

# Canada's population estimates, fourth quarter 2020

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## Lowest population growth rate since 1916 because of COVID-19

Canada's population growth in 2020 was vastly reduced because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the year, the population increased by 149,461 (+0.4%) to reach 38,048,738 on January 1, 2021, about one-quarter of the growth seen in 2019 (575,038 or +1.5%). This was the lowest annual growth since 1945 (in number) and 1916 (in percent), both periods in which Canada was at war.

The population grew in most provinces and territories in 2020, albeit at a slower pace than in 2019 (except for Nunavut). Ontario (+0.4%) had its lowest annual growth rate since 1917 and British Columbia (+0.4%) had its lowest annual growth rate since 1874. Growth was negative in Newfoundland and Labrador (-0.6%), while the population was stable in Saskatchewan (-0.0%) and the Northwest Territories (+0.0%).

## Deaths reach record high

In 2020, deaths in Canada surpassed 300,000 (309,893) for the first time in Canadian history. The [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) (PHAC) reported that 15,651 or 5.1% of deaths in 2020 were caused by COVID-19, meaning that the pandemic is estimated to have been the cause of about 1 in 20 deaths in Canada. This proportion was lower than what was estimated in the United Kingdom (12.3%), the United States (11.2%) and France (9.7%) but higher than in Australia (0.7%) and New Zealand (0.1%).

Despite the increase, the number of deaths in 2020 was still lower than the number of births (372,727). Accordingly, natural increase (births minus deaths, +62,834) fell to its lowest annual level since at least 1922.

However, the increased number of deaths was not the main source of lower population growth in 2020. The most significant demographic impact of the pandemic came from changes to international migration.

## International migration curtailed by the pandemic

International migration has accounted for more than three-quarters of the total population growth since 2016, reaching 85.7% in 2019. Following border and travel restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19 in March 2020, this percentage fell to 58.0%. Population increase through international migration in 2020 was over 80% lower than it was in 2019.

This trend of lower international migration is not unique to Canada and has been observed elsewhere in the world. For example, net migration in New Zealand decreased by 39.6% in 2020, even though it was not hit as hard by the pandemic as Canada was.

Canada welcomed 184,624 immigrants in 2020, down by almost half from 2019 and the lowest in any year since 1998. The pre-pandemic target for immigration set by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada was 341,000.

The decrease in the number of non-permanent residents caused by COVID-19 played a major role in the slower growth in 2020. More non-permanent residents left Canada than came to the country in 2020 (-86,535)—the largest net loss since comparable data have been available. By comparison, Canada had a net gain of 190,952 non-permanent residents in 2019. Every province and territory except Prince Edward Island had a net loss of non-permanent residents in 2020—almost entirely because there were fewer work and study permit holders.

Travel and border restrictions in 2020 also impacted the movement of Canadians leaving and returning to the country (and changing their usual place of residence minus net emigration). In 2020, the population change brought about by these movements was just over one-quarter of the levels observed in 2019.



## **Canadians continue to move between provinces, but fewer than in 2019**

There were 8.8% fewer people moving from one province or territory to another in 2020 than there were a year earlier. British Columbia (+20,994) had the highest net gain through interprovincial migration for the sixth consecutive year. This was also the largest net gain in the province since 2016. Saskatchewan had the largest net loss to other provinces or territories (-10,318) for the third straight year.

## **Signs of recovery for most components of population growth, except deaths, in the fourth quarter**

Deaths in the fourth quarter of 2020 reached a record high for any quarter since comparable records became available (81,759). This was mainly due to more deaths from COVID-19 in the fourth quarter (6,324 according to the PHAC) during the resurgence of the pandemic.

International migration started to rebound slightly in the fourth quarter. Both the number of immigrants and net non-permanent residents were much lower than they were during the same period one year ago, but were up from the third quarter.

Immigration was about half of what it was in 2019, but was up 2.6% from the third quarter of 2020. The net number of non-permanent residents was negative in the fourth quarter of 2020 (-2,560), following the typical seasonal pattern, but was up from the record low in the third quarter (-65,754). This change was mostly due to an increase in the number of work permit holders.

