

Recruitment and Acceptance Rates of International Students

Saint Mary's University

Introduction

Competitiveness and Visa Processing Times

With a backlog of almost two million applications, international students face long waits and tremendous uncertainty when trying to study in Canada.

At this [moment](#), "Study permit applications have declined since October, but the overall temporary residence inventory is up by nearly 73,000 persons over the same period. Demand for various temporary residence categories has increased throughout the pandemic, especially to fill in for Canada's worker shortages."

When international students start to consider their education destination, processing times are an immediate impediment for our post-secondary universities. Compared to other major global education markets, our processing times reduce the number of students willing to consider coming to Canada. This presents a short-term financial challenge to post-secondary institutions struggling throughout the pandemic. It also presents a long-term risk that is more serious. Processing times that lag our international counterparts send a message to prospective students – look elsewhere for fast service, welcoming communities, and quality education.

Bias in Acceptance and Rejection Rates

Recent committee testimony shone a bright light on a troubling trend in acceptance and rejection rates. Canada's treatment of African applicants creates a disturbing impression that is hard to shake.

According to testimony from Paul Davidson, President of Universities Canada, "In 2019, the visa approval rates for undergraduate students from Morocco and Senegal – two of our priority countries for Francophone student recruitment – were 55% and 20%, respectively." Additionally, a [2019 report](#) suggested that three in four African applicants were rejected, and our country faces charges of bias over Canadian approval rates.

Given the federal government's desire to increase the diversity of our international student population, this practice is very short-sighted. At SMU, we are also interested in diversifying our global presence. We believe it is a crucial part of our commitment to intercultural learning and an essential step for our institution's financial sustainability. The outcomes of African applicants make our efforts much harder and create unnecessary obstacles.

The long-term trend should be an investment in African-specific resources and an effort to improve further the flow of people between Canada and the African continent. And while our population continues to age, the African continent is full of young people who are full of potential. The average age in Africa today is [19.7 years old](#). The median age in the developed world is 40. As the continent grows and develops, it will host a growing and increasingly influential middle class.

Failure to position Canada for long-term success on the continent will be a missed opportunity that will have long-term consequences for our country and our sector.

The other bias that is a challenge for SMU manifests in approval rates for universities outside of Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia universities convert study permit applications at a rate of approximately 55% (IRCC data, 2019). Given our province's demographic challenges, this further limits our sector's growth and increases the financial risk associated with immigration policy and decision-making.

Challenges and Limitations of Dual Intent

The federal government's dual intent policy is confusing students and sends a poor message to prospective immigrants. The policy can lead to unnecessary denials and rejections, but more fundamentally, it sends the wrong message and prevents us from fully leveraging the benefits of immigration.

We want newcomers to feel welcome and part of our community. The policy of dual intent makes that much harder. It says that we want you to come, pay for tuition, and spend money in our economy. Then we want you to return home. Instead, we should encourage them to consider Canada their new home and make their experience one that reinforces that message.

Building the workforce of tomorrow also requires a shift in immigration policy. While we must address today's workforce needs, unreasonable limitations make it harder to develop a talent pool that drives innovation and thrives in a knowledge economy. To that end, we need more highly skilled and educated workers, regardless of how they match with the current labour market.

We believe that more people coming here will bring new ideas and create more opportunities for all.