



# Here to Stay

Understanding Immigrant  
Retention in Canada



**Institute**  
for **Canadian**  
**Citizenship**

**Institut** pour  
la **citoyenneté**  
**canadienne**

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# Introduction

Research from the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC) shows that immigrant onward migration – immigrants leaving Canada – has increased steadily since the 1980s. Housing affordability, inflation, cost of living, and similar macro-level economic factors are contributing to immigrants' decision to leave.

As birth rates decline, growing numbers of immigrants leave Canada, and immigrant admission levels contract, finding ways to retain the immigrants who are already in Canada is critical to the country's prosperity and success. Yet very few studies have looked at the factors that motivate immigrants to stay in Canada.

**This report explores the various factors that contribute to an individual's intention to stay in Canada permanently. It establishes the most significant factors influencing one's intention to stay and highlights opportunities to support immigrant retention through targeted investments in specific types of programming.**

# Summary of Findings

Five core factors influence intention to stay in Canada permanently, even after accounting for key demographics. A one percentage point (pp) increase in any one of the following factors leads to a multiple percentage point increase in intention to stay in Canada permanently.

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**Optimism** about the future in Canada (↑28pp)

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**Identity** and belonging (↑25pp)

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**Sense of stability** and security (↑16pp)

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**Confidence** in Canadian institutions (↑15pp)

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**Optimism** about the Canadian economy (↑14pp)

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Among these, **optimism about the future** (+28pp) and **identity and belonging** (+25pp) emerge as the **strongest motivators**.



# Methodology and Sample

A survey of 4,919 verified immigrants to Canada was conducted among members of the ICC's Canoo program.

The composition of respondents was diverse across demographic variables including age, gender, household composition, country of origin, time in Canada, income, immigration category on arrival, region of residence in Canada, etc.

A statistical analysis was conducted using R to determine the relationship between five independent variables (indices representing factors affecting intention to stay) and one dependent variable (intention to stay in Canada permanently).

Additional details on the methodology and sample are contained in the appendix.

