advisor told us to apply as refugees. My dad and brother came first and then we followed. We lived in shelters at first and got our food from food banks. The first winter was horrible! We didn't have a car and we had all these appointments with lawyers, doctors and social workers. Pushing my daughter's carriage through the snow was a nightmare. Then my family started cleaning buildings. Sometimes I did the night shift, but I was mostly a stay-at-home mom. Then I got pregnant. I had health coverage then, but now I am five months pregnant with my third child and I have no health benefits because our application was rejected last year. Luckily our social worker got me and my family into a community health centre. It's also been hard being away from my husband who is working in another province. He is also undocumented. Now we are just saving enough money to go back.



Body posture: I am lying down in a fetal position on my body map to show how limited and vulnerable I feel because I lack legal status in Canada. This position also shows the physical changes I have experienced being pregnant.

Colours: I chose blue for my body outline because, to me, it's a colour that represents freshness and freedom – something I wish I had. It's also a colour that makes me feel calm. My hand is red because my hands are what I use for working, and I feel that the colour red is strong and hard just like some of the cleaning work I've done.

Migration journey: I represent the beginning of my migration story with the images on the left side behind my head. The thought of coming to Canada was exciting, but this quickly went away when my family and I arrived in a shelter and claimed refugee status. The winter jacket and the snow globe behind my head capture our first winter in Canada. We were very poor, so the shelter gave us some clothes for the cold, and we bought some extra things we needed from a thrift store. A few months went by and things got better. I wanted to begin studying right away, but I was told I needed a certain level of English to go to school. The female student and the books behind my back represent me taking ESL classes when I first got here. But I was never able to finish because I got pregnant with my second child and felt sick all the time. The words “community connections” represents how I met my husband, while doing volunteer work. The box with the gloves and cleaning items represents the short period of time when I worked as a cleaner to help my family. The picture of chicken fingers behind my feet to the left side represents another time when I worked part-time at a factory packaging frozen food. Now I am mostly a homemaker.

The images on the bottom of my body map represent a time when relocated to another Canadian city to live with my husband and children. By this time, I had no status and was a homemaker while my husband worked full-time. The money symbol represents living away from my parents and having to learn how to manage money on my own. I also learned to cook. There is a picture of a couple because I also learned a lot about how to resolve marital problems independently. Although I enjoyed being with my husband and my children as a family, like the pictures you see on the bottom, I felt very lonely and isolated there. I included a picture of a laptop because that was my only form of social interaction. The Internet was my support system. I eventually came back to Toronto because I found out I was pregnant and I have the support of my family in Toronto. My husband stayed back working to save money for when we go back home.

When I came back to Toronto, things were different, mostly because I didn't have a legal status anymore. I had a hard time enrolling my child in school, and no one understood why I didn't have bills under my name or a credit card. This is why I included a blank piece of paper with the letters I.D. on the right side of my body map. People seem less friendly now that I don't have status, and I am scared to go out and do the things I used to do. People always ask why I can't do certain activities. The image of the two females on the right captures the stigma I feel. The caption of the lady on the left reads, “Hey, did you apply for that government program for your children? You should apply, I'll go with you...”. The caption of the blonde lady on the right represents how I feel in these situation and reads, “Okay, thanks, I'll get around to it. I have to go now. Bye”.

Personal symbol and slogan: To represent my migration journey, I put a

picture of a family in my heart. My husband and my children give me strength, but I often I worry about our futures. The English translation to the slogan that appears over my head in yellow says, “You haven't failed if you have tried”. We didn't get status but we began a new stage of our lives here. I put this slogan near my head because I always keep this in mind when I'm faced with a new challenge.

Marks on/under the skin: It's very clear from my body map that I am pregnant – you can see the image of a baby inside me– and this is my second pregnancy in Canada. My first child was born back home, and I had my second child as a refugee claimant. This pregnancy is different now that I don't have status. I don't have many choices related to the kind of care I am getting and I have to pay for a lot of services and medicines that I used to have coverage for. Although a translator accompanies me to most of my appointments, it is not the same as being able to ask questions on your own. For instance, I had to go alone to get an ultrasound, and the technician was very rude, and they wouldn't tell me whether I was having a boy or a girl. I wanted to know! The image of the female on a chair being questioned by a health provider on the right side represents these experiences.

Support structures: On my body map you can see three hands supporting my back which represent my friends (“amigas” in green), my family (“familia” in blue) and a health centre (“centro de salud” in yellow) that has given me a lot of support in Canada. Friends have helped me and my family find needed resources like housing and jobs, and have provided advice when we've needed it. As for my family – my mother, father and sibling who are here with me, we try to support each other because we have no extended

family here. One particular health centre has helped make it easier for us to get essential services when we've needed it.

Future: The images on the top right corner of my body map represent my near future (“mi futuro”) since I plan to go back home once the baby is born. Our migration story has been a very sad one, and having been denied status makes it very difficult to lead a normal life. At least if I go back, I can rebuild my life close to the rest of my family. Like the pictures show, if I go back home I may be finally able to own a home (“mi casa”), reunite with my family (“reunirme con mi familia”), go to beauty school (“estudiar”), find work (“trabajar”) be with my husband and my children in one place (“estar con mi esposo y hijos”). I know the economic situation and the violence back home will be tough, but being undocumented has taught me that you can't realize your full potential when you live in constant fear. I don't want that kind of future for me or my children.

Message to others: My message is to other refugee claimants in Canada. It is found on the left side, behind my head, and says, “Taking into account my current situation, it is very difficult – I am afraid that at any moment I can be deported. My recommendation would be for those who are still in the process of claiming refugee status, to fight as hard as you can to stay in Canada legally, because the situation back home in our home countries is very difficult. There are opportunities here. If I had been allowed to stay, I would have taken advantage of these opportunities”.



Click the play button to listen to Mariana's testimonio

Maya

I am Maya, a nanny and a kitchen helper. I was recruited from Latin America by a first-world diplomat living in Canada to come work as a nanny. A few months after I arrived, I was fired because I complained about being left alone for 10 days without the health card of a toddler who got sick. Then, my problems got worse. Although I had other families willing to hire me, my work visa only allowed me to work for a diplomat. I couldn't go back right away; I had no job to go back to. I came here to experience this beautiful country, to learn how to live on my own, and to study English. My only friend felt sorry for me and helped me find a job. Now I work in a restaurant 4 days a week for 10 hours a day for 8.50\$/hour, and I get a 10-minute break for lunch. On weekends I work as a nanny. I haven't told my co-workers or my boss that I don't have papers; people try to take advantage of you if they know. I haven't told my family either; I don't want them to worry. Now, I am trying to take better care of myself – I need to gain weight and see a dentist and a doctor. Finally though, after a year and a half, I've saved enough to attend language classes.



Body position: In my body map, I am in a lying down in a fetal position. Lying in this position helps me think as I stroke my hair, like my parents used to do – my family is very loving and affectionate. In this position, I also cry quietly at night as I remember my family.

Colours: My body outline is pink because it is the colour of femininity but it also symbolizes love. My hands are green because I love to be in touch with nature and the earth.

Migration journey: To represent my home country, I included several symbols behind my head in a green bubble– good food, beachwear and television shows are the first things that come to mind when I think of back home. Close to my hand on the left side, I also drew a package of colourful candy to symbolize how much I love sweets. I also feel that candy represents kids very well, and I came to Canada to work as a nanny, so this symbol captures my reason for migrating as well. The book below my feet also represents how I came to Canada to study and learn English – I wanted to get ahead professionally by coming to Canada.

I have also included some pictures of landscapes on my body map to represent Canada. These are located on the left side of my body map, inside a red bubble. I chose red because I realized after

living here, that Canada is based on a lot on capitalist values and is very dependent on what goes on in the Unites States. To me, red captures this feeling.

Personal symbol and slogan: My personal migration symbol is the winged heart placed inside my chest. When I migrated to Canada, I left behind my beloved family members to take care of another person here – to become a nanny. Therefore, my migration experience was all about love – leaving people I loved behind, but also, opening my heart to new experiences here in Canada.

My person slogan, located inside my feet, comes from the lyrics of a song that says: “walking against the wind, without a handkerchief or documents”. These words capture my experience in Canada, since I try my best to keep walking, working, and living, but deep inside I feel like an intruder here. I feel uncomfortable because I cannot really walk freely; sometimes this is a very oppressive feeling.

I also have another slogan, placed above my head which says, “Everything is worth it when the soul is not small”. In less than two years in Canada, I have lived and experienced more than many people will live in 20 years. I feel a bit Canadian, I wanted to get to know Canada, this is such a beautiful country, and now that I am here, I hope to

visit the whole country, from coast to coast. The human soul needs to fly. If you think big, if you want more from life, you need to have an open, free soul.

Marks on/under the skin: The big sunflower along the right side of my body map represents someone in my family who was killed back in my home country due to urban violence – it’s a big part of me that is missing. On my body map, I have also drawn the many health problems I have faced since I migrated to Canada. For instance, I have lost a lot of weight since I arrived, and this is represented by the empty brown plate near my leg on the left. The one-legged “saci” near my foot on the left side of my body map, also represents the ligament problems I’ve had. The orange tiger paw on the top left side represents other people’s aggression towards me because of my status. It also represents me living in fear and the workplace violence I once experienced here in Canada. The broken heart by my elbow symbolizes an intimate relationship I had here in Canada that didn’t work out. One side of the heart is red to illustrate the intensity of that relationship and half pink to represent how, even though the relationship ended, I am doing okay.

