



December 2020

ENGAGED IN THE WORLD

Executive Report

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Introduction

The Office of the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces published its report entitled [*Engaged in the world: A systemic investigation into the administration of postings, assignments and employments of Defence Team personnel outside of Canada*](#) on December 15, 2020.

Our investigation looked at the experience of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members, Department of National Defence (DND) employees, staff of the Non-Public Funds (NPF) as well as family members posted outside of Canada (OUTCAN).

As of June 2020, there were over 4,000 CAF members, DND employees, staff of the NPF and their families posted to 70 countries OUTCAN

The continuation of Canada's participation in OUTCAN postings is essential in helping our nation meet international obligations.

What did we learn?

One theme that came up repeatedly was a lack of effective communication and administrative support. Participants felt inadequately prepared and ill-informed about the realities of living abroad. As a result, they felt under prepared for the reality of an OUTCAN posting. This investigation also revealed specific areas for improvement. These areas include:

- OUTCAN Programme oversight;
- policy interpretation and application;
- complex or absent screening and pre-posting processes;
- OUTCAN relocations;
- administrative challenges faced by Defence Team personnel at post;
- health and safety awareness in the host country; and
- emergency evacuation processes.

We identified 16 findings and made 13 recommendations to address these findings. In addition, we presented 22 observations.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: By September 2022, the CAF, DND and Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS) ensure that:

- 1.1 Any gaps in the resourcing of support personnel within the OUTCAN Programme are identified and addressed; and
- 1.2 All support personnel and stakeholders involved in the OUTCAN Programme are well informed of their responsibilities, and that mechanisms are put in place to validate the effectiveness of this process.

Recommendation 2: By September 2022, the CAF, DND and CFMWS develop and implement a communication plan. The plan should assess and address communication gaps in all phases of the process, including local information gaps, to increase awareness of the OUTCAN Programme and ensure that all Defence Team personnel are adequately prepared for their OUTCAN posting.

Recommendation 3: By January 2023, the CAF conduct:

- 3.1 A comprehensive comparative review to identify and address all sections of the Military Foreign Service Instructions that are a duplication of the Foreign Service Directives; and
- 3.2 A review to validate the sections in the Instructions that address specific military requirements or mandate.

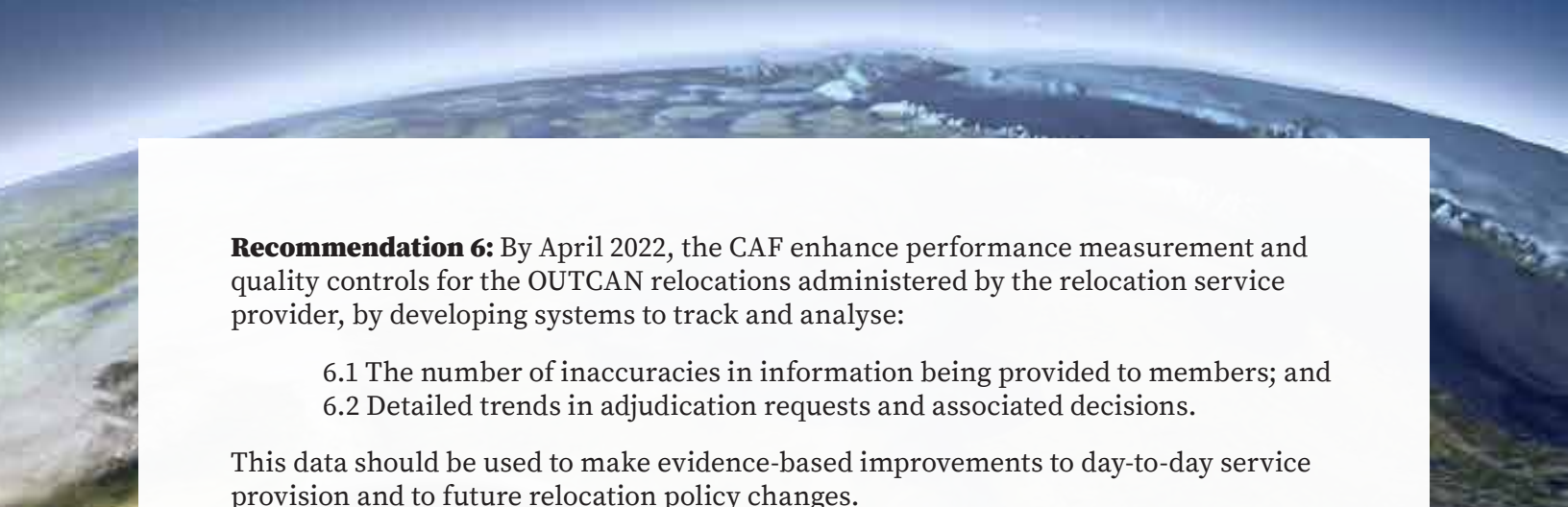
The results of these reviews should be compiled and submitted to the approving authority.