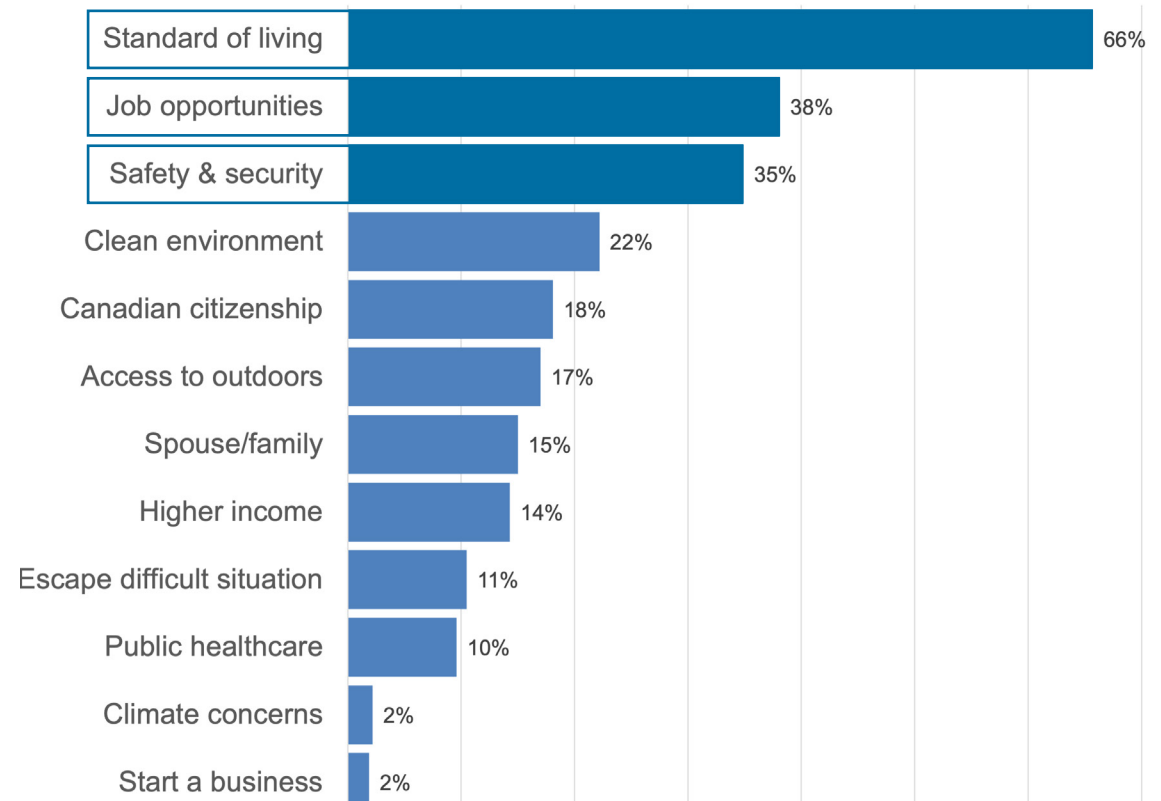


# What Motivated People to **Move** to Canada

Respondents were able to select up to three motivations for moving to Canada.

**Standard of living** (66%),  
**job opportunities** (38%), and  
**safety & security** (35%) were  
most selected.

Top Motivations for Moving to Canada







# What Motivates People to **Stay** in Canada

When we asked respondents to describe in an open text response what motivates them to stay in Canada, the most common answers were:

- + **Better quality of life** (appeared 805 times);
- + **Safety** (appeared 560 times);
- + **Environment** (appeared 431 times);
- + **Family and community** (appeared 425 times); and
- + **Opportunities** (appeared 408 times).

These responses gave us a good sense of what matters most and helped us figure out which factors to focus on for further analysis.

To measure these factors systematically, we grouped related survey questions into indices representing different dimensions of life in Canada.

# Factors that Influence Intent to Stay

Five indices were created through groupings of survey questions (five-point scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree) which captured various social, political and economic factors that can affect one's intention to stay in Canada.

## **Identity and belonging index**

- I call myself a Canadian.
- I belong in Canada.
- I trust other Canadians to do what is right for the country.
- Canada provides good opportunities for my family.

## **Economic optimism index**

- I see opportunities to advance my career in Canada.
- I see my financial situation improving.
- I get a fair chance in the Canadian job market.
- My income in Canada reflects my credentials and experience.
- I am optimistic about Canada's economy.

## **Trust in institutions index**

- Canada is respected globally.
- Canada has a functioning system of government.
- Canada's leaders are setting the country up for success.

## **Safety and stability index**

- Canada is a safe place to live.
- Canada's healthcare system provides the care that I need.
- Canada is a place with affordable housing.
- Canada is a safe place to live considering the impact of climate change.

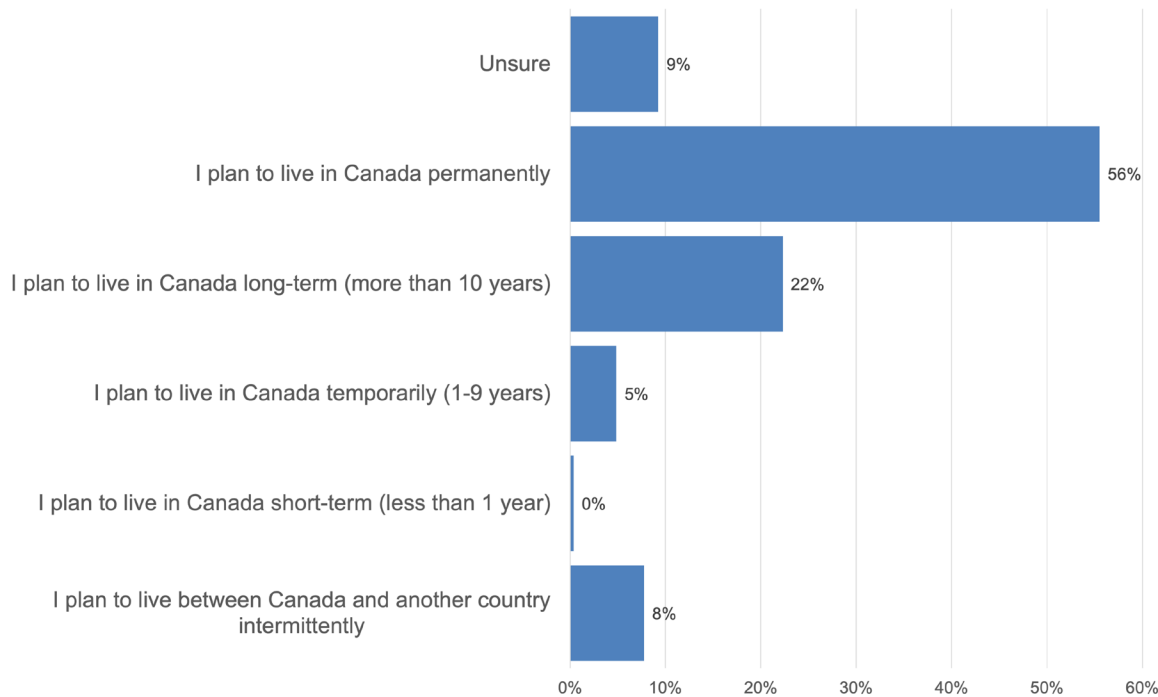
## **Future optimism and future orientation index**

