

ATTITUDES TOWARDS UNIONS AND MIGRANT WORKERS IN SASKATCHEWAN

Preliminary findings
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"Saskatchewan in the Global Division of Migrant Labour"

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Overview

These survey results are part of a broader project that examines migrant workers in Saskatchewan. The research has been funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Dean's Research Award (University of Regina, Faculty of Business Administration) as part of a study, "Saskatchewan in the Global Division of Migrant Labour". Fueled by economic development and global commodity prices, the province's population growth over the last decade has been driven by immigration. Many of these newcomers entered Saskatchewan through a multitude of programs such as the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP), the International Mobility Program (IMP), among others. International students enrolled at our post-secondary institutions also constitute an important - and growing - element of the newcomer population. Currently, around 20,000 migrant workers and permanent residents call Saskatchewan home.

As permanent residents, temporary foreign workers, immigrants, and new Canadians, these newcomers staff our restaurants, work in our province's mines, factories, and oil fields; they are engineers and construction workers; physicians, and nurses; they are professors and graduate students; they work in all three levels of government; they toil in our greenhouses and agricultural industry; they are nannies and live-in caregivers. But, most importantly for the purposes of this study, they are also union members. The study provides a snapshot of findings, and compares union attitudes amongst unionized non-Canadian, Canadian, and international student workers. These preliminary findings merit further investigation and are worth reflection when it comes to union policies, practices, and collective bargaining agendas in our increasingly diverse workplaces.

Methodology

Between December and June of 2017 social media, mail outs, email list-serves, and leafleting at public events were used to promote the on-line survey. The survey involved 46 branching questions focusing on the following themes: citizenship status; number of years working in Canada; country of origin; perspectives on foreign workers; opinions on unions; income; educational background; industry of employment; occupation; job satisfaction; working conditions; and level of engagement with the union. Promotional material was distributed to unionized workers through membership lists maintained by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Saskatchewan Building Trades, and the United Steelworkers in Saskatchewan. A total of 247 participants completed the survey; 130 of who were members of a union. Although the response rate is hardly representative of the Saskatchewan population or workforce, it offers important insights about union-migrant worker relations in the province.

Migrant workers & immigrants by industry

Migrant workers and immigrants in Saskatchewan's workforce

Industry	Non-permanent workers	Non-permanent workers as % of workforce	Immigrants	Immigrants as % of workforce
All industries	7,065	1.30%	65,945	12.12%
Food services and accommodations	2,060	5.89%	10,220	29.20%
Retail	960	1.60%	8,600	14.32%
Education	440	1.00%	3,895	8.86%
Construction	440	1.01%	3,430	7.89%
Health care	410	0.58%	10,735	15.24%
Farms	345	0.71%	1,955	4.07%
Taxi & limousine	15	1.38%	590	54.38%
Manufacturing	295	1.18%	5,260	14.32%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2016 (Saskatchewan)

Survey highlights

Satisfaction with union representation (satisfied & very satisfied)

56% Non-Canadians

51% Canadians

My union should offer support to foreign workers who wish to become permanent residents

77% (yes) Non-Canadians

40% (yes) Canadians

How often do you turn to your union for help or assistance with a workplace matter?

21% (frequently) Non-Canadians

17% (frequently) Canadians

My union could do more to support me and other workers in the workplace (strongly agree & agree)

64% Non-Canadians

40% Canadians

My union could do more to support workers who want to get involved with the union (strongly agree & agree)

67% Non-Canadians

49% Canadians

My union could do more to support foreign workers (strongly agree & agree)

75% Non-Canadians

28% Canadians

My union could do more to support community engagement (strongly agree & agree)

66% Non-Canadians

36% Canadians

My union could do more to support political engagement (strongly agree & agree)

51% Non-Canadians

26% Canadians

My union could do more to support Aboriginal workers (strongly agree & agree)

72% Non-Canadians

34% Canadians

My union has my best interests in mind (strongly agree & agree)

62% Non-Canadians

47% Canadians

My union listens to my concerns (strongly agree & agree)

46% Non-Canadians

41% Canadians

Unions are a positive force in Canada (strongly agree & agree)

67% Non-Canadians

75% Canadians

Workers are better off when they belong to a union (strongly agree & agree)

65% Non-Canadians

73% Canadians

If I had to choose, I probably would not be a member of a union (strongly agree & agree)

18% Non-Canadians

8% Canadians

Workers would be just as well off if there were no unions in Canada (strongly agree & agree)

15% Non-Canadians

2% Canadians

My union effectively represents the interests of its members (strongly agree & agree)

59% Non-Canadians

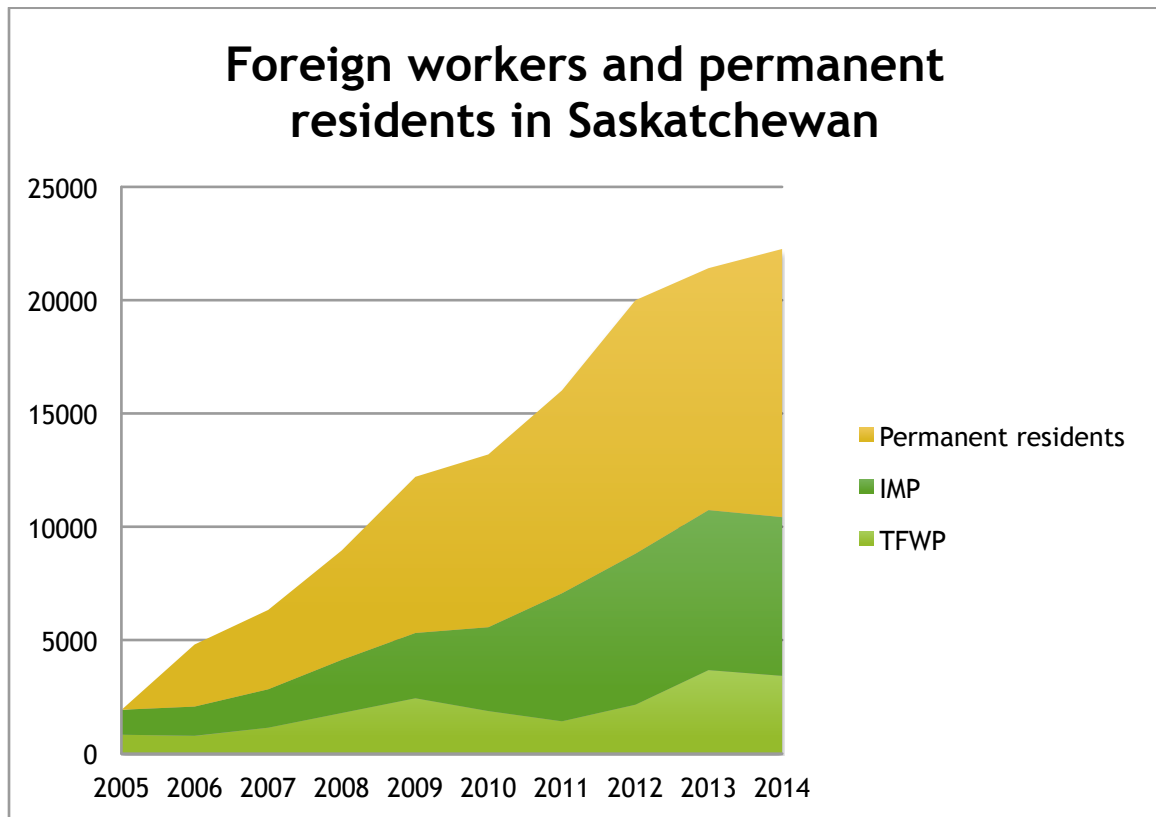
57% Canadians

I fear losing my job because of subcontracting and/or budget cuts (strongly agree & agree)

62% Non-Canadians

66% Canadians

Demographics



Percentage of TFWs and Permanent Residents by region (2016)		
Area	Temporary Foreign Workers	Permanent residents
Saskatoon	17%	34%
Regina	21%	31%
Other	62%	35%
Source: Government of Canada		

Migrant worker wages

Top employers of TFWs by LMIA (2012-2014)			
Employer	Number of TFWs hired	Average hourly wage	Median Hourly wage
Subway	52	\$11.15	\$11.01
Tim Horton's	42	\$10.96	\$11.00
BFI Constructors Ltd.	40	\$36.55	\$37.73
A&W	32	\$11.83	\$11.18
McDonald's Restaurant	28	\$11.19	\$11.00
Pizza Hut	27	\$12.68	\$12.25
Saskatoon Regional Health Authority	24	\$54.93	\$39.30
Cameco Corporation	22	\$62.23	\$57.67
Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region	20	\$73.04	\$41.98
Prairie North Regional Health Authority	19	\$129.63	\$134.50
University of Saskatchewan	19	\$38.03	\$37.44

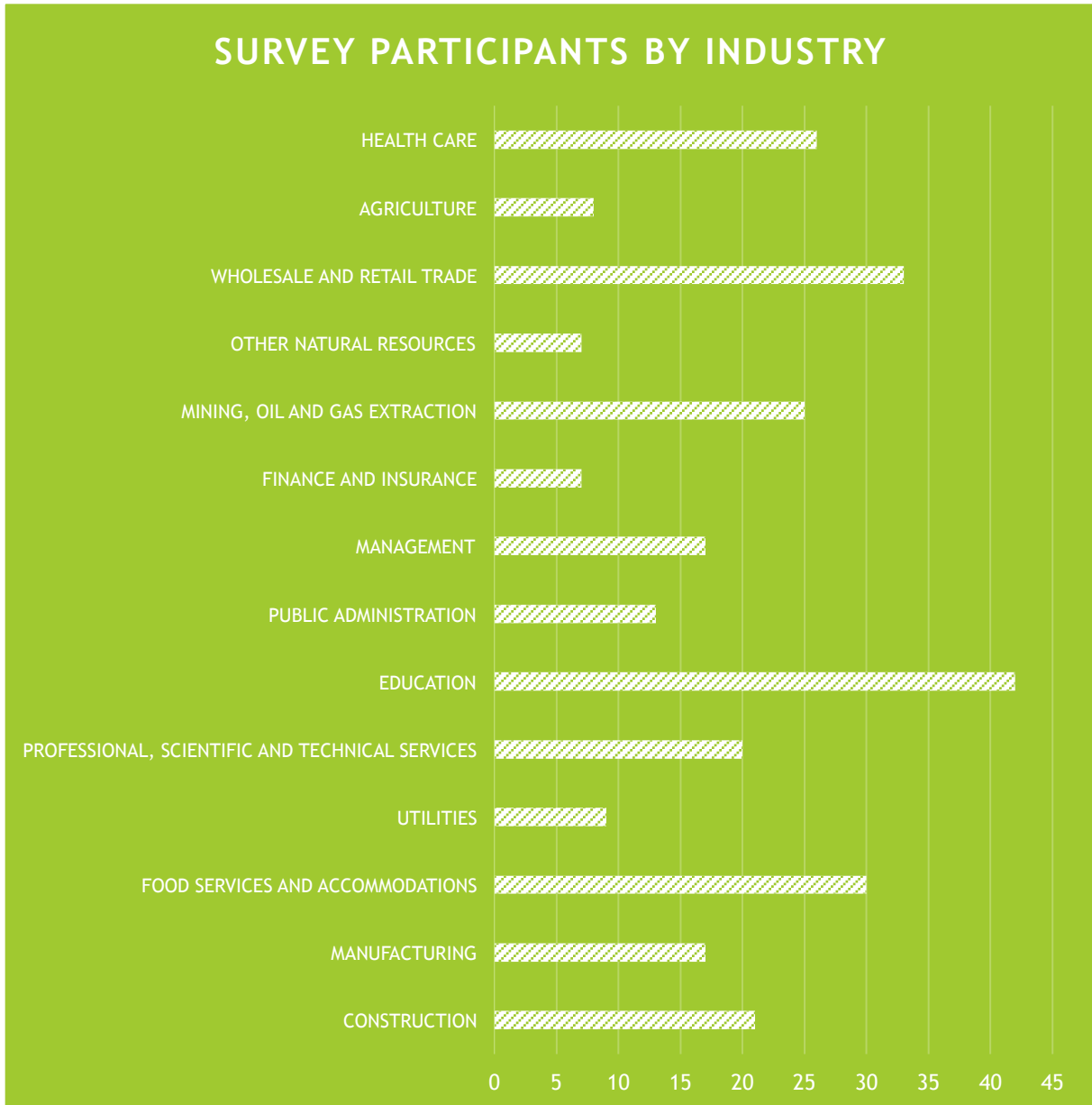
Source: Data obtained through access to information request

