Non-permanent residents (NPRs) represent a growing share of Canada's population; they fill critical labour shortages in key sectors, participate in Canada's postsecondary education system, and contribute to the Canadian economy as consumers.

Like many countries, Canada grants temporary foreign workers, international students and asylum claimants the right to live in Canada temporarily. In 2021, close to 1 million (924,850) NPRs were enumerated in the census, making up 2.5% of Canada's population.

The largest segment of NPRs had a work permit, such as temporary foreign workers. In 2021, 40.1% of NPRs had a work permit only, and another 14.2% had a work and study permit. NPRs with a study permit alone (such as international students) represented 21.9% of all NPRs, while asylum claimants, those seeking refugee protection, accounted for 15.1%.

The remaining 8.7% was a combination of other NPR types, including temporary resident permit holders, family members of NPRs and parent and grandparent super visa holders, all of whom live in Canada as their usual place of residence.

Today, Statistics Canada is releasing a study titled Non-permanent residents in Canada: Portrait of a growing population from the 2021 Census, which looks at the characteristics of NPRs by their reason for temporary residence in Canada, based on results from the 2021 Census of Population.

Non-permanent residents are younger than the rest of the Canadian population

Overall, 6 in 10 NPRs (60.1%) enumerated in the 2021 Census were young adults aged 20 to 34 years. By comparison, the proportion of young adults was 37.3% for recent immigrants and 18.4% for the rest of the Canadian population.

The age profile of NPRs largely reflects the age composition of NPRs with a work permit only, who were most often aged 25 to 34 years, and those with a study permit (either alone or combined with a work permit), who were most commonly in their early 20s.

There was greater age diversity among asylum claimants. For instance, nearly one-quarter (22.7%) of people seeking refugee protection in Canada were children under the age of 15 years, slightly lower than the proportion of young adults aged 20 to 34 years seeking asylum (26.4%).

India and China are top places of birth for non-permanent residents

NPRs come from many different countries, though the most common places of birth were India (28.5%), followed by China (10.5%). These were the top places of birth of NPRs across most provinces, with the exception of Quebec, where France (20.4%) was the most common place of birth of NPRs.

While India and China were the top places of birth among NPRs with a work or study permit, this was not the case for asylum claimants. Nigeria was the most common place of birth, with 10.7% of those seeking refugee protection originating from this country, followed by India (8.3%) and Mexico (8.1%).

The top place of birth of asylum claimants varied markedly between provinces. Of asylum claimants living in Ontario, Nigeria (15.4%) was the top place of birth, while in Quebec, it was Haiti (17.6%) and in British Columbia, it was Iran (29.8%).
Most non-permanent residents know an official language

Mirroring the linguistic richness of immigrants, the wide variety of source regions of NPRs contributes to linguistic diversity in Canada. At the same time, the vast majority (95.3%) of NPRs had knowledge of an official language.

Almost all NPRs with a study permit only (97.7%) and with a work and study permit (99.0%) reported knowledge of English or French. While asylum claimants were the least likely NPR type to know an official language, the proportion was high, at 86.7%.

Outside of Quebec, the proportion of NPRs with knowledge of English was high (94.8%), while 4.6% knew French. Within Quebec, where French is the official language, 68.4% of NPRs knew French, with just over one-quarter (26.6%) not knowing French and relying on English only. In Quebec, knowing only English was more common among NPRs with a work and study permit (41.0%).

Non-permanent residents more often live in apartments, in unsuitable housing and with roommates

Apartments were the most common dwelling type for enumerated NPRs living in private households whether they lived in a large or small city. Almost three in five NPRs (59.4%) enumerated in the 2021 Census lived in rented apartments. This was higher than the proportion for recent immigrants (41.5%) and much greater than that for established immigrants (18.4%) and non-immigrants (15.3%).

Moreover, almost one-third (32.9%) of NPRs lived in unsuitable housing, meaning that there were not enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household, according to the National Occupancy Standard. The prevalence of this situation was more than three times higher than for the rest of the Canadian population (9.1%).

NPRs were almost nine times as likely as the rest of the Canadian population to be living with roommates. In 2021, 3 in 10 NPRs (30.2%) lived in households composed of roommates, that is, two or more people living together, among which none were part of a census family. This percentage was 3.6% for the rest of the population.

Labour force participation high among non-permanent residents

In the face of Canada’s aging population, declining fertility rates and labour shortages in certain sectors, Canada is increasingly relying on NPRs in the labour market.

