

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

TRY GLOBE UNLIMITED

99¢ per week for the first 4 weeks

SIGN UP TODAY

Ottawa seeks to attract Chinese workers

[Nathan VanderKlippe](#) AND [Steven Chase](#)

BEIJING and OTTAWA — The Globe and Mail

Published Tuesday, Aug. 09, 2016 9:48AM EDT

Last updated Wednesday, Aug. 10, 2016 9:10AM EDT

The federal government is petitioning Beijing to triple the number of cities where Chinese can apply for Canadian visas, as Ottawa tries to woo not only more students and travellers but also additional temporary foreign workers.

Foreign workers became a flashpoint in Canada several years ago, when a public backlash was directed at companies bringing in non-Canadian employees to take jobs in this country. At one point, there was a plan to bring in as many as 200 Chinese miners to work on a proposed project in northeastern British Columbia. The former Conservative government ended up tightening rules for importing foreign workers.

Related: Meet the wealthy immigrants at the centre of Vancouver's housing debate
[<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/real-estate/vancouver/meet-the-wealthy-immigrants-at-the-centre-of-vancouvers-housingdebate/article31212036/>]

Minister of Immigration John McCallum landed in Beijing on Sunday for meetings with senior Chinese officials at the country's Foreign Affairs and Public Security ministries. He has asked for approval to quickly open new visa application centres in five secondary Chinese cities: Chengdu, Nanjing, Wuhan, Jinan and Shenyang. They could open as soon as next year. Chinese can currently apply for Canadian visas in five locations, including Hong Kong.

This comes ahead of an expected visit to China by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau starting at month's end, before the G20 summit in Hangzhou in early September.

Mr. Trudeau has charged International Trade Minister Chrystia Freeland with expanding Canada's economic relationship with China. Accordingly, the Liberals are trying to pry open the door wider for Chinese visitors to swell university enrolments in Canada, place foreign talent in high-tech jobs and bring in new investment cash – even if that means adding to housing demand at a time of overheated home prices.

Canada also wants a further five visa application locations in the future to smooth the path for Chinese to come to Canada – bringing the total number to 15 – and is asking for additional air links between the two countries. Chinese already forms the biggest group of temporary visitors to Canada, including some 120,000 students now in the country.

“But we want to get it even bigger,” Mr. McCallum said in an interview in Beijing on Tuesday. The Liberal government wants “the highest growth we can of tourists coming to Canada, of qualified foreign students who want to study in Canada. If that's a doubling [in numbers], that's great,” he said. He described Chinese officials as “actively on board” with the idea.

Mr. McCallum's visit suggests ambitious new Chinese visitor targets will form an important element of Mr. Trudeau's trip to China.

China, in exchange, has sought to convince Canada to join its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, launch talks toward a free-trade agreement and begin work on an extradition treaty so people Beijing calls fugitives, many accused of corruption, can be sent back.

Ottawa, however, has signalled in recent months that it's in no rush to start or conclude negotiations on a free-trade deal. It has also rejected formal extradition proceedings as long as China maintains the death penalty, Mr. McCallum said.

In meetings Tuesday with China's vice-minister for public security, he nonetheless discussed further “co-operation on this kind of thing, in terms of working with their people on facilitating the return of some [suspected fugitives] without having an extradition treaty.”

The same ministry is responsible for approving new visa application centres, which Canada wants ahead of a 2018 biometric deadline that will require visitors to apply in person. “That means you have to fan out across the country,” Mr. McCallum said.

Charles Burton, a former counsellor at the Canadian embassy in Beijing, said he thinks the Liberals have changed tack on the timeline for striking a free-trade deal with China, particularly in light of how some of the expected gains from such an agreement have failed to materialize for other countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

“It appears when a free-trade agreement [with the Chinese] leads to the partner achieving a significant improvement in their market share, experience suggests that China then imposes other barriers,” Mr. Burton said. “Initially, I had thought the government planned to have a free-trade agreement in place before the next election; my understanding is the government no longer anticipates achieving that within their first mandate.”

Polls suggest Canadians have a very negative impression of the Chinese government and oppose a free-trade deal with China by a narrow margin.

The government's bid to attract more Chinese workers and students comes as the Canadian economy sheds jobs and critics worry about the influence of foreign investors on fast-rising house prices in cities such as Vancouver and Toronto. Canada's unemployment rate increased to 6.9 per cent in July.

