

**Foreign Workers in Canada:  
Government Programs Desirable But Verifying  
Credentials Can Be Problematic**



**COMPAS Inc.  
Public Opinion and Customer Research  
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## 1.0 Overview

CEOs and business leaders on the COMPAS business panel were asked for their views of foreign worker programs in the wake of the Alberta government's suspension of its own programs. Panelists are divided about the merits of Alberta's decision, attributing it in part to a slowing Canadian economy.

Most panelists perceive foreign worker programs as benefiting Canada's economy by allowing the economy to get the most out of skilled workers. Despite their enthusiasm for foreign workers and their support for foreign workers programs, panelists acknowledge several challenges associated with their hiring—in descending order, verifying credentials, adequate grasp of one of Canada's official language, verifying skills, and cultural adaptation (e.g. treatment of women in the workplace, treatment of subordinates).

These are the key findings from this past week's Internet survey of CEOs and business leaders on the COMPAS panel. The weekly business survey is undertaken for *Canadian Business* magazine under sponsorship of BDO Dunwoody LLP.

## 2.0 Details

Table 2a shows division of opinion about Alberta's suspensions of its foreign worker programs while table 2b shows a tendency to attribute the Alberta decision to a slowing economy.

Table 2c shows that panelists see such programs as benefiting and not harming the economy.

Table 2d shows panelists acknowledging several challenges associated with the hiring of foreign workers—in descending order, verifying credentials, adequate grasp of one of Canada's official language, verifying skills, and cultural adaptation (e.g. treatment of women in the workplace, treatment of subordinates).



*Table 2a: (Q1) There's been discussion of the Government of Alberta's suspension of two foreign worker programs and its review of its temporary worker program. Which of the following opinions is closer to your own? The Government of Alberta is...*

	%
Wrong to suspend these foreign worker programs because companies should be allowed to employ the most skilled workers regardless of citizenship.	49
Right to suspend these foreign worker programs because the employment of Canadians must come first.	42
Don't Know	9

*Table 2b: (Q2) Which of the following opinions is closest to your own. The suspension of these foreign worker programs is a sign that Alberta's...*

	%
Economy is slowing	59
Labour shortage has been overcome	27
Don't Know	14

*Table 2c: (Q3-5) Using a 7 point scale, please indicate how much you agree with each of the following opinions.*

	Mean	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
Foreign worker programs benefit Canada's economy by allowing the economy to get the most out of skilled workers.	4.7	13	16	28	20	11	4	4	4



*Foreign Workers - BDO Dunwoody Weekly CEO/Business Leader Poll by  
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	Mean	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
In the current economic climate, governments should focus on the employment of Canadian citizens rather than ensuring the labour demands of industry are being met.	4.0	10	14	14	22	15	13	10	3
Foreign worker programs harm the economy by taking jobs away from Canadian citizens.	3.2	4	7	8	17	28	22	13	2

*Table 2d: (Q6-9) 4. On a seven point scale, how great of a challenge are each of the following when it comes to hiring foreign workers.*

	Mean	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
Verifying credentials	5.4	16	39	28	9	3	2	2	2
Adequate grasp of one of Canada's official language	5.2	19	33	23	11	6	5	3	1
Verifying skills	5.0	15	22	31	19	5	4	3	0
Cultural adaptation (e.g. treatment of women in the workplace, treatment of subordinates)	4.9	16	16	36	17	9	5	1	1

The following verbatim comments provide a nuanced sense of respondent opinion:

We need to ensure the Canadian education system produces people with the skills we need!!

Unfortunately, this is becoming a political football. We have recommended some changes to the Alberta Government



with reference to specific issues that are described below. The Alberta Immigrant Nomination Program (AINP) is very important to businesses that wish to retain critical foreign workers that have proven to be excellent contributors to the employer and the Alberta economy. For occupations with insufficient workers to meet the needs of Alberta businesses, this program is essential for those businesses to remain competitive and viable in Alberta. Project Description Our experience with the management and staff operating the AINP has been very positive. We have found them to be responsive and cooperative although limited by regulations and resources. Our TFWs are highly skilled and experienced forging machine operators (NOC 9512). These skills are very difficult to find in Canada – even during the current economic slowdown. Without retaining these essential skills to manufacture our products, our competitiveness is at risk along with the jobs of our Canadian employees. It is therefore important that we do what we can to retain these temporary workers that are so important to our industry. Because HRSDC has categorized these workers as low skilled (NOC Code C), it is increasingly difficult to get the necessary federal approvals to permit these important workers to remain in Canada. Note: The core difference between the accepted definition of skilled and semi-skilled workers (regardless of years of training or experience) is that skilled workers have been issued a document (certificate, degree, or diploma) from an educational institution. HRSDC advises workers to reapply for work permit extensions before their work permit expires (with or without a LMO) to give them an additional 90 days of “implied status” when they can legally work in Canada without a valid work permit. Unfortunately, temporary workers without valid work permits are not allowed access to Alberta Health Care even though they are legally permitted to remain in Canada and continue working. Many of these temporary foreign workers have expressed strong interest in becoming Permanent Residents (PR) in Canada. Standen’s has nominated our best TFWs for provincial nomination