The labour force participation rate of NPRs stood at 74.2% during the census reference week. While this rate was higher than that of the rest of the population (63.4%), the younger age structure of NPRs largely explains this difference. Among the core working age group, aged 25 to 54 years during the census reference week, NPRs (81.0%) had a lower participation rate than the rest of the population (85.8%).

The participation rate of NPRs aged 15 years and older varied widely by NPR type, broadly reflecting their main reason for coming to the country. The highest labour force participation rates were seen among those with a work permit only (88.0%), followed by those with a work and study permit (76.8%). NPRs with a study permit can, depending on eligibility, work on and off campus. They had the lowest labour participation rate (51.5%).

Sales and service occupations were the top occupations of all NPRs aged 15 years and over enumerated in the 2021 Census. More than one-third (36.4%) of NPRs worked in sales and service occupations, compared with one-quarter (25.0%) of the rest of the Canadian population.

Asylum claimants had the most unique occupation profile compared with other NPRs and the rest of the population. Asylum claimants were more often in trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations (23.9%), manufacturing and utilities occupations (12.3%) and health occupations (11.7%).
Underutilization of skill more common among non-permanent residents

While NPRs had a higher educational attainment on average than the rest of the population, they were more often in occupations requiring no formal education (23.7%) than the rest of the population (15.7%).

Indeed, overqualification, having a bachelor's degree or higher but working in a job that typically requires at most a high school diploma, was more common among NPRs. In 2021, 32.4% of NPRs with a bachelor's degree or higher were overqualified for their current position, while this was the case for 26.2% of recent immigrants and 15.9% of the rest of the population.

Obtaining a bachelor's degree or higher in Canada made little difference in overqualification for NPRs. That is, the rates of overqualification between those with foreign (34.0%) and domestic (28.1%) credentials were similar and were primarily driven by NPRs with a work permit only. More research is needed into the reasons for the high rate of overqualification among NPRs and the lack of difference of overqualification between NPRs with domestic and foreign credentials.

Among all NPRs with a bachelor's degree or higher, asylum claimants (50.7%) had the highest overqualification rate, while over two in five NPRs with a study permit only (43.0%) and a work and study permit (44.6%) were overqualified. The high overqualification rate of these NPRs may be related to the fact that a high proportion of them worked part time and part of the year, limiting access to job opportunities commensurate with their skills. Among all NPRs, those with a work permit only (24.7%) had the lowest overqualification rate. They were also more likely to have worked the full year and full time.

Note to readers

This study used data from the 2021 Census of Population.

The census has been reporting the number of non-permanent residents (NPRs) in Canada since 1991. From 1991 to 2016, the census derived NPRs by using responses to immigrant status and citizenship questions. New in 2021, census data were integrated with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) administrative records to derive immigration variables. The difference in methods of reporting on NPRs does not allow for comparison of the count of NPRs between previous censuses and the 2021 Census.

A new immigration variable, NPR type, was derived from the integration of the 2021 Census data and IRCC administrative information. NPR type identifies asylum claims and valid permits from January 1 to May 11, 2021 (Census Day). The categories of NPR type are mutually exclusive.

Every effort is made to obtain a comprehensive count when conducting a census in a large and diverse country like Canada. Despite best efforts, undercounting of some demographic groups occurs. This includes mobile and precarious populations like NPRs.

It is important to note that other data sources on the NPR population exist. The 2021 Census of Population estimates the NPR population living in private households in Canada on Census Day, May 11, 2021. In comparison, the administrative data from IRCC provide information on the total number of temporary residents in Canada with a work or study permit or an asylum claim. The IRCC data cannot be used to estimate the population of temporary residents living in Canada, as they do not account for any outflows, such as deaths or exits from the country. As IRCC provides the total number of all temporary residents in Canada with a valid permit, this administrative data count is higher than the census estimates of NPRs living in Canada at a given point in time.

The Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) combines IRCC data with tax data files. As such, the IMDB only captures tax-filing NPRs for a given year and will have a different estimate than the census and IRCC administrative data. Due to differences in methodology, collection goals and reference periods, differences across these data sources are expected. For more information on the comparability of data sources on NPRs, see Place of Birth, Generation Status, Citizenship and Immigration Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021.
Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3901.

The article entitled "Non-permanent residents in Canada: Portrait of a growing population from the 2021 Census" is now available in Insights on Canadian Society (75-006-X).

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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediateline-lineinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).