Mr. McCallum, though, said Canada has a "legitimate need for temporary foreign workers" in some regions and industries. He cited fish processing, meat packing and high-tech as examples.

He also said the Liberals want to find a middle ground on foreign workers. "We went from a situation five years or so ago where everybody was allowed in and then there were various scandals, and went to the other extreme of almost nobody allowed in. And now we want to be in an intermediate position, and it's not fully resolved," Mr. McCallum said.

"There's a parliamentary committee that hasn't reported yet. But the general idea would be that in some regions and in some industries, we have a legitimate need for temporary foreign workers. But – and this is a big but – we would generally want to see these people on a pathway to permanent residence if that is their desire."

He said he wants to make it easier for companies to bring in foreign workers. "We're also going to reduce some of the barriers and the silly rules ... in order to give companies freedom to bring in the best and the brightest. We'll get rid of many of these [required] labour-market impact assessments which slow things down enormously."

Mr. McCallum acknowledged that bringing in more students could further raise pressure on real estate prices, since one of the primary Chinese motivations for buying Canadian property is to house sons and daughters at university.

"I don't deny there is such a connection," he said. But he downplayed its severity, saying many places outside Vancouver and Toronto are begging for more foreign students and immigrants, including Atlantic Canada.

Ottawa, meanwhile, is also studying ways to remake an investor immigrant program that was cancelled under the Conservatives after it amassed a backlog of roughly 65,000 applicants, mostly from China. A replacement program failed to attract much interest, and "we're working on" another attempt, Mr. McCallum said, pointing to a U.S. program designed to propel investment into senior care facilities. That could serve as a model, he said.

[Report Typo/Error](#)

Follow us on Twitter: Steven Chase [@stevenchase](http://twitter.com/@stevenchase) [<http://twitter.com/@stevenchase>], Nathan VanderKlippe [@nvanderklippe](http://twitter.com/@nvanderklippe) [<http://twitter.com/@nvanderklippe>]

Also on The Globe and Mail

Foreign home buyers face a new reality as B.C.'s tax kicks in (BNN Video)

More Related to this Story

- [B.C.'s foreign-buyer tax could help China fight corruption: ex-envoy](#)
- [Vancouver home prices soar as foreign-buyer's tax looms](#)
- [Canada seizing more suspect money from Chinese travellers](#)



Register to The Globe and Mail and get access to

The Globe's House Price Data

Centre

Tools to track your portfolio

Newsletters

Sign up for FREE today

And more exclusive content ...

Next story | [Learn More](#)



Investors making huge returns in Vietnam drug stocks

SUNDAY, AUG. 14, 2016, 4:19PM EDT



Vancouver's real estate tax sparks backlash from Chinese buyers

MONDAY, AUG. 15, 2016, 11:10AM EDT



Ottawa mapping out potential Canadian effects of U.S. election outcomes

SUNDAY, AUG. 14, 2016, 12:59PM EDT

Thank You!
Please check your email

We've sent an email to your email address containing a URL you'll need to follow to verify your account. You should receive the email within the next few minutes.

Please note Your Globe and Mail account will expire after 30 days if not validated as described in the email.

Share this selection

Register for a Free Account

- [Facebook](#)

Already have an account? [Log in here.](#)

We did not find an account associated with the account below:

With your social account

Or with your email

Email address
Password
First name
Last name
Display name
Postal/zip code

Show

We need this Account Information to register you. We use your email to create your account, tell you important things about your account, or notify you of special Globe promotions. You can edit this information in our [Customer Preference Centre](#). You will be given a mechanism to unsubscribe from any non-essential email from us. Your email address will not be given to third parties for their commercial use.

By creating an account, you will be subject to our [Terms and Conditions](#). See also our [Privacy Policy](#) and [FAQs](#).

Supplementary Information

To improve your experience, please provide the following optional information.

By completing this optional information you give The Globe consent to display advertising, content recommendations and communications from The Globe based on supplementary information you provide.

By creating an account, you will be subject to our [Terms and Conditions](#). See also our [Privacy Policy](#) and [FAQs](#).

Log In

Don't have an account? [Create one here.](#)

We did not find an account associated with the account below:

With your social account

OR with your email and password

Keep me logged in

[Trouble logging in?](#)