

# A Comparative Analysis of Investor and Entrepreneur Immigration Programs in the United States and Canada (2024)

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## ABSTRACT

This review paper compares immigration programs for investors, and entrepreneurs in the United States and Canada as of 2024. It looks at how the programs are designed, who can apply, how much money is required, how applications are processed, recent policy changes, and what results have been seen so far. On the United States side, the focus is on the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program, the International Entrepreneur Rule, and the E-2 Treaty Investor visa. For Canada, the review examines the Start-Up Visa and the provincial entrepreneur streams. The review finds that: The United States EB-5 program requires large investments, and is mainly centered on creating jobs, with new reforms aimed at reducing fraud. The United States offers fewer direct options for start-up founders compared to Canada. Canada's Start-Up Visa allows entrepreneurs supported by investors to get permanent residence, with some positive, but still limited economic results so far. Canada's provincial programs give local governments flexibility, but lead to mixed rules and outcomes across provinces. Furthermore, both countries face trade-offs between attracting more applicants, ensuring program integrity, and supporting innovation. The paper also suggests measures of success, quicken processing for founder visas, and better tracking of long-term economic impact.

**Keywords:** Investor visas, entrepreneur immigration, EB-5, Start-Up Visa, International Entrepreneur Rule, provincial nominee program, immigration policy, Canada, United States.

## INTRODUCTION

Immigration is not only about people moving for work, and or family, it is also about attracting investors and entrepreneurs who can bring money, create jobs, and start innovative businesses. However, many developed nations use special immigration programs to make this happen. These programs are often called “investor visas”, or “entrepreneur/start-up visas”, and they are designed to strengthen the economy, while also offering foreign nationals a pathway to residence and, in most cases, citizenship (OECD, 2024).

Frankly speaking, there are two types of programs. Investor programs usually require a huge capital investment in an approved business or project. In return, applicants and their families may qualify for residency, provided they meet other conditions such as job creation. Meanwhile, entrepreneur or start-up programs, on the other hand, focus less on the amount of money invested, and more on the applicant's ability to launch and run a business that contributes to innovation and economic growth (Migration Policy Institute, 2019).

Additionally, the fine print such as the investment size, processing times, and whether permanent residence is granted will determine how attractive the program is, who applies, and what benefits the host country receives (USCIS, 2024; IRCC, 2024). On top of that, the United States and Canada are among the most popular destinations for investor and entrepreneur immigrants. For example, in the United States, the flagship program is the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program, which requires a substantial capital investment and proof that at least ten (10) jobs are created.

Other options include the International Entrepreneur Rule (IER), which provides temporary permission (parole) for founders of high-growth start-ups to work in the United States, and the E-2 Treaty Investor visa, which allows

investors from some countries to start and manage a business, but does not lead directly to a green card (USCIS, 2024). Hence, Canada takes a different approach, as regards this.

However, the Start-Up Visa (SUV) program targets innovative entrepreneurs backed by designated venture capital funds, angel investors, or incubators, and it offers a direct path to permanent residence. In addition, provinces run their own entrepreneur streams under the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), setting local requirements for investment amounts, net worth, and job creation (IRCC, 2024).

Furthermore, the major policy question is: i) should these programs focus on attracting large sums of capital quickly, or ii) should they prioritize innovative start-ups with long-term potential? Both models have strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, this paper compares the two countries' approaches, examining their goals, structures, and outcomes. It also explores how governments balance accessibility with program integrity, and how these choices shape economic results. (Table 1) below summarizes the main features of the United States and Canadian investor/entrepreneur programs as of 2024.

Table 1. Comparison of United States and Canadian Investor/Entrepreneur Immigration Programs (2024)

Feature	United States	Canada
<b>Main Programs</b>	EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program; International Entrepreneur Rule (IER); E2 Treaty Investor	Start-Up Visa (SUV); Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) entrepreneur streams
<b>Minimum Investment</b>	EB-5: \$800,000 (Targeted Employment Area) or \$1.05M elsewhere; E-2: "substantial" (no fixed amount); IER: funding/ownership thresholds	SUV: No fixed personal investment; requires backing from designated VC (\$200k+), angel investor (\$75k+), or incubator; PNP streams vary by province (often CAD \$150k–\$600k)
<b>Job Creation Requirement</b>	EB-5: 10 full-time jobs for U.S. workers (direct or indirect via Regional Centers); IER: growth/job potential evidence; E-2: must generate employment	SUV: Not fixed, but business must be viable and innovative; PNP streams usually require 1–2 full-time jobs created for Canadians
<b>Path to Permanent Residence</b>	EB-5: Direct route (conditional green card, then permanent); IER: parole only (no direct PR); E-2: nonimmigrant, no PR	SUV: Direct to permanent residence for applicant and family; PNP: work permit leading to PR if conditions are met
<b>Family Inclusion</b>	Spouse and dependent children included (EB-5, IER, E-2)	Spouse and dependent children included (SUV, PNP)
<b>Program Focus</b>	Capital investment, infrastructure, real estate, job creation	Innovation, start-ups, regional economic development
<b>Recent Reforms/Notes</b>	EB-5 Reform and Integrity Act (2022); USCIS updated EB-5 guidance in 2024; automatic threshold adjustments for IER	

