

The Toronto Sun

August 20, 2008 Wednesday  
FINAL EDITION

NEWS; Pg. J3

658 words

Online guide helps employers tap into foreign workers

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In response to the immediate demand for skilled workers, the Construction Sector Council (CSC) has launched a step-by-step guide for employers interested in navigating the Temporary Foreign Workers Program -- an increasingly crucial labour source. For many employers, hiring workers from outside Canada is new territory. "Some need help to navigate the process for hiring temporary foreign workers," says George Gritziotis, executive director of CSC. "We're seeing not just employers use the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, but industry groups."

The guide comes on the heels of a CSC study that found the number of temporary foreign workers being used to meet short-term peak demand in the construction industry continues to rise, particularly in Alberta -- which has become Canada's largest employment centre -- as well as British Columbia and Ontario.

Despite record numbers of registered apprentices, recruiting difficulties and concerns about skills shortages remain a concern for many associated with large engineering and industrial projects, CSC reports.

At the same time, recruiting may have reached the limits of interprovincial mobility, as demand for engineering and industrial trades is strong all across Canada. "Alberta has been depleting the worker pool from Atlantic Canada and is looking abroad for fully qualified workers," Gritziotis says.

CSC is a national organization committed to developing a highly skilled workforce that supports the current and future needs of the construction industry. Last year, it identified the need to train 250,000 workers by 2015 in order to replace retiring baby boomers and to meet demand for new construction projects.

#### STUDY IDENTIFIES TRENDS

Its study, "Temporary Foreign Workers in the Canadian Construction Industry: An Analysis of Programs and Mechanisms," helps industry understand more about this crucial labour source -- including how many are here, where they're coming from and where they're going to work.

CSC identified several clear trends: temporary foreign workers are fulfilling a critical short-term need and their employment is on the rise across Canada. Most come from the United States, with the United Kingdom and the Philippines tied for second place. The majority is employed in the institutional, commercial and industrial sector, with the new home building and renovation sector close behind.

Though the number of temporary foreign workers has increased dramatically, it represents just a small portion of the workforce. Of the nearly 100,000 temporary

foreign workers who came to Canada in 2005, about 3% worked in construction -- a percentage that accounted for less than 1% of all construction workers, CSC reports. The use of temporary foreign workers is expected to continue. "Demographically, Canada has an aging population, especially in Atlantic Canada, where the natural birth rate is negative," Gritziotis says. "For our workforce to grow even 1%, we are dependent on foreign workers."

CSC recognizes the importance of having the appropriate infrastructure in place for foreign workers and will soon release a step-by-step guide for foreign workers interested in coming to Canada on its website at [www.csc-ca.org](http://www.csc-ca.org).

"They may have the technical skills, but not the language skills. They need to have health and safety training and need to know their rights," Gritziotis says. "There are a lot of best practices out there that will go into this guide."

In Alberta, about 21,000 construction workers are expected to retire by 2016. CSC predicts a booming economy will generate demand for an additional 31,000 new construction workers.

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#### QUICK FACTS

The Construction Sector Council partners business and labour and works to meet the human resources challenges facing the industry, including the shortage of skilled tradespeople. Employers interested in navigating the Temporary Foreign Workers Program can take advantage of its new step-by-step guide available at [www.csc-ca.org](http://www.csc-ca.org).