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NEWS

Federal backlog leaves foreign worker jobless after fire



Andres Mendieta, the kitchen manager at Joey's Pizza and Pasta, said he has been unable to look for another job since the restaurant burned down on April 7 because he came to New Brunswick on a closed visa, as well as federal backlogs affecting his permanent residency application.

Photo: Submitted

When Andres Mendieta woke up for work at Joey's Pizza and Pasta on April 7, he did not know that by the end of the day he would be left without a place to work.

The restaurant was destroyed by fire earlier this month, leaving the employees without a livelihood. Mendieta, who is a foreign worker from Ecuador who came to Sackville four years ago, said unlike his co-workers, he is not allowed to apply for another job because he came to New Brunswick on a closed visa specially for Joey's Pizza, meaning he is unable to legally work anywhere else in Canada.

Mendieta, who worked as the kitchen manager at Joey's, is in the process of getting his permanent residency status. Until it's approved, if he applies for another job and is hired he would have to go through the lengthy process of getting a temporary work visa.

Until then, he is in limbo and is not sure when he will receive word on how long he will have to wait. He had applied for his permanent residency about a year and a half ago.

"It's a very, very complicated situation," he said. "I cannot go to work."

Other staff members at Joey's are eligible for employment insurance, but Mendieta said he does not know if he qualifies. He noted other restaurants in the Sackville area have offered work to Joey's employees, but he is unable to accept it.

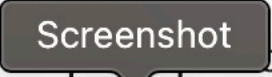
People have suggested he start a GoFundMe, but Mendieta said he is not used to asking for help.

Mendieta said he understands the process to become a permanent resident can be long, and he wonders if his case will face further delays because of the ongoing federal workers strike, which is causing slowdowns for several federal departments.

"The time for me waiting is just huge," he said.

He lives in Sackville with his wife, but he noted one income is not enough to keep up with their expenses.

So far he has reached out to MP Dominic LeBlanc's office and Memramcook-Tantramar MLA Megan Mitton's office for guidance. LeBlanc's office did not respond to a request for comment by press time.

Mitton said her office is working on Mendieta's case. She noted immigration is federal jurisdiction, so the MP would have more experience in handling those cases, but if someone in a similar situation to Mendieta contacts her office, her staff will try to  on navigate government programs

and websites and assist in finding resources.

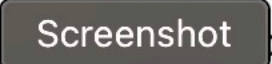
"What I have seen is that things move so slowly through IRCC, and it's really frustrating especially when there are many cases when there's urgency, and it doesn't seem to elicit an urgent response," she said.

The Madhu Verma Migrant Justice Centre is one entity that works directly with foreign workers, Mitton pointed out.

The Times & Transcript has asked Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada for comment, but was told there may be delays in receiving a response because of ongoing labour actions and did not receive answers to questions by press time.

According to the IRCC website, if a person has submitted an application to the department there will be "limited capacity" during the labour disruption, so delays in processing should be expected.

Temporary residents in Canada whose status will soon expire can apply for an extension to maintain their temporary resident status. Applications for an extension must be submitted before the expiry date of their current status and must be complete, including biometrics, fees and other requirements, the website stated.

When asked if Mitton has seen delays in helping constituents when dealing with federal departments  our actions started, the MLA said the

most common problem is people who have planned travel and have applied for passports have seen delays in getting their applications processed.

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