



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

2022 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 bulletin board conducted by Environics Research on behalf of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. The quantitative survey was conducted with 2,504 Canadian youth and 1,050 parents of Canadian youth, and the bulletin board was conducted with 108 Canadian youth and 39 parents of Canadian youth in March 2022.

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Executive summary

Background and objectives

International Experience Canada (IEC), a program managed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) enables young Canadians to work and travel abroad. For Canadian citizens aged 18-35, IEC provides a path to a work permit or visa, giving them opportunities to work and explore one of over 30 countries and territories. Because it is a reciprocal program, foreign youth from partner countries/territories can do the same in Canada. The program includes options for Open Work Permits (i.e. Working Holiday) which do not require a job offer, and Employer-Specific permits that are tied to a valid job offer.

IEC as a program aims to maximize reciprocity between international youth participation and Canadian youth participation. As a result, the primary objective of this research is to provide insights that will help IEC increase Canadian youth participation in the program. This involves evaluating the 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
- the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on attitudes and travel intentions
- experiences and attitudes in key target groups including LGBTQ2+ youth, Indigenous youth, youth women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), and youth with mobility/hearing impairments

Insights about perceived barriers and motivators to pursuing work abroad experiences build on past knowledge from previous public opinion research with Canadian youth and past IEC participants, will inform policy and will allow targeted engagement and promotion of IEC.

Methodology

To meet the research objectives, both quantitative and qualitative research was conducted. The quantitative phase consisted of an online survey with Canadian youth, aged 18 to 35, and parents of Canadian youth attending secondary or post-secondary education. The qualitative phase drew participants from the final sample of both youth and parents, as well as through referrals from organizations that work with Indigenous youth.

1. A **quantitative online survey** conducted February 3 to March 4, 2022, with 2,504 Canadian youth aged 18-35, and 1,050 parents of Canadian youth currently attending secondary or post-secondary education. Both groups were recruited from an online panel. The survey was approximately 10 minutes in length and explored behaviours and attitudes toward international travel, perceived benefits and barriers of an

international experience, awareness and perceptions of the IEC program and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel attitudes.

2. The qualitative phase drew insights using two separate approaches:
 - a. A selection of participants from the quantitative survey were screened and invited to participate in a two-day **qualitative bulletin board**. The boards required input from participants on two separate days and was conducted over a total window of three days, from March 2 to 4, 2022. A total of 147 people (39 parents and 108 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 from each of the following groups were also included: General population, LGBTQ2+ youth, Indigenous youth, youth women in STEM and youth with mobility/hearing impairments.
 - b. Environics conducted 30 one-on-one interviews; 21 interviews with Canadian youth (age 35 or under) who identify as Indigenous, and 9 parents of Canadian youth who identify as Indigenous and are currently enrolled in secondary or post-secondary education. These interviews were conducted by the respondent's choice of Zoom videoconference or telephone between February 7 and March 1, 2022 and were approximately 60 minutes in length; a \$150 honorarium was given to each participant who completed an interview. Participants were recruited in two ways: first, a networking and referral approach beginning with organizations that work with Indigenous youth, and second, recruiting from qualified respondents in the online quantitative survey. Interview participants included First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, and comprised a range of identities and backgrounds.

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 random probability samples, no formal estimates of sampling error can be calculated. Although not employing a random probability sample, 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 \$199,494.60 (HST included).

Key findings

Qualitative phase

Reflecting on two years of pandemic life, youth and parents largely described their adaptation in terms of a balance between negative and positive. Over time, many learned to cope with disappointment and isolation by appreciating certain benefits, like a slower pace of life and the proliferation of virtual options for school and work. At this stage in the pandemic (research was conducted in early 2022), many were also beginning to transition back to more normal routines, a change that brought its own ups and downs. Some youth and parents

expressed ongoing concerns about the mental health impacts and academic consequences the pandemic has had on youth, and most participants retained some level of concern about the risks of COVID-19 to themselves, their families, and their communities.

Most participants indicated that they (or their child) took at least one international trip before the pandemic; vacation trips were most common. Those who had not travelled mainly cited financial barriers. While some participants reported that they had already started travelling again, most indicated a desire to wait a bit longer to ensure there is less risk when they do go. While some suggested that the pandemic had increased their desire to travel, this concept of pent-up demand was not universal and many expressed varying degrees of unease about international travel in the near term. For some, other concerns like the conflict in Ukraine made them additionally uneasy about going to other countries at this time. Among qualitative participants, few had clear intentions to travel specifically for work, study, or volunteer opportunities.

In terms of future travel, safety around COVID-19 was a primary consideration for most participants, both youth and parents. Work responsibilities, finances, and the cost of travelling were also mentioned frequently as barriers by youth; parents noted similar considerations and also often mentioned travel companionship as a means of making travel safer for their children. There was a wide range of views on when international travel will truly be safe again, but most youth and parents saw vaccines and vaccine mandates – domestic and international – as the key factor in ensuring safety for travellers. Many also expected to see public health measures like masks in place for some time. In general, there was widespread acceptance of public health measures as an unavoidable fact or a necessity for international travel, though some expressed more impatience for a return to normal. Overall, youth and parents were broadly optimistic that there would eventually be a return to normal, and most were able to describe future visions of travel with hope and excitement.

