



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

2018-19 International Experience Canada (IEC) youth study

Executive summary

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This public opinion research report presents the results of a quantitative online survey and a qualitative online community conducted by Environics Research on behalf of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. The survey was conducted with 520 Canadian youth and the community was conducted with 80 Canadian youth in March 2019.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : **Étude sur les jeunes d'Expérience internationale Canada (EIC) 2018-19**

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Executive summary

Background and objectives

International Experience Canada (IEC) is a program managed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) which offers Canadian citizen youth aged 18-35 the opportunity to travel and work in one of over 30 partner countries/territories. Though the program aims to be reciprocal with its partners, participation in the program by Canadian youth is not as strong as our partner countries. IEC has a targeted stakeholder engagement and promotion plan in place, with the goal of increasing awareness of opportunities abroad, and increasing Canadian youth participation in the program.

With this broader goal in mind, the primary objective of this research is to evaluate knowledge of the IEC program among its target audiences. More specifically, the objectives of the research include measuring:

- previous travel and or work abroad experience (where, main objective of travel, duration, etc.)
- awareness of the IEC program
- motivations and barriers to participating in international work abroad experiences, such as those facilitated by the IEC program
- perceived benefits of travel or work abroad experience

Insights about perceived barriers and motivators to pursuing work abroad experiences will inform policy and allow targeted engagement and promotion. The survey results will also be used to inform corporate performance reporting requirements (such as Performance Information Profiles and associated Performance Measurement Strategy Framework) for the IEC program.

Methodology

To meet the research objectives, both quantitative and qualitative research was conducted. The quantitative phase consisted of an online survey which screened for youth with previous international work/study/volunteer experience. The qualitative phase was conducted with youth who would be eligible for the IEC program but who do not necessarily have international work/study/volunteer experience.

1. A **quantitative online survey** conducted March 15 to 27, 2019, with 520 Canadian youth (recruited from an online panel) aged 18-35 who self-identify as having either previously participated in the IEC program or obtained a visa to work/study/volunteer abroad. The online survey screened panellists to ensure they were IEC-eligible to provide incidence estimates for this group. It also served as the source for recruiting participants to the second, qualitative phase of the research. The survey was approximately 8 minutes in length and explored behaviours and attitudes toward international travel, perceived benefits and barriers of an international experience, awareness & perceptions of the IEC program and likelihood of future participation in the IEC program.
2. A selection of the youth screened for the quantitative online survey were also invited to participate in a two-day **qualitative online community**. The online community required input from participants on two separate days and was conducted over a total window of six days, from March 21 to 26, 2019. A total of

80 youth aged 18-35 from across the country participated and each was given an honorarium of \$100. In order to get input from specific groups of interest to IRCC, youth were screened and included from each of the following groups: General population East (Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada) and West (The Prairies, BC and the Territories), LGBTQ2+ youth, Indigenous youth, youth women in STEM and youth with mobility/hearing impairments.

A more detailed methodology is presented in Appendix A of this report.

Statement of limitations: Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as measured in a quantitative survey. The results of the qualitative research should be viewed as indicative rather than projectable to the population.

Since online panel surveys are not a random probability samples, no formal estimates of sampling error can be calculated. Although not employing a random probability samples, online surveys can be used for general population surveys provided they are well designed and employ a large, well-maintained panel.

Contract value

The contract value was \$122,290.24 (HST included).

Key findings

Qualitative phase

Participants show a general preoccupation with travelling that elicits strong positive emotional responses and often describe themselves as ‘travel enthusiasts.’ For some, affordability influences their perception of travel, leading to frustration with the financial constraints that prevent them from pursuing it. Only rarely do they mention wariness about negative events such as terrorism, violence or natural disasters.

Most participants have at least some international travel experience. English speakers are more interested in Asia and Australia as desired future travel destinations, while French speakers tend toward locations in the U.S. Reasons given for these destinations include discovering their heritage/visiting family, satisfying their curiosity about certain cultures, exploring history/art or simply having an adventure.

Immersion in another culture and achieving personal growth are underlying motivations to study or work abroad. Participants value ‘stepping outside of their comfort zone’ and the enrichment and perspective it would provide them. Living abroad provides a greater opportunity to learn than leisure travel and many feel it would be valued by employers and enhance their employment prospects in Canada. Developing personal connections and the possibility of new friendships are also benefits.