- I am optimistic about my future in Canada.
- I see myself retiring in Canada.
- My friends and/or family can succeed in Canada.

# Clarifying

## "Intent to Stay" in Our Analysis

Intended Length of Stay in Canada



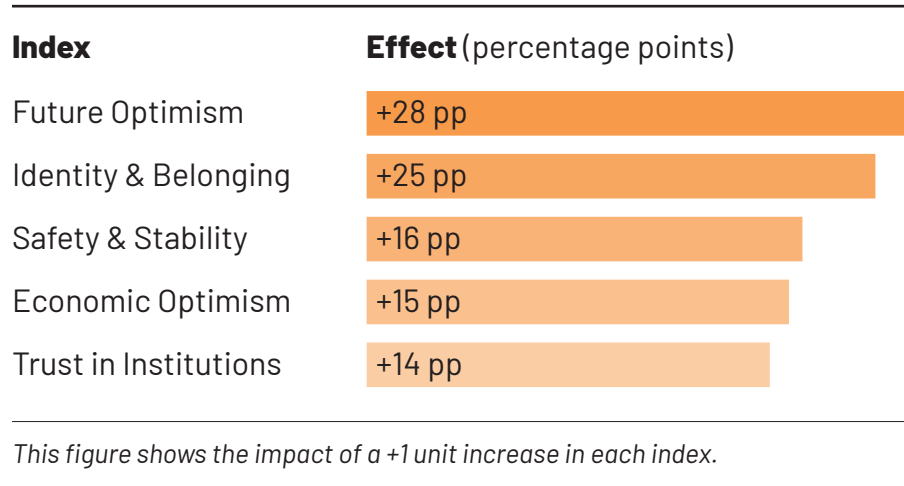
**For the analysis of the various factors, a binary variable was created for intention to stay in Canada to separate those who intend to stay permanently from everyone else.**

1 = I plan to live in Canada permanently

0 = All other responses (these responses reflect some uncertainty as to whether one wants to stay)



# Which Factors Matter Most



The above figure shows how much each factor influences someone's likelihood of wanting to stay in Canada permanently. For each factor, we calculated the change in probability when that factor increases one unit on our scale.

All five factors significantly influence whether one intends to stay in Canada permanently, with two factors having a particularly strong influence.

- **Future Orientation** has the strongest impact: a one-unit increase in this index is associated with approximately a 28 percentage point increase in the probability of staying permanently. This shows that optimism and hope about one's personal and family future in Canada matter a great deal.
- **Identity & Belonging** comes next, with approximately a 25 percentage point increase. This highlights the importance of feeling connected and included in Canadian society.
- **Safety & Stability and Economic Optimism** also significantly boost the likelihood of staying, but with slightly smaller effects (~16pp and ~15pp, respectively). These reflect the importance of feeling secure and optimistic about economic opportunities.
- **Trust in Institutions** has the smallest but still significant effect (~14pp). This suggests that confidence in Canada's governance and institutions supports retention but may be less influential than personal and economic factors.

