

# Issue Brief

## Federal Temporary Foreign Worker Program



### Overview

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program was designed to fill short-term labour needs for skilled workers, seasonal agricultural workers and live-in caregivers. With the well documented skilled labour shortage in Alberta, the TFW Program was consistently revised to allow for the recruitment of greater numbers and classifications of skilled workers. Recent changes including increased accountability, processes and application fees were designed to limit alleged abuses, and to forestall negative public opinion. The changes will negatively impact rule-following construction employers to the potential detriment of the Alberta economy.

### Merit Supports

- Increased accountability to ensure the program is targeting high demand worker populations
- Better labour market data to better prepare, analyze and address labour needs from a regional perspective
- Increased permanent immigration for skilled labour
- Increased federal participation and collaboration to address inter-provincial labour mobility barriers
- An overhaul of the Employment Insurance benefit system to encourage labour mobility between jurisdictions with high and low unemployment

### Merit Opposes

- An overhaul of the program to address a relatively small abuse of TFWs.
- The imposition of onerous costs without direct benefit for employers of TFWs in the construction industry

## Background

Shortages of skilled workers in Alberta are well-known and well-documented. The TFW Program has been an important part of the solution. It is in the best economic interests of all of Canada that the Alberta construction industry continues to have access to a skilled labour pool.

The federal government has overhauled the TFW Program arbitrarily, apparently based on anecdotal information, without a solid backing of good data. The decisions have been made by using national data to explain regional problems.

While the federal government has messaged that the changes to the TFW Program were not politically motivated, the general consensus in Alberta is that the broad changes to the program are the result of a distortion of information from cases that were made public on low-wage program abuses.

The federal government has added an overly imposing administrative component to the TFW Program. In order to track the information on Canadians who have applied, interviewed and not hired, contractors will need to add additional administrative functions.

The criteria where Canadian cannot be laid off or have their hours reduced at a worksite that employs TFWs is problematic. Due to the seasonal and cyclical nature of the construction industry, it is unrealistic to expect the same continuity of work found in other industries.

Contractors in the construction industry have been making concerted efforts to hire Canadian workers, including significant advertising, increased wages, training and recruitment efforts. A shortage of skilled trades remains despite these efforts.