

Temporary Foreign Workers: Canadians support reduced program; few want workers to have path to citizenship

Majority believe program is 'bad' for labour market for citizens, Canada's housing situation

September 10, 2024 – As Canadians [express more concern over immigration](#), the federal government is taking steps to rein in the number of temporary residents the country takes in. That includes changes that will take effect later this month to the Temporary Foreign Workers program, [which had grown considerably in the past two years](#).

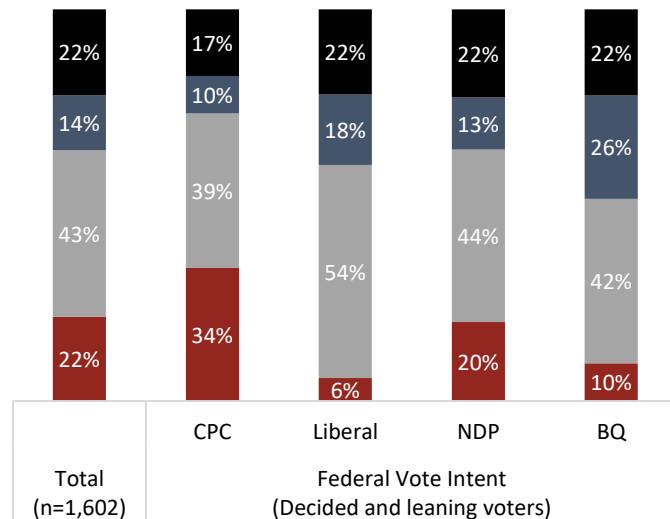
New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians support a reduced Temporary Foreign Workers program as they express concerns over its effect on the housing and job markets.

A plurality (43%) say the program is fine to continue after the changes implemented by the federal government take effect later this month. A further one-in-seven (14%) believe the changes were not necessary and the program was okay as it was. A minority of one-in-five (22%) believe the program should be abolished entirely.

For their part, would-be Conservative voters are most supportive of eliminating the program entirely, but half would still keep it in either the reduced form or as it has been for the past two years. Few intending Liberal voters would end the program, while one-in-five who say they would vote for the NDP would abolish it.

Forthcoming changes to the program, including reducing the maximum proportion of a businesses workforce eligible to be made up of TFWs from 20 to 10 per cent, and not allowing businesses to apply for workers if the local unemployment rate is above six per cent, are overwhelmingly popular.

How do you think the federal government should proceed with the Temporary Foreign Workers program?



- Not sure/ Can't say
- The program was fine as it is before and the federal government shouldn't implement those changes
- The changes are fine, the program should continue in this reduced form
- These changes aren't enough – the federal government should eliminate the program altogether

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Aug. 29 to Sept. 4, 2024 among a representative randomized sample of 1,602 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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Canadians have grown more concerned about the effect of immigration overall – [four times as many people select it as a top issue as did two years ago](#). When it comes to the TFW program, they are mostly concerned about potentially negative effects in housing and employment for Canadian citizens. Three-quarters (75%) say the TFW program is “bad” for the housing situation in the country, while a majority (55%) believe it negatively impacts the job market for citizens.

For these and perhaps other reasons, the desire to open a pathway to citizenship for all temporary workers is relatively low among Canadians. More than one-in-three (36%) say that this should be a part of the agreement for workers, while half (52%) disagree. Notably, those who would vote for the Liberals (51%) or New Democrats (56%) are significantly more likely than Conservative supporters (20%) to say a pathway to citizenship should be available for TFWs.

More Key Findings:

- Two of Canada’s fastest growing provinces in 2023, Alberta and Ontario, are most likely to say Canada takes in “way too many” temporary workers. Two-in-five (38%) say this in Alberta, with 35 per cent saying the same in Ontario. Manitoba residents are least likely to hold this view (18%).
- Three-in-five Canadians (62%) say “if businesses can’t afford to pay a wage Canadians will take then they shouldn’t be in business”. This view is less common (51%) among Canadians living in rural areas than those living in urban ones (63%).
- There are also concerns about exploitation among Canadians in the wake of a United Nations’ report calling the program a “[breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery](#)”. By a two-to-one ratio, Canadians are more likely to believe workers are treated unfairly (54%) than fairly (23%) by employers, and that the Canadian government exploits these workers (49%) than not (28%).
- Most (74%) believe the TFW program is “good” for businesses who employ the workers, and a majority (61%) believe the workers are “important because they take jobs that Canadians don’t want to do”. More than half (53%) also believe the program is good for temporary foreign workers overall, despite the concerns outlined above.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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Part One: Views of Temporary Foreign Workers program

