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Leap in temporary foreign workers will hurt Canada long-term, critics say



Temporary migrants now outnumber permanent immigrants – and lack of ties to this country could cause social unrest

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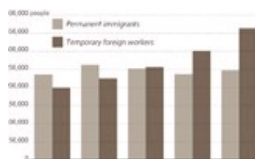
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Joe Friesen Demographics Reporter
From Friday's Globe and Mail (Includes Correction)
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Three years ago Canada passed a significant milestone when, for the first time, it accepted more temporary foreign migrants than permanent residents.

It marked a major shift in policy for a country that historically was built through permanent immigration, and one that could have long-term consequences for Canadian society.



A new study from the Institute for Research on Public Policy suggests that the rapid growth of the temporary foreign worker program could undermine the model of integration that has so far made Canada's consensus on expanded immigration the exception among Western nations.

Since 2002, the number of temporary foreign workers in Canada has nearly doubled. The program is in part a response to an aging population, but increasingly workers are sought for the unpalatable or poorly paid jobs Canadians simply refuse to take on.

The study's co-author, University of Ottawa professor Delphine Nakache, says although the program may solve short-term labour shortages, it may also be short-sighted.

"We were traditionally a country of permanent immigration," Prof. Nakache said. "Now the landscape is changing ... When people spend years in the country we can't expect them to leave once we don't need them any more."

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“Canada is a country built by immigrants, not by migrant workers.”

— Olivia Chow

The program’s growth, from about 100,000 temporary foreign workers present in Canada in December, 2002, to more than 250,000 in December, 2008, has created a kind of permanently temporary work force, Prof. Nakache said. The situation is somewhat reminiscent of European guest-worker programs, which spawned years of social unrest in countries such as Germany, she said.

“Being a temporary foreign worker gives you less legal status than a permanent resident,” she said.

“You can’t benefit from training or language services. You cannot benefit from all settlement services ... If you’re not happy at a job or in the hands of an abusive employer you may well find it harder to move jobs.”

Immigration Minister Jason Kenney said comparisons to Germany are alarmist and have no relevance to the Canadian experience.

“Here’s the truth. Those who want to shut down this program, essentially the labour unions and those who are in their employ, they have to tell the orchard farmer in the Okanagan that his business will go under because no one will help with the harvest,” Mr. Kenney said. “The critics of this don’t even try to balance their critique with the very real and urgent labour shortages that are being faced by many businesses. They disingenuously dodge this issue by suggesting the employees are being underpaid or exploited.”

NDP immigration critic Olivia Chow described the increase in temporary foreign workers as a terrible policy that breaks with Canadian tradition. It’s bad for the economy, because it depresses wages and is a disincentive to invest in potentially more expensive Canadian workers, and bad for society, she said.

“Canada is a country built by immigrants, not by migrant workers,” she said. “Migrant workers have no capacity to put down roots in their community. Most can’t bring their families and build neighbourhoods and communities. Because their status is precarious they’re open to abuse.”

New statistics released by Mr. Kenney’s department Thursday show that the number of temporary foreign workers admitted in 2009 was 178,640, well below the number accepted the year before. He said the top complaint he receives from employers is that it has become more difficult to take advantage of the program since regulations, such as requiring the job be advertised to all Canadians, were tightened during the recession.

Although the program was initially created to help address the need for highly skilled workers, the majority of successful applicants now work in low-skilled jobs. Nearly half go to Alberta and B.C., many of them to work as meatpackers, seasonal agricultural labourers, construction workers or caregivers. They can apply to become permanent residents either through the provincial nominee program, or in the case of more skilled workers through the Canadian experience class.

The government has promised regulatory changes to limit temporary foreign workers to four years in Canada, but they have yet to be enacted. At the moment permits can be extended indefinitely.

Editor’s Note: An earlier version of this article misstated the number of temporary foreign workers in Canada by including the number of temporary foreign students, which are classified separately. This version has been corrected.

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Total Serenity

5/15/2010 2:26:04 AM

@northernboy 20 5/14/2010 3:46:16 PM

You are obviously young. Just wait until you have been in the workforce for a couple decades and you have been repeatedly ripped off by CEOs would rather take \$4,000 or \$5,000 dollars off your pay and the pay of your fellow workers in order to pocket it because they think it looks better in their pocket than it does yours.

There is no loyalty when there are dollars on the line. Once you get too expensive, even though you have worked to earn your place, there will always be another graduate student who will work for cheaper because they are naive, desperate and don't know any better.

There are very few 'loyal' business owners and CEOs. You are a number and a resource to most of them.

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Nacken

5/14/2010 10:13:53 PM

We have enough problems with immigrants, at least with foreign temporary workers we can get rid of them if necessary or keep them if they are worth it. Chow's remark that immigration is traditional has no relevance and is an emotional appeal, not a logical argument. Traditionally we didn't allow Chinese into the country. Traditionally she wouldn't be a citizen. Having temporary immigrants allows for more flexibility. Forcing the country to take in people to serve temporary needs is inefficient and foolish in these times.

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GeorgeBrown IIII

5/14/2010 9:53:04 PM

Mr Mugabe your twisted logic certainly suits your name.

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The Caring Jailer

5/14/2010 8:19:36 PM

these temp workers can apply for permanent residency after being in Canada for awhile. What is Chow proposing: that we give anyone who sets foot on Canadian soil permanent residency/citizenship the moment they land in Canada? Ridiculous.

for the record I'm a guest worker in a foreign country right now, been here five years so far. They pay me a salary, treat me well enough and that's it. I won't be protesting or hoping that they change their immigration policies simply because a bunch of loud mouthed socialist activists think it's a good idea.

Finally, if unemployment in Canada is high, and Canadians on welfare or unemployment benefits are capable of doing these jobs, but WON'T do them, then cut their benefits off. Immediately. Welfare in Canada is supposed to be a form of bridge financial assistance between jobs.

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M Mugabe

5/14/2010 7:33:56 PM

Both Professor Delphine Nakache and Olivia Chow are blithering idiots. Just because it was, does not mean it can always be. Infinite growth in a finite world is insane.

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