



One Year Later

Canada's Enduring Appeal to Prospective Immigrants in the Face of COVID-19

Comparative Analysis, August 2020 – August 2021

Contents

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Context
- III. Profile of Respondents
- IV. Results
- V. Appendix: Methodology & Survey Metrics

I. Executive Summary

Executive Summary

In 2020, WES conducted a series of surveys of individuals who applied for a WES academic credential evaluation for immigration purposes. Our goal was to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigration plans. In August 2021, WES repeated the survey to compare responses and determine what had changed in light of the evolving pandemic context: To what extent were people still interested in immigrating to Canada? What was making them more or less interested? Over the past year, how had key factors affected their interest in immigration?

This report compares results from surveys distributed in August 2020 and August 2021. The 2021 survey received 13,138 valid responses; these were compared with the 13,953 valid responses from the August 2020 survey.

Complete survey metrics and methodology can be found in Part V: Appendix.

Key Findings

Interest in immigrating to Canada remains high. Survey results show no decrease since 2020 in respondents' interest in immigrating. Between 2020 and 2021, the proportion of respondents who indicated that the pandemic would have no impact on their immigration plans rose from 48.3% to 51.5%. In both years, the proportion of respondents who indicated that the pandemic would either have “no impact” or make them “more interested” was over 90%.

Respondents anticipate a positive impact on the availability of jobs in their occupation/sector in Canada. The proportion of respondents who expected that the pandemic would negatively impact job availability in Canada decreased from 45% to 33% year over year, while those who expected a positive impact rose from 27% in 2020 to 35% in 2021.

A positive perception of the ability of the government and health care system in Canada to manage the pandemic is having a positive impact on interest in immigrating. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of respondents indicated that they were more interested in immigrating to Canada because of the ability of the Canadian Government and health care system to manage the pandemic and care for COVID-19 patients.

There is a significant increase in the proportion of respondents who are interested in immigrating to a country other than Canada. The proportion of respondents who indicated that they were likely to immigrate to a country other than Canada as a result of the pandemic rose from 13% in 2020 to 22% in 2021.

The pandemic has not been a significant factor in delaying immigration plans. The proportion of respondents who indicated that they were likely to delay immigrating to Canada to a future date fell from 35% in 2020 to 21% in 2021.

II. Context

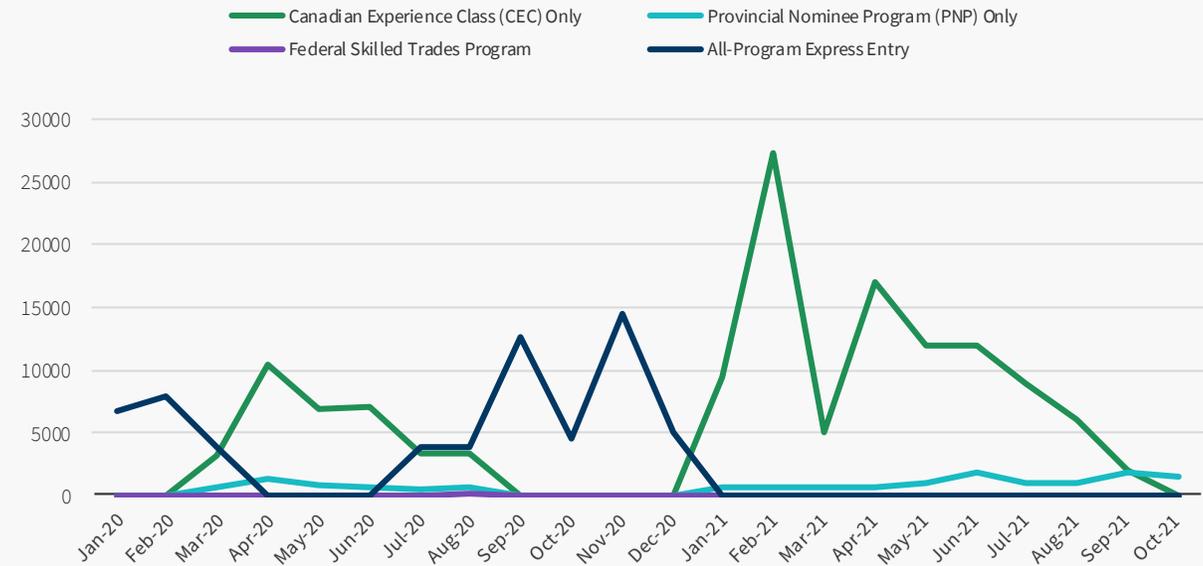
The Changing Immigration and Employment Context

The Canadian Government remains committed to ambitious immigration levels. On December 23, 2021, the government announced that it had reached its target of 401,000 new permanent residents for 2021 – surpassing the previous record set in 1913. A focus remains on welcoming immigrants who can support both the immediate economic recovery as well as longer-term labour market needs; however, important emphasis is also placed on family reunification and refugee resettlement, particularly in the context of ongoing refugee crises around the world.

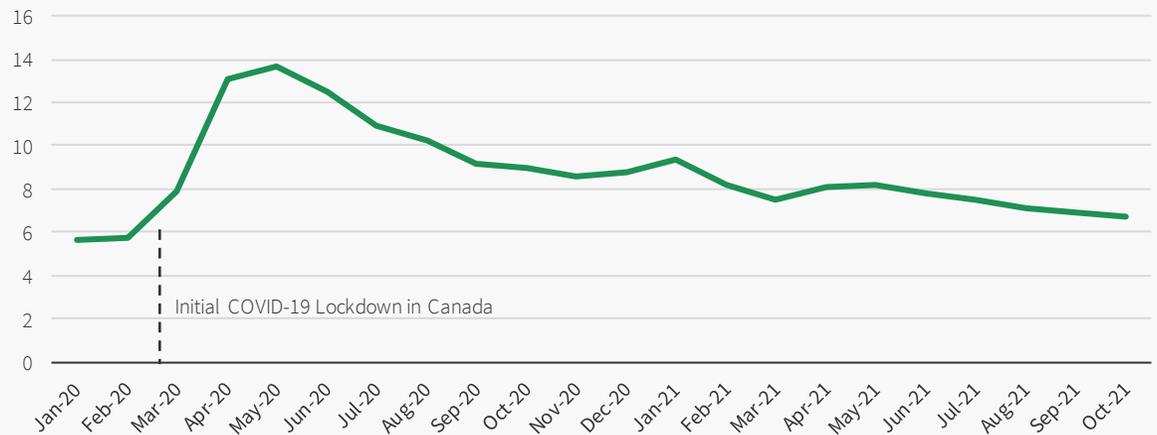
The first three months of 2021 saw the largest number of Invitations to Apply (ITAs) issued through Express Entry since 2015, the year the program was launched (44,124) – more than double the number issued over the first three months of 2020. On February 13, 2021, IRCC issued a historic single-day Express Entry draw with 27,332 ITAs for individuals from the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) of Express Entry. By September 24, 2021, the number of ITAs issued in that year surpassed the total number of ITAs in all of 2020 (107,350). To date, the majority of ITAs issued in 2021 have been for CEC applicants, who are temporary residents already living in Canada.

While the economic and labour market impacts were substantial at the beginning of the pandemic, there has been a gradual decrease in rates of unemployment, from a high of 13.7% in May 2020, to 6.7% in October 2021. While the overall unemployment rate has decreased, recovery in sectors that employ a high percentage of newcomers has been less robust. As of November 2021, labour market and skill shortages were still evident in a variety of sectors throughout the country. These changes are important to note in order to better contextualize and compare survey responses.

