

# Immigration caps 'not solving the integrity problem,' warn critics, after audit finds IRCC 'not acting' on fraud cases

The auditor general found the federal department investigated only 4,057 out of 153,324 foreign students who were potentially non-compliant with their study permits in 2023 and 2024.

BY ELEANOR WAND

The NDP and Bloc Québécois' immigration critics are calling out the "disregard" and "neglect" in the Liberals' international student program after an audit found that Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada did not investigate most cases of students who were potentially non-compliant with their study permits. And the NDP critic warns "rushed caps" won't fix a system rife with "bad actors."

The findings in the March 23 auditor general's report "expose a system that has been neglected at the top while ordinary people pay the price," said NDP MP Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, B.C.) in a statement.

"For years, the government allowed bad actors—unscrupulous recruiters and exploitative institutions—to take advantage of international students, many of whom arrive in Canada with hopes of building a better life," she wrote.

Kwan called the "rushed cap" on study permits in recent years a clear example of policy "driven by political pressure rather than principle."

Auditor General Karen Hogan's probe looked at reforms to the international student program under then-prime minister Justin Trudeau, which were intended to improve the integrity of the system after years of Ottawa increasing the number of study permits issued. But Hogan found that Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) "fell short" on that goal.

IRCC only investigated 4,057 cases of potentially non-compliant students out of 153,324 students in 2023 and 2024, the report found. Of the cases the department investigated, 1,654 students—about 41 per cent—did not respond to IRCC, and the department took "limited action" beyond contacting them for more details. Hogan later told reporters the office found the department was "not acting on the information they have."

"They have the powers and the tools; they just need to use them," she said.

Luisa Veronis, a professor and research chair in immigration at the University of Ottawa, said international students became the "perfect bait" for bad actors once Trudeau began pushing for more "internationalization" of post-secondary education.

Trudeau grew the foreign student population substantially during his time in office. His government offered quicker paths to residency, promoting Canada as an ideal student destination for students

from overseas, and also further opened up this country's immigration pipeline once COVID-19 lockdowns were lifted as part of efforts to stimulate the economy following the pandemic.

But Veronis said the rapid policy shift created a situation for "bogus" institutions and recruitment agents to take advantage.

In 2024, the Trudeau government shifted course. It introduced caps on study permits, reducing permits by 35 per cent, followed by another 10 per cent decrease in 2025, citing the integrity of the system as being "threatened." Colleges and universities across the country that were reliant on that revenue stream were forced to make

cuts. And in the November 2025 budget, Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) halved the number of foreign student permits to 155,000 in 2026, and 150,000 in 2027 and 2028—down from the past target of 305,900 new arrivals for 2025.

But Veronis said that "fix" didn't address the root of the issue, which was tied to integrity, not numbers.

"It's kind of a blanket solution that is causing more problems," she said. "We're not really eliminating the actual problem."

"The federal government caused a whole problem by being so open and willing ... but then they weren't screening, really, the applications, and they weren't necessarily checking, 'are these colleges and universities really existing?' So, the solution of cutting the caps is not solving the integrity problem."

On March 25, when pressed about the damning audit, Carney told reporters "We're taking back control on immigration."

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## ADVERTISEMENT

### China's Commitment to High-Quality Development Brings Stability, Reliability, and Positive Momentum to a Turbulent World

By H. E. WANG Di, Chinese Ambassador to Canada

The annual sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), also known as Two Sessions, serve as an important window to observe China's development and are a crucial moment for understanding China's confidence and the direction it is heading in. The recently concluded Fourth Session of the 14th NPC and the Fourth Session of the 14th National Committee of CPPCC took stock of China's economic and social development achievements over the past year, reviewed and approved the Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026—2030), and charted the course for China's development this year and the next five years. Given the turbulences in the world and the uncertainty in global economy, China's solid efforts to realize high-quality development have attracted world-wide attention. I would like to share three points herein.

