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# Tracking yearly shifts in residency status among Canada's work and study permit holders



by Yuqian Lu and Feng Hou

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# Tracking yearly shifts in residency status among Canada's work and study permit holders

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Amid concerns about housing shortages, pressure on public services and labour market imbalances, the Canadian government has announced a policy shift to reduce the share of temporary residents—including temporary foreign workers, international students and asylum seekers—in the national population. The government aims to lower the proportion of temporary residents in the national population to 5% by the end of 2026 to ease the strain on infrastructure and support more sustainable population growth (IRCC, 2024a).

To achieve these goals, the government's multi-year plan includes tighter caps on study permits, stricter eligibility for post-graduation work permits and sector-specific limits on temporary foreign worker approvals (IRCC, 2024a). The government is also prioritizing permanent residency pathways for skilled temporary residents already in Canada, aiming to select more than 40% of permanent residents annually from among temporary residents (IRCC, 2024b). These measures led to the combination of three approaches to reduce the stock of non-permanent residents (NPRs): limiting new inflows of NPRs, increasing transitions to permanent residency and restricting permit extension.

Recent administrative data reveal that reducing new entries alone may have limited short-term impact on the overall stock of NPRs. From 2023 to 2024, the number of newly issued study permits (including first-time permits and extensions) dropped by 24%, while the total stock of study permit holders at the end of the year declined by 4%. Likewise, for the International Mobility Program (IMP, work purposes), the number of permits issued declined by 6% between 2023 and 2024, while the year-end stock as of December 31 increased by 17%. For the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), permits issued rose by 4% over the same period, while the year-end stock increased by 26%.<sup>1</sup> These trends highlight the importance of understanding the role of transitions to permanent residency and extensions of temporary status in affecting the stock of NPRs.

By using year-end stock-level data from 2018 to 2022, this article examines how the stock of work and study permit holders in a given year changed their residency status over the following three years. Specifically, it calculates the share of work and study permit holders in each subsequent year who (1) obtained permanent residency, (2) held valid current permits, (3) received a new temporary residency permit, (4) claimed asylum or (5) did not have a valid residency permit.

While previous studies have tracked the residency trajectories of new work or study permit holders, particularly regarding the timing and likelihood of obtaining permanent residency (e.g., Choi, Crossman, & Hou, 2021; Lu & Hou, 2024; Prokopenko & Hou, 2018), they have not provided a comprehensive picture on how the status of a stock of work and study permit holders shifts from one year to the next. This article fills that gap.

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1. Authors' calculations based on data from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (the Open Government Portal) on study permit holders and TFWP and IMP work permit holders.

The analysis focuses on individuals holding valid work permits under the TFWP and IMP for work purposes<sup>2</sup> and study permit holders, as of December 31 each year. Asylum claimants are excluded from the initial stock because their claims do not have an expiration date, but asylum claimants are included as a possible status outcome in subsequent years.

The stock counts are based on residency status as of December 31 each year, derived from the Non-permanent Resident File. Residency status is determined by the validity period of work or study permits and does not indicate whether an individual was residing in Canada. The stock counts of this article differ from Statistics Canada's official population estimates for NPRs because they do not include demographic adjustments applied to administrative data for the purposes of calculating population estimates (Statistics Canada, 2024; 2025).

## Yearly changes in residency status in the stock of permit holders

Many individuals with a valid work or study permit on December 31 of a given year may continue to maintain legal residency in Canada—either by remaining under their current permit, transitioning to a new temporary status or becoming permanent residents. Table 1 presents the three-year status transitions of permit holders in each annual stock from 2018 to 2022.

Over this period, 64% (in 2020) to 79% (in 2022) of permit holders retained valid NPR status by the end of the following year. The 2020 stock had the lowest rate because of a higher level of transition to permanent residency, driven by the selection of more permanent residents from NPRs living in Canada amid travel restrictions related to the pandemic. The highest rate occurred in 2022, amid strong post-pandemic labour demand. Compared with earlier years, the 2022 stock had a much higher share of permit holders whose permits remained valid in the following year.

By the end of the second year, 48% to 59% of the original stock maintained NPR status, falling to 36% to 38% by the third year. Although the 2020 stock had a lower retention rate in the first year, its third-year rate was similar to that of earlier cohorts.

Initially, most individuals retained NPR status by holding a valid original permit. By the end of the first following year, 38% to 53% of the NPR stock still held valid original permits. By the third year, however, new permits became the main mechanism for continued NPR status, with 32% to 36% of the original stock obtaining a new temporary residency permit.

Except for the 2020 stock, not holding a valid residency status initially played a larger role in reducing the stock of existing NPRs than transitioning to permanent residency. By the end of the first year, 12% to 20% of NPRs no longer had valid residency status, while 4% to 10% obtained permanent residency. By the end of the third year, however, the two avenues played similar roles.

Changes in residency status varied by permit type. Rates of retaining NPR status were highest among study permit holders, followed by TFWP permit holders. By the end of the first year, 78% to 85% of study permit holders remained NPRs, compared with 62% to 76% for TFWP permit holders and 48% to 71% for IMP permit holders. By the third year, 52% to 59% of study permit holders retained NPR status, compared with 36% to 37% for TFWP permit holders and 12% to 13% for IMP permit holders.