Canada's population grew in 2023 at a rate not seen since 1957, the overwhelming majority of which was driven by immigration, both permanent and temporary. [In March](#), Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that temporary immigration had "grown at a rate far beyond what Canada has been able to absorb" and that it needed to "get back under control." Trudeau's comments came after the federal government introduced a cap to the number of [international students in January](#). At a summer cabinet retreat, the Liberal government announced plans to reduce the number of temporary foreign workers in the country as well, reversing some changes the government had enacted [two years ago as the country exited the pandemic into a labour shortage](#).

Canadians say they hear more negative things than positive ones

Canadians have evidently heard more bad things than good about the country's Temporary Foreign Workers program as discussion over its merits and ripple effects has increased. Approaching half (46%) say they've seen, read, or heard more negative things about the program than positive ones, outnumbering those who say they've seen more positive than negative (19%, [see detailed tables](#)).

Most say number of workers too high

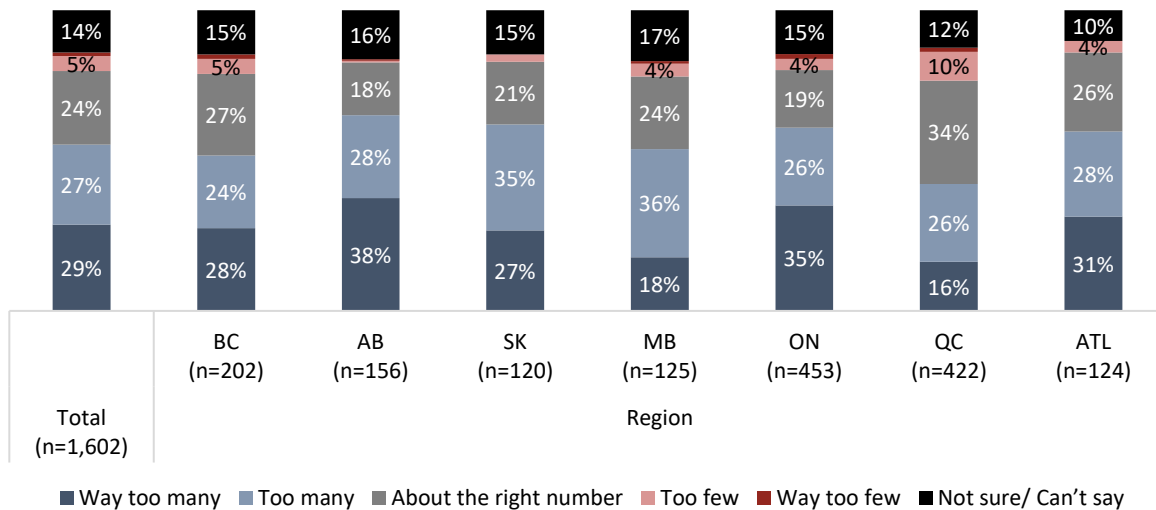
As Trudeau and the federal government [acknowledge the effects](#) of the rising number of temporary workers on aspects of life like housing, the labour market and public services like health care, Canadians believe the country has admitted too many overall. A majority (55%) say Canada takes in "too many" (27%) or "way too many" (29%) temporary foreign workers. One-quarter (24%) say the country is taking about the right number in, while only one-in-20 (6%) believe Canada is admitting too few.

Alberta and Ontario [were the two fastest-growing provinces in 2023](#), with their populations growing by 4.3 per cent and 3.4 per cent respectively. As well, the temporary worker population in those two provinces grew significantly [in the past year](#) – from 360,000 to 557,000 in Ontario and 76,000 to 131,000 in Alberta. People living in those two provinces are also the most likely to say Canada takes in "way too many" temporary workers:

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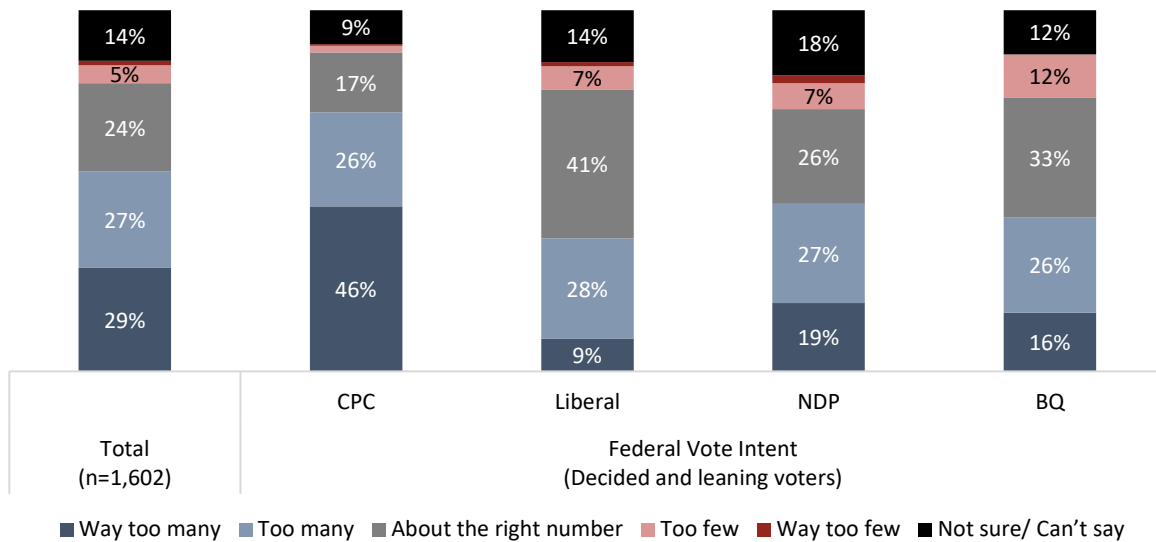
In your opinion, overall, does Canada take in too many, too few, or about the right number of Temporary Foreign Workers?



Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre accused the Liberal federal government of “destroying” Canada’s immigration system, arguing the Temporary Foreign Worker program should “only be available to fill jobs that employers have proven beyond a doubt cannot be filled by Canadians.” Likely Conservative voters are more likely than others to believe Canada is taking in too many temporary foreign workers.

Those who would vote Liberal if an election were held today are the most likely to believe Canada is taking in the right number, while likely NDP and Bloc Québécois voters lean towards believing Canada takes in too many rather than too few temporary workers:

In your opinion, overall, does Canada take in too many, too few, or about the right number of Temporary Foreign Workers?



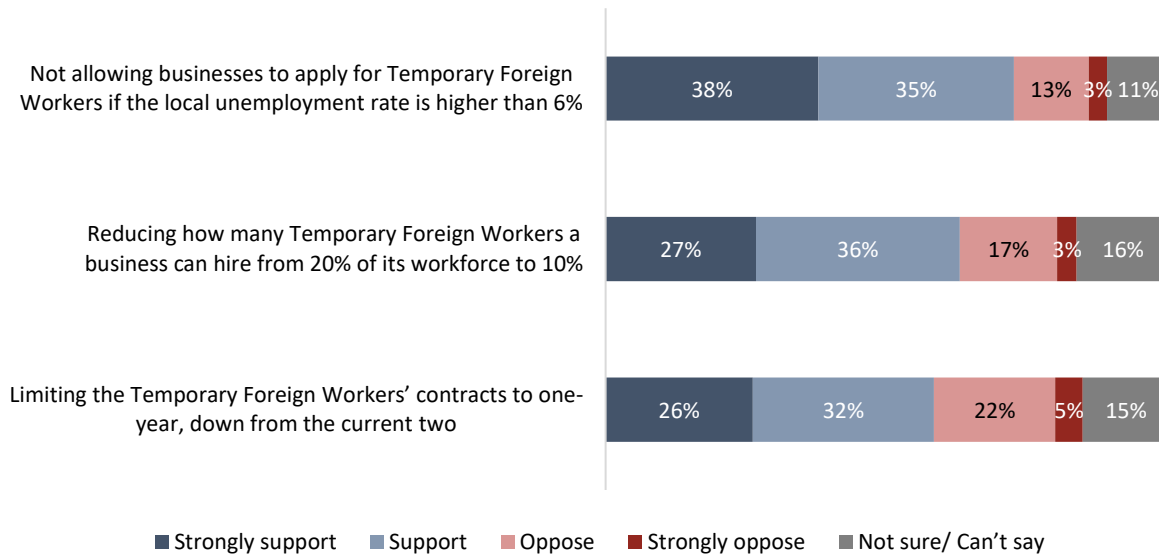
Plurality say program should continue with changes