Within the four specific target groups identified for this study (youth with mobility or hearing impairments, LGBTQ2+ youth, youth women in STEM, and Indigenous youth), attitudes and perceptions were largely in line with those expressed by youth overall. However, youth with impairments sometimes expressed a higher degree of concern about COVID-19 and felt more strongly about maintaining measures like vaccines and masks for travellers. For many Indigenous youth who were interviewed, the pandemic had substantial impacts on their communities, leading them to feel a strong duty of caution about the risks of travel and the possibility of bringing COVID-19 into their communities. Distance was also an important consideration for Indigenous youth living in remote/northern communities and the importance of family/community connections appear to be more of a barrier to travel for some.

Quantitative phase

Canadian Youth

Travelling internationally is generally common among Canadian youth aged 18 to 35. Most of the time (86%), Canadian youth travel for leisure or business, reporting at least one international trip for this reason in their lifetime. About four in ten travelled specifically for a work, study, or volunteer experience. Of those who have travelled for work, study, or volunteering, about half (49%) say they have obtained a visa for this purpose. International experience is most commonly self-arranged, as opposed to being arranged through school, an employer, or elsewhere. These results are consistent with the same questions asked in 2021.

When asked to reflect on their international experiences, young travellers continue to place the highest value on the opportunity to learn about new cultures, the adventure, and personal growth. Benefits such as learning a secondary language or gaining career skills are mentioned less often. A little over half of youth who have

travelled abroad say they include this experience on a resume; those who don't often cite a lack of relevance to a specific role. While more than six in ten (64%) say they are eager to highlight their international experience to potential employers, only half (53%) believe that such experience has improved their job prospects since returning to Canada.

Just under one in ten Canadian youth say they have participated in the IEC program; Australia, France, Germany and the UK remain the most visited IEC partner countries. Among IEC participants, total satisfaction (86%) and likelihood of recommending the program (85%) to family or friends is consistent with satisfaction results from 2021. Above all else, IEC participants attribute their satisfaction with the program to a great overall experience and personal growth (51%).

Similar to last year, awareness of the IEC program is generally low among Canadian youth. Those aware are likely to have heard about it through family or friends or through general internet searches. The desire to learn more, however, is still vibrant, with one third (30%) indicating interest in learning more. Communicating such information would be mostly welcomed through the internet, school, or by word of mouth.

Looking to the future, Canadian youth generally look forward to travel once the pandemic is over, with three quarters (74%) very or somewhat likely to pursue such experiences, particularly for leisure or business. To that end, young Canadians remain mindful of safety concerns surrounding travel and COVID-19, with over six in ten more likely to travel when restrictions make it possible (64%) and over half (56%) saying they are more comfortable travelling now that they are vaccinated.

Despite widespread general interest in travel, many Canadian youth encounter obstacles that prevent them from pursuing international experiences. When asked about potential barriers to travelling abroad, most mention language, financial issues or obligations at home. In addition, a sizeable proportion of youth express long-term concerns about travel after the pandemic including four in ten (39%) who say there are places in the world they would no longer consider living in. Canadian youth, however, are seemingly less concerned with another country's COVID-19 rates approaching zero as a standard to dictate their comfort; this concern sits at 34 percent this year, a noteworthy decline from 2021 when it was 53 percent.

Though likelihood of participating in a program like IEC is somewhat low (30%), most youth do plan to travel internationally in the future in some way. Likely to be motivated by exploration and adventure, as well as the chance to learn about a new country, most youth (76%) say they are likely to travel for leisure or business before they turn 35. Close to one in three (34%) say they are likely to travel for work, and one in five intends to travel abroad for study (20%) or to volunteer (20%).

With most Canadian youth now vaccinated from COVID-19 and more inclined to consider future travel, they are also looking forward to reduced restrictions to feel comfortable travelling. Barriers to future trips specifically for work, travel or volunteering are broadly similar to other reasons cited for not travelling in general (i.e. language, finances, and personal obligations). Additionally, more than half of youth (56%) feel they simply do not know how to get started when it comes to working, volunteering or studying outside Canada. A similar proportion (49%) feel they would have difficulty finding work in another country.

Parents of Canadian Youth

Few parents (11%) of Canadian youth say their child has obtained a visa for international work, study, or volunteer experiences and 6 percent say their child has participated in IEC. Among parents themselves, fewer

than one in five (17%) have obtained a visa for work, study, or volunteering abroad, and 5 percent are past IEC participants.

Comparable to 2021, parents, like youth, have low awareness of IEC and most often learn about the program by word of mouth. Despite this, almost half (44%) of parents say they are interested to learn more about the program, preferably through the internet, school resources, or IEC information sessions. Though school resources are still valued by parents, general internet searches have risen in importance since last year in terms of driving awareness.

Like their younger counterparts, parents hold some concerns related to safety outside of Canada due to the pandemic. One such concern, held by over six in ten (63%), is that there are places in the world they wouldn't want their children to live (in case there is another pandemic). Despite these concerns, however, more than half (58%) of parents say they are likely to recommend international travel for work or volunteering to their children once it is safe to do so. In fact, parents of Canadian youth are even more inclined to say their child is likely to travel for study, work or volunteer than youth themselves.

Parents with their own experience outside of Canada are more likely to recommend an international experience to their children in general (79%) compared to parents without international experience (53%). There was no significant difference, however, between these groups in terms of how they view travel to specific countries outside of Canada, due to the pandemic.

Political neutrality statement and contact information

I hereby certify as senior officer of Environics that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada, and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.



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