



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada

# 2019-20 International Experience Canada (IEC) Youth Study

## Final report

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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 850 Canadian youth and the community was conducted with 115 Canadian youth in February 2020.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : **Étude sur les jeunes d'Expérience internationale Canada (EIC) 2019-20**

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## Executive summary

### Background and objectives

International Experience Canada (IEC) is a program managed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada which offers Canadian citizen youth aged 18-35 the opportunity to travel and work in one of over 30 partner countries and territories. Because it is a reciprocal program, foreign youth from partner countries/territories can do the same in Canada. The age limit and types of work permits available depends on the youth mobility arrangement negotiated with each partner country. The research will be used to provide insight into the travel and work abroad behaviours of Canadian youth, as well as perceptions and attitudes towards travel and work abroad experiences among IEC's target audience.

The objective of this research is to measure awareness and knowledge of the IEC program among its target audiences and to better understand the planning, motivation and experience of those who have undertaken an international work/study/volunteer experience. More specifically, the objectives of the research include measuring:

- previous travel and or work abroad experience (where they travelled, main objective of their travel, duration, etc.)
- awareness of the IEC program
- effectiveness of incentives in motivating youth to participate (i.e. job placement in Canada, international certificate, other non-monetary incentives, etc.)
- perceived benefits of travel or work abroad experience

Insights about the attitudes and behaviours of those who have undertaken an international work/study/volunteer experience will inform policy about the program. Information about barriers, motivators and incentives to pursuing work abroad experiences will also help inform policy and target engagement and promotion to increase IEC program participation among its Canadian target audience.

### Methodology

To meet the research objectives, both quantitative and qualitative research was conducted. The quantitative phase consisted of an online survey conducted with Canadian citizens aged 18-40 with previous international work/study/volunteer experience. The qualitative phase was conducted with youth from the quantitative phase and further probed their experience their international work/study/volunteer experience. Participants over the age of 35 (up to age 40) were included as the research focused on past participation in IEC.

1. A **quantitative online survey** conducted February 7 to 21, 2020, with 850 Canadian youth (recruited from an online panel) aged 18-40 who self-identify as having either previously participated in the IEC program or obtained a visa to work/study/volunteer abroad. The survey was approximately 6 minutes in length and explored past international experience, awareness of and satisfaction with the IEC program and the likelihood of future participation in the IEC program. The online survey was also used to screen panellists to serve as the source for recruiting participants to the second, qualitative phase of the research.

2. Screened during the online survey, a selection of qualified youth who had international work/study/volunteer experience were 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 window of three days, from February 19 to 21, 2020. A total of 115 youth aged 18-40 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, 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 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 \$139,964.63 (HST included).

## Key findings

### Quantitative results

#### The IEC program – incidence, awareness and satisfaction

The incidence of youth 18-40 who have had an international experience (obtained a visa or permit to work, study or volunteer outside of Canada or participated in the IEC program) is 22%. It skews male and is higher in Ontario, Alberta and BC than the rest of the country. International experiences involving study are the most common experience for which people received a visa and while less than a third have knowingly participated in the IEC program, two thirds have some awareness of it (most commonly from friends or family or doing their own internet searches).

Among those who have participated in the IEC program, satisfaction with the experience is high: four in five (80%) say they are at least somewhat satisfied (38% are very satisfied) and very few are dissatisfied (4%). Most say they would be very (40%) or somewhat likely (44%) to recommend the IEC program to a friend or family member; very few would be unlikely to (5%). There are no differences on these measures in terms of age, gender or region. Finally, a little less than half (47%) of respondents under 35 say they are likely to participate in a program like IEC in the future.

## Qualitative results

### Previous International Experience

While the international experiences described by online community participants included a wide variety of destinations and durations of stay, the most salient factor for understanding their experience is their purpose for going abroad: to work, to study or to volunteer.

- **Study.** Participants who studied abroad frequently work through their academic institution by way of an exchange program or an independent course. Institutions provide purpose, structure and direction for participants and play an important role in determining the location and substance of the experience.
- **Work.** For some going to work abroad, international experiences are primarily about a targeted way of gaining professional experience. This includes recent grads looking for employment early in their career and those looking for internships, co-op placements or residencies. The destination and duration are shaped by needing to go where they can find employment in their field. For others, employment is primarily a means to fund further travel. These participants work a variety of unskilled labour jobs for short periods of time. Australia and France (especially for francophones) are common destinations in this regard.
- **Volunteering.** These youth are passionate about the initiatives they support (schools and hospitals, animals, or environmental initiatives) and have found meaningful work helping people. Their experiences tend to be much shorter than working or studying experiences, typically lasting less than 6 months but the destinations are often more varied.

Regardless of the primary reason for the experience, participants see the opportunity for travel beyond their main destination as an important objective. They positively describe experiences visiting nearby cities and countries during their experience. Other underlying goals include building a cultural understanding of their destination through integration and learning new skills.

### Incentives and motivations

As a group, youth participants in international experiences hold social values that elevate the importance of having authentic cultural experiences. This includes the desire to learn local languages, explore out-of-the-way locations and to experience things the way that locals do. Participants also score high on measures of personal control, defined as “striving to organize and control the direction of one’s future, even when it feels that there are forces beyond one’s immediate control.”

When asked directly, participants tend to view incentives to participate in travel and work abroad programs as self-evident: the experience provides valuable work and/or study experience, opportunities to travel, and immersion in other cultures. They do not describe a lack of motivation to participate due to a lack of incentives (e.g. job placements, getting certifications or other non-monetary incentives). Motivation comes from the experiences of family and friends who support and encourage them and many describe the positive influence of elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools in cultivating a travel-oriented mindset (programs or experiences that expose students to such ideas are commonly mentioned).

## Perceived benefits

Participants highly recommend that others consider similar experiences due to the benefits they derived from their experience. The benefits described by participants fall into 4 areas:

- **Character development.** Their international experience is often the first time participants have lived without a strong support network and takes participants out of their comfort zone. Overcoming these challenges leads to long-lasting improvements in self-confidence, ability to cope with stress and navigating difficult or uncertain social environments.
- **Cultural understanding.** Participants develop a new awareness of other cultures gained through the nuanced appreciation of local history and customs that comes from an extended stay. They also become more open to cultural differences as the result of needing to adapt to not being part of the dominant culture, often leading to a greater appreciation for the Canadian way of life.
- **Professional development.** Working internationally opens opportunities for training and for insight into global industry practices. It also develops communication skills by giving them experience in overcoming cultural barriers, becoming adaptable in complex team settings and learning foreign languages.
- **Development of social networks.** Participants develop lasting personal and professional relationships during their experience, providing them with a global network of contacts and helping to maintain the global perspective they gained during their international experience.

## The decision-making journey

**First considerations.** Many begin considering trips abroad from a young age, even as early as elementary school. There is a connection between the primary purpose of the experience and the life stage they first seriously considered the opportunity: those volunteering are usually the youngest and those going for work tend to be at least around the age of graduating post-secondary.

At this stage, participants are excited for the opportunity to travel, but also express uncertainty about the logistics they will need work out (especially finances). Those going abroad to work are specifically concerned about finding employment and whether it is a wise career choice. Students describe concerns about undertaking lengthy program applications while maintaining their grades and can get overwhelmed. Volunteers express self-doubt and are more likely to have concerns about their personal safety.

**Research.** The purpose of the international experience also drives research and consideration about potential destinations. In instances where those going for work are free to choose their destination, they gravitate toward places where they can speak the language to ensure they are employable. Students are open to more destinations and usually narrow down their options by researching institutions available to them through an exchange program. Volunteers either research destinations that the organization they are working with has available or research organizations based on the destination they are looking for.

Most research is internet-based and makes use of program-specific and government sites. University websites are a good, centralized source for students and offer connections to coordinators and experienced peers. The ability to connect with an experienced contact or mentor who can advise on the process is universally seen as a major advantage. Common research topics are financial costs and budgeting, program outcomes (e.g. career prospects) and logistical details such as accommodation and transportation. Doing the necessary research tends to provide a boost in confidence about the opportunity even when some doubts linger.

The most common research pain points involve visas and tax information. Available resources on these topics are often seen as complicated and/or contradictory – there is often no straight answer available. Other specific concerns include finding job opportunities (those going for work), determining course equivalencies (study) and evaluating which organizations are legitimate and which are not (volunteers). A centralized portal of accurate, and up-to-date information, especially if tailored to their specific purpose (information for working, studying or volunteering), would be very helpful for them

**Decision.** Most participants make their decision easily once all the necessary research has been done, finances are arranged, and they receive positive support and feedback. In the process of making the decision, family and friends play a key role by offering advice, encouragement and support. Many of those going to work or volunteer make the decision because the time is right – they have finished school or are between jobs. The decision is more difficult when finances are not totally arranged or there are family/other obligations. Once participants have made a decision, their feelings mainly turn to excitement.

**Planning the experience.** Finally, participants begin to take concrete action by booking travel, living arrangements, seeking employment and getting vaccinations. In this phase, having the support of some type of organization is a major differentiator. For students applying through an exchange program or those going to work for their current employer, the process is straightforward and painless as many of the details are taken care of for them. Those without this support must arrange their own logistics, including visas.

Visa applications are singled out for being confusing and time-consuming whether aided by an organization or not and are especially difficult for those not living near embassies/consulates. Information on taxes is another pain point as it is often not clear what is required of them or how the process will work at their destination. Other concerns involve fears of social isolation and missing partners, family, and friends.

Participants provide several suggestions for resources that could improve this stage. All groups mention the value of talking to a peer or mentor who had travelled abroad as a source of informed and unbiased advice. They also indicate a need for a centralized online repository of up-to-date information, including comprehensive plain language instructions for visa applications, budget planning, application checklists and job banks.