**The steady performance of China's economy with good momentum injects confidence and strength into the global economy.** In 2025, China's economy maintained overall stability with steady progress, demonstrating strong resilience. A growth rate of 5.0% stood out among major global economies. The annual economic increment exceeded 5 trillion yuan (about 1 trillion CAD), an equivalent to the economic scale of a medium-sized economy. The total economic output surpassed 140 trillion yuan (about 27.7 trillion CAD), with imports and exports of goods exceeding 45 trillion yuan (about 8.89 trillion CAD), maintaining positive growth for nine consecutive years. Its trade in service exceeded 8 trillion yuan (about 1.58 trillion CAD), remaining in the forefront of the world. China's contribution to global economic growth has stayed around 30%, serving as a solid pillar for stability and development of the global economy.

The Chinese Government Work Report has put the economic growth target for 2026 at 4.5%-5%. This target strikes a balance between current and long-term needs, domestic and international environments, and what is needed and what is possible, while taking into account both favorable and unfavorable conditions. It is an ambitious yet pragmatic target that reflects both enhancement in growth quality and reasonable increase in growth quantity. We are confident in and capable of achieving this target and will strive for even better outcomes. Meanwhile, we are ready to share opportunities of China's sustained development with the world.

**China's five-year blueprint will provide more opportunities for the global economy.** The outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan adopted at the Two Sessions has drawn a new blueprint for China's modernization in the next five years. In the complex international environment, a China with clear planning, well-defined goals, and sustained openness will provide "a list of opportunities" for global economic development.

In the next five years, China will focus on building a modern industrial system underpinned by advanced manufacturing. Building on its strengths in supply enabled by a complete industrial system, China will enhance industrial innovation capabilities and promote the growth of emerging and future industries. China has become the world's leader in the humanoid robotics industry, with high-tech products such as specialized equipment, high-end machine tools, and industrial robots becoming new business cards

for Chinese manufacturing exports. China also leads the world in green trade, represented by lithium batteries, wind turbines, and photovoltaic products, which creates new opportunities for deepening international cooperation in clean energy.

In the next five years, China will further expand high-standard opening-up, sharing the opportunities of its massive market with the world in a more open manner through the three initiatives of "Buying in China", "Exporting to China", and "Investing in China". In terms of consumption, with a 1.4 billion population and a middle-income group of over 400 million people, China has the second largest consumer market. The total retail sales of consumer goods have exceeded 50 trillion yuan (about 9.88 trillion CAD), and its consumption of goods in kind ranks the first in the world. This mega-sized market will continue to provide growth opportunities for trading partners worldwide. Regarding import and export trade, Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao highlighted that China has been the world's second-largest import market for 17 consecutive years. The next step will be to further promote balanced trade development, ensuring that the two "wheels" of exports and imports remain balanced, so as to enable the vehicle of trade to go more steadily and further. In terms of investment, China will continuously optimize its business environment, organize more well-targeted events, and provide services of even higher quality and better platforms to attract more foreign enterprises to use the Chinese market as a testing ground and application field for their innovation and R&D.

**Efforts should be made to enhance China-Canada economic and trade relations so as to elevate the bilateral practical cooperation to a new height.** In 2025, the leaders of China and Canada had successful meetings. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney paid an official visit to China earlier this year, during which the two sides reached important consensus on fostering a new strategic partnership between China and Canada, ushering in new opportunities and broad prospects for expanding China-Canada economic and trade cooperation. China and Canada are mutually important economic and trade partners with strong economic complementarities and a solid foundation for cooperation. China looks forward to working hand in hand with Canada to be partners that uphold mutual respect, pursue shared development, trust each other, and engage in collaboration. We should lengthen the list of cooperation while shortening the list of irritants, and keep strengthening the bond of common interests with more in-depth and extensive cooperation. Our two countries can work together to reinforce each other's success, achieve shared prosperity, and enhance the well-being of our two peoples. This will inject more positive energy into the recovery and stability of the global economy in a world entrenched in division and uncertainty.



