

RESTAURANTS

CANADA

RC LABOUR & IMMIGRATION UPDATE

FEBRUARY 2026



**Restaurants
Canada**

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires



Labour shortages are putting real pressure on restaurants. A core priority for Restaurants Canada is advocating for an adequate supply of key labour positions rooted in changes to immigration policies that are data-driven, predictable, and responsive to sector-specific needs.

Here is a snapshot of what Restaurants Canada has been doing to advocate for the foodservice sector.

1. KPMG: BUILDING A RESILIENT WORKFORCE FOR CANADA'S RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

We commissioned a report by KPMG to prove what we already know; that the restaurant industry is an economic powerhouse in Canada and that severe staff shortages threaten our industry.

- The restaurant industry is Canada's fourth-largest private-sector employer, supporting 1.2 million jobs.
- The sector accounts for 4% of Canada's GDP.
- Demographic shifts, waning domestic interest in service sector work, and intense labour competition have left restaurants with severe staff shortages, particularly in mid-size cities, rural, remote and tourism areas.
- Key roles that have proven difficult to fill include back-of-house roles such as cooks, chefs and employees supporting 24/7 operations.
- Due to these challenges, many restaurants have relied on foreign workers to support their operations, allowing them to employ a local workforce and contribute to the communities they serve.
- There are over 70,000 job vacancies in foodservice today, projected to exceed well over 105,000 by 2030, even before accounting for new restrictions on foreign labour.
- Despite the second-highest wage growth of any industry since 2022, attracting local talent remains difficult in many areas of the country. Tight profit margins and reduced consumer discretionary spending limit restaurants' ability to raise wages further.

2. IMMIGRATION POLICIES: FOREIGN LABOUR IS ESSENTIAL TO CANADA'S FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY

We created a comprehensive immigration policy and a short list of recommendations to government.

These recommendations were developed using Restaurants Canada's internal research and sector insights, external labour market analysis with Tourism HR Canada, an assessment of the current political and public climate, and findings from the Reimagining Immigration and KPMG reports. Restaurants Canada also engaged former Immigration Minister Jason Kenney to provide additional perspective. All recommendations were shaped with careful consideration of both sector needs and public perception.

We have five recommendations to modernize and improve access to this essential labour pool:

1. Expedite pathways to permanent residency;
2. Introduce a dedicated rural and tourism stream;
3. Provide open work permits for specific NOCs in a limited geographical area;
4. Simplify and extend labour market assessments; and
5. Encourage settlement initiatives in rural communities.

3. WORKFORCE CAMPAIGN – MANY HANDS MAKE RESTAURANTS WORK

We are launching a targeted ad campaign designed to influence federal decision-makers.

Launching in February, the campaign is centered around the theme of “Many Hands Make Restaurants Work”, with a distinct tagline, narrative and visual identity. We want decision-makers to understand:

- The fundamental importance of the restaurant industry to Canada's economy and communities
- That restaurants need newcomers to operate their businesses, requiring smart federal immigration policies.

The campaign will include a signature video, digital ads, and a microsite. A comprehensive media plan has been developed outlining platforms, formats, and priority audiences for the coming months to ensure alignment with, and support for, our advocacy objectives in Ottawa. This will be both for educational and awareness purposes.

In advance of the full campaign launch, digital ads were used to reach key federal political decision-makers at three events in January:

- Cabinet Retreat in Quebec City (January 22 and 23)
- Return of the House of Commons (January 26)
- Conservative Party Convention in Calgary (January 29 to 31)

4. GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

We have actively engaged with provincial and federal officials to clarify our sector's use of the TFW program, address misconceptions, and communicate our specific workforce and immigration needs.

- Federal: In the last six months alone, RC's advocacy team has met with 35 public office holders including Members of Parliament, senior political staff and bureaucrats. We have also previously written to Mr. Poilievre expressing concern that his comments on the TFW program cast a harmful spotlight on racialized frontline workers restaurants.
- Provincial: RC's President & CEO met with Premier Eby following negative remarks about the industry.
- National: Discussions were had with all Premiers at the First Ministers' meeting in Huntsville, ON (July 2025).

5. NATIONAL MEDIA

We are defending the foodservice industry in the national media.

Over the past year, we have seen a concerning increase in rhetoric targeting the foodservice industry's use of the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program. Federal and provincial elected officials, including party leaders and premiers, have been calling for the program to be scrapped. We have been active in the media dispelling misconceptions about our sector and the workers we employ. Restaurant Canada's President and CEO has appeared on major political news programs including CBC's The House, CTV News and CBC's Power and Politics, and many of our team members have also been active in other national and local media outlets.

6. RECRUITING INTERNATIONAL WORKERS: 2025 GUIDE FOR CANADIAN RESTAURANTS

We created a guide to help our members understand how the immigration system works to grow their business in the context of systemic labour shortage.

In the context of systemic labour shortages, it has become increasingly necessary for our members to understand how the immigration system works as they look for ways to sustain and grow their businesses. Developed with help from a immigration law firm, the toolkit was designed to provide clarity to business owners navigating the Canadian immigration system.

7. REIMAGINING IMMIGRATION: THE CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL WORKFORCE PROGRAM

We collaborated with more than 70 business associations to support the jointly signed Reimagining Immigration paper, authored by Nancy Healey, Federal Commissioner for Employers.

The paper calls on the federal government to ensure that our immigration system remains fair and protects workers, while meeting the needs of Canada's labour force.

- During a trade-war and global market turmoil, Canada's political leaders have stressed the need to increase investment and improve productivity in our country. At the same time, they are focused on cutting immigration levels. These two priorities cannot exist together. We simply cannot increase the productivity of our economy without the labour needed to do so.
- Immigration has accounted for all of Canada's labour force growth in recent years and, due to demographic challenges beyond our control, Canadian employers must continue to rely on foreign workers to fill consistently vacant positions.
- The government has an important role to play in ensuring that our immigration system remains fair and protects workers, while meeting the needs of Canada's labour force. This will require a multi-pronged strategy, with efforts to first hire locally, while utilizing immigration to meet our currently unmet labour and productivity needs. The Canadian International Workforce Program is tied to labour force demand and is critical to our long-term economic viability.