### Scope And Approach

This paper uses a narrative review approach to bring together existing information about investor, and entrepreneur immigration programs in the United States and Canada. Instead of collecting new data, the review focuses on gathering, and interpreting evidence from reliable sources to form a clear, up-to-date picture of how these programs are designed and how they perform. Some of the main sources of information include:

- i. Government publications including official program guidelines, and policy updates from United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). These provide the most direct and authoritative details on eligibility, processing, and recent changes (USCIS, 2024; IRCC, 2023).
- ii. Program evaluations especially Canada's official evaluation of the Start-Up Visa, which offers insights into program effectiveness, and measurable outcomes (IRCC, 2023).
- iii. Peer-reviewed studies including academic research on the economic and migration impacts of investor visas, and entrepreneurship-based immigration programs, thereby; helping to place government policies in a broad evidence-based context (Shachar, 2020).
- iv. International analyses such as reports by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation, and Development (OECD), which compare how different countries use investor and entrepreneur visas to attract talent and capital (OECD, 2022).
- v. Reputable media and policy reports on some trusted sources that capture recent debates, reforms, and challenges around EB-5, the International Entrepreneur Rule, and Canada's Start-Up Visa.

However, attention was given to the most recent and relevant materials up to 2024, especially those addressing new reforms to the United States EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program, and adjustments to the International Entrepreneur Rule. To ensure accuracy and balance, evidence from several sources was cross-checked, and comparative studies were used wherever possible to understand how outcomes in the United States and Canada agrees with international trends. In this way, the review will go beyond describing rules "on paper", but rather highlight how these programs are working in practice, what risks they face, and how policy choices affect their success.

## Overview Of Programs

Investor and entrepreneur immigration programs in the United States, and in Canada share the same goal of attracting foreign talent as well as capital, but vary in their design and long-term net results. However, the United States system gives more attention on the size of investment, and job creation, while Canada focuses more on innovation, entrepreneurial support, and pathways to permanent settlement. Going further, I have simplified below a general overview of major programs in both countries.

### United States

#### EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program

The EB-5 Program allows foreign investors to get a United States green card by making a qualifying investment in a business, and creating at least 10 full-time jobs for American workers (USCIS, 2024a). However, investors can invest directly or through Regional Centers, which permit indirect job creation. Applicants first get conditional permanent residence for two years, and then apply for full permanent residence once the job requirement is proven. Furthermore, recent reforms have raised the minimum investment amounts, and tightened oversight to reduce fraud (USCIS, 2024a).

#### International Entrepreneur Rule (IER)

The International Entrepreneur Rule is designed for start-up founders who can show strong growth potential, or secure significant investment from United States investors. Additionally, it provides temporary legal stay and work authorization tied to the business, usually up to five years with renewals (USCIS, 2024b). While it does not directly lead to a green card, it offer entrepreneurs time to grow their companies, and later on switch to other immigration options. It is on this note that the Department of Homeland Security has updated its rules and guidance in recent years (Federal Register, 2024).

#### E-2 Treaty Investor Visa

The E-2 visa allows nationals of countries that have treaties with the United States to invest a "substantial" amount in a United States business and manage it (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Although, it is not a pathway to permanent residence, but rather a flexible option for entrepreneurs from eligible countries.

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## Canada

### Start-Up Visa (SUV) Program

Canada's Start-Up Visa Program grants permanent residence to entrepreneurs who secure a letter of support from a designated venture capital fund, angel investor group, or business incubator (IRCC, 2023). Also, applicants must also meet language and settlement fund requirements. However, the SUV is focused on innovative, job-creating businesses. Hence, evaluations show positive results, but also note challenges including long processing times, and limited data on long-term outcomes (IRCC, 2023).

### Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) Entrepreneur Streams

According to (IRCC, 2024) report, provinces and territories in Canada operate their own business immigration streams under the PNP. These programs have different rules for net worth, investment size, job creation, and management responsibilities. Hence, this flexibility allows provinces to tailor requirements to local economic needs, but it also means results vary across regions.

### Program Design: Eligibility, Investment, and Duration

The design of investor and entrepreneur immigration programs depends largely on how much money applicants must invest, what kind of proof they provide, how long the program lasts, and whether family members can join. However, the United States and Canada approach these elements differently, thus; showing their distinct policy priorities.

### Investment Thresholds and Requirements

#### EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program (United States)

In order to qualify for EB-5, investors are required to put in a reasonable amount of money into a United States business. However, the minimum amount was USD \$1.05 million, but this could be reduced to USD \$800,000 if the investment was made in a Targeted Employment Area (TEA), usually a rural or high-unemployment region (USCIS, 2024a).

In addition to showing a lawful source of funds, applicants must demonstrate that their investment will create at least 10 full-time jobs for United States workers. Those who invest through Regional Centers can count indirect job creation. Hence, recent reforms and new USCIS guidance (2024) have introduced a more strict compliance rules, with stronger monitoring, and penalties for misuse of funds.

#### International Entrepreneur Rule (IER, United States)

The IER is different from EB-5 because it does not set a fixed investment amount. Instead, applicants must prove that their start-up has received significant funding from qualified United States investors, or that the company shows strong growth potential (USCIS, 2024b). These requirements are outlined in DHS rules and Federal Register updates (2024). Therefore, the program provides parole status, usually for up to five years with possible extensions, but does not guarantee permanent residence.

#### Start-Up Visa (SUV, Canada)

Canada's SUV program takes a more flexible approach. Instead of requiring entrepreneurs to "buy in" with a set amount, applicants must obtain endorsement from a recognized venture capital fund, angel investor group, or business incubator (IRCC, 2023). For example, venture capital funds must invest at least CAD \$200,000, and angel investors at least CAD \$75,000, while incubators offer endorsement based on program admission rather than cash (IRCC, 2023).

In addition, applicants must meet language requirements and also show that they have enough money to support themselves upon arrival. Evaluations have noted delays with long processing times, and a lack of detailed evidence on long-term economic results (IRCC, 2023).

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## Pathway Permanence and Family Inclusion

### EB-5 (United States)

EB-5 provides a direct path to United States permanent residence. Applicants will first receive a two-year conditional green card and, after proving job creation, can transit into full permanent residence. This pathway also includes the applicant's spouse and unmarried children under 21 years of age, thus; making it more attractive for families (USCIS, 2024a).

### International Entrepreneur Rule (United States)

IER is temporary. It provides parole tied to the start-up, not permanent residence. Therefore, family members may also receive parole to accompany the entrepreneur, but long-term residence must be achieved through other visa categories (USCIS, 2024b).

### Start-Up Visa (Canada)

Moreso, SUV offers a clear and permanent path. Therefore, successful applicants are granted permanent residence right away, and this includes their spouse and dependent children. Furthermore, this makes SUV appealing, most especially for entrepreneurs who want stability for their families, while building businesses in Canada (IRCC, 2023).

## Program Administration, Integrity, and Reforms

### United States

The administration of United States investor and entrepreneur programs has undergone major reforms in recently, especially in response to concerns about fraud, inconsistent oversight, and unclear program outcomes. However, the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program has historically attracted billions of dollars in foreign capital, but has also faced criticism for misuse, within Regional Centers, where job creation is sometimes indirect and difficult to verify (USCIS, 2024).

To address these concerns, the EB-5 Reform and Integrity Act of 2022 introduced new measures, including stronger reporting requirements, audits, background checks on promoters, and stricter punishment for noncompliance. However, in 2024, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) updated its Policy Manual to make clear the responsibilities of project entities, and strengthen investor protections (USCIS, 2024a). These steps shows an ongoing effort to make the program more transparent and credible.

Moreover, the International Entrepreneur Rule (IER), on the other hand, has remained an important option for startup founders who do not have access to capital-intensive programs such as the EB-5. While it does not provide a direct pathway to permanent residence, the IER allows founders to temporarily live and work in the United States if only they can demonstrate significant startup potential, including attracting private investment or showing rapid business growth.

Conversely, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has periodically updated guidance on IER, including automatic adjustments to funding thresholds in 2024, to making the rule more adaptable to changing economic conditions (Federal Register, 2024). However, challenges still remain that the parole-based nature of the program limits long-term certainty for founders, and uptake has been relatively low compared to the EB-5 visa category.