## 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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# Introduction

## Background

International Experience Canada (IEC) is a program managed by IRCC offering Canadian youth the opportunity to travel and work in one of over 30 partner countries and territories. Because it is a reciprocal program, foreign youth from partner countries/territories can do the same in Canada. The age limit and types of work permits available depends on the youth mobility arrangement negotiated with each partner country but for Canadians to qualify, they must be citizens resident in Canada between the ages of 18-35.

The IEC program has the mandate to maximize reciprocity between international youth participation and Canadian youth participation in the work-travel pathways negotiated with partner countries/territories. However, IEC officials believe participation in the program by Canadian youth is not as strong as it should be and is not reciprocal in terms of participants with almost all of 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.

This report provides insights into the attitudes and behaviours of those who have undertaken an international work/study/volunteer experience. It provides an understanding about the barriers, motivators and incentives to pursuing work abroad experiences as well as carefully examining the journey taken by youth when planning and undertaking their international experience. The results will inform policy and target engagement and promotion activities to increase IEC program participation among its Canadian target audience.

## Objectives

The objectives of this research are to measure awareness and knowledge of the IEC program among its target audiences and to better understand the planning, motivation and experience of those who have undertaken an international work/study/volunteer experience. More specifically, the objectives of the research include measuring:

- previous travel and or work abroad experience (where they travelled, main objective of their travel, duration, etc.)
- awareness of the IEC program
- effectiveness of incentives in motivating youth to participate (i.e. job placement in Canada, international certificate, other non-monetary incentives, etc.)
- perceived benefits of travel or work abroad experience

The **quantitative online survey** was conducted to gather information about Canadian youth who have participated in an international experience that required a visa/work permit and/or have participated in the IEC program in the past. It provides information about this group by measuring their incidence in the population, assessing their awareness of the IEC program and discovering their likelihood to recommend international experiences to others as well as their intentions of participating in a future experience.

The **qualitative online community** was conducted to collect in-depth information from those who have already undertaken an international experience that required a visa/work permit and/or have participated in the IEC program. It was done using an online community where youth were asked to provide detailed information about their international experience, their travel motivations and values, the benefits they received from the experience and their journey through the planning and execution process. In addition to youth in the general population, the qualitative research specifically included LGBTQ2+ youth, Indigenous youth, youth women in STEM and youth with mobility/hearing impairments in order to explore if and how their experiences differ on these topics.

## About this report

This report begins with an executive summary outlining key findings and conclusions, followed by a detailed analysis of the quantitative data and qualitative results. A detailed methodology section is provided in Appendix A. Provided under a separate cover is a detailed set of “banner tables” presenting the results for all questions by population segments as defined by region and demographics for the quantitative portion of the research. The quantitative data tables are referenced by the survey question in the detailed analysis.

In this report, quantitative results are expressed as percentages unless otherwise noted. Results may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses. Net results cited in the text may not exactly match individual results shown in the tables due to rounding. Qualitative results do not reference percentages or precise proportions to avoid any implication that results are projectable.

## I. Detailed findings - Quantitative

### International Experience and IEC Awareness

The incidence of past international experience among Canadian youth is 22%, with studying being the reason in almost two thirds of cases. A third have knowingly participated in the IEC program, but two thirds have some awareness of it.

The quantitative phase of the research measured the incidence of international experiences (like those of the IEC program) as well as awareness of, participation in and satisfaction with the IEC program specifically.

While the full survey was asked only of those who have past international experience, screening of more than 4,000 youth who were otherwise qualified (Canadian citizens residing in Canada between the ages of 18-40) was done to provide incidence estimates of past international experience among demographic and regional groups. Those who have such experiences skew male and are higher in Ontario, Alberta and BC. The table below provides estimates by gender within each region of Canada.

**Table 1: Incidence of international experience among eligible screened participants, by demographic group**

Demographic group	Number of eligible screened participants	Incidence of international experience
<b>Total</b>	<b>4046</b>	<b>22%</b>
Atlantic Canada – Male	108	19%
Atlantic Canada – Female	159	11%
Quebec – Male	488	21%
Quebec – Female	601	15%
Ontario – Male	684	29%
Ontario – Female	929	21%
Prairies (MB/SK) – Male	68	22%
Prairies (MB/SK) – Female	120	18%
Alberta – Male	184	30%
Alberta – Female	243	21%
British Columbia/Territories – Male	184	29%
British Columbia/Territories – Female	250	24%

The research asked respondents about each of studying, working and volunteering internationally. These experiences are not mutually exclusive, and many have done more than one. International experiences involving study are the most common experience for which people received a visa (62%) with around half (50%) also receiving one for work and one in five (21%) to volunteer.

**Table 2: Visa/work permit for each type of experience**

**Question S10: Have you ever obtained a visa or permit to work, study or volunteer outside of Canada?**

	Overall (n=850)	18-24 (n=75)	25-30 (n=212)	31-35 (n=300)	36-40 (n=263)	Female (n=412)	Male (n=432)
Study	62%	34%	59%	68%	65%	54%	67%
Work	50%	65%	58%	43%	47%	53%	48%
Volunteer	21%	32%	26%	17%	19%	23%	20%

Among those who have international experience, only around a third (31%) knowingly participated in the IEC program. There are no clear demographic differences in this respect. IRCC is aware that a proportion of program participants are not aware that they have participated in the IEC program.

**Table 3: IEC participant (aware)**

**Question S11: Have you ever participated in the International Experience Canada program, which provides Canadian youth facilitated access to a work permit in 34 different countries and territories?**

	Overall (n=850)	18-24 (n=75)	25-30 (n=212)	31-35 (n=300)	36-40 (n=263)	Female (n=412)	Male (n=432)
Yes	31%	29%	29%	34%	29%	30%	32%
No	65%	70%	67%	62%	65%	64%	65%
Not sure	4%	1%	4%	5%	5%	6%	3%

All respondents who participated in IEC or received a work visa were asked which countries they have worked in. Australia, the United Kingdom and France are the most common destinations and two thirds (66%) who got a work permit worked in countries/territories which are part of the IEC program.

**Table 4: Work permit destinations**

**Question 1C: Have you worked, using a work permit, in any of the following countries? Please select all that apply.**

**Subgroup: Those who worked abroad on a work visa or participated in the IEC program (n=599)**

	Overall (n=599)	18-24 (n=35)	25-30 (n=139)	31-35 (n=229)	36-40 (n=196)	Female (n=268)	Male (n=325)
Australia	20%	9%	20%	23%	18%	21%	20%
United Kingdom	11%	6%	13%	8%	15%	12%	11%
France	9%	11%	12%	9%	8%	11%	8%
Hong Kong	6%	3%	11%	5%	5%	6%	7%
Germany	6%	0%	9%	6%	5%	4%	7%
Japan	6%	4%	8%	5%	6%	5%	7%
New Zealand	4%	7%	6%	4%	3%	5%	4%
Switzerland	3%	3%	2%	4%	3%	4%	3%
Republic of Korea	3%	0%	2%	4%	3%	3%	3%

	Overall (n=599)	18-24 (n=35)	25-30 (n=139)	31-35 (n=229)	36-40 (n=196)	Female (n=268)	Male (n=325)
Mexico	2%	4%	3%	2%	2%	2%	3%
Italy	2%	0%	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%
Austria	2%	0%	4%	1%	3%	2%	3%
Taiwan	2%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Ireland	2%	0%	6%	1%	1%	2%	2%
Netherlands	2%	0%	3%	1%	3%	3%	2%
Spain	2%	2%	2%	1%	3%	1%	2%
Denmark	2%	3%	6%	<1%	1%	2%	2%
Costa Rica	2%	5%	3%	<1%	2%	2%	2%
Poland	2%	3%	2%	3%	0%	1%	2%
Chile	2%	0%	3%	1%	2%	3%	1%
Belgium	2%	0%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%
Czech Republic	1%	0%	4%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Croatia	1%	4%	3%	1%	0%	<1%	2%
Sweden	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%	<1%	2%
Greece	1%	4%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Norway	1%	0%	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%
Ukraine	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	<1%
Portugal	1%	0%	1%	<1%	1%	1%	1%
Slovenia	1%	0%	2%	0%	1%	<1%	1%
Latvia	1%	0%	1%	<1%	1%	2%	0%
Luxembourg	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Lithuania	<1%	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%	<1%
Estonia	<1%	0%	1%	<1%	0%	1%	<1%
San Marino	<1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	<1%	<1%
Slovakia	<1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%
None of the above	34%	37%	31%	32%	37%	33%	34%

## Awareness and satisfaction

Although three in ten have never heard of the IEC program, five in ten say they are at least a little knowledgeable about it. Of those who have participated in an IEC program, eight in ten are satisfied with the experience and would recommend it to their friends and family.

Awareness of the IEC program is mixed with some saying they know the program well (11%) or know a fair amount about it (15%) and others saying they know a little about it (24%) or have only heard the name (12%). Around a third (34%) say they have never heard of the program. Among those who had at least heard of the IEC program, awareness most often comes from friends or family (43%) or doing their own internet searches (26%). Hearing about it through their academic institution/school (20%), from the IRCC website (13%) or through work (11%) are also common sources.