Average hourly rates of pay by ALMOs in Saskatchewan (2012-2013)	
Country of origin/region	Median hourly rate of pay
Philippines	\$14.32
India	\$15.00
Ireland	\$24.00
Global South	\$20.50
Average	\$21.00

Average hourly earnings amongst foreign workers by skill level (2012-2014)	
Skill level	Average hourly earnings
Skill A	\$53.86
Skill B	\$22.43
Skill C	\$13.70
Skill D	\$12.72

Source: Data obtained through access to information request

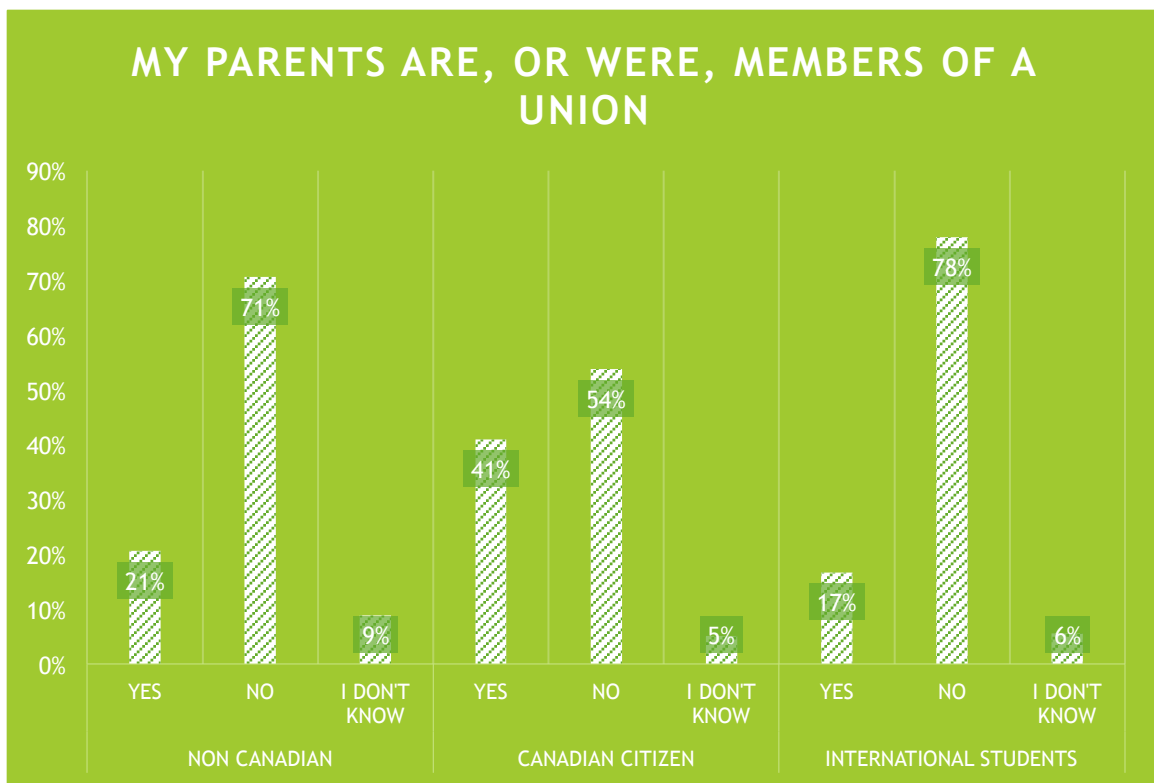
Survey participants by industry



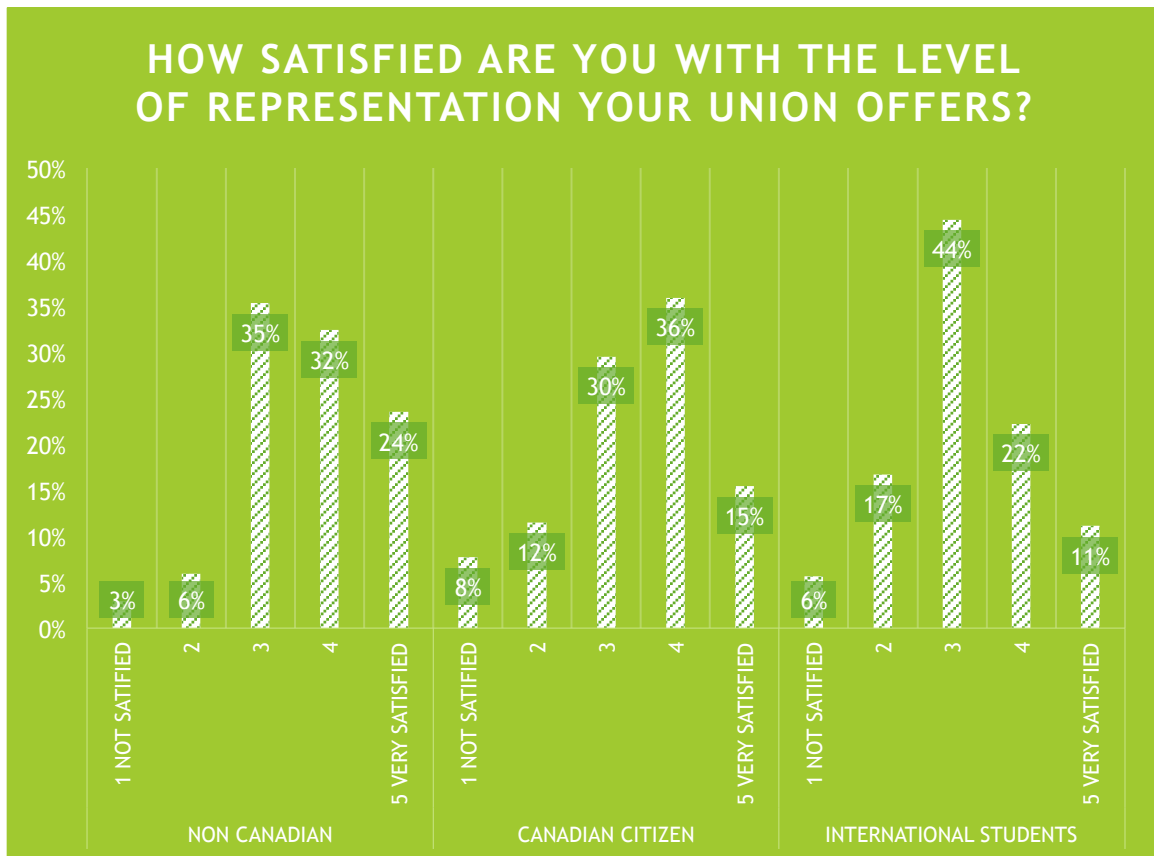
Service to the union



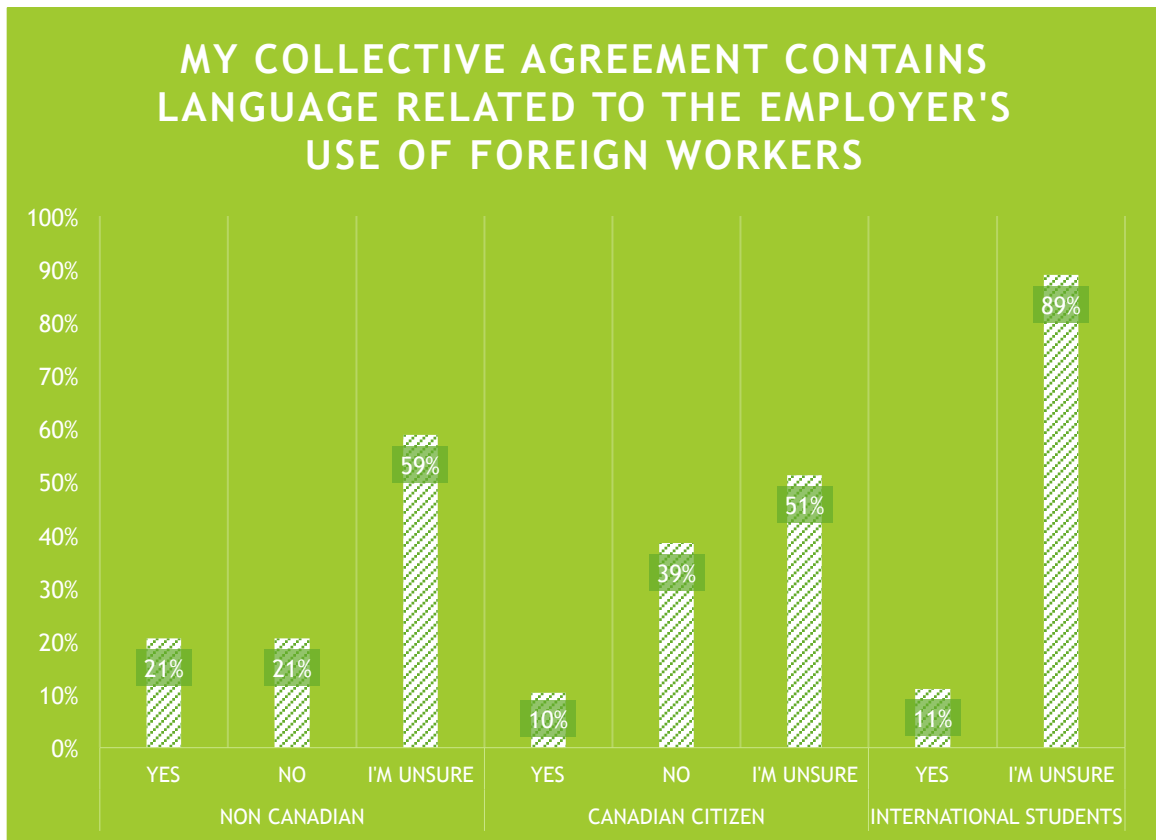
Parents and unions



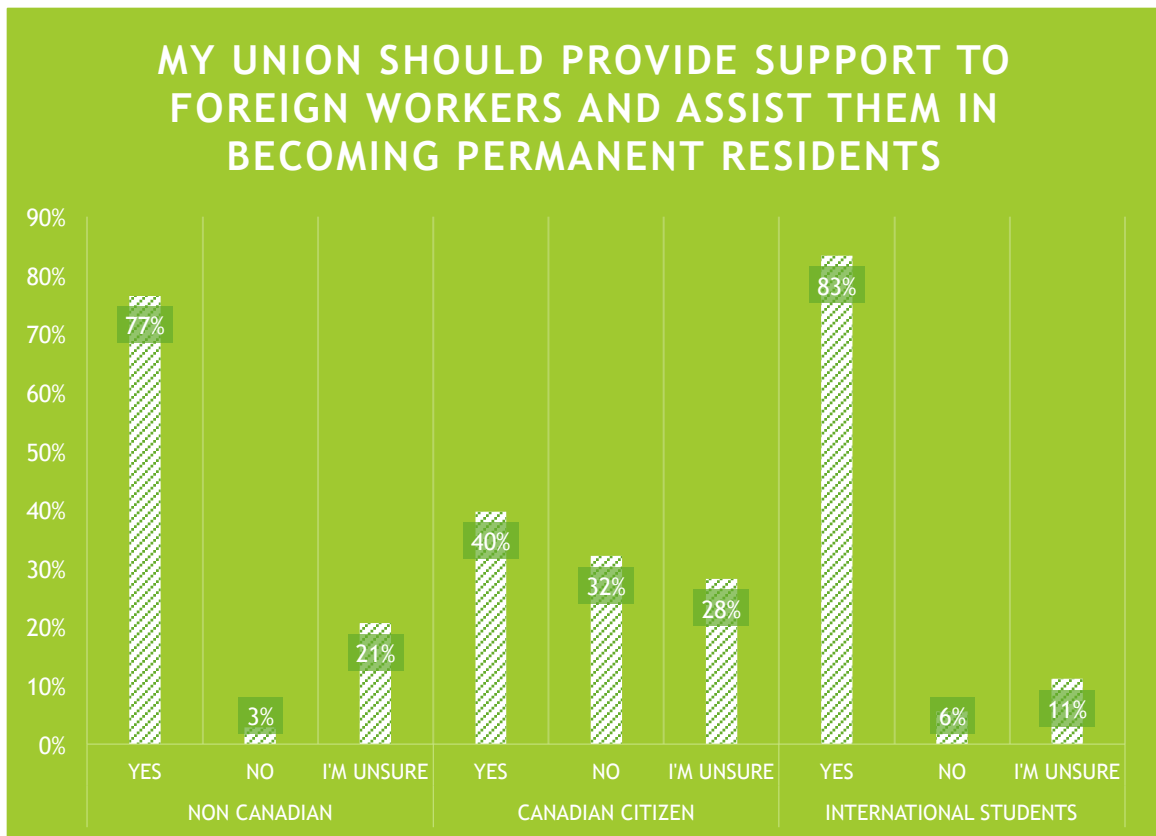
Union satisfaction



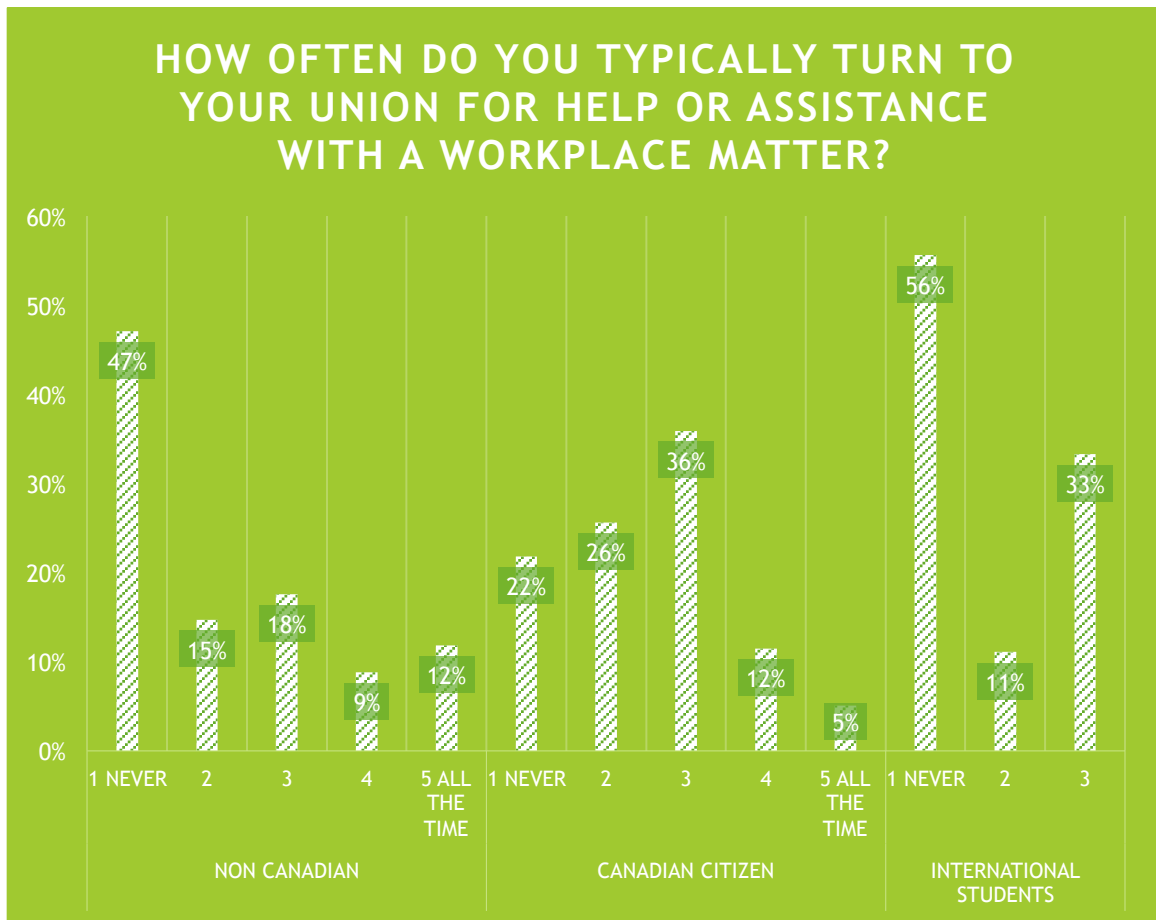
Collective agreement language and foreign workers