Express Entry Draws Month by Month (2020–2021)



Unemployment Rate (%) in Canada (2020–21)



Processing Times and Travel Restrictions



Travel restrictions

Since 2020, the Government of Canada has gradually reduced travel restriction measures; however, most individuals who enter the country are still [subject](#) to specific travel restrictions, COVID-19 screenings, and quarantine requirements. Currently all individuals entering Canada are assessed against specific restrictions, including whether their purpose of travel is essential (non-discretionary) or not.

Groups exempt from travel restrictions:

- Canadian citizens, permanent residents, and protected persons
- Immediate family members
- Extended family members traveling for non-discretionary purposes for compassionate reasons (for example, to attend a funeral or end of life ceremony, to assist in pregnancy or birth, or to provide elder care)
- [International students](#) and accompanying family members (may enter if approved for a valid study permit and enrolled in an institution with a COVID-19 readiness plan *and* a credible plan for quarantine)
- [Temporary workers](#) may enter Canada for non-discretionary purposes if they have a valid work permit



Processing times

The pandemic has caused significant delays in the processing times of immigration applications.

In March 2021, the *Toronto Star* [reported](#) that there was a backlog of at least 9,100 applications from caregivers seeking permanent residence. There have also been delays in issuing study permits to international students, resulting in some students beginning their courses virtually from abroad or [deferring](#) their start dates to 2022. As of September 2021, approximately 60,000 study permit applications from international students submitted after May 15 remained to be processed.

The government [lifted](#) travel restrictions for individuals with Confirmation of Permanent Residence (COPR) documents on June 21, 2021. Until that date, however, many COPR holders had been prevented from entering Canada, resulting in [expired documentation](#) and continued delays as IRCC worked to re-issue valid or current immigration documents.

In October 2021, IRCC reported a backlog of 1.8 million applications, including 140,000 applications for permanent residency through Express Entry. It is estimated that the backlog could take up to [three years](#) to clear.

The shift to remote operations and service delivery has spurred a move toward digitizing Canadian immigration processes; a \$430 million investment is included in the 2021 budget to “[develop and deliver an enterprise-wide digital platform](#)” which is expected to improve application processing “as early as 2023.”

III. Profile of Respondents

India, Nigeria, and the Philippines remain the top three countries of citizenship of survey respondents

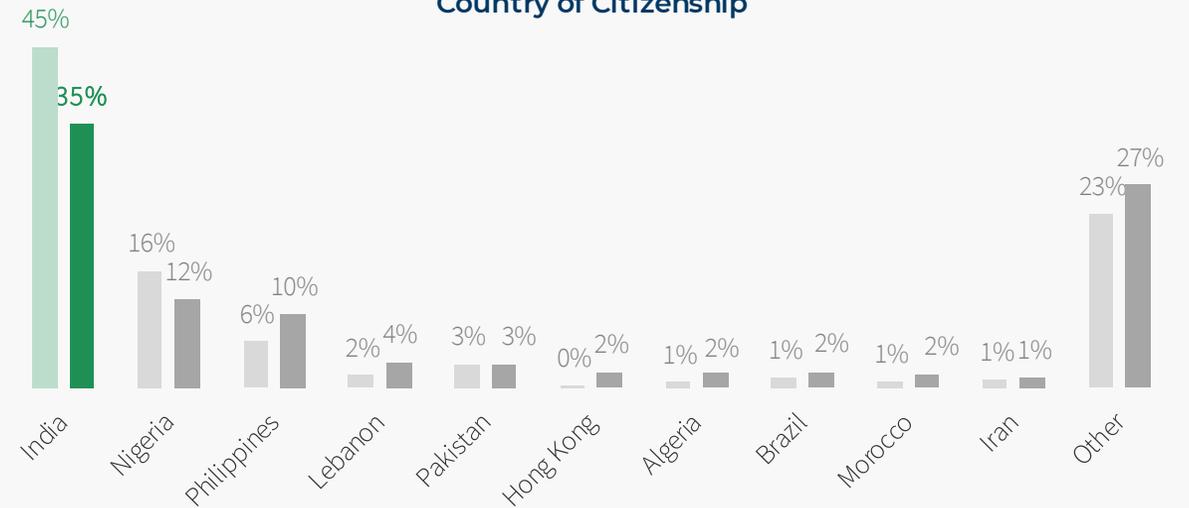
Survey respondents are individuals who have applied for a WES credential evaluation for the purpose of immigrating to Canada. There is no overlap of respondents between 2020 and 2021.

Given the fluid nature of international migration, the survey distinguishes between the country of residence and country of citizenship of respondents. In 2021, the top five countries of **citizenship** were India, Nigeria, the Philippines, Lebanon, and Pakistan. * However, the top five countries of **residence** were India, Canada, Nigeria, United Arab Emirates, and the Philippines, indicating that some Indian, Filipino, and Pakistani respondents were living in Canada or the Gulf region when they completed the survey.

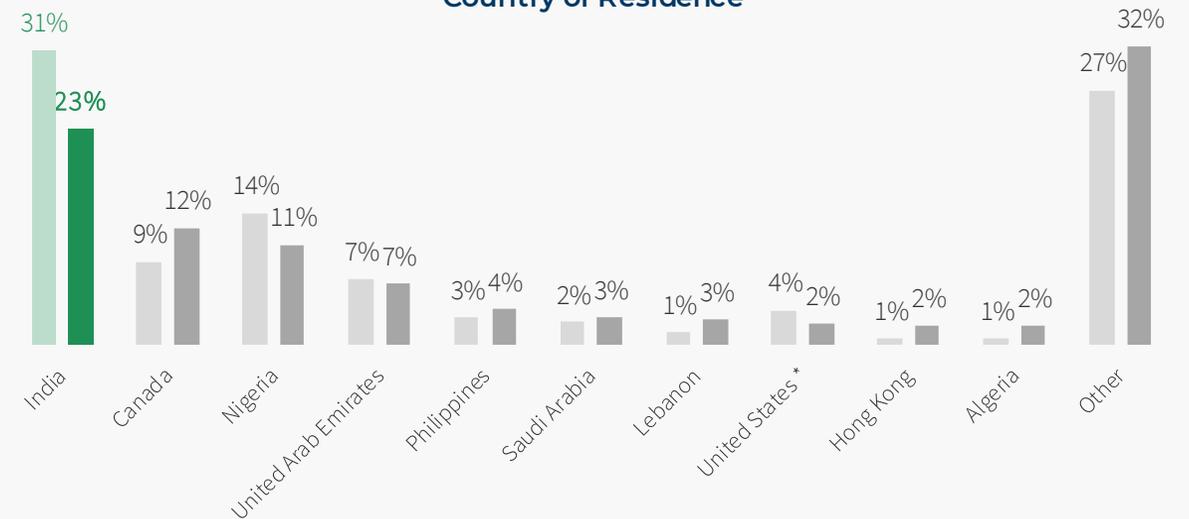
India is the [number one](#) source country of economic immigrants to Canada. In 2020, 45% of respondents were Indian citizens; however, in 2021, the proportion of Indian respondents dropped to 35%. This decrease can be linked to the impacts of the pandemic in India, which contributed to significantly reduced immigration to Canada between 2020 and 2021. This reduction is reflected in the drop in WES application volumes from India during the early months of the pandemic.

* Top 5 countries of respondents do not correspond with the top 5 countries of WES applicants due to low survey response rates of individuals from China.

Country of Citizenship



Country of Residence



* Including overseas territories

2020 2021

Part III: Profile of Respondents

In both years, a majority of respondents living in Canada were on temporary work permits.