# What are People **Concerned** About in Canada

**Affordable housing is of increasing concern for newcomers.**

Most disagreed that Canada is a place with affordable housing.

**"Canada is a place with affordable housing"**



# Policy Domains to Support **Immigrant Retention**

While macro-level 'push' factors like housing affordability may be contributing to an increase in immigrants leaving, these factors remain highly complex and difficult to solve quickly and at scale. Our analysis highlights options for policy makers to increase immigrant retention through targeted investments in specific domains.

Programs that make life in Canada more meaningful, enjoyable, and rewarding for families can have a significant impact on immigrant retention via increases in future optimism as well as identity and belonging – the two strongest factors driving immigrant retention.

- **Initiatives that support** newcomer skills development and labour market integration.
- **Activities that connect** immigrant families and friends to each other and to other Canadians, building community, inclusion and belonging.
- **Programs that provide** immigrants with opportunities to engage in social, recreational and civic activities and experiences.





# Insights Recap

A one percentage point increase in optimism about the future is associated with an average increase of approximately 28 percentage points in the probability that a respondent plans to stay in Canada permanently. The same increase in identity and belonging corresponds to an average increase of about 25 percentage points in that probability.

**Safety and stability, economic optimism, and trust in institutions also significantly influence intention to stay,** each increasing the probability by roughly 14 to 16 percentage points.

Among those who expressed a willingness to leave, the top reasons cited were housing affordability (16%) and inflation/ the economy (15%), highlighting housing and general affordability concerns as critical policy areas.

**These findings emphasize the importance of investing in programs and initiatives that nurture a strong sense of belonging and optimism about the future by making life more meaningful, enjoyable, and rewarding for immigrants.**

# Appendix

# Sample

A survey of verified immigrants to Canada was conducted with a sample of N = 4,919 respondents.

- 52% of respondents identified as female and 48% as male.
- The average age of respondents was 40.4 years.
- The vast majority (98%) reported living in urban or suburban areas, while only 1.6% were located in rural areas. Among urban respondents, 22% resided in Toronto, followed by 11% in Calgary, 5% in Mississauga, 4% in Ottawa, and 3% each in Montreal and Vancouver.
- The sample skews highly educated, with over 90% holding a college diploma or higher, including 65% with a graduate degree.
- 47% are homeowners and 32% rent privately. Around 6% are living with friends or family, the majority of whom are paying rent.
- Approximately 70% of the sample is employed. 37% report an annual income over \$100,000, while around 30% fall between \$50,000 and \$99,999.

# Methodology

**Independent variables:** Five indices representing key motivators. Each index was created by averaging several related questions originally answered on a 5-point Likert scale, where 0 means 'Strongly disagree' and 4 means 'Strongly agree.' These responses were converted into numeric values from 0 to 4 before calculating the averages for each index.

**Dependent variable:** Intention to stay permanently in Canada (binary), distinguishing respondents who were certain about permanent residence from those uncertain or planning shorter stays.

**Statistical approach:** Five separate logistic regression models, each including one index as the key predictor along with demographic controls.

**Demographic controls:** Age (continuous), gender (binary), income (continuous), province (categorical), college education (binary), urban/rural status (binary), homeownership (binary), employment status (binary), marital status (binary), presence of children (binary), satisfaction with life (continuous).

**Interpretation:** Average marginal effects (AMEs) calculated to express effects as predicted changes in the probability of intending to stay permanently.



## About the ICC

The ICC is a national charity that aspires to a Canada where immigrants don't just come, but stay, become citizens, and contribute to their fullest potential so that Canada can grow and succeed.

We are Canada's leading source of thought leadership on citizenship and immigration. Through our Canoo Access Pass, we give 750,000 newcomers free access to Canada's best culture, nature and sport experiences. We also host enhanced citizenship ceremonies across Canada.

## Ideas & Insights at the ICC

Working with partners and program participants, Ideas and Insights drives research and develops cutting edge insights on immigration and citizenship in the 21st century.

Ideas & Insights is led by George Carothers ([gcarothers@inclusion.ca](mailto:gcarothers@inclusion.ca)).



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