Support structures: When I think about the things that give

me support in Canada, I think of a group of friends that I have and people who love me. I think that people who don’t have friends are in trouble. This is why I drew a circle of friends on my back to demonstrate the support my friends give me both personally and at work.

Message to others: My message is to other immigrants, and I’ve placed it in my belly because this is where people generally feel emotions. It reads, “You should not feel fear; do not give up on your goals for anything or anyone. Believe in yourself and have faith and courage. Live the moment and let life happen. There are few opportunities for happiness. Take advantage of all of them. Always remember that we cannot go back to the past and that time doesn’t stop. Every experience is unique.”

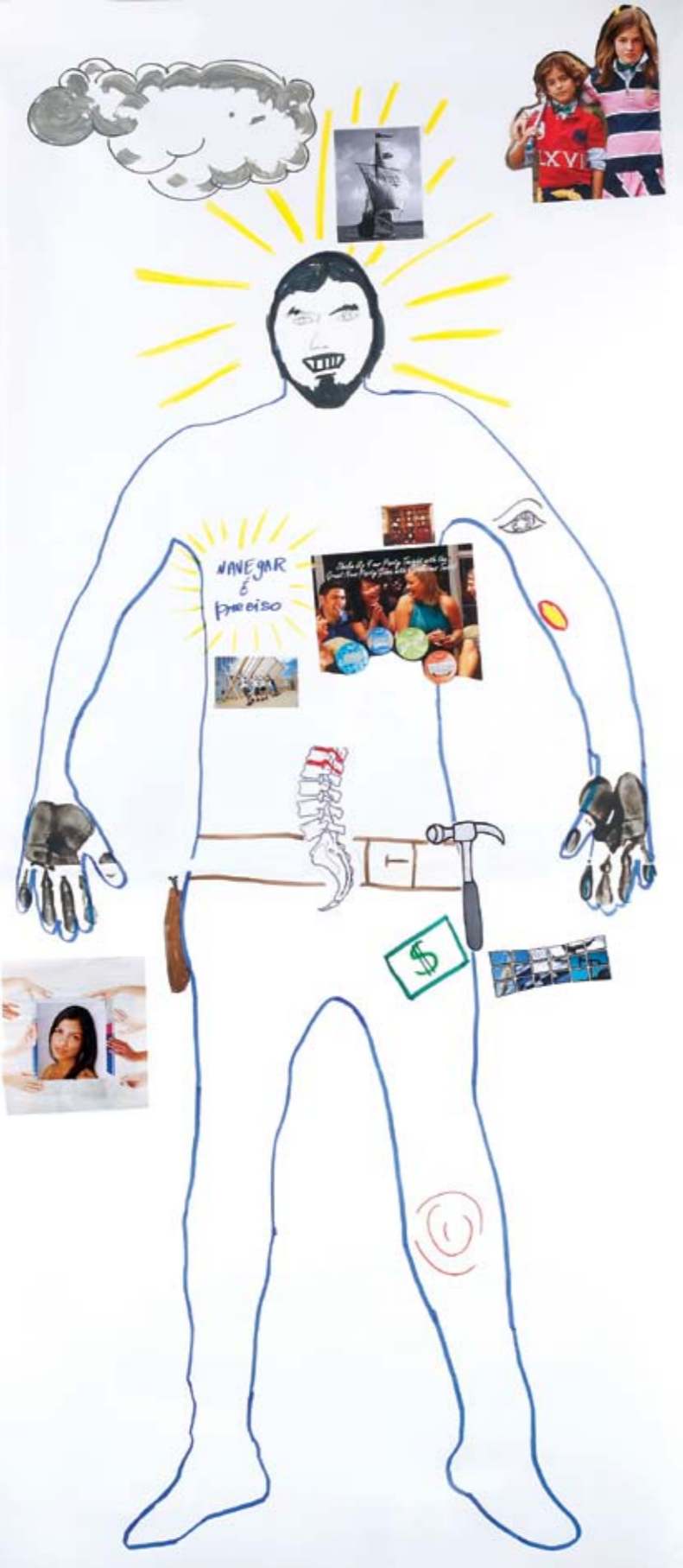
Future: I feel like my future cannot be represented, because it is in my heart. I know it involves me studying again and learning English.



Click the play button to listen to Maya’s testimonio

Nelson

Hi, I am Nelson, a carpenter. In my home country, I owned a small business and my wife had a job, which gave us and our family enough to get by. However, my children got older and needed to go to university, so I came to Canada to work. Working with wood was a hobby of mine in my home country, and I really like my work as a carpenter now. I work very hard, but I am not like other illegal workers. I have a good boss and co-workers. Being a carpenter keeps me fit, and I am proud of my work; no more sitting down for 12-hour work days. Sometimes, though, I get exhausted and I have back and body pain. If I could make the same amount of money back home, I'd prefer to be there. But, I must confess, every day I like it here more and more. I like having four seasons, I like the city, I like the culture, I have made many friends, I watch hockey and I support Canada. I hope to stay long enough so that my children can get their degrees. I believe it doesn't matter what life throws at you; you have to keep going, keep sailing.



Body posture: In my body map I am standing up, just like I do at work.

Colour: My body outline is blue because this is my favourite colour and my hands are black to represent the gloves I frequently use at work.

Migration journey: I came to Canada to make money. I wanted to give my children, represented by the picture on the top right, more than I could provide them if I stayed back home. I wanted them to go to university, this way they would never need to migrate to another country for better opportunities, and if they decide to, they would be skilled and get papers. This is why I chose a dollar sign symbol, close to my pocket inside my body, to represent my journey. The job opportunities I've had here are shown in the blue picture next to it.

Personal symbol and slogan: By coming to Canada I have discovered a new time in my life, a new culture, new friends, and new dreams. My personal symbol is a ship; it represents discovering a new world. I think meaningful things should be placed either on your head or in your heart, so I decided to put the ship on the top

of my head. My personal slogan is placed on my chest; it is a quote from a famous poem which, when translated to English, says, "sailing is necessary" ("navegar é preciso"). This quote summarizes a proverb I once read that said the harbour is the safest place for a ship because there, it is protected from storms on the open sea; yet, if the ship doesn't sail away, its vessel corrodes". I truly believe you either face the challenges your life brings your way or you'll be destroyed by them.

Marks on/under the skin: I know undocumented workers' lives are not easy. I have heard horrible stories, but I have been okay. The only thing that bothers me is being away from my family. If the government would give me documents just to travel once a year and nothing else (that is, no health care), I would be fine – that is all I need; to kiss my children once a year.

Body scan and personal strength: Sometimes I have pain, represented by the red areas in between my lower back bones and the knee to the right. I also have pain on my arms when I work long hours and I have some lumps on my body, like the one on the arm to the right. My person-

al strength comes mainly from faith, hope for a better future, and determination; the yellow light around my head shows this strength.

Support structures: I usually don't ask anyone for help. I think people should take care of their own problems. But there are things I like here in Canada, that I enjoy doing. For example, most of my employers to date have been good to me and my co-workers have been fine too. I placed them below my slogan, on my chest. I like my job, especially when I get to build furniture; this is why I drew a carpenter's belt around my waist and placed a picture of a bookcase close to my heart. I like to make furniture because I feel proud of work that is well done, particularly when clients get really happy when they see it ready. It is really nice to see how much they like it. I have also made many friends in Toronto, who I placed in my heart because I believe it is very important to have a rich social life. The picture on the left side has many hands supporting one person, showing how friends are important.

Future: I drew a black cloud on the top left because I know I have to be here for 5 more years

for my children to finish their studies. But being undocumented makes me worry. There is always some level of insecurity. Let's say, if I am sent home, they may never finish their degrees. So, I don't know what the future holds for me. I like Canada; I would like to stay here. I have "tattooed" an eye on my arm to represent the future.

