

How international students make decisions about staying in Canada

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While some international students come to Canada knowing whether they intend to stay or return home after completing their degrees, the majority decide after they have had a chance to live here for a few years,

a new study has found.

"Nearly a quarter of our participants made the decision prior to arriving in Canada," said Elena Neiterman, a lecturer in the School of Public Health and Health Systems at the University of Waterloo. "However, the majority were not certain what their plans for the future were until they had a chance to live here and explore life in Canada."

The students identified several factors shaping their decision to stay or go, including family ties in Canada or abroad, employment opportunities here compared to their home country, the perceived complexity of the immigration system and feelings of isolation or experiences of racism.

The researchers also found that the way students conceived of the word "staying" varied considerably. While two-thirds of the study participants said they hoped to stay, 17 percent of them saw it as permanently settling in Canada. More than 33 percent planned to stay for a few years, then move back home. The others were not sure what the future will hold.

For more than half the participants, staying in Canada included a plan to apply for permanent residency following graduation. Students said that permanent residency would allow them the flexibility to keep more options open and give them access to increased job opportunities.

The researchers interviewed 60 [international students](#) from two universities, aiming for diversity in graduate versus undergraduate status, male versus female or non-binary, with 20 students each studying in three fields: social sciences and humanities, [health sciences](#), and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math).

"Only 10 students had a strong initial desire to stay in Canada that remained unchanged while they studied, and for them, an [international education](#) was a means to immigration," Neiterman said. "For the others,

the decision-making process regarding migration was complex and changed over time."

Participants were all in their last year of study and represented 23 different countries, with 30 percent coming from China.

International students comprised 16.5 percent of the total number of students enrolled in Canadian schools in 2018. In 2017, they contributed \$15 billion to the Canadian economy, according to Global Affairs Canada.

The study, "Should I Stay or Should I Go: International Students' Decision-making About Staying in Canada" was co-authored by Waterloo's Neiterman, Lauren Harrison and Angela Freeman; the University of Alberta's Grace Shoyele and Christine Covell; and the University of Western Ontario's Victoria Esses. It was published in the *Journal of International Migration and Integration*.

More information: "Should I Stay or Should I Go: International Students' Decision-making About Staying in Canada" *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 2021.

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