To scale back the number of temporary foreign workers in the country, the federal government announced the roll back of some changes to the program it had implemented when the country was facing a post-pandemic labour shortage in 2022. These changes, including reducing the percentage of a business's workforce that can be comprised of temporary foreign workers, are widely supported by a majority of Canadians:

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**Support vs. oppose changes to Temporary Foreign Workers program
(All respondents, n=1,602)**

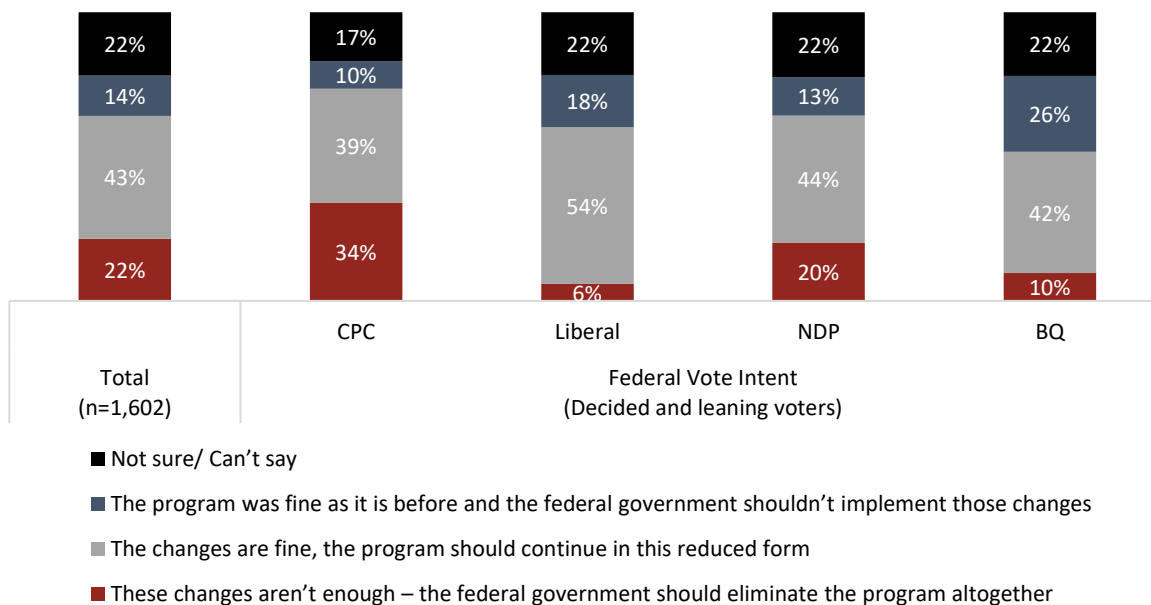


With those changes, a plurality (43%) believe the program should continue in its reduced form. One-in-seven (14%) believe the changes were unnecessary, while one-in-five (22%) say the program should be eliminated altogether. CPC supporters are the most likely (34%) to believe that the TFW program should be abolished, but more (39%) support the program continuing in its reduced form. A plurality of likely NDP (44%) and Bloc Québécois (42%) voters and a majority of Liberals (54%) agree:

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How do you think the federal government should proceed with the Temporary Foreign Workers program?