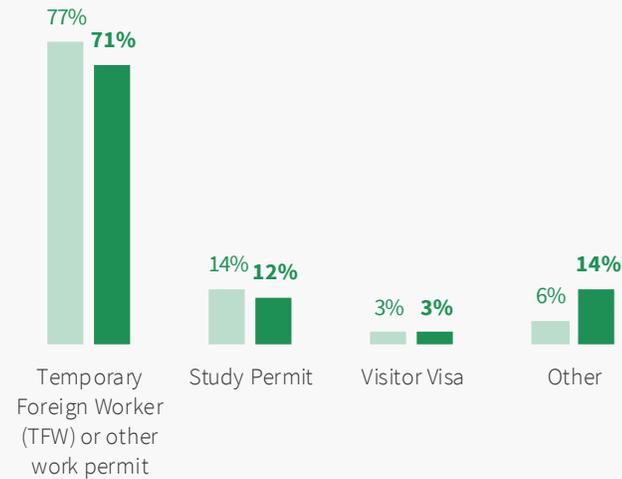
In 2020, 9% of respondents were living in Canada* and by 2021, this increased to 12%. Of these, the majority were in Canada on temporary work permits (77% in 2020 and 71% in 2021). These findings align with an increase in recent decades in the proportion of individuals who immigrate to Canada through a two-step process, first arriving as temporary residents, and then applying for permanent residency while already living and working in Canada. Throughout the pandemic, the Canadian government is focusing on prioritizing Express Entry draws for economic immigrants from the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) who are already living in Canada as temporary workers or students and have Canadian work experience.

In both years, the gender distribution** and age range of respondents were fairly typical of economic immigrants to Canada.

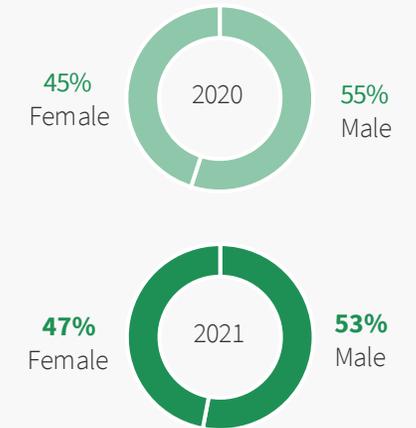
* Individuals who had already received Confirmation of Permanent Residency in Canada were disqualified from the rest of the survey and are not included in these statistics or analysis.

** "Other" was provided as an option for gender and was selected by 0% of respondent in both years.

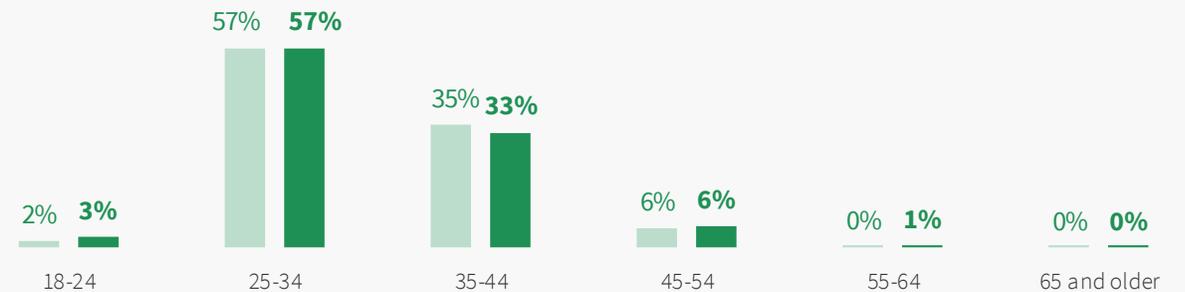
Immigration Status (Respondents living in Canada)



Gender of Respondents



Age of Respondents



IV. Results

Expectations About the Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Canada and Abroad

More respondents think that the pandemic will positively impact job availability in their occupation or sector.

While the pandemic has negatively impacted certain industries, particularly the [service industry](#), it has also created new employment opportunities in other areas, including health care, information technology, and transportation. Survey results suggest that prospective immigrants are more optimistic about job availability in Canada over a year into the pandemic.

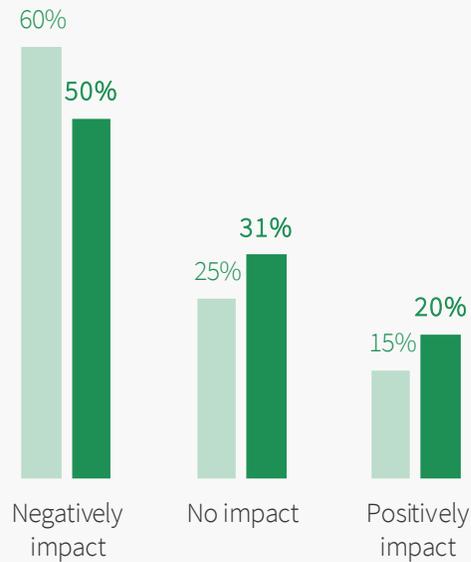
Interestingly, between 2020 and 2021, there was an increase in the percentage of respondents who expected that the COVID-19 pandemic would have a positive impact on the availability of jobs in their occupation or sector, both in their home countries and in Canada.

The proportion of respondents who expected that there would be either no impact or a positive impact on the availability of jobs in their home country increased from 40% in 2020 to 51% in 2021.

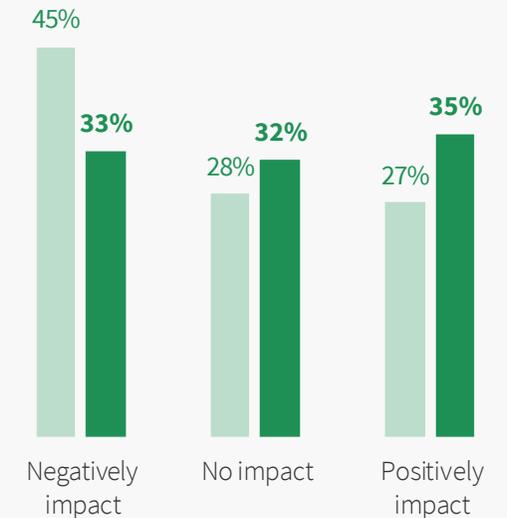
Findings are similar in the Canadian context: Between 2020 and 2021, the proportion of respondents who indicated that the pandemic would negatively impact the availability of jobs in their occupation or sector in Canada decreased from 45% to 33%, while those who expected either no impact or a positive impact rose from 55% to 67%.

“To what degree do you expect COVID-19 to positively or negatively impact the availability of jobs in your occupation/sector in your home country/Canada ...”

Impact of COVID-19 on availability of jobs in my occupation/sector in my home country



Impact of COVID-19 on availability of jobs in my occupation/sector in Canada



IV. Results

Effects of Expectations on Interest in Immigrating

Overall interest in immigrating to Canada continues to be strong.

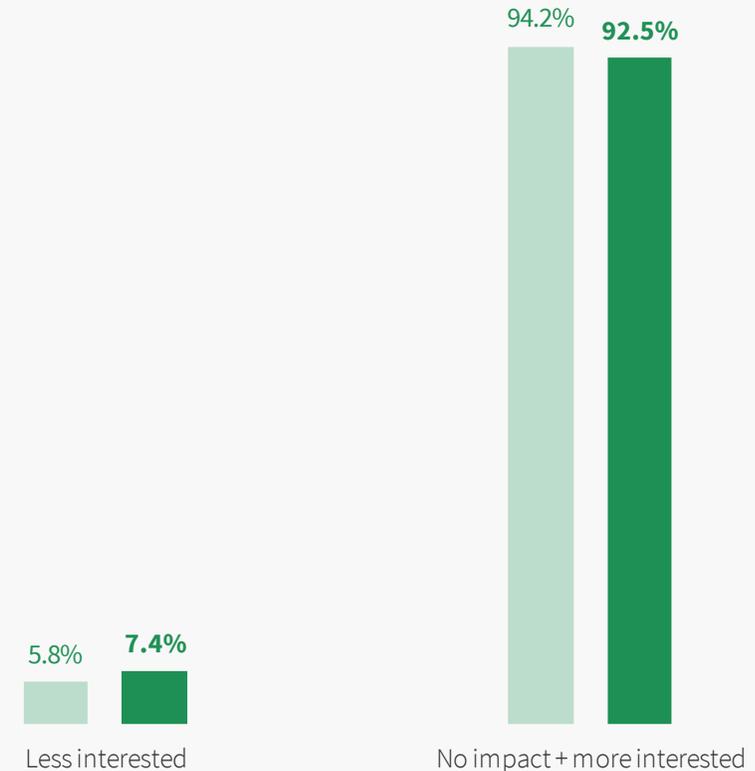
As respondents are all individuals who have applied for a WES credential evaluation for immigration purposes, this survey assumes that respondents already have a certain level of interest in and intent to immigrate to Canada. As a result, responses of “no impact” are interpreted to mean “I was interested, and I continue to be interested.”

