



TEMPORARY RESIDENCE IN CANADA

A Patchwork of Rules

Canada has seen a significant increase in the number of temporary residents in recent years — a category encompassing people subject to widely varying and frequently changing conditions of admission and stay. This brief provides an overview of the main types of temporary residence and the associated conditions.

Temporary residence is a heterogeneous status with a multitude of shifting rules. The disparate authorizations and restrictions governing the admission and stay of temporary residents create distinct systems of rights for this population, with repercussions for society as a whole.

MULTIPLE CATEGORIES OF TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

There are three broad categories of residence in Canada: citizenship, permanent residence and temporary residence. The first two confer similar rights, with a few exceptions — most notably, the right to vote, which is reserved for citizens.

Temporary residence provides comparatively limited rights, particularly with regard to employment and access to services. Canada's temporary resident population has grown substantially over the past 15 years and is estimated to number approximately three million in 2025, compared with fewer than one million in 2010 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2025). Temporary residence is now the principal pathway for the admission of immigrants, whereas most were previously admitted as permanent residents. This constitutes a major shift in Canadian immigration policy.

Temporary residents can be subdivided into three categories: (1) temporary workers; (2) international students; and (3) asylum claimants and protected persons.¹ As shown in figure 1, of the 1.6 million temporary residents admitted to Canada in 2024, 89 per cent were either temporary workers (12 per cent admitted under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program [TFWP] and 45 per cent under the International Mobility Program [IMP]) or international students (32 per cent).

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¹ Visitor visa holders are also considered temporary residents under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. However, for the purposes of this brief, we use Statistics Canada's classification of non-permanent residents, which includes holders of work permits, holders of study permits, asylum claimants and protected persons (people whose application for protection has been accepted but who have not yet obtained permanent residence). In addition to these three groups, there is an "Other" category, which includes people who hold a special temporary resident permit, such as recognized victims of human trafficking or domestic violence.



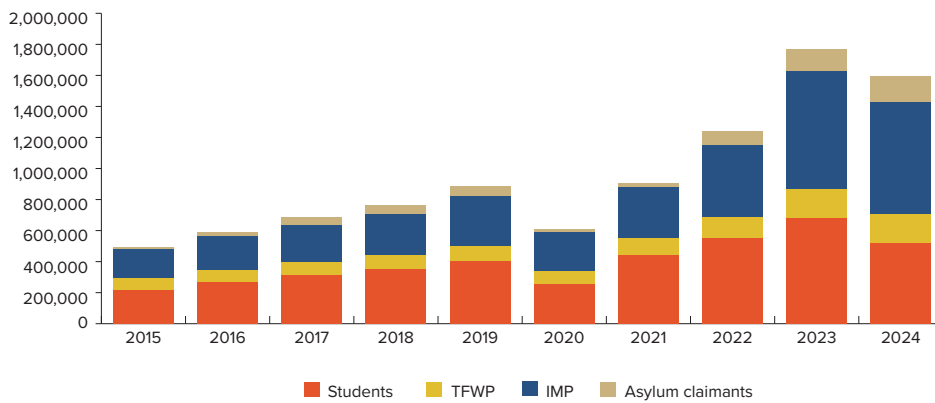


Figure 1. Change in the number of temporary residents admitted to Canada per year since 2015

Source: IRCC. (2025). Temporary residents: Monthly updates for TFWP and IMP work permit holders, Study Permit Holders, and Asylum claimants. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Available at <https://search.open.canada.ca/opendata/>.

As figure 2 illustrates, temporary residence comprises a number of categories with different conditions of admission and stay, particularly in the case of temporary workers. These categories are governed by the federal government. However, under the 1991 Canada-Quebec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens, Quebec has specific jurisdiction over immigration matters, including authority in some aspects of the TFWP selection process, such as approving Labour Market Impact Assessments and issuing certificates of acceptance to temporary workers.

