

Evaluation of the International Experience Canada Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluation Division

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Executive Summary

The evaluation of the International Experience Canada (IEC) Program was conducted in fulfilment of requirements of the Treasury Board 2016 *Policy on Results*. The evaluation covered the period since the program's transfer from Global Affairs Canada (GAC) to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) (FY 2013-14 to FY 2017-18).

Evaluation Findings

Relevance

Overall, there is a continued need for a youth mobility program and the IEC Program has effectively facilitated cultural and employment experiences of participants while also providing important international bilateral benefits at the federal government level.

Further, the evaluation found that the program is aligned with Government of Canada priorities, particularly given the current focus on youth, and also with IRCC's mandate and priorities, mainly with regard to facilitating the entry of foreign nationals. As the program intersects a number of themes related to immigration, employment, culture, international relations and youth, the IEC also aligns with the mandates of other government departments, including GAC, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), Canadian Heritage (PCH), and the Prime Minister's Youth Secretariat.

Performance – Effectiveness

Reciprocity

Youth Mobility Agreements (YMA) signed between Canada and partner countries are designed to be reciprocal both in terms of quotas (i.e., the number of program participants) and opportunities offered, as required under Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (paragraph 205(b)) which forms the basis of the Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) exemption for open work permits issued through IEC.

Despite reciprocity's central role in the design of YMA, reciprocity in program participation has been a major challenge over the last several years, as demonstrated by the significantly greater number of foreign youth participating in the program annually than Canadian youth. Evidence points to some quota management decisions that have contributed to this reciprocal disparity, including attempts made to limit the increase of country-specific quotas and the expansion of YMA to new countries despite low Canadian participation over the last 10 years. Further, other factors were found to be potentially limiting Canadian participation, such as the onerous program application requirements of other countries and economic conditions abroad (e.g., minimum wages and youth unemployment rates in YMA countries).

Awareness of IEC Program

To increase Canadian awareness of and participation in the program, IEC has conducted various promotional activities mainly focusing on Canadian youth and, more recently, on "youth influencers". While promotional activities are relatively new, and it will take a few more years before noticing changes in awareness behaviour, Canadian youth awareness of and participation in the program have remained relatively low thus far.

Cultural and Professional Experiences

Findings showed that foreign and Canadian youth have gained various cultural and professional experiences as a result of their participation in the IEC program. The most common cultural experiences identified by foreign and Canadian youth included: visiting cultural sites, participating in cultural activities, and developing friendships. In terms of key cultural benefits gained from IEC program participation, foreign and Canadian youth reported learning about a new country or culture, gaining international experience that contributed to their personal growth, and taking part in explorations and adventures.

Further, both foreign and Canadian youth participants have gained professional experiences during their time abroad as part of the IEC Program. Recent data showed a high incidence of employment among foreign youth participants in Canada and that their average employment earnings have been steadily increasing. Obtaining international career experience and professional development was also identified by many foreign and Canadian youth as a key benefit of their participation.

Supporting Canada's International, Economic and Social Interests

Overall, the IEC Program is supporting Canada's social, international and economic interests. From a social perspective, international experiences increase youth awareness and understanding of other cultures and evidence also points to the program being key to supporting Canada's international interests, acting as a tool in bilateral relations with other countries. Moreover, a small portion of IEC foreign youth who came to Canada under the IEC Program between 2013 and 2017 transitioned to permanent residence, further enriching Canada's diversity.

From an economic standpoint, the program provides a potential pool of temporary workers and also contributes to the tourism industry in Canada.

Given that the number of foreign youth participants in the program considerably outnumber their Canadian counterparts (on average 3:1 annually over the last five years), there may be potential for displacement within the Canadian labour market. However, the evaluation did not find conclusive evidence that displacement has occurred, pointing to the need for additional advanced research to assess IEC's full impact on the Canadian labour market.

Program Delivery and Integrity

There were no major challenges associated with program delivery and overall, roles and responsibilities of program groups within IRCC, as well as between IRCC and other government departments (OGD) are clear and understood. Moreover, communication and coordination between program groups within IRCC and between IRCC and OGDs has been effective. However, the evaluation did find that there is a need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Recognized Organizations (ROs) as well as to improve communication between IRCC and ROs, mainly with respect to governance and oversight. As of October 2018, the Department negotiated new MOUs with ROs and assigned new resources to address these issues.

IRCC generally processed IEC applications within prescribed service standards during the period covered by the evaluation. Further, the program has implemented quality assurance mechanisms; no major program integrity issues were identified.

Resource Utilization

IEC Program resources have increased over the recent years, though IRCC's share of overall program costs has decreased (relative to other government departments) and have been offset by increasing revenues.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The IEC Program is aligned with departmental priorities and has contributed to the achievement of several expected program outcomes, namely the timely entry of foreign youth, providing cultural and professional experiences for participants, and supporting Canada's international, social and economic interests. However, the evaluation found several areas for improvement in the program:

- the management of reciprocity;
- the limited awareness of the program and its benefits among Canadian youth, affecting program uptake;
- the need to conduct further research into program impacts on the Canadian labour market; and
- the lack of program monitoring and data collection on Canadian youth travelling abroad as part of IEC.

As a result, the following recommendations were developed to address these issues:

Recommendation 1: IRCC should reconfirm and clearly articulate the focus of the IEC Program, specifically in relation to:

- the program mandate and expected outcomes; and
- the policy translation and implementation of the reciprocity principle.

Recommendation 2: IRCC should enhance the promotion of the IEC Program to Canadian youth, with the aim of increasing their awareness of the benefits the program offers, and their participation in the program.

Recommendation 3: To support the monitoring of program outcomes related to Canadian youth going abroad, IRCC should establish effective data collection and management strategies.

Recommendation 4: IRCC should undertake in-depth research to further assess the full impact of the IEC Program on the Canadian labour market.