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CANADA

RECONSTITUTING CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROGRAM

**Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and
Immigration**

Julie Dzerowicz, Chair

**APRIL 2026
45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

has the honour to present its

FOURTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied the International Student Program and study permits and has agreed to report the following:

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SUMMARY

Since January 2024, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has introduced a series of reforms to the International Student Program. Among these changes are caps on the number of study permit applications for international students processed each year and targets for the number of new study permits issued. IRCC has also reduced the number of hours international students may work off campus, narrowed pathways to post-graduation work permits, and limited opportunities for permanent immigration.

IRCC's objectives with these and other reforms introduced since 2024 have been to improve program integrity and security, protect international students from exploitation, and reduce the number of international students in Canada. The reforms took place after the government had allowed nearly a million international students into the country which contributed to increasing housing costs, healthcare wait times and youth unemployment. Although education and the regulation of learning institutions fall under provincial and territorial jurisdiction, the federal government was responsible for issuing an unsustainable number of study permits and allowing the system to be abused. IRCC issued 222,000 new study permits that became effective in 2015 and 404,000 permits in 2019. By 2023, it issued 684,000. That year, Canada hosted nearly one million international students.

This report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration follows its study of the International Student Program and study permits between 23 September 2025 and 25 November 2025. Part One outlines the division of powers between levels of government concerning international students. Part Two explains the 2024 study permit targets and related reforms. Part Three examines the effects of the 2024 changes, as well as the structural challenges remaining in the international student system. Part Four recommends changes to how the federal government and other actors understand, coordinate and make international student policy in the future.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Increase Cost-of-Living Threshold for International Students

Recommendation 1

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada further increase the cost-of-living threshold for international students beyond the annual updates to the low-income cut-off amount established by Statistics Canada. 26

Introduce Random Audits and Clear Penalties for Designated Learning Institutions

Recommendation 2

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada introduce random audits for Designated Learning Institutions and clear penalties for Designated Learning Institution issuing misleading documents. 31

Establish Caps on International Students from Countries with High Rates of Permit Overstays or Asylum Claims in Canada

Recommendation 3

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada establish caps on study permits and study permit extensions to those applying as nationals from countries with a high rate of permit overstays or asylum claims. 32

Stricter Monitoring of Language Proficiency Requirements

Recommendation 4

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada monitor language proficiency requirements more strictly for international students' study permit issuance. 33

Draft Plain-language International Student Program Rules and Expectations

Recommendation 5

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, with the provinces and territories, publish clear plain-language program rules and expectations for prospective international students and Canadians, including integrity measures, housing and support expectations, and that immigration pathways are competitive and not guaranteed; and, that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada require designated learning institutions to inform prospective international students of the same.

34

Consult with Provinces and Territories about Long-Term Plans for the International Student Program

Recommendation 6

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada consult more extensively with the provinces and territories about long-term plans for the International Student Program.

44

Expedite Graduate Student Study Permit Renewals

Recommendation 7

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada expedite the processing of study permit renewals for graduate students.

47

Defer to Provinces and Territories about Labour Market Needs when Deciding Study Programs Eligible for Post-Graduation Work Permits

Recommendation 8

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada defer to provinces and territories about labour market needs when setting the list of study programs eligible for post-graduation work permits.

50

Fund Centre for Excellence for International Education

Recommendation 9

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada help fund a centre for excellence for international education that brings together relevant international student data from all levels of government and that promotes research and policy innovation among stakeholders and governments within international student education.

53

Instruct Parliamentary Budget Officer to Analyze International Student Program and Study Permit Application Caps

Recommendation 10

That the Parliamentary Budget Officer undertake a comprehensive analysis of the International Student Program, including costing the effects of the study permit application caps on enrollment, housing, research and regional and national economic growth.

53



RECONSTITUTING CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

In January 2024 – as stories about conditions on campuses were being reported – Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) announced, for the first time, a cap on new study permit applications it would process, aiming to reduce the annual number of new permits issued by 35%.¹ Since then, among other changes, IRCC made this application cap permanent and further reduced its target to 155,000 new study permits for 2026. It reduced the number of hours international students may work off campus during the academic year. It also reformed the immigration system to make it more difficult for international students interested in working and staying in Canada to attain work permits and permanent resident status.² In the face of unprecedented international student numbers, the federal government has rapidly and dramatically reduced the number of study permits. It has changed the rules by which international students study, work and stay in Canada.

In the 2023–2024 academic year, in the time leading up to the reforms, the living conditions of international students at Conestoga College in southwestern Ontario became regional and national news. Students interviewed in these stories described paying high rents, living in severely overcrowded living conditions, and falling victim to housing scams – despite paying roughly three times the tuition charged to domestic students.³ Several news outlets linked the shortage of suitable housing to the college's aggressive recruitment of international students, noting that Conestoga received more study permits

1 Government of Canada, [Canada to stabilize growth and decrease number of new international student permits issued to approximately 360,000 for 2024](#), news release, 22 January 2024; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), [2025 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration](#), 2025, p. 53. On 5 April 2024, the government updated the 2024 target to 364,000 new study permits, including 236,000 new study permits from applications subject to a cap. Government of Canada, [Minister Miller issues statement on international student allocations for provinces and territories](#), 5 April 2024.

2 Government of Canada, [Government of Canada reduces immigration](#); Government of Canada, [Work in Canada after you graduate: About the post-graduation work permit; Update on field of study requirement for post-graduation work permits](#), 25 June 2025.

3 Trishla Parekh, ["Sharing bedrooms, infestations, scams: What some international students have to endure to find housing,"](#) *CBC News*, 25 September 2023; Kevin Nielsen, ["Councillor calls out Ontario college after learning student lives with 13 people,"](#) *Global News*, 20 February 2024; Heather Senoran, ["Regional councillor calls living situation 'inhumane' for Conestoga College's international students,"](#) *CTV News*, 14 February 2024.



and study permit extensions than any other Canadian learning institution in 2023.⁴ Journalists also documented the pressures this rapid growth placed on the learning environment, citing under-resourced teachers, challenging teaching conditions and students arriving underprepared academically while often needing to work off campus for up to 40 hours a week to cover expenses.⁵ While Conestoga College’s situation drew national scrutiny and represented only one extreme of a broad continuum, similar concerns were beginning to emerge at other institutions which, like Conestoga College, took advantage of the government’s poor “no international student limit” policy.

Two years later, some impacts of the January 2024 changes are clear – and they reach well beyond Canadian campuses. Canadian institutions and international students are facing uncertainty as they adapt to significant federal policy changes. Some international students are abusing the immigration system by claiming asylum to stay in the country, adding more applications into the current years-long asylum claim backlog. In addition, fewer international students are choosing to apply to Canadian institutions, reducing the number of study permits well beyond IRCC targets.⁶ Some colleges, universities and schools face significant financial shortfalls, and have cancelled whole programs and laid off staff.⁷

The Government of Canada has stated that its policy changes are necessary to ensure students receive proper supports, to address pressures on housing and healthcare, to increase program integrity, and to further regional and national economic goals.⁸ It has pointed to the need to act in the face of a post-pandemic influx of study permits

4 Nojoud Al Mallees, [“Conestoga College under fire by students, union leaders for aggressive international student recruitment,”](#) *CBC News*, 30 April 2024; Government of Canada, [CIMM – Conestoga College – February 28, 2024](#), 28 February 2024.

5 Nojoud Al Mallees, [“Conestoga College under fire by students, union leaders for aggressive international student recruitment,”](#) *CBC News*, 30 April 2024.

6 Navitas University Partnerships North America, [Submission to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration – International Student Program and Study Permits](#), November 2025, p. 1.

7 Universities Canada, [International Student Program and study permits](#), brief submitted to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (CIMM), October 2025, p. 1, and Canadian Association of University Teachers, [Study on the International Student Program and Study Permits](#), brief submitted to CIMM, October 2025, p. 1.

8 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), [New International Student Program regulations take effect](#), news release, 15 November 2024.

applications, which allowed rapid growth in the international student population and exacerbated housing shortages.⁹

Critics have argued that, following IRCC's caps, Canada's reputation as a leading destination for international education has been greatly damaged.¹⁰ Some warn that certain regions have lost the workers necessary for local and national economic projects and the researchers necessary for realizing Canada's innovation goals.¹¹ Others maintain that federal government policy in the last twenty years, along with that of the provinces and other actors, has significantly contributed to the rise in international student numbers. Many are also concerned that larger structural problems in the international student system still need to be addressed.¹²

This report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (the committee) examines how IRCC issues study permits, assesses the systemic issues that persist in the International Student Program, and recommends solutions to recalibrate the system to benefit Canadians, educational institutions, employers and students more fully. It follows the committee's study of these issues between 23 September 2025 and 25 November 2025. Part One of this report outlines the division of powers between levels of government concerning international students, and traces the rise of study permit numbers in the last ten years, using the challenges of Conestoga College as a case study for the causes and effects of aggressive international recruitment. Part Two outlines the 2024 study permit targets and related reforms. Part Three looks at the effects of the changes, ways to improve the reforms, and broader problems underlying the International Student Program. Part Four recommends changes to how the federal government and other actors understand, coordinate and make international student policy.

9 CIMM, *Evidence*, 23 September 2025, 1540 (Soyoung Park, Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Programs, IRCC; Government of Canada, *CIMM – International Students and Housing – February 28, 2024*, 28 February 2026).

10 See, for instance, Universities Canada, *International Student Program and study permits*, brief submitted to CIMM, October 2025, p. 2; CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1620 (André Côté, Executive Director, The Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University); CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1725 (Robert Asselin, Chief Executive Officer, U15 Canada).

11 World Education Services, *International Student Program and Study Permits*, brief submitted to CIMM, 1 October 2025, p. 3; CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1645 (Robert Asselin); CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 November 2025, 1540 (Lysiane van der Knaap, Executive Director, Éducation internationale).

12 See, for instance, CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1540 (Alex Usher, President, Higher Education Strategy Associates); CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1720 (David Agnew, President, Seneca Polytechnic); CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1635 (Lisa Brunner, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of British Columbia, Centre for Migration Studies).



PART ONE: CONSTITUTIONAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Assessing the 2024 reforms requires, in part, an understanding of the constitutional and historical context.

Federal Authorities Over Immigration

International students are foreign nationals with student permits that allow them to stay and study in Canada for a period of more than six months.¹³ Under section 91(25) of the *Constitution Act, 1867* concerning “Naturalization and Aliens,” jurisdiction over the rights and limitations attached to foreign nationals is exclusively federal.¹⁴

Aiesha Zafar, Assistant Deputy Minister for Migration Integrity at IRCC, described the federal government’s role in admitting international students to Canada, as follows:

The IRCC is responsible for assessing the eligibility and admissibility of ... students ... who want to travel to Canada. We do that in accordance with the legislated requirements for eligibility and admissibility. With the information that is available to us at the time, the officer assesses to ensure that they are not a threat to the security of Canada and the health of Canadians, and that they have no criminal background.¹⁵

Under the International Student Program, IRCC is responsible for verifying acceptance letters for all study permit applications.¹⁶ It must also confirm that international students have sufficient funds to meet the program’s financial requirements,¹⁷ including being able cover their own expenses during their period of stay.¹⁸

IRCC officials further explained to the committee that the department’s mandate included detection and prevention of fraud in the program. Aiesha Zafar noted that after

13 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* (IRPR), SOR/2002-227, [s. 215](#). Some temporary residents are allowed to study in Canada without a permit for more than six months, notably minor children. See Government of Canada, “[Who can study without a permit](#),” *Study permit*.

14 *Constitution Act, 1867*, 30 & 31 Victoria, c. 3 (U.K.), reprinted in R.S.C. 1985, App. II, No. 5, section 91(25).

15 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1555 (Aiesha Zafar, Assistant Deputy Minister, Migration Integrity, IRCC).

16 *Ibid.*, 1625.

17 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1540 (Soyoung Park).

18 IRPR, SOR/2002-227, [s. 220](#) (including tuition fees, transportation and to maintain themselves and accompanying family members).

international students enter Canada, the federal government remains the primary responsible authority in this regard:

Compliance with the student permit or work permit is a responsibility of IRCC and a joint responsibility with ESDC with regard [to] work permits, but any other activity, criminal or otherwise, would be under the purview of our enforcement partners, such as CBSA or RCMP.¹⁹

As a part of this mandate, IRCC manages the International Student Compliance Regime, a program that has been in place since 2016, but which was made mandatory in 2024.²⁰ This program requires that learning institutions report twice a year on the international students they have enrolled, and whether or not students registered with them are in fact attending their school.

Provincial Authorities Over Education

Under Section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* provinces have jurisdiction over education.²¹ As such, provinces (and the territories by delegation from the federal legislature) have the legislative authority over their education system, including managing their finances, setting tuition fees and imposing limits on the proportion of international students within each learning institution.

Accordingly, international students must enrol and actively pursue courses in post-secondary institutions accredited by provinces and territories, also known as Designated Learning Institutions (DLIs).²² As such, the province or territory is responsible for determining whether a school is considered a DLI, and for overseeing the programming and recruitment practices of these institutions.²³

Although provinces and territories are responsible for authorizing DLIs, the federal government has maintained the authority over which DLIs and which study programs

19 CIMM, *Evidence*, 23 September 2025, 1555 (Aiesha Zafar).

20 *Ibid.*, 1600.

21 *The Constitution Acts 1867 to 1982*, section 93.

22 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations*, SOR/2002-227, s. 211.1(a). See Government of Canada, *Designated learning institutions list*.