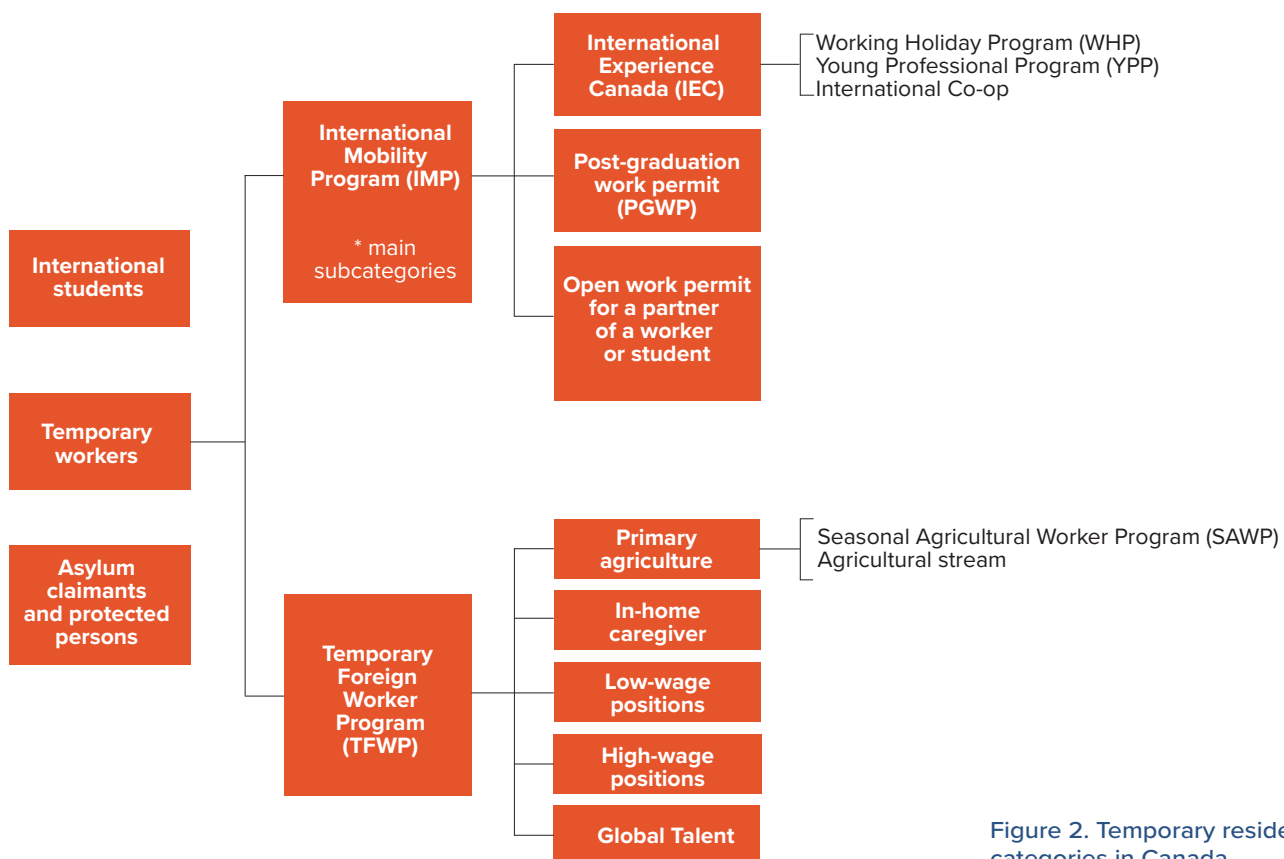


Figure 2. Temporary residence categories in Canada

A TANGLE OF ADMISSION AND STAY CONDITIONS

The differences in admission and stay conditions for temporary residents of Canada depend on three main factors. First and foremost is the category of temporary residence, which determines the terms and conditions for obtaining, using and renewing a residence permit.

The second factor is the province of residence. The provinces play a decisive role in the conditions of stay for temporary residents due to their exclusive jurisdiction over health, education and employment, and their shared responsibility with the federal government for immigration.

The third factor is the temporary resident's country of citizenship. Some countries have agreements with the federal or provincial governments providing for specific conditions of admission and stay for their nationals.

These factors determine the conditions of the permit as well as the admission of family members and access to the labour market, education and public services.

Table 1 provides a non-exhaustive summary of the eligibility requirements and employment conditions for certain categories of temporary residents. Employment conditions were selected for inclusion here to demonstrate the diversity and complexity of the rules governing the admission and stay of temporary residents. A similar comparison could have been made for other categories of rights and services, taking into account the specific provisions in each province. This comparison of employment-related conditions shows that temporary residents are subject to widely varying authorizations for and restrictions on Canadian labour market access and integration.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE MAZE OF CONDITIONS

The patchwork of admission and stay conditions for temporary residents of Canada has a number of implications.

First, it is symptomatic of the fragmented and volatile governance of immigration. Immigration policies and regulations are rarely established through comprehensive, long-term planning. They mostly take the form of piecemeal micro-adjustments affecting specific subgroups of temporary residents.