Between 2020 and 2021, the proportion of respondents who indicated that the pandemic would have no impact on their immigration plans rose from 48.3% to 51.5%.

In both years, the proportion of respondents who indicated “no impact” or “more interested” was over 90%. These findings suggest that prospective immigrants to Canada remain motivated to pursue their immigration plans even in the face of added complexity and risk brought about by the pandemic.

However, taken together, the proportion of respondents who indicated that the pandemic would either have no impact or make them more interested in immigrating fell slightly, from 94.2% in 2020 to 92.5% in 2021 (a statistically significant difference).

“How has COVID-19 influenced your interest in immigrating to Canada?”



Interest in immigrating from top source countries remains high.

In both years, more than 84% of respondents residing in top source countries indicated that COVID-19 would either have no impact on their immigration plans or make them more interested.

In recent years, the Philippines has consistently been a top source country of immigrants, and interest in immigrating to Canada among Filipino respondents remains high. In both 2020 and 2021, over 70% were **more interested** in immigrating than they had been before the pandemic, and in both years over 95% reported either no impact or being more interested.

While overall interest remains high, it is notable that the percentage of respondents from Canada's top immigration source countries who reported being **less interested** in immigrating to Canada increased in 2021, including respondents from Nigeria, Pakistan, the United States, and Iran.*

Interest in immigrating to Canada was also analyzed based on the country of citizenship of respondents, with similar findings. Further research is needed to better understand the reasons behind this reduced interest.

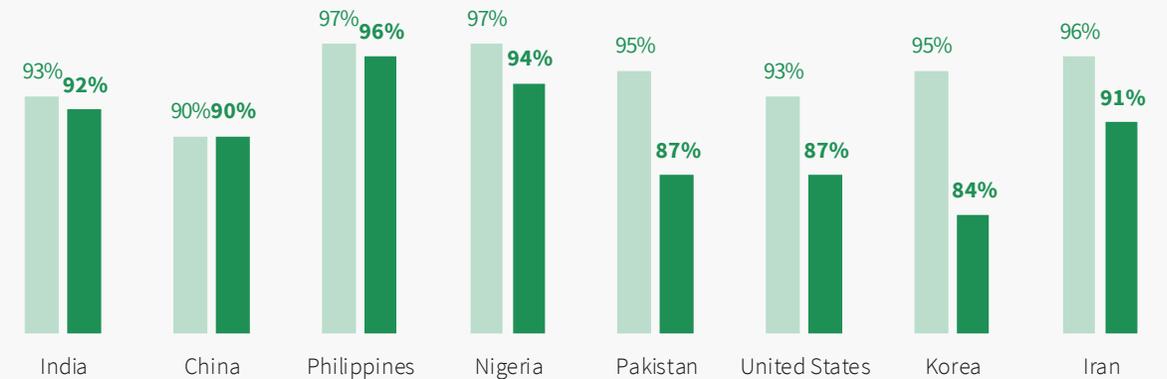
* Top 10 source countries of permanent residents to Canada in 2019 included Syria, Eritrea, and South Korea. Because of the low number of survey respondents, these countries are not visualized here.

Source for top source countries: [2020 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration](#)

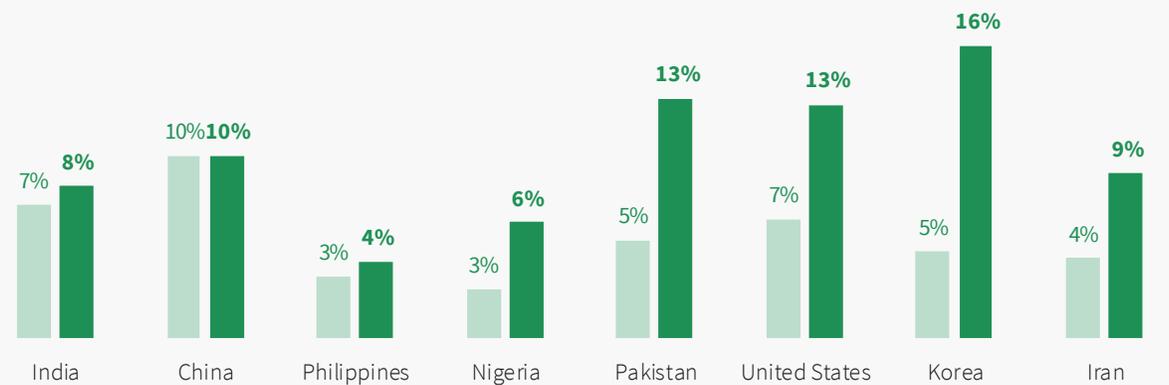
“How has COVID-19 influenced your interest in immigrating to Canada?”

Top source countries of immigrants to Canada (Country of Residence)

More interested and no impact on interest in immigrating to Canada



Less interested in immigrating to Canada



There is little change in interest in immigrating to Canada on the part of respondents already living in the country as temporary residents.

Between 2020 and 2021, the proportion of survey respondents already residing in Canada when they completed the survey increased from 9% to 12%, and the proportion of those in Canada on temporary work permits decreased from 77% to 71%.*

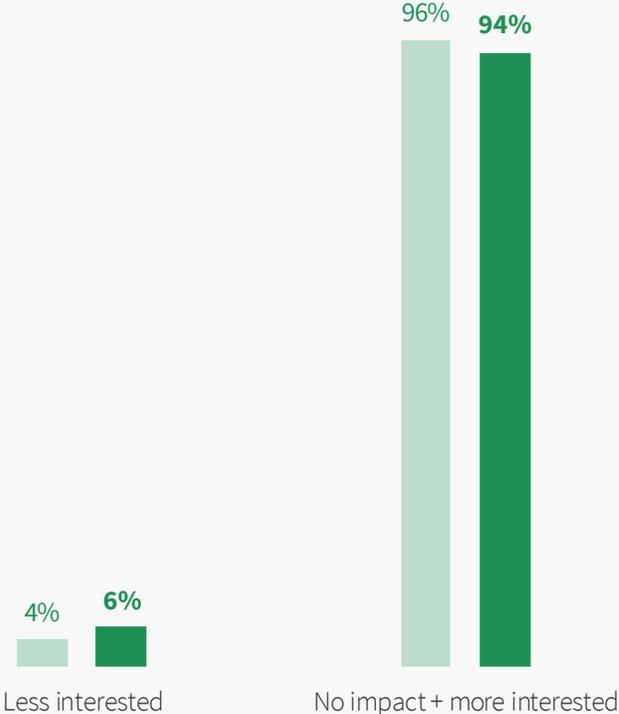
While there was a 4% decrease (from 40% to 36%) between 2020 and 2021 in the proportion of in-Canada respondents who indicated greater interest in immigrating as a result of COVID-19, the proportion that indicated either “no impact” or “more interested” remained above 94% in both years.