23 Government of Canada, *CIMM – International Student Compliance Regime – June 14, 2023*.



render international students eligible for post-graduation work permits (PGWPs) upon graduation.²⁴

International Student Program Before 2024

In 2014, the federal government released its first national strategy on post-secondary education. Through the *International Education Strategy (2014–2019)* (hereafter, “the Strategy”), the Government of Canada sought to establish a long-term strategy that would allow Canada to maintain and increase its “market share of the best and brightest international students and researchers.”²⁵ During its study, the committee heard that international students continue to contribute greatly to Canada. Soyoung Park, Assistant Deputy Minister of Economic Programs at IRCC, stated that international students “make important contributions to our communities, campuses, and economy.”²⁶ Robert Asselin, Chief Executive Officer of U15 Canada, added that international students, and especially graduate and post-graduate students, “bring skills and ideas that make Canada more innovative and more productive, thereby strengthening both our economy and our communities.”²⁷

According to Rob Kristofferson, President of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, the development of the Strategy came with “major economic implications” for the Government of Canada, which came to realize that “educational expenditures by international students [had] a greater impact on Canada’s economy than exports of auto parts, lumber or aircraft.”²⁸ The goal of the Strategy was for Canadian institutions to double the number of international students in Canada by 2022, to a total of more than 450,000,²⁹ a goal which was surpassed as early as 2017 (See Figure One).³⁰

In recent years, the International Student Program has increased beyond even this target. Between 2020 and 2023, the number of international students continued to

24 Government of Canada, *Work in Canada after you graduate: Who can apply*.

25 Government of Canada, *ARCHIVED – Canada’s International Education Strategy (2014–2019)*.

26 CIMM, *Evidence*, 23 September 2025, 1635 (Soyoung Park).

27 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1645 (Robert Asselin).

28 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1540 (Rob Kristofferson, President of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations). Global Affairs Canada, *Building on Success: Canada’s International Education Strategy (2019–2024)*.

29 Government of Canada, *ARCHIVED – Canada’s International Education Strategy (2014–2019)*.

30 International students in Canada in 2017 totalled 490,735. See IRCC, *Canada - Study permit holders with a valid permit on December 31st by Province/Territory of intended destination and study level, 2000 - 2024*.

grow, and almost doubled – from 530,000 to over 1 million study permit holders.³¹ When testifying at committee, Soyoung Park noted that, prior to reforms made in 2024, study permits were demand-driven, and applications were simply processed “as they were received.” There was no federal cap yet limiting the number of study permit holders.³²

Aggressive Recruitment by Some Colleges, Universities and Recruiters

In recent years, the number of study permit holders in the International Student Program has increased beyond even this target. Between 2020 and 2023, the number of international students continued to grow, and almost doubled – from 530,000 to over 1 million.³³

As will be explored below, IRCC implemented its 2024 reforms, in part, to curb the exploitation of international students by recruiting agents abroad who supplied fake letters of offer, and by some DLIs – often colleges – that offered minimum-standard, high-volume education to take advantage of high international student tuition. These agents helped to drive the high international student numbers. As Rob Kristofferson explained, “These bad actors were primarily outside the university sector. They were international recruiting agents, whose compensation depends on volume rather than quality, as well as private educational providers.”³⁴ Lisa Brunner, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of British Columbia’s Centre for Migration Studies, also blamed some public universities and colleges for high volume-recruitment strategies, as “many private programs were delivered through lucrative curriculum licensing agreements with public institutions.”³⁵

Witnesses noted that recruitment for college business programs – and, to some extent, university business programs – contributed to high numbers of international students and PGWP holders. These programs often have high profitability margins and low requirements for students.³⁶ IRCC issued 240,200 PGWPs for 2023, an increase of 94%

31 See ApplyBoard, “[How Will PGWP Program Changes Impact International Education in Canada?](#),” *ApplyInsights Blog*, 23 October 2024.

32 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1635 (Soyoung Park).

33 See ApplyBoard, “[How Will PGWP Program Changes Impact International Education in Canada?](#),” *ApplyInsights Blog*, 23 October 2024.

34 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1540 (Rob Kristofferson).

35 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1705 (Lisa Brunner).

36 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1615 (Alex Usher); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1610 (André Côté).



from 2022.³⁷ That year, college graduates accounted for 66% of all PGWP approvals, with about 50% graduating from business programs.³⁸ As André Côté, Executive Director, The Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University, explained, “it became a numbers game,” rather than a primarily education- or job-focused endeavour, because graduates from “general business certificate programs” had a “very low likelihood they would have labour market success afterwards.”³⁹

International recruiters and DLIs have also used pathways to permanent residence to attract international students – and sometimes under false pretenses. When the Government of Canada first introduced a pathway for international students to attain permanent residency in 2007, it was thought this pathway would improve the integration of new immigrants, as these people already had Canadian credentials and work experience.⁴⁰ As Alex Usher, President, Higher Education Strategy Associates, noted, “[i]t didn’t occur to them that colleges would come along and monetize this policy.”⁴¹

Since then, as André Côté noted, some universities, colleges and international recruiters have engaged in “really aggressive growth strategies”:

[P]art of the challenge on the recruitment side was that a promise was made to many of these students that this would put them on an immigration track in Canada, when the simple fact was that there were not enough permanent residency slots to accommodate the huge volume of students we were letting into the country.⁴²

The pathways to permanent residency have always been narrow, with many international students and few permanent residency slots. Before the 2024 reforms, some DLIs and international recruiters took advantage of applicant’s lack of knowledge about the low chances for permanent residency to greatly boost tuition and enrollment.

37 IRCC, [*Canada - International Mobility Program \(IMP\) work permit holders under post-graduate employment by province/territory and census metropolitan area \(CMA\) of intended destination and year in which permit\(s\) became effective, January 2015 – September 2025.*](#)

38 ApplyBoard, [*“How Will PGWP Program Changes Impact International Education in Canada?”*](#) *ApplyInsights Blog*, 23 October 2024.

39 CIMM, [*Evidence*](#), 25 September 2025, 1610 (André Côté).

40 CIMM, [*Evidence*](#), 25 September 2025, 1615 (Alex Usher); Citizenship and Immigration Canada, [*Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration*](#), 2007, p. 4.

41 CIMM, [*Evidence*](#), 25 September 2025, 1615 (Alex Usher).

42 CIMM, [*Evidence*](#), 25 September 2025, 1610 (André Côté).

Case Study: Conestoga College

The role of colleges in the rapid growth of international students in Canada cannot be understated. The immediate effects of this growth are evident in the case of Conestoga College from 2019 to 2024. At the end of 2023, the college hosted the most study permit holders in Canada, approximately 38,000. The college reached this high number quickly, with an increase of 187% in study permit holders since 2019.⁴³

According to a *CBC News* article, this growth was fuelled by an “aggressive international student recruitment” strategy by the college that often prioritized revenue over education. According to a 2024 article posted on a local news website, some faculty at the institution were critical of the college’s “reliance on untrusted and improperly-vetted immigration agents in India,” and, in particular, for recruiting students into “programs where they don’t belong and don’t want to be.”⁴⁴ In the words of Leopold Koff, the president of the union representing Conestoga College’s faculty, support staff and librarians, as quoted by another local news source, the *Waterloo Region Record*, there appeared to be “more of a push to pass people through, to get them through the program and to graduate, with whatever it takes,” rather than applying rigorous academic standards.⁴⁵ The *Waterloo Region Record* also reported that, in 2020, a committee of 50 Conestoga faculty outlined concerns to college officials about the rapid growth and deteriorating academic standards. For instance, some faculty referred to:

[H]earing students referring to particular programs as a “joke” because the students’ only goal was to “get into Canada,” and some instructors said they were being overruled by management when they followed the college’s policies for late assignments, missed assignments and overall grading.⁴⁶

While the college reportedly recorded a \$106-million surplus in the 2022–23 fiscal year, and a \$57-million surplus in the 2021–22 fiscal year,⁴⁷ media reports outlined how the faculty, the international student and Canadian student populations, and the surrounding community bore the brunt of this rapid growth. In local and national media in 2023 and 2024, faculty reported difficult teaching conditions, including some students significantly unprepared for classes, and having to give up offices to make room for more

43 Government of Canada, *CIMM – Conestoga College – February 28, 2024*, 28 February 2024.

44 Joe McGinty, “[Conestoga’s own staff critical of international student recruitment policies](#),” *CambridgeToday.ca*, 1 May 2024.

45 “[Conestoga enrolment taking toll on teachers and staff](#),” *Waterloo Region Record*, 23 February 2024.

46 “[Conestoga faculty outlined major concerns over international enrolment in 2020 report](#),” *Waterloo Region Record*, 27 February 2024.

47 “[Conestoga enrolment taking toll on teachers and staff](#),” *Waterloo Region Record*, 23 February 2024.



classes. For international students and local residents, the high numbers meant difficulty finding housing. International students also reported high rents, rental scams and substandard living conditions.⁴⁸ Many international students needed to work more than 20 hours per week to afford rent and high international student tuitions.⁴⁹

While the housing pressure Conestoga College's recruitment put on the Waterloo area was severe, increased international student populations created similar challenges in other regions. In 2023, the Bank of Canada highlighted that the sharp increase of newcomers, of which international students represented one third in 2022,⁵⁰ also caused "demographic demand" to outpace the construction of new housing. This has resulted in an imbalance in the market. The Bank of Canada explained that, although large numbers of newcomers boosted Canada's "potential growth rate" by increasing capital, productivity and labour (without adding to inflation), the additional demographic pressure has exacerbated a "long-standing housing supply issue."⁵¹ According to Statistics Canada, about 31% of international students were concentrated in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver in 2021.⁵² André Côté agreed that pressures on housing were increased by the "30% growth" in the number of international students for two straight years (reaching a million in 2023) and a "lack of oversight in the growth of the system."⁵³

Structural Challenges

The committee heard that federal and provincial policy decisions also incentivized "bad actors" among recruiters and DLIs to recruit more international students, leading to the challenges the caps are now attempting to address.

48 Trishla Parekh, "[Sharing bedrooms, infestations, scams: What some international students have to endure to find housing](#)," *CBC News*, 25 September 2023; Kevin Nielsen, "[Councillor calls out Ontario college after learning student lives with 13 people](#)," *Global News*, 20 February 2024; Heather Senoran, "[Regional councillor calls living situation 'inhumane' for Conestoga College's international students](#)," *CTV News*, 14 February 2024.

49 Nojoud Al Mallees, "[Conestoga College under fire by students, union leaders for aggressive international student recruitment](#)," *CBC News*, 30 April 2024.

50 Bank of Canada, "[Economic progress report: Immigration, housing and the outlook for inflation](#)," speech from Toni Gravelle, Deputy Governor Windsor–Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, 7 December 2023.

51 Ibid. This can be attributed to "complex set of structural issues," such as zoning restrictions, lengthy permitting processes in many cities, and a shortage of construction workers.

52 Max Stick, Feng Hou and Haozhem Zhang, "[Housing international students: Housing suitability across municipalities](#)," Statistics Canada, 22 May 2024.

53 CIMM, "[Evidence](#)," 25 September 2025, 1550 (André Côté).

Most simply, DLIs and recruiters acted in response to federal policies. Pre-reform, the federal government and other actors encouraged growth in international student numbers to meet economic and immigration goals. When testifying before the committee, John Tibbits, President of Conestoga College, justified this growth, saying there was “no question” that the federal government, the Ontario government and local municipalities and industries wanted Conestoga College to “grow dramatically because they couldn’t fill positions across a wide range of industries: health care, skilled trades.”⁵⁴ Some of these same labour shortages are being exacerbated by the study permit caps and other reforms. Alex Usher also noted that growth was fueled by the federal government’s policy during the COVID era of finding much-needed workers by doubling the hours that foreign students could work from 20 to 40 hours a week. This, together with permanent resident pathways and the PGWP policy, meant that Canada had “by far the most generous set of conditions” internationally and attracted a “flood” of students.⁵⁵

In its policies and messaging, IRCC also brought in international students to meet immigration goals. Specifically, the committee heard that the federal government sometimes echoed the overpromises made by DLIs and recruiters about the ease of attaining permanent residency. As David Agnew, President, Seneca Polytechnic, noted, responding to questions about federal oversight of the significant growth of international student numbers at his college, “[w]e were really out there co-recruiting with the federal government. There’s a video that you can still find on the IRCC website that says, ‘Study—Explore—Work—Stay.’”⁵⁶

While noting that international students “who become permanent residents have above average economic outcomes and contribute significantly to our communities,”⁵⁷ Lisa Brunner similarly argued that the enthusiastic recruitment of students by the federal government, DLIs and recruiters has sometimes misled international students with a promise of permanent residence status in Canada.⁵⁸

At the same time, witnesses noted that provincial governments encouraged the recruitment of international students by reducing funding to DLIs in the 1990s and

54 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1540 (John Tibbits, President of Conestoga College).

55 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1540 (Alex Usher).

56 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1720 (David Agnew).

57 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1635 (Lisa Brunner).

58 Ibid.



early 2000s. Per capita funding has never recovered. Witnesses added that this reduction has been particularly marked in Ontario.⁵⁹ As Alex Usher highlighted:

Compared to the rest of the country, Ontario spends, per student, less than half of what the rest of the country pays for college students. That was what started the move [for colleges to] look for these alternative sources of funding, like international students. There were a lot of colleges that went far beyond that. They got cut by 25% and then grabbed another 400% or 500% with international student tuition.⁶⁰

Usher added, moreover, that on three occasions between 2019 and 2024, the Ontario provincial government “loosened the regulations so that colleges could accept more and more students. Colleges said, ‘[y]ou won’t give us the money, so let us go get it ourselves.’”⁶¹ While DLIs have, in some cases, recruited international students heavily, they have done so in the face of reduced provincial funding and regulation. Some provinces have also capped the amount of tuition DLIs can charge to domestic students.⁶² As Rob Kristofferson explained, speaking about Ontario, “universities aggressively pursued international students, not because of a lack of domestic students but because they needed revenue.”⁶³

PART TWO: 2024 REFORMS

In January 2024, IRCC introduced the first cap on study permit applications and the first on study permit targets. For almost all the witnesses and contributors to the committee’s study, the January 2024 study permit cap – and the many federal reforms that have accompanied it – have profoundly altered Canada’s international student system.⁶⁴ Across the country, different actors from the federal government, provincial governments, municipalities, universities, colleges and recruitment agencies, as well as students, are grappling with the economic, social and, in some cases, personal effects of the reforms and the accompanying drop in international student enrollment. André Côté commented about how the introduction of the January 2024 study cap

59 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1720 (David Agnew); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1615 (Alex Usher).

60 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1600 (Alex Usher).

61 Ibid., 1615.

62 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1625 (André Côté).

63 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1540 (Rob Kristofferson).