By the fourth quarter, the number of interprovincial migrants was beginning to return to its pre-pandemic levels. In the third quarter, levels were down by 21.7% from the previous year. Although they were still down in the fourth quarter, the year-over-year decrease was smaller (-10.6%) than it was in the third quarter.

## Note to readers

The estimates released today are based on 2016 Census counts adjusted for census net undercoverage and incompletely enumerated Indian reserves, to which are added the population growth estimates for the period from May 10, 2016, to the date of the estimate.

Please take note that today's release includes an update to the interprovincial migration estimates of the third quarter of 2020 and, consequently, to the population estimates as of October 1, 2020.

This analysis is based on preliminary data. These data will be revised over the coming year, and it is possible that some trends described in this study will change as a result of these revisions. Therefore, this analysis should be interpreted with caution.

Comparable records by quarter for the components of population growth are available from July 1, 1971.

International data are from the following sources: United Kingdom – the [Office of National Statistics](#) (to December 4, 2020); United States – [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#); France – [Santé Publique France](#) and the [Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques](#); Australia – the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) (to November 24, 2020); and New Zealand – [Stats NZ](#) and the [NZ COVID-19 dashboard](#).

Certain components of the demographic estimates were adjusted to account for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (deaths and the components of emigration). As the adjustments closely follow what was done in the second quarter of 2020 (see [Technical Supplement: Production of Demographic Estimates for the Second Quarter of 2020 in the Context of COVID-19](#)), a technical supplement was not produced for the fourth quarter.

### Canada's population clock (real-time model)

[Canada's population clock \(real-time model\)](#) was updated today with the most recent quarterly population estimates released by Statistics Canada.

Canada's population clock is an interactive learning tool aiming to give Canadians a sense of the pace of the country's population renewal. The [population estimates](#) and [census counts](#) remain the measures used by various government programs.

### Definitions

For the purpose of calculating rates, the denominator is the average population during the period (the average of the start-of-period and end-of-period populations). For the sake of brevity, the terms growth, population growth and population growth rate have the same meaning.

**Total population growth** in Canada is equal to natural increase (births minus deaths) plus international migratory increase (immigrants plus net non-permanent residents minus net emigration). At the provincial and territorial level, total population growth also includes interprovincial migratory increase.

**Natural increase** is the difference between the number of births and deaths.

**Net international migration** refers to the total number of moves between Canada and abroad that result in a change in the usual place of residence. It is calculated by adding immigrants, returning emigrants and net non-permanent residents, then subtracting emigrants and net temporary emigration.

An **immigrant** (or permanent immigrant) refers to a person who is or has been a landed immigrant (permanent resident) and who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants are either Canadian citizens by naturalization (the citizenship process) or permanent residents under Canadian legislation. Some immigrants have resided in Canada for a number of years, while others have arrived recently. Most immigrants are born outside Canada, but a small number are born in Canada. Also, children born in other countries to parents who are Canadian citizens temporarily residing in another country are not included in the category, as they are Canadian citizens at birth. The terms immigrant, landed immigrant and permanent resident are equivalent.

A **non-permanent resident** (or temporary immigrant) is a person who is lawfully in Canada on a temporary basis and who holds a work, study or other (excluding visitor visas) permit issued for that person along with members of their family living with them. This group also includes individuals who seek refugee status upon or after their arrival in Canada and remain in the country pending the outcome of processes relative to their claim. Note that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada uses the term temporary resident rather than non-permanent resident. Net non-permanent residents is calculated by subtracting the number of non-permanent residents estimated at the beginning of the period from the number estimated at the end of the period.

**Net emigration** refers to emigrants minus returning emigrants plus net temporary emigration.

**Available tables:** [17-10-0009-01](#), [17-10-0020-01](#), [17-10-0040-01](#), [17-10-0045-01](#) and [17-10-0059-01](#).

**Definitions, data sources and methods:** survey number [3601](#).

The *Quarterly Demographic Estimates, October to December 2020* ([91-002-X](#)) publication is now available.

The product *Quarterly demographic estimates, provinces and territories: Interactive dashboard* ([71-607-X](#)) is also available.

The product *Canada's population clock (real-time model)* ([71-607-X](#)) is also available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).