Part Two: Who benefits and loses from TFW program

Most see a boon for business at the cost of labour market and housing

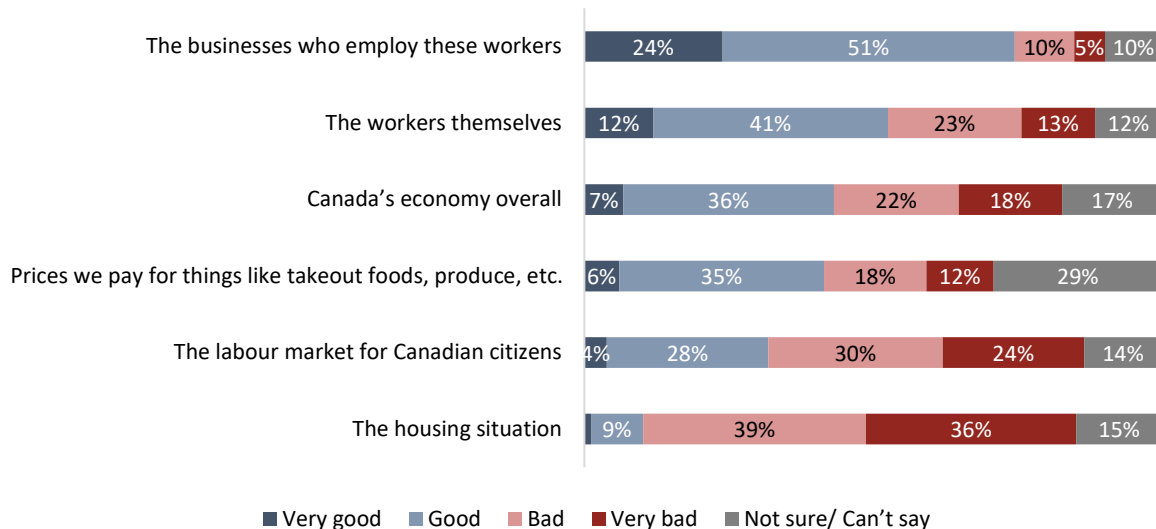
Canadians were asked to assess the Temporary Foreign Workers program and whether it is good or bad for businesses, the workers themselves, prices of goods in Canada, the labour market for Canadians, the housing situation and Canada's economy in general. Canadians view businesses who hire temporary workers as clear beneficiaries of the program (75% say the program is good for businesses), while a majority (53%) also say the program is good for the workers who come to Canada.

There is less certainty if the TFW program has a positive (43%) or negative (40%) effect on Canada's economy, or on the prices Canadians pay on goods (41% good, 30% bad). A majority say the program has a negative impact on the labour market for Canadian workers (54%). Three-quarters (75%) believe the program is "bad" for housing in this country. Concern over the housing crisis has played a key role in the government's decision to alter immigration targets and temporary worker permits.

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Do you believe the Temporary Foreign Worker program is good or bad for...
(All respondents, n=1,602)



Liberal supporters most positive, cross-partisan concern about impact on housing

Views on the benefits and drawbacks of the Temporary Foreign Workers program vary by political leanings. Across the board, Canadians of all political stripes are more likely to believe the influx of temporary workers is harming Canada's housing situation than helping. On other matters, there is more disagreement. Likely Liberal voters are more likely to see the program having benefits for the labour market, Canada's economy and prices for goods than not. Those who intend to vote Conservative are more critical of the program and are more likely to believe it is bad for Canada's economy:

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Do you believe the Temporary Foreign Worker program is good or bad for... (Net: Good shown)					
	Total (n=1,602)	Federal Vote Intent (Decided and leaning voters)			
		CPC	Liberal	NDP	BQ
The businesses who employ these workers	+59	+47	+78	+62	+75
The workers themselves	+17	+13	+33	+1	+52
Canada's economy overall	+4	-26	+48	+5	+52
Prices we pay for things like takeout foods, produce, etc.	+12	-12	+52	+13	+58
The labour market for Canadian citizens	-23	-50	+11	-15	+17
The housing situation	-65	-80	-43	-59	-66

Men under 35 are the most likely to say the program has more downsides than benefits. Older Canadians are more likely to believe the program is “good” for Canada’s economy. There is agreement across generations that temporary foreign workers are straining Canada’s housing supply:

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Do you believe the Temporary Foreign Worker program is good or bad for... (Net: Good shown)							
	Total (n=1,602)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=217)	35-54 (n=263)	55+ (n=297)	18-34 (n=218)	35-54 (n=273)	55+ (n=327)
The businesses who employ these workers	+59	+48	+62	+64	+52	+61	+61
The workers themselves	+17	-10	+9	+27	+17	+17	+31
Canada's economy overall	+4	-18	-5	+21	-6	+4	+16
Prices we pay for things like takeout foods, produce, etc.	+12	-11	+13	+29	+3	+12	+19
The labour market for Canadian citizens	-23	-55	-39	-9	-27	-12	-7
The housing situation	-65	-74	-68	-59	-60	-64	-65

Part Three: Concerns about treatment of workers, but little support for citizenship

Canada's Temporary Foreign Workers program has been criticized by the United Nations. A report written by a UN special rapporteur called the program a "[breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery](#)", after he had heard [reports of abuses](#) within the program, including employers underpaying workers, confiscating documents and not allowing the workers access to proper protective equipment or health care. The federal government [has objected](#) to the phrase "contemporary slavery".