# Globetrotting gap? Some MPs back idea of more House training, safety information while travelling abroad

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when she travels abroad, including secure technology, and help connecting with local embassies, high commissions, or consuls general. She said there's "an onus on MPs as well, as we're travelling, to be aware of our surroundings and to make sure we are" being safe.

Former Liberal MP John McKay, who travelled often with House committees and parliamentary groups during his almost two decades in Parliament, said GAC knows about trips being taken by parliamentarians, and provides country assessments that can include cautions "as to whether they think you should go or not."

As reported by *The Hill Times*, the House Foreign Affairs Committee previously had requests to travel to Ukraine denied as a result of recommendations from the Sergeant-at-Arms and GAC.

But McKay said he recalls little in the way of information for MPs about what to do in case of an emergency while travelling.

Overall, he said he sees "no downside" to the House offering more training about how to stay safe, and what to do in such circumstances.

## What is offered

*The Hill Times* asked the House of Commons, the Senate, and GAC about what training—if any—is offered to parliamentarians about security while travelling, as well as what security-related information, policies, and procedures are communicated ahead of a trip.

The House declined to provide any information, including confirmation of the existence of training or procedures, citing "security reasons." GAC deferred to the House for comment.

The Senate, meanwhile, confirmed its Corporate Security Directorate (CSD) "provides risk-informed support for Senators travelling abroad, including advice, assessments, and briefings tailored to the circumstances of their travel."

"As appropriate, that support may also involve co-ordination with relevant partners," read an emailed response.

There is, however, more information about both the House and Senate's practices already available online.

An October 2025 report produced by the House for the Interparliamentary Union's Association of Secretaries Gen-

eral of Parliaments states that, before MPs travel, the House co-ordinates with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the RCMP, and GAC for a risk assessment.

"ParlVoyage, a secure travel toolkit, provides encrypted devices, 24/7 cybersecurity support, and an emergency-ready app, allowing secure communication on mobile devices," it reads, noting as well that "on-site presence via local police or vetted private security" can be arranged for public events outside the Parliamentary Precinct.

Information obtained through the Foreign Interference Commission, which filed its final report last year, expands on the House and Senate's offerings.

Through testimony, House reps explained that ParlVoyage offers MPs "a risk assessment based on the traveller's destination and accompanying persons," which is used to determine whether they can travel with parliamentary electronic devices.

"If a security risk is identified, the device is restricted with a different security configuration," reads an interview summary. The House administration "also provides protective pouches for portable devices."

MPs have a "duty" to tell the House administration when they travel internationally with a House electronic device, "regardless of the purpose of the trip." (They have no similar duty if they aren't bringing a House device.) All House devices are tracked, and "[r]eports are generated every morning to see where various MPs around the world are when travelling with" a House device.

A Senate "Institutional Report" filed with the commission notes it's responsible for risk assessment services for Senators when travelling on parliamentary business domestically or internationally. Two directorates play a role: the CSD, and the Information Services Directorate (ISD).

The CSD has a Travel Security Program that establishes "local security liaison support," in addition to doing "pre-travel threat and risk assessments," which include a review of GAC travel advisories, as well as advice and briefings for Senators and staff. The CSD team also develops threat and risk assessments evaluating the "security risk of locations and venues, as well as the potential for protest or disruption," and include a "local security support strategy." Members of a travelling delegation can ask to

be briefed on the CSD's assessment and recommendations either before or during travel.

Focused on cybersecurity, the ISD also does threat and risk assessments for all international trips, explains the report, and, "[w]hen warranted, special travel devices are loaned to travellers to mitigate risks." Senators can get 24/7 IT support from the ISD while travelling, and the directorate publishes directives and guidelines related to travel, among other things.

"Senate Administration employees can consult both directorates prior to organizing activities when senators and staff are travelling abroad on parliamentary business," reads the report, be it with a committee or interparliamentary group.