64 See, for instance, CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1545 (André Côté); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1620 (Larissa Bezo, President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Bureau for International Education).

created a sense of there being “the times before ... the announcement, and the times after the announcement.”⁶⁵

Study Permit Cap

In its 22 January 2024 announcement, IRCC introduced its first annual target for approved study permit applications. This represented a 35% reduction from 2023.⁶⁶ The department would reach this target by limiting or capping the number of student permit applications that it would accept for processing in a given year, assuming an average acceptance rate of 60%.⁶⁷ Before this change, IRCC had processed each complete application as it was received, assessing its eligibility and its admissibility, on security and health grounds; the number had been limited only by demand and processing capacity.

For the Government of Canada, the goals of the study permit acceptance targets and application caps have been to stabilize and, subsequently, bring down, the numbers of international students in Canada – a number that grew significantly for most of the past ten years.⁶⁸ In its reporting, the department tracks several related numbers connected to this total. These include the annual number of applications processed and approved by the department, and the number of study permits issued within a given period of time, meaning when international students arrive in Canada and are actually issued the permit.⁶⁹ The department also tracks the number of valid student permits by date the permits become effective. While IRCC issued a total of 222,000 new permits that became effective in 2015,⁷⁰ and 404,000 new permits in 2019, it issued 684,000 permits in 2023 (Figure 1).

65 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1545 (André Côté).

66 Government of Canada, *Canada to stabilize growth and decrease number of new international student permits issued to approximately 360,000 for 2024*, news release, 22 January 2024.

67 Government of Canada, *Minister Miller issues statement on international student allocations for provinces and territories*, 5 April 2024.

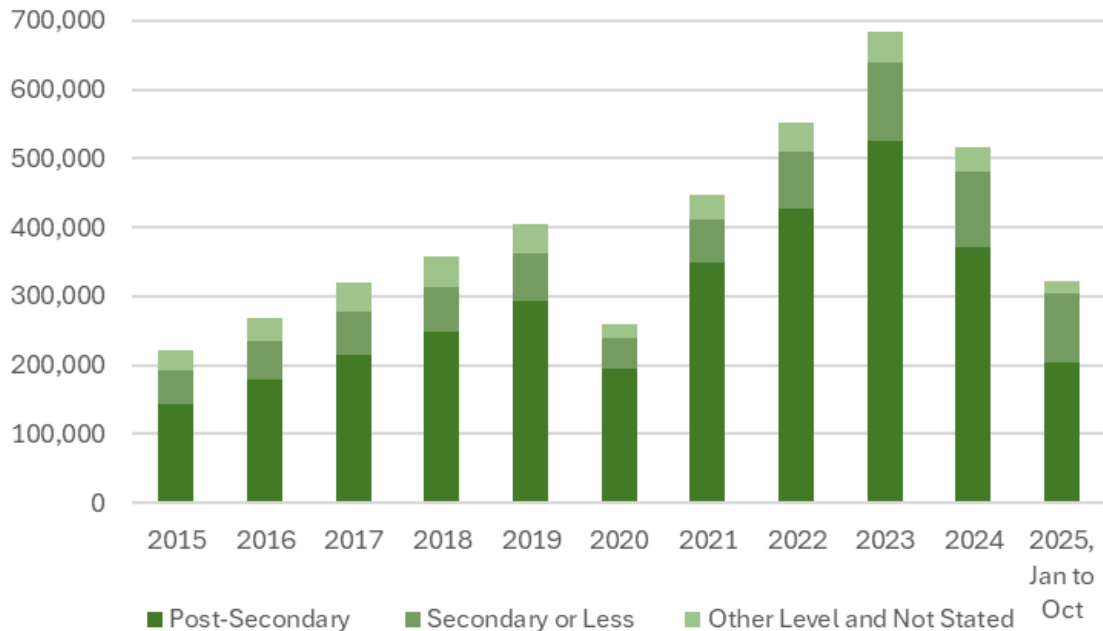
68 CIMM, *Evidence*, 23 September 2025, 1540 (Soyoung Park).

69 IRCC notes that the department counts monthly arrivals “based on the number of people issued study ... permits in that month.” Government of Canada, *Understanding student and temporary worker numbers in Canada*. At committee, Soyoung Park clarified that “[t]here’s ... a number for the number of approvals, which actually leads to a certain number of arrivals.” CIMM, *Evidence*, 23 September 2025, 1620 (Soyoung Park).

70 These figures are totals, including children in preschool, primary and secondary school, adults in post-secondary and other programs, and students who did not state their level of education (See, Figure One).



Figure 1—Study Permit Holders, January 2015 to October 2025, by Year in Which the Permit(s) Became Effective

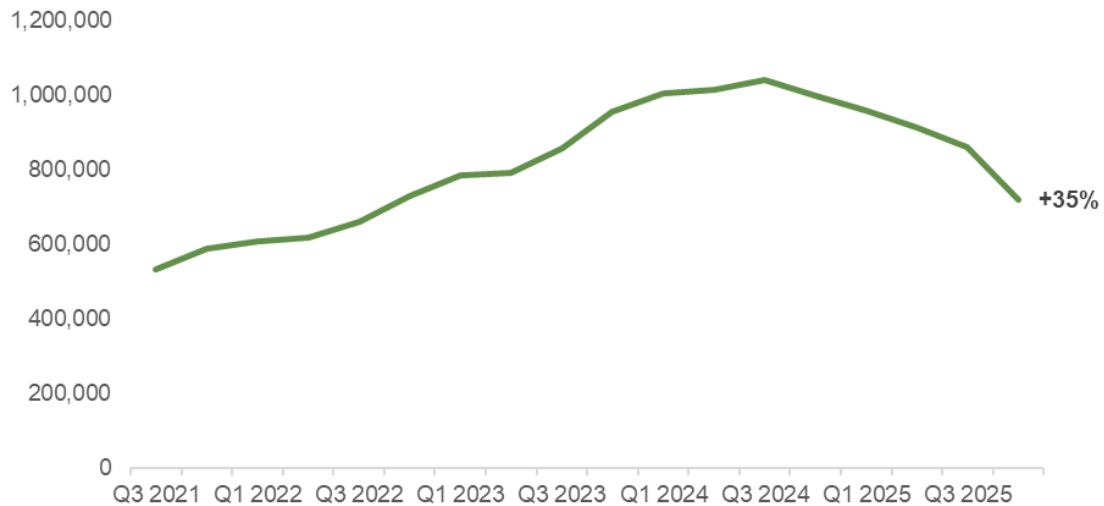


Source: Government of Canada, [Temporary Residents: Study Permit Holders – Monthly IRCC Updates - Canada – Study permit holders by study level, province/territory and year in which permit\(s\) became effective](#). Prepared by Library of Parliament.

Importantly, the number of international students is higher in a given year than the number of study permits, because the permits often cover multiple years; ideally, they follow the length of education programs. By the end of 2023, just before IRCC introduced the first study permit application cap, Canada hosted almost a million international students – a threshold that Canada surpassed in 2024 to reach just over a million (Figure 2). IRCC has argued that stabilizing and bringing down these numbers is necessary to ensure students have sufficient supports, such as housing, and to more broadly reduce pressures on housing, healthcare and other services.⁷¹

71 Government of Canada, [Canada to stabilize growth and decrease number of new international student permits issued to approximately 360,000 for 2024](#), news release, 22 January 2024.

Figure 2—Estimates of Total Number of Study Permit Holders, Third Quarter 2021 to Fourth Quarter 2025



Source: Statistics Canada, [Estimates of the number of non-permanent residents by type, quarterly](#). Prepared by Library of Parliament.

To address these concerns, IRCC set application caps for 2024, 2025 and 2026. In each year, it used slightly different methods for deriving the number. In April 2024, IRCC replaced its January 2024 target of 360,000 approved new permits with a target of 485,000, which included applications for study permit extensions. The 485,000 number “was based on a zero net-growth model where the number of approved study permits in 2024 [was] meant to be approximately equal to the number of permits expiring in 2024.”⁷² Subtracting the number of study permit extensions, and then increasing the number with a buffer, the 2024 target for approved new study permit applications was 364,000 (Table 1). Considering the average acceptance rate of study permit applications (60%) and subtracting the number of new study permits for those exempt from the cap, the target calculated for 2024 was 236,000 new study permits, which translates to roughly 393,000 study permit applications.⁷³

72 Government of Canada, [OLLO – Study Permit Application Cap – November 4, 2024](#).

73 Government of Canada, [Minister Miller issues statement on international student allocations for provinces and territories](#), 5 April 2024.



Table 1—Study Permit Targets and Application Caps, 2024–2026

Year	Target of Approved Student Permits	Applications Under Cap Distributed to the Provinces and Territories	Exclusions and Adjustments
2024	485,000 permits, including extensions (364,000 new study permits, including 236,000 new study permits from applications subject to cap)	552,000	Cap did not include study permit extensions and study permits for some international students, such as master’s or doctoral level students and primary and secondary students.
2025	437,000 (316,276 non-exempt new study permits)	550,162	Most study permit applications in 2025 must include a provincial or territorial attestation letter, confirming that the application has been counted within the region’s share of study permits. Cap now includes master’s and doctoral students; 12% of the cap is reserved for them.
2026	408,000	309,670	Master’s and doctoral students are again exempt from cap.

Source: Government of Canada, [Minister Miller issues statement on international student allocations for provinces and territories](#), 5 April 2024; [2025 provincial and territorial allocations under the international student cap](#); [2026 provincial and territorial allocations under the international student cap](#); [CIMM – Study Permit Application Caps – November 25, 2024](#); [Ministerial Instructions with respect to the processing of certain applications for a study permit made by a foreign national as a member of the student class](#), 23 December 2024, in *Canada Gazette*, Part I, Volume 159, Number 3, 18 January 2025; [Ministerial Instructions with respect to the processing of certain applications for a study permit made by a foreign national as a member of the student class](#), 23 December 2024, in *Canada Gazette*, Part I, Volume 159, Number 51, 18 January 2025.

For the 2025 and 2026 caps, the government reduced the 2024 target by 10% and 16%, respectively, to help reduce the share of all temporary residents to 5% of the total population, and to achieve the new arrival targets for temporary resident admissions in the immigration levels plans.⁷⁴ While master’s and doctoral students were exempt from the 2024 and 2026 applications caps, they were included in the 2025 cap (Table 1).

74 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1540 (Soyoung Park); Government of Canada, [CIMM – Study Permit Application Caps – November 25, 2024](#); [2026 provincial and territorial allocations under the international student cap](#).

For each year, the federal government distributes application space under the cap to each province and territory, primarily based on its share of the Canadian population. Based on the 2025 target of 316,276 new study permits, for instance, IRCC made 550,162 study permits applications available to provinces and territories (Table 1). It then distributed the applications to each province and territory, based on past average study permit approval rates in each region, and its share of the population. In 2024, IRCC made a similar calculation, but reduced allocations to limit any growth to 10% of the number of international students hosted by the region in 2023. “For provinces that would receive fewer international students in 2024 than in 2023,” moreover, “the government adjusted their allocation to lessen the negative impact in the first year and support broader regional immigration goals.”⁷⁵

The provinces and territories then distribute the allocated applications how they see fit to designated learning institutions (DLIs) in their jurisdiction. Prospective students must obtain a letter of acceptance from a DLI before applying for a study permit. In the province of Quebec, the applicant must also submit to IRCC a Quebec Acceptance Certificate issued by the Government of Quebec that confirms that the province accepts the applicant as an international student. As of 2025, IRCC also requires territories and all other provinces to issue study permit applicants an attestation letter that they can submit to confirm that they have been assigned one of the available cap spaces for that province or territory.⁷⁶

According to an IRCC official, this partnership between the federal government and the provinces and territories follows the division of powers between the federal and provincial governments.⁷⁷ As mentioned above, jurisdiction over the rights and limitations attached to foreign nationals is exclusively federal.⁷⁸ As international students are foreign nationals, IRCC is responsible for assessing the eligibility of international students to study in Canada, and their admissibility.

75 Government of Canada, [*Minister Miller issues statement on international student allocations for provinces and territories*](#), 5 April 2024.

76 Government of Quebec, [*Required authorizations*](#); Government of Canada, [*Provincial attestation letter or territorial attestation letter*](#).

77 CIMM, [*Evidence*](#), 23 September 2025, 1550 (Soyoung Park).

78 See [*Constitution Act, 1867*](#), 30 & 31 Victoria, c. 3 (U.K.), s. 91(25), reprinted in R.S.C. 1985, App. II, No. 5. Canada’s Constitution includes the original United Kingdom statute that established the Dominion of Canada at the time of confederation, the *British North America Act, 1867* (now the *Constitution Act, 1867*). It also includes the *Constitution Act, 1982*, which became part of the Constitution when it was patriated to Canada in 1982, as well as unwritten sources, including British parliamentary tradition and certain common law principles, such as the rule of law.



Under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, while final determinations on entry to Canada are made by the Canada Border Services Agency,⁷⁹ provinces – and by agreement with the federal government, the territories⁸⁰ – have the legislative authority to manage their education systems, including authority over the financial model and tuition fees of DLIs. Universities, colleges and vocational schools may set curricula and invite students, but the province or territory possesses the ability to impose limits on how many international students each DLI can host.⁸¹ They also possess the power to designate or remove the designation of DLIs. As Soyoung Park explained to the committee, “we set the overall cap, but it is up to each province to decide how it’s going to distribute those allocations.”⁸² She said that “[p]rovinces and territories allocate spaces to learning institutions based on community capacity and housing availability, among other factors.”⁸³ Aiesha Zafar stated, “[w]ith regard to the international student compliance program and the student program, it’s a joint responsibility. There are absolutely measures that IRCC is responsible for.”⁸⁴

Related Reforms

In addition to the study permit cap and provincial and territorial attestation letters, IRCC introduced a series of related reforms to support program integrity, including ensuring students have sufficient funds when coming to Canada, and tailoring the International Student Program more closely to regional and national economic goals. To prevent and detect fraud, IRCC made it mandatory on 1 December 2023 for DLIs to verify the letters of acceptance that overseas applicants submit as part of their study permit application⁸⁵ – a program that has since expanded to include in-Canada study permit applications.⁸⁶ In 2023, certain international students were exploited by unscrupulous actors abroad issuing fraudulent higher education acceptance letters.⁸⁷ Although most of the students had no idea their acceptance letters were fraudulent, they came to Canada and were not

79 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1555 (Aiesha Zafar).

