

International Students

Key Messages

- International students enhance Canada's social, cultural, and economic fabric, but unsustainable growth in the number of students arriving in Canada required action.
- The government has a mandate to return immigration to sustainable levels and reduce Canada's temporary population to less than 5%. International Student Program reforms are aimed at attracting the best and brightest students to Canada, in volumes aligned with community capacity and the economic needs of the country.
- The cap is working. In 2025, Canada welcomed about 115 385 international students, which is 177 635 (or 61%) fewer compared to 2024.
- So far this year, Canada has welcomed 9 140 students, which is 40% fewer than the same time last year (January–February 2025).
- As a result of program reforms, a greater proportion of students are coming to Canada to study at the university level, aligning with the government's talent attraction goals.

Key Facts and Figures

- For 2025, the government sought to issue up to 437 000 study permits (a 10% reduction from the 2024 target of 485 000). As of December 31, 2025, roughly 403 600 permits were issued, including new arrivals and permit extensions.
- For 2026, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) expects to issue up to 408 000 study permits, which includes 155 000 to newly arriving international students, as outlined in the [2026–2028 Immigration Levels Plan](#), and 253 000 extensions for current and returning students.
- In 2025, the total number of international students in Canada decreased by 26%. As of December 31, 2025, there were roughly 691 215 study permit holders in Canada, compared to 928 430 at the end of 2024. As of February 28, 2026, there are 698 510 study permit holders in Canada.

Refusal Rates

- The refusal rate for new study permit applications increased to 59% between January and December 2025, compared to 52% in the same period in 2024.
- The total percentage of refusals for misrepresentation reasons increased in 2024, but has since remained stable:
 - January to December 2025: 1.8%
 - January to December 2024: 1.8%
 - January to December 2023: 1.4%
- Program reforms, such as increased financial requirements, the decommissioning of the Student Direct Stream, as well as an overall enhanced focus on program integrity, have resulted in increased refusal rates. However, rates are expected to stabilize over time as prospective students and institutions adapt to the updated requirements, and non-genuine students are disincentivized from applying to the International Student Program (ISP).

If pressed on IRCC's processing timelines online:

- Current processing times posted on our website are backwards-looking and do not reflect actual processing times. The Department is exploring changes to the way processing times are posted online to better reflect what clients can expect at the time of application. This new approach is in line with our client service strategy to provide meaningful information for applicants to make informed decisions.

If pressed on processing timelines for study permit extensions:

- Students needing a study permit extension to complete their current program at the same designated learning institution (DLI) benefit from maintained status while their study permit extension is being processed.
- Students needing to transfer DLIs must, with limited exceptions, wait for their new study permit to be issued, before they can begin studying at the new DLI. However, in summer 2025, IRCC introduced an information technology solution for these transfer students to allow for prioritization of their application.

If pressed on Department's commitment to improving outcomes for study permit applicants from countries with lower approval rates:

- The Department continues to analyze data, fine-tune criteria, and design tools to improve the decision-making process to ensure program integrity while improving processing efficiency. IRCC is also committed to ensuring that each application is treated fairly and without discrimination. The Department:

- Maintains a training curriculum to include further unconscious bias, cultural and anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion training;
- Maintains quality assurance measures to achieve greater consistency in decision-making on these applications;
- Continues to work with partners to attract eligible, admissible applicants from a variety of source countries.

Program Changes and Updated Requirements

- In January 2024, the government established an intake cap on most study permit applications to stabilize the international student population in Canada.
- For the first time in 2025, the Immigration Levels Plan included temporary resident admission targets.
- The 2025–2027 Levels Plan also reduced overall immigration targets to support the economy, while easing pressure on services and housing.
- In 2025, IRCC received 62% fewer new student arrivals (115 470) than the 305 900 target in the Levels Plan. For 2026, this target has been reduced to 155 000.

Updated Financial Requirements

- Every year in September, the Government of Canada updates the financial requirements based on the cost of living to ensure that international students can pay for travel and tuition costs and afford to live in Canada. Financial requirements reflect 75% of Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-Off.
- As of September 2025, students are required to demonstrate that they meet a financial threshold of \$22,895 (per single applicant) to cover their cost of living.
- The higher financial requirements help prevent student vulnerability and exploitation by ensuring that international students have the funds needed to take care of themselves while studying in Canada.

International Student Fraud

- IRCC has taken actions over the last several years to strengthen the integrity of the ISP and deploy a multi-layered approach to prevent, detect, and address fraud in study permit applications.

- When it comes to fraud, IRCC is primarily focused on two issues: (1) identifying organizers of coordinated fraud and (2) individuals who knowingly commit fraud or attempt to deceive IRCC.
- IRCC collaborates closely with domestic and international enforcement bodies, as well as provincial and territorial partners, to identify cases of concern and program integrity issues and to promote effective cross-jurisdictional information sharing. This integrated approach reinforces Canada’s overall fraud response capabilities.

Program Integrity Improvements

Regulatory Amendments

- In addition to addressing unsustainable growth, the government has also introduced a number of integrity measures in November 2024, to strengthen the integrity of the ISP and to better protect students:
 - Setting a 24-hour limit that international students can work off campus each week;
 - Requiring international students to attend the DLIs named on their permit. Students wishing to change learning institutions need to apply for and be approved for a new study permit;
 - Introducing consequences for DLIs that do not comply with reporting requirements and Letter of Acceptance (LOA) verification procedures.