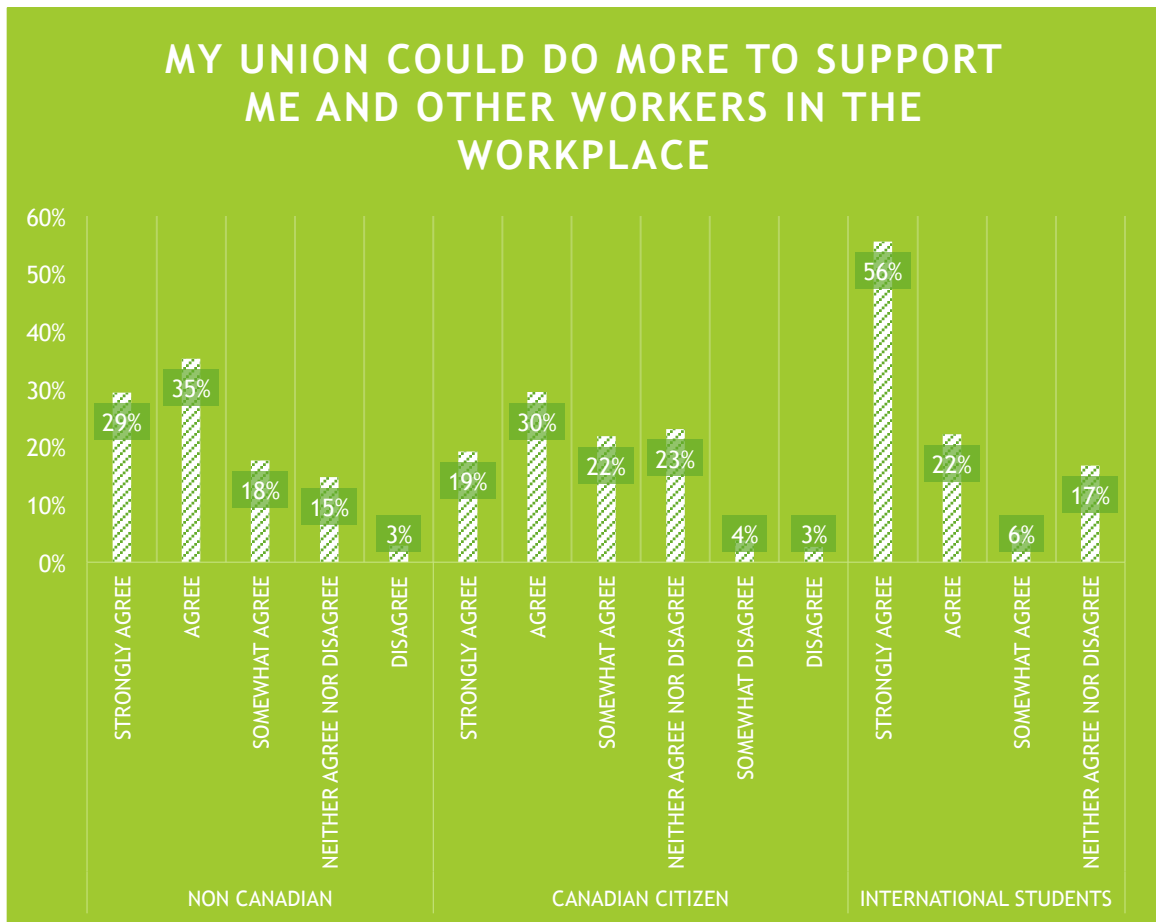
Unions and immigration assistance



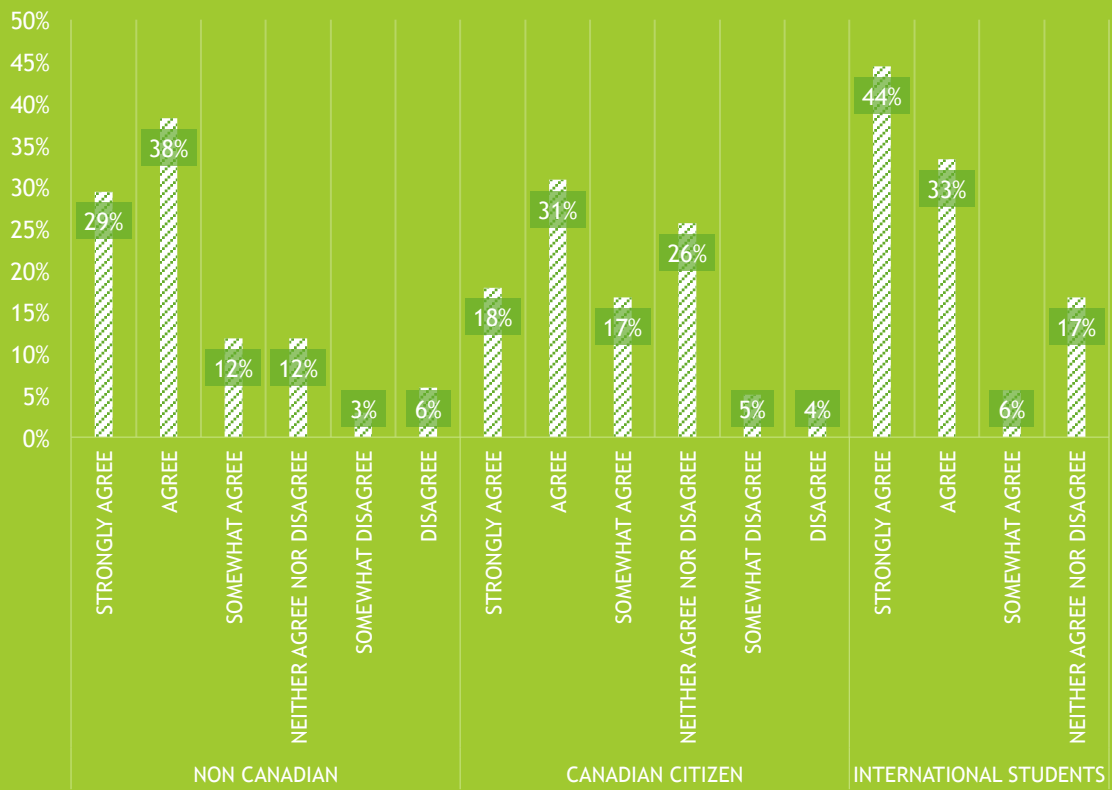
Turning to the union for assistance



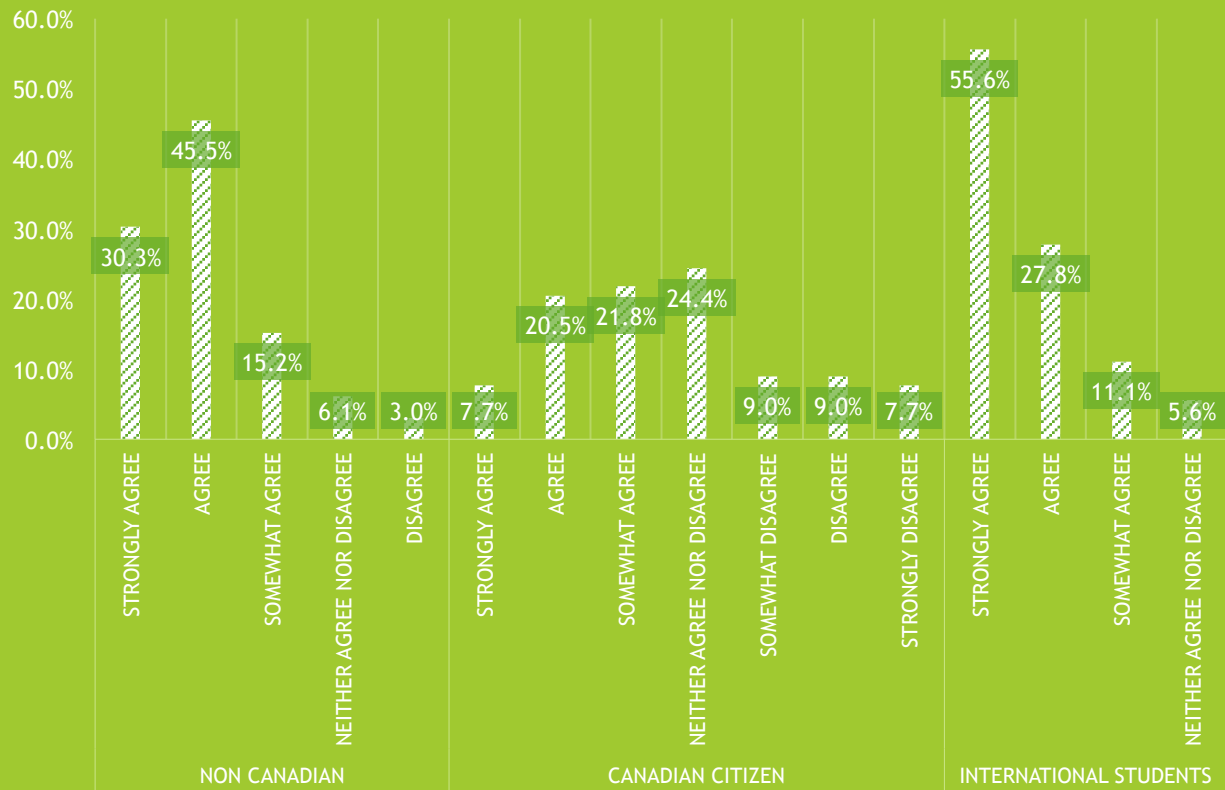
Providing membership support, leadership, and engagement



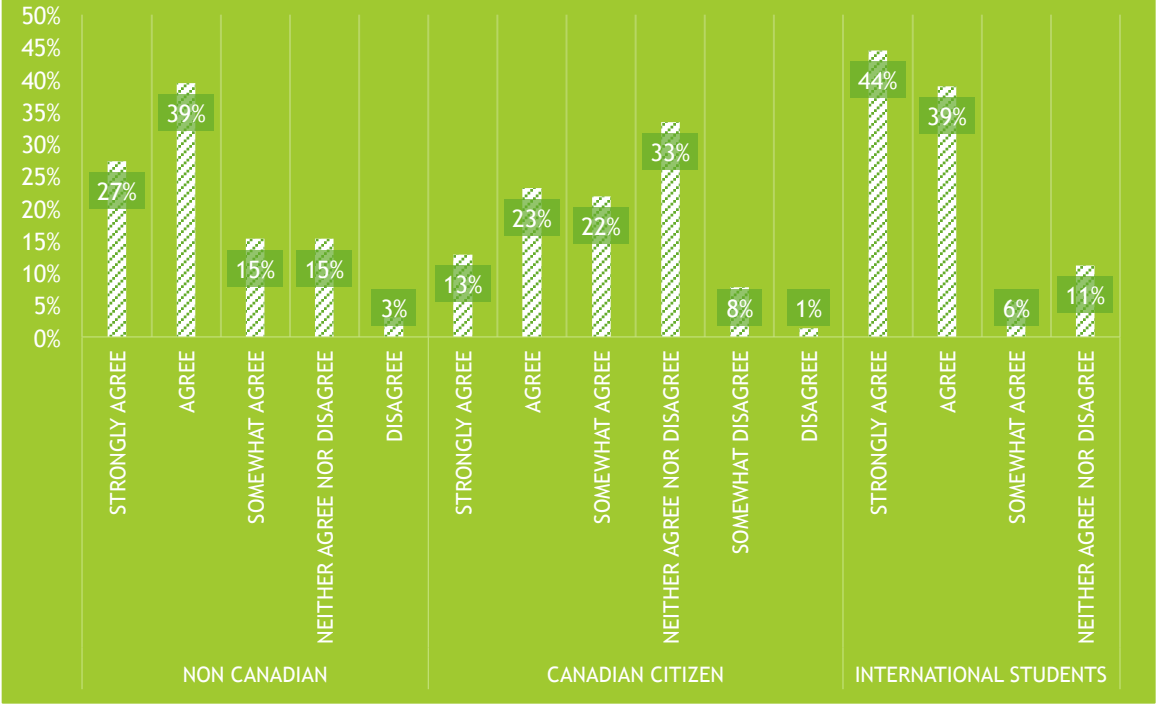