80 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1550 (Soyoung Park).

81 Government of Canada, [CIMM – International Student Compliance Regime – June 14, 2023](#).

82 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1550 (Soyoung Park).

83 *Ibid.*, 1540.

84 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1615 (Aiesha Zafar).

85 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1540 (Soyoung Park); Government of Canada, [CIMM – Letter of Acceptance Verification – December 05, 2023](#).

86 Government of Canada, [Letter of acceptance verification: About the process](#).

87 For more information, see CIMM, [Exploitation Scheme Targeting Certain International Students](#).

allowed to study as they were not actually enrolled, having paid fees through the “ghost consultants.”⁸⁸

Starting 1 January 2024, IRCC also raised the cost-of-living requirement that study permit applicants must demonstrate they have available from \$10,000 – maintained since it was first established in the early 2000s – to \$20,635, to ensure they have enough to live on during the period of their studies in Canada.⁸⁹ Additionally, the cost-of-living requirement will be adjusted each year when Statistics Canada updates this low-income cut-off amount.⁹⁰ Quebec also establishes its own cost-of-living threshold for international students and has raised this threshold periodically. For 2025, the threshold for one person aged 18 or over was \$15,508, while for 2026 it is \$24,617. This now includes settlement fees and health and hospital insurance, which were previously calculated separately from the minimum financial capacity.⁹¹

Among other measures introduced since bringing in the cap, IRCC implemented new eligibility requirements for the post-graduation work permit (PGWP), which apply to international students who wish to work in Canada after they finish their studies. All applicants must now submit language results, and “international students in non-degree programs (programs other than bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral degrees) must complete a program in an eligible field of study linked to jobs in long-term shortages.”⁹² At

88 The Genuine Students Impacted by Fraud Taskforce was formed jointly by IRCC and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) to review cases of affected students and graduates, with the goal to prevent genuine students from facing removal from Canada. On 23 June 2023, the CBSA announced that charges were laid against Brijesh Mishra on multiple counts of misrepresentation under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. In May 2024, Brijesh Mishra pleaded guilty to three charges of misrepresentation and communicating false information, and was sentenced to three years in prison in Canada. IRCC, *Statement from Minister Fraser concerning reports of international student fraud*, Statement, 14 June 2023, and IRCC, *Changes to International Student Program aim to protect students*, News release, 27 October 2023; CBSA, *CBSA investigation leads to criminal charges for immigration offences including fraudulent letters for Canadian post-secondary institutions to Indian students*, 23 June 2023; Jon Hernandez, “*Man pleads guilty in international students fraud case*,” *CBC News*, 29 May 2024.

89 Government of Canada, *Revised requirements to better protect international students*, news release, 7 December 2023.

90 The low-income cut-off established by Statistics Canada represents the “minimum income necessary to ensure that an individual does not have to spend a greater than average portion of income on necessities.” Government of Canada, *Revised requirements to better protect international students*, news release, 7 December 2023.

91 Quebec, *Costs related to studying in Québec*.

92 Government of Canada, *Work in Canada after you graduate: About the post-graduation work permit; Update on field of study requirement for post-graduation work permits*, 25 June 2025.



committee, Soyoung Park also highlighted three changes made in November 2024 to increase international student program integrity:

One, we set a new 24-hour weekly limit for off-campus work. Two, students who change learning institutions must apply for a new study permit so that we can better track where they are and the fact that they are studying. Lastly, we now have additional regulations to enforce compliance and reporting standards on learning institutions.⁹³

For an international student to change DLIs, they must apply to extend their study permit while specifying the change in institution.⁹⁴ In 2024, IRCC also made mandatory the International Student Compliance Regime, which had been in place since 2016.⁹⁵ This program requires that DLIs report twice a year whether international students registered with them are in fact attending their school.

In the interest of promoting international students' financial independence while in Canada, and allowing them to focus on their studies, the committee recommends:

Increase Cost-of-Living Threshold for International Students

Recommendation 1

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada further increase the cost-of-living threshold for international students beyond the annual updates to the low-income cut-off amount established by Statistics Canada.

Results

Soyoung Park cautioned that, as the reforms are relatively new, only some effects are clear:

[I]t's going to take some time for us to see some of those results and to ensure that we are making changes based on evidence. There is a certain period of time that is required in order to know whether or not we should continue on that path.⁹⁶

Most evidently, the number of international students on study permits in Canada has come down. Where IRCC issued the 684,000 permits for study permits becoming

93 CIMM, *Evidence*, 23 September 2025, 1540 (Soyoung Park). See, Government of Canada, *New International Student Program regulations take effect*, news release, 15 November 2024; *Student compliance reporting*.

94 IRCC, *Changing your school or program*.

95 CIMM, *Evidence*, 23 September 2025, 1600 (Aiesha Zafar).

96 CIMM, *Evidence*, 23 September 2025, 1620 (Soyoung Park).

effective in 2023, it only issued 517,000 permits becoming effective in 2024 (Figure 1). Of these 517,000 permits, “only 293,835 were issued to new students entering Canada in 2024, with the balance being issued to students already in Canada,” supporting IRCC’s goal of reducing the number of new students arriving in Canada.⁹⁷ In addition, Soyoun Park noted that, in 2024, “there were 200,000 new PGWP holders ... a decrease of 15% from the previous year.”⁹⁸ For 2025, by October, the department had issued only 273,000 permits. Monthly IRCC data shows 60% fewer “new students arrived between January and October 2025 compared to the same period in 2024.”⁹⁹

The drop in study permits issued has indeed meant less foreign nationals in Canada on study permits. Speaking to the committee in September 2025, Soyoun Park noted that, since the cap was introduced, there has been “a 21% reduction of study permit holders in Canada.”¹⁰⁰ More recently, Statistics Canada similarly noted that the total number of study permit holders in Canada fell to 722,000 in the final quarter of 2025, after reaching the high of just over 1 million through 2024 (Figure 2). Looking at the third quarter, the agency also calculated that the falling number of study permit holders resulted in a decrease in temporary residents in Canada during this time, more generally:

The decrease in the number of non-permanent residents in the third quarter of 2025 was attributable to the drop in study permit holders only (-73,682) and in work and study permit holders (-67,616), with a smaller drop in work permit holders only (-35,231).¹⁰¹

Statistics Canada noted that “[t]he decrease in study permit holders only was concentrated in Ontario (-47,511) and British Columbia (-14,291), both of which also have the highest number of study permit holders.”¹⁰²

Some evidence suggests that these decreases are relieving pressure on housing in some regions. At committee, Soyoun Park cited a recent Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) report that showed price decreases in some markets that the agency attributed to falling international student enrollment: “rental price growth slowed from 8.9% to 3.2% in Kitchener-Waterloo, and similarly in Hamilton, from 12.8%

97 IRCC, “[Temporary Resident Programs and Volumes](#),” *2025 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration*, November 2025.

98 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1545 (Soyoun Park).

99 Government of Canada, [Understanding student and temporary worker numbers in Canada](#).

100 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1535 (Soyoun Park).

101 Statistics Canada, [Canada's population estimates, third quarter 2025](#).

102 Ibid.



to 2.4%. [CMHC] stated that it was due to lower international student numbers.”¹⁰³ CMHC’s 2025 report also found that “[a]reas of the [Greater Toronto Area] with post-secondary institutions observed notably higher vacancy rates” in 2025.¹⁰⁴ In Vancouver, similarly, CMHC found that the “[f]ederal policy changes affecting non-permanent residents, such as temporary workers and students, softened demand in the region.”¹⁰⁵

PART THREE: SUPPLEMENTING AND RECALIBRATING THE REFORMS

Witnesses shared their assessments of other aspects of the IRCC reforms, many of which were negative or mixed.

Many witnesses supported the reductions to the numbers of international students in Canada.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, many argued – albeit in different ways – that the reforms remain incomplete in the face of larger challenges in the international student system, or that they undermine the goals of promoting program integrity and Canadian research and economic prosperity. For Larissa Bezo, President and Chief Executive of the Canadian Bureau for International Education, the “changes represent a serious overcorrection,” that is harming Canada’s reputation, education system and economic prosperity.¹⁰⁷ André Côté added that the reforms are “like a half-completed project, so it’s important that we come back to it.”¹⁰⁸ Lisa Brunner noted significant challenges “where we have international students being framed in certain ways and being blamed for systemic issues for which they might make up a very small proportion.”¹⁰⁹

The following section of this report outlines problems that remain unaddressed by the reforms. It also traces the reforms’ negative and mixed effects and makes recommendations for improvement. While the reforms are meeting the department’s broad goals of shrinking the number of international students in Canada, and improving the integrity of the program, the committee is also concerned the reforms are

103 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1610 (Soyoung Park).

104 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), “[Greater Toronto Area](#),” *2025 Rental Market Report*.

105 CMHC, “[Vancouver](#),” *2025 Rental Market Report*.

106 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1545 (André Côté); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1645 (Robert Asselin).

107 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo).

108 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1545 (André Côté).

109 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1705 (Lisa Brunner).

indiscriminately harming provinces, DLIs and the international students that Canada needs to meet its research and economic goals.

The first two subsections that follow look at ways to supplement and complete the reforms to address policy and structural problems in student recruitment and support. The second two subsections look at how reforms can be recalibrated or rolled back in the face of significant enrolment overcorrections that could harm Canada's research and economic goals.

Ensuring Security and Integrity of the International Student Program

While early results suggest some success in improving program integrity, significant security vulnerabilities persist. The committee believes it is important to draw attention to an episode of the Radio-Canada program *Enquête* entitled "L'arnaque amoureuse, spécialité de la « mafia africaine »".¹¹⁰ The producers reported on a criminal network using the International Student Program to get onto Canadian soil to defraud Quebecers, and how immigration consultants were advising clients how to use the International Student Program to make asylum claims in Canada.

Vulnerabilities in the International Student Program to Crime

The *Enquête* episode alleges that a criminal network out of the Ivory Coast scammed many Quebecers out of money through romance scams, and that the criminal network has a base of fraudsters in Quebec, having arrived as international students with no plans to actually study.¹¹¹ The Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre reported that \$58 million dollars left Canada through romance scams alone in 2024, more than doubling the \$28 million estimated from the same fraud in 2020.¹¹² According to Karine Caron, a Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) Intelligence Analyst who was interviewed in the episode, 80% of members of this criminal network in Canada arrived as international students.¹¹³

110 Radio-Canada, "[L'arnaque amoureuse, spécialité de la « mafia africaine »](#)", *Enquête*, 18 September 2025.

111 This criminal network has been named "African organized crime" by Canadian authorities, and they specialize in cyber-criminality, but also the falsification of documents, money laundering and even exporting stolen Canadian vehicles. Radio-Canada, "[Les Québécois, « cibles faciles » des brouilleurs ivoiriens](#)," *Enquête*, 19 September 2025.

112 Ibid.

113 Radio-Canada, "[L'arnaque amoureuse, spécialité de la « mafia africaine »](#)", *Enquête*, 18 September 2025.



Larissa Bezo commented that, although learning institutions need to “remain vigilant” and alert the federal government if DLIs become aware of security issues, the responsibility for security screening rests with IRCC and CBSA.¹¹⁴ Christian Blanchette, the President of the University of Québec at Trois-Rivières, concurred:

The federal government, that is, IRCC, has the power and the means to find out if applicants who want to come to Canada have a criminal record or other problems. We are willing to co-operate with IRCC ... to help identify individuals that, according to the department, should not be in Canada and to find out if such people are actually here. We’ll continue to do that as long as IRCC wants to work with us, but the department is the one with that power, not universities.¹¹⁵

Aiesha Zafar indicated that when foreign nationals in Canada have committed crimes, “the CBSA, the RCMP and local police will investigate those crimes,” and information relayed to them by learning institutions would be used by IRCC to ensure that permits are not granted to individuals with the same fraudulent indicators. She told the committee that immigration officers are trained to use “indicator packages” that are “specific to different regions of the world or different cohorts” based on information from police and law enforcement partners.¹¹⁶

According to data obtained by the committee from IRCC, from January 2021 to August 2025, there have been a total of 184 study permit or study permit extension applications that were either refused by IRCC or withdrawn due to a failed criminality assessment on file. This includes 157 refused study permit applications, and 21 refused extensions.¹¹⁷

As of September 2025, Aiesha Zafar confirmed all provinces are supporting the newly mandatory International Student Compliance Regime and that IRCC is currently “working with the Province of Quebec to onboard” DLIs in that province. Regarding compliance data from spring 2025, IRCC confirmed for the committee that “91% of the students who were reported on were compliant – registered and in school – and 8% were potentially

114 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1605 (Larissa Bezo).

115 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1705 (Christian Blanchette, President, University of Québec at Trois-Rivières).

116 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 23 September 2025, 1605 (Aiesha Zafar).

117 IRCC, *CIMM 3.4 – Withdrawn or Refused Study Permits due to Criminality*, 23 September 2025.

non-compliant.”¹¹⁸ IRCC also stated that they conduct roughly 2,000 investigations per year for the 8% of students who are potentially non-compliant.¹¹⁹

Finally, Aiesha Zafar noted that, since the letter of acceptance verifications were introduced, over 14,000 potentially fraudulent letters have been identified. She noted that:

When we look at potentially 14,000 fraudulent letters of acceptance, we take the data and look at the indicators in each of those applications. Is there something that’s consistent in each of those applications that identifies for us that this is a large-scale fraud or that individuals are trying to circumvent the program? We will issue reports or other types of packages for our officers, so that they can look out for those things in future applications.¹²⁰

Given *Enquête’s* reports of the blatant misuse of the International Student Program to commit crime in Canada, however, the committee maintains that these screenings, compliance regime, and acceptance letter verifications are insufficient. The committee underscores that these reports should be further investigated.

To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the acceptance letter verification program, the committee recommends:

Introduce Random Audits and Clear Penalties for Designated Learning Institutions

Recommendation 2

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada introduce random audits for Designated Learning Institutions and clear penalties for Designated Learning Institution issuing misleading documents.