through the Alberta Immigrant Nomination Program (AINP). Regulatory Issues and Impact our understanding is that the original Alberta Provincial Nomination Program was designed to allow Alberta businesses to nominate their proven foreign workers for immigration to Canada. In 2008, the program was renamed the Alberta Immigrant Nomination Program (AINP) and expanded to allow Albertans to nominate relatives outside of Canada as well as several other nomination streams. This resulted in a significant increase in case load for the AINP officials. In 2009 the average processing time was quoted as 12 weeks. As of the date of this submission, the total processing time for the employer stream has been quoted as 11 months. The current AINP process requires the applicant to submit copies of the full Permanent Residence application for themselves and all family members before the AINP application is considered or approved. This not only duplicates the work of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), but can delay the application for months as the TFW attempts to locate and obtain documentation for family members in their home country. AINP does not accept most semi-skilled occupations unless the occupation has been specifically approved by ANIP. While Standen's occupations are specifically approved, we are aware of other companies with challenges applying for provincial nomination as their critical occupation has not been approved. For example, we are aware of a major municipality which has a critical shortage of transit drivers and has recruited drivers from the United Kingdom. However, since they are unable to nominate these workers through ANIP, they are restricted in their ability to offer the potential of long-term secure positions. Another example is a major Alberta advertising firm who reported attempting to recruit one of the best web designers they had encountered from a foreign country. Because this individual was self-taught and had no educational credentials, HRSDC would not issue a Labour Market Opinion (LMO) and provincial nomination was not an option. Today this highly-skilled web designer is working for a



competitor in another country. Currently, nominations for semi-skilled temporary workers are dependent upon the validity of their work permits. ANIP will not nominate a worker whose work permit has expired – even if they legally are able to work and remain in Canada. A delay in ANIP application processing time may result in the TFW's work permits expiring before the provincial nomination is approved. With HRSDC resisting issuing Labour Market Opinions (even for AINP applicants), there are increasing incidents of AINP applicants without work permits. Once they have received provincial nomination, TFWs can apply for Permanent Residence and a new work permit immediately without the need for a LMO. When HRSDC does issue the rare LMO, they restrict it to a one-year work permit. With 11 months to approve a provincial nomination, there almost no possibility of receiving a nomination before the worker's work permit expires. These individuals can end up in a "Catch-22" where they cannot get a new work permit without the provincial nomination, and they cannot get a provincial nomination without a work permit. With HRSDC reluctant to issue LMOs, this can leave businesses and TFWs in a difficult position. Since AINP applications are approved for candidates outside of Canada in categories other than Semi-Skilled, it would make sense to continue the approval process for semi-skilled workers who have employment commitments and proven skills and work ethic regardless of their status in Canada. ANIP applications for employer stream applicants who have to return to their home country due to CIC decisions are cancelled and they must re-apply once they return to Canada. This results in significant waste of government and non-government resources. It would be better to allow the ANIP application process continue when requested by the employer and support the return of the applicant to Canada should the applications for nomination and permanent residence be approved. Recommendations 1. AINP applications for skilled and semi-skilled temporary foreign workers already employed in Alberta and nominated by reputable employers