If pressed:

- Since December 2023, IRCC verifies LOAs directly with DLIs before issuing a study permit. This helps ensure only genuine students are approved.
 - In 2025, over 368 000 LOAs were verified. About 4 900 were flagged as “no-match,” i.e., not matching school records, prompting further review by officers.
 - All “no match” cases are further reviewed by an officer before a decision is made on the application.
 - In 2025, about 35% of “no match” cases were resolved as the applicant was able to produce a verifiable LOA through the procedural fairness process. In many cases, the initial “no match” was the result of applicant or DLI error.
 - The remainder of “no match” cases in 2025 were either withdrawn or refused, thereby preventing these applicants from entering Canada as students.
- Fewer LOA verifications in 2025 produced “no-match” results than in 2024 (1.3% compared to 2.2%).
- This suggests the system is not only catching fraud but may also be deterring it.

International Student Compliance Regime

- The International Student Compliance Regime (ISCR) was launched in 2014, to help identify students who may not be genuinely studying and to track trends in student compliance.
- DLIs report twice a year on whether international students are actively enrolled and studying.
- If a student is flagged as non-compliant, it can affect future immigration applications and may lead to enforcement action.
- In fall 2025, 587 out of 656 DLIs (91%) answered IRCC's request to report on the enrolment status of 454 667 international students:
 - 91% of schools responded to IRCC's request for data.
 - 90% of students were reported as likely compliant.
 - Around 38 394 (8%) were flagged as potentially non-compliant.
 - 2% (6 819) had no data reported.
- IRCC is working with the Province of Quebec to onboard the DLIs in Quebec to the ISCR and include enrolment status of international students in Quebec.

If pressed on possible non-compliance of the 38 394:

- The number of 38 394 potentially non-compliant students is based on initial compliance reporting from the respective DLIs and does not constitute confirmed non-compliance. A verification must be completed to determine non-compliance.
 - The enrolment statuses should only be considered an indication of potential compliance or non-compliance.
 - IRCC must still verify the study permit holders' statuses, and procedural fairness may be undertaken to inform a final decision. Depending on the outcomes, the student may be subject to enforcement action.
- Once reporting of enrolment status is received, IRCC analyzes the set of students who are reported as potentially being non-compliant.
 - Procedural fairness is offered to students who are suspected of being potentially non-compliant. Upon completion of the procedural fairness process, a student confirmed to be non-compliant is flagged in IRCC's systems. This may inform future applications the student submits, or notify border officers if the student attempts to re-enter Canada.

- The Canada Border Services Agency may place removal orders on individuals who are found to no longer be admissible to Canada.

DLI Compliance Regime

- DLIs must, pursuant to new regulations, actively report to IRCC, including verifying LOAs and confirming students are studying.
- The new regulations impose consequences, including not accepting into processing study permit applications destined for certain DLIs, if those DLIs fail to comply with the reporting requirement.
- IRCC conducts verification activities when a DLI is non-responsive, or suspected of providing inaccurate information, improperly issuing LOAs, or failing to comply with departmental requests for student information.
- The process is fair and evidence-based. DLIs can respond before any decision is made. Consequences range from a warning to suspension of a DLI for up to one year, with the inability to receive any new international students during the suspension period.
- This enhanced process was launched in fall 2025. Potentially non-compliant DLIs have now been identified and the Department will undertake verifications to determine if they were non-compliant and if so, render the necessary decisions determining the consequences. Findings will be available in summer 2026.

Student Asylum Claims

- There was a 80% drop in asylum claims from temporary resident visa holders in February 2026 (1 810) compared to February 2024 (8 975).
- In 2025, claims made by former students made up 17% (19 725) of all asylum claims (114 540).
- Fewer asylum claims are being made by former students (-11% in 2025 with 19 725 claims, compared to 22 245 in 2024). As of February 28, 2026, there have been 2 105 asylum claims made by prior students.
- Most of these claims are being made by students that entered Canada before program reforms were implemented.
- C-12 is expected to provide further controls.

Francophone Minority Communities Student Pilot

- On August 26, 2024, IRCC launched the Francophone Minority Communities Student Pilot (FMCSP), in partnership with French-language and bilingual post-secondary DLIs outside Quebec.
- The two-year pilot aims to make access to the program fairer for French-speaking international students from regions where the study permit approval rate is generally lower, namely Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. Participants are eligible to apply for a permanent resident pathway upon graduation, to support the long-term vitality of Francophone Minority Communities.
- FMCSP participants count toward the overall study permit issuance target (408K in 2026), but are exempt from the requirement to provide provincial or territorial attestation letter with their permit application.

If pressed:

- The approval rate for the FMCSP was 65% as of December 2025. This is a notable increase from historical approval rates in eligible countries (34% for students from Africa and the Middle East and 39% from the Americas in 2023).
- The pilot is set to end on August 25, 2026. IRCC is currently evaluating the results of year one to inform a recommendation on next steps.