

CANADA

1. **Poverty rate:** 9.5% of the total population.¹
2. **Migration data**²
 - a. Sending country: about 2.8 million Canadians reside abroad mainly in the US, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and France.
 - b. Destination country: 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%).
 - c. Host country for refugees: Between 2011 and 2016, around 140,000 people were recognized as refugees.
3. **Impact of COVID-19³ (as of July 14, 2020)**
 - a. Registered cases: 188,959
 - b. % of cases out of the total population: 0.49%
 - c. Number of deaths: 9,663
4. **State measures**
 - As soon as the pandemic started, nationals and residents were alerted to return to Canada as a preventive measure.
 - In mid-March 2020, the borders were closed and only Canadians and legal residents were allowed to enter.
 - Initially, asylum seekers and refugees were allowed access Canada as long as they continued to quarantine.
 - Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) suspended deportations of denied refugee claimants and detained im/migrants. They were postponed temporarily due to the closure of international borders.
 - As of March 20, Canada and the US signed an agreement to return asylum seekers who arrive irregularly to Canada, back to the US. Irregular entrants had been crossing into Quebec over the last few years. Many were Haitians and Central Americans population arriving from the US. This measure violates the principle of *non-refoulement* and directly affects the right to seek asylum.

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-](https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-can-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=7;)

[eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=7;](https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/canada-population/)

[https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/canada-population/;](https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/canada-population/)

³ John Hopkins University (2020). "Coronavirus Resource Centre". <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

- The federal government launched The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), an aid program for Canadian workers to receive USD 1,400 per month for three months. Permanent residents (landed immigrants) are included.
- Some provincial governments, such as Quebec and Ontario, announce that tests for Covid-19 and other health services will be available even if someone does not have public (government) health insurance.
- There is a limited production of information on how to access financial and other relief aid for groups that do not speak English or French.

5. At risk populations:

- *Irregularized migrants* (this population is extremely vulnerable to Covid-19)
 - o Before the pandemic:
 - Irregularized migrants faced a constant threat of deportation, and had limited access to health services, public education and social welfare benefits.
 - They were exploited, suffered abuses from employers, deception by recruitment agencies, and lack of access to a path to permanent residence and citizenship.
 - Some “sanctuary cities” have offered access to municipal services and solidarity but in a more symbolic than real way.
 - **The situation for irregularized migrants has NOT changed during the pandemic. Risks have been exacerbated, which directly affects the lives of irregularized migrants in Canada.**
 - o During the pandemic:
 - The vast majority of irregularized migrants do not have the option to socially distance or quarantine at home.
 - Those who keep jobs do not have health protections or benefits in the workplace.
 - Most migrants use crowded public transportation to get to work, which poses risk to their health.
 - Many migrants have lost their jobs. They are not accessing government special support and most of the organizations providing services are closed. A handful of organizations continue to work virtually, at least in Toronto.
 - Access to health services is limited due to their irregularized condition and the fear of being detained and deported.
 - Many migrant workers live in overcrowded conditions, in places that negatively impact good health by making social distancing impossible.
- *Asylum seekers and refugees* (legal limbo, population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)

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- o Before the pandemic:
 - Government financial aid for asylum seekers and refugees is too low to cover actual living expenses, especially in large cities.
 - Funding cuts for legal aid limited advice and support for preparing applications.
 - Changes in health coverage policies hindered access to health services (IFH-Interim Federal Health).
 - Discrepancies between legislation at the federal (immigration and refugee policy) and provincial (health policy) levels complicate access to health.
 - **The situation for asylum seekers and refugees has NOT changed during the pandemic. Risks have probably been exacerbated which directly and negatively affects the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in Canada.**
- o During the pandemic:
 - Due to the border closure, no new cases are being accepted. Those with existing applications and their families may end up in protracted waiting and legal limbo.
 - The border is closed for all asylum seekers. Shelters for refugees are only offering information by phone and social media.
 - Due to quarantine measures, the legal processes to request asylum has come to a halt (government offices closed, along with many law offices and community centers). They reopened on September 14, 2020.
 - Initial loss of network-based social assistance and support. This has begun to change as organizations pivot to virtual organizing.
 - On August 14, the Canadian government announced the immigration regularization of asylum seekers who provide or have provided health care during the pandemic. The government describes the measure as "exceptional" allowing them and their families the possibility of obtaining permanent residence.
 - The program's eligibility criteria are the following: have performed direct patient care or nursing duties during the pandemic between March 13 and August 14, worked at least 120 hours, demonstrated that the asylum seeker has at least six months of experience in one of these occupations, made an application for asylum in Canada before March 13, 2020, and obtained a work permit after the application for asylum was made.
 - The granting of permanent residence also includes the spouse and dependent children who are currently in Canada at the time of the application for regularization.
 - This regularization program is intended only for health care workers and not for other types of jobs that are performed within