**Table 5: Awareness of the IEC program**

**Question 5: Before taking this survey, to what extent were you aware or unaware of the International Experience Canada program?**

	Overall (n=850)	18-24 (n=75)	25-30 (n=212)	31-35 (n=300)	36-40 (n=263)	Female (n=412)	Male (n=432)
Know the program well	11%	12%	14%	9%	10%	9%	13%
Know a fair amount about the program	15%	10%	17%	15%	13%	15%	14%
Know a little bit about the program	24%	22%	25%	21%	29%	26%	23%
Only know the name	12%	16%	8%	14%	14%	13%	12%
Never heard of it	34%	37%	33%	38%	30%	35%	35%
Do not know	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%

**Table 6: How you became aware of the IEC program****Question 6: How did you become aware of the International Experience Canada program? Please select all that apply.****Subgroup: Those who had ever heard of the IEC program (n=529)**

	Overall (n=529)	18-24 (n=45)	25-30 (n=132)	31-35 (n=178)	36-40 (n=174)	Female (n=255)	Male (n=268)
From my friends and family	43%	40%	39%	43%	46%	46%	40%
General internet search	26%	26%	30%	28%	22%	26%	26%
Academic institution/school campus	20%	21%	22%	17%	20%	20%	19%
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada website	13%	7%	18%	11%	14%	10%	16%
Through my work	11%	6%	14%	10%	11%	10%	11%
Through a Recognized Organization (AIESEC, SWAP, etc.)	10%	12%	11%	11%	9%	11%	10%
From a news agency (print or online)	7%	6%	9%	7%	5%	6%	7%
Person/group I follow on social media	5%	11%	9%	3%	2%	6%	4%
International Experience Canada Abroad Facebook account	4%	2%	7%	5%	2%	3%	5%
International Experience Canada Abroad Instagram account	4%	6%	4%	4%	3%	3%	5%
Other	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Do not know	4%	0%	4%	5%	5%	5%	4%

Satisfaction with their IEC travel experience is very high, with more than four in five (80%) saying they are at least somewhat satisfied (with 38% are very satisfied). Very few aware IEC program participants say they are dissatisfied with their travel experience (4%) and only one in ten are neutral (13%). Similar proportions would recommend the IEC program to a friend or family member (84% saying they would be very or somewhat likely to).

**Table 7: Satisfaction with IEC program****Question 10: To what extent were you satisfied or dissatisfied with your work and travel abroad experience via the International Experience Canada program?****Subgroup: Aware IEC participants (n=257)**

	Overall (n=257)	18-24 (n=21)	25-30 (n=60)	31-35 (n=99)	36-40 (n=77)	Female (n=120)	Male (n=136)
Very satisfied	38%	34%	47%	30%	43%	44%	34%
Somewhat satisfied	42%	43%	34%	49%	39%	40%	43%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13%	9%	17%	11%	14%	12%	14%
Somewhat dissatisfied	2%	7%	2%	2%	1%	1%	3%
Very dissatisfied	2%	0%	0%	5%	0%	1%	3%



**Table 8: Likelihood to recommend IEC program to friends/family**

**Question 12: To what extent are you likely or unlikely to recommend an international working abroad experience such as International Experience Canada to family or friends?**

**Subgroup: Aware IEC participants (n=257)**

	Overall (n=257)	18-24 (n=21)	25-30 (n=60)	31-35 (n=99)	36-40 (n=77)	Female (n=120)	Male (n=136)
Very likely	40%	36%	45%	39%	39%	50%	34%
Somewhat likely	44%	43%	45%	42%	45%	38%	47%
Neither likely nor unlikely	10%	7%	5%	10%	13%	8%	11%
Somewhat unlikely	3%	7%	4%	3%	1%	1%	5%
Very unlikely	2%	0%	0%	5%	0%	2%	2%

Finally, respondents under the age of 35 were asked how likely it is that they would participate in a program like IEC in the future (those over 35 are not eligible). Around half of those 18 to 24 years old (53%) or 25-30 (50%) say they would be either very or somewhat likely to, but this drops off with age: only around four in ten (43%) of those 31 to 34 say the same.

**Table 9: Likelihood to participate in a work & travel abroad program in future**

**Question 14: To what extent are you likely or unlikely to participate in a work and travel abroad program like International Experience Canada in the future?**

**Subgroup: Those under 35 years of age (n=533)**

	Overall (n=533)	18-24 (n=75)	25-30 (n=212)	31-34 (n=246)	Female (n=285)	Male (n=246)
Very likely	15%	19%	18%	13%	14%	17%
Somewhat likely	31%	35%	32%	30%	35%	28%
Neither likely nor unlikely	18%	19%	18%	18%	19%	18%
Somewhat unlikely	14%	18%	15%	13%	14%	14%
Very unlikely	18%	6%	15%	24%	15%	20%

## II. Detailed findings - Qualitative

### Qualitative participant profile

A selection of those who completed the quantitative online survey were invited to participate in the online community. All participants had past international experience that involved getting a visa or participating in the IEC program. Separate bulletin boards were conducted with English and French speakers and included a mix of participants based on demographic and regional characteristics. Additionally, targets were used to ensure that the online community included representation from the following groups:

- LGBTQ2+ youth
- Indigenous youth
- Youth women in Stem
- Youth with mobility or hearing impairments

Table 10 summarizes the distribution of the online community participants by membership in the target quota groups. Since participants could fall into more than one group, they are counted in each of the rows where they qualify.

**Table 10: Membership in target quota group**

Target group	Online community participants (n=115)	English bulletin board (n=89)	French bulletin board (n=26)
General population	65	47	18
LGBTQ2+ youth	25	19	6
Indigenous youth	7	5	2
Youth women in STEM	20	18	2
Youth with mobility or hearing impairments	7	7	0

Tables 11 through 15 summarize the experience and demographic profile of the online community participants. In terms of their past experience, participants are slightly more likely to have obtained a visa to work internationally than the larger quantitative group but are about as likely to say that they have participated in the IEC program. Most were born in Canada to Canadian-born parents and have a range of language abilities.

**Table 11: Visa/work permit for each type of experience**

	Online community participants (n=115)	English bulletin board (n=89)	French bulletin board (n=26)
Study	54	43	11
Work	62	45	17
Volunteer	32	27	5

Table 12: Participation in IEC program (aware)

	Online community participants (n=115)	English bulletin board (n=89)	French bulletin board (n=26)
Yes	33	27	6
No	75	60	15
Not sure	7	2	5

Table 13: Participants born in Canada

	Online community participants (n=115)	English bulletin board (n=89)	French bulletin board (n=26)
Yes	98	79	19
No	17	10	7

Table 14: Participants with immigrant parent(s)

	Online community participants (n=115)	English bulletin board (n=89)	French bulletin board (n=26)
Yes	48	46	2
No	66	42	24
Prefer not to say	1	1	0

Table 15: Languages spoken by participants

	Online community participants (n=115)	English bulletin board (n=89)	French bulletin board (n=26)
English Only	59	59	0
French Only	10	0	10
English and French	29	17	12
English and Other	8	8	0
French and Other	0	0	0
English, French and Other	9	5	4

The online community included an ‘ice-breaker’ exercise on where participants were asked to share something interesting about themselves:

- Although the exercise instructions suggested sharing their interests and hobbies, participants often talked about their occupations.
- A range of hobbies were presented but given the context many participants mention a love of travel, often accompanied by a list of destinations they have visited. Some even linked their other work or hobbies to travel.

“I enjoy cycling, cooking, and film photography and think that these are great activities to do when exploring a new place or city.”

## International Experience

On the first day of the online community, participants were asked to describe their previous experiences abroad. Their responses reflect a wide variety of reasons for travel, durations of stay and destinations, showing how unique travel and work experiences can be. Participants travelled for study, work and volunteer opportunities for as long as a week to multiple years, across many countries and continents. While the primary purpose of travel (study, work or volunteer) strongly influenced the destination and duration of travel, while abroad, youth pursued similar secondary objectives and shared common reactions to their experiences.

### Primary objectives of travel

#### Studying abroad

Participants who studied abroad frequently did so as part of a direct offering through their university, via a learning exchange program or an independent course. Travelling with a school (in Canada or in the host country) helped to provide purpose, structure and direction in a cultural setting that was otherwise foreign. Specifically, schools played an important role in:

- **Determining the location of opportunities**

“I chose Poland because it was one of the few destinations that offered a group study abroad experience. A group of 20 students from my university, with a professor, all travelled to Poland together and we enrolled in the same courses. This option made me feel more comfortable going abroad than an exchange experience where I would have been flying solo.”

- **Curating experiences**

“I spent 4 months living in Vienna, Austria. I chose Vienna because it is a beautiful city filled with lots of rich history and it is very central in Europe, making travelling around easy. As well, I really liked the opportunities that were offered by the school in Vienna which I chose, such as having a 3-week orientation program for incoming students and a buddy program which paired me with a local Viennese student.”

- **Empowering students to try something new**

“I went to southern India for 3 months. It was a summer study abroad program offered through my undergrad. The timing worked well (didn’t conflict with school year) and I’d never been to India and felt like it would be a good opportunity to go plus study.”

The duration of the trips typically lasted from a couple of weeks (i.e. for a short course) to a few months (i.e. one or two semesters).

#### Working abroad

Working participants took different approaches to finding employment abroad. The more common approach was to use the international experience as a targeted way to gain professional experience. Participants travelled to destinations where they could secure employment in a relevant field for their career. For this group, these jobs tended to last over a year.

“I lived in London, UK for four years. I chose this location simply because there was work available for me.”

“France for an undergrad exchange semester (5 months). Currently working in France (1.5 years). I chose France to further improve my French and allow me to apply to bilingual jobs when I return to Canada.”

This approach was also taken by students and recent grads who pursued international work experience through internships and co-op placements. The duration of their placements was typically shorter, lasting from one month to two semesters (i.e. 8 months).

“In 2012, as part of my undergraduate studies at the University of Ottawa, I completed an international internship in Delhi, India, for four months. I chose that destination because it was somewhere I was intimidated to travel alone. I felt safer participating in a program coordinated by local and international NGOs and uOttawa.”

“I went to work in Belgium for an internship for 4 months. I also recently got back from an 8-month internship in Austria. Both locations were chosen because of the work offered by the specific companies I worked for.”

“I went to France, more precisely to Caen, for 4 weeks to work. At the time, the CEGEP service had contacts in various places in France, so it was the easiest destination to be able to leave and do an internship there. But France has always interested me, so it would have been in my choice even if there had been other choices.”

Similarly, other working programs like residencies narrowed the possibilities of where to travel while providing specialized career growth that typically lasted for half a year or longer.

“I applied to do an artist residency in Vienna, Austria for 6 months and was accepted into this program. I chose this destination because the residency was well-funded and would be a good opportunity for me as an artist.”

“I went to Spokane, Washington. I was there for a year. It was where I was accepted for my position... I was a Dental Resident which is for a year. It was a great experience and I really enjoyed my time there.”

