

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities: Impacts of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program on the Labour Market

The Canadian Employee Relocation Council (CERC) welcomes this opportunity to provide our comments to The House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities as it studies the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), including its impacts on the labour market.

The focus of our submission will be on the High-Wage Stream and its role in enabling employers to access highly skilled and specialized talent. In an increasingly competitive global economy, access to international expertise is essential to Canada's productivity, innovation, and long-term economic growth.

When administered with appropriate safeguards and compliance requirements the TFWP, and in particular the High-Wage Stream, remains a necessary and effective policy tool.

Public discussion of the TFWP often focuses on lower-wage or seasonal work, but this does not reflect the growing reliance of Canadian employers on the program to fill high-skill, high-wage in demand occupations. Many employers face persistent shortages in occupations requiring advanced education, professional credentials, or specialized experience - gaps that cannot be addressed quickly or sufficiently through domestic labour market alone.

Demand for Highly Skilled International Talent

Canada's labour market is increasingly experiencing structural pressures driven by demographic change, technological advancement, and increasing demand for specialized skills. An aging workforce and rapid growth in knowledge-intensive sectors have contributed to sustained shortages of highly skilled workers.

Survey data from our member organizations underscores this challenge. Over 70% of respondents indicated that increased access to international talent and immigration will be required to meet future business needs. Many organizations reported using the TFWP, and more specifically the High-Wage Stream, to recruit specialized talent that is in limited supply in the current Canadian labour market.

These occupations span a wide range of highly specialized roles, including advanced manufacturing specialists, senior economists, skilled trade professionals, executive-level roles, Chartered Professional Accountants (CPAs), audit and management consulting professionals,

climate scientists, engineers, technicians, and other specialized experts. These roles are often central to innovation, regulatory compliance, and strategic growth. Prolonged vacancies in these sectors can delay investment, constrain growth, and reduce Canada's global competitiveness.

For employers, hiring through the High-Wage stream of the TFWP is complex. The process entails significant financial costs and ongoing compliance obligations, in addition to the risk that approvals may be delayed or denied. As a result, international recruitment is almost always pursued as a last resort after extensive recruitment efforts have failed. This emphasizes that reliance on the High-Wage Stream is driven by genuine labour market need, and not by cost savings or convenience.

Role of the High-Wage Stream in Economic Competitiveness

The High-Wage Stream provides employers with access to international talent only when genuine skill shortages exist and when positions are offered at wages that meet or exceed prevailing wage rates. This approach protects the domestic workforce while allowing employers to secure the expertise needed to grow.

Highly skilled temporary foreign workers often contribute specialized knowledge, global experience, and leadership capacity that strengthen Canadian teams and support productivity. These individuals often bring specialized knowledge, international experience, and niche expertise that strengthens Canadian teams, supports knowledge transfer, and enhances productivity. Overall, their presence can enable business expansion, innovation, and job creation for Canadians.

Alignment with Immigration and Talent Retention Objectives

The High-Wage Stream of the TFWP also plays an important role in supporting Canada's broader immigration objectives and talent retention goals. Many highly skilled temporary foreign workers develop strong ties to Canada, contribute to its innovation and economic growth, and seek to transition to permanent residence. Clearer and more predictable pathways to permanence can improve workforce stability, reduce vulnerability, and help retain talent that is already contributing to the Canadian economy.

CERC Recommendations

To strengthen the High-Wage Stream of the TFWP in addressing highly skilled labour shortages, the following measures are recommended for the HUMA committee's consideration:

1. Reinforce the High-Wage Stream as a critical mechanism for addressing shortages in highly skilled and specialized occupations.
2. Ensure LMIA's remain rigorous and evidence-based, whilst improving processing efficiency for highly skilled, high-wage roles.
3. Recognize the role of highly skilled international workers and the TFWP in supporting innovation, productivity, and global competitiveness, particularly in advanced and specialized sectors.
4. Maintain strict enforcement and compliance in the system. Employers who fail to meet their obligations in the program must be dealt with swiftly and to the full extent of the law.

Access to highly skilled international talent is essential to Canada's continued economic success. The TFWP, and in particular the High-Wage Stream, provide a vital and well-structured mechanism for addressing specialized labour shortages that cannot be met through the domestic workforce alone. The CERC's survey data confirms that reliance on global expertise will continue to grow, particularly in high-value and specialized occupations. With strong safeguards, compliance and efficient administration, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program should continue to support innovation, competitiveness, and sustainable economic growth in Canada.

About the Canadian Employee Relocation Council

The Canadian Employee Relocation Council (CERC) is a membership organization whose goal is to provide leadership, services and assistance to members enabling efficient recruitment and deployment of talent. CERC plays an active role in representing its members' interests on immigration and mobility policy to policymakers and regulators. Established in 1982, the CERC represents the interests of its members on workforce mobility matters. Many members of CERC are listed in Canada's Financial Post Top 100.

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