Going further, United States reforms shows a balancing act between attracting foreign capital, and ensuring integrity. While EB-5 continues to favor wealthy investors, the IER shows a dynamic, but still limited openness to founder-led startups.

### Canada

On the contrary, Canada adopts a different approach, with program administration centered on Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) working in partnership with private sector players. The Start-Up Visa (SUV) Program relies on endorsements from designated venture capital funds, angel investors, or business

incubators. This public–private collaboration is designed to align immigration selection with innovation and job creation objectives.

However, an official IRCC program evaluation (Government of Canada, 2022) found that SUV agrees with national priorities, helps Canada attract innovative entrepreneurs, and shows early signs of positive economic impact. At the same time, the evaluation took into consideration major areas for improvement such as the need for better performance indicators, a more reliable long-term data, and a shorter processing times, since start-up ventures often operate on fast timelines.

In addition to the federal SUV, Canadian provinces run their own Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) entrepreneur streams. These streams allow provinces to setup their own investment, net worth, and job creation requirements in order to meet local needs (Government of Canada, 2024). While this flexibility is valuable, it also creates a patchwork of rules that can confuse applicants, thereby resulting in uneven program outcomes across provinces.

## Outcomes and Empirical Evidence

**Economic impact and job creation:** The EB-5 has been a major source of foreign capital in the United States, especially in real estate and infrastructure projects. However, researchers note that the program often give more attention to capital inflows over direct entrepreneurship, and job creation impacts can be difficult to measure (Papademetriou and Sumption, 2020).

By contrast, Canada’s SUV has a stronger founder-focus. Although the total number of SUV firms is still relatively small, evaluations show these businesses have contributed to job creation and innovation ecosystems (IRCC, 2022; OECD, 2023).

**Accessibility for founders and capital investors:** The United States EB-5 program mainly benefits wealthy investors who may not be the actual entrepreneurs running the business. However, Canada’s SUV, in contrast, is designed for active founders of innovative start-ups, which makes it more easy to access an earlystage entrepreneurs with strong ideas, but with less capital (OECD, 2023).

## Comparative Strengths and Weaknesses

### United States Strengths:

- i. The EB-5 provides a direct pathway to permanent residence, citizenship, and family inclusion.
- ii. It involves large-scale capital inflows, and access to the United States market.
- iii. Also, the recent reforms have improved oversight and integrity (USCIS, 2024a).

### United States Weaknesses:

- i. The high investment thresholds ranging from \$800,000–\$1.05M, make EB-5 inaccessible to many.
- ii. Moreso, history of fraud, and delayed processing times reduce reliability.
- iii. Furthermore, limited founder-focused options, makes it temporary, parole-based, and underutilized.

### Canada Strengths:

- i. The start-Up Visa offers a direct permanent residence pathway for innovative founders alongside their family members.
- ii. It involves lower capital barriers compared to EB-5; with a focus on ecosystem support through endorsements.
- iii. The evidence shows positive outcomes in attracting and retaining entrepreneurs (IRCC, 2022).

### Canada Weaknesses:

- i. The processing times remain a major challenge, often misaligned with start-up business timelines.

- ii. Also, the number of SUV firms remains modest compared to demand.
- iii. Finally, provincial nominee programs is difficulty due to varied rules and requirements (Government of Canada, 2024).

## DISCUSSION

This comparative review shows that the United States and Canada have taken different approaches to using immigration policy as a tool for attracting investment and entrepreneurship. It is important to note that the United States EB-5 program is centered around capital inflows and job creation, whereas Canada's Start-Up Visa (SUV) is focused on entrepreneurial talent, innovation, and integration into local ecosystems. However, both strategies have clear strengths, but they also come with trade-offs that shape who applies, the kinds of businesses created, and the long-term impact on their economies.

One significant difference lies in scalability versus selectivity. The EB-5 program has been able to generate large amounts of capital quickly, often channeling funds into real estate or infrastructural projects (Papademetriou and Sumption, 2020). However, evaluators note that some investors are more interested in obtaining residency, rather than actively engaging in business creation (USCIS, 2024a).

In contrast, the Canadian SUV admits fewer entrepreneurs, but those who do enter are often better aligned with innovation-driven goals such as technology startups, and knowledge-intensive firms (Government of Canada, 2022).

Another trade-off relates to integrity versus access. Because the EB-5 category involves huge amount of money, strict rules, and oversight mechanisms have been introduced to reduce fraud and misuse most recently through the EB-5 Reform and Integrity Act of 2022 and updated USCIS guidance in 2024 (USCIS, 2024b; Reuters, 2022).

