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Education Immigration

Nearly 7% of international students in Canada are truant at enrolled schools

By Quinn Patrick, True North Wire • January 17, 2025

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Nearly 50,000 international students were marked as "no-shows" by their universities and colleges, according to recent government data, further damaging the validity of the student visa program.

The data, first obtained by the Globe and Mail, revealed that close to 50,000 international students have been reported as non-compliant.

According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada data, no-show students accounted for 6.9% of all international students.

However, immigration lawyer Sergio Karas believes the IRCC figure understates the severity of the problem.

"The number of non-compliant students is probably underreported and the problem is much larger," Karas told True North. "The Study Permit system was never designed to accommodate the large number of foreign students coming to Canada, or the growing list of educational institutions accepting them."

According to Karas, the culprits of this exploitation involve "multiple parties" which commit a "considerable amount of fraud, including the education agents abroad receiving commissions, the 'diploma mills' institutions that rarely enforced student attendance, and the students themselves."

He noted how many students solely use the study permit program as a means to obtain permanent residency.

Under the International Student Compliance Regime, universities and colleges are required by law to report to the immigration department biannually regarding truancy for all study permit holders.

The ISCR was launched in 2014 to assist provinces in weeding out fraudulent students as well as schools thought to be accepting questionable applicants.

Still, Karas believes that immigration authorities are "also responsible for their lax enforcement of the requirements needed to obtain a Study Permit and their lack of capacity to deal with the astronomical number of applications."

"There is plenty of blame to spread around," he said.

IRCC data found that between March and April of last year, students from Rwanda had the highest non-compliance rate at 48.1%, whereas students from the Philippines had the lowest at 2.1%.

Other countries with notably high rates of no-show students include the Democratic Republic of Congo (34.8%), Ghana (31.1%), Jordan (29%), Algeria (24%), Cameroon (22.5%) and Iran (11.6%).

While Indian students only had a non-compliance rate of 5.4%, the fact there were an estimated 359,781 over that period means a total of nearly 20,000 were still reported as no-shows with data on an additional cohort of 12,553 going unreported altogether.

The RCMP has been working with Indian law-enforcement officials on investigating links between dozens of Canadian colleges and multiple Indian "entities" which are alleged to be involved in illegally transporting "international students" across the Canada-U.S. border once inside the country.

While these people may enter Canada legally under the guise of pursuing an education in Canada, upon arrival they then cross the border illegally into the U.S.

"At this point, the federal government should declare an indefinite pause in issuing most Study Permits from abroad until a new system is put in place to ensure that bad actors are weeded out," said Karas.

"They should also scrutinize study permit extensions to ensure that applicants comply with all regulatory conditions. As things stand now, the system is out of control and they need to stop the bleeding".

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