The other approach to travel and working abroad viewed the experience primarily as a means to fund travel, not professional development. Participants described working various unskilled labour jobs for short periods of time as they travelled around. Australia was a popular destination for this type of travel abroad because of its warm environment, a culture familiar with this type of travel, and high minimum wage; additionally, France held appeal to Francophones for ease of language.

“I recently took advantage of the Working Holiday Visa program to work in Australia.”

“I worked on several farms while in Australia. The first one was a sheep farm, and we worked there for 2 weeks it was a great experience and enabled me to make some money to continue travelling and seeing the sights. Later I worked on a pear orchard for another 2 weeks. Again, thus giving me the money to keep travelling.”

“I went to Australia for 8 months. I picked it because I had friends there and it had a high minimum wage.”

“Australia. A year. For the culture of travel, which is well-established there, the ease of obtaining a visa, security and culture not too destabilizing for a first backpack trip.”

“Paris, France 1 year. I chose Paris for ease with French as my first work holiday experience.”

Not everyone was able to find a job immediately, which did cause some financial stress (and debt in some cases). Nevertheless, working holidays typically lasted around a year.

## Volunteering abroad

Volunteers abroad were passionate about the initiatives they supported. Participants found meaningful work helping people (i.e. in schools and hospitals, building initiatives), animals, or environmental initiatives. The duration of these types of trips were typically shorter than for those working or studying, typically lasting less than 6 months.

“I went to various small places in the Caribbean in a range of 6 months, I didn't choose the destination I went with a friend who had family... My experience was helping hand out food, combing the hair of children who lived in the streets and lost their parents, providing comfort and toys. It was eye opening, humbling and absolutely unforgettable.”

“I worked with children who had both physical and mental disabilities. I really enjoyed the experiences to see how different their treatment methods using the resources they had available to them.”

“I was there to volunteer but I wanted the flexibility to work, travel and longer stay. It went well people were nice and helpful. The work was tree planting, erosion control and other day to day work to protect the environment.”

“I volunteered as an ESL Instructor in Costa Rica for 5 months. There weren't teaching jobs available for me one September, so I decided to go to somewhere warm and interesting for the winter months. It also helped that I speak intermediate Spanish.”

## Secondary objectives of travel

Studying, working and volunteering abroad offered participants opportunities to pursue experiences unique to their destination. Indeed, the impetus to pursue opportunities abroad was commonly spurred by a desire to travel. Participants described how they had planned to tour the neighbouring regions and countries of their main destination.

“I chose Singapore because I wanted to escape the Montreal winter and ice, as well as explore a new culture. I had never been to Asia before, and Singapore itself is an incredibly diverse and interesting place to explore, but it is also so close to many other Southeast Asian countries to explore as well.”

“Our group went on various adventures. Some of which were on our own, and some of which were part of the program. We went on a Safari, partially climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, hikes to waterfalls, coffee plantations, visited an orphanage, watched tribal dances, shopped in the main part of town, spoke with locals.”

“Living in Europe allows me to travel to nearby countries once or twice a month for relatively cheap and I've loved getting to see so many new and different cultures.”

Apart from travelling, panel participants described how they integrated into their destination community over the longer duration of their stay by building relationships and developing personally. They were able to connect with family and friends residing in the local area, learn more of their ancestral culture, and build new relationships with both expats and locals.

“Much travel and integrating into a foreign culture/society.”

“Traveled to various cities within Poland to the hometowns of the locals and friends I've met there...”

“I attended conferences across Europe, took German classes, and took every opportunity to travel around and explore new countries. I also made lots of life-long friends and took the time to visit them after my internships.”

"I got to go to other areas of Australia, alone and with my host family. I got to go snorkeling near the Great Barrier Reef. It was amazing!"

They also describe learning new skills and building cultural knowledge.

"Learn about culture, improve language skills, and also travel within Asia."

"I enjoyed engaging with Cuban people different cultures, I was involved with different musical bands."

### Attitudes while living abroad

Participants were asked how they felt during their time abroad. Participants expressed great excitement at being able to immerse themselves in other cultures. Responses reflect how these trips abroad are significant milestones for participants as youth to assert their independence away from familial support and to develop self-confidence. In these unfamiliar environments, participants were drawn from their comfort zones and forced to meet new people, try new activities and learn new perspectives.

"I was excited as it was the first time I was living on my own. I was thrilled to learn and explore my city. I literally drove around and just see what was around."

"I loved it. I felt really independent and adventurous. It was a bit scary because I didn't know anyone, but it forced me to make new friends and be open to anything."

"I felt in constant evolution, I learned every day. Everything was new, I was amazed every day. I met new people all the time. It was very inspiring."

"It was a great feeling to experience something new and completely different and being on my own. It forced me to explore and be open to more things."

While international experiences are widely described with great positivity, participants also described undergoing a period of adjustment while settling into their destination. The beginning of an extended stay abroad is often overwhelming at first; anxiety and loneliness were common symptoms of "culture shock". Participants found that these negative reactions faded with time as they integrated in the new culture:

"At first, I was nervous because it was the first time I had moved away from home and lived in a different city and country. After the first couple of weeks, I began to really enjoy living abroad and with the change of pace of lifestyle."

"At first, I felt very alone. It was the first time that I had been abroad for so long and I knew absolutely no one there. I then developed better social skills, got better, made friends. In addition, I started to organize small solo excursions regularly so quickly, my boredom disappeared."

Additionally, participants were confronted with challenges to their sense of comfort and safety. For those visiting non-English speaking countries, language was a significant barrier to adjusting to new environments:

"I felt great, it was a bit tough at first adjusting to the cultural and language differences, but after I pushed through and made it successfully."

"I was a bit overwhelmed at first. It is tough to acclimatize to a new environment, especially when most people don't speak the same language as you. I learned a lot of words in the different languages: Flemish in Belgium and German in Austria... But my coworkers were welcoming, and I ended up spending a decent amount of time helping them improve their English (as requested)."

Some participants recounted witnessing prejudicial attitudes where they expected more tolerance:

“I didn't find people as open-minded as I expected to. Racism and homophobia were omnipresent.”

“In Africa I have a shock (with the) hospitals, but people are welcoming; in the United States you see the technology is present, but some people are less welcoming and there has been racist behavior towards me.”

Despite some negative aspects, experiences were viewed positively overall.

## Subgroups of Interest

Participants belonging to the subgroups of interest (LGBTQ2+ youth, indigenous youth, youth women in STEM and youth with mobility or hearing impairments) have mainly worked and travelled abroad without noting significant negative barriers that relate to their identities. Like the general population, international experience provides valuable opportunities: learning about foreign cultures and developing personally. The major challenges facing these groups are not substantively different than those faced by the other participants.

Previous research has shown that LGBTQ2+ youth worry about cultural attitudes and what that may mean for their personal safety. Participants in this group did express concern for their safety, although no specific incidents were referenced. Mostly, their feedback suggested that they were unprepared for what it meant to be immersed in more traditional, less open cultures.

“I would have liked to know more about going to the location with a same-sex partner, particularly two women - this information isn't readily available anywhere.”

“I would recommend doing research about the city you'll be living in. I wrongly assumed that the capital would be liberal and vibrant, and I learned that there were other cities that would better meet this expectation, and I would have probably had a better experience if I had stayed in those places.”

Ultimately, traveling abroad was an empowering experience to those in the subgroups, helping participants to build confidence and understand the world in a broader perspective.

“I learned a lot of myself as a person from the experience of being away and gained a lot of independence, sometimes a little too much. I often find myself not relying on anyone and isolating myself. I don't think there's anything I would have done differently because I appreciate all of the moment I had.”

## Incentives & Motivators

### Perceived benefits of international experience

Participants were asked how they benefited from their travel or work abroad experience. The benefits described usually reflect intangible outcomes and four themes emerged: character development, cultural understanding, professional development and a global network.

#### Character development

Many described how their international experiences challenged them and helped them to mature. These trips abroad often marked the first-time participants lived on their own. As an added challenge, basic tasks like doing laundry and buying groceries were made more difficult when conducted in a foreign language. Although they faced difficult situations in the absence of a familiar support system, they gained self-confidence as they overcame these challenges.



“On a personal level, I have “proven” to myself that I can adapt to new situations, that I know how to be sociable, that I can manage the stress of the unknown, that I can overcome obstacles. I increased my self-confidence. I also made friends who hosted me when I visited them in their country (especially in Seoul, South Korea!).”

Out of their comfort zones, participants learned to be adaptable and resilient. By necessity, participants pushed through emotional fatigue (resulting from culture shock and associated feelings of isolation and anxiety) and other hardships to solve problems they faced and be accepting of the things they could not change.

“This experience benefitted my character - to know how to adjust and learn in a less-than-ideal environment... and to test and strengthen my courage when I can only rely on myself.”

“I also developed my adaptability and resilience as I dealt with culture shock and learned how to navigate life in completely new situations.”

The magnitude of personal growth could be profound. One participant who volunteered to share her diagnosis of anxiety described how her international experience helped her to push past her limits.

“My study abroad literally changed my life. I have diagnosed anxiety and I wasn't sure if I would be able to handle all the change and unknown. It was definitely hard, and I had to push myself to be stronger and braver (things like learning French, getting lost, lack of routine especially) and it really helped me overcome my anxiety. When I came home, I knew I could do things that previously I would have been too scared to try. A couple years later I went on a 2-month long trip to Asia, which I never would have done if I didn't have my experience studying abroad.”

This anecdote may not be typical of travel experiences abroad, but it does point to how impactful these opportunities can be for Canadian youth. Broadly, participants’ responses reflect how their experiences transformed their sense of self by improving their self-confidence, their ability to cope with stress and navigate difficult or uncertain social environments. These experiences have a transformative, lasting impact on youth.