Vulnerabilities in the International Student Program to Facilitating Asylum Claims

The *Enquête* report also alleged that some immigration consultants may be advising foreign nationals to use the International Student Program as a means to make asylum claims within Canada, rather than for study. Romain Schué, an *Enquête* journalist visiting Abidjan, Ivory Coast, noticed that the immigration consulting agency he visited had signs

118 CIMM, *Evidence*, 23 September 2025, 1600 (Aiesha Zafar); IRCC, *CIMM – International Students – October 21, 2025*, 21 October 2025.

119 CIMM, *Evidence*, 23 September 2025, 1600 (Aiesha Zafar).

120 *Ibid.*, 1620.



outside with logos and names of Canadian schools, including Cégep Limoilou, Université de Québec à Montréal, and the University of Ottawa. An undercover accomplice asked the consultant about the possibility of getting to Canada without the intention to study. The consultant recommended applying “under the cover of studies,” adding that this works best when the client is still in their 20s. He also said that they can afterwards claim asylum in order to remain in Canada without needing to study, and that doing so was not risky.¹²¹

According to information provided to the committee by IRCC, the top nationalities making asylum claims with a study permit or a study permit extension in 2024 were India (4,256), followed by Nigeria (2,630) and the Republic of Guinea (1,959). In 2025, the top nationalities for asylum claims with a study permit or a study permit extension were India (3,815), the Republic of Guinea (1,254) and Nigeria (1,059). In 2024, Ivory Coast was 8th on the list with 673 asylum claims with a study permit or a study permit extension, and 5th on the list in 2025 with 752 asylum claims.¹²²

To further protect the International Student Program from being used to enter Canada for reasons other than to study, the committee recommends:

Establish Caps on International Students from Countries with High Rates of Permit Overstays or Asylum Claims in Canada

Recommendation 3

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada establish caps on study permits and study permit extensions to those applying as nationals from countries with a high rate of permit overstays or asylum claims.

To ensure that international students truly meet the language requirements for studying in Canada, the committee recommends:

121 Radio-Canada, *L'arnaque amoureuse, spécialité de la « mafia africaine »*, Enquête, 18 September 2025.

122 IRCC provided additional information regarding asylum claimants holding post-graduation work permits (PGWPs): In 2024, the top nationalities making asylum claims with a PGWP were India (142), Iran (66) and Nigeria (61). In 2025, the top nationalities for asylum claims with a PGWP were India (246), Nigeria (128) and Iran (33). IRCC, CIMM 3.1 – Asylum Claimant Nationalities: IRCC’s response to a request for information made by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on September 23, 2025.

Stricter Monitoring of Language Proficiency Requirements

Recommendation 4

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada monitor language proficiency requirements more strictly for international students' study permit issuance.

Protecting International Students from Exploitation

While largely supporting IRCC's efforts to reduce the number of international students coming into Canada and to increase program integrity mechanisms, several witnesses called for IRCC, the provinces, territories and DLIs to do more to prevent the exploitation of international students by foreign recruiters and some DLIs – including by making structural changes to how and why Canada attracts and retains international students.¹²³

False Promise of Permanent Residence

The false promises made to foreign students regarding permanent residence has rendered them more vulnerable to exploitation once they are in Canada. Even since the recent reforms, international students and PGWP holders often remain in a temporary status for long periods before getting a chance at becoming a permanent resident. As Lisa Brunner noted:

Not all international students want to stay in Canada after graduation, but many do ... Achieving that goal under our current system requires years of uncertainty as to whether they will be able to stay permanently. This leaves a segment of our society vulnerable to exploitation, with limited recourse or political representation.¹²⁴

As the example of Conestoga College illustrates, these students may be more likely to accept substandard housing, education and work in the hope of achieving one of an increasingly shrinking number of permanent resident places.

Those who came to Canada just before the 2024 reforms are in a particularly difficult situation, because the number of spaces has shrunk since they first came to Canada and committed to programs and pathways. As André Côté remarked:

[T]he challenge is that you have this whole wave of students who came in during that boom, and the rules of the game were changed while they were here. Maybe they were

123 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1540 (Rob Kristofferson); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1635 (Lisa Brunner).

124 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1635 (Lisa Brunner).



towards the end of their studies, or maybe they were already post-studies, on a postgraduate work permit, but they had had some signals about the direction of our immigration system, and that changed pretty abruptly.¹²⁵

To address this cohort and “reduce the potential precarity,” Lisa Brunner recommended that IRCC prioritize for permanent residence a higher percentage of temporary residents already in Canada, noting this would contribute to the goal of reducing temporary residents in Canada’s population to 5%.¹²⁶ More generally, she advised limiting international student enrolment primarily to accredited public institutions.¹²⁷ She also recommended that “[i]nternational student pathways to permanent residency ... be predictable and clearly communicated so that students have accurate expectations and can make informed choices.”¹²⁸

In the interest of promoting transparency for international students regarding their options for pursuing permanent residency, the committee recommends:

Draft Plain-language International Student Program Rules and Expectations

Recommendation 5

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, with the provinces and territories, publish clear plain-language program rules and expectations for prospective international students and Canadians, including integrity measures, housing and support expectations, and that immigration pathways are competitive and not guaranteed; and, that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada require designated learning institutions to inform prospective international students of the same.

Needed Structural Change

As mentioned in Part One of the report, witnesses traced the rise of international student numbers to the combined effects of underfunding, aggressive recruitment and the reliance on international students to fulfill general economic and immigration goals. In this study, witnesses highlighted that these challenges are not unique to Canada. Roopa Desai Trilokekar, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University, outlined that Australia faced many of the same difficulties over a decade ago:

125 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1620 (André Côté).

126 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1720 (Lisa Brunner).

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid., 1635.

Australia went about aggressively recruiting international students, with their higher educational institutions equally incentivized to recruit large numbers to fill their funding gaps. Their student programs were linked to immigration. The outcomes of all of these policies were very negative. There were imbalances and unregulated growth of programs and private institutions. There were challenges within communities, given this high growth rate. Chinese and Indian international students were becoming victims of assaults, and there was overall exploitation of them in the housing and employment market.¹²⁹

Lisa Brunner similarly noted that both Australia and Canada suffer from “funding issues and the resulting marketization of public post-secondary institutions.”¹³⁰ In both cases, international students became vulnerable to exploitation, because they were aggressively recruited to meet financial needs.

Both Roopa Desai Trilokekar and Lisa Brunner highlighted as a compelling model for Canada the international student system in Germany, which lacks the financial incentive to bring in large numbers of international students, because education institutions are more robustly funded.¹³¹ As Brunner noted:

[I]nternational students [in Germany] are not charged differential tuition compared to domestic students. Essentially, in Germany, the higher education system is funded much more robustly than in Canada, so we really see that the marketization of higher education has a very big impact. If we had more opportunities for funding for higher education, I think that would stabilize some of the issues—of course, with regulation as well.¹³²

The stability of higher education funding in the German system has allowed the country to consider international students first and foremost as students, and then in relation to a wide range of other goals, such as encouraging immigration and meeting specific high-skilled labour needs.¹³³

Roopa Desai Trilokekar recommended that international education be delinked from the immigration and economic policy files: “By intertwining these policy objectives, we have sent conflicting messages as to why international students should come to study in

129 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1535 (Roopa Desai Trilokekar, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, York University).

130 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1645 (Lisa Brunner).

131 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1625 (Roopa Desai Trilokekar); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1645 (Lisa Brunner).

132 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1645 (Lisa Brunner).

133 *Ibid.*, 1645, 1650; CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1625 (Roopa Desai Trilokekar).



Canada and why we are interested in hosting them.”¹³⁴ Lisa Brunner recommended that the Government of Canada should recognize “the recruitment and retention of international students as a distinct form of [combined] migration,” and pursue “forward-looking, collaborative, [and] systems-thinking planning.”¹³⁵ She stressed the particular importance of collaboration “now that the higher education system is a growing economic immigrant recruitment mechanism across the OECD in many different countries.” She added that, “[i]t may not be long before the Canadian federal government finds itself struggling to compete for international students as immigrants.”¹³⁶

André Côté called for “refocused efforts on international education ... to attract talent into a smaller but better system.”¹³⁷ Lisa Brunner similarly recommended that the Atlantic Canada Study and Stay Program¹³⁸ and the Francophone Minority Communities Student Pilot¹³⁹ be assessed as possible models for new, more targeted pathways to permanent residence:

[G]iven reductions in study permit targets, Canada should think carefully about which international students to prioritize and about how we support them. Tailored initiatives such as the Atlantic Canada study and stay program ... and the francophone minority communities student pilot, which tie into broader policy goals like targeted regional retention, should be assessed.¹⁴⁰

More narrowly, the Canadian Association of University Teachers recommended in a brief submitted to the committee that federal departments should coordinate efforts to “accredit recruitment agents to prevent exploitation.”¹⁴¹ World Education Services recommended prohibiting “exorbitant differences in tuition fees between domestic students and international students.”¹⁴²

134 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1535 (Roopa Desai Trilokekar).

135 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1635 (Lisa Brunner).

136 Ibid.

137 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1545 (André Côté).

138 Government of Canada, [Study and Stay Program](#).

139 Government of Canada, [Francophone Minority Communities Student Pilot: Path to permanent residence](#).

140 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1635 (Lisa Brunner).

141 Canadian Association of University Teachers, [Study on the International Student Program and Study Permits](#), brief submitted to CIMM, October 2025, p. 3.

142 World Education Services, [International Student Program and Study Permits](#), brief submitted to CIMM, 1 October 2025, p. 2.

Increasing Student Supports and the Accountability of Designated Learning Institutions

Some witnesses pointed to the role that DLIs may play in promoting student safety and well-being on and off campuses. Lisa Brunner pointed out that many Canadian institutions offer important services to international students “that could be further supported.” She explained that higher education institutions play an important role by providing these services, “which are essentially settlement supports for students ... There could be coordination and regulation of those services to ensure that there’s consistency and that students are able to thrive while they’re here.”¹⁴³

Roopa Desai Trilokekar also mentioned that Germany has many local-level initiatives that are worth considering in Canada, as well as protective mechanisms for international students seeking jobs, so they do not face exploitation.¹⁴⁴ On this same point, she mentioned New Zealand’s new code of practice as an example: *The Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021* sets out what education providers must do to ensure the safety and wellbeing of international students.¹⁴⁵

Among other recommendations, Rob Kristofferson argued that any IRCC increases to the number of international students under the study permit cap “should be tied to the availability of student housing and student services, with universities required to show that they can provide these supports.”¹⁴⁶ Lisa Brunner called for benchmarks to be set, given “there is significant disparity among institutional and provincial practices.” These benchmarks should be set in light of such questions as:

What proportion of each institution’s international student tuition revenue, for example, is directed toward purpose-built housing and support services for international students? Are provincial and territorial quality assurance mechanisms governing designated learning institutions sufficient?¹⁴⁷

143 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1650 (Lisa Brunner).

144 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1625 (Roopa Desai Trilokekar).

145 Ibid. For more information, see New Zealand, *Understanding the Code for International Learners in New Zealand*.

146 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1540 (Rob Kristofferson).

147 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1635 (Lisa Brunner).



Addressing Overcorrections in International Student Enrolment

In brief, the cap and related reforms are reducing DLI enrolment in excess of the provincial and territorial allocation targets, because they damage the brand and reputation of Canada's International Student Program. Canada's program competes with those of other countries to attract international students. Since the 2024 study permit application cap and other reforms were introduced, many of these students have looked elsewhere – in some cases avoiding Canada's institutions in greater numbers than those intended through provincial and territorial study permit application caps.

Tarnished Reputation

Witnesses explained how the rapid reduction of study permits, post-graduation work permits (PGWPs) and permanent residence numbers, as well as changes to the International Student Program rules, have been frustrating for international students in Canada, who shared their opinions with others in their home countries. André Côté illustrated this with an example: "In India ... people on Reddit message boards were literally talking about how Canada pulled the rug out from under them. These are the things that will linger."¹⁴⁸ By advertising for years Canada's welcome of international students, and the pathways to work permits and permanent residence, and then changing the rules, IRCC betrayed the expectations of many international students already here. Many of these students invested significant time and money to pursue education and residency here in Canada.¹⁴⁹ The quick shift has made Canada seem untrustworthy to them.

The federal government's critique of colleges has also harmed the International Student Program's brand. IRCC's most visible target of its reforms has been private colleges, some of which grew their international student populations rapidly and offered programs of low quality. This critique of certain colleges has, however, affected the reputation of all Canadian DLIs. Larissa Bezo referenced a December 2023 comment by the then minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Marc Miller, when he was contemplating bringing in the study permits' application cap. She commented: "We cannot speak about [DLIs as] "puppy mills" and not damage the perceived quality of Canada's education system."¹⁵⁰

148 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1620 (André Côté).

149 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1720 (Lisa Brunner).

150 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1605 (Larissa Bezo); "[Federal government hikes income requirement for foreign students, targets 'puppy mill' schools](#)," *CBC News*, 7 December 2023.

More generally, the cap and government criticism of program integrity have affected Canadians' perception of international students, and the students' perception of Canada as a welcoming place. As Larissa Bezo continued, "over the course of these last 18 to 20 months, we have seen a considerable amount of scapegoating and blame directed towards international students who have chosen to come to study at our institutions."¹⁵¹ Some witnesses argued that this rhetoric has both damaged Canada's brand abroad and made some international students feel unwelcome and even unsafe in Canada.¹⁵² As Robert Asselin remarked, "[w]hen my university presidents travel abroad, it's clear that the message we have sent is very negative: 'Don't come to Canada; we don't want you here.' It's very harmful."¹⁵³ Looking to the future, Roopa Desai Trilokekar argued that international students' trust and good impressions of Canada are forms of "soft power" that the country should not squander, "because, as international students return to their home countries or go to a third or fourth country and take vital positions in different sectors, they will be ambassadors for the future of Canada and its interests."¹⁵⁴

Falling Enrollment

The damage to the reputations of Canada's DLIs and of international students in Canada has had additional consequences. Witnesses highlighted how the introduction of the cap and related reforms has decimated international student enrolment and, accordingly, the financial situation of many universities, colleges and vocational training schools.¹⁵⁵ Larissa Bezo explained that "[s]ince the fall of 2024, Canadian institutions have announced 35 site closures, 863 program suspensions and the loss of over 10,000 jobs, with many more to come."¹⁵⁶ Speaking about post-secondary vocational training programs in Quebec, Lysiane van der Knaap, Executive Director, Éducation internationale, reported that "[m]ore than 50% of training centres tell us that they have experienced a 50% or more drop in admissions."¹⁵⁷

151 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo).

