



## **Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

### **Study: Impacts of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program on the Labour Market**

**Written submission from World Education Services**

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#### **Rethinking the Temporary Foreign Worker Program Within Canada's Immigration System**

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and its precursors were designed to help Canadian employers fill temporary job vacancies when qualified Canadians and permanent residents were unavailable. For decades, temporary foreign workers have been critical contributors in sectors such as agriculture, food service, fishing, and transportation, among others. The transformative role they have played in essential industries was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is challenging to assess the impact of the TFWP in isolation from a broader trend towards greater reliance on temporary migration. Since 2006, the number of temporary permits issued annually has exceeded the number of new permanent residents each year. In 2025, there were nearly 3 million non-permanent residents in Canada. Of those, only about 255,000 held a work permit through the TFWP.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, employer demand for the TFWP has increased substantially. Between 2015 and 2024, the number of permits issued under the TFWP nearly tripled.<sup>2</sup> More recently, caps and other restrictions have somewhat reshaped which employers have access to the TFWP.

One explanation for the growth in the TFWP is the persistent mismatch between the occupations and skill levels prioritized in federal immigration and those most in demand in the labour market. Until the introduction of category-based selection, federal economic immigration has largely prioritized applicants who have advanced education, proficiency in an official language, and work experience. While there is a

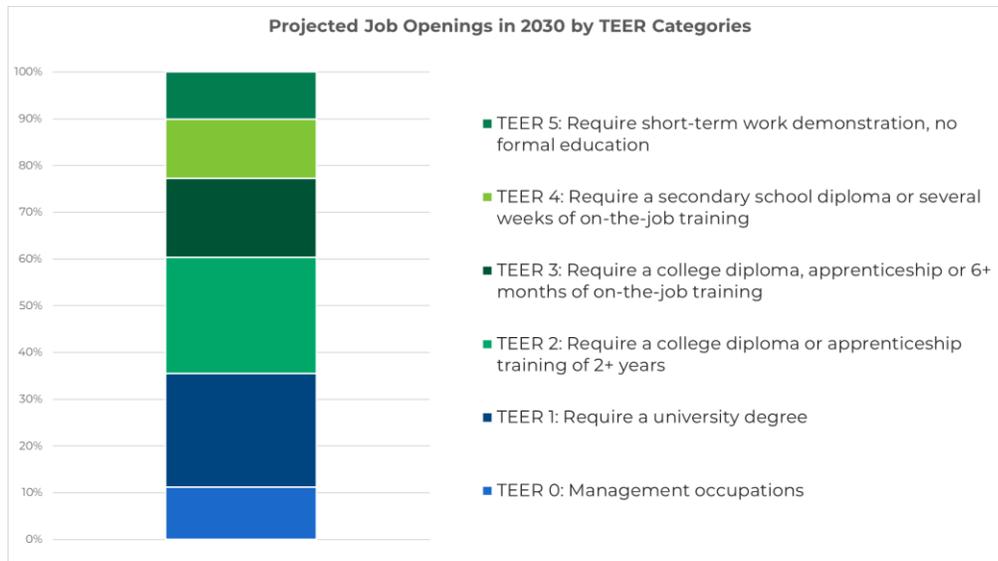
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<sup>1</sup> ESDC. 2025. [Question Period Note: Temporary Foreign Worker Program Wage Requirements](#).

<sup>2</sup> IRCC. 2025. [Temporary Foreign Worker Program work permit holders by province/territory of intended destination, intended occupation \(4-digit NOC 2011\) and year in which permit\(s\) became effective](#).



clear need for and benefit to selecting immigrants with high human capital, the Canadian labour market requires an influx of workers across the skill spectrum.<sup>3</sup>



Source: [ESDC \(COPS 2024 Projections\)](#) and [Statistics Canada \(Labour Force Survey\)](#)

A mismatch between the skill level needed in the labour market and the skill level required for immigration creates a strain on employers, contributes to immigrant underemployment,<sup>4</sup> and inflates the demand for temporary immigration.

