

Covid-19 and (Im)Mobility in the Americas

CANADA

October - December 2020

1. **Poverty Rate (defined by unsatisfied basic needs):** 9.5% of the total population.¹
2. **Migration Facts**²
 - Emigration: About 2.8 million Canadians reside abroad mainly in the US, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and France.
 - Immigration: about 7.5 million immigrants or 22% of Canada's total population. The main countries of origin are India (9%); China (8.6%); Philippines (7.8%); United Kingdom (6.6%); the US (3.4%); and Italy (3.1%).
 - Refugees: Between 2011 and 2016 around 140,000 people were recognized as refugees.
3. **State Measures**
 - [The border between Canada and the United States has been closed for half a year](#), the number of foreigners who were not able enter Canada between March and October 2020 was 22,414 people, 87% from the United States and 13% from other countries. Only essential travelers, such as truck drivers, have been allowed to enter. Starting October 8th, entry will be granted to families and couples who share an address. [Farm workers were also allowed in entry](#).
 - Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, [announced that the border between Canada and the US will be closed until November 21st](#), travelers traveling from the US will be rejected if they arrive for tourism, shopping, or entertainment.
 - Starting in November, it was confirmed that [the Canadian border will be closed to foreign citizens](#) until January 21 to those who come for a non-essential reason.
 - Starting October 20th, international students enrolled in a Canadian learning institution will be able to enter Canada, provided their Institution has a Covid-19 preparedness plan that has been vetted by the province.
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 - Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau announced on October 5th that [applications for the Emergency Farm Support Fund are now being](#) accepted in certain provinces and territories. This fund consists of a \$35 million investment to improve health, as well as prevent and respond to the spread of Covid-19. To a large

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190226/t002b-eng.htm>

² <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-can-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=7;> [https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/canada-population/;](https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/canada-population/)

- extent, the agriculture sector is made up of immigrants, the engine of the Canadian economy, according to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.
- In August, the immigration minister, Marco Mendicino, announced [a program for the Guardian Angels \(healthcare workers\) so that they might receive permanent residence status](#), however, until October no asylum application was accepted. [Only on December 14th did Canada began accepting permanent residence applications from refugee claimants](#) who provided direct medical care during the pandemic. However, the requirements for this program are quite restrictive and the chances of qualifying are very limited.
 - [Alberta government will limit the number and types of jobs available to new temporary foreign workers](#). Labor and Immigration Minister Jason Copping says the plan will create more than 1,350 jobs for unemployed Albertans.
 - [The Report to Parliament on Immigration, the Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship of Canada \(IRCC\)](#) stated that its goal in 2020 was to welcome approximately 341,000 people as permanent residents. This goal was not met due to COVID-19, during which time it is estimated that about half that number were admitted. For this reason, the Immigration Levels Plan 2021-2023 may include those 150,000 immigrants who were not able to enter the country.
 - Even though the pandemic persists, [the Atlantic provinces are turning to virtual recruitment and continue to offer settlement programs](#), among other strategies, in order to attract and retain newcomers as part of their path to economic recovery.
 - The federal government of Canada has an ambitious immigration plan, [granting permanent residency to some 1.2 million migrants](#). The updated plan will provide this status to 401,000 new permanent residents in 2021, increasing to 411,000 in 2022, and 421,000 in 2023. The plan includes temporary foreign workers, international students, and an international mobility category for postgraduate work permit holders.
 - The federal government's ambitious [2021-2023 Immigration Levels Plan](#) will allow the Halifax and Nova Scotia region to continue on a long-term growth path, despite Covid-19. The plan focuses on skilled workers, attracting new immigrants to rural areas and is based on selection models such as the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP), which aims to bring 6,000 immigrants to Atlantic Canada in 2021, 6,250 in 2022 and 6,500 in 2023.
 - The [IRCC is processing more spousal immigration applications](#) following a slowdown at the start of the pandemic.
 - [Travelers to Canada will soon need to use the ArriveCAN mobile app](#) as part of efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus. This free app was introduced in April 2020 for travelers to comply with border measures.
 - Canada's Citizenship and Immigration Standing Committee is conducting a study that [will examine the impact of COVID-19 on the Canadian immigration system](#). Once the study is complete, the committee will report its findings to the House. The government will then have 120 days to submit a comprehensive response, however it is not required to make any changes to the policy.

- [The immigration department is resuming citizenship tests](#) that were suspended more than eight months ago due to the global pandemic, with safeguards to ensure proper identification of those taking such tests.
- For the first time, [Chatham-Kent Township is conducting an online survey](#) to assess how welcome immigrants feel in the community.
- In the first days of December, Canada held an Express Entry drawing, inviting 5,000 selected candidates to apply for [permanent resident status](#). It should be noted that the invitations were sent to a ‘pool’ of people that includes many temporary workers who are already in Canada, and the minimum score necessary to qualify was lowered.
- [Canada has relaxed eligibility requirements](#) for the Pilot Plan for Rural and Northern Immigration – RNIP.
- The Ontario government is expanding health care coverage and providing financial assistance to [some 400 migrant workers from Trinidad and Tobago](#) stranded in the province, many in southwestern Ontario. The government also launched [a new strategy to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among migrant farm workers](#), which includes prevention and containment strategies before workers arrive on the farm, during their work shift and at home. It should be noted that the plan has received criticism from pro-migrant activists.
- [Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has pledged to create jobs](#) with significant green investments and has pledged to significant spending on childcare and Covid-19 relief programs.
- In general, the main effort of the Canadian State in this last quarter of 2020 aims to recover and accelerate state immigration plans as a mechanism for [post-pandemic economic reactivation](#). [So said Lena Diab](#), Minister of Immigration when referring to the Nova Scotia case.