152 Ibid.; CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1725 (Robert Asselin); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1710 (Lisa Brunner); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1535 (Roopa Desai Trilokekar).

153 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1725 (Robert Asselin).

154 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1535 (Roopa Desai Trilokekar).

155 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1645 (Robert Asselin); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 November 2025, 1550 (Lysiane van der Knaap).

156 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo).

157 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 November 2025, 1550 (Lysiane van der Knaap).



These reductions, moreover, are exceeding the reductions that the study permit targets and caps demand. According to IRCC data submitted to the committee, the department approved only 267,772 new study permits in 2024, although the approved application target was 364,000 (Table 1).¹⁵⁸ While more research is needed to confirm the extent of the difference,¹⁵⁹ the 100,000 shortfall between the 2024 target and the actual approvals suggests the goal was significantly missed. In his own calculation for 2024, using 2023 as a reference point, David Agnew noted “a 45% decline in study permit approvals, which was well beyond IRCC’s stated target of a 35% reduction” from 2023 levels.¹⁶⁰ Looking at the associated number of applications processed in 2024, Darcy Rollins, Head of Division, Navitas University Partnerships North America, noted in a brief to the committee that the number “fell by 38% year-over-year—double the initially projected 19% decline — bringing volumes close to 2021 levels.”¹⁶¹

IRCC’s monthly arrival and issuing data in 2025 suggests an even greater overcorrection relative to the study permit application target for the year. While IRCC issued approximately 125,000 study permits to new arrivals in the first half of 2024, it only issued 36,000 in the first half of 2025.¹⁶² As Larissa Bezo put it, the “plummeting” number of applications to universities and colleges in Canada in 2025 is “not surprising, given that new study permits [issued] dropped by 70% between January and June [2025], well in excess of IRCC’s goals.”¹⁶³ This trend continued into the rest of the year, though it is not quite as steep. IRCC notes that monthly arrival data is cyclical, “with big increases in December and August each year ... because most study permits are issued

158 CIMM, *CIMM 3.4 – Withdrawn or Refused Study Permits Due to Criminality, IRCC’s response to a request made by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on September 23, 2025*.

159 Importantly, the data provided by IRCC are “in persons,” and do not count multiple applications from the same applicant in the same year, while the targets and caps are for all applications. Given that study permits are only issued to students studying in Canada for 6 months or longer, and that IRCC’s total of 267,772 does not include study permit extensions – including of applications lasting less than a year – the total likely does not include many multiple acceptances within the same year; further research using data for “applications only” would be needed to confirm this conclusion.

160 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1730 (David Agnew).

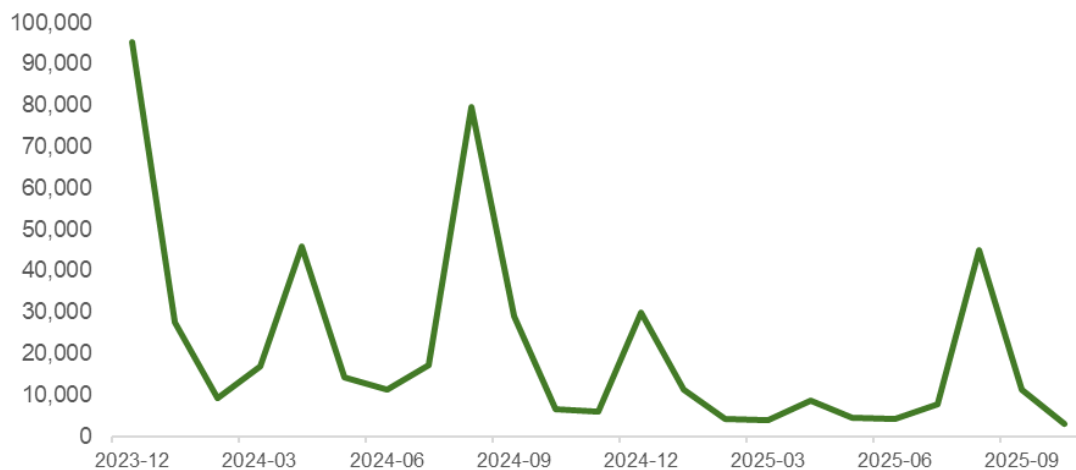
161 Navitas University Partnerships North America, *Submission to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration – International Student Program and Study Permits*, November 2025, p. 1. According to the data submitted to the committee, IRCC processed 557,394 applications in 2021, 867,150 in 2023, and 583,733 in 2024. Note that these numbers are in persons, exclude multiple applications, and include applications not subject to the cap (e.g., applications for study permits for graduate study). CIMM, *CIMM 3.4 – Withdrawn or Refused Study Permits Due to Criminality, IRCC’s response to a request made by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on September 23, 2025*.

162 Government of Canada, “[New student arrivals to Canada – Table](#),” *Understanding student and temporary worker numbers in Canada*.

163 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo).

before the start of the fall and winter semesters.”¹⁶⁴ Where IRCC issued 79,760 permits to students arriving in August 2024, it only issued 45,115 to arrivals in August 2024, a reduction of 43%. As André Côté commented, looking at projections for all of 2025, “[w]e’ve seen the projections ... not even meeting the hugely reduced targets” of the 2025 cap.¹⁶⁵ While IRCC aimed to decrease all study permits by 10% between 2024 and 2025, the effective reduction of study permits to new international students in 2025, based on month-to-month data, was in fact around 70% during some periods, and 43% during others. To understand this data, more research would be needed into the cases where new study permits were issued to foreign nationals already in Canada (e.g., to international students who need a new permit when changing DLIs). After two years of caps, the 2024 policy changes seem to have reduced new study permit applications and enrolments much more than IRCC planned – and much more than provinces, territories and DLIs expected.

Figure 3—New Student Arrivals to Canada, December 2023 to October 2025



Source: Government of Canada, [Understanding student and temporary worker numbers in Canada](#). Prepared by Library of Parliament.

The reductions have also hit some regions much harder than anticipated. In the 2024 provincial and territorial application allocations, the number of applications that IRCC calculated for Ontario was anticipated to result in a 41% reduction in approved applications from 2023. By contrast, Quebec received enough study permit applications

164 Government of Canada, [Understanding student and temporary worker numbers in Canada](#).

165 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1620 (André Côté).



to potentially increase its number of approved applications by 10%.¹⁶⁶ Two years later, however, Christian Blanchette reported enrollment dips and remaining application cap room at Quebec universities, rather than steady or increasing international student enrolment.

In April 2025, Quebec universities as a whole saw a 43% drop in the number of applications for admission ... Every Quebec university is allowed to accept a limited percentage of international students. [Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières] was only able to reach 36% of its limit. The figures I am seeing from the system as a whole indicate an average of around 35%.¹⁶⁷

In summary, while IRCC is attempting to reduce the number of international students in some provinces and territories, and to address overreliance on international students by colleges, its policies are impacting enrolment in regions and institutions across the country and in higher numbers than anticipated. Despite the government's complex allocation formula, the policy is too broad and ignores regional institutional realities. As Christian Blanchette put it, the "international student situation is a regional problem for which some have sought a national solution. This has resulted in tragedy for many of the country's universities."¹⁶⁸ While universities in some regions, such as Quebec, have not generally had problems with growing international student populations too quickly, nor with housing these students,¹⁶⁹ the cap has decimated enrolment from coast to coast.

Many witnesses argued that the low numbers of international students reflect the damage done to Canada's reputation as a top international destination for study.¹⁷⁰ As Larissa Bezo noted, even in 2024, the year that applications for study permits for graduate-level education were excluded from the cap, "we saw significant declines in international talent at the graduate level coming into our institutions."¹⁷¹ Christian Blanchette noted that, while experiencing very different challenges from English-language DLIs – and generally not experiencing housing problems – French-language institutions and their enrollment have been affected by the larger conversation about housing shortages and reducing immigration. As he put it, "the francophonie reacts

166 Government of Canada, [Minister Miller issues statement on international student allocations for provinces and territories](#), 5 April 2024.

167 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1645 (Christian Blanchette).

168 Ibid.

169 Ibid., 1725.

170 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1545 (Larissa Bezo); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1645 (Robert Asselin); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1705 (Christian Blanchette).

171 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1620 (Larissa Bezo).

strongly to Canadian rhetoric.”¹⁷² Whatever the targets and mechanics of the study permit cap, the combined effect of IRCC’s changes and justifications have made many international students feel less interested in Canadian education and less welcome. Several witnesses recommended that Canada send more clear signals that the country wants and values its international students, that all levels of government and institutions promote the value of Canadian education and that all actors avoid falling into anti-immigrant rhetoric that can put international students here at risk.¹⁷³

Witnesses noted, moreover, that the enrolment and reputational problems have been exacerbated by other effects of the 2024 reforms, accompanying higher refusal rates for applications.¹⁷⁴ While this rate was 39.9% for applications processed in 2023, it was 45.6% in 2024 and 55% in 2025 (Figure 4).

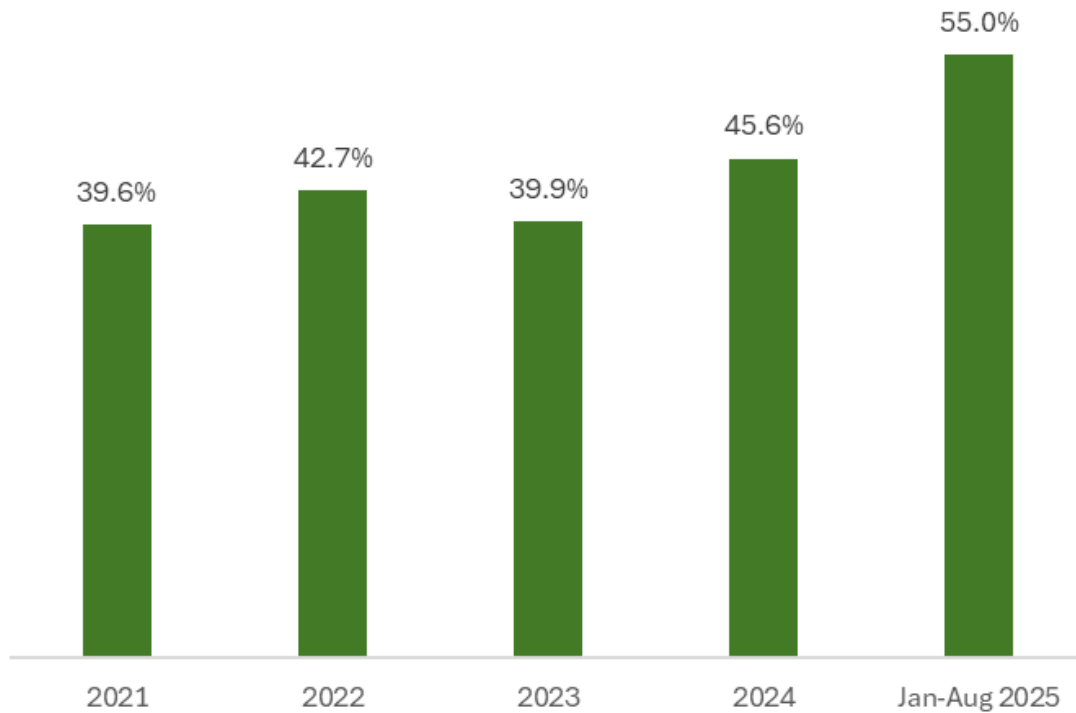
172 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1710 (Christian Blanchette)

173 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1645 (Christian Blanchette); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1645 (Robert Asselin); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1650 (Lisa Brunner).

174 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1640 (David Agnew).



Figure 4—Refusal Rates, Study Permits Including Extensions by Final Decision in Persons, January 2021-August 2025



Source: CIMM, *CIMM 3.4 – Withdrawn or Refused Study Permits Due to Criminality*, IRCC’s response to a request made by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on September 23, 2025. Prepared by Library of Parliament.

To give time for all actors in the international student system to adapt, and to give more certainty to current and prospective international students, the committee also recommends:

Consult with Provinces and Territories about Long-Term Plans for the International Student Program

Recommendation 6

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada consult more extensively with the provinces and territories about long-term plans for the International Student Program.

Fortifying Economic and Research Initiatives

By reforming the way Canada receives international students, the system can be better tailored to fit the needs of Canadian students, while attracting talent abroad in areas where it is needed. The impact of reduced enrolment has demonstrated the significant economic dependence on international students, both for educational institutions and for our economy.

Negatively Impacted Economic and Research Projects

In its January 2025 report, *Impact assessment of 2025–2027 Immigration Level Plan*, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (OPBO) estimated that the government's 2024 reduction in immigration levels for permanent and temporary immigration between 2025 and 2027 – to which reduced international student targets are linked – would cost the economy about \$37 billion in GDP “on average over the next three years.” Testifying before the committee, Caroline Nicol, Advisor-Analyst, Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, noted that the calculation did not isolate the economic effect of reduced international student numbers.¹⁷⁵ Interim Parliamentary Budget Officer, Jason Jacques, affirmed that the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer could produce such an estimate, given time and direction from the committee to do so.¹⁷⁶

At committee, witness testimony gave some sense of the impact of the caps. Larissa Bezo testified that “IRCC’s policy changes are crushing a sector that in 2024 contributed \$38.6 billion to Canada’s GDP, over 1.7% of the total.”¹⁷⁷ John Tibbits noted that “international students alone have added about \$1.6 billion to Ontario’s GDP.”¹⁷⁸ He also noted the threat to the significant economic contribution of international students to local economies surrounding DLIs, as did Lysiane van der Knaap.¹⁷⁹ This is further evidence of the long term dependence that institutions and local economies have had on international student enrolment.

In cutting the number of international students Canada receives to address the associated pressures our country currently faces, there has been an impact on the

175 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1655 (Caroline Nicol, Advisor-Analyst, Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer).