MY UNION COULD DO MORE TO SUPPORT WORKERS WHO WANT TO GET INVOLVED WITH THE UNION



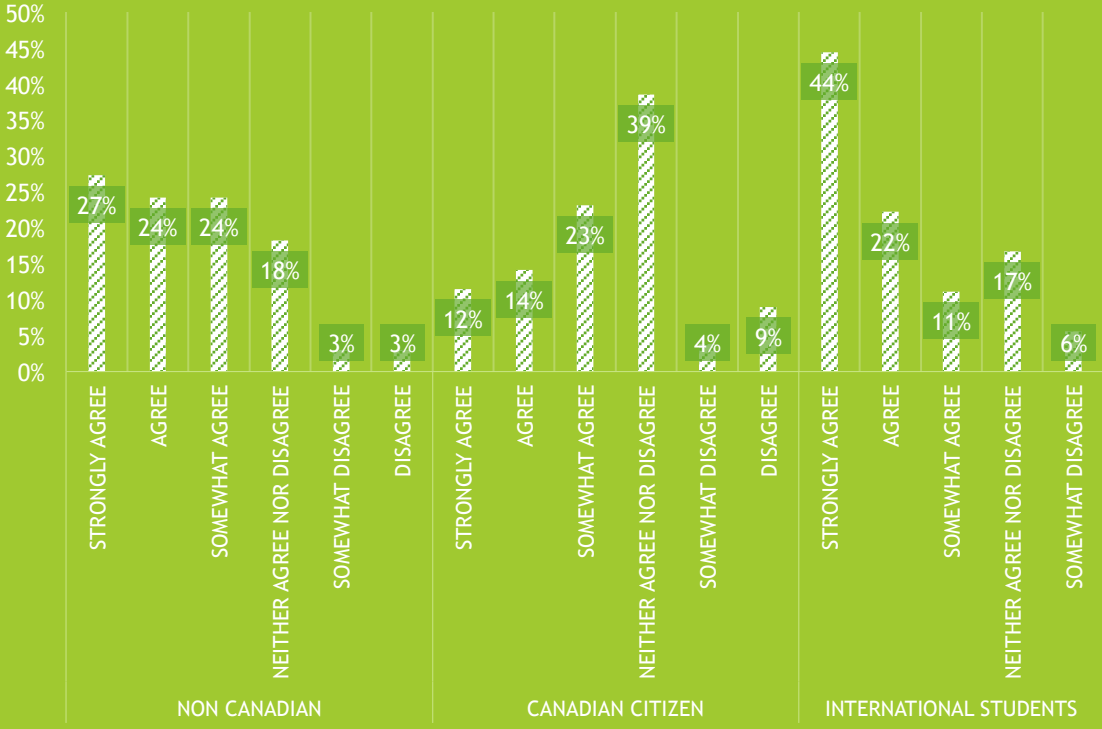
MY UNION SHOULD DO MORE TO SUPPORT FOREIGN WORKERS



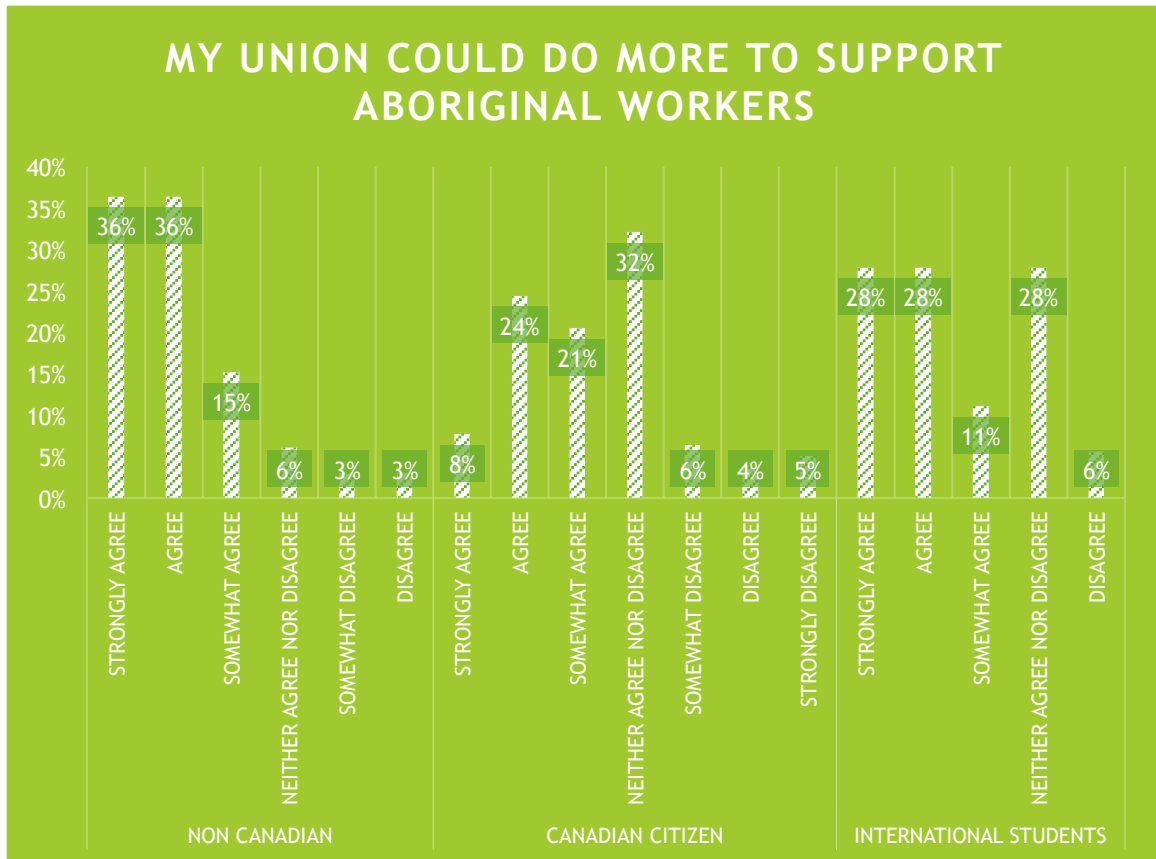
MY UNION COULD DO MORE TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