Recommendation 4: By January 2023, the CAF strengthen oversight of the OUTCAN Programme, by:

- 4.1 Enhancing data integrity and quality controls moving forward;
- 4.2 Establishing a formalized process to capture lessons learned to improve business operations;
- 4.3 Improving overall coordination among the stakeholders to encourage the sharing of information and best practices; and
- 4.4 Establishing a performance measurement strategy to monitor and assess the administration of the OUTCAN Programme.

Recommendation 5: By January 2022, the CAF establish support for screening that is easily accessible to CAF members and their families, by:

- 5.1 Making the screening form and overall process fully digitized;
- 5.2 Establishing formal service standards for all steps of the screening process; and
- 5.3 Standardizing and communicating the process for CAF members and their families for obtaining their passports and visas.



Recommendation 6: By April 2022, the CAF enhance performance measurement and quality controls for the OUTCAN relocations administered by the relocation service provider, by developing systems to track and analyse:

- 6.1 The number of inaccuracies in information being provided to members; and
- 6.2 Detailed trends in adjudication requests and associated decisions.

This data should be used to make evidence-based improvements to day-to-day service provision and to future relocation policy changes.

Recommendation 7: By January 2022, the CAF ensure that all members posted OUTCAN have a clear understanding of the local health and safety protocols and processes.

Recommendation 8: By January 2022, the CAF, DND and CFMWS conduct a review of and update the Emergency Evacuation plans. This review should consider all Defence Team personnel and their families.

Recommendation 9: By June 2021, the CAF improve the process for the management of children's education requests, by increasing transparency in the communication of decisions to CAF members through their support units, including the rationale for decisions and the development of a standardized process for correspondence with members.

Recommendation 10: By January 2022, the DND must review the processes in place for the administration of the OUTCAN Programme, update the processes accordingly, and establish a periodic review plan.

Recommendation 11: By January 2022, the CAF, DND and CFMWS conduct a review of and update the Emergency Evacuation plans. This review should consider all Defence Team personnel and their families.

Recommendation 12: By January 2022, CFMWS establish a formalized screening process for the sponsored Staff of the NPF.

Recommendation 13: By January 2022, the CAF, DND and CFMWS conduct a review of and update the Emergency Evacuation plans. This review should consider all Defence Team personnel and their families.



What else did we find out?

Many members of the Defence community consider an OUTCAN posting as very desirable. However, our investigation found they face challenges that are unique to this experience. These challenges include:

- increased stress levels;
- a sense of helplessness combined with uncertainty;
- frustration; and
- isolation (especially for family members).

Challenges aside, most of the people with whom we spoke would be willing to take on another OUTCAN posting.

Why did we investigate OUTCAN?

During the period of 1 January 2014 to 31 March 2019, we received 61 complaints about OUTCAN postings. The majority of these complaints involved the interpretation and administration of Programme services and benefits as well as the perceived unfairness of the OUTCAN posting process as a whole. As a result, we identified OUTCAN as a priority area for investigation in 2019-2020.

What do we do with the recommendations of this investigation?

Periodically, we will follow up on our 13 recommendations to determine how the CAF, DND, and NPF have responded to our recommendations. Our first progress report on the OUTCAN Programme will occur one year after we publish this report.

Our hope is that our recommendations will have a long-lasting and positive impact on the Defence community that ultimately will improve the OUTCAN experience for all participants.



How did we conduct this investigation?

- In June 2019, the Ombudsman announced the launch of a systemic investigation of the administrative, procedural and policy challenges associated with the OUTCAN Programme.
- We conducted all constituent interviews on a voluntary basis.
- We did our interviews on-site in one-on-one and focus group situations as well as via telephone and virtual questionnaires.
- In total, we spoke with 260 members of the CAF, DND civilian employees, and staff of the NPF as well as their family members, posted in 33 different countries. We also contacted 25 internal and external stakeholder groups who provide support, policy guidance, or are otherwise involved in the OUTCAN Programme.
- In addition to the telephone interviews, we travelled to six countries to meet with our constituents in person. These countries are Belgium, Germany, Italy, Latvia, United Kingdom, and the United States.

For more information

The full version of this report, educational products related to OUTCAN and more information about our systemic investigative process are available on our website.