4. Migrant Situation Alerts

Immigrants

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the job market, especially for immigrant women. The Canadian government has not been able to cope with the obstacles generated by the pandemic, at least in terms of employment.
- [Young people, women, and recently arrived immigrants are among the most affected](#) and those with the highest rate of sustained unemployment during the pandemic.
- The areas where the largest number of recent immigrants live, areas with the highest percentage of people who do not speak English, as well as the largest families and the largest number of minorities; [These are the zones with the highest rates of active cases of Covid-19](#), as well as the highest total number of infected since the pandemic began. Such is the case in the upper northeast area of Calgary.
- Thousands of approved applicants—that is, migrants admitted to Canada—have been [trapped in limbo because border closures delayed their departures](#), resulting in

expired authorizations. Many had already sold their homes, liquidated their assets, and taken their children out of school and are now trapped in their home countries.

Asylum and Refugee Petitioners

- As of October, [no asylum application has been accepted during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). “The application process for this initiative will open in the coming months,” said a spokesman for the Immigration Department.
- The federal government says that despite lockdowns and travel restrictions, Canada is now resettling about 250 refugees a week after [admissions dropped to a trickle due to the global pandemic](#). The government's goal was to host 32,000 refugees and only 6,000 have been received in 2020.
- [Syrian refugees remember the trauma of the war](#) with the stoppage of activities, the closure of shops and schools, and quarantines due to COVID-19 in Canada.

Agricultural Workers

- Syed Hussan, Director of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change indicated that at least [1,600 agricultural workers fell ill and 3 have died](#) as a result of employer abuse and government inaction within the context of the pandemic.

“Low-Skilled” Temporary Workers Outside of Agriculture

- [Alberta temporary migrant workers will be replaced by their local peers](#) who are unemployed due to Covid-19. The plan will make 1,300 jobs available to Albertans. The new policy will affect 475 occupations in sectors such as accommodation and food service, retail, transportation, construction, and professional services.
- Migrant Rights Network published a report titled Behind Closed Doors (survey of 201 foreigners, mainly women, in the care of children, the elderly and people with disabilities) which [exposes the exploitation of migrant care workers during Covid-19](#). One in three respondents reported losing their job during the pandemic, of which one third reported ongoing problems accessing Employment Insurance or Emergency Response Benefit. For those who kept working, almost 50% reported working longer hours, more than 40% said they were not paid for overtime, and a third were prevented from leaving workplaces to “avoid” infections. The study estimates that unpaid wages per worker for the past six months reached \$6,552.
- [Gig, transportation, and delivery workers](#), especially women, afro descendant, indigenous, and colored people are subject to further exploitation and discrimination. This is exacerbated by the pandemic.

Social Responses

Solidarity Networks

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- o [Refugee advocates say the federal government must step up its efforts to help people fleeing conflict and persecution abroad](#), even as the pandemic continues to restrict cross-border movement around the world. The Canadian Association of Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders, representing 118 organizations that sponsor refugees privately, urges the government to exempt all refugees from travel restrictions regardless of when they were approved as permanent residents. At this time, only those approved before March 18 are exempt.
- o The Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC) is renewing its call for the federal government to grant permanent immigration status to temporary foreign workers as a second wave of COVID-19 cases appears in Ontario. The group celebrated at a press conference the decision of the Ontario Labor Relations Board (OLRB) to grant Luis Gabriel Flores Flores, a migrant worker from Mexico, a compensation package of \$25,000. A court found that his employer, Scottlyn Sweetpac Growers, unfairly fired him because he spoke to the media about his concerns after contracting the novel coronavirus.
- o The strategy to prevent Covid-19 among Ontario migrant farm workers [was not well received by organizations such as the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change](#), who said the policies disregarded the opinion of employees.

Xenophobia

- o With an aging and slowly growing population, Canada relies on immigration for economic and demographic growth, a trend that is constrained by Covid-19. Worrisome new evidence on Canadian attitudes, shaped by the pandemic, suggests that when borders reopen and economic reconstruction begins, [immigrants may not be as welcome as in the past](#).
- o [Quebec's immigration minister, Nadine Girault, withdrew from a virtual meeting between provinces on human rights](#), drawing criticism from federal government officials who say it stems from the province's refusal to acknowledge systemic racism. The summit was organized in part by Heritage Canada and focused on the impact of COVID-19 on human rights, particularly on marginalized and vulnerable groups, as well as on issues of systemic racism, discrimination, and inclusion.