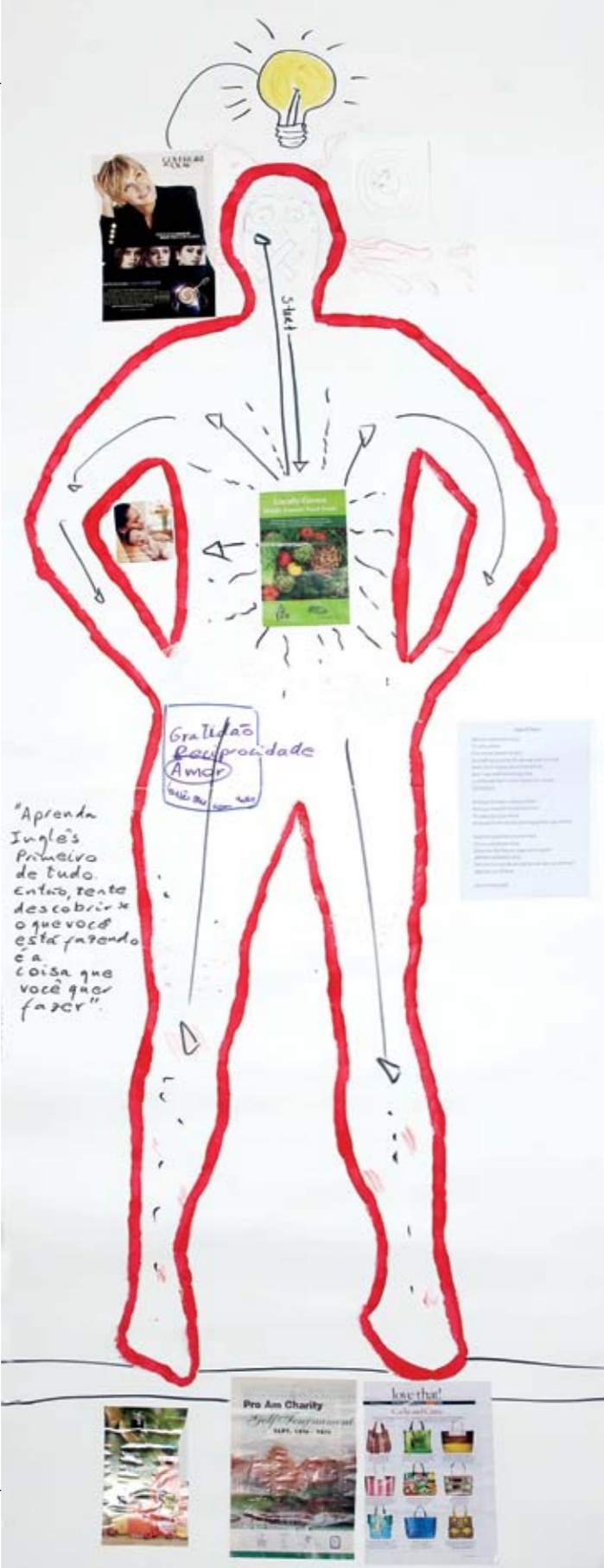
Message to others: I prefer not to leave a message.



Click the play button to listen to Nelson's testimonio

Paulo

I am Paulo and I came to Canada 3 years ago to learn English because I wanted to travel around the world. At that time I didn't plan to stay for so long, but I started to make connections and now I feel that my heart is here; I don't want to go back to my home country. Although I enjoy living here, I have a hard life. Construction work is stressful and at the end of day, I am exhausted and without any energy to study English. On top of that, I often have to deal with aggressive bosses and employers who take advantage of my situation; some give me too much work and others don't pay me after the job is done. At my job site, workers don't get along and the boredom of repeated work makes me feel frustrated and hopeless. Because I am illegal, I try to be very discreet. I avoid using my work clothes in public spaces, like on the subway. I realized that if I want to reach my goals and maintain my self-esteem, I have to be strong and take care of my health.



Body posture: In my body map, I appear with my hands on my hips because I want to show the world that I am ready to fight for my life in Canada, regardless the hardships I have to face.

Colours: I chose red for my body outline, because this colour reminds me of strength and fury, qualities which are needed if I want to contribute and make a difference in the world. As for my hands, I chose white because I want to show people that even though my hands are always dirty because of the construction work I do, I am a clean person. The colour white also represents my honesty and transparency.

Migration journey: My home country is symbolically represented by a mother and a child underneath my arm on the left, since I always carry my country with me, no matter where I am. To represent my migration experience to Canada, I've included several pictures on my body map to capture the things I've learned and observed here about Canadian society. The light bulb on top of my head represents my new ideas and values, especially about the role of women in the society. I realized that I was very sexist back home, and only in Canada did I learn to appreciate women's power, strength and intelligence. I placed a picture of a known lesbian show host, Ellen DeGeneres, near my head to represent Canadian society as inclusive– something I respect a lot now.

Yet, I also feel that certain people in

Canada are very selfish and lose sight of the real meaning of a charity work. I placed a picture of a charity golf tournament near my feet to represent this aspect of Canadian society. I also included a picture of an expensive natural juice beside this to capture the irony behind people who claim to be “green” while relying on consumption to do it. The natural juice represents the “artificial” way people try to lead a healthy life here. Under my feet, I also placed an advertisement of women’s purses to symbolize consumerism in Canada.

Personal symbol and slogan: I choose an airplane as a symbol for my migration journey because I only needed to take an airplane to come to Canada. I came to Canada because I wanted to study English, so I drew an airplane travelling around the earth to Canada which is located on the top right side of my body map near my head.

I choose the lyrics to the song “Out of Time” as my personal slogan, which is located on the right side of my body map. One part of the song says, “Feel the sunshine on your face/it's in a computer now”. This part of the song represents modern way of life, new technologies and the way people are connected in today's world. My migration experience is a reflection of this new way of life – For instance, I am able to connect quickly with people back home through the Internet. I also know a lot of people in Canada that have found their partners through online dating. This is something that scares me be-

cause it seems that people can't form relationships in person through everyday activities anymore.

Marks on/under the skin: In the centre of my body map, on my chest, I put a picture of different vegetables to represent the healthy eating habits I have developed in Canada. The radiating lines and the two big arrows going in opposite directions, one coming from my mouth to the centre of my body and the other one going up to my face, symbolically show how the healthy food I eat, feed my body and mind. The tape on my mouth represents the lack of voice I have in Canada as an undocumented worker. Even though I try to speak up and communicate with others, I am always fearful of who is paying attention. The red marks coming out of my ears, represents the sexist comments and aggressive remarks that I constantly hear at my construction job. In my work environment, there is a lot of “machismo”, and I constantly have to put up with abuse. On several places on my arms and legs, I have included red cuts to represent how injuries are part of my everyday work; it is almost impossible to not get hurt doing construction work.

Support structures: When I think about social support, I have a hard time thinking about specific people or things that help me get through hard times. I feel like I get my strength from within. I am passionate about helping others in society and that motivates me

and keeps me going. I prefer to represent people who support me through their words of gratitude, love and reciprocity. In the middle of my body map I circled the word, “love” (“amor”) and I wrote, “Not for everybody”, because I feel that love and support are unique feelings and not everybody understands or experiences these things.

Future: The picture of a mother holding her baby, which I used to represent my home country, also represents my future. I know someday I will see my home country again.

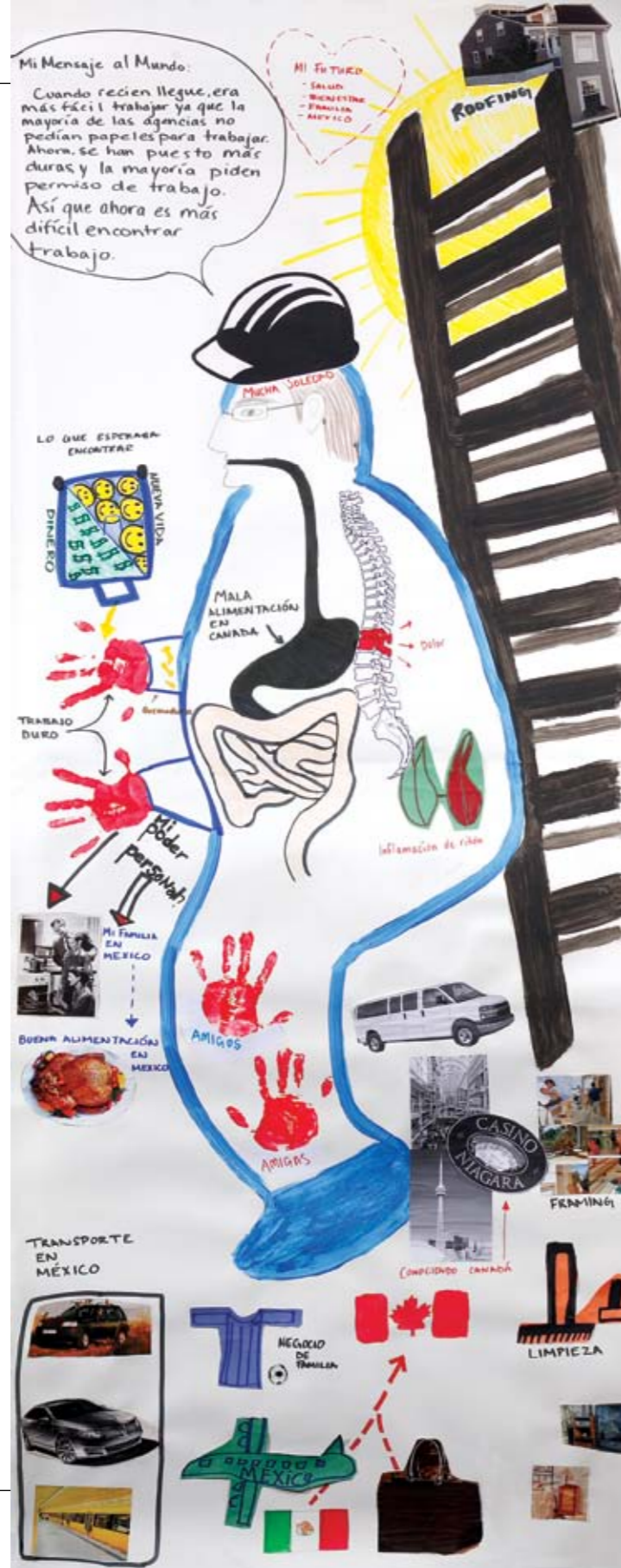
Message to others: My message is for other immigrants and is located on the left side beside my leg. My message begins by saying, “First of all, learn English”. Through my own experience, I feel that if you can speak English, you have more opportunities and are better able to connect with Canadians and other immigrants who can help you. Without English you have limited options. Later in my message I say, “Then, try to find out if what you are doing, is something that you want to do”. Through my experience, I feel that it is important for immigrants to set goals and be aware of their options.