Majority say businesses that can't afford to pay wages Canadians will take should close

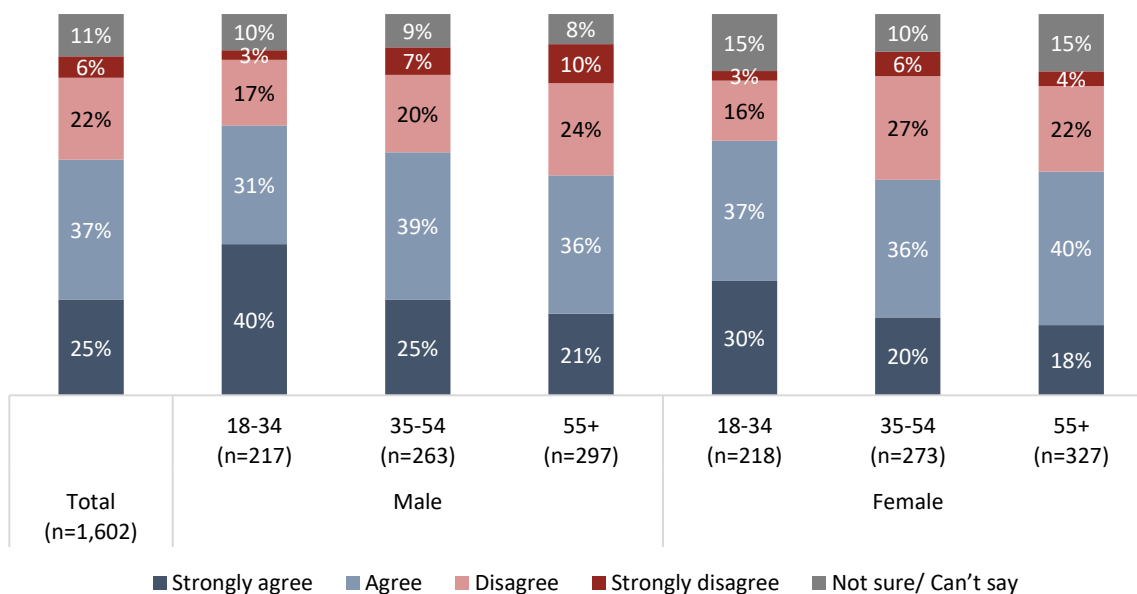
There has been criticism from elsewhere of the so-called "low-wage" stream of the program, with [some arguing it should be abolished](#) because it makes it harder for Canadians to find jobs and suppresses the wages in the labour market in general.

A majority (62%) believe that businesses that can't afford to pay wages Canadians will take shouldn't be in business. Younger Canadians are more likely to believe this than older ones:

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**Agree vs. disagree -
"If businesses can't afford to pay a wage Canadians will take then they
shouldn't be in business"**



Historically, Temporary Foreign Workers have played an important role in rural communities, especially when it comes to farming, an industry which has relied on [temporary workers seasonally to harvest crops](#). Canadians living in rural areas are more likely to disagree that businesses shouldn't be operating if they can only hire temporary workers at low wages ([see detailed tables](#)).

Many also say Canadians don't want to do the jobs TFWs perform

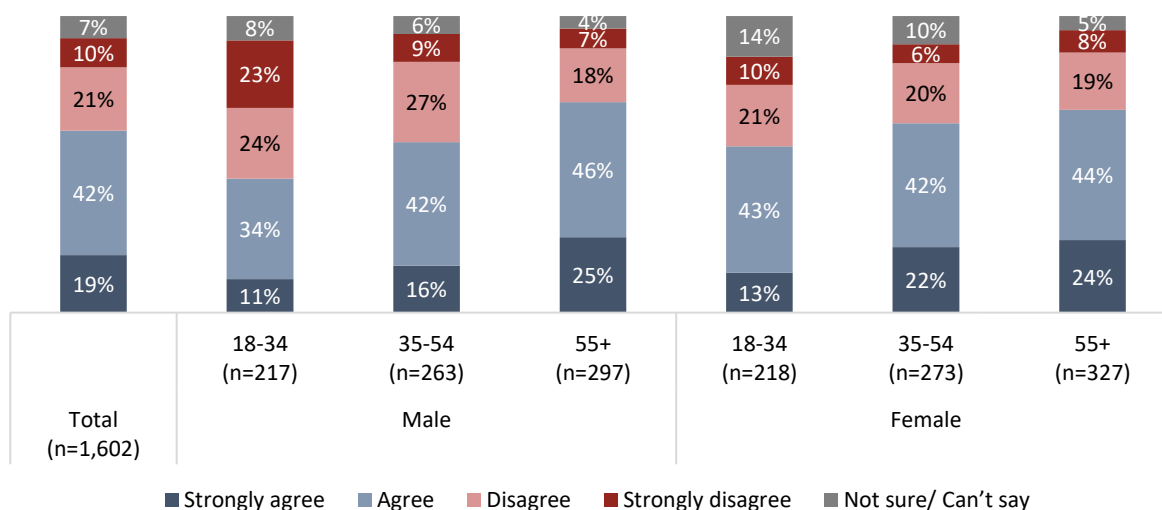
One Ontarian farmer told CBC news that without temporary foreign workers, he would not be able to find anybody to [harvest fruits and vegetables](#). Most Canadians (61%) believe that temporary foreign workers fill jobs that Canadians would not. Men under 35 are the most likely to disagree (47%). Younger Canadians have struggled with higher unemployment in recent months. In June, the unemployment rate for those under 25 was [double the rate of the overall population](#). One-in-five (19%) Canadians under 35 say jobs/unemployment is one of the top issues facing the country.