176 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1700–1705 (Jason Jacques, Interim Parliamentary Budget Officer, Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer).

177 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo).

178 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1540 (John Tibbits).

179 Ibid.; CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 November 2025, 1605 (Lysiane van der Knaap).



original intent of the International Student Program: building the specialized labour force necessary for achieving some of Canada’s economic, security and research goals. Commenting on Canada’s 15 leading research universities, Robert Asselin noted that:

Graduate and doctoral programs are ... seeing major reductions, particularly in engineering, computer science, health and life sciences. These are precisely the fields that underpin Canada’s future economy and security. In graduate computer engineering programs, enrolment has dropped by more than 20% in a single year. This is the talent we need to build nuclear reactors, advance AI supercomputing, and strengthen our defence industrial base.¹⁸⁰

Many of Canada’s emerging economic priorities (e.g., artificial intelligence, defence) rely on the training and expertise of international graduate students, who are enrolling in smaller numbers due to the 2024 cap on graduate student applicants, and due to the larger decline in the reputation of the Canadian International Student Program.

These reductions are also threatening Canada’s research capacity. Graduate students play a central role as research assistants, and losing many of them is “eroding the capacity of Canada’s research ecosystem to deliver the discoveries and innovations our society and businesses depend on.”¹⁸¹ Christian Blanchette cautioned that Canada’s more restrictive immigration policies should not compromise its ability to attract international students. Blanchette explained that “every area of cutting-edge research is having trouble recruiting talent,” and while Canada is filling universities with Canadian students in cutting-edge disciplines, “there isn’t enough talent in Canada to meet the needs of Canadian-funded research” in areas like artificial intelligence or hydrogen technology.¹⁸² Overall, he concluded that it is “Canada’s research program and Canada’s economic transformation program that are affected by the scarcity of international students.”¹⁸³ He argued that IRCC should expedite study permit renewals as these renewals often burden doctoral students. Their study permits only last three years, but they often complete doctoral programs in four and a half years.¹⁸⁴ Robert Asselin supported exempting graduate students once again from the study permit application cap, a change that IRCC has announced for the 2026 cap

180 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1645 (Robert Asselin).

181 Ibid.; CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1645 (Christian Blanchette).

182 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 October 2025, 1710 (Christian Blanchette).

183 Ibid.

184 Ibid., 1705.

(Table 1).¹⁸⁵ Lisa Brunner recommended that Canada improve innovation by focusing on recruiting international students for research-based master's and doctoral programs.¹⁸⁶

To help reverse the harms caused by the 2024 reforms to Canada's research capacity, and to improve innovation, the committee recommends:

Expedite Graduate Student Study Permit Renewals

Recommendation 7

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada expedite the processing of study permit renewals for graduate students.

The drop in international students in vocational training programs in Quebec, similarly, is undermining Canada's efforts to meet labour shortages in the skilled trades. Lysiane van der Knaap explained to the committee the unique vocational training system in Quebec.

The Quebec public network of vocational training consists of 174 training centres that offer more than 200 programs in 21 sectors to approximately 130,000 students across Quebec. Vocational training is a pillar of Quebec's education system. It exists to meet the needs of the skilled trades workforce.¹⁸⁷

In the Quebec system, vocational training programs typically require 615 to 1800 hours to complete, and may be followed by further specialization.¹⁸⁸ Lysiane van der Knaap claimed that "80% of vocational training programs are geared toward trades with a labour shortage," such as machinists, welders, construction workers and, in healthcare, personal support workers. Jérôme Carette, Director of Education Services, Adult Sector, Centre de services scolaire du Lac-Saint-Jean, Éducation internationale, noted that all 15 vocational training programs offered by the training centre in Alma, Lac-Saint-Jean, have a 100% placement rate following graduation.¹⁸⁹ The decrease in the number of international students means that the training programs "are simply no longer able to provide the graduates needed to meet labour market needs."¹⁹⁰ International students are critical to

185 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1645 (Robert Asselin).

186 CIMM, *Evidence*, 9 October 2025, 1720 (Lisa Brunner).

187 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 November 2025, 1540 (Lysiane van der Knaap).

188 See, Government of Québec, *Studying in vocational training*.

189 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 November 2025, 1540 (Jérôme Carette, Director of Education Services, Adult Sector, Centre de services scolaire du Lac-Saint-Jean, Éducation internationale).

190 *Ibid.*, 1550.



filling these positions. In 2024, they made up only 14% of vocational training students,¹⁹¹ and yet they help maintain the training offerings for all students.¹⁹²

The 50% drop in number of international students in the vocational training programs has harmed many Quebec industries that depend on these graduates. Lysiane van der Knaap noted that some of the programs facing drops in enrolment are “directly related to investments by the current federal government, such as the surveying and heavy-duty road vehicle mechanics programs.”¹⁹³ Vocational training programs train most construction workers needed to help build houses and increase housing supply.¹⁹⁴

Post-Graduate Work Permits Unsited to Regional Realities

Witnesses highlighted IRCC’s restrictions to post-graduation work permit (PGWP) eligibility based on study program as particularly damaging to vocational programs and the industries that depend on them.¹⁹⁵ Lysiane van der Knapp summarized a series of changes since 2024 to the list of study programs out of which students can apply for a PGWP:

Since November 1, 2024, when an eligibility criterion based on the field of study was imposed, only 55 [vocational training] programs have been eligible for the post-graduation work permit ... Before that, there were 142. According to information provided by IRCC, the list could be reduced to 35 programs in early 2026. Of the ineligible programs, more than 40 are geared toward trades with documented labour needs.¹⁹⁶

According to IRCC, the department chooses PGWP-eligible programs that it judges to be “linked to certain jobs in long-term shortage in Canada.”¹⁹⁷ On 4 July 2025, the federal government extended the eligibility to early 2026 of programs that have been excluded

191 Ibid., 1620.

192 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 November 2025, 1540 (Lysiane van der Knaap).

193 Ibid.

194 Ibid., 1615.

195 Ibid.; CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 November 2025, 1600 (Jérôme Carette).

196 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 November 2025, 1540 (Lysiane van der Knaap).

197 Government of Canada, [Work in Canada after you graduate: Field of study requirement](#). In 2025, for instance, IRCC updated the list of programs to reflect the job experience priorities of Express Entry, a points-based system by which the federal government assesses the qualifications and experience of many permanent resident applicants. Government of Canada, [Update on field of study requirement for post-graduation work permits](#), 25 June 2025.

in late June 2025.¹⁹⁸ Larissa Bezo supported the department's "latest recalibrations around the PGWP," as a "further alignment to ensure ... graduates are job-ready."¹⁹⁹ According to Lysiane van der Knapp, however, IRCC is increasingly excluding vocational training programs in sectors with clear labour shortages from PGWP eligibility.

More specifically, IRCC's restriction of PGWP-eligible programs in Quebec to those that require at least 900 hours of study excludes students from shorter programs in sectors that are nonetheless crucial to the economy, such as personal support worker (PSW) training and training in many construction trades.²⁰⁰ Speaking about PSW training, for instance, Jérôme Carette noted the challenges for international students to obtain a work permit in this in-demand field:

PSW training lasts 705 hours and leads to a diploma of vocational studies ... However, since the training lasts less than 900 hours, the program does not lead to a post-graduation work permit. As a result, international students who want to continue their education by working at an organization have to go through a very long bureaucratic process to get a closed work permit. ... The 900-hour cut-off has a direct impact on our ability to provide labour to service businesses in our region.²⁰¹

Overall, Lysiane van der Knapp argued that in setting PGWP-eligibility criteria, IRCC should value the contributions of international students graduating from the vocational training schools as much as those graduating from universities, which are not subject to restrictions based on program and labour shortages. As she put it, "it is true that we need engineers and doctors in Quebec and in Canada, but a hospital can't operate without practical nurses and orderlies."²⁰² She recommended that IRCC review the study program criteria, including the 900-hour program-length threshold, and align them more closely with documented national and provincial labour shortages.²⁰³ She also argued that IRCC officials should educate themselves about the unique vocational training programs in Quebec, because these officials sometimes reject otherwise eligible applications or make administrative errors.²⁰⁴

198 Government of Canada, [Update on field of study requirement for post-graduation work permits](#), 25 June 2025.

199 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1555 (Larissa Bezo).

200 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 November 2025, 1615 (Lysiane van der Knaap); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 November 2025, 1600 (Jérôme Carette).

201 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 November 2025, 1600 (Jérôme Carette).

202 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 November 2025, 1605 (Lysiane van der Knaap).

203 Ibid., 1615.

204 Ibid.



Ensuring an alignment between labour shortages and PGWP criteria will require accurate data. Lysiane van der Knapp repeatedly cited Quebec government data about labour shortages and highlighted the work and data of the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail,²⁰⁵ a Quebec government organization that brings together representatives from across the Quebec labour market. It aims for alignment between training offerings, workforce skills and labour market needs.²⁰⁶ Regarding changing PGWP eligibility and implementing the cap on graduate students, André Côté recommended that IRCC should defer to provinces and territories, because they are better placed to understand and manage local and regional needs, or that IRCC should discontinue these reforms altogether:

Basically, out of IRCC, you're sort of dictating a list of 1,000 programs. ... The real question is, is that something the federal government should be doing? There were also changes for graduate students, including the cap ... Simply put, these are areas that the IRCC is not well equipped to intervene in. It pushes into provincial jurisdiction. To us, it's better to either scrap it or delegate it to provinces and territories.²⁰⁷

David Agnew similarly argued that IRCC must engage all institutional stakeholders – provinces, territories, local and regional governments, the business community and DLIs – because “[r]egional variations of in-demand skills are considerable.”²⁰⁸ Drawing from this testimony about PGWPs and labour market data, the committee recommends:

Defer to Provinces and Territories about Labour Market Needs when Deciding Study Programs Eligible for Post-Graduation Work Permits

Recommendation 8

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada defer to provinces and territories about labour market needs when setting the list of study programs eligible for post-graduation work permits.

PART FOUR: TOWARD A SMALLER BUT BETTER SYSTEM

Ultimately, the federal government must change the way it addresses challenges in Canada’s International Student Program – including how it collaborates with other

205 Ibid., 1540, 1630. She highlighted, in particular, Government of Quebec, *État d'équilibre du marché du travail à court et moyen termes : diagnostics pour 516 professions*, 2024.

206 Government of Quebec, *La CPMT en bref*.

207 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1545 (André Côté).

208 CIMM, *Evidence*, 25 September 2025, 1640 (David Agnew).

stakeholders and how it collects and uses data to address challenges. Many witnesses supported bringing down the number of international students and improving program security and integrity. At the same time, they argued that reforms have been too heavy-handed, have affected DLIs uniformly rather than accounting for differences in institution type (e.g., university, college, vocational training school) and have lacked key solutions necessary to meet Canada's immigration, educational and economic needs.

For Alex Usher, looking at the many challenges that led to the unprecedented number of international students and the 2024 reforms:

What we ended up with was a federal government that barely understood what was going on, lashing out, acting alone, doing anything it could to bring the numbers down with only the barest understanding of the system it was regulating. Of course, we ended up with a dog's breakfast.²⁰⁹

He added that the mistakes that have been made and solutions that are needed pertain not simply to what policies were introduced, but to how such policies are developed and implemented by educational stakeholders and all levels of Canadian government. He continued:

Yes, you can point to certain policies for certain actions like that, but the real causes here are that, one, we underinvest in operational and data systems, which leaves decision-makers poorly informed and the system as a whole insecure, and two, we have almost no instinct anymore for co-operative federalism. This was a clear case where governments should have been talking to one another, and they weren't. They should have been including institutions, as well. We have brutally siloed decision-making.²¹⁰

Other witnesses similarly called for greater collaboration between the federal government, other levels of government and DLIs. For instance, André Côté said, "the collaborative federalism is huge. This is a system jointly administered with provinces and also, critically, with institutions and various other players, like third party recruiters, so there needs to be a team approach."²¹¹ As the challenges facing international student recruitment and Canadian immigration are systemic and touch multiple domains (e.g., immigration, economic development) and jurisdictions, the solutions must engage transparently with all key actors – including Canadians and international students.

209 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1540 (Alex Usher).

210 Ibid.

211 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1600 (André Côté).



As Larissa Bezo noted, moreover, IRCC cannot act alone, but must work more closely with other government departments and agencies to address the related immigration, economic, security and educational concerns. For Bezo:

[W]e need to be clear that this isn't solely an immigration issue. Talent development and attraction cuts across departments and needs whole-of-government coordination: Global Affairs to align trade and diplomatic priorities, ISED to define industrial policy and Canada's research and innovation agenda, ESDC to ensure alignment with labour market and human resources development, the intergovernmental affairs secretariat to ensure provincial and territorial engagement, and Public Safety to address security considerations.²¹²

As we have seen, several witnesses also echoed Alex Usher's call for better data and recommended more data-sharing between institutions, following the lead of the institution best positioned to collect and interpret a given type of information (e.g., provinces providing labour statistics).²¹³ Drawing from the Canadian Bureau for International Education's feedback from 225 organizations at a conference it organized concerning the 2024 reforms, Larissa Bezo recommended that the Government of Canada help develop a centre of excellence for international education that "would provide for policy innovation, research, capacity building and strategic coordination in international education."²¹⁴ As the conference action plan and summary report described the initiative further:

More complete international education data will inform sector-wide policy and program decisions and can draw on multiple existing sources including but not limited to StatsCan, IRCC, GAC, ESDC, provinces, JobBank, business community, etc. IRCC sharing of real-time data on provincial & DLI processing times, LOA verification data, and updates of allotments under the national cap on international students will be important components moving forward, as well as post-graduate pathway flows.²¹⁵

To make better decisions and policies, these witnesses argued, IRCC must access more international student, immigration and labour data and share it more widely with stakeholders, both inside and outside of government.

Drawing from this proposal, the committee recommends:

212 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo).

213 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1630 (André Côté); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo).

214 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 25 September 2025, 1530 (Larissa Bezo).

215 Canadian Bureau for International Education, [Action Plan and Summary Report National Dialogue on International Students](#), p. 5.