Click the play button to listen to Paulo's testimonio

Pepe

I'm Pepe. I used to be a college student, but when my dad died and our family business shut down, I had to come to Canada to support my mom. I lived in coffee shops for 3 days when I got here, and barely had enough for food. Then I met a Latin American man and he offered me a job and a place to stay. For the first 2 years, I worked in bread factories through temp agencies. Then I found construction and cleaning jobs. I'll never go back to factory work! They make you work harder and faster than the permanent workers and the most they'll pay is \$7/hour – they even deduct travel! My kidney condition also got worse because of all the turning and twisting they made me do. My diet doesn't make it any better either. But food is so expensive here and I don't know how to cook, I take the pain killers my landlord tells me to buy at the pharmacy. I know I should see a doctor but my co-workers tell me that others have been caught when they go to a hospital. Besides, I don't have extra money.



Body posture: I am lying down in a comfortable fetal position to contrast the uncomfortable situation I find myself in here in Canada because of my status.

Colours: I drew my body outline in blue because that is my favourite colour. My hands are red because I feel that red represents life. I've suffered a lot here through the work I've done, so I wanted to use red to show my appreciation of life, my appreciation for still being here.

Migration journey: I was a student before migrating to Canada, and only worked part-time, helping my family run our small business. The image on the bottom left corner of my map, of a yellow subway train represents the method of transportation I used back home to get to work and school. The cars above the train represent what everyone wishes they had instead. The soccer jersey and soccer ball represent my culture and my family business. When my father passed away, our family business gradually slowed down and we eventually had to shut down. We had nothing, and my only option was to come to Canada to support my mother.

On the bottom of my body map, near my feet, I drew a plane and a suitcase to represent my journey to Canada. It was very hard at first because I didn't know anyone and I had nothing but a few dollars in my pocket and a suitcase. Eventually I met someone who gave me work and a place to stay. The images on the bottom right of my body map of the broom and dustpan, the carpenters and the house, all represent the jobs I've had in Canada – which are cleaning, fram-

ing and roofing. They are basically the only jobs that undocumented workers can get here. The pictures on the right corner represent where I live now – in a rented, furnished room with an old television. I live with other Latin American workers and we share a kitchen. I spend \$80-\$100 per week on food and this barely leaves me with enough money to send back home. I have changed my way of thinking since coming here. I value life and the simple things a lot more, like having a meal with my family.

Personal symbol and slogan: My personal symbol is the colourful suitcase I am holding in my hand on the left side. Half of the suit case is full of smiley faces and the other half is full of dollar signs to represent that I migrated to Canada in search of a new life ("*nu-eva vida*") for me and my family and an opportunity to work and make money ("*dinero*"). I could never achieve these things in my home country.

My slogan is more of a statement about my experience in Canada and is written across my forehead in red. It reads, "*A lot of loneliness*". I placed my slogan here, because I hold memories of my family in my mind, and I tend to feel very lonely when I think about my family and realize that they are so far away.

Marks on/under the skin: On one of my arms, in yellow, you can see burns from cooking. When I first arrived, I didn't know how to cook and I had a lot of accidents. My landlord helped me search for a good ointment to buy to put on my burns, but I still have scars. Back home my mother did everything for me! Sometimes, I would call her, and she

would explain how to cook things over the phone. I learned how to cook some things, but most of the food available is pre-made and healthy food is expensive here. Sometimes I think my health problems are related to my poor diet and that is why I drew a black stomach and digestive tract on my body map.

The inflamed kidneys ("*inflamación de riñón*") on my body map represent the kidney problems I've had in Canada. I am afraid to go see a doctor or go to the hospital when the pain gets severe, so for now, I manage my pain with pain-killers. I think the heavy twisting and turning I did when I worked in factories aggravated my kidney problems. This is why I coloured red discs and arrows on my spine to represent the radiating back pain ("*dolor*") I've had through factory work. Out of all the jobs I've had, I've liked cleaning the best because it is the most relaxed. I drew a large sun and a ladder on the right side of my body map because falling and getting burned by working long days outside are common risks in construction jobs. I have never fallen on the job, but I have seen others fall. I put a hard hat on my head, because I used one for safety when working as framer but not when I was in roofing.

Body scan and personal strength: Under my hands I put an image of family and of good food, because that is what I think of when I think of home, and both are out of reach here in Canada. These are symbols of my personal strength, since it is for my family that I am still here.

Support structures: My family and friends have been tremendous supports

throughout my migration journey. The handprints on the inside of my lower legs specifically represent the support I get from my male ("*amigos*") and female ("*amigas*") friends, which also includes my landlord. In my last construction job, I got along very well with my coworkers, and on our time off, we would go to major tourist attractions in and around Toronto. The pictures of the Eaton centre, the Sky Dome and Casino near my feet, to the right, represent the little travelling and sightseeing I've done. The white work van above these images represents my coworkers.

Future: If I stay here, I would like to become a Canadian citizen so I can do the things I want to do in life. But I know this is very difficult, and this is why I mostly see myself back home in the future. I want to be closer to my family and lead a healthy life. This is represented in the heart above my head.

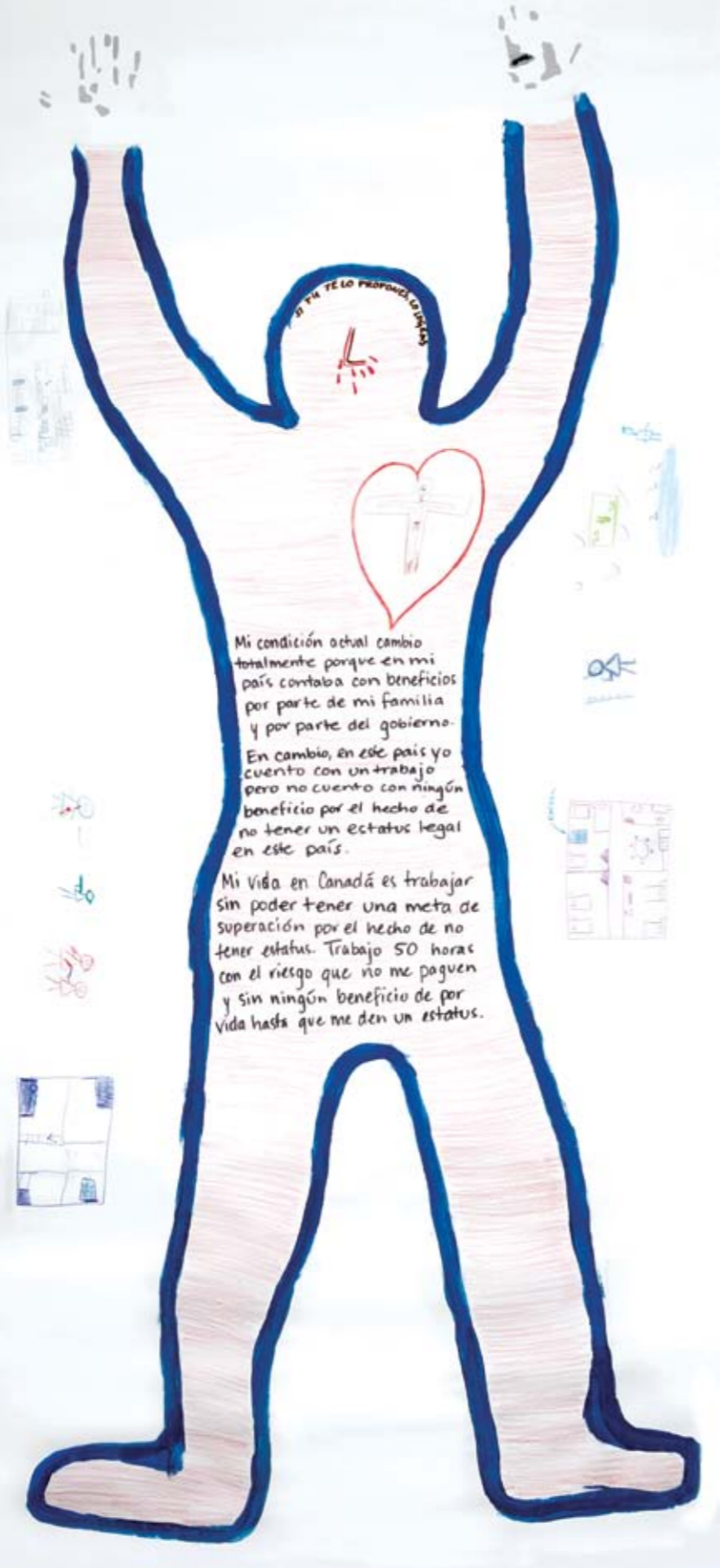
Message to others: My message is found on the top left corner in a thought cloud, and is for people looking at my body map and for people thinking about migrating to Canada. It says, *“When I first arrived, it was easy to work because most temporary work agencies didn’t ask for papers. Now, most of them require work permits, so it’s hard to find work”*.



