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CANADA

Deportations surge as regularization stalls for the undocumented

Advocates say Canada boosted efforts to deport migrants while stalling on promise to grant permanent residence to those who have lost legal status.

By **Nicholas Keung** Immigration Reporter

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Activist Syed Hussan says the issue of undocumented migrants is the result of a failure of the immigration system to provide adequate access to permanent residence while Canada is bringing in vast numbers of temporary residents such as international students and foreign workers.

Bernard Weil Toronto Star file photo

Ottawa has stepped up its effort to deport foreign nationals while stalling the rollout of a promised plan to grant permanent residence to those who have lost legal status in Canada, advocates charge.

According to government data, the Canada Border Services Agency removed 7,232 people from the country in the first six months of this year, at a rate averaging 39 people a day.

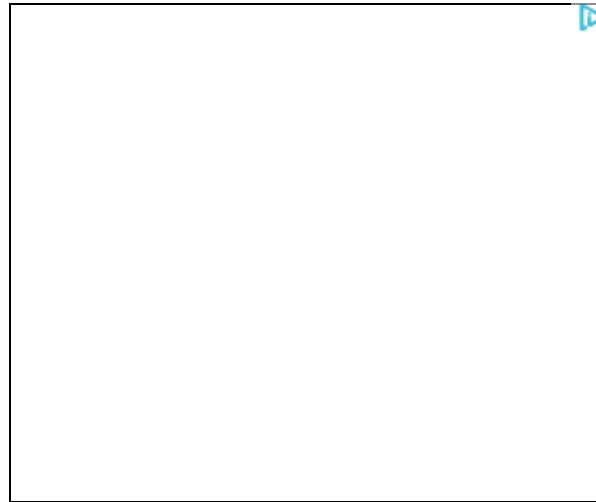
It compared to the total 7,635 deportations, or 21 cases a day, that the agency enforced in the entire year of 2021, when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau pledged to legalize the status of undocumented migrants in Canada, a population estimated in the hundreds of thousands.

"The concern is about what's happening to the people who should be experiencing regularization of their status, but instead, are facing the fear of actually being deported," said Mary Gellatly, a community legal worker at Parkdale Community Legal Services, who obtained the data from an access-to-information request.

In a mandate letter in December 2021, Trudeau asked then Immigration Minister Sean Fraser to further explore ways of "regularizing status for undocumented workers who are contributing to Canadian communities."

The government was very close to finalizing the plan last fall after extensive consultations with the legal and migrant communities, as well as advocacy groups and employers, the Star has reported. But the wait for such a plan has continued as Marc Miller replaced Fraser at the helm of the immigration department in July.

"A commitment has been repeated on multiple occasions by two different immigration ministers, senior bureaucrats and policy staff," said Syed Hussan of the Migrant Rights Network, a national umbrella group advocating for farmworkers, care workers, international students and undocumented people.



"Repeatedly, we've been told it's coming, it's happening. Yet, what we are experiencing in our communities is that there has been an upsurge in deportations."

The advocates say the issue of undocumented migrants is the result of a failure of the immigration system to provide adequate access to permanent residence while Canada is bringing in vast numbers of temporary residents such as international students and foreign workers.



Statistics Canada data showed the number of work permit holders in Canada skyrocketed to 861,600 in 2021 from 531,800 a decade ago while the number of study permit holders rose to 617,250 from 225,295 over the same period.

Gellatly said temporary residents are vulnerable and can easily fall out of legal status at a whim.

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A client of the legal clinic came from Mexico as a temporary foreign worker but fell out of status. The worker was owed \$6,000 in wages by the temp agency that hired her to work in hotels during the pandemic. When they pursued wage recovery, said Gellatly, the agency reported her to the CBSA.

"They picked her up and went to the the high school where her teenage daughter was. A day later, they were deported," Gellatly said. "Given how dire the situation is for people as they wait for the regularization program, we're hoping the government will as quickly as possible bring it into place."

The Immigration Department said it's still exploring options for regularizing the status of undocumented workers and will continue listening to experts as well as undocumented migrants themselves.

"Any new developments would be communicated publicly," said department spokesperson Rémi Larivière.

Nicholas Keung is a Toronto-based reporter covering immigration for the Star. Follow him on Twitter: [@nkeung](#).



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