These findings suggest that there continues to be a high level of interest in pursuing immigration and obtaining permanent residency on the part of individuals living in Canada with temporary resident status.

* Permanent residents of Canada were disqualified from completing the survey and are not included in the above statistics or analysis.

“How has COVID-19 influenced your interest in immigrating to Canada?”

(for respondents already in Canada as temporary residents)



A positive perception of the ability of the government and health care system in Canada to manage the pandemic is having a positive impact on interest in immigrating.

Interest in immigrating to Canada remains high. Findings show that the overall perception of the country’s COVID-19 response is positive, and that actions taken by the government and health care system to mitigate health impacts are an important factor in immigration plans.*

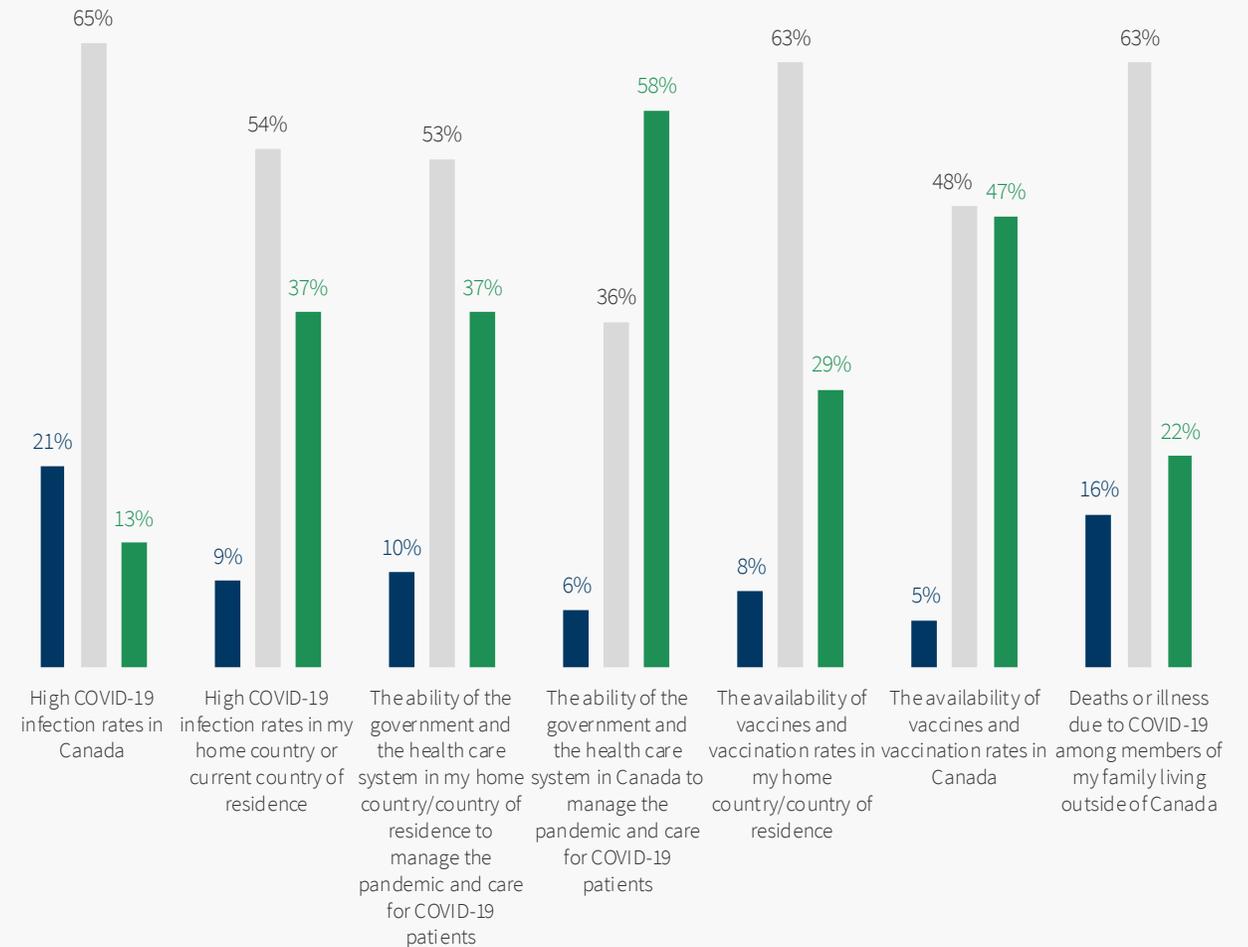
58% of respondents were more interested in immigrating to Canada because of the ability of the government and health care system to manage the pandemic and care needs of COVID-19 patients

47% of respondents were more interested in immigrating to Canada because of vaccine availability and vaccination rates

65% of respondents indicated that even if there were high COVID-19 infection rates in Canada, it would have no impact on their interest in immigrating

*Data are for 2021 only, this question was not included in the 2020 survey.

“To what degree do (or would) the following situations affect your interest in immigrating to Canada?”



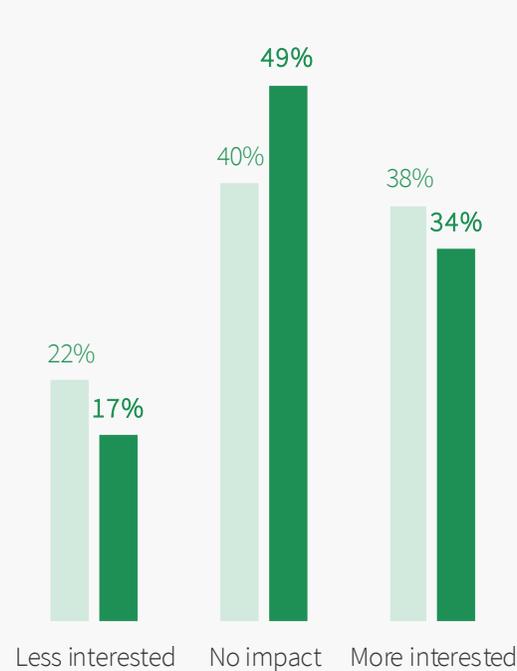
More respondents say that personal and/or familial economic hardship would have no impact on their interest in immigrating to Canada.

In fact, the proportion of respondents who indicated either no impact or more interested increased from 78% in 2020 to 82% in 2021.

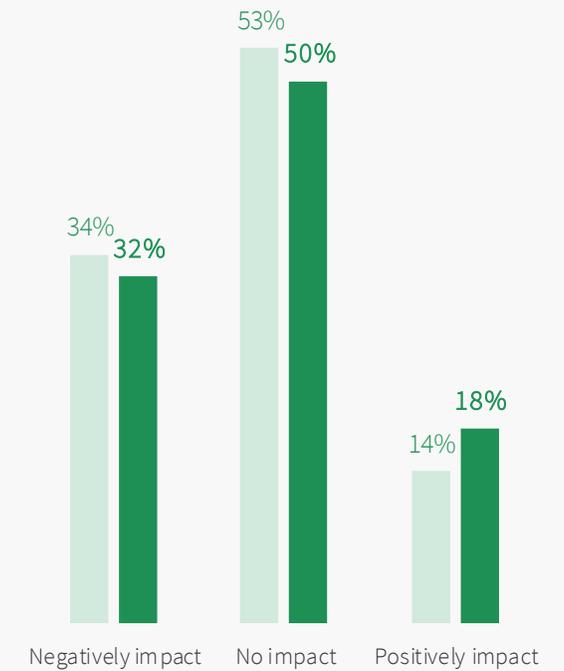
Regarding immigration costs, the proportion of respondents who agreed that the pandemic would either negatively impact or have no impact on their ability to pay these costs decreased from 87% in 2020 to 82% in 2021.