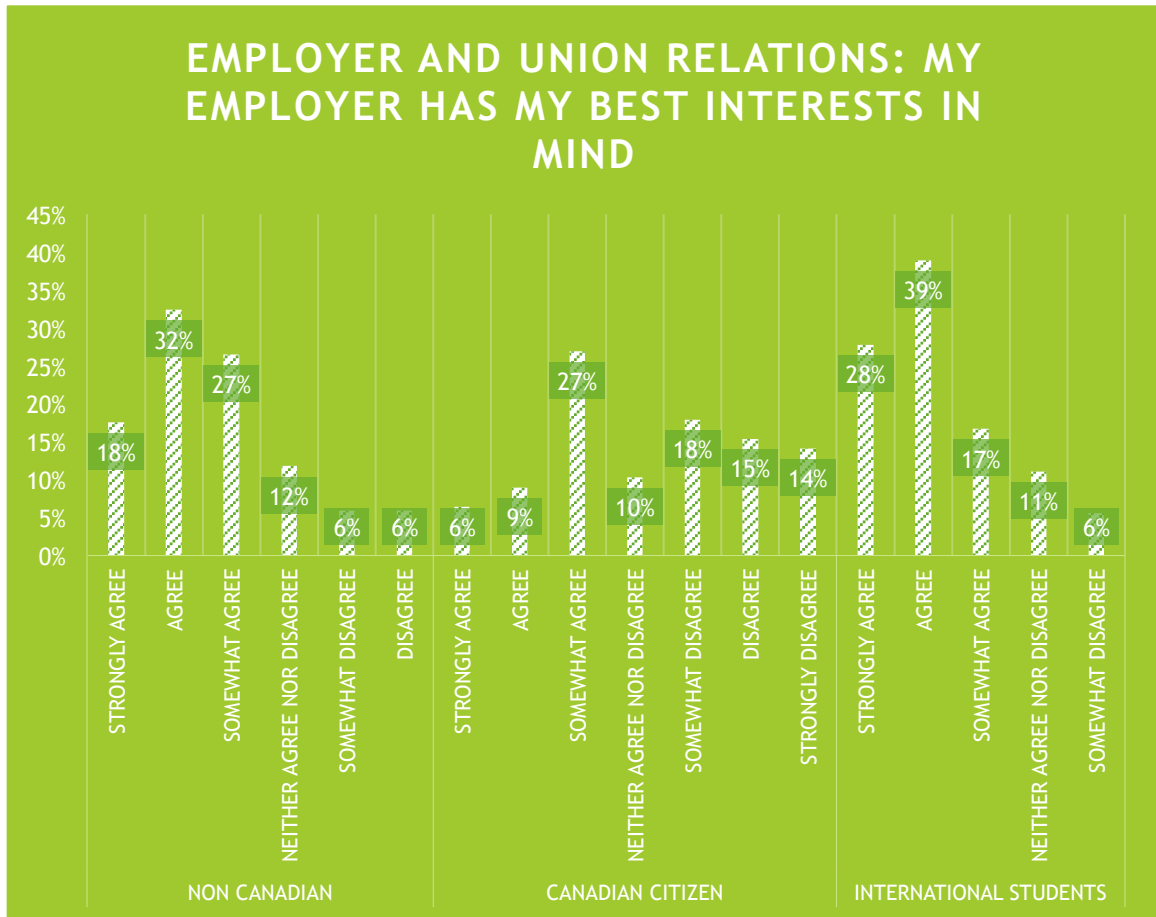
MY UNION COULD DO MORE TO IMPROVE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT



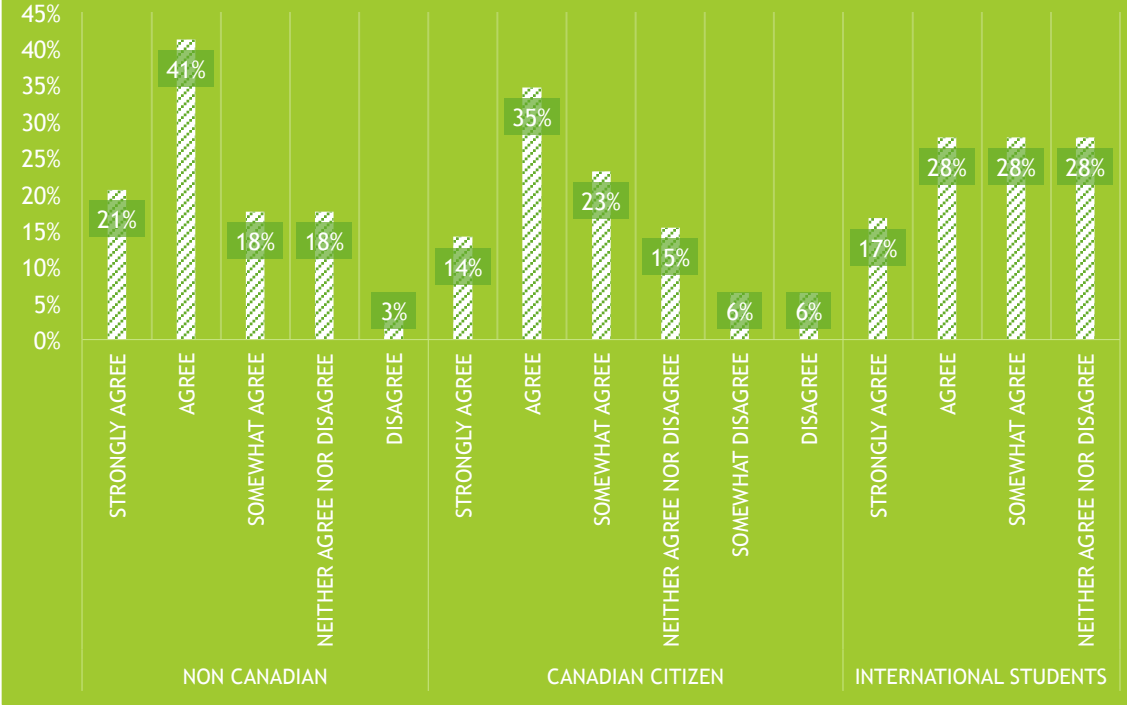
Supporting Aboriginal workers



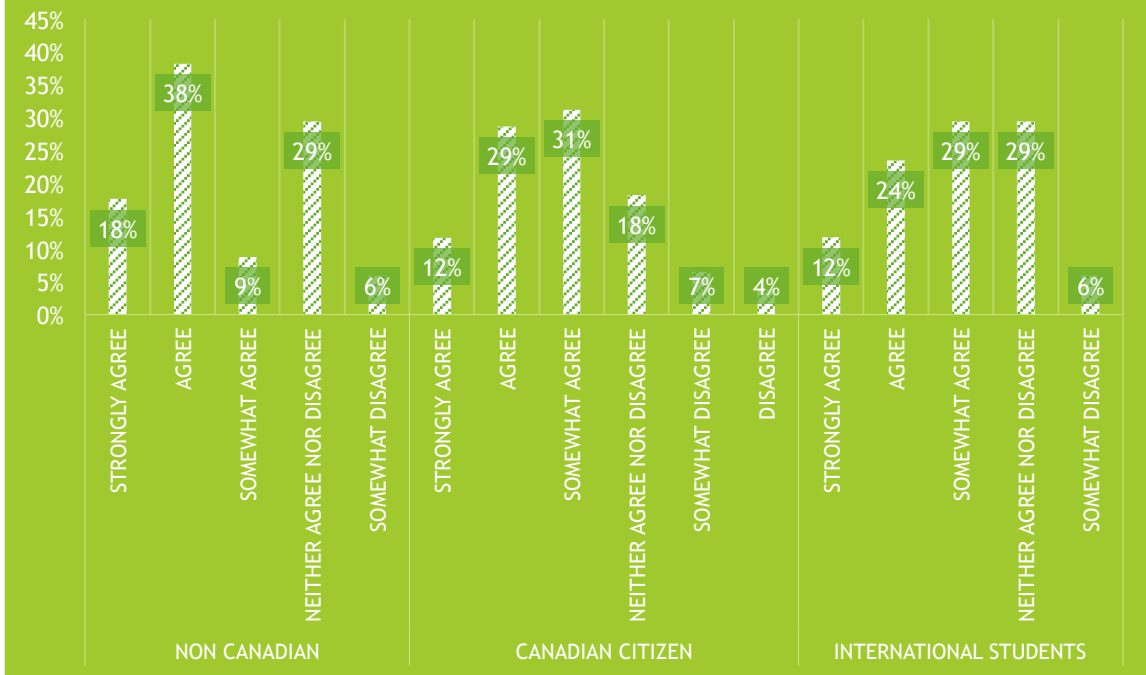
Employer and union relations



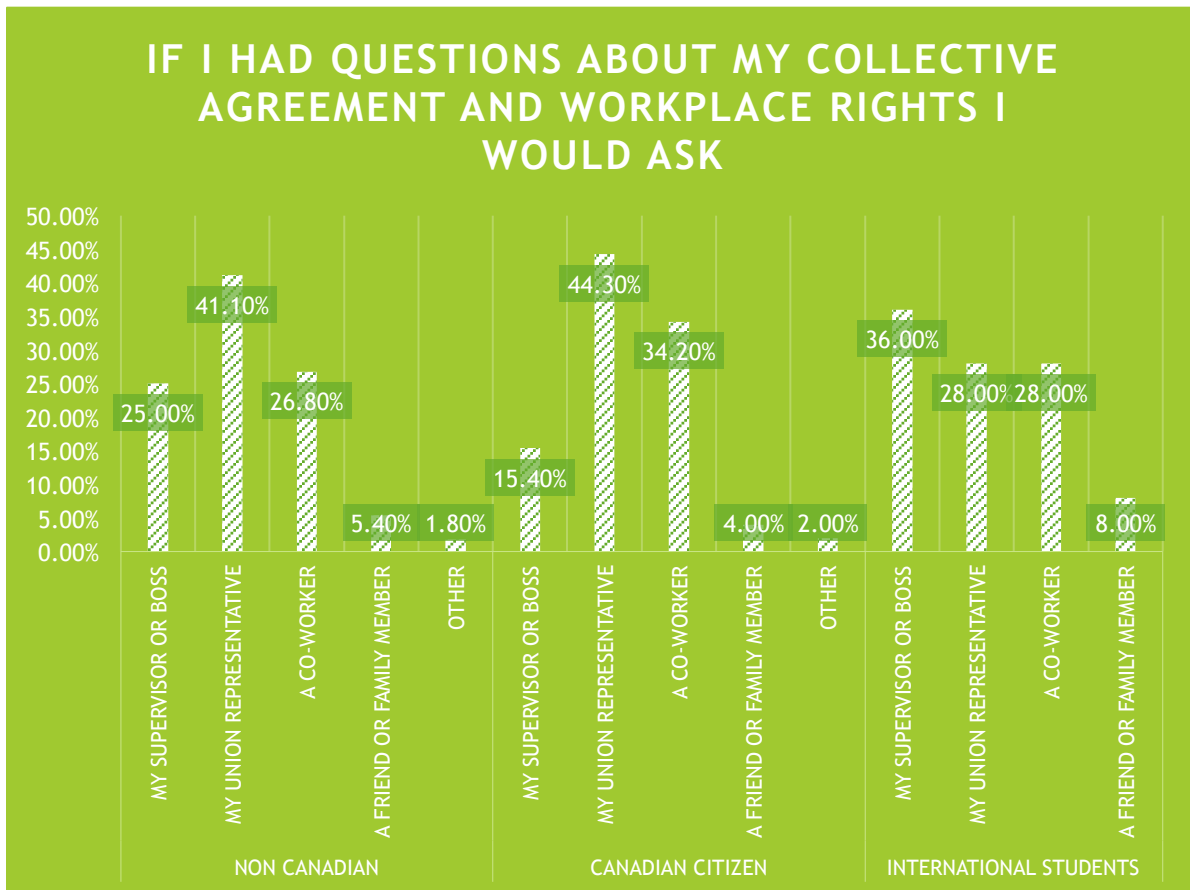
EMPLOYER AND UNION RELATIONS: MY UNION HAS MY BEST INTERESTS IN MIND



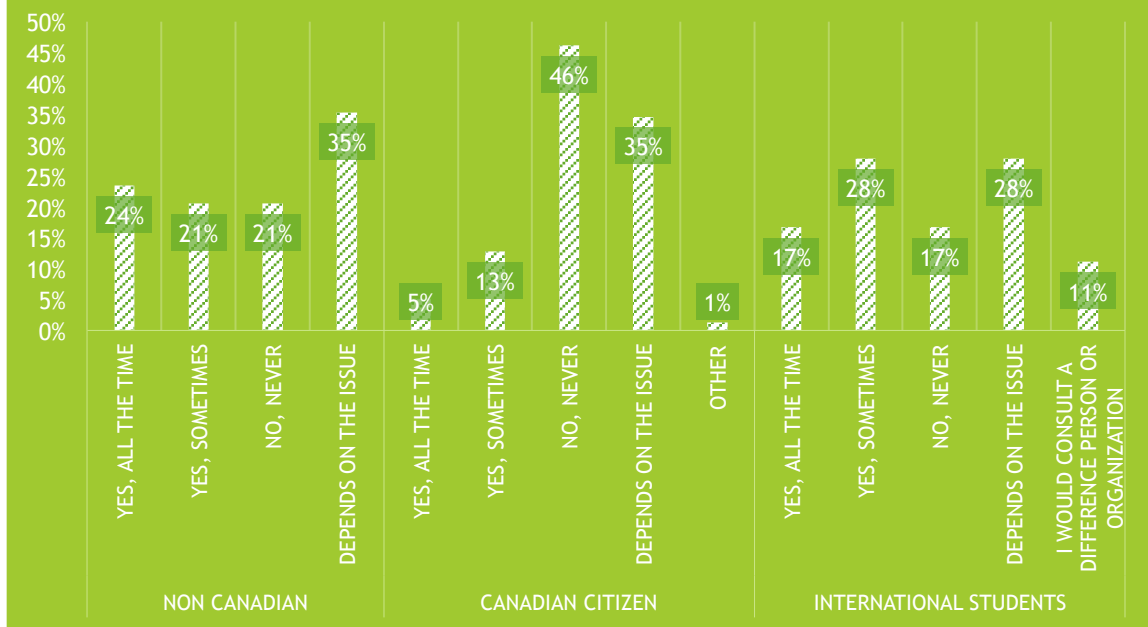
EMPLOYER AND UNION RELATIONS: MY UNION LISTENS TO MY CONCERNS



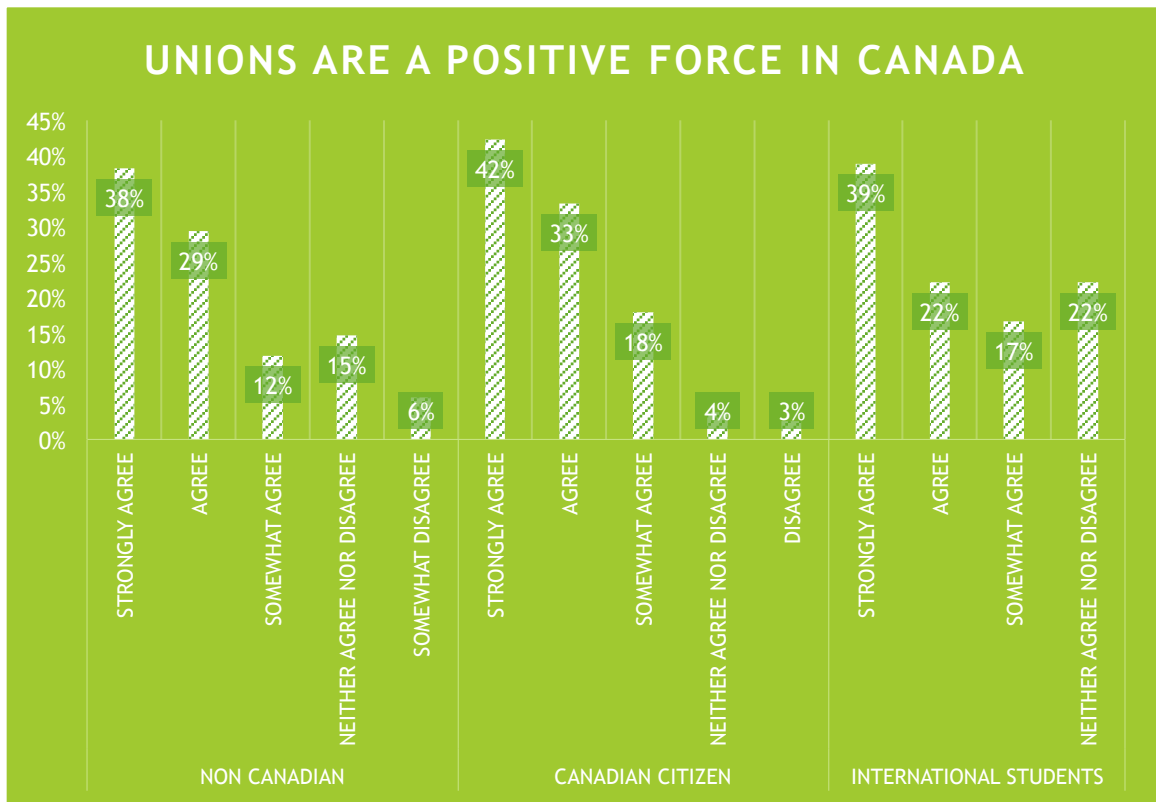
Reading the collective agreement



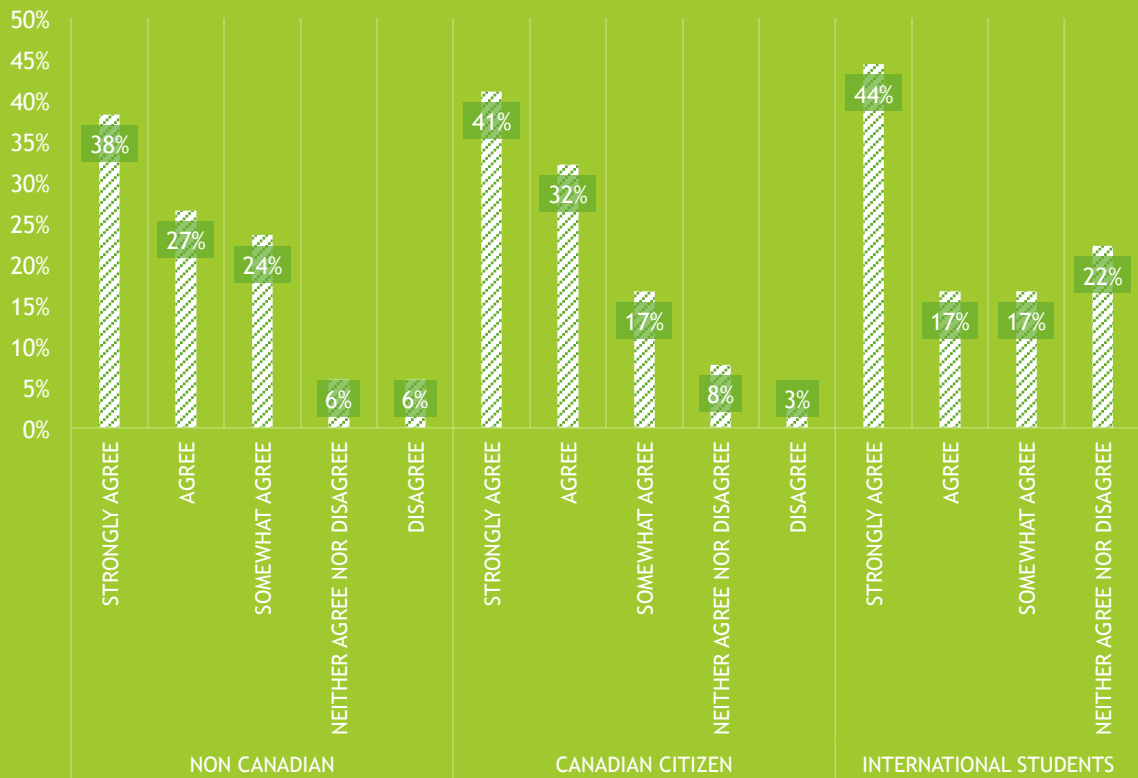
I WOULD GO TO MY SUPERVISOR FOR HELP UNDERSTANDING MY COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT AND WORKPLACE RIGHTS