Yet there are risks in using temporary migration to resolve labour market gaps not addressed by permanent immigration. The TFWP has been criticized because of concerns about its effectiveness and fairness, as well as its impact on the economy. These concerns reflect a set of interconnected challenges related to program design, governance, and outcomes, including the following:

### **Misalignment: Short-Term Solution for Long-Term Needs**

- The TFWP has increasingly become a long-term solution to structural labour shortages.
- Addressing structural labour market shortages through temporary immigration creates instability and turnover that employers then have to deal with, and it challenges longer-term workforce planning.
- Overreliance on the TFWP shapes employment and recruitment strategies and shields employers from pressure to invest in wages, productivity, and better working conditions.

<sup>3</sup> Richardson, Benjamin and Cynthia Leach. 2024. [A Growing Problem: How to align Canada's immigration with the future economy](#). RBC Thought Leadership.

<sup>4</sup> Zhang, Tingting et al. 2023. [Does Canada's Express Entry System Meet the Challenges of the Labor Market?](#) *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*. 21(1).



## **Governance: Oversight, Compliance, and Administrative Barriers**

- Complex requirements, such as recruitment and advertising obligations associated with Labour Market Impact Assessments (LMIA), may be onerous, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Conversely, some employers and recruiters have treated LMIA rules as procedural formalities rather than substantive requirements that they must meet.
- Oversight mechanisms have not sufficiently safeguarded against LMIA fraud and unsafe working conditions.<sup>5</sup>

## **Vulnerability: Unequal Access to Benefits**

- Temporary workers lack the stability and social safety net afforded to other workers, hampering integration. This leaves temporary workers vulnerable to exploitative conditions, discrimination, and threats of deportation.<sup>6</sup>
- Many workers contribute to Canada's economy and social development for extended periods but are unlikely to be eligible for permanent residence, an experience termed "permanent temporariness."<sup>7</sup>

These challenges have consequences for workers, employers, communities, and governments alike.

## **Linking the TFWP to Broader Immigration Objectives**

As the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) committee conducts this study, WES encourages the HUMA committee to assess not only how effectively the TFWP functions, but how well it aligns with Canada's broader immigration and economic objectives.

## **A Coherent, Whole-of-Government Approach**

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<sup>5</sup> Obokata, Tomoya. 2024. [Visit to Canada: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Including Its Causes and Consequences. A/HRC/57/46/Add.1.](#) United Nations Human Rights Council.; Carbert, Michelle. 2023. "[Immigration Rule Changes Needed to Stop 'Jobs for Sale' Scam, Experts Say.](#)" *Globe and Mail*.

<sup>6</sup> Nakache, Delphine and Kinoshita, Paula J. 2010. [The Canadian Temporary Foreign Worker Program: Do Short-Term Economic Needs Prevail Over Human Rights Concerns?](#) IRPP Study No. 5.; Basok, Tanya and George, Glynis. 2020. "[We are part of this place, but I do not think I belong.](#)" *Temporariness, Social Inclusion and Belonging among Migrant Farmworkers in Southwestern Ontario. International Migration.* 59(5); Amnesty International. 2025. ['Canada has destroyed me': Labour exploitation of migrant workers in Canada.](#)

<sup>7</sup> Hennebry, Jenna. 2012. [Permanently Temporary? Agricultural Migrant Workers and Their Integration in Canada.](#) IRPP Study 26.



Immigration has been a key driver of economic prosperity and social development. To continue serving Canada's interests effectively, the country needs a coherent, long-term framework that connects immigration policy with economic growth, demographic goals, and social integration, and that clarifies how different immigration streams contribute to shared national objectives.<sup>8</sup>

Within this context, decisions about the scope and design of the TFWP must be guided not only by the needs of employers, but by the long-term best interests of Canada, which depend on economic growth, social integration, and newcomer well-being. An approach grounded in principles of fairness, inclusion, and respect for worker rights and dignity will maximize the potential, credibility, and effectiveness of the TFWP and align it more closely with the broader immigration system.

Advancing this vision requires a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach, characterized by unprecedented coordination within and beyond government to establish key economic objectives, and the role and limits of immigration—including temporary immigration—in meeting those objectives. These priorities should, in turn, inform immigration levels planning and program criteria across the TFWP and other immigration programs.