Along with security assessment briefings, Senate committees can also ask to be accompanied by security liaison officers and to receive "security logistics support from local law enforcement or military officials"—arrangements that are usually made "on an ad hoc basis," and are "intelligence-driven"—according to the report.

An interview summary with Senate officials produced for the commission also notes that the CSD offers "specific training related to" travel plans for Senators and staff—using information from CSIS and Public Safety Canada—"and meets with Senators on their return." Senators are also asked to contact the ISD before they travel, and the directorate's risk assessment is based on "where Senators are travelling to and who they are meeting with."

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Kwan, meanwhile, pointed to the report's findings that smaller provinces in Atlantic Canada and in the Prairies experienced at least a 59 per cent reduction in international students in 2024, despite caps only intending to reduce numbers by about 10 per cent or less in those regions.

## 'What kind of investigation is that?'

Bloc MP Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, Que.) said he is "deeply concerned" about IRCC's "disregard" for potential fraud.

Hogan's audit also found there were 800 cases of study permits issued between 2018 and 2023 granted on the basis of fraudulent documents or "misrepresented information." IRCC did not follow-up with those students, and most of those students later applied for other permits to

allow them to remain in Canada, more than half of which were approved.

IRCC "did not consider acting in any of the 800 cases," the report reads.

"I'm shocked, and I'm trying to understand the process by which [the immigration] minister have decided to take no action at all toward 800 cases of study permit[s], ... attributed based on false document[s]," Brunelle-Duceppe said in an interview with *The Hill Times*.

"What kind of an investigation is that? ... It seems that the philosophy within this minister is that we give permit[s] and won't do any follow-up, whatever you tell us the problem is."

Brunelle-Duceppe said that philosophy needs to be changed, as there are people "playing with the system," and the "whole population is watching."

Kwan echoed that displeasure, saying in her statement that the "Liberal government has allowed the International Student

Program to drift into disorder—failing both the people who come here in good faith and the communities that rely on a fair, well-managed system."

## Caps to 'strengthen integrity' working, says Minister Diab

In comments to reporters after Hogan's report, Immigration Minister Lena Diab (Halifax West, N.S.) said the governments' measures to reduce student intake to "ease pressure on housing and communities," as well as "strengthen integrity" are "working."

"We will be centralizing the investigation, we will be streamlining anyone that is flagged, we will be doing more reporting, and we will be information sharing with CBSA of any students that are not compliant," Diab said on March 23.

But Justice Minister Sean Fraser (Central Nova, N.S.), who was

the immigration minister during some of the years Hogan investigated, from October 2021 to July 2023, told the CBC on March 25 that, with hindsight, he should have capped study permits earlier.

Conservatives have renewed calls for Fraser and Diab to resign alongside Identity and Culture Minister Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Que.), who was immigration minister after Fraser until March 2025.

Conservative immigration critic Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, Alta.) told reporters the department's recent changes to the system are "a bit of an illusion." She added that the report is likely to create "angst and consternation" among Canadians about bringing in students under the current system.

According to Hogan's report, IRCC department officials say their failure to investigate further is down to resources. Officials told her office that they only had temporary funding to investigate

2,000 cases annually from 2023 to 2028.

## Report highlights 'gap' between law, policy, and politics: lawyer

Immigration lawyer Warren Creates said this all points to a "gap" between the law, the policy, and the political pledges.

He said that it's "very tedious work" to find students who are potentially non-complaint and to collect the amount of evidence to prove an infraction has been made on "reasonable grounds to believe."

"The numbers are so big that the department cannot keep up with their mandate," stressed Creates, who heads the Immigration Law Group Perley-Robertson, Hill & McDougall.

"They cannot do the proper investigation to get the evidence—or even find some of these students, many of them."

Barbara Jo Caruso, director of the Canadian Immigration Lawyers Association, agreed that because there is now "so much fraud," IRCC doesn't have the resources to properly investigate.

"You either have to put more resources into investigating, or you have to look at, how do we curtail the fraud?" she said.

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