should be given priority and expedited through the nomination process with a target maximum processing time of no more than 10 weeks. These workers have proven skills and work ethic and are already contributing to the Alberta economy. With the increasing difficulty in obtaining federal labour market opinions, the economic contribution of these workers and the Canadian jobs they support may be lost to Albertans if their applications are delayed. We understand that the key “road block” is a shortage of government workers to process the applications. We also recommend increasing the ANIP staffing dedicated to the employer stream applications. Every worker approved will provide a long-term economic benefit to Alberta. 2. ANIP should not limit the semi-skilled occupations eligible for nomination. Employers should be permitted to nominate any employee with proven skills and work ethic. Recruiting foreign workers is a challenging and frustrating process for both the employer and the worker. Reputable employers would not be hiring TFWs if qualified Canadians are available and willing to do the job. There will always be unique situations that should be considered when the nominee is adding value to the economy. If abuse of the program is a concern, ANIP could have a requirement that the employer be recognized as a reputable employer and operating in Alberta for at least five years prior to the application for nomination. However, speedy processing time will be needed with this requirement. This recommendation will also support increasing the ANIP staffing dedicated to the employer stream applications. 3. Employer-Driven Stream provincial nomination applications should continue through the approval process up to and including approval regardless of the immigration status of the worker as long as a reputable employer commits to continue employment of the nominee once they are legally able to work in Canada. 4. We recommend that employer stream ANIP applications continue to be processed, when requested by the Alberta employer, should the worker be required to return to their home country at the end of their



temporary contract. 5. We recommend that full Permanent Residence (PR) application documentation for all family members should not be required for approval of the provincial nomination. CIC requires the full information for the nominee and each family member. Provincial review of all the documentation duplicates the work of CIC. It is both inefficient and delays the provincial nomination process when there is difficulty obtaining the family member documentation required for permanent residence applications. Since it is only the employee who is nominated, ANIP should review only the employee PR application and let CIC review the final employee and family applications. 6. Alberta Health Insurance coverage should be continued for foreign workers who legally remain in Canada while their immigration applications are under review. Implementation of these recommendations should help to streamline processes, ensure continuing economic benefits of proven foreign workers, and assist business and other organizations to continue to grow and contribute to the benefit of all Albertans.

...There are times when foreign workers are necessary however all other avenues should be explored first . We should be monitoring and training our own people when there is a shortage.

There is no doubt that with unemployed Canadian labour, Canadians must be trained and upgraded to fill these positions otherwise as time goes by we will create a large number of Canadians who are unemployable.

The real "Canadian" issue is the allowance and accommodation for high unemployment in some regions while labour shortages exist in others. Politically this needs to be addressed.

Our experience with foreign worker programs has not been very successful. It was expensive to get them here, difficult adaption to our culture and as soon as they became aware of the many worker rights in this country they used them.



One of the main reasons our firm relied on temporary foreign workers is because the screening of Permanent Resident candidates does not work well at allowing well qualified people in to the country. The process is ridiculously slow and the "point count" and preferred occupations tend to be behind the times compared to the needs of the country. At one time, about 5 or 10 years ago, taxidermists were a preferred occupation but nurses and engineers were not.

My information, directly from employers in Alberta, is that the employee surplus has evaporated and industry is back into the recruitment challenges we saw earlier this decade.

My experience with foreign-trained workers is that they often have difficulty appreciating the Canadian values and ethics, and therefore have trouble fitting in.

It seems that even with the job shortage people will not put themselves out to obtain employment. I have a paid internship available right now that has been advertised for 2 months, no one wants to come to a small town to live, even if it will give them marketable skills later. Workers from another country may be my next step.

It looks like Fort McMurray is starting to boom again and we don't have the pool of skilled workers to handle the load.

It is a sad statement, but unfortunately true, that there are some jobs and some places where unemployed Canadians simply will not do or go.

If we cannot supply the skilled labor that Canadian companies need, then companies should be allowed to hire skilled foreign labor. The government should focus on education and training that will fulfill that need and make us less reliant on importing foreign labor.

I think we need to become better at allowing foreign people to convert their educational qualifications to use here we need their skills and their work ethic that is so sadly lacking in our people.



I don't see any issues in bringing in foreign workers when the skills, expertise or manpower are not available in Canada. The challenge however lies in developing programs to train Canadians to ultimately fill specialised roles.

Can we please look after our own people first.

As this happens to be my industry, I could write for pages, however, suffice it to say that the answer options were too limited to address this issue.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The COMPAS web-survey of CEOs and leaders of small, medium, and large corporations was conducted August 27-31, 2010. Respondents constitute an essentially hand-picked panel with a higher numerical representation of small and medium-sized firms.

Because of the small population of CEOs and business leaders from which the sample was drawn, the study can be considered more accurate than comparably sized general public studies. In studies of the general public, surveys of n=101 are deemed accurate to within approximately 9.8 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The principal investigator on this study is Conrad Winn, Ph.D.

