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Manitoba Office

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## Temporary Foreign Workers: How federal settlement policies overlook some newcomers

**M**anitoba has embarked on aggressive immigration strategies to attract newcomers to settle in a variety of communities in the province with the purpose of meeting local labour force demands. In response to these trends, it is necessary to have appropriate and effective support systems to assist in the long-term settlement and integration of the increasing number of newcomers. Prior to the federal government's changes to the delivery model of settlement services in 2012, these services were a provincial responsibility in Manitoba, Quebec, and British Columbia. As a result of federal and provincial agreements, the settlement service framework gave these provinces considerable discretion over how services were implemented, funded, and delivered, with the purposes of addressing region-specific needs. There was an acknowledgement that individual regions had unique settlement needs and that service delivery should be tailored rather than implemented in one-size-fits-all fashion. However this has all changed.

In 2012, the federal government centralized Canada's immigration policies. Provision, design, and implementation of settlement services are now overseen by the federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), with the goal of developing an efficient immigration system that addresses the overall needs of skilled immigrants arriving to Canada. However, the needs of smaller regions like Manitoba will most likely be lost in this new model, as an emphasis on more centralized and broader settlement needs is put forth. Settlement service delivery, particularly in smaller, non-traditional immigrant desti-

nations in Manitoba, faces considerable adjustments to their current practices as they lose the autonomy based in locally-managed service delivery. Given that there will be less regional autonomy over settlement service practices, organizations are required to more closely consider who they do and do not offer services to. A group of newcomers that will experience the effects of such changes are Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs).

Across Canada, Temporary Foreign Worker Programs are used to address labour shortages that are not met by the Canadian labour force. These shortages are often in low wage, strenuous, and sometimes dangerous work, spanning a variety of skill levels and industry sectors. In Manitoba TFWs predominately work in the meat-processing and service sectors, with many arriving through the federal Stream for Lower Skill Occupations. Manitoba has been at the forefront of extending protections and considerations to TFWs, implementing the first piece of legislation (the Work Recruitment and Protection Act) that regulates recruitment practices and guards against unscrupulous recruiters and employers. The Province also allows TFWs the option to apply for permanent residence, by way of the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). After about six months of working in the province, TFWs are encouraged to apply to the PNP and upon a successful nomination they can apply for permanent residence. A successful nomination is based upon having a permanent job offer and achieving a Canadian Language Benchmark level four. However, achiev-

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ing this benchmark can prove to be a challenge without access to adequate EAL classes.

Many of the initial settlement needs of TFWs are required to be met by employers, rather than federally funded settlement service organizations. For example, employers must ensure that there is adequate and affordable housing available and that TFWs have health care insurance. Employers have an interest in encouraging the permanent settlement of the TFWs they invested money into hiring and training to establish a more secure labour source. The extent to which employers assist in any additional settlement needs can vary and is at their discretion. Because of the nature of temporary migration and the fact that TFWs are hired to address a supposedly temporary labour shortage, long-term settlement needs and integration are often ignored. The exception is in companies where the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) operates. UFCW fills this settlement service gap for TFW members by offering assistance with language and other services.

TFWs may plan to settle in the province long-term, but until they transition to permanent resident status, they cannot access many settlement services through government-funded organizations. That being said, prior to the settlement policy changes in the Province, some organizations would assist TFWs with their applications to the PNP and for permanent residence. While TFWs may have accessed services from settlement organizations in the past, the recent CIC service delivery changes will, in all likelihood, reduce such practices. TFWs will now have to get the entirety of their settlement services from either their employer or, for some TFWs, their union.

Broadening the eligibility for both permanent residence and settlement services to TFWs of all skill levels would protect them from many of the barriers to settlement they face while also recognizing their valuable contribution to the communities they choose to settle and work in. The reality in Manitoba is that many TFWs of all skill levels are staying and

transitioning to permanent resident status. Given that the labour market relies on foreign labour and that TFWs are allowed to apply to transition to permanent resident status in Manitoba, then, how do we reconcile the fact that some future permanent residents are, for a period of time, denied services that can positively contribute to their long-term settlement? Excluding TFWs from settlement services may hinder their efforts to successfully settle, contribute to inequities within the newcomer population, and place further strain on settlement service providers who will have to turn away people in need of assistance.

The labour market relies on foreign labour to address shortages that appear to be more permanent than temporary. A realignment of thinking is needed to acknowledge TFWs of all skill levels as potential permanent members of communities that contribute to the labour force. The purpose of settlement services is to ensure that newcomers can successfully establish themselves in a new country. A narrow scope of eligibility for settlement services, however, hinders these efforts and contributes to inequities within the newcomer population as well as overlooks regional differences within the province. Therefore, it would be constructive for CIC support the relatively inclusive approach to settlement service delivery that has been operating in Manitoba. Addressing exclusions in settlement service delivery will contribute to a more comprehensive settlement service program that recognizes the needs of all newcomers who intend to stay and work in the province.

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