## Moving Away from Reliance on Temporary Immigration

Aligning the TFWP with the objectives of the immigration system means looking beyond questions about number of permits, or distinct rules for specific sectors or regions to consider more broadly: What other ways can government support industries that have structural labour shortages? In what circumstances should these policy mechanisms be applied instead of or in tandem with temporary migration?

Addressing labour shortages requires a multi-pronged approach, rather than reliance on temporary migration. A range of complementary policy tools, including skills training and upskilling programs, productivity investments, and improvements in wages and working conditions, all play an essential role in developing a sustainable, resilient workforce. Immigration can contribute, but the strongest lever is permanent immigration across a wide range of occupations, as well as immigrant professionals' access to faster licensure processes.

Within a coherent immigration framework, clear and transparent criteria are therefore needed to distinguish when the TFWP represents an appropriate policy response and when permanent immigration pathways and complementary policy tools would better serve Canada's long-term interests.

## Recommendations

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<sup>8</sup> World Education Services. 2025. [Reimagining Canada's Immigration System: Insights from a WES National Roundtable Series](#).



**Embed decisions about the TFWP within a renewed vision for immigration in Canada that is aligned with long-term economic growth and population sustainability, that is based on articulated principles and measurable outcomes, and that adopts a whole-of-government approach.**

- Establish a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to objective-setting and planning that aligns immigration levels and eligibility rules with long-term population growth, labour market needs, infrastructure priorities, and regional development goals. This means deepening collaboration between Employment and Social Development Canada and other relevant departments, such as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, as well as collaboration with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments.
- Set clear objectives and outcome measures for the immigration strategy to track progress, ensure accountability, and guide adjustments over time.
- Establish an independent national advisory council on immigration and economic coordination, with representation from labour, business, and civil society, to ensure transparent, cross-sector input into immigration and TFWP planning.
- Support the efforts of provinces and territories to remove barriers to credential recognition in regulated professions.

**Re-establish permanent residence as the foundation of economic immigration and, as an interim measure, create clear, predictable pathways from temporary to permanent status for qualified temporary residents already in Canada.**

- Prioritize permanent immigration as the primary mechanism for meeting structural, long-term labour market needs, rather than continued reliance on temporary permits.
- Develop permanent immigration programs that reflect long-term labour market needs across the occupational and skill spectrum.
- Create a clear federal pathway to permanent residence for qualified temporary foreign workers already in Canada. This immigration program should remain available until the population of temporary residents consists only of migrants filling temporary vacancies.

**Strengthen TFWP integrity and worker protection.**

- Determine and publish criteria that distinguish short-term labour gaps from structural workforce needs that require permanent solutions. Limit the TFWP to genuinely temporary and time-limited labour shortages based on rigorous assessment rather than employer preference.
- End the practice of employer-tied work permits.



- Work with provinces and territories to ensure access to essential services and supports and to strengthen the enforcement of employment rights and workplace standards.
- Devise a phased approach that gradually ends the use of the TFWP to meet both seasonal job vacancies and structural labour market gaps.
- Strengthen labour market testing and compliance mechanisms, including enhanced verification of recruitment efforts, increased monitoring and enforcement of TFWP rules and worker rights, and robust accountability across all program stages.
- Identify complementary policy tools that can support industries that have met seasonal or structural labour market needs through use of the TFWP. Examples include skills training and upskilling programs, productivity investments, wage and working condition improvements, and supports for seasonal and migrant workers.

**About WES:** World Education Services is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students. Since 2013, WES has been a designated provider of Educational Credential Assessments (ECAs) for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). For over 50 years, WES has set the standard for international academic credential evaluation, supporting millions of people as they seek to achieve their academic and professional goals. Through decades of experience as a leader in global education, WES has developed a wide range of tools to pursue social impact at scale. From evaluating academic credentials to shaping policy, designing programs, and providing philanthropic funding, we partner with a diverse set of organizations, leaders, and networks to uplift individuals and drive systems change. Together with its partners, WES enables people to learn, work, and thrive in new places.