the health care system, such as security guards, maintenance and cleaning personnel, and kitchen staff.

- It should be noted that most of the asylum seekers who can benefit from this program are located in the province of Quebec.
- *Agricultural workers* (this population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)
 - o Before the pandemic:
 - Their closed work permits depend on the employer. These workers were already exploited and often abused by employers, deceived by recruitment agencies, and lacked access to a path to permanent residence or citizenship. They were entitled to health care but often did not receive it and were likely to be repatriated if injured.
 - **The situation for agriculture workers has NOT changed during the pandemic. Risks have been exacerbated, directly affecting the lives of agricultural workers in Canada. As of June 29, three Mexican agricultural workers had died in Ontario.**
 - o During the pandemic:
 - Agricultural workers do not have the option to socially distance and quarantine by “staying at home.” They are pressured to continue to work and are not paid if they stay back.
 - Many workers live in overcrowded conditions, in places that prevent good health through social distancing.
 - When they arrive in Canada, they need to quarantine for 14 days, supposedly with their wages paid.
 - The vast majority of workers live in employer housing, close to work. But some use crowded public transportation which prevents conditions for good health.
 - Agricultural work in fields does not offer the hygiene and sanitary conditions to guarantee or protect worker’s health.
- *Temporary “low” skilled workers outside of agriculture (Slaughterhouses, workers in meat cutting and packing)*
 - o During the pandemic:
 - They work in overcrowded conditions, in situations that prevent conditions for good health.
 - In Alberta and Ontario, the number of Covid-19 cases and deaths has exponentially increased in the past weeks. In Alberta, the Cargill company closed a huge industrial park. There are workers there that are traveling to work together, and several live with relatives who work in elder care.⁴

- Between April and May 2020, the Alberta-based Cargill company closed a huge plant. In that plant there were workers who travelled to work together, and several lived with relatives who work in eldercare.
- Among farm workers in Ontario, there are more than a thousand people infected, mostly in the Essex region. Of the 176 companies in this region, only one-third have allowed COVID-19 testing at their sites. The COVID-19 testing sites in Leamington have had little success. Both workers and employers have resisted testing. Infected workers are kept in isolation in hotels. They are entitled to insurance, but not all have applied for it. As of August 20, three Mexican workers had died.

Temporary "high" skilled workers

During the pandemic:

- On August 24, the federal government announces a program that allows people to apply for a temporary work permit within Canada. This will allow temporary workers and "visitors" who are tied up in Canada because of the pandemic and quarantine to apply for permits to continue working in Canada. Such permits allow employers to retain workers in authorized status. There are several requirements.

6. Social responses

- Migrant struggles:

- o Detained irregularized migrants have started hunger strikes and protests in detention centers. For example, 4 men were still on a hunger strike in a detention center in Laval.

- Solidarity networks:

- o Migrant rights organizations advocate stopping migrant detention and deportations.
- o Migrant rights organizations also advocate for "status for all" and "status on arrival."
- o Several NGOs have launched campaigns to publicize the situation of irregularized migrants, and migrant agricultural workers.
- o Various groups and networks are delivering food and preparing meals for vulnerable populations. In Toronto they work with migrants and racialized groups.
- p Migrants and allies argue that the "regularization" offered to asylum seekers working in eldercare is too limited. They call for an expansion of the program.



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