Click the play button to listen to Pepe's testimonio

Rafael

I am Rafael, I used to be a manager but now I am a carpenter. After our family business collapsed, my choices back home were really limited. If I stayed, I would be forced to work in the drug trade to survive. So I came three years ago to Canada with a recruitment agency. The agency promised me a work permit and a place to stay, but it was all a lie and I lost a lot of money. At the beginning I did temp work at a factory for less than \$8/hour. Then I found roofing and framing jobs which paid better. Some bosses were nice, but others didn't pay me. One boss even tricked me into going to work in Alberta. My co-workers drink a lot and almost all of them have wives and children back home. I have very little friends here, and although I want to start a family, I have nothing to offer a woman. My parents are very old and I am the youngest of three brothers, so I have to take care of them. When I feel lonely I go to church or work extra hours at the factory.



Body posture: My body is positioned like a person who has just won a victory. The reason I positioned myself this way is because I believe coming to Canada has given be me a chance to realize my dreams. I feel grateful every day because I am alive and healthy to do work and support my family.

Colours: I chose a light blue colour for my body outline because I believe this best represents my soul – peaceful, serene, and grateful. My hands are white because my hands do no harm. I am a clean and honest person. I don't fight, steal, or do anything harmful to anyone.

Migration journey: To represent my home country, I drew several images on the left side of my body map. Crime is very common in my home country, so I included images of gun violence and someone getting mugged to capture how insecure and unsafe my life was back home. A lot of dirty business goes on where I am from, and it is very easy for people who have lost everything to get caught working for drug cartels. This is why I came to Canada. After our family business collapsed, there was nothing we could do – we were left nearly homeless and it was impossible for me to find a decent job to support my parents. The large floor plan of a factory near my arm, on the top left side, represents my family business. Further down the left side I drew the layout of a home, to represent living with my parents before I came to Canada.

On the right side of my body map, I drew images to represent Canada. I included a picture of a policeman and of money on the top, because unlike my

home country, here I found safety, security, opportunity, and a well-organized society. My dream is to stay in Canada and restart my business here. But of course, not everything has been perfect in Canada. As a construction worker, I've had many abusive bosses. Some didn't pay me, others tricked me, and the working conditions were sometimes very bad. When I first came to Canada I was tricked into believing I would get a work permit, but instead, I got a visa and was forced to live in a small home with several other migrant workers who also had been scammed. The floor plan of several bedrooms, on the right side of my body map represents how I lived with several men in a small house when I first arrived. The man with the hard hat on the right side represents my current job as a construction worker.

Personal symbol and slogan: My personal symbol, which I drew on my chest, inside my heart, is Jesus, the son of God. Jesus represents my migration journey because every day I ask him for help so I can continue on in Canada. I talk to him in prayer about my experiences, and it is through these intimate moments that I get a clear sense of the steps I need to take to make a life here. By carrying him in my heart, it also serves as a reminder to love and respect everyone, even though I often don't get the same treatment back because of my status.

The English translation to my slogan, which is written on my forehead, is "When there is a will, there is a way". I believe that all that you plan in life you can make happen, and I put this message on my forehead because this belief keeps

me going. I've already seen results in my own life. I came to Canada and I've been able to work, pay off my debts and take care of my family. Sometimes I think that the further you fall, the harder it is to get back up. But if you try to get back up, you end up going farther. God wanted me to try, and I succeeded.

Marks on/under the skin: Even though my job as a construction worker is hard, I carry out my work with enthusiasm, happiness and dedication. I was once a business owner, so I value the importance of making clients and the people I work for, happy. That's a goal I keep in my head and in my heart.

When I lost my business and was left without a job back home, I felt worthless. Work gives me a sense of identity. This is why when I think about the jobs I've done in Canada, I try to see them in a positive way. Sometimes, when you have nothing is when you begin to value everything. But I've also had really negative experiences through work. For instance, a few years ago I had a workplace accident and hurt my nose. I may have even broken it, but I never went to see a doctor to find out because I didn't want to miss work. This injury is represented by the bleeding and swollen nose on my body map. The inside of my body is also shaded in red to capture the impact of my work and my migration experience on my body. It represents cuts, burns, bruises, but also the sorrow of being away from my family and very lonely in Canada. I haven't wanted to make friends in Canada because I feel that they bring nothing but trouble and extra spending that I can't afford. I would love to be in a relationship and have children,

but until I pay off my debt, I feel like I have nothing to offer a woman, and I refuse to get married for papers.

Support structures: My parents support me by giving me the motivation to keep working hard, but only God supports me in an emotional and spiritual sense. This is connected to my personal symbol found in my heart.

Future: The thought of leaving soon is always in my mind, but it is hard to show this on my body map.

Message to others: My message is to all Canadians, and is found inside my body because this is where I feel the emotional burden of living without status. It reads:

"My living conditions totally changed when I came to Canada because, back home, I could at least count on benefits, both from my family and from the government. Instead, in this country, I have a job, but I am not entitled to any benefits as a result of not having legal status in this country."

My life in Canada is all about working without having the power to set goals to improve my living conditions because I lack status. I work fifty hours (a week) with the risk of not being paid, and I will never be given benefits until I am given a status."



Click the play button to listen to Rafael's testimonio

Renata

I'm Renata and I came with my partner 4 years ago because back home was very insecure. I was sexually assaulted several times at work and both my partner and I had to drop out of university because we couldn't afford it. In our first year here we worked night shifts cleaning and went to English classes during the day. I would get 4 hours of sleep and eat canned food. Then I got sick, I was depressed, had insomnia, and lost a lot of weight. The counsellor told me to keep busy, so now I volunteer as a cook and work as a food store manager. My dream is to open a restaurant here. But last year our refugee application was denied. We can't go back. This is home now. Here we have our church and our friends. Every day I fear being caught, but I trust in God that our humanitarian grounds application will be successful.

EL SER O DECIDIR SER INDOCUMENTADO -- EN UN PAÍS, NO ES FÁCIL, POR EL CONTRARIO ES MUY DURO, A VECES TE SIENTES SOLO Y SIN RUMBO, Y LO QUE LES QUIERO DECIR ES QUE ESTE SACRIFICIO VALGA LA PENA, SIGAN DISFRUTANDO DE LA VIDA, QUE NO HAYA FRUSTRACIONES SI NO POR EL CONTRARIO ORGULLO DE LOGROS Y ESFUERZO!!

Acciones

Hogar
Trabajo
Iglesia
Comunidad
Trabajo Voluntario
▶ APOYO A LOS DEMÁS
▶ SERVICIO Y AMOR.

"ESTE EN DONDE ESTE, VAYA A DONDE VAYA ESTARE BIEN PORQUE TU ESTAS CON MIGO."

ESTRÉS

TEMOR A UNA DETENSIÓN.

▶ En el trabajo
→ responsabilidad c/ los trabajadores

Body posture: In my body map I am lying face up because it represents how I want to feel at the end of all of this – free. Sometimes I think, “If at some point they come looking for me, I want to show my face and say ‘Yes, that’s me’”. Because I am not committing a crime, I am just fighting for something better – a dream.

Colours: My body outline is blue to represent tranquility, just like a blue sky. As an undocumented worker, there are days when you can feel calm, but things always get in the way and make you feel stressed and unstable. My hands are red because I feel that red represents passion and I love the work that I do. I love cooking! Red also represents hard work.

Migration journey: The pictures on the left of my body map, near my hand, represent my life before I migrated to Canada. The pictures of different women and the words “*papas*” represent my siblings and my parents. The picture of a dessert and food represents my part-time work as a cook back home. Even though I worked part-time, this was not enough to pay for my university studies and I eventually had to drop out in order to survive. My partner had to do the same. I also suffered a lot of sexual abuse at work and on the streets. My home country was not a safe place to live. We contemplated coming to Canada, but it was impossible to save the money needed to buy our tickets. Then, one day, my partner surprised me with two tickets to Canada. A family friend who worked at a travel agency agreed to finance the tickets. The picture of a young man, a debit machine and two tickets with the word “*Canada*” on them represents how our journey to Canada began.

We got here two weeks after my partner got us the tickets – we loved the city immediately! But things were not easy like we thought it would be. We stayed with a friend

in her apartment, but were soon asked to pay rent or get out. The apartment near my foot on the left represents this. We got jobs as quickly as possible to start paying our tickets and our rent. Our first job was as cleaners at a fitness gym, where we were paid below minimum wage and worked night shifts. The treadmills and equipment on the left side represent this first work experience. Then we were advised to apply for refugee status. While our application was being reviewed we were given work permits, and finally, I was able to get a job in my field. I worked at a bakery and took several classes to perfect my baking. The before ("*antes*") and after ("*despues*") pictures of my cake design represent the time when I had legal status and had dreams to one day open my own business. During this time, my partner and I moved into our own apartment, met lots of friends, and used to ride our bicycles around the city – we couldn't be happier.