## Cultural understanding

International experiences help to improve cultural understanding. Cultural understanding was developed in three different ways. First, participants described new awareness of other cultures. Living abroad gave time to develop a more nuanced appreciation of local history and customs compared to shorter stays (i.e. while touring).

“I also learned about Costa Rican culture (which I had wrongly assumed would be the same as all of Latin America) and food. I developed awareness of different lifestyles and viewpoints.”

“Overall, I am confident that I can navigate a variety of situations. I have experienced what it is like to live in another country and have a deeper understanding of some of the conflicts that exist.”

Second, participants described a conscious effort to be open to cultural differences. As foreigners living abroad, participants needed to adapt to not being part of the dominant culture, making them more sensitive to the need to be more open-minded about differences.

“I experienced a different culture and learned to respect others’ differences and adapt to them.”

“I feel that the experience had a tremendous positive benefit to me in terms of being exposed to different culture, lifestyle and people, and developing confidence to travel solo.”

“It gave me more flexibility, appreciation of other experiences, cultures, and languages, helped me realize how much I take for granted.”

In turn, heightened cultural awareness helped participants to understand what it means to live in Canada. Even though international experiences were positive, an oft repeated benefit of living abroad was a strengthened gratitude for the Canadian way of life.

“Travelling opened my eyes to realities that were sometimes very far from mine. I came to discover that the world is more than Montreal or Quebec. Everyone has problems and different ways to solve them. I also know that we are very fortunate to be in Canada. I have gratitude for being where I am.”

“I definitely had more of an appreciation for the things that I have back home. It opened my eyes that not everyone has what I have, and that I must do what I can to help those who need it most.”

“I feel as though it benefited me as I was exposed to a very different culture and way of life. It also helped me to realize just how blessed I am to live in such a beautiful and developed country.”

### Professional development

Some participants directly related their experience abroad to professional development. Working internationally opened opportunities to receive training and insight into global industry practices. Returning to Canada, participants were able to incorporate their knowledge into their work, building a global mindset and creating the possibility for international collaboration.

“I felt this experience opened my eyes professionally to the medical-related needs and the state of medical care in China. This helped me understand and compare the healthcare systems between Canada and China, and it would inform my professional work back here in Canada.”

“It allowed me to learn new skills and to think about collaborative global projects.”

Another merit of working abroad was the development of communication skills. Participants learned to overcome cultural barriers, become adaptable in complex team settings, and some also improved foreign language skills. These skills were valued as important soft skills easily sellable to future employers.

“I learned how to work with people of different backgrounds and cultures. Each workplace was incredibly diverse and each member of the team worked in a different way. It helped me to understand how each member of a team can contribute in a unique way, even if it isn't the way you would do things. I also learned how to improve my communication skills both in English and in Flemish/German. It was much more difficult to present information to ESL colleagues than it was to present to English-speaking colleagues, and it helped me to improve the way I talk and give information to better suit the needs of the listener.”

### Development of social networks

The final benefit of living abroad were the lasting personal and professional relationships; participants developed a global network of contacts. These ongoing relationships can be considered a continuing reinforcement of global perspectives gained during their international experience.

“I have been able to hone professional skills which is great to put onto a resume. Having connections from around the world is also beneficial when travelling or seeking advice as I can get a myriad of perspectives.”

“It also benefited me in that I met people who I worked with and came from different parts of the world. Some of them became close friends who I have travelled abroad to visit as recent as a few months ago.”

“I made good friends from different nations around the world who committed to support same project.”

## Social and travel values

This qualitative research also included an effort to deepen understanding of the underlying values that motivate international experience travel. Social values are used to understand what motivates people in order that outreach strategies/messages can be tailored to align with the values of the intended target. The online community offered an opportunity to assess the motivations of participants. To do this, we incorporated measure of social and travel values.

Our analysis looks at five travel value types:

- Authentic Culture Explorers,
- Historical Explorers,
- Shared Experience Explorers,
- Nature Explorers and
- Unstructured Experience Explorers.

While each of these travel value types is associated with international experience travel, authentic cultural exploration and nature exploration appear to be the strongest motivators.

**Authentic Culture Explorers** are motivated by experiencing and integrating into a foreign culture and experiencing it as the locals do. This is linked to the cultural understanding benefits described in the section below and involves truly embracing the opportunity to experience life in an international destination.

**Nature Explorers** are motivated to see places of natural beauty and to be ‘awe-struck’ by them.

The table below summarizes the specific values associated with each of the travel value types.

Table 16: Explorer types and associated variables.

Explorer Type	Associated Attitudes
<b>Authentic Culture Explorers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I try to learn and use some of the local language so that I can interact with locals in a more authentic way.</li> <li>• My favourite part of travelling to a different place is to wander around and discover little hidden nooks, streets, local shops and eateries that only the locals know about.</li> <li>• I like to put myself in the shoes of locals and experience what it is like to live as they do, or as closely as possible.</li> <li>• I like to experience local foods, attend events, and to see local architecture.</li> <li>• I like to leave the beaten path and explore places most tourists won't go to.</li> <li>• I find it enriching to be exposed to others, engaging in their customs, routines and rituals in their own environment - to me, that is the authentic travel experience.</li> <li>• When visiting a new place, I like to stroll through their parks</li> </ul>
<b>Nature Explorers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would like to see such natural wonders as the Alaskan Glaciers, the Great Barrier Reef, the Himalayan Mountains, the Amazon Basin rainforests, etc.</li> <li>• I prefer to visit places where I will be awe-struck by the sheer beauty of nature, the land, mountains, seas and wildlife.</li> <li>• I want to see natural settings before they are ruined.</li> </ul>
<b>Shared Experience Explorers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like to share with other people the memories of where I've been and what I've done.</li> <li>• I enjoy sharing my travel memories with others because it lets me "re-live" them.</li> <li>• I always keep mementos of my travel experiences like receipts, ticket stubs, and different souvenirs.</li> <li>• Travelling is so much more enjoyable when you do it with someone.</li> </ul>
<b>Historical Explorers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certain places and moments in history fascinate me, and I want to know everything about them.</li> <li>• Visiting sites of historical significance are more interesting to me than any of the other tourist attractions.</li> <li>• I want to be able to stand in the place where history happened - to touch the relics of that time.</li> </ul>
<b>Unstructured Experience Explorers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't need to see all the recommended tourist sites to feel as if I've really visited a place.</li> <li>• When travelling, I like just going with the flow and letting things unfold spontaneously.</li> <li>• One of the most exciting things about travelling is discovering things on my own rather than what the guidebooks tell me.</li> </ul>

We also considered a selection of social values which are not directly related to travel. Youth with international experience tend to exhibit personal control, defined as “striving to organize and control the direction of one's future, even when it feels that there are forces beyond one's immediate control.”

A strong commitment to life-long learning is also evident with participants being especially likely to say they place a high priority on continuous learning. Youth with international experience also tended to agree with the following: “I try to gather a lot of information about products or services before I make an important purchase” and “when I'm interested in a topic, I like to research it, and then visit the place where I can learn more about it”.

## Other considerations

Participants tended to view incentives to participate in travel and work abroad programs as self-evident: the experience provides valuable work and/or study experience, opportunities to travel, and immersion in other cultures. Youth did not lack motivation to participate due to a lack of incentives like job placements, getting certifications or other non-monetary incentives. However, since most international experiences are a proactive choice, participants had to actively pursue these opportunities to make them happen. Support from social networks and institutions plays a positive role in presenting opportunities and encouraging youth to pursue travel abroad.

The inspiration to travel was commonly sparked by the international experiences of others. Family, friends and colleagues directly supported participation, often through sharing their own experiences abroad (or regret for not traveling abroad):

“I first considered it when a colleague mentioned that they had worked abroad for a year. Prior to that, it never occurred to me that that was something I could do, or be interested in.”

“An easy decision because I had great interest and my parents immediately encouraged to follow this path.”

“I had heard from people that it's a great experience, I think it was my cousin who said that it was one of his regrets that he didn't get to do this and recommended it.”

For many youths, the idea of international travel germinated when they were very young and they waited years for opportunities to go. Others learned of opportunities when they were older and decisively pursued them, travelling within a year of deciding to go. Secondary and post-secondary schools play a significant role in cultivating a travel-oriented mindset and programs or experiences that expose young students to the idea often play a role. Others heard about opportunities in university and pursued them:

“It was something I wanted to do from a young age. Probably since presenters came to my elementary school to talk about student exchanges.”

“[I started thinking about it...] A few years prior after a presentation from my Universities Exchange Coordinator.”

“With respect to Denmark, I studied in Copenhagen because it was highly recommended by my school in Canada, and I had spoken to friends who had gone there previously and loved it.”

“This decision was easy to make since my family strongly encouraged me to participate in it and that the experience was very valued in my school.”

A smaller group of participants pursued international work without any formal institutional support:

“I wanted to travel New Zealand, but I was concerned about the duration and the budget and how to cover the cost in case I decide to stay longer. I found this volunteering opportunity and I could stay there, and they would provide food during the stay. It definitely reduced the cost of travel as well as an opportunity to understand the local culture. Everyone was self-driven and motivated to make the experience happen; some discussed how they had tried a couple of times without fully committing, which preventing them on going before.”

“[I was motivated by a] lack of employment opportunities in my career field in my hometown.”

“I was working when I thought about it - I read that the age of eligibility had been increased to 35 so I figured for this program it was now or never.”

There was also an understanding that these international experiences were best pursued in their youth – when they had fewer commitments. The average age of participants was 22.

“My family were pushing me to take it saying that while I'm young is the time to do things like this.”

“I wanted to try working abroad while I was still young and could afford the risk of doing so.”

“During my last year of schooling, I was told that I can either start working or continue with a residency program. A lot of people told me the residency will give me more experience. I wanted to be better, so I started looking at different programs.”

“I had a meeting with a curator who told me about this residency program in Austria and encouraged me to apply. I had thought about doing artist-in-residence programs before, but this was the first time I put serious consideration and effort into it.”

