

Volatility and the Hyper-Flexible Workforce

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TFWs as Labour Supply Strategy

- Alberta employers increasing use of temporary foreign workers (TFWs)
 - 2000 = 9,000
 - 2014 = 76,045 (3% of labour force)
- Can be seen as a strategy for managing labour supply in Alberta's boom and bust economic cycles

Talk vs. Action

- In 2007 government and industry developed 10-year labour force strategy aimed to increase participation of targeted groups, including women, aboriginals, youth and immigrants
- Growing use of TFWs overshadowed efforts to broaden domestic labour supply
- TFWs a regularized element of employer labour supply strategy

Employer Perspectives

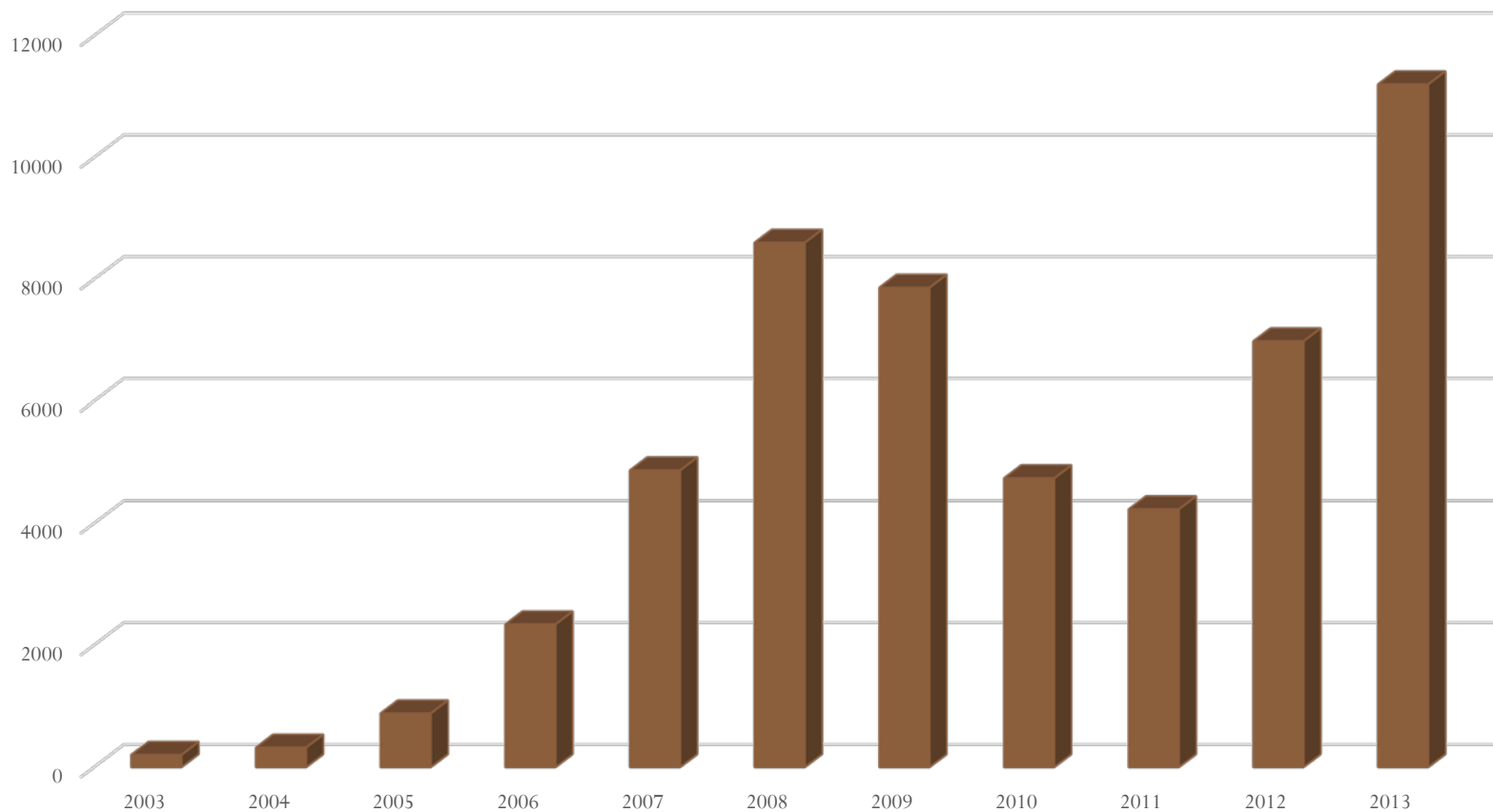
“[With TFWs] we're dealing with a dedicated workforce. We're also dealing with a workforce for supervisors that end up being malleable.” – employer

