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Project: COVID-19 Among Meatpacking Workers: Documenting Migration Status and Employment Conditions in Southern Alberta

Project goals:

Canada's largest outbreak of COVID-19 among meatpackers in Southern Alberta reflects deep inequities along the fault lines of immigration status and racialization in an industry deemed essential by government. While meatpacking has long been identified as a difficult and dangerous industry, COVID-19 has brought new challenges vis-à-vis the health and safety of vulnerable workers to the forefront of public conversation.

This project seeks to unpack the links between the migration status of meatpackers and their experience of COVID-19. Reports in the media and by community advocates, including our partner organization, [ActionDignity](#), indicate that the workforce is composed of almost entirely of migrant and immigrant workers: both Temporary Foreign Workers from the Philippines and resettled refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan; yet exact information about the current legal status of workers is unknown.

Our project aims to document exactly who works at these plants, under what conditions, and with what impacts at the Cargill plant in High River and JBS Foods in Brooks, Alberta. As of June 8th, 2020, more than 1500 cases tied to Cargill have been identified, and another 900 linked to JBS Foods. Five people have died in connection to these outbreaks.

The partner for this research is ActionDignity, a community-based organization representing migrant and immigrant communities in Alberta. Its staff have been on the frontline of supporting workers in the meatpacking industry since the beginning of the outbreak.

This project has three objectives:

1. To produce new knowledge about the intersection of immigration and temporary migration policies and the health and safety of immigrant and migrant 'essential' workers.
2. To identify the specific manifestations and impact of COVID-19 on immigrant and migrant workers in the meatpacking industry in Southern Alberta.
3. To identify possible strategies, opportunities and challenges related to improving the health context of workers in meatpacking.

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