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Almost 600 foreign nationals with criminal records due to be deported are missing, CBSA says

MARIE WOOLF >

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Figures from the Canada Border Services Agency show that 1,635 foreign nationals guilty of committing crimes in Canada are facing deportation, but almost 600 have failed to attend deportation proceedings.

DARRYL DYCK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Canadian border agents are trying to track down almost 600 foreigners with criminal records who are due to be deported but have gone missing - 431 of whom have been found guilty of serious crimes such as sexual assault.

Figures from the Canada Border Services Agency show that 1,635 foreign nationals guilty of committing crimes in Canada are currently facing deportation, but 599 of them have failed to attend deportation proceedings and have been placed on the agency's "wanted" list.

Of those 599, 315 have been evading deportation for more than three years. Another 46, according to CBSA figures obtained by The Globe and Mail, have been evading the authorities for more than two years.

Of the foreign nationals due to be deported, 401 are serving a prison sentence and must leave the country after they get out of custody.

Border bill would create 'in limbo' foreign residents, refugee groups say

Luke Reimer, a CBSA spokesperson, said people facing deportation because of criminality are removed from the country "as soon as possible to ensure the protection and safety of Canada and the Canadian public."

Those considered to be serious criminals include people who have been convicted of offences punishable by a prison term of at least 10 years.

Border officers regularly review warrants "to identify new leads to locate wanted individuals or confirm that they are no longer in Canada," Mr. Reimer said. But some evade capture.

"Individuals subject to immigration enforcement have [an] incentive not to be found and may rely on family and community members to shelter them. In addition, some individuals may resort to using alternate identities to avoid detection," Mr. Reimer said.

Randy Hahn, a member of Lawyers for Secure Immigration, an advocacy group of immigration lawyers, said the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act stresses the need to maintain Canada's security. He said that efforts to track down criminals facing deportation need to be stepped up and "enforcement mechanisms should be applied more effectively."

Mr. Hahn said that it appeared that some foreign nationals with criminal records had evaded capture for decades. The CBSA figures show that 38 foreign nationals were guilty of "in-Canada criminality" under the 1976 Immigration Act, which was updated in 2001. Eighteen of them are on the CBSA's "wanted inventory" and have not been located.

Conservative immigration critic Michelle Rempel Garner questioned whether there was "a lack of political will" by the government to track down such individuals.

Foreign nationals facing deportation, including failed asylum claimants, have the right to appeal to the courts. The process can take years.

Most foreign nationals facing deportation are supervised in the community, with some subjected to electronic monitoring and the requirement to report to the authorities.

The CBSA said 29 foreign nationals with criminal records facing deportation are currently detained.

"Individuals that are subject to removal may be detained due to their danger to the public or unlikelihood to appear," Mr. Reimer said.

The CBSA has been moving away from detaining high-risk offenders in provincial prisons after objections from provinces and human-rights and migrants' advocates. Government plans to detain them instead in federal prisons were shelved after an outcry from human-rights groups. The CBSA runs a number of immigration holding centres, including in Laval, Que., Toronto and Surrey, B.C.

In December last year, three Chilean nationals were reported to have escaped from the Laval, Que., detention centre.

The three men were reported by Radio Canada to be facing deportation after they were suspected of belonging to a criminal association that specializes in home theft.

Thousands of foreigners' criminal convictions forgiven by Ottawa over 11-year span, raising transparency concerns

Strengthening the border and apprehending foreign nationals involved in crime have increased in urgency in Canada this year after U.S. President Donald Trump complained that Canada was allowing criminals to enter America.

In February, Ottawa listed seven transnational criminal gangs, including Mexican cartels, as terrorist entities. It has earmarked funds to hire more border and RCMP officers to clamp down on human trafficking and criminal gangs as part of a \$1.3-billion injection of cash in securing the border.

Last year, a Jordanian national was deported by the U.S. after crossing illegally from Canada where he was on the run from CBSA officers.

Mohammad Hasan Abdellatif Albana had slipped across the border to Canada from the United States in 2017 and then claimed asylum in an effort to stay. When he crossed the border back into the U.S. illegally, he was being sought by Canadian border agents after his appeals to remain in the country as a refugee had failed.

There has been a rise in the number of foreign criminals evading the authorities in recent years. In 2021, there were 469 foreign criminals facing deportation whose whereabouts were unknown, according to the figures obtained by The Globe and Mail.

At the time, the border services agency used a “Wanted by the CBSA” webpage with mug shots of missing high-risk offenders to help gain leads from the public. The webpage, set up in 2011, had featured 159 profiles of wanted individuals before it was taken down in 2023.

The wanted individuals included Abdirahman Moumin Okie from Ethiopia, a convicted sex offender, whose last known address was in Montreal. He was subject to a Canada-wide arrest warrant.

“This individual is inadmissible to Canada for serious criminality for being convicted of forcible confinement, committing a sexual assault along with another person and conspiracy to commit sexual assault,” the “Wanted” site said before it was taken down.

The CBSA said it has since closed down the web page “as investigative tools and methods have evolved.” It would not comment on whether Mr. Okie has since been tracked down and deported, saying it does not comment on individual cases.

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