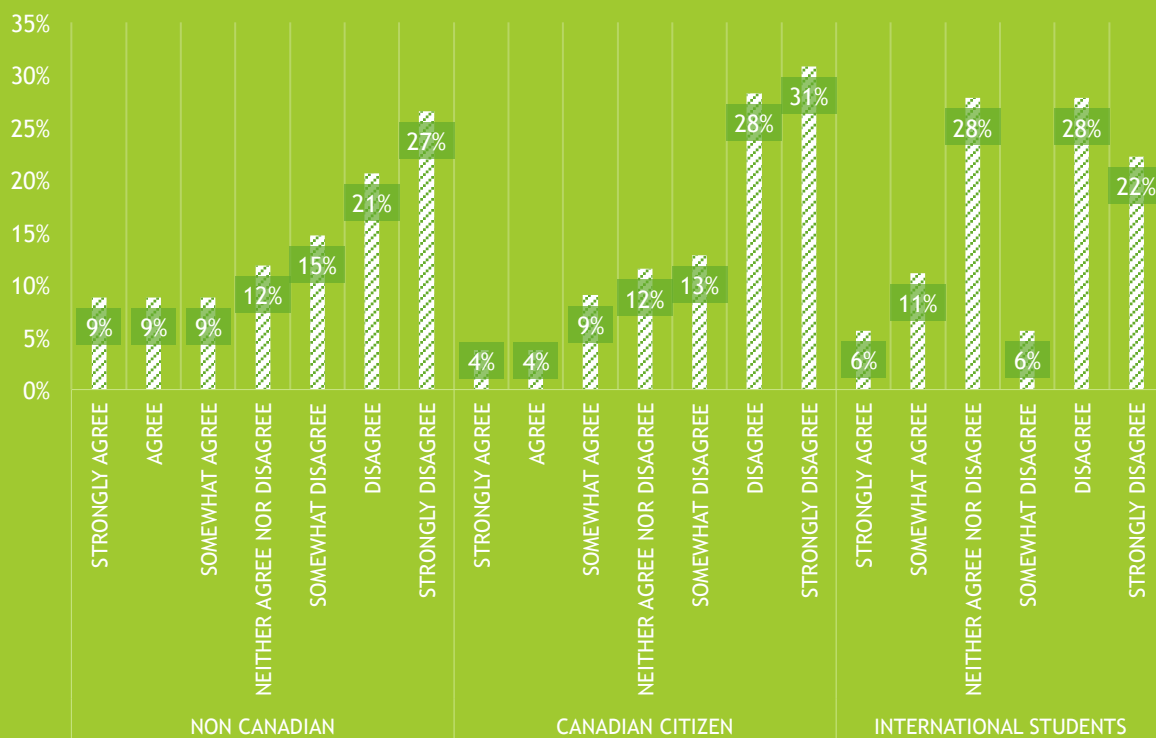
Opinions about unions in Canada



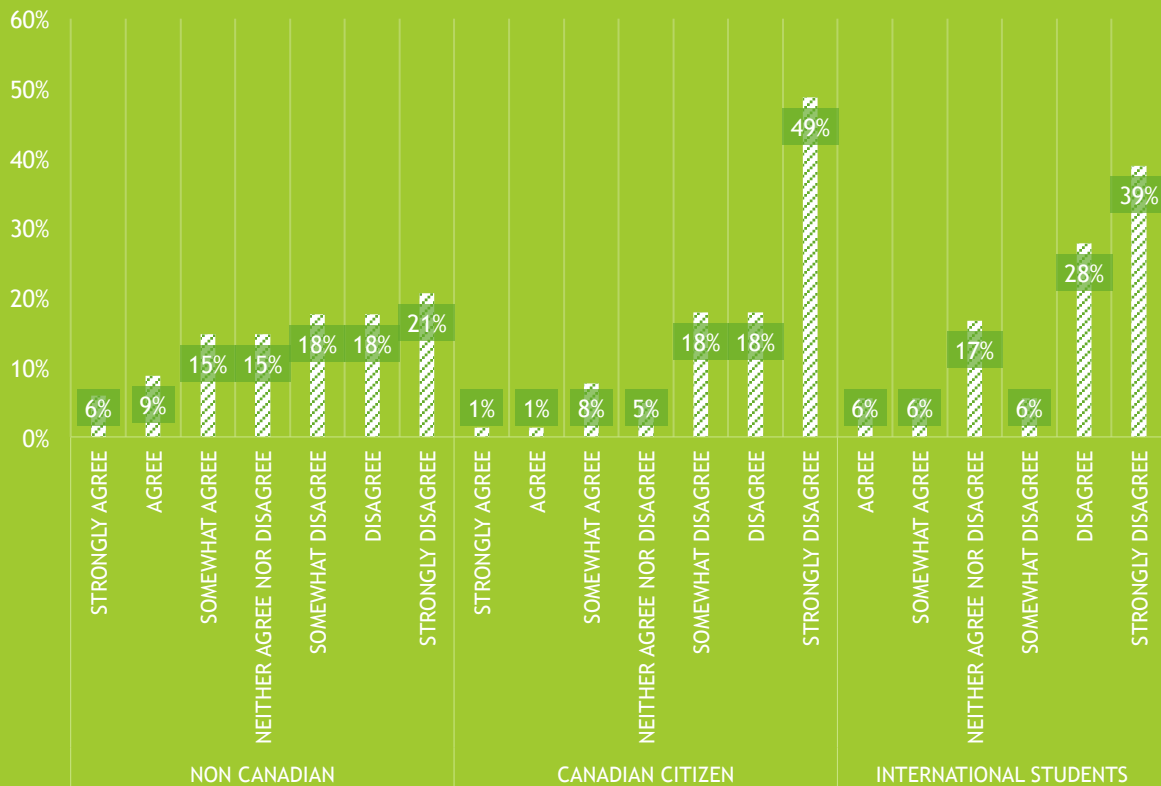
WORKERS ARE BETTER OFF WHEN THEY BELONG TO A UNION



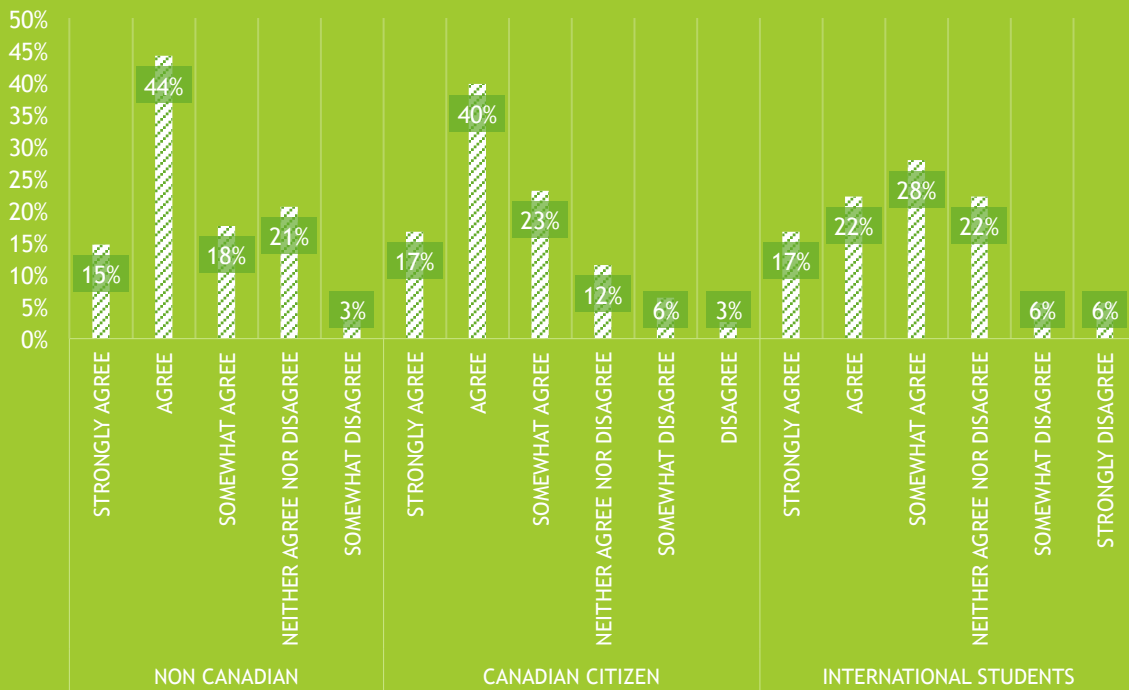
IF I HAD TO CHOOSE, I PROBABLY WOULD NOT BE A MEMBER OF A UNION



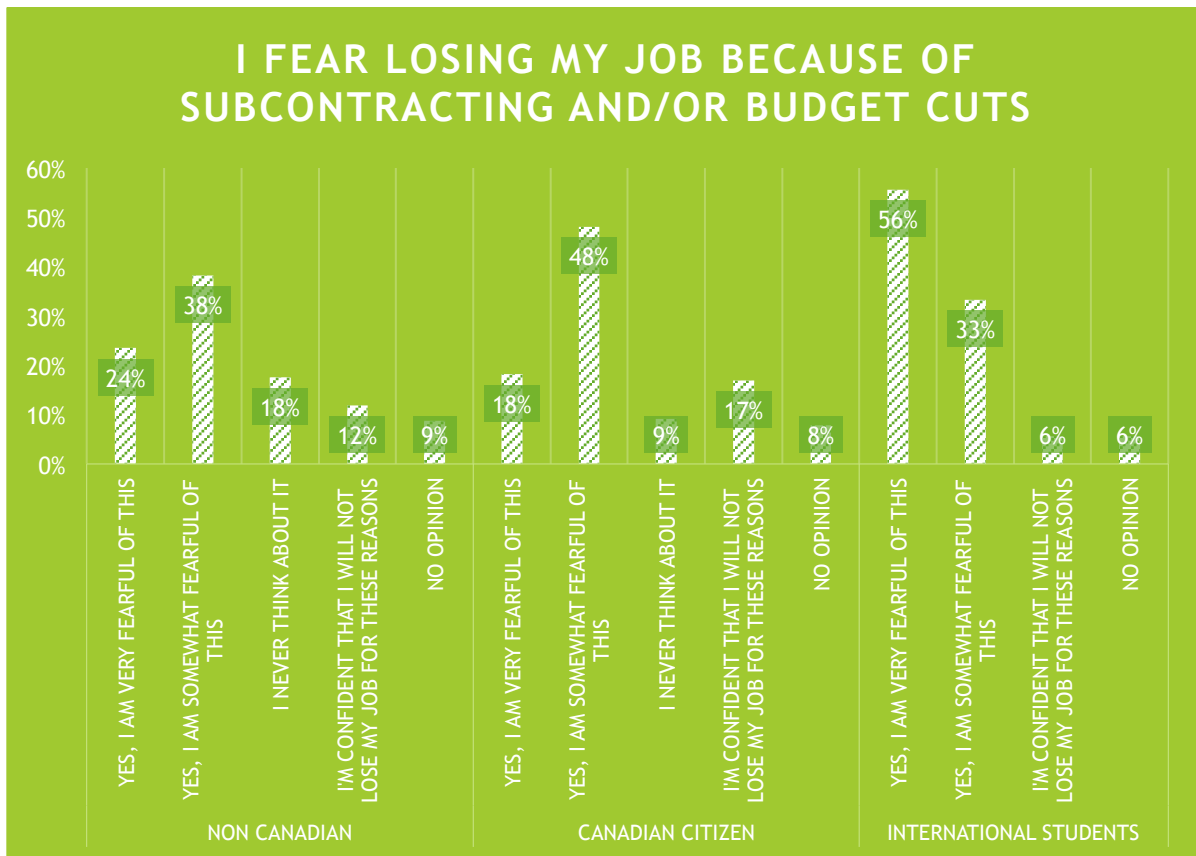
WORKERS WOULD BE JUST AS WELL OFF IF THERE WERE NO UNIONS IN CANADA



MY UNION EFFECTIVELY REPRESENTS THE INTERESTS OF ITS MEMBERS



Subcontracting and budget cuts



Survey Findings

Perception of unions (1 = Strongly agree; 7 = Strongly disagree)		
Union attitudes		
	M	SD
Unions are a positive force in Canada		
<i>Non-Canadian (n = 51)</i>	2.21	1.242
<i>Canadian (n = 78)</i>	1.94	1.085
Workers are better off when they are part of a union		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	2.19	1.299
<i>Canadian</i>	2.01	1.145
If I had to choose, I probably would not be a member of a union		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	4.88	1.896
<i>Canadian</i>	5.33	1.695
Workers would be better off if there were no unions in Canada		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	4.98	1.809
<i>Canadian</i>	5.86	1.448
My union effectively represents the interests of its members		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	2.69	1.261
<i>Canadian</i>	2.59	1.232
My union could do more to:		
	M	SD
Support me and other workers in the workplace		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	2.13	1.205
<i>Canadian</i>	2.71	1.27
Support workers who want to get involved with the union		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	2.25	1.153
<i>Canadian</i>	2.6	1.371
Support foreign workers		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	2.23	1.323
<i>Canadian</i>	2.81	1.349
Improve community engagement		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	2.14	1.149
<i>Canadian</i>	3.04	1.232
Improve political engagement		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	2.41	1.329
<i>Canadian</i>	3.36	1.358
Support Aboriginal workers		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	2.29	1.331
<i>Canadian</i>	3.37	1.478
Support foreign workers		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	1.94	1.047
<i>Canadian</i>	3.64	1.667