But then our refugee application was denied and everything changed. The picture of the two men in black suits on the bottom of my body map represent the time when we were told the news by the immigration officials. We were forced to hand over all of our identification, and were given a deportation date. That's when we made the decision to stay to wait for our humanitarian grounds application. I went an entire year without using my bike because I was afraid to go out in public. I remember the first time I used it thereafter; I felt so exposed and quickly turned back home and stored it away. I barely use it now, and I made sure to remove the basket and other things it had so that it wouldn't attract too much attention. The pictures of people riding their bikes and of a couple going on a picnic on the bottom of my body map represent what I can no longer do as freely as before. The crossed out picture of people having fun, represent how now, we must avoid public exposure.

Personal symbol and slogan: My personal symbol is the apple tree inside my heart. I used to live in a big urban centre, and I had never seen so many beautiful trees until I came to Canada. The tree also represents my strength, and the apples figuratively represent the fruit of my hard labour in Canada. My personal slogan is: *"Wherever I am, wherever I'll be, I'll be okay because you'll be with me"*. I wrote this near my heart because sometimes I feel like I don't know where I am heading. I often repeat this slogan to myself to remind me that I have to be patient and have faith that God is always watching over me.

Marks on/under the skin: I drew purple dotted lines outside my waist to represent the significant weight loss I have experienced in Canada. My stomach is also purple and written on it is the word “stress” (*“estrés”*) because since we were denied refugee status, I have endured a lot of stress, and this has taken a toll on my digestive system. I have a gastric ulcer and rarely have an appetite. The arrow connecting my stomach to the pictures on the right side represent the stress and fear I experience almost every day as an undocumented worker. The picture of a man watching over a wall represents my fear of being found and detained (*“temor a una detención”*) and because I am a manager for a local business, I get stressed because I am also responsible for the safety of other undocumented coworkers who I supervise (*“en el trabajo, responsabilidad para los trabajadores”*). This is represented by the picture of a crying woman.

Body scan and personal strength: At this moment in my life, I am very attached spiritually to God. I find strength in my faith and I know that God will give me everything I need. My thoughts and feelings are always in light of my faith and my actions come

from this – it's like a circle. This is represented by the green arrows connecting my thoughts in my head to my feelings in my heart and my list of actions on the left. My actions include building a home ("*hogar*"), working ("*trabajar*"), belonging to my faith-based community ("*iglesia-comunidad*"), and doing volunteer work ("*trabajo voluntario*"), which in turn, allows me to support others ("*apoyo a los demas*") and provide service and love ("*servicio y amor*").

Support structures: The yellow outline of my head represents my faith and the support God gives me to keep moving forward. The colour yellow represents God illuminating my path. My faith-based community has also been a great source of support since I fell out of status, and they are represented by the pictures of a church, priest, and groups of people in between my feet on the bottom.

Future: I don't know what I future holds, but I have faith in God that something good will come.

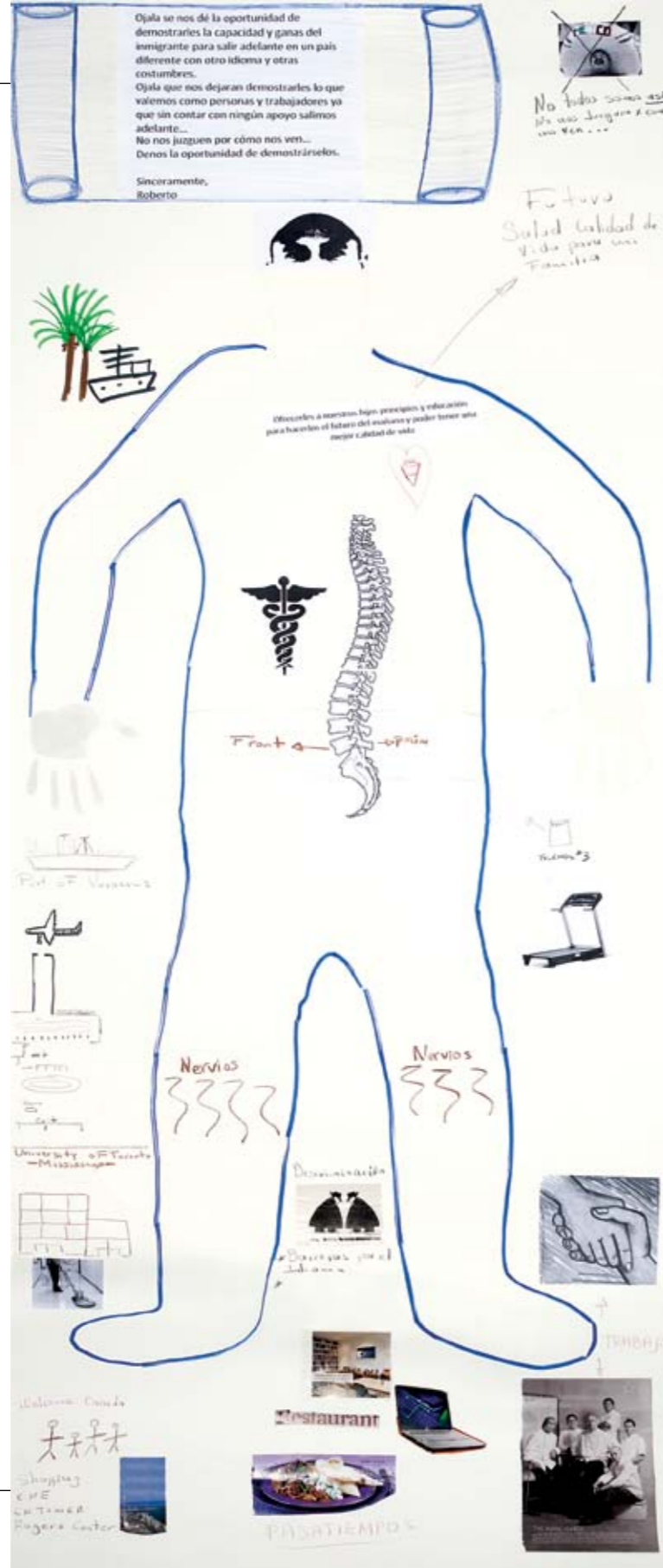
Message to others: My message, located on the top of my body map is for other undocumented workers in Canada. It reads: *"To be – or to choose to be "undocumented" in a country, is not easy. On the contrary, it is very difficult. There are times when you feel alone and you don't know where you are heading. I want to tell people, to make this sacrifice worth it. Continue to enjoy life without frustrations. Instead, be proud of your achievements and hard work!"*



Click the play button to listen to Renata's testimonio

Roberto

I'm Roberto, a cleaner and a father of two. I was a cargo manager for more than a decade until I was let go because of my age. It was very hard to find a job after that and it led to problems in my marriage. I got very depressed and I couldn't support my children, so I came to Canada to find work. I already had back problems so cleaning was better for me than construction. One of my first jobs was with a Latin American boss. I trusted him, but then he didn't pay me for 2 months of work. Now I work 3 jobs and I have 3 roommates living in my apartment to make extra money. I also share my job as a dishwasher sometimes so I don't lose it. Cleaning is harder than I thought. Men use heavy machines to buff floors and clean out large garbage bins. I feel really guilty for not being there to see my children grow up, so I work harder so they can come visit me here. They've been here 4 times already! I am the happiest man alive when they are here, but it last for only a little while. Some days I feel sad and cry for no reason and have no motivation to go to work.



Body posture: In my body map I appear standing face forward because I want to show everyone who I am – a man with no fear of hiding his identity.

Colours: I chose blue around my body to represent my straightforward personality and the time I spend trying to keep myself healthy. I also used the colour white on my hands to represent my job as a cleaner in Canada.

Migration journey: The pictures from top to bottom on the left side of my body map represent my migration journey in chronological order. The first picture of palm trees represents my hometown, and further down the left side, I drew a picture of a cargo ship because I was a cargo manager for over 10 years back home. After I lost my job, I started having problems with my wife and to make matters worse, I had a hard time finding work because of my age. That's when I decided to come to Canada. Back home, it's well known that you can get a job here without papers. But no one prepared me for the journey. The picture of the airport and the word "*inmigracion*" (immigration) represent the fear I faced when I landed at the airport and went through "*la aduana*" (customs). The wiggly lines on my knees and the words "*nervios*", represent how weak and nervous I felt at that time.

The next drawing of a University of Toronto building and a man buffing floors represents how I got a job in my first week here cleaning university buildings as a subcontractor. I worked full-time hours for two months and then my boss refused to pay me. He never returned my phone calls and I got desperate because I had no money for food and could only afford to rent a small room in a cold basement. After that bad experience, I learned not to trust people. Now I work as a cleaner in the evenings and as a dishwasher at a restaurant on the weekends. I face a lot of discrimination at my jobs for being an

immigrant and for being unable to speak English very well, but I try to ignore it. This is why I placed these barriers outside my body in between my legs, rather than inside, where it can affect my mental health.