Fund Centre for Excellence for International Education

Recommendation 9

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada help fund a centre for excellence for international education that brings together relevant international student data from all levels of government and that promotes research and policy innovation among stakeholders and governments within international student education.

In the interest of understanding the rise in international student numbers, the 2024 reforms and the effects of these reforms more fully, and in the face of sometimes incomplete data, the committee also instructs:

Instruct Parliamentary Budget Officer to Analyze International Student Program and Study Permit Application Caps

Recommendation 10

That the Parliamentary Budget Officer undertake a comprehensive analysis of the International Student Program, including costing the effects of the study permit application caps on enrollment, housing, research and regional and national economic growth.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Department of Citizenship and Immigration Pemi Gill, Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery Bronwyn May, Director General, International Students Branch Soyoung Park, Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Programs Aiesha Zafar, Assistant Deputy Minister, Migration Integrity	2025/09/23	3
Canadian Bureau for International Education Larissa Bezo, President and Chief Executive Officer	2025/09/25	4
Higher Education Strategy Associates Alex Usher, President	2025/09/25	4
Seneca Polytechnic David Agnew, President	2025/09/25	4
The Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University André Côté, Executive Director	2025/09/25	4
U15 Canada Robert Asselin, Chief Executive Officer	2025/09/25	4
University of Quebec at Trois-Rivieres Christian Blanchette, President	2025/09/25	4
As an individual Dr. Lisa Brunner, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of British Columbia, Centre for Migration Studies Roopa Desai Trilokekar, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, York University	2025/10/09	7

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Conestoga College Dr. John Tibbits, President	2025/10/09	7
Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer Jason Jacques, Interim Parliamentary Budget Officer Caroline Nicol, Advisor-Analyst	2025/10/09	7
Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations Dr. Rob Kristofferson, President	2025/10/09	7
Accueil francophone du Manitoba Bintou Sacko, Executive Director	2025/11/25	14
Éducation internationale Jérôme Carette, Director of Education Services , Adult Sector, Centre de services scolaire du Lac-Saint-Jean Odile René, Regulated Immigration Consultant for International Students Lysiane van der Knaap, Executive Director	2025/11/25	14

APPENDIX B: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Canadian Association of University Teachers

Computer Science Canada

Languages Canada

National Association of Career Colleges

Navitas University Partnerships North America

Universities Canada

World Education Services

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 3, 4, 7, 14, 18, 22, 24 and 26](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Dzerowicz
Chair

Supplementary Opinion on the Report on International Students Liberal Members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Liberal Members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration largely agree with the report as adopted by the committee following its study of the government's changes to the international students program.

We wish to state that international students are an important part of Canadian society and Canada's education system. Their diverse and unique perspectives contribute to the success of our local students and strengthen our education system. Most international students come here genuinely to study and improve themselves, and too many have been taken advantage of by unscrupulous actors. The students themselves should not be blamed for the actions of those bad actors or scapegoated for broader societal issues.

It is vitally important to ensure that international students are not blamed for the housing shortage or strain on other services. Canada had a housing issue for 30 years because successive governments at all three levels did not invest enough. The large influx of international students which were issued student visas at unprecedented levels exacerbated the problem rather than causing it.

We also wish to draw attention to the multijurisdictional nature of the international student program. While the federal government runs the immigration system and issues student visas to qualified applicants in receipt of a valid offer of admission to a designated learning institution (DLI), the provinces have constitutional authority for post-secondary education as well as responsibility for regulating and ensuring DLIs are providing a quality educational experience.

As the report notes, the federal government's decision to implement a study permit cap was in the context of an unsustainable increase in international student admissions issued by DLIs, particularly in the Province of Ontario.

Prior to the introduction of the student cap, the federal government was obligated to simply process all applications by prospective students with a valid offer of admission from a DLI if they met the security criteria and demonstrated the ability to fund their studies.

Soyoung Park, Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Programs for Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, told the committee that "it is under the authority of provinces and territories to decide which institutions to designate. They do have ultimate authority over the education sector."¹

The committee heard how underfunding by the provinces led many DLIs to an overreliance on revenue from international students, further exacerbating and incentivizing them to take in more international students than they had the resources to support.

¹ *Park, CIMM-3*

This was noted by Alex Usher, president of Higher Education Strategy Associates:

“You had provincial governments—mainly, but not exclusively, Conservative—that realized that if institutions could monetize this policy, Canadian governments didn't need to subsidize universities and colleges so much. This is great. Lots of people did that.”²

Witnesses also testified to the committee that tuition freezes set by the provinces, especially the Province of Ontario, have kept revenue for universities stuck in place and in some cases have lost institutions the revenue they need to operate.

Dr. Rob Kristofferson of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations told the committee how this has in turn influenced institutions to turn to international students to make up for lost revenue:

“In the province of Ontario, similar to other jurisdictions in Canada, revenues for universities are based on a provincial grant per student, the tuition of students and international student income, plus some other smaller things. Since the economic crisis of 2008, the provincial grant has been essentially flat. In 2019, the provincial government reduced tuition by 10% and has frozen it there since, in a highly inflationary environment, so in order to make up revenues and keep afloat, universities, to some extent, turned to international students.”³

Therefore, we wish to make the following supplemental recommendations:

- 1. That the provinces and territories, that are constitutionally responsible for education, ensure post-secondary institutions receive adequate and sustainable funding to provide a quality educational experience to domestic students.**
- 2. That the provinces and territories closely monitor and audit the institutions they certify as designated learning institutions to ensure they are providing a professional, quality educational experience for all students and that they have adequate resources to accommodate all they seek to admit as international students.**

² Usher, CIMM-4

³ Kristofferson, CIMM-7

**House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration
(CIMM)**

Study on International Student Program and Study Permits

**Dissenting Opinion of Canada's Official Opposition
Conservative Party of Canada**

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner, PC, MP Calgary Nose Hill

Brad Redekopp, MP Saskatoon West

Costas Menegakis, MP Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill

Fred Davies, MP Niagara South

Vincent Ho, MP Richmond Hill South

Introduction

Canada's immigration system must work for Canadians. The international student program stands as a headstone on the grave of Canada's immigration consensus, and the mistakes must never be repeated. Mass fraud, provincial buck-passing, and wage-suppressing big corporate interests conspired to create a vacuum of responsibility that destroyed opportunity for Canadians while enriching those in positions of power.

The Committee studied this, in full knowledge that the damage had already been inflicted, in order to present the facts to the Canadian public so as to provide some measure of accountability. What we found was that the rot ran deep, and that when questioned, the key players and decision-makers in this scandal had no satisfactory response. In fact, they had operated in naked self-interest with a mix of willful blindness and the knowledge that their actions were morally wrong to Canadians and the students coming from abroad. Making matters worse, Canadians were betrayed by their government and left to suffer the consequences.

We hope that this report and its recommendations will serve as a signpost to policymakers and concerned citizens, so that these mistakes are never repeated, and we can bring prosperity and stability back to Canada.

1. Tying international students to housing availability, healthcare capacity, and employment.

The Committee repeatedly questioned officials from the Department of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada on whether they had provided advice to the Minister of Immigration on several important areas. Officials were asked if they advised with regard to the impact of international student permit approvals on housing, healthcare, or jobs in the affected regions. The Committee did not receive clear answers to these questions.

In that same vein, the Committee heard that educational institutions were not consulted by the Government of Canada on whether the local economy could sustain more intake of study permits, taking into account these three pillars: housing, healthcare, and jobs. The Committee posed this question to Seneca College President David Agnew and Conestoga College President John Tibbits. Agnew and Tibbits both clearly confirmed that the government conducted no such consultation. Agnew and Tibbits were also asked, and refused to answer clearly, whether institutions, while collecting record profits from international students and issuing massive executive compensation packages, bear any financial liability when applicants do not receive adequate services. Moreover, in cases where applicants overstay their visas with asylum applications, and continue adding unsustainable pressure to those same areas.

Based on testimony, the Government of Canada appeared to allow Institutions to ignore necessary steps and provide adequate availability of these essential services to international students. The Committee questioned Conestoga College President Tibbits, following reports that the institution enjoyed record profits from international student tuition, while students line up at food banks and exacerbate the local housing crisis. Seneca College President Agnew was also questioned whether his institution bears any responsibility for these issues. The Committee did not receive a clear answer. Tibbits went on to confirm that the Government even encouraged his institution to continue to grow its international student population, despite widespread knowledge of the overwhelming intake at Conestoga College. Jérôme Carette, the Director of Education Services at the Centre de Services Scolaire du Lac-Saint-Jean provided testimony showing that smaller regions, when they take the time to control and aid their international students, can offer adequate support to those attending the institutions in their regions.

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada, in conjunction with education institutions, establish a comprehensive plan to tie approval of international student permits with housing availability, healthcare capacity, and jobs in the target region.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada establish a framework of financial liability for educational institutions, tied to asylum claims and visa overstays made by international students.

When the Committee discussed reports that in 2022 federal public servants tried to warn the immigration department about the looming housing crisis, witnesses such as Alex Usher from Higher Education Strategy Associates confirmed that they also published works alluding to the same crisis in 2023. Andre Cote from The Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University stated that he saw no evidence that the Government had initiated talks with institutions to address housing at that time, despite the jaw-dropping influx of international students.

2. Tracking study permit applicants

IRCC officials were asked on asylum inflows, stemming from applications into Canada originally from study permit applicants, and whether they tracked these. Officials were also asked if they tracked non-compliant applicants and removal orders issued to study permit holders, or if they even knew where they were in Canada. Lastly, IRCC representatives were asked how many of these study permits were withdrawn due to criminal activity and whether these cases were tracked. Committee members struggled to collect clear answers on these questions.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada conduct regular and precise tracking, disclosure to Parliament of international student permit applicants that:

- **Apply for asylum**
- **Are deemed non-compliant**
- **Are issued removal orders**
- **Have their permits withdrawn due to criminal activity**

Seneca College President David Agnew testified in Committee that, regarding the inflow of asylum claims originating from study permits, conversations with the federal government did not begin until the issue became relevant in the media.

3. Strengthening language proficiency requirements

The Committee heard testimony that language proficiency is a major problem within Canadian post-secondary institutions and the International Students Program. The need for strong language proficiency in either English or French is crucial to ensuring a fair learning environment to all those participating in Canadian post-secondary schooling. Alex Usher, President of the Higher Education Strategy Association, outlined that business programs are popular due to the fact that they “require the lowest levels of language skills”.

Recommendation 4: That the Government of Canada enforce language proficiency requirements in order to admit international student applicants that have the greatest potential to succeed and contribute to Canadian society.

4. Review and track applicants from countries with high non-compliance, or make fraudulent asylum claims

The Committee received testimony that some countries have high rates of international students who overstay their permit, submit asylum claims or whose permits are withdrawn, compared to others. Addressing these patterns and ensuring study permits are issued responsibly is critical to maintaining public confidence in the immigration system and protecting the credibility of Canada's post-secondary institutions. Aiesha Zafar, the assistant Deputy Minister of Migration and Integrity at the IRCC confirmed that fraud and non-compliance has been identified disproportionately from specific source countries.

Furthermore, the IRCC provided data showing that the top nationalities among foreign students who later claimed asylum in 2024 and early 2025 included India, Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, Iran, the Republic of Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Bangladesh, the People's Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Recommendation 5: That the Government of Canada more clearly review and track study permit applications by country of origin that apply for asylum, and ensure that legitimate claims are prioritized, while fraudulent claims are not.

5. Tracking Non-Compliance

The committee heard extensive testimony that indicates a clear issue of foreign students entering Canada on study permits but failing to attend their designated learning institution, making them non-compliant. Aiesha Zafar, the assistant deputy minister of Migration Integrity at the IRCC, stated that "8% of the students we asked for compliance information from were potentially non-compliant". She then further explained that after IRCC inquired about those 8% of students the DLI, reported back that they don't have information on these individuals. This testimony demonstrates a significant gap in the current compliance framework, as designated learning institutions were unable to confirm the status of students they are responsible for monitoring. By mandating regular reporting from designated learning institutions and suspending institutions

that do not comply from accepting new international students, the federal government will be able to uphold the integrity of the study permit system.

Recommendation 6: That the Government of Canada take steps to enforce existing regimes of reporting from educational institutions, to ensure the most accurate data is collected on compliance of study permit holders.

6. Immigration Consultants

The Committee questioned whether immigration consultants, or Regulated International Student Immigration Advisers (RISIA), were partly responsible for the massive influx of international students in Canada, but did not receive precise answers.

Larissa Bezo, the President and Chief Executive Officer for the Canadian Bureau for International Education, testified to the Committee about the significant responsibility and authority entrusted to RISIA consultants. Ms. Bezo outlined that RISIA's roles and duties are to: "support students as it relates to immigration, advise within the framework of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, ensure that institutions are meeting quality assurance commitments and manage integrity challenges with respect to study permit applications."

Based on this and other testimony, the Committee looked to clarify whether education institutions are then attempting to enroll as many applicants as possible, noting the fee that organizations such as CBIE receive with each new applicant who is trained. No clarification on these points was provided.

Recommendation 7: That the Government of Canada establish a framework in which immigration consultants report to lawyers to address the widespread fraud affecting international students.

7. Response to Main Report tabled by the Standing Committee

Regarding the recommendations in the main report, Conservative members disagree with Recommendation 7. The Government of Canada has shown that when study permits are expedited, fraudulent activity in applications is not addressed. A scathing review by the Auditor General, released on March 23, 2026 confirmed what Conservatives have said all along, that

there is widespread fraud and dangerous gaps in the Liberals' oversight of foreign student work permits. That report outlined 153,000 suspected cases of fraud in 2023-24 alone, with only just over 4,000 actually investigated. During testimony at the Standing Committee on March 23, 2026, the Minister of Immigration further confirmed that IRCC allocated funding to investigate 2,000 cases per year.

Conclusion

Canada was a leader around the globe, building a reputation for having one of the best immigration systems in the world. It was fair in the process, balanced in its approach, and offered a robust economic outlook to receive newcomers, including students from abroad, so that they may be set up for success. Unfortunately, the Canadian consensus on immigration has been severely eroded by 10 years of Liberal policies that have broken Canada's immigration system. Polling in Canada has demonstrated this.

The Liberal government must do better. Canadians deserve better.