These findings help to dispel the assumption that economic hardship would contribute to a decreased interest in immigrating to Canada. Even in the face of a reduced ability to pay immigration costs, interest in immigrating to Canada remains high.

“To what degree would personal and/or familial economic hardship affect your interest in immigrating to Canada?”



“To what degree do you expect COVID-19 to positively or negatively impact your ability to pay for the costs of immigrating to Canada?”



Majority say an economic recession in Canada would have no impact on their interest in immigrating.

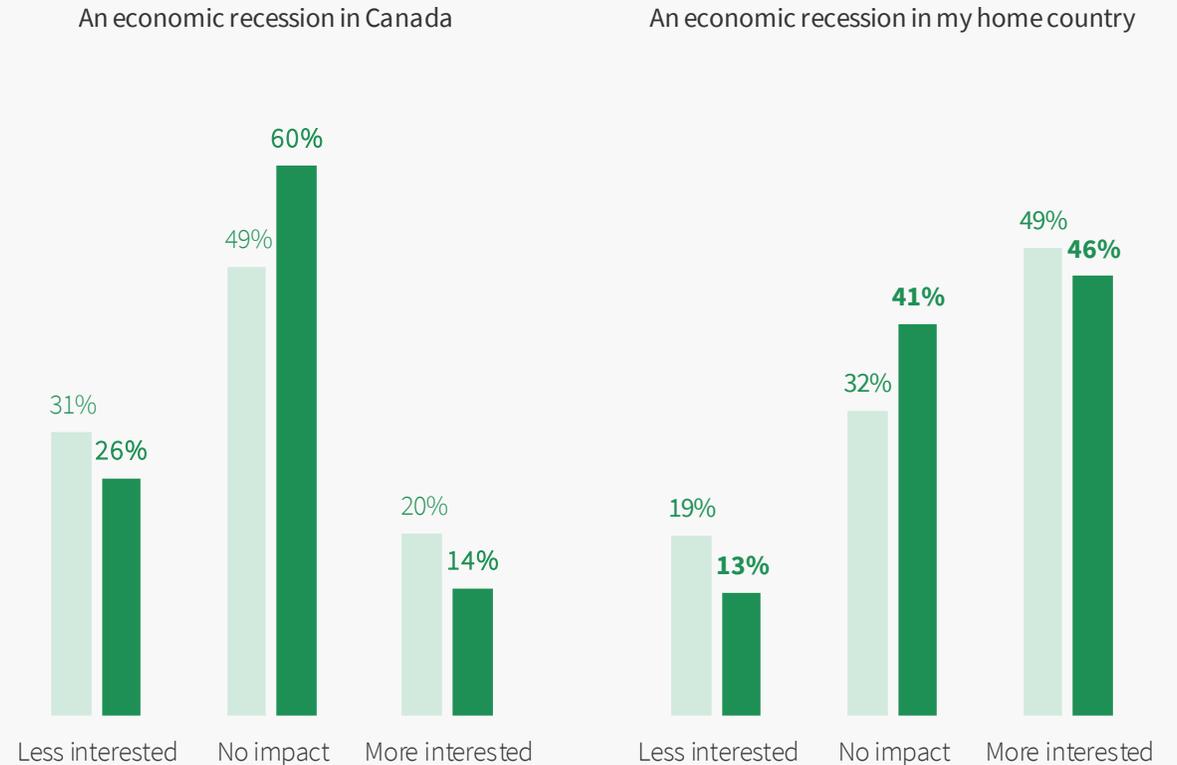
The proportion indicating that an economic recession in Canada would have no impact on their interest in immigrating rose from 49% in 2020 to 60% in 2021.

Taken together, the proportion of respondents who indicated that an economic recession in Canada would either have no impact or make them more interested in immigrating rose from 69% to 74%.

Similarly, the proportion of respondents who said that an economic recession in their home country would have no impact on their immigration plans rose from 32% to 41%.

Once again, these findings offer evidence to suggest that interest in immigrating to Canada remains high because of a wide range of factors, and that the risk of economic recession is but one factor that influences immigration plans.

“To what degree would an economic recession affect your interest in immigrating to Canada?”



More respondents say job availability will not impact their interest in immigrating to Canada.

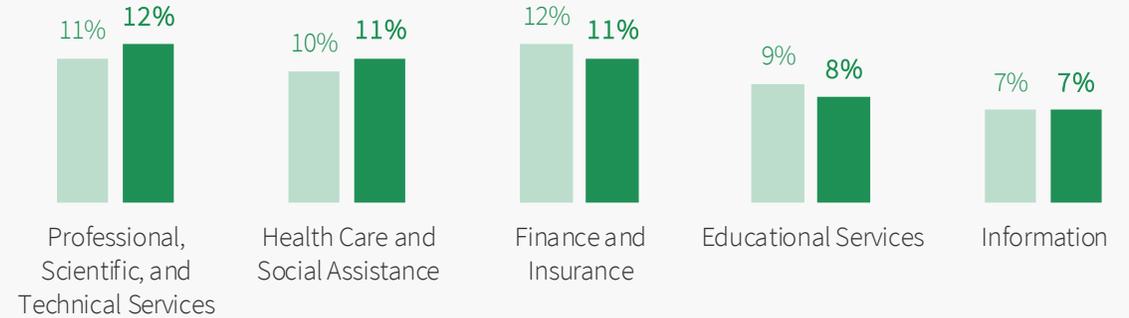
Job availability is often a key factor in immigration plans for economic immigrants, and so it is interesting to note that between 2020 and 2021 there was an increase in the proportion of respondents who indicated that a lower availability of jobs in their occupation or sector would have no impact on their immigration plans, considering job availability both in their home country (37% to 47%) and in Canada (48% to 59%).

The proportion that were less interested as a result of decreased job availability in their sector **in Canada** dropped from 31% in 2020 to 26% in 2021.

The proportion that were less interested as a result of decreased job availability in their sector **in their home country** dropped from 21% in 2020 to 14% in 2021, while the proportion that were either more interested or unimpacted grew from 79% to 85%.

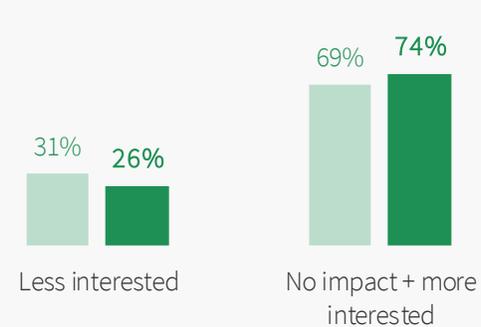
These findings offer evidence that factors outside of job availability (for example, family ties, strength of health systems, and economic or labour market stability) continue to play an influential role in immigration plans.

Top sectors of employment of respondents

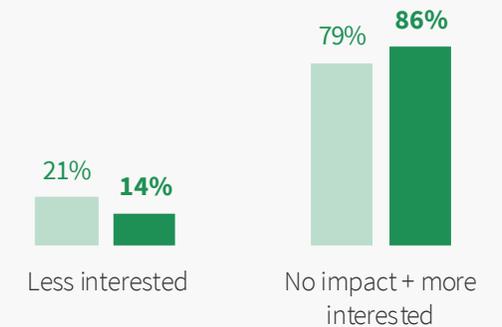


“To what degree would a decrease of availability of jobs in your occupation / sector affect your interest in immigrating to Canada?”