Related: [Federal Politics: Concern over immigration quadruples over last 48 months](#)

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**Agree vs. disagree -
"Temporary Foreign Workers are important because they take jobs that
Canadians don't want to do"**



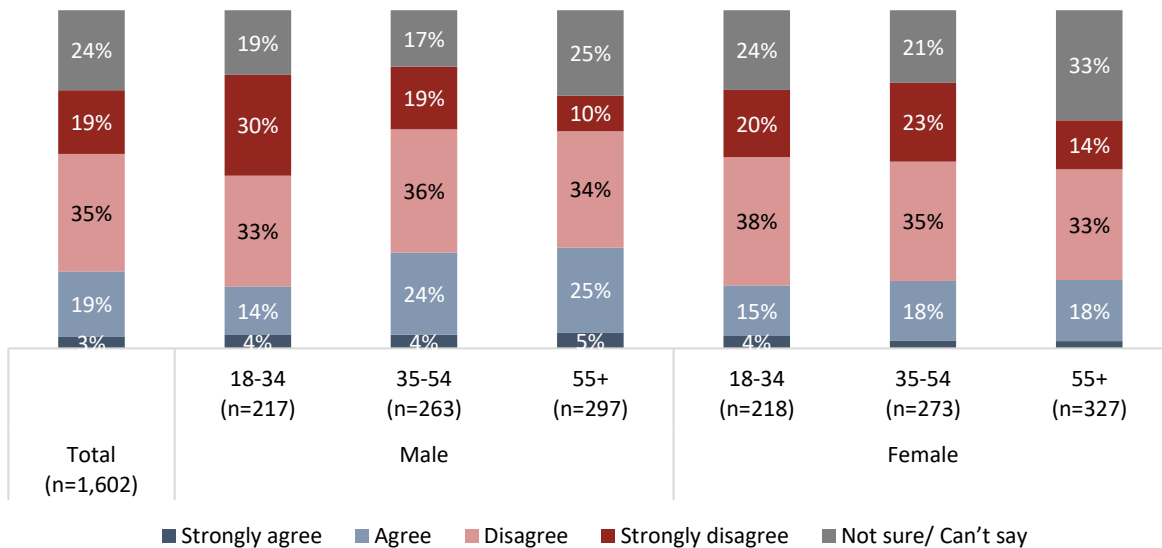
Majority say businesses treat TFWs unfairly; half say government exploits them

As noted above, [a United Nations' report](#) compared the Temporary Foreign Workers program to a "breeding ground for contemporary forms of slavery". Canadians also have their misgivings of the program, with a majority disagreeing that temporary workers are treated fairly by employers. Men, especially those older than 34, are more likely to believe employers are treating temporary foreign workers well:

