

Curiosity over the alleged mistreatment of migrant workers at a mill in Port Alberni and what this may mean for Canada's forestry and logging industry led to an analysis of government data exposing a trend of increasing temporary foreign workers in Canada's forestry sector.

Using Excel, I filtered the publicly available IRCC data for codes pertaining to occupations in logging, forestry and millwork. From there I used pivot tables to look at the numbers by year and by province, and used these data sets to produce two charts in Datawrapper:

1. Year-over-year temporary foreign worker permit holders in forestry-related occupations.
2. Number of temporary foreign workers destined for each province between 2016 and 2023.

The publishing program did not allow for inactive charts so they were published as images. Citing the data was tremendously important since the the data was IRCC data and not Statistics Canada data, it presented an extra challenge to get a hold of someone who could clarify our questions.

In the end, we learned that we had to be specific that temporary foreign workers were "destined for a province," because they may not have necessarily ended up there, and that this data does not necessarily reflect the number of jobs available to TFWs.

To fill in those gaps, I interviewed seven experts and industry professionals (four made it to the article) to understand the star takeaway from this data: forestry occupations between 2021 and 2023 saw more than a fivefold increase in workers who held permits through the temporary foreign worker program. This is significant given forestry is an employment sector relied on by domestic workers and not typically where we find TFWs.