Decrease of availability of jobs in your occupation / sector in Canada



Decrease of availability of jobs in your occupation / sector in your home country



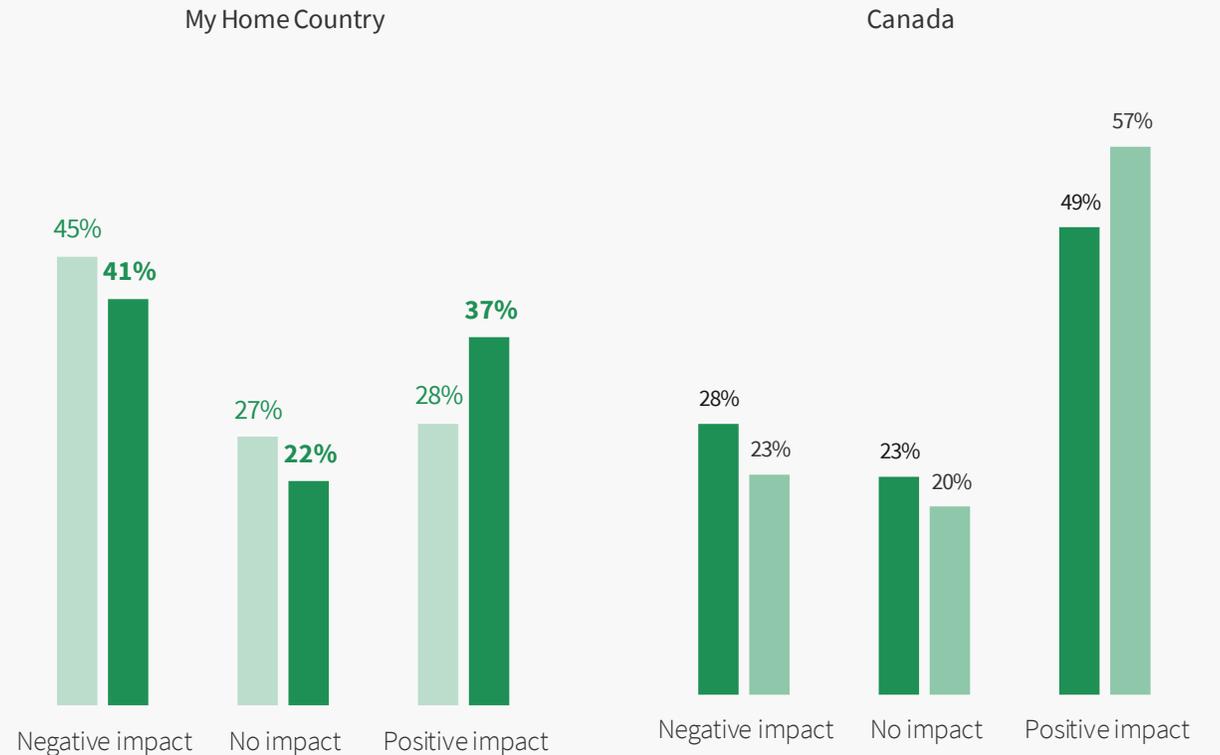
People employed in health care and social assistance expect a positive impact on job availability.

With the increased demand on health systems and social assistance due to the pandemic, it is reasonable that the proportion of respondents employed in these sectors who believed that the pandemic would positively impact job availability in Canada rose from 49% in 2020 to 57% in 2021.

This finding is interesting, given that in Canada there is evidence of significant skill underutilization of internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs) and that barriers to commensurate employment of IEHPs persist.

In both 2020 and 2021, respondents employed or recently employed in the health care and social assistance sectors felt that the availability of jobs in their sector in Canada had been positively impacted by COVID-19, whereas it had been more negatively impacted in their home country.

“To what degree do you expect COVID-19 to positively or negatively impact the availability of jobs in your occupation/sector in your home country / Canada?”



Between 2020 and 2021, the pandemic has decreased as a factor in delaying immigration plans.

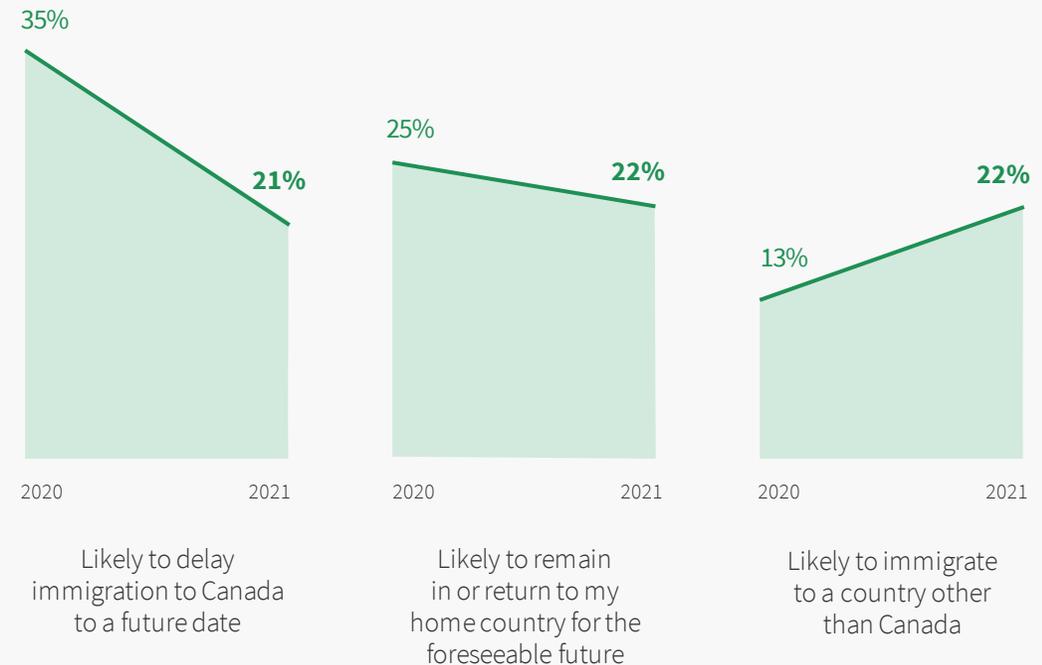
The proportion of respondents who indicated that they were likely to delay immigration to Canada to a future date fell from 35% in 2020 to 21% in 2021, while the proportion of respondents who indicated they were unlikely to delay immigrating to a future date because of the pandemic rose from 56% in 2020 to 69% in 2021.

These findings are unsurprising – over time, the impact of the pandemic has become clearer, and people have a better understanding of the implications and risks.

A smaller proportion of respondents indicated that they were likely to remain in or return to their home country for the foreseeable future, decreasing from 25% in 2020 to 22% in 2021.

There was an increase in the percentage of prospective immigrants who indicated that they were likely to immigrate to a country other than Canada as a result of the pandemic; the proportion rose from 13% in 2020 to 22% in 2021. This is an interesting finding and represents a potential area for further research into the factors driving this change.

“As a result of COVID-19, how likely are you to consider the following?”



Top factors for reduced interest in immigrating among those considering delay.