The higher retention rate among study permit holders likely reflects continued study or participation in the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program. By contrast, IMP permit holders were more likely to transition

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2. Some IMP work permits are issues for other purposes: study, humanitarian and compassionate considerations, and permanent residency applicants. Holders of work permits for study purposes are included in study permit holders.

to permanent residency, with 47% to 64% of the 2018-to-2020 stocks becoming permanent residents by the end of the third year.

**Table 1****Changes in residency or permit status<sup>1</sup> of work and study permit holders over three years**

	Total work and study permit holders			Temporary Foreign Worker Program permit holders			International Mobility Program permit holders for work purposes			Study permit holders		
	On December 31 of...											
	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	1st year	2nd year	3rd year
	percent											
<b>With valid permit on December 31, 2018</b>												
Permanent resident	7.6	13.1	30.5	13.0	20.8	36.5	15.2	25.9	46.8	1.9	3.7	19.0
Valid current permit	46.5	16.1	3.6	42.1	1.7	0.2	47.0	16.3	0.4	46.6	17.5	6.1
New temporary residency permit	26.6	41.0	32.4	26.0	46.5	35.3	13.3	19.6	12.2	35.5	54.7	45.7
Asylum claim	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.3
No valid permit	19.3	29.7	33.3	18.8	30.7	27.9	24.4	38.1	40.6	15.9	23.9	28.9
<b>With valid permit on December 31, 2019</b>												
Permanent resident	4.4	21.8	31.5	4.8	23.0	36.3	9.0	40.3	52.0	1.1	8.6	16.4
Valid current permit	49.4	14.0	3.5	44.9	2.0	0.1	52.5	11.6	0.4	47.7	17.0	6.1
New temporary residency permit	26.3	35.7	34.2	27.6	45.6	36.8	14.5	15.8	11.3	34.6	48.5	50.1
Asylum claim	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.3	0.3
No valid permit	19.7	28.3	30.7	22.5	29.2	26.6	24.0	32.2	36.4	16.3	25.5	27.2
<b>With valid permit on December 31, 2020</b>												
Permanent resident	18.2	29.2	40.4	15.7	29.6	42.2	34.6	51.9	63.8	4.6	9.8	20.1
Valid current permit	37.6	11.6	1.7	33.6	1.6	0.2	36.5	11.1	0.2	39.2	13.6	3.2
New temporary residency permit	26.3	36.4	35.6	28.1	42.6	35.3	11.9	13.1	12.1	38.4	55.4	55.6
Asylum claim	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.2
No valid permit	17.8	22.7	22.2	22.5	26.1	22.2	17.1	23.9	23.8	17.7	21.1	20.9
<b>With valid permit on December 31, 2021</b>												
Permanent resident	10.0	22.1	..	9.4	23.5	..	20.8	42.9	..	2.6	7.5	..
Valid current permit	48.6	16.0	..	44.0	3.2	..	52.3	20.3	..	46.7	14.7	..
New temporary residency permit	23.5	42.9	..	24.9	47.4	..	10.4	18.4	..	32.5	59.3	..
Asylum claim	0.1	0.1	..	0.1	0.1	..	0.0	0.0	..	0.1	0.2	..
No valid permit	17.8	18.9	..	21.6	25.8	..	16.5	18.3	..	18.2	18.3	..
<b>With valid permit on December 31, 2022</b>												
Permanent resident	9.3	..	..	8.4	..	..	17.3	..	..	2.8	..	..
Valid current permit	53.2	..	..	52.5	..	..	60.0	..	..	47.8	..	..
New temporary residency permit	25.3	..	..	23.1	..	..	11.4	..	..	37.1	..	..
Asylum claim	0.1	..	..	0.0	..	..	0.0	..	..	0.1	..	..
No valid permit	12.1	..	..	16.0	..	..	11.4	..	..	12.2	..	..

.. not available for a specific reference period

1. Residency or permit status is based on the valid period of the study or work permit or date of obtaining permanent residency status. The current data have no information on permit holders' actual presence in the country.

Source: Statistics Canada, Non-permanent Resident File.

In sum, this article examines how the residency status of work and study permit holders in Canada changed from one year to the next, using annual stock-level data from 2018 to 2022. By tracking the transitions of permit holders over time, the findings reveal that while 64% to 79% retained their NPR status in the first year, this share declined steadily and reached 36% to 38% by the third year. The article also highlights important differences by permit type: study permit holders were more likely to maintain

NPR status, while IMP permit holders more often transitioned to permanent residency by the end of the third year. These patterns underscore that the dynamics of the NPR population are shaped not only by new entries, but also by transitions to permanent residency, permit renewals and exits from valid status.

The article's results indicate that understanding and managing the stock of NPRs involve considering both inflows and the varied pathways through which individuals maintain or alter their status. The observed variation in retention and transition rates across permit types points to the importance of program design and eligibility criteria in shaping retention outcomes. As Canada implements new policies to reduce the NPR share and prioritize transitions to permanent residency, understanding these dynamics can inform ongoing policy development and evaluation. Continued monitoring of stock-level transitions will be essential to assess the effectiveness of recent measures and to anticipate their broader impacts on labour markets, public services and population growth.

## Authors

Yuqian Lu and Feng Hou are with the Economic and Social Analysis and Modelling Division, Analytical Studies and Modelling Branch, at Statistics Canada.

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