For example, the federal government has introduced several measures over the past year to restrict the hiring of temporary workers under the TFWP and limit the issuance of open work permits to spouses of international students and temporary workers.

We are also seeing increasingly complex immigration pathways for people with temporary status. Many wish to remain in Canada beyond the expiry of their initial permit, but must navigate a convoluted and ever-changing regulatory framework to retain their right to stay, work or study. Their paths often involve a series of temporary permits, the risk of losing their status, and a more difficult, if not impossible, transition to permanent residence.

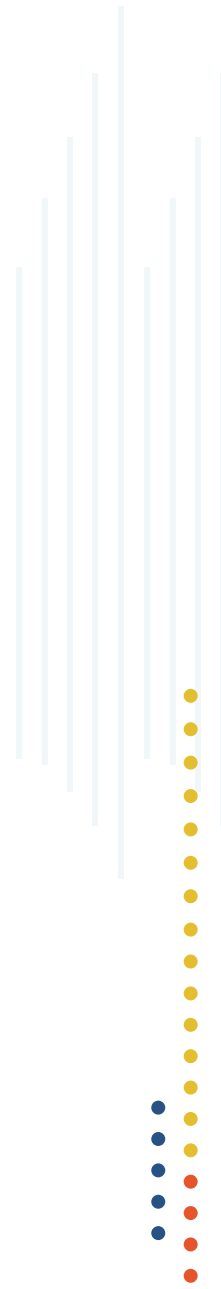


Table 1. Comparison of eligibility requirements and employment conditions for certain categories of temporary residents

		Temporary Foreign Worker Program			International Mobility Program			International students
		Low-wage positions	High-wage positions	Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program	Working holiday visa	Young Professional permit	Post-graduation work permit	
Eligibility requirements	Citizenship requirement	No	No	Citizens of Mexico and 11 Caribbean countries	Citizens of 35 countries	Citizens of 28 countries	No	No
	Age restriction	No	No	No	18-30 or 18-35, depending on citizenship	18-30 or 18-35, depending on citizenship	No	No
	Requirements related to education, experience or language skills	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Spouse eligible for an open work permit for family members	No	Yes (under certain conditions)	No	No	No	Yes (under certain conditions)	Yes (under certain conditions)
Employment conditions	Restrictions related to sector and position	Positions below provincial wage threshold	Positions above provincial wage threshold	Primary agriculture sector	No	Job related to training/ experience	No	No (possible exceptions)
	Employment tied to a single employer	Yes	Yes	Yes (transfer possible under certain conditions)	No	Yes	No	No
	Maximum duration of authorization to work	1 year	3 years	8 months	12-24 months	12-24 months	8 months to 3 years	Varies depending on duration of study permit
	Limit on working hours	No	No	Min. 240 hours	No	No	No	Max. 24 hours per week during school term
	Possibility of renewing authorization to work	Yes (under certain conditions)	Yes (under certain conditions)	No Must leave by December 15 each year	Varies depending on citizenship	Varies depending on citizenship	No	Yes, if study permit is renewed

International students are a case in point. Until recently, their arrival was encouraged and facilitated, but since 2024 a series of federal and provincial reforms has made their admission and stay more complicated. These include a cap on applications for study permits, higher financial resource thresholds, reduced eligibility for accompanying family members and diminished prospects of obtaining a post-graduation work permit. Many international students have been forced to reconsider their plans to study and settle in Canada.

Finally, this regulatory environment is creating an increasingly precarious situation for temporary residents of Canada.

The uncertainty stems, first, from the highly restrictive conditions for some residence categories, such as those that prevent workers from changing employers, giving rise to abuses and limiting workers' ability to assert their rights and improve their working and living conditions.

The difficulty of navigating this complex immigration system and maintaining one's status also contributes to the precariousness. Frequent changes in policies governing work, study and settlement in Canada create acute uncertainty and make planning for the future problematic. This insecure environment is costly in financial and human terms for immigrants and breeds misinformation, abuse and immigration fraud. More broadly, it affects their families, the institutions involved with temporary residents (such as businesses, educational institutions and community organizations) and the communities that receive them.

The current regulatory framework for temporary residence in Canada presents significant public policy challenges at both the provincial and federal levels. While government authorities mainly focus their attention on the thresholds for temporary and permanent admissions, this brief underscores the need for deeper reflection on the conditions of admission and stay for people with temporary status. Unequal rights for temporary residents, the erosion or total lack of prospects for settlement and family reunification, and the very high degree of regulatory unpredictability are major issues that call for an organized policy response harmonized across levels of government.

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