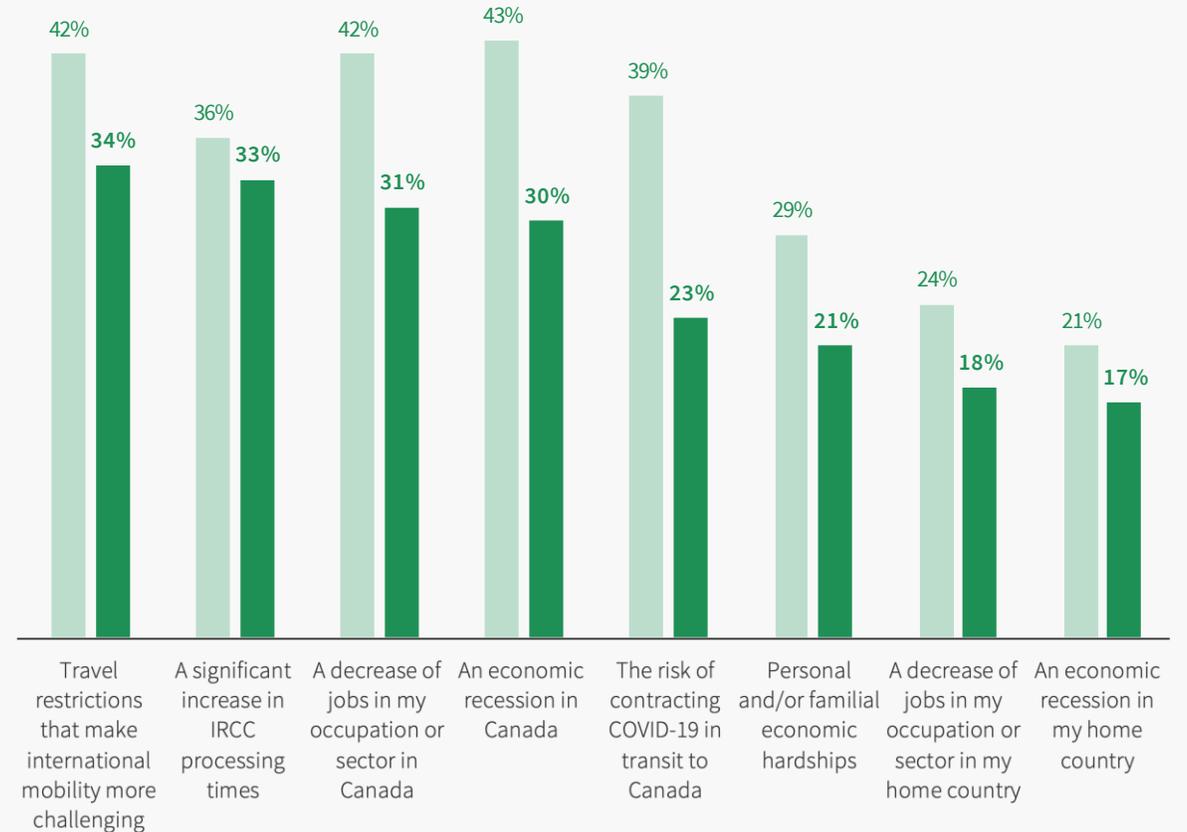
In both 2020 and 2021, some prospective immigrants indicated that they were considering the possibility of delaying their immigration plans because of issues related to the pandemic. Of those considering a delay, a significant percentage continued to be concerned with:

- Travel restrictions that make international mobility more difficult
- Significant increases in IRCC processing times
- A decrease in the number of jobs in their occupation or sector in Canada

On the other hand, the proportion of respondents who were considering a delay because of the risk of an economic recession in Canada fell substantially, from 43% to 30%, indicating lower perceptions of risk to the economy over one year into the pandemic.

As vaccination rates have increased globally, and the transportation industry, including airlines, has enhanced its health and safety protocols, the risk of contracting COVID-19 while en route to Canada has decreased significantly as a factor for reduced interest in immigrating (from 39% in 2020 to 23% in 2021).

Top factors for reduced interest in immigration for those considering delay



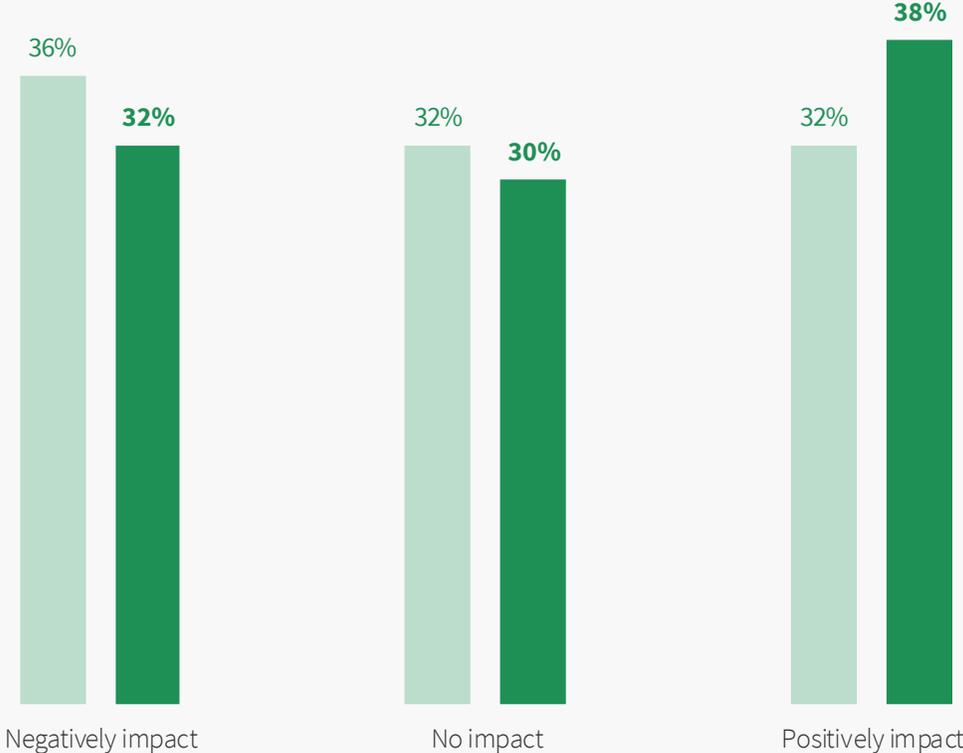
More respondents believe the pandemic will have an impact on the degree to which Canadian society is welcoming to immigrants.

Given the documented rise in reports of xenophobia and racism, specifically anti-Asian racism, over the course of the pandemic, this survey sought to test the assumption that we would see an increase in the proportion of respondents who expected the pandemic to negatively affect the openness or welcoming attitude of Canadian society.

Interestingly, respondents remain relatively divided over the impact of the pandemic on the attitude of Canadian society toward immigrants; slightly fewer respondents between 2020 and 2021 expected it to have a negative or very negative impact (from 36% in 2020 to 32% in 2021), while 6% more expected the impact to be either positive or very positive (from 32% in 2020 to 38% in 2021).*

* The 2020 survey asked respondents about “the openness of Canadian society to immigrants,” whereas the 2021 survey asked about “the degree to which Canadian society is welcoming to immigrants.”

“To what degree do you expect COVID-19 to positively or negatively affect the degree to which Canadian society is welcoming to immigrants?” *



V. Appendix

Methodology

- **Sampling method:** Stratified random sampling
- **No incentive offered**
- **Reporting:**
 - Some incomplete but valid responses were included in the analysis.
 - Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
- **Questionnaire:** Based on survey logic, each respondent answered between 12 and 16 questions.
- “Not applicable” responses were excluded from the analysis. Percentages have been recalculated to reflect this change for all graphs in this report.
- All 5-point scales were collapsed to 3-point scales for graphs presented in this report. “Positively Impact” combines “Very Positively Impact” and “Positively Impact.” “Negatively Impact” combines “Very Negatively Impact” and “Negatively Impact.”
- Respondents with permanent residency in Canada were disqualified from the survey and not included in analysis.
- Analysis in the 2020 [“Trend Report: Canada’s Appeal to Prospective Immigrants in the Face of COVID-19”](#) excluded in-Canada respondents (n = 1,236). This year’s comparative report includes these 1,236 respondents as part of the 2020 total responses/valid responses.

Survey Metrics

	2020	2021
Data collection periods	August 17 – 26, 2020	August 25 – September 6, 2021
Total invitations	213,172	210,264
Total responses	17,688	18,532
Response rate	8.3%	9%
Valid responses	13,953	13,138
Completion rate	79%	71%

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