Two broad groups can be defined by their travel motivations: **Experientialists** who desire new experiences that influence their mind-set and **Escapists** who desire to escape daily life and to enjoy leisure. Further analysis reveals four segments, three of which are subsets of the **experientialists**:

- **authentic travellers**, for whom travel is about exploration and excitement; it is directed at satisfying curiosities about cultures, people and places

- **experienced explorers** are drawn to new destinations as they already have international experience; they see travel as an essential learning experience and a self-reflective exercise that broadens their horizons
- **inexperienced but eager** travellers have travelled less and tend to be younger and less financially stable; they are eager, excited and determined to see the world and experience new things

The final segment consists of **escapists**:

- **no-hassle hedonists** consider themselves tourists on vacation seeking to escape their everyday lives; travel is seen as a well-deserved reward

Some participants are open to working/studying/volunteering abroad, but it is often not front of mind when they discuss travel. Participants say they would consider it if the opportunity presented itself, but it is generally a more passive consideration than an active interest. Living abroad is associated both with the excitement of having new experiences and the fear of leaving their familiar, established lives. Overall, there is less eagerness to work/study/volunteer than to travel abroad, though **experientialists** more often express enthusiasm about it than **escapists**.

The major barrier mentioned is **affordability**. Participants often cite a lack of employment, limited savings and student (and other) debt as problems. **Language barriers** are also potentially overwhelming, especially among those who are not confident in their language skills. This is seen as being likely to compound other potential issues including **gaining stable employment**. Finding work is seen as a barrier for several reasons: a perception that working abroad requires one to go through a complex application process, concerns about the transferability of qualifications/skills or a lack of employable skills. **Social disconnection** and separation from family are also barriers. Fear of social isolation is especially common among introverts who worry about making social connections.

There is a general lack of awareness of the IEC program: most participants are unaware of it and what it offers. Those who are familiar usually hear about it from friends/family or from looking into work abroad opportunities themselves. Many find the program interesting and feel that more information/knowledge about the program would make them more inclined to participate, but that their participation would be contingent on overcoming the common barriers (language, employment and finances). Others say their current life circumstances (children, career, etc.) prevent them from participating.

Participants from the population sub-groups of interest are equally enthusiastic about travel as general population participants and are no more or less likely to be interested in studying/working/ volunteering abroad. They share similar views about the benefits of the experience and foresee the same challenges already mentioned above, but also point out some which are unique to their experience. For people with mobility impairments, accommodation is a challenge and there is serious concern about reliable access to medical care among those taking medications. Those with mental health issues like anxiety and depression face barriers due to existing struggles with isolation and many say that living aboard would mean disconnecting from their support networks. Although cultural attitudes (and what they may mean for their personal safety) are major considerations for LGBTQ2+ youth and women, they also mention the same barriers as other groups.

Quantitative phase

The demographic profile of Canadian youth who have obtained a visa or permit to work, study or volunteer outside of Canada skews toward males and people from Ontario relative to the census population of Canadian citizens aged 18-35. Less than a third of those who obtained a visa/work permit say they participated in the IEC program. A little more than half obtained a visa to study, a little less than half to work and only around a third did so to volunteer (people could get more than one type).

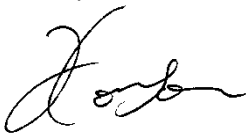
International travel experience is viewed positively by those who obtained a visa/work permit or participated in the IEC program: it leads to personal growth, learning experiences and exploration. The most common challenges faced were language barriers, financial concerns and isolation. Many in this group see future travel for leisure purposes as a near certainty, while sizeable proportions say they are very likely to work (34%), study (24%) or volunteer (22%) internationally in the future. Few say it is unlikely that they would do these things in the future but studying abroad is the option that the fewest people said they would likely do.

More than half (55%) say they know at least a little bit about the IEC program but a third have never heard of it. Among those who are unaware of IEC, two in five are interested in more information; they are most interested in getting information via a general internet search. Former participants are very satisfied with their IEC experience, saying it was a great life experience and that would recommend it to their friends and family.

A slim majority of those with a past international work/study/volunteer experience say they are likely to participate in a program like IEC in the future; those who do not say they are likely to participate in the future most often cite family or financial/career commitments.

Political neutrality statement and contact information

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