“They raised the bar. These guys weren't used to taking coffee breaks so the 15 minute coffee breaks, at nine minutes they were standing up with their jackets on and the Canadians are going, holy gee.” – employer

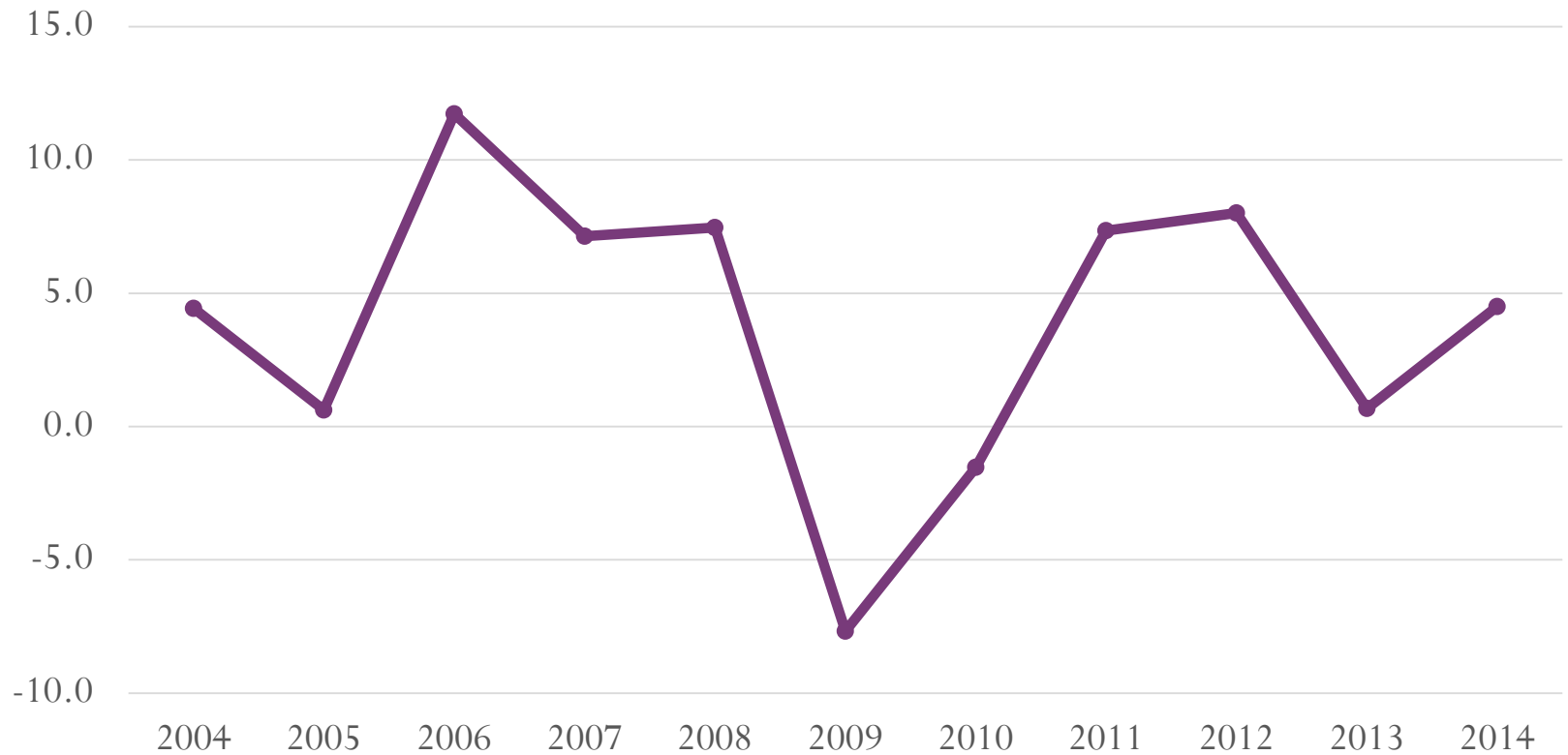
“[The]foreign worker is here to work. Shift starts at 7, they're there every day at 6:30 or 6:45 waiting for you to open the doors. The work ethic is incredible. They don't phone in sick; they're there every day. If you have overtime, they're taking it.” – recruiter

“Because of the wage differences from India and the Philippines to Canada, they're very appreciative and prepared to work very hard to sustain their employment.” – employer

