

Citation: Vosko, Leah F, Eric Tucker & Rebecca Casey, “Enforcing Employment Standards for Temporary Migrant Agricultural Workers in Ontario, Canada: Exposing Underexplored Layers of Vulnerability” (2019) 35:2 Intl J Comp Lab L & Ind Rel 227

Abstract: Over 50,000 migrant agricultural workers are employed in Canada each year, almost half of whom are destined for the Province of Ontario. These workers are among the most vulnerable in the country and therefore most in need of labour and employment law protection. One important source of employment rights in Ontario is the Employment Standards Act (ESA), which establishes basic minimum entitlements in areas such as wages, working time, and vacations and leaves. Drawing on an analysis of the Ontario Ministry of Labour’s (MOL’s) Employment Standards Information System (ESIS), a previously untapped administrative data source containing information on all of Ontario’s employment standards (ES) enforcement activities and their outcomes, this article investigates the enforcement of ES among migrant agricultural workers. After offering a few methodological caveats, the analysis unfolds in three parts beginning, in Part I, by setting the stage with a discussion of the layers of vulnerability that combine to construct migrant agricultural workers as an extreme case. Against this backdrop, Part II describes agricultural workers’ limited entitlements under the ESA and the Act’s complaint-based enforcement regime, which produces, for workers in general, a gap between rights on the books and in practice. Part III then looks more specifically at ES enforcement among agricultural workers, focusing, where possible, on the situation of those that are migrants and illustrating how a complaint-based enforcement regime and an under resourced and poorly targeted inspectorate is ill-suited to the realization of rights among this group.