Foreign workers in the community and in the union (1 = Strongly agree; 7 = Strongly disagree)		
Perspectives on foreign workers		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Foreign workers are necessary in Saskatchewan		
<i>Non-Canadian (n = 51)</i>	1.77	1.041
<i>Canadian (n = 78)</i>	3.44	1.877
Foreign worker lower wages for all Canadians		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	5.02	1.59
<i>Canadian</i>	3.79	1.761
Foreign workers are active in their union		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	3.62	1.598
<i>Canadian</i>	4.29	1.538
Foreign workers add important diversity to my workplace		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	1.88	1.247
<i>Canadian</i>	3.06	1.875
Employers should focus on employing Aboriginal workers over foreign workers		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	4.13	1.669
<i>Canadian</i>	3.76	1.745
Foreign workers are taking Canadian jobs		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	5.08	1.713
<i>Canadian</i>	3.74	1.819
Foreign workers add important diversity to my community		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	1.71	1.035
<i>Canadian</i>	2.91	1.881
Respect at work and in the community		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I feel respected by my co-workers		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	1.88	1.06
<i>Canadian</i>	2.31	1.272
I feel respected by my union and union representative		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	2.25	1.153
<i>Canadian</i>	2.6	1.371
I feel respected by neighbours and in the general community		
<i>Non-Canadian</i>	2.04	0.885
<i>Canadian</i>	2.31	1.073
1 = Strongly agree; 7 = Strongly disagree		

Participant voices

Union attitudes

“Okay, from my understanding the ... initial intention of the establishment of ... unions were ... protecting the worker’s rights and ... spreads your voice. But ... in contrast, many unions now-a-days, uh, they probably both intentionally and unintentionally created inefficiencies in the labour market. And creating boundaries in the labour market which prevent it from being competitive. Furthermore, some ... unions even collude with both or either social and political activists for certain intentions and therefore they ... somehow increased the cost of labour. And ... that’s for sure then decreased the competitiveness of the Canadian labour force. Uh, according to ... my understanding I argue that certain, like, certain more efficient regulations should be imposed to the unions in order to keep the Canadian economy and labour force competitive, internationally.” (International student, employed part-time as a server)

“I don’t know about them [unions]. I will speak for myself ... I am an international student too. I know that they will look at you at an asset at the workplace, they don’t look at you in the long term. They don’t look at you in the perspective of a student, sorry international student. I’m saying this cause so far I know the union should also help you to sort of migrate your migration status and help you to work those ways, and I haven’t had that support in that matter. So far I know it has been the same for the other two ex-employees from the same place, they left, they found another job. But that being said, they also looked for help from the union and they were not the most ... effective.” (International student, employed part-time as a headline cook)

“Yes, the union fairly represent me well. Even though I am still kind of new in the from what I have seen so far I think the union is representing very well, when I got the job there was an orientation which made me know a bit more than what I previously knew about unions before, now. The union is fairly responsible... I believe the union can get closer more to employees, than what they are currently doing.” (Permanent resident, employed full-time with the provincial government)

“I mostly think unions ... are- are not a positive force. They are mostly reasons to ... companies, for two bad things; one is that companies can get rid of the ... the foreman guys. They’re unionized, they can’t just fire them. And uh, and second one is unions actually in a sense, I think lower salaries one can get, and if one is good enough on- on- on their uh, own in private companies. For example, I do know one developer working somewhere else in a unionized company. Not a developer actually today, but he is getting less than me in a unionized company. So, yeah I don’t believe in unions.” (Permanent resident, software developer)

“So I when I was working for [a major multinational corporation] in Germany, it was a unionized company there, but it’s, I was, I was amazed that it was not unionized in Canada because I thought like if, if the company like that global player is unionized in Europe, why wouldn’t it be unionized in any other country? And ... here the unions don’t have that many rights to, to tell the, the employers what to do. I have the feeling ... I’m not that perfectly sure to be honest because I’ve never worked in a unionized company here. Because most of them are not unionized.” (Permanent resident, photocopier technician)

“Like I have colleges that, like I was fortunate to leave because the union helped me get to where I am today. However, I have a lot of colleges that are still there. One of my friends ... I mean I saw him come in the company in 2003 I believe, and he is still there. So, that is fourteen years ago. And he just stays there and he is taught in our cultural put your head down and just work, don’t say anything, and managers love him for it. I mean I have heard managers say he is our, you know, “why can’t you be like Jerry, why can’t you be less outspoken, just be quiet and not act.” And while I was there I was advocating, oh well you should give our guys projects, put them on the special projects, help them get somewhere in the company, you know get someplace in the company. Help them get specialized and be better in the company. And they saw that as one of the things that they didn’t like about me; that I am kind of an activist in that way.” (Canadian citizen, employed at Crown corporation)

“So, uh, aside from [the union] representative in our [union local] you have a president who could go too. And I think that, well, I haven’t been there, but I have communicated with the president herself through email when I have concerns or questions with anything regarding work.” (Permanent resident, Registered Nurse)

“Um, to be honest, I have never ... actually dealt with the union. I have no issues with my employer that I had to go to the union. Any issues I had I just talked to my manager and my supervisor and it was sorted out. But, uh, I had other people who had issues ... my coworkers, and they went to the union. And the union actually fought for them.” (Permanent resident who initially arrived as an international student, security guard)

“Yeah. I think that uh they’re not I would say they’re not good at it cause we barely have [a wage] increase like maybe 25 cents every year. So they’re not good at it. But then if you have a problem, yeah you take it, they could help you. I’m now working in [a different local company] and it is a unionized, still a unionized company.” (Permanent resident, works in meat packing industry)

“I would say that there’s some for us some minorities we are not getting a fair share from, from the management. It’s like the treatment is different from ... the people who are, who are here way before, before us. Long before us. So I decided that I uh I want a representation from our group... some things like uh if you want something you cannot get it, you cannot get it right away or it’s too hard to ask a superior to do this. But if a specifically white person get asked a supervisor to, to ask for a favor they could easily get it.” (Permanent resident, stay at home parent, husband employed in a unionized workplace)

“But when it comes to work ethics or something that you are like you can’t. You don’t feel comfortable to talk to [the union representative]. The same thing with the, with the production managers. Right? So that’s part where I found the union would come in, but that’s when the union lacked because they never made themselves present.” (Canadian citizen who first arrived as a refugee, mechanic)

“I think that there is a bit of a gap between unions and temporary foreign workers because ... I don’t know if you know this but a lot of temporary foreign workers are not unionized. So, they are really at the mercy of the employer and out of the grasp of the union that could help them if they were part of. So, like in a case of the seven oaks, in I don’t know if you know where that is ... I know a lot of foreign workers that were working there and um a lot of them kind of got ousted I think when they hired more- I think they hired more workers to, and coerced them to go rid of their union which protected the workers that were there and those workers had picketed for a year. Like they were out there for a really long time. And now I see them and they are working at the dollar store minimum wage... (Canadian citizen, employed at Crown corporation)

Unions and migrant workers

“And that's what we've also been trying to do in Migrante, is to reach out to local unions and show that the temporary foreign program is not really an issue. Migrant workers, temporary foreign workers is an issue for the working class of Canada so that's hoping for time to reach out to rank-and-file members and the working class in general.” (Marco Luciano, migrant work activist, Migrante Alberta)

“No actually, the actual integration [of migrant and Canadian workers] on the work site has been relatively good. Like I said these guys have a great sense of humour, they're well liked by most of the people. I mean obviously there's going to be some splinter groups with side issues, possibly related to the notion of here's the foreigners coming to take our jobs. But there's been less of that than what think. But I will say this, that not one single of these foreign trades workers have come down to the union hall. They know as well as everybody else that we are against the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and I think in certain cases with some of these workers I've talked to a little bit on the work site, they feel like we're against them.” (Alex Hanson, President of USW Local 9346)

“Coming forward now in 2014 - in that time period a number of unions, for example USW Steel has come to recognize that the Temporary Foreign Worker Program is a vehicle for wage suppression and that people need a pathway [to permanent residency] .. a number of unions and union leaders actually recognizing the folly of this program and this design to undercut unions and to lead to wage suppression across the board and they have taken up the charge in saying we are in solidarity with [inaudible] and we need a policy that pursues human rights as part of reforms. Not all the unions have got that picture. You will still see some [inaudible] that say the wrong thing and are reading the correct side of the script. That's not a big surprise. It's a ... change for a number of unions to be able to recognize the interconnectedness for union growth with newcomers to Canada.” (Karl Flecker, Immigrant employment specialist, former National Director, Anti-racism and Human Right Department, Canadian Labour Congress)

“Because we are supposed to be treated equally as the Canadians. So I think they were doing a good job with providing us with handbooks and stuff with their contact information.” (International student, senior mechanic)

“Well as a condition of employment since it’s a closed shop, if you brought someone in they have to become a member of the union. A couple of our contractors were on some of the taking away, moving off temporary foreign workers but this was going to Saskatchewan Nominee Program, they have been on the missions to Ireland and brought in skilled trades to do that. Once they brought them in then they got signed up with the union and they were treated the same as anybody else.” (Employer-side labour relations consultant in Saskatchewan’s construction industry)

“One of my big uh dreams I guess uh when I started doing internal organizing in healthcare was to get a Filipino workers committee set up where Filipino workers have their own resources and their own platform to make their own decisions and to build their own space within the union. Uh because it’s lacking in, in the public sector union I work with so... There is um I would say it really depends on the leadership in some cases. Uh I guess backing up one step. Leadership the top elected positions in healthcare are like 99% old white people. Like white people over the age of 45 or 50. Um and it depends on the leadership how receptive they are to something like this. There is resistance from some quarters. So when the idea of a Filipino workers committee was broached there’s leadership who say “well why are you, why, why are, why Filipino workers getting their own committee? What about the, what about all the east Europeans we have. What about people from everywhere else?” So there was in one instance uh the leadership suggestion or through conversation that they would be much more comfortable with a ‘New Canadians committee’ that would roll all racialized people into it.” (Union organizer)