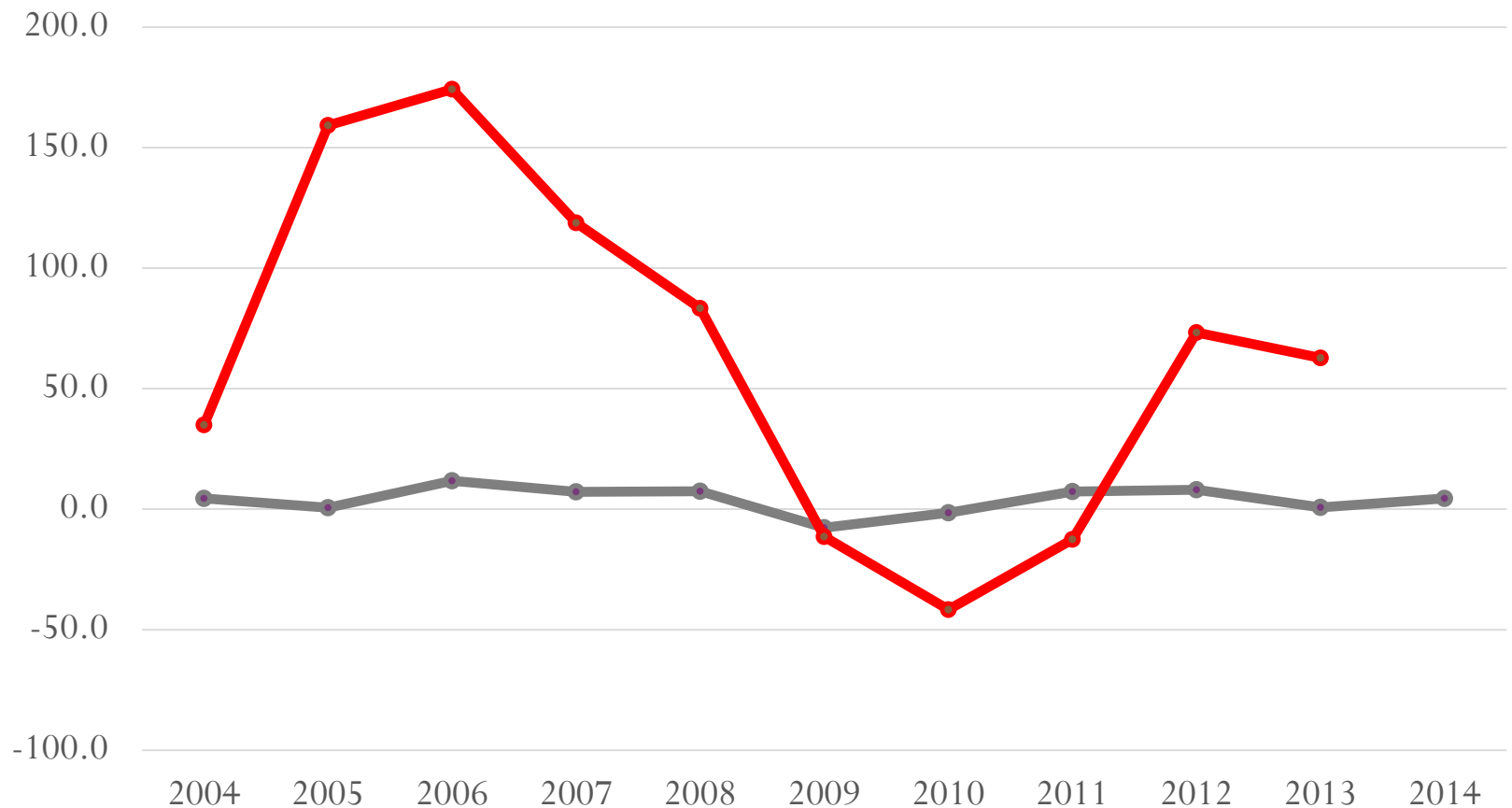
TFWs in Construction Occupations, Alberta



Year-over-Year Change, Construction Employment (%)



Year-over-Year Employment Change, TFWs (%)



- Most wish to stay permanently
- Experience stress, uncertainty, social exclusion
- “compliant” due to precarious, employer-dependent status
- Unemployment does not mean departure
- Last 18 months – increase in “undocumented” workers

Conclusion

Emerging strategy of TFWs as hyper-flexible labour supply.

- “Effective” for employers in smoothing out boom and bust employment cycles
- Significant economic and social consequences
- Takes advantage of TFWs’ precarious and vulnerable status

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