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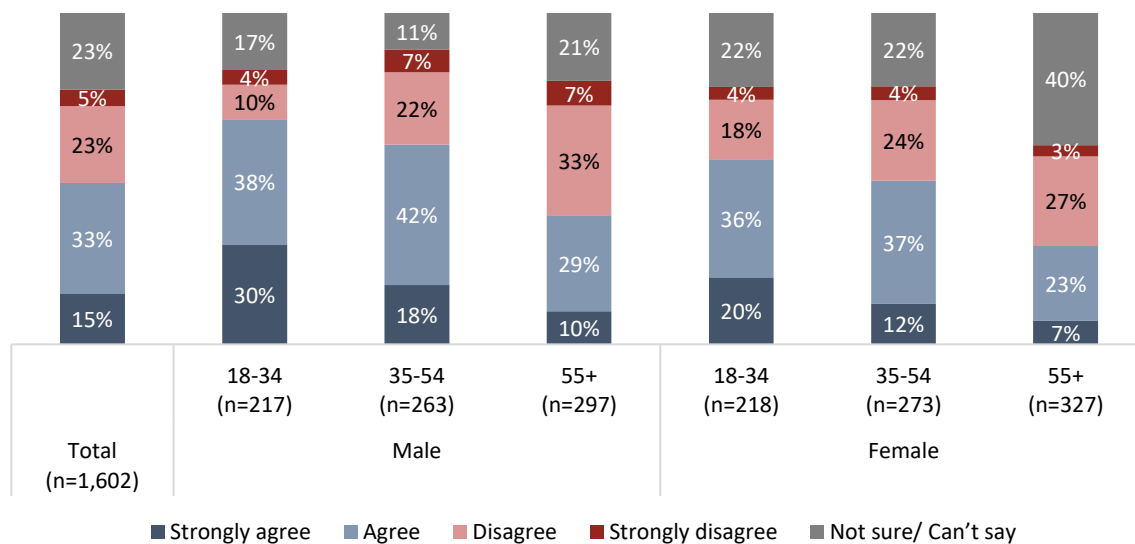
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Agree vs. disagree -
"Temporary Foreign Workers are treated fairly by employers"



Blame over abuse and exploitation is not limited to businesses, however. Half of Canadians (49%) say that the Canadian government is complicit in exploitation, with this view increasing among younger residents:

Agree vs. disagree -
"The Canadian government exploits Temporary Foreign Workers"



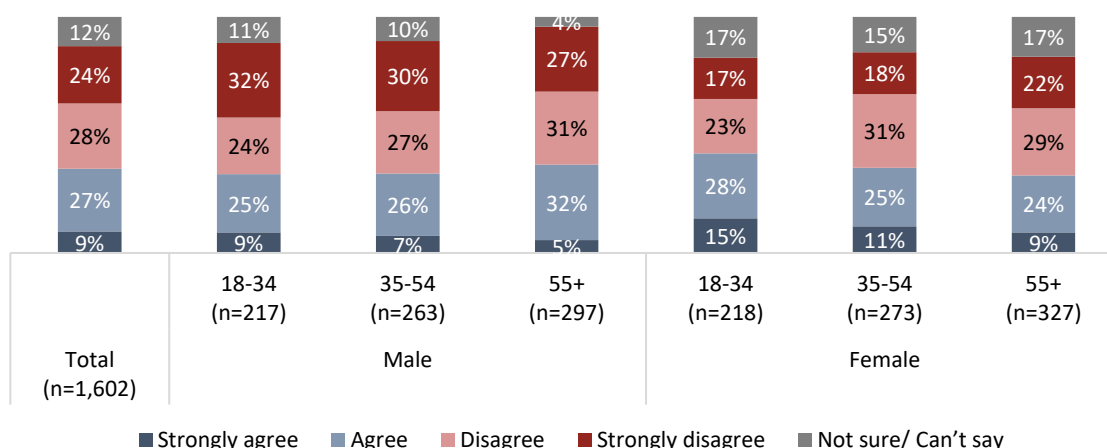
Another group more likely to view the program as exploitative are non-white Canadians. The proportion of this group saying the government is exploiting workers is 14 points higher than among white respondents ([see detailed tables](#)).

Citizenship for TFWs not supported by many

While support for continuing with the Temporary Worker Program in a modified form is relatively high, as seen earlier in this report, the idea that workers should have a pathway to citizenship is not. Slightly more than one-in-three (36%) Canadians say that they would have citizenship available for TFWs to progress toward, while half (52%) disagree.

Would-be Liberal and NDP voters are more likely to support a path to citizenship, though large portions of each group still disagree ([see detailed tables](#)). Paths to citizenship for temporary workers [are currently varied](#) based on the assessed skill of the position and the offer of a permanent position, among other factors.

**Agree vs. disagree -
"All Temporary Foreign Workers should have a pathway to citizenship in
Canada"**



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

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