### Recommendations to others

Participants would highly recommend others participate in international travel and work experiences. The greatest incentives for participating are framed as the benefits of the experience, which are personal growth and global understanding:

“Absolutely do it. It doesn't matter if it's the place you will make the most money, or if it seems difficult or intimidating. Going through the experience of heading someplace you've never been and working with people you've never met is an empowering and challenging experience that will change the way you see things in the future.”

Because experiences abroad are primarily realized through individual pursuit, participants also provided more specific recommendations to help smooth the process of travel, avoid potential stressors, and maximize the experience. Thorough research was encouraged of all aspects of the trip:

- **Culture and language**

“Do a bit of research about the culture of the country before going there and be sure to know at least the basic phrases in the national language.”

“I also learned that cultures could behave incredibly differently in the workplace and it's important to inform yourself of the cultural differences of your host country beforehand to avoid any misunderstandings.”

- **The affiliated program or company**

“Make sure that you do your research on both the company you will be working for as well as the company that is helping to pair you with the companies and supporting you throughout the span of the internship.”

“I would recommend to start early by contacting the people you are going to stay with to avoid any unwanted surprise.”

- **Types and costs of visas, as well as the application process**

“Understand the type of work visa that would be best suited for your situation.”

“Getting visas is hard and takes a long time. It is also more expensive than you would expect. I would have started on that process earlier, given the chance...”

- **Salary, exchange rates and cost of living**

“I would also tell them to make sure they budget carefully and understand the resources they will need once in a foreign country. Australia was much more expensive than I had anticipated and had I done some research I may have planned my budget more carefully.”

“Better understand standard of living differences and taxes from Canada. Negotiated a salary based on fluctuating and unstable exchange rates.”

“Be financially well-prepared if the job does not pay very well and don’t have any expectations.”

“Please think about your budget and how you are going to earn or spend the money that you need in abroad.”

- **Tax implications**

“Taxation was something unclear - being temporary residents or holiday-ers, people could have been taxed differently depending on how they lived. This greatly affected the tax rate, especially for my husband who worked many more hours and paid a high tax bill after we arrived home.”

“If I were to go back, I would probably apply to specific jobs rather than doing many short-term through an agency. However, wanting to travel and be able to simply decline work was what I valued at the time and it was a good fit. I learned more about taxation in a foreign country and how I should research those things more if working abroad in other areas.”

Furthermore, participants recommend preparing by reflecting and being mindful of what one wants to gain from the experience.

“Just to be open minded, understand that there will be things to get used to but if they stick with it and trust in themselves it can only go well.”

Other specific recommendations included to:

- Pack lightly
- Make friends quickly
- Connect with locals
- Maintain connections with friends after returning home
- Participate in travel opportunities as soon (and as often) as possible

When asked if they would do it all over again if they could, participants were unanimous in their willingness to repeat the experience.

## **International Experience Planning Journey**

### **First considerations**

Participants began considering trips abroad from a young age. For some, living abroad was a dream that began in their early teenage years, long before they had the opportunity to go. On average, those who volunteered were the youngest (very often considering the opportunity prior to starting post-secondary education), while those who worked abroad began considering the option when they were a few years older, after the typical age for post-secondary graduation. Consequently, the different traveller types were in different life stages when they first considered the opportunities.

Participants had mixed emotions when first considering their opportunities to live abroad. All were excited for the opportunity to travel, but many expressed uncertainties at this stage of the decision-making process. Many details need to be determined – a general nervousness as well as a concern about finances are common to all. Those preparing to work abroad had specific concerns about finding employment or doubts about whether going abroad was the best choice for their career. Students had to undertake lengthy exchange program applications while maintaining grades at school, with some finding all the details of planning overwhelming. Volunteers were also nervous, expressing self-doubt and some concerns for personal safety while abroad.



Table 17: First considerations

	Work	School	Volunteer
<b>Age first considered going abroad</b>	23 years old	21 years old	19 years old
<b>Life stages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Working (<i>including co-op</i>)</li> <li>- Not working (<i>newly graduated / lacking employment opportunities</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Studying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Studying</li> <li>- Newly graduated</li> <li>- Between jobs / unsatisfied with job / underemployed</li> </ul>
<b>Trigger of first consideration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restless</li> <li>- Employer/professional recommendation</li> <li>- Long-term plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exchange opportunities through school</li> <li>- Friends / coworkers participating/ed</li> <li>- Desire for change/travel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Word of mouth (<i>through family, friend, teacher, online</i>)</li> <li>- Inspired by family/friends who participated</li> <li>- Desire to change/travel</li> </ul>
<b>Quotes</b>	“I first considered it when a colleague mentioned that they had worked abroad for a year. Prior to that, it never occurred to me that that was something I could do, or be interested in.”	“I have always wanted to live abroad since I can remember. I always loved traveling and so when I went to university, I knew I definitely wanted to do a program.”	“Knowing that friends from my hometown were going helped in my decision and they encouraged me to go. My parents also encouraged me to go.”
<b>Positive thoughts and feelings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> <li>- Ready for adventure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> <li>- Driven/committed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> </ul>
<b>Negative thoughts and feelings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nervous</li> <li>- Uncertain of job / future</li> <li>- Disbelief / reality check</li> <li>- Financial concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nervous / Anxious</li> <li>- Waiting on program application</li> <li>- Scared / fearful</li> <li>- Stressed /Overwhelmed by details</li> <li>- Financial concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nervous</li> <li>- Self-doubt / Doubtful</li> <li>- Safety concerns</li> <li>- Torn to family commitments</li> </ul>

## Research

The purpose of the international experience results in different considerations for researching the opportunity. Those intending to go abroad for work either had no decision to make (the destination being dictated by their employer) or gravitated to consider countries where they already knew the dominant language (in an attempt to maximize their employability while abroad). Participants who travelled for school frequently indicated that they were open to go anywhere, narrowing down their options as they researched possible programs. Volunteers were split, either choosing their destination based on what was offered by an organization of interest or choosing to go with an organization that operated in their destination of interest.

Participants used a variety of resources to research their international experience opportunities. The Internet is a key source of information for youth looking into each of the three types of international experiences. Program-specific and government websites are consulted most often, while students also leverage university websites. Further to this, universities are a rich, centralized point of reference for students specifically, connecting them to campus exchange coordinators, workshops, and other students who have previously participated on an exchange. Participants of all types were particularly eager to seek out people who had participated in similar programs or lived abroad to gain insight into what to expect. Personal relationships (i.e. family, friends, colleagues) serve as sounding boards that participants rely on to discuss prospective opportunities.

Top research concerns include financial costs (i.e. how to afford going abroad) and program outcomes (e.g. career prospects, credit transferability, etc.). Logistical details like exploring transportation and accommodation options were also important.

During this phase of research, participants became more confident in their path forward as they became more knowledgeable about the experience ahead of them. However, nervousness persisted among many participants. For those working, they balanced the opportunity costs of career and income in Canada versus the unknown. Students meanwhile found it overwhelming to consider all the details to plan.

Table 18: Research considerations and sources

	Work	School	Volunteer
<b>Destinations considered</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most locations determined by job requirements</li> <li>- Those with ability to choose tended to narrow options by region or language spoken by countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Open to anywhere, narrowing decision based on programs and/or preferred regions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus on organization over location, or</li> <li>- Chose to volunteer with organization based on countries served</li> </ul>
<b>Quotes</b>	“Only one because that was what my company offered me.”	“I did consider many destinations, but I did zoom in on one early on (Sweden) which I was able to make work through my universities partnership.”	“I zoomed in on one really. I knew I wanted to be in Asia and specifically with Chinese people. Therefore geographically, only China/Taiwan really made sense.”
<b>Sources of information consulted</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internet (<i>general searches; blogs; program, travel and government websites</i>)</li> <li>- Family, friends, coworkers and those with experience abroad</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internet (<i>online forums; university, program, travel and government websites</i>)</li> <li>- University/program resources (<i>Campus exchange / program coordinators, professors, workshops, brochures</i>)</li> <li>- Family, friends, those gone on exchange</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internet (<i>program website</i>)</li> <li>- Program staff/volunteers</li> <li>- Family/friends</li> </ul>
<b>Top concerns in research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Career experiences &amp; future opportunities</li> <li>- Cultural differences</li> <li>- Logistics (<i>banking, accommodations</i>)</li> <li>- Financial costs, fallback plans</li> <li>- Safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial costs (<i>program, cost of living</i>)</li> <li>- University credits</li> <li>- Logistics (<i>accommodation, visa, transportation</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Program expectations and outcomes</li> <li>- Culture and geography</li> <li>- Financial costs</li> </ul>
<b>Positive thoughts and feelings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited for future</li> <li>- Informed/confident</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> <li>- Accomplished/confident</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> </ul>
<b>Negative thoughts and feelings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anxious/impatient</li> <li>- Financially stressed</li> <li>- Hesitant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nervous</li> <li>- Overwhelmed by details</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nervous</li> </ul>

There are many aspects of an extended trip abroad that require research and scoping out. A lot of information is readily found online, but there are some common pain points in the research process. A prime example is information regarding visas and tax being difficult to find and understand. Other specific difficulties include: finding job opportunities in advance for those on a working holiday; accurately determining course equivalences for school credits among students; and evaluating the legitimacy of volunteer organizations among volunteers.

In general, participants value being able to connect with a mentor or contact who had been abroad and could advise on the process. They also identified that a centralized portal of key information would go a long way in smoothing the multi-faceted application and planning process. Additionally, more grants and bursaries would help reduce financial stress while organizing a trip.