Personal symbol and slogan: My personal symbol is found on the inside of my heart. The triangle shape represents a playground I hope to make for my children when I go back home so that they can run and do exercise. If I get the opportunity to build it, I will paint it red and white to represent Canada, a country that I will always keep in my heart.

With respect to my slogan, I don't really have one, but I have a goal written near my heart which represents what keeps me here. I believe it applies to all immigrants who have left their children behind. It reads, *"To offer our children an education and the principles to make them the future of tomorrow and to give them a better quality of life"*.

Marks on/under the skin: With the two jobs that I have right now, I work 10 hours or more a day with no days off. I've noticed that my stress levels are very bad, and the back pain I used to have before I came to Canada got worse here because of the factory jobs I did for several months before getting into cleaning work. The heavy lifting I do now as a cleaner only makes it worse, and that's why you can see me wearing a tight wrap around my lower back in my body map. I wear this and take Tylenol regularly to alleviate my pain so that I can work. I've seen several alternative medicine specialists, but nothing seems to work and I've spent a lot of money. For the meantime, I try to eat healthy and work out regularly, which is why I placed a picture of a treadmill on the right side and a picture of the medical symbol on the inside of my body.

Body scan and personal strength:
My strength comes from my heart, the or-

gan that provides me the willpower to do many things, with no shame. I'm a person who dares to show his face, because I have nothing to hide. I'm not doing anything wrong, just my job. *(Note to the reader: At time of the interview, Roberto provided a full colour picture of himself to be included on his body map to demonstrate he was not afraid of making his identity publicly known. For ethical reasons, the research team was unable to include the picture in its original format, and therefore only a partial, de-identified section of the photo appears on the body map.)*

Support structures: The drawing of a family and several tourist attractions in Toronto, located on the bottom left corner of my body map, represent the many times my children have come here to visit me. Saving the extra money for them to travel meant having to work overtime hours, but I don't regret it. Nothing can make me happier than being with my children. It is very difficult to be away from them, but I get pleasure from spoiling them when they come visit. Their happiness gives me the strength and motivation to work even harder.

The pictures in between my legs capture the things that keep me busy when I am not working. Through my dishwashing jobs at top restaurants, I have learned a lot about cooking, and enjoy doing this on my spare time. I also spend a lot of time keeping up to date with news from back home by reading online newspapers. This is why I included a picture of a laptop– it keeps me connected to the world I once belonged to.

Although I didn't draw my boss on my body map, the picture of two holding hands on the right side captures the important role she plays in my life here in Canada. She knows my status, she understands when I'm sick, and gives me support even with my language barrier. I have a special feeling of gratitude towards her. There is also a great sense of teamwork among coworkers at the

restaurant where I work, which is why I pictured a group of cooks on the bottom right corner.

Future: I'd like my children to study, to be healthy and to have a better quality of life. This is captured by the handwritten words connects to my heart with an arrow. I don't ask God for love or money for myself because I've already experienced these things. I just want him to give me health and the strength to continue living.

Message to others: I have several messages on my body map for different audiences. The message located on top of my head is for all Canadians, and reads: *"I hope we (immigrants) are given an opportunity to demonstrate to all of you the ability and the eagerness we have to get ahead in life, in a place different from our own, with a different language and customs. I wish you would let us prove our worth as individuals and as workers, who, without having received any support we have been able to succeed. Do not judge us for what we look like. Give us an opportunity to show you who we are."*

To future immigrants, I hope my story is useful for you and you don't suffer how I did.

Finally, to everyone looking at my body map, I'd like your help to avoid the stereotypes often made of migrant workers, like the picture of the man wearing a Mexican sombrero, located on the top right corner of my body map. The message below it reads, *"Not everyone is like this. Please don't judge us until you know who we are"*.



Click the play button to listen to Roberto's testimonio

Tania

My name is Tania and I came to Canada two years ago to get some money to be able study. I wanted to specialize in something beyond my university degree. My first jobs in Canada were horrible! I had a boss who was very rude and used to scream at me in front of customers. Another one refused to pay me for the hundred hours I worked! I used to be a very outgoing person, with a smile on my face all the time. But after being sexually harassed by two bosses and one co-worker, I became distrustful of people and now I'm very reserved. I am sure they took advantage of me because they knew I had no legal status. Now I work as a cleaner in a store from 2am to 10 am; it's a crazy schedule but it's a better job. When I am not working, I like spending time at home cooking with my roommate, reading or working on visual arts. I don't want to go back to my country, but I am not sure I want to stay here either.



Body posture: I decided to lie down on my back with my arms down and my hands wide open because this is a comfortable position for me.

Colours: I chose red for my hands, because the fury of the colour red captures the intensity of the manual labour I have done in Canada. My body outline is blue because this is my favourite colour. My personal slogan, located beside my face, is written in green, because this colour reminds me of hope.

Migration journey: To represent my migration journey, I preferred to search for pictures in magazines instead of drawing; I am not very good at drawing. To characterize my home country I placed several pictures inside my body, on the left. I included a picture of the countryside, several pictures of nature and a picture of a cow because these images remind me a lot of the region where I'm from. I also placed pictures of books on this side of my body because I used to have a lot of free time to read back home, something that I miss doing in Canada. I chose a picture of people playing volleyball because it is a very popular sport in my country. The dog represents a close friend that I left there.

To link the images of my home country to Canada, I put a door and a window in between the left side and the right side of my body. These images clearly capture my migration experience since coming to Canada was a chance for me to get ahead in life – a window of opportunity. Sometimes, though, I think

the real reason I came to Canada was because of my sexual orientation.

To represent Canada, I placed several pictures on the right side of my body. I included pictures of women from different races to depict Canada and Toronto's multiculturalism. These pictures represent other things to me as well. The woman with the red hair symbolizes the beauty of Canadian women and the picture of the elderly woman represents how I have worked with elderly people here. During my time here, I've also noticed that Canadian women seem to be stressed all the time and this is why I placed a picture of a woman who looks worried. I also placed a picture of a woman holding a cat because I was surprised by the number of cats there were in Canada. I also placed a lottery ticket to represent Canadian society as a whole. I think there are a lot of greedy people here who will do anything to make easy money. The vacuum represents my work as a cleaner and the bicycle represents how I get to work. The fries and dip represent my bad eating habits. In Canada, I drink a lot more wine than I did back home, so this is why I have included a picture of a wine bottle. The picture of someone cutting vegetables represents the cooking I do on my free time.

Personal symbol and slogan: My personal slogan appears on the right side, beside my face in green writing. It is a verse of a popular song in my country called "Emotions" and it says, "In faith I find optimism". My personal symbol is the long grey and red road

located on the bottom left corner of my body map to represent my complicated migration journey. I also placed a big heart there to symbolize my emotional struggles.

Marks on/under the skin: If you look closely at my legs, I included purple varicose veins to show the effect of the strenuous work I do on my body. The grey brick that appears over my shoulders also represents the stress and exhaustion I've had to deal with in Canada from work overload. Another mark on my body is the fat localized around my waist in orange. I included this to represent the weight I've gained in Canada. I also included a small orange spot on my spinal column to represent the constant back pain I deal with. The small exclamation sign and question mark above my head represents the poor mental health I feel some days.

Body scan and personal strength: The diamond located outside my body map, between the sun and the tree, represents my inner strength which helps me carry on with my duties and my life in Canada. I chose a diamond because it is a symbol of my faith. I also drew a person with light coming out of their heart, to symbolize God's strength found within everyone. This is where I get my own personal strength.

Support structures: Two very important people in my support structure are my mother and my close

friend. The large orange tree behind me, on the right side represents my mother always watching over me. The hand extending from the left side of my body map, represents my close friend.

Future: In a thought cloud over my head, I tried to draw Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream" to represent my fear of dying in a foreign place without any of my family close by. I represent the future with a person carrying a camera, beside the thought cloud on the left side. Finally, the large yellow and orange sun on the top left corner represents my hope for a brighter future, whatever that may be.

Message to others: I placed my message to other immigrants from my home country along the side of the tree. My message or recommendation to them is that they surround themselves with good people, that they keep a positive outlook and that they continue to believe in their choices. I also included a message for my friends and family back home located on the left side near my shoulder. My message to them is that I am okay here, that it was my choice to come to Canada, but that I wish they were here with me.



Click the play button to listen to Tania's testimonio

Valeria

I'm Valeria, a cook and a single mom. I have 2 children back home. I came here to make money to buy a home for us after I saw how much money I could save when I worked in the US. In the first 2 years, I worked 3 jobs, 7 days a week, and I slept 3 hours a night. I was tired all the time and when I was at work, I would even peel potatoes asleep! Now, the apartment is finally paid off and I have money to go back and get surgery for my varicose veins. My legs are very swollen because I'm the only cook for the lunch and dinner shifts. Kitchen work is really hard! You have to lift huge pans, chop meat and bones, and you do this all standing up! I believe God has given me the strength to do this hard work all these years. I wish someone would record a day in my life so that my children could see how much their school and our home have really cost me. Now, my only hope is that my children will forgive me for leaving them behind and that we can live happily together in our new home.