These measures has helped protect investors and the system, but they also make processing longer and more difficult. Canada, on the other hand, delegates much of the selection process to designated venture capital funds, angel groups, and incubators. This approach leverages private expertise, but introduces variability, since the quality and motivations of endorsing organizations can differ (OECD, 2023).

However, the two models also differ in economic alignment. EB-5 projects frequently contribute to construction jobs, and physical infrastructure, which are valuable but not always innovation-driven (Papademetriou and Sumption, 2020). By contrast, the SUV is designed to place founders into Canada's innovation ecosystem, supported by investors and incubators, with the expectation of creating technologyfocused, growth-oriented firms (Government of Canada, 2022).

Findings from OECD, (2023) suggest that, while both models contribute economically, better metrics are needed to measure results such as firm survival, innovation capacity, patents, and follow-on venture funding.

Based on this comparison, several policy suggestions emerge as discussed below:

- i. **Improve data and performance indicators:** Both countries need to track results more thoroughly. Also, Canada's IRCC evaluation explicitly recommended stronger performance indicators in order to to assess job quality, firm survival, and innovation outputs (Government of Canada, 2022).
- ii. **Expand founder pathways in the United States:** While EB-5 serves wealthy investors, the United States still lacks a permanent start-up visa pathway. Expanding founder-focused routes, modeled on the Canadian SUV or other OECD countries, could help attract more innovative entrepreneurs (CGO, 2021).
- iii. **Strengthen oversight of intermediaries:** Both EB-5 regional centers, and Canada's designated endorsers require strict monitoring. Additionally, the United States has already moved in this direction with the Reform and Integrity Act (USCIS, 2024b), and Canada may need to introduce a clear standard and accountability for its endorsing organizations (Reuters, 2022).

Furthermore, while the United States prioritizes capital-based immigration and Canada prioritizes talent-based entrepreneurship, each could borrow lessons from the other. Hence, the United States could develop more

founder-oriented policies, while Canada could strengthen oversight and expand program scale. Together, these improvements could make both systems more effective in meeting economic and innovation goals.

## CONCLUSION

Conclusively, by 2024, the United States and Canada clearly demonstrate two different philosophies when it comes to using immigration policy to attract investors and entrepreneurs. On top of that, the United States has built its main pathway, the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program, around large-scale capital investment, and job creation.

This program offers a direct route to permanent residence, which is attractive to high-net-worth individuals, but the high cost of entry limits access mainly to wealthy investors. However, past misuse and fraud cases have forced repeated reforms, most recently through the EB-5 Reform and Integrity Act and new USCIS guidance, which now emphasize stronger oversight and accountability.

Beyond EB-5, the United States also provides temporary or limited options such as the International Entrepreneur Rule (IER), and the E-2 Treaty Investor visa, but these do not create a stable, permanent pathway for innovative founders.

In contrast, Canada has taken a different pathway with its Start-Up Visa (SUV), which directly targets entrepreneurs with innovative business ideas and backing from trusted private-sector endorsers such as venture capital firms, angel investors, or incubators. Unlike the EB-5, the SUV is not about buying residency through capital; but about supporting founders who can contribute to innovation and long-term economic growth.

On top of that, the SUV grants permanent residence from the outset and allows family inclusion, making it more accessible to younger founders and startup teams. However, it admits fewer number of applicants compared to EB-5 and still faces setbacks around bureaucratic delays, small program scale, and the need for a more systematic outcome tracking.

Observing both models side by side, the lesson for policymakers is clear. The program goals must be straight forward, and program design should point out those goals. Therefore, if the aim is quick capital inflow, high investment thresholds and large infrastructure projects (like those supported by EB-5) may be appropriate. But, if the goal is to strengthen innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems, models like Canada's SUV may be more effective. In either case, a strong oversight and reliable data collection are essential to ensure that these programs deliver real economic value, protect participants, and maintain public confidence.

Furthermore, in the future, a hybrid approach may be most effective. The United States could benefit from developing a permanent founder-focused visa to complement its capital-driven EB-5, while Canada could strengthen oversight of endorsers and expand the scale of its SUV.

Both countries would gain from improved performance indicators that track not only money invested and jobs created, but also firm survival, innovative outcomes, and long-term contributions to their economies. Ultimately, immigration policies that balance capital, talent, and integrity will be best positioned to deliver sustainable economic growth in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

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