**Table 19: Research pain points and solutions**

	Work	School	Volunteer
<b>Pain Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tax information</li> <li>- Identifying job opportunities in advance</li> <li>- Daily life / details of accommodation</li> <li>- Medical requirements</li> <li>- Visa application</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visa information</li> <li>- Financial assistance</li> <li>- Communication with host school/program</li> <li>- Accurately determining course equivalences</li> <li>- Difficult to compare countries / no centralized information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficulty finding information on remote locations / daily living</li> <li>- Evaluating the legitimacy / impact of a volunteer organization</li> <li>- Medical documentation/vaccines</li> </ul>
<b>Quotes About Pain Points</b>	<p>“Tax information and information on how to earn some money while travelling, it is not easy being low income and not being able to have an income while abroad. The experience definitely put me in some debt.”</p>	<p>“The best resource is the university international offices. They are so knowledgeable. The government of Canada website is too complicated to navigate and does not easily share information for Canadians living abroad.”</p>	<p>“It was difficult to know what daily life was going to be like. Where would I be living, what would I be doing, etc.”</p>
<b>Solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connect to a mentor / contact with someone who had participated in program</li> <li>- Centralized information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Checklists</li> <li>o Clarification on filing tax</li> <li>o Budget help</li> <li>o Local connections to temporary housing, jobs, social meetups</li> <li>o Direct contact for help with visas</li> <li>o Grants/bursaries</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connect to a mentor / contact with someone who had participated in program</li> <li>- Centralized information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Checklists</li> <li>o Clarification on filing tax</li> <li>o Budget help</li> <li>o Local connections to temporary housing, jobs, social meetups</li> <li>o Direct contact for help with visas</li> <li>o Grants/bursaries</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial support</li> <li>- More information</li> </ul>

<p><b>Quotes about ideal resources to have</b></p>	<p>“A clear website on foreign insurance and the necessary visas as well as tax implications, or an agency offering to resolve these questions for you.”</p> <p>“More materials on successful desk swap candidates may have influenced my decision. Also, more encouragement to pursue it.”</p>	<p>“Ideally, I would have had someone with first-hand experience, as well as someone at the destination institution telling me about life abroad.”</p> <p>“School websites that all contained the exact same information so that I could easily compare schools instead of having to search for all of the information. More information provided by the Canadian government on the visa application process and what to expect upon arriving in my host country.”</p>	<p>“Maybe an "all-in-one" package deal could have helped where most things were already planned and all I had to do was say yes.”</p> <p>“More finances in order to explore more. I think being a fresh grad, my finances were a limiting factor in how long I could be abroad for.”</p>
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Participants were asked whether, during their research, they looked at any Government of Canada programs or services, and if so, what were the advantages or disadvantages. Few had researched federal programs, and fewer still had considered or applied. These few also had difficulty recalling specific program names that they had researched.

“Yes, I looked into some programs. I don't remember which ones they were. They seemed very competitive and out of reach for someone like me. I never felt it worth my time to go and apply for the programs as I didn't feel like I had the skills to present myself as the best candidate.”

Participants were generally unaware that the Government of Canada offered programs facilitating experiences abroad. Some mistook this reference of government programs as the Registration of Canadians Abroad, visa applications, or country-specific travel advisories.

“I remember looking at the Government of Canada website prior to travelling to Kenya. I believe it was a program to notify them about my travel to Kenya. There was also information about what areas to avoid during my trip. I found that the information was useful.”

When studying abroad through school, students were not likely to consider federal travel programs. They relied on institutional partnerships to take courses abroad.

“No, I did not look at these programs because my international study experience was conducted directly through my University.”

## Decision

Unsurprisingly, participants who studied abroad were on average the quickest to commit to going abroad, taking an average of eight months to make a decision. They often needed to meet stricter deadlines for program applications and standardized start dates dictated by school calendars. Those who volunteered abroad took only slightly longer (eight and a half months) to commit to a decision to go, while those choosing to work abroad took on average a month longer (nine and a half months). (Please note, these figures are based on qualitative findings, and are not a representative measure of the experiences of Canadian youth overall. They are indicative rather than projectable to the population.)

The decision to go abroad was easy for most. For students, the application process meant that students had already determined the program fit with school schedule, credits required and personal goals. Once accepted into the program, if finances were arranged (typically involving scholarships and/or parental support) and encouragement was received from their social network, they were ready to commit to go. For those working and volunteering, the decision to go abroad was made easier if it felt like “opportune” timing – typically characterized by having a break in work or school and/or with the realization they had no or minimal family commitments.

Some factors make it more difficult to decide, like the financial burden of travel, weighing opportunity costs and benefits, family obligations or lack of support. These are common to across all traveller types.

Family is the most-often consulted – whether it is to discuss the possibilities or simply for would-be participants to share the excitement of their decision. Friends, colleagues, and mentors also play an important role by helping participants discuss their potential experience abroad. A number said they did not discuss their plans with anyone, or simply shared the fact that they were going.

By the time participants had made this decision, their feelings had crystalized and most simply recall excitement for their upcoming journey.

Table 20: Decision making

	Work	School	Volunteer
<b>Time lapsed to make decision</b>	9.5 months (avg) <i>Range: immediately – 9 years</i>	8 months (avg) <i>Range: immediately – 5 years</i>	8.5 months (avg) <i>Range: immediately – 3 years</i>
<b>Consulted parties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family</li> <li>- Spouse/partner</li> <li>- Colleagues</li> <li>- No one</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family</li> <li>- Academic counsellors</li> <li>- Friends</li> <li>- Those gone on exchange</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family</li> </ul>
<b>Deciding factor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decided by employer/program</li> <li>- Ease of obtaining visas</li> <li>- Cost of living/Minimum wage</li> <li>- Location of friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Program requirements / fit</li> <li>- Courses offered at exchange school</li> <li>- Scholarship / bursary</li> <li>- Time commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alignment with education/professional goals</li> <li>- Fit with organization</li> </ul>
<b>Quotes</b>	“Loss of my job and the ease to apply for a visa.”	“How it aligned with my current studies and what year I wanted to go.”	“The fact that it was a humanitarian trip organized by my school gave me confidence in the idea of traveling to a foreign country.”
<b>Factors that made it easy to decide</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Friends/family encouragement</li> <li>- Opportune time / no obligations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family / friends encouragement</li> <li>- Finances (family, scholarship)</li> <li>- Fit of program (timing, credits, goals)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family / friends encouragement</li> <li>- Opportune time / no obligations</li> <li>- Secured funding</li> </ul>
<b>Factors that made it difficult to decide</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial considerations</li> <li>- Indecisive / crossroads</li> <li>- Family obligations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of family support</li> <li>- Leaving friends</li> <li>- Indecisive / Crossroads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Indecisive / Crossroads</li> <li>- Funds</li> </ul>
<b>Thoughts and Feelings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> <li>- Nervous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> <li>- Nervous</li> </ul>

### Planning your experience

The final stage in the journey is planning the specifics of the international experience. Participants continued to feel excited, although some of those preparing to work abroad were also feeling overwhelmed. For those going without a partnered organization, they were responsible for arranging all their own travel details, including securing visas, accommodating and employment. As well they needed to give notice to their employer – a significant milestone preparing to travel abroad. Meanwhile, students and volunteers prepared by completing applications, finalizing booking details, and enrolled in courses raised funds, and received vaccinations (as applicable).

Family continued to be an important support for all at this stage. Those working abroad also gravitated towards government websites and social media forums; students spoke with academic counselors, program administrators and program alumni; volunteers relied on speaking to other volunteers.

At this final stage in the planning journey, participants had lingering concerns. Those preparing to work abroad had many functional concerns related to employment, housing, cost of living and community. Students had more generalized concerns about what the experience was going to be like, being away from home for an extended period, general health and safety, and impact of language barriers. Volunteers were more concerned for their safety and about missing their family.

**Table 21: Experience planning - considerations**

	Work	School	Volunteer
<b>Thoughts and Feelings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> <li>- Overwhelmed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> <li>- Nervous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excited</li> <li>- Nervous</li> </ul>
<b>Steps taken</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Look for employment</li> <li>- Give notice/close out Canadian responsibilities</li> <li>- Secure accommodations</li> <li>- Get information on taxes/banking</li> <li>- Learn about day-to-day life</li> <li>- Book travel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complete application</li> <li>- Navigate visa process</li> <li>- Choose courses</li> <li>- Learn about day-to-day life</li> <li>- Book travel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complete applications</li> <li>- Navigate visa process</li> <li>- Raise funds</li> <li>- Vaccinations</li> <li>- Book travel</li> </ul>
<b>Where did they get support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employer</li> <li>- Spouse/partner</li> <li>- Government websites</li> <li>- Social media forums</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family</li> <li>- Academic counsellors and program administrators</li> <li>- Those who have previously gone on exchange</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family</li> <li>- Other volunteers</li> <li>- Volunteer organizations</li> </ul>
<b>Main concerns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of employment</li> <li>- No/poor accommodations</li> <li>- Social isolation</li> <li>- Lack of funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General nerves</li> <li>- Language barriers</li> <li>- Health and safety</li> <li>- Missing family/partner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Safety</li> <li>- Missing family/partner</li> </ul>
<b>Quotes</b>	<p>“What if I don't get a visa or miss some obscure tax rule?”</p>	<p>“I was a bit worried about being away from home for an extended period of time. I was also worried about things like the language barrier, and not having any of my support system nearby.”</p>	<p>“I was concerned about how safe it was, but that usually is a result of lack of experience in travel as I was at the time.”</p>

All types of travellers benefitted from talking with people who had travelled abroad (whether in the same program or not). External agencies (i.e. job agencies, universities, volunteer organizations) were supportive to many while planning, helping to navigate complex paperwork and application processes. Some of aspects of planning were also considered easy to arrange, like booking flights.



Without an external agency, the planning process was more challenging. Some found visa applications very confusing, regardless of whether they had support through an agency. As well, extended stays abroad tended to require a lot of paperwork which, although not always challenging, could be tedious.

On reflection, participants have several suggestions for resources that could be made available to improve this planning stage. All groups indicated that they would have valued (or did benefit from) the opportunity to talk to a person who had travelled abroad, in order to get informed and unbiased advice. They also indicated a need for an online centralized repository of information, including comprehensive information on visa applications, budget planning, application checklists as well as job banks. Visa applications were made more difficult for those not living near embassies, and those with spouses regretted not being able to bring them along.