Body posture: I wanted to show myself in the position I fall asleep every night because sleeping was something I rarely did in Canada. For years I just slept a few hours per night because I had back-to-back jobs. It was so bad that I couldn't do any work sitting down because I would fall asleep even when people were talking to me. Looking at my body in this position, I see a peaceful, restful person, and wish I could have just a third of such peace. My body map represents a rested body and people who work as hard as I do, deserve to rest and feel in peace. If I had a visa, I would go home every year for two months and rest.

Colours: For my body outline, I first thought of brown because I believe it is the colour of my skin. But, a meaningful colour for me is red, like a ruby, which is my favourite stone and colour. I've painted my hands in blue because my hands are always working.

Migration journey: The pictures from left to right around my legs represent my migration journey. I entered Canada with a tourist visa. When immigration officers asked me about the reason for my visit, I told them I was attending an orchid fair. I came to Canada in 'search of an orchid' – a better future for my family. I was a salesperson back home, when I planned my trip to Canada, and 48 hours after I arrived, I became a cleaner. After working several cleaning jobs simultaneously, I eventually

got a job as cook for six days a week and kept only one of my cleaning jobs. My savings from all this work allowed me to buy an apartment for me and my children back home. At the beginning and the end of my migration journey is my family; family is where everything starts.

Personal symbol and slogan: The orchid that appears on top of my head is my migration symbol because it represents my 'reason' for coming to Canada and the opportunity to stay. An orchid blooms every year and since I came to Canada my life has changed. My slogan is 'God never abandons you'. I like the lyrics of a song called 'Footprints In the Sand'; it says that in times of great despair people are under the impression God has abandoned them, because when they look at the footprints in the sand they only see the prints of a single individual, they feel alone, but God replies that in those difficult moments it was God who was carrying her/him, and this is why there is only one set of footprints. I kept listening to this music to keep moving forward. I've placed the title of the music in my heart and the lyrics at my feet.

Marks on/under the skin: The red dots around my left leg represent the edema that happens six days a week when I work as a cook, standing for most of the workday. On my forearms, I have 13 scars of burns that I have gotten with the oven and stove. The picture on the left, close

to my arm, represents me working 7 days a week and sleeping an average of 3 hours per night for over 2 years. I have also chosen to mark my joints because I am no longer able to fully extend or close them because of the very heavy and demanding nature of my work; now I can't peel potatoes or garlic anymore. When I was doing the hand painting exercise for my body map, I wasn't able to fully extend my fingers and that's why there are missing parts on my handprint. The picture of people fighting on the left represents the difficult work relations I have with my co-workers. For instance, I always end up having extra duties and more responsibilities at work because the people, who are hired to work as my assistants, often have never worked in a kitchen before.

Body scan and personal strength: I believe my strength comes from my brain. Sometimes I think that all I've done, all I've achieved, was done by God- not by me, but by God. This is why I pictured God as a sun on the top left corner of my body map. I think no one has as much strength to do all that I've done in this country.

Support structures: I think my boss has been the person who has helped me the most in Canada. The orange hand on the right side, pushing me up to overcome hurdles, represents my boss.

Future: I know my future will be

all happiness. The big smiles on the right corner symbolize my happiness and victory; happiness because my family will be finally together. The future rests close to my hands because it will become true in a few months when I return to my country and reunite with my two children. Right now my children are upset because I left them behind, but I believe that one day they will understand, that all the sacrifices I made, were for a good cause.

Overall, I think my body map could have been done better, but because I was sleep deprived for so many years, my brain is not the same anymore; it is slow and I struggle to do activities in a timely manner. I think people will look at this body map and say: "This woman has had no life, she only worked non-stop".

Message to others: When I came to Canada, I did not get information about my immigration status and became undocumented as a consequence. This is why my message, found on the top right, is for other immigrants. It says, "Immigrants should search for information when they arrive. I did it wrong due to a lack of information".



Click the play button to listen to Valeria's testimonio

Victoria

I am Victoria. I have a business degree and I came here to study English two years ago. I am pretty fluent now. When I was in school I worked as a landscaper because it paid well and I needed to cover my living expenses. The bad thing was that I worked long hours outside in the summer heat and almost all of my co-workers were men. They always went for beers after work and they made very sexist comments. I've also worked at a bar and I've participated in clinical trials to get extra money. After my student visa expired, I decided to stay to save money for grad school, but then I got pregnant. His family thinks I got pregnant for papers and we're no longer together. I moved out of the house I lived in because it wasn't a good environment to raise a baby. My roommates drank, smoked and partied all the time. Now I rent my own apartment, and I do bookkeeping for a living. I am not too worried about being caught, but I am scared that my baby's father will use my status against me to take my baby away.



Body posture: I am lying in a position that shows I'm pregnant because this has been the most important thing that has happened in my life, and one of the most difficult things I've had to face in Canada.

Colours: I used green for my hands to represent the work I did as a landscaper, and red for my body outline to represent a well-balanced, healthy body.

Migration journey: To represent my life back home I included a picture of a tennis racket on the right side to capture how I played several sports back home and was always active. When I completed my studies, I did administrative work for several big companies, and this is represented by the picture of a black laptop, an outdoor pool and a picture of brownies found on the right. I came to Canada because I wanted to improve my English. I had been in the United States several years before, and I really liked the experience, but I barely had a chance to practise my English there because I had to work. The picture of the American flag and vegetables on the right side captures my work experience in the U.S., since I worked at a food market. That was my first time away from home, and I learned how to live on my own.

After living in the U.S., I went back home and decided to save money so I could come to Canada and focus on only learning English, not work. Then after several months, I enrolled in a private English course and came to Canada with several thousand dollars in savings –but it didn't last long. I soon found myself desperately looking for work in order to pay for rent and have some emergency savings. I worked several part-time jobs when I got here, and did a range of income generating activities on the side. The pictures on the left side of my body map, behind my

back represent the range of jobs I've done. I placed them here because they've mostly been manual labour jobs and a person's back typically symbolizes hard labour. In between working and having finished my English course, my visa expired. I stayed because I wanted to save more money and see if I could apply for school here. I also met my baby's father during this time.

I worked for the longest amount of time in landscaping. I put two gardening shovels near my hand, on the top, to represent this work experience. Unlike the administrative work I did back home, I only needed physical strength to do this kind of work. This why I put one of the shovels in my hand and drew work boots on my feet. Landscaping was very exhausting work, not just because of the long work days in the summer heat, but also because there weren't many females and my male coworkers were very sexist. The beer bottle and the female symbol enclosed in the larger male symbol to the left represent how I worked in a male dominated environment. Now, I do bookkeeping for several small businesses because I am pregnant and can't risk doing physical jobs.

Personal symbol and slogan: My personal symbol is found above my head and represents my goals in life. The book represents education, the hard hat represents work, and the small squares below show how these are the building blocks for a rich and prosperous life depicted by the dollar sign at the end. I drew these images above my head because this is my life philosophy and it guides everything I do. The purple arrow connecting this to the images representing my work back home on the right side, symbolize how following this life philosophy is difficult. Migrating to Canada was a step towards achieving my goals, but I fell out of status, and now, I lack many opportunities.

My slogan is found in a thought cloud above my head which reads, *"If life knocks you down, it is up to you to get up or stay down"*. This slogan depicts my resilience to the challenges I've faced in life, especially when I migrated here. I had to constantly remind myself to keep going in order to fight the frustration of being unable to get a professional job and not make that much money.

Marks on/under the skin: Most of the marks on my body represent strains caused by the work I did as a landscaper. I often spent whole days bent over gardening or lifting heavy equipment which caused an enormous stress on my arms and legs. This is depicted by the double orange lines on my arms and legs and the orange area in my lower back. After some time, these areas of my body became very muscular – landscaping was more intense than working out. Being outdoors and using harsh gardening chemicals also gave me serious allergic and respiratory reactions, which I represented on my body map by the red double line around my nose. With respect to my pregnancy, I feel very vulnerable, emotionally speaking. Everything affects me negatively and this is why I drew a heart inside my body and an arrow connecting it to my developing baby.

Body scan and personal strength: My strength lies in my will to make things happen. It's the way I think –a philosophy, and you can see it reflected in my slogan and in my personal symbol.

Support structures: Since coming to Canada, I've grown spiritually and this helps me reflect on my goals and how I am towards others. My family and my baby are the most important things in my life right now. In addition to my family's emotional support, they have

also been a big source of material support for me during my pregnancy. I don't have coverage here because of my status, and having a baby is very expensive. I pay out-of-pocket each time I see a specialist, and I've had to purchase several items like a crib and a carriage to prepare for the arrival of my baby. My family has sent me some money to cover these costs. My baby's father is involved as well, but we are no longer together and this has been very stressful for me.

Future: I've represented my future near my feet with several pictures. The picture of a mother, father and a baby represents me raising my child and possibly having more children and getting married. The image which says "It's All About U" as well as the image of graduates represents me eventually getting higher education. Finally, the man in the business suit represents me becoming successful in my career.

Message to others: My message is to all those looking at my body map and to other immigrants. It is found near my baby on the right side and reads, *"You should always have a purpose in life, it doesn't matter the pauses you have make"*. I placed my message near my growing baby because even though I am pregnant, I have many goals I want to accomplish in life. For now, I've put these dreams on pause, in order to concentrate on giving my child everything it needs.






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Additional information on this and
related projects can be obtained at
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