



CANADIAN IMMIGRATION

Canada is among the world's most generous nations for immigrants and has one of the highest per capita admission rates. It has, on average, offered residency to about 200,000 immigrants and refugees a year over the past decade, earning a global reputation for an "open arms" attitude. However, with the United States seeking to secure its borders after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and over a dozen terrorism-related arrests in June involving Muslims of foreign descent, questions have been raised about Canada's immigration policy and its ability to assimilate those immigrants already on Canadian soil.

What has Canada's position on immigration been historically?

Like the United States, Canada is one of a handful of countries where immigration has traditionally been a major shaping factor in society and culture. With its small population and vast tracts of unsettled land, Canada's immigration policy was initially fueled by a desire for expansion, with most immigrants settling in rural, frontier areas. In the early twentieth century, Canada began to control the flow of immigrants, adopting policies that excluded applicants whose ethnic origins were not European. However, by 1976 new laws removed ethnic criteria, and Canada became a destination for immigrants from a wide variety of countries, which it remains today. The 2006 [UN Report on International Migration and Development \(PDF\)](#) ranked Canada seventh among twenty-eight countries that currently host 75 percent of all international migrants.

Who immigrates to Canada?

Canada has granted permanent resident status to more than 200,000 immigrants and refugees in each of the last ten years and aims to maintain similar if not higher levels for 2006. The majority come from Asia, particularly China, India, and the Philippines. Significant numbers also come from Pakistan, Iran, Britain, and the United States, in addition to a number of African countries. The number of Muslim immigrants to Canada has increased in recent years; over 175,000 Muslims immigrated to Canada from 1996 to 2001.

How does Canadian immigration policy work?

Immigration policy in Canada is structured around three main categories:

- **Economic.** This category represents the largest portion of immigrants each year. Selection is based on a point system that rewards applicants with higher levels of education, job experience,

and language skills (i.e., English and French). With the manufacturing sector in decline and the country shifting toward a more information-based economy, this policy emphasizes flexible, transferable skills over specific occupations.

- **Family reunification.** This class of immigrants includes spouses and children joining family members who are already living in Canada. This is the second-largest group of immigrants admitted on a yearly basis. Canada will recognize same-sex couples in this category even if they are not legally married due to restrictions in their country of origin, although a couple must provide proof of a long-standing relationship.
- **Refugees.** This is the smallest group of immigrants admitted to Canada every year. It includes both humanitarian resettlement programs and claims for asylum protection.

Between 1990 and 2002, 49 percent of immigrants to Canada were from the economic class, 34 percent were from the family reunification category and 13 percent were humanitarian cases.

Don DeVoretz, co-director of Vancouver's Center for Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis (RIIM) at Simon Fraser University, says the policy is designed so that economic immigrants will fuel growth in Canada, offsetting the cost of other types of immigrants. "The policy of the Canadian program is very clear," DeVoretz says. "They expect that those that are selected for their economic prowess will support those that are not selected for their economic prowess."

How does the government accommodate immigrants?

Canada provides immigrants with language training and access to Canada's national health care and social welfare programs. "The Canadian government has many more programs to welcome immigrants and help them settle than the United States," says Deborah Meyers of the Migration Policy Institute, a Washington-based group. However, the Canadian government is concerned by certain economic indicators that suggest immigrants arriving since the 1990s have had more difficulty matching the economic success of those who came in the 1980s. Some studies also show that despite the focus on admitting educated professionals, many recent immigrants do not find jobs that match the level of their qualifications. The Conference Board of Canada estimates underemployment affects approximately 340,000 immigrants annually, costing them some \$4 billion in lost earnings. "It's the story of a mismatch of qualifications," says DeVoretz. "Some immigrants don't have the language skills [in English or French] to exploit their degrees. Some people arrived with [foreign] qualifications that we didn't recognize."

However, the problem may be broader than that. While income levels rise for Canadian-born children of immigrants, this is more often the case for immigrants of European origin. Non-white Canadians are almost twice as likely as the rest of the Canadian population to experience low income rates. Still, the 2001 census, which was the first to ask whether a respondent's parents were foreign born, indicates some positive signs for second- and third-generation immigrants. Education levels are as high, or higher, than their counterparts throughout the country, and intermarriage in urban areas is relatively common.

What is Canada's policy on asylum seekers?

Canada is known for having a relatively liberal policy on asylum. Any person who arrives in Canada can apply for refugee status at any border, airport, or immigration office inside the country. "If you arrive and say you are a refugee—even people that most other countries would not consider a refugee—Canada will at least look at a claim from anyone in the world, and that includes friendly nations and democracies like the United States," says Martin Collacott of the Fraser Institute, a conservative Canadian think tank.