Table 22: Experience planning - factors

	Work	School	Volunteer
<b>Factors that made planning easy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Planning/support through employer or agency (e.g. arranging flights, accommodation and visas)</li> <li>- Previous travel experience</li> <li>- Online resources/expat connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support through school &amp; study abroad office or agency</li> <li>- Enjoyable/streamlined process</li> <li>- Personal flexibility</li> <li>- Support from family &amp; friends</li> <li>- Information available online</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advice/support from people in program</li> <li>- Short trip</li> <li>- Big decisions taken care of</li> <li>- Going with friends</li> </ul>
<b>Quotes about ease of planning</b>	“It was an easy process thanks to the agency. Had I done it all on my own, it probably would have been challenging.”	“It was easy because the study abroad office was very supportive, and they know what they are doing. The university was well organized, and I also love planning trips.”	“It was really easy due to all of the help I got from volunteers willing to answer questions in Bangladesh ahead of me.”
<b>Factors that made planning challenging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confusion / process not straightforward</li> <li>- Visa application process</li> <li>- Short timeframe to plan</li> <li>- Difficult to find information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Length of process/tedious</li> <li>- Visa application</li> <li>- Lots of choices / second-guessing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fundraising</li> <li>- Uncertain/first trip away</li> </ul>
<b>Quotes about challenges of planning</b>	“Challenging since I had to find everything on my own.”	“It was only challenging because it was a lot info to process--but not particularly difficult in terms of skills required.”	“Challenging because I've always been close to my family.”
<b>Potential improvements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Person to consult for advice/guidance</li> <li>- Job bank</li> <li>- Expense calculator</li> <li>- Comprehensive planning checklist</li> <li>- Streamline/cut costs of visas</li> <li>- Flexibility to bring spouses/family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Streamlined/all-in-one application</li> <li>- Centralized information</li> <li>- Person to consult for advice/guidance</li> <li>- Financial and/or logistical support</li> <li>- Ease process of applying for visa when not located nearby</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Person to consult for advice/guidance</li> <li>- Comprehensive planning checklist</li> <li>- Financial and/or logistical support</li> </ul>

### III. Conclusions

The results of this research provide insight into the experiences, attitudes and behaviours of past international experience participants as well as the motivations, aspirations and needs related to participation. As IRCC is concerned with increasing awareness of, and participation in, the IEC program among Canadian youth, some observations from this research are highlighted below for consideration.

#### **Promotion of the program**

For many, the idea of living abroad was implanted when they were young - they describe experiences in secondary or post-secondary school exposing them to the idea as playing a significant role in cultivating a travel-oriented mindset. Post-secondary students are an easily reached group and maximizing outreach to them (or even earlier) would be an effective way of 'planting the seed' in the minds of many young people. As they reach post-secondary education age, most students do not yet have many obligations to bind them to Canada and are in a strong position to seek out exchange programs or other opportunities if they are already favourably disposed toward them.

Further, previous research has suggested raising awareness by recruiting past IEC program participants to provide presentations or spread the word through social media. They could act as 'spokespeople' or 'ambassadors' to not only promote the program but could be leveraged to provide youth interested in an international experience with advice and feedback. Participants consistently state that having such a resource was very valuable to them (or would have been).

Ideally, communications would take into account the motivations, aspirations and needs of youth who are candidates for an international experience. Although those motivations were explored in this research, it is very likely that additional quantitative research would uncover segments within the international experience population, further enabling targeted and value aligned communications.

#### **Centralized information hub**

There is a clear difference between those who had organizational support (their employer, a university exchange program or volunteer program) and those who did not in terms of how difficult they found the process of planning for their experience. A centralized hub of information targeted at youth planning or preparing to work, study or volunteer abroad which brings together all of the information they would need in one place would be a valuable tool and could help to minimize that gap. Participants say that the information they find online is often out of date or contradictory so having a trusted source of the most recent and accurate information in a single place could eliminate this issue.

This hub would be especially useful if it offered specialized information organized according to whether the searcher is looking to work, study or volunteer abroad. As this research shows, these groups have distinct information needs. In addition, since few participants were aware of travel programs offered through the Government of Canada (and even fewer had considered these programs for themselves) providing information about IEC within the hub would highlight the program for its target audience.

**Information about visas and taxes**

The most common pain points for participants are visas (and visa applications) and information about taxes in foreign countries. It would be beneficial to youth who are undertaking an international experience to have access to accurate, up to date information specifically about these issues in an accessible, and plain language manner. The details around these issues can seem overwhelming and clearly laid out instructions or checklists would alleviate much of that anxiety.

## Appendix A: Research methodology

In order to meet IRCC's research objectives two phases of research were conducted with the same target audience but with different focuses.

### Qualitative phase methodology

The target population audience for the **qualitative online community** was Canadian youth who have either had an international experience that required a visa/work permit or have participated in the IEC program. It included youth from the general population but also recruited those from low-incidence groups (LGBTQ2+ youth, Indigenous youth, youth women in STEM and youth with mobility/hearing impairments) to explore if/how their views differ from those in the general public. Separate English and French bulletin boards were run concurrently.

A total of 115 youth aged 18-40 from across the country completed the community over a total window of three days, from February 19 to 21, 2020. Participants were recruited as part of the quantitative phase and all respondents who qualified for the online survey were screened for recruitment (including questions to evaluate their suitability). Invitations were sent selectively to the pool of qualified recruits in order to get a range of participants based on regional, demographic, language and other characteristics. Respondents who have a family member who works in the media were not invited to participate in the qualitative phase.

Participants in the online community were informed of the purpose of the exercise, the time commitment and honorarium, and provided with guidance on how to protect their privacy. The methodology avoided attrition by minimizing the time lag between recruitment and the beginning of the qualitative exercise. Each participant was given an honorarium of \$100 as a thank you for their time. The demographic breakdown of the participants in the online community is provided in the tables below.

**Table 23 Gender breakdown of participants in the online community**

Group	English bulletin board	French bulletin board	Total
Male	47	13	60
Female	41	13	54
Other	1	0	1

**Table 24: Age breakdown of participants in the online community**

Group	English bulletin board	French bulletin board	Total
18-24	16	2	18
25-30	20	8	28
31-35	33	5	38
36-40	20	11	31

**Table 25: Regional breakdown of participants in the online community**

Group	English bulletin board	French bulletin board	Total
Atlantic	7	0	7
Quebec	5	25	30
Ontario	43	1	44
Prairies	24	0	24
BC and the Territories	10	0	10

The online community used the Recollective online bulletin board platform (programmed and hosted in Canada). This platform generated an asynchronous threaded discussion that developed as participants completed the research. Respondents were required to log onto the platform on two separate days to allow them the opportunity to review and comment on the posts of others before coming in to complete their second day. This approach brings together a focus on introspective, individual activities and feedback from moderators, and a larger community to encourage participants to volunteer and explain their motivations, concerns and feelings more openly.

The moderator overseeing the research process was Tony Coulson with support on the bulletin boards provided by our partner, Asking Canadians. At Tony's direction, analysts from Environics posted comments on the bulletin board in order to stimulate conversation and to probe participants for further information.

### **Statement of limitations**

This research was qualitative in nature, not quantitative. As such, the results provide an indication of participants' views about the issues explored, but they cannot be generalized to the full population of members of the general public or members of the targeted audience segments. 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.

### **Quantitative phase methodology**

The **quantitative online survey** was conducted in order to accomplish two goals: measure the incidence of Canadian youth who have participated in an international experience that required a visa/work permit and/or have participated in the IEC program in the past and to gather information from this group on their experience, their awareness of, and satisfaction with, the IEC program and their future intentions regarding international experiences.

### **Sample design and weighting**

To measure the incidence of youth who participated in an international experience that required a visa/work permit and/or have participated in the IEC program, panelists were screened first to identify if they met the eligibility requirements of a potential past IEC program participant (a Canadian citizen living in Canada between the ages of 18-40. Participants over the age of 35 (up to age 40) were included as the research focused on past participation in IEC. Given the low incidence target audience, no quotas were set, but in total, 4,046 youth respondents were identified who met these eligibility requirements and were asked the screening questions to determine whether they qualified for the survey by asking about past international travel experiences and/or participation in the IEC program. A total of 850 qualified youth completed the survey.

Since the demographic characteristics of the group of Canadian youth who have either previously participated in the IEC program or who obtained a visa to work, study or volunteer abroad is not known, screening was done with a large number of youth eligible to participate in IEC to estimate the incidence of qualification for each gender within each region (see table 1). The overall incidence of this group in Canada is 22%.

Weights for the final data file were generated by first weighting the sample of 4,046 cases who were screened for international experience and otherwise qualified according to the 2016 Census and then excluding the cases which did not qualify (did not have a past international experience). This procedure ensured the final data set (n=850) accounted for variations in qualification incidence within each gender/region group. The final data therefore matches the population of Canadian citizen youth living in Canada aged 18-40 but accounts for the likelihood of each group being qualified to participate. The demographic characteristics of the final weighted data set are presented in the tables below.

**Table 26: Survey participants' gender**

Gender	All respondents (n=850)
Male	58%
Female	41%
Another gender	1%
Prefer not to say	<1%

**Table 27: Survey participants' age**

Age	All respondents (n=850)
18-24	8%
25-30	25%
31-35	37%
36-40	30%

**Table 28: Survey participants' province**

Region	All respondents (n=850)
Atlantic Canada	4%
Quebec	20%
Ontario	42%
Prairies	19%
BC + Territories	14%

Since online panel surveys are not a random probability samples, no formal estimates of sampling error can be calculated. Although opt-in panels are not random probability samples, online surveys can be used for general population surveys provided they are well designed and employ a large, well-maintained panel. Respondents were informed about privacy and anonymity.

### Questionnaire design and pre-test

EnviroNics adapted the survey questionnaire provided by IRCC to meet the research objectives and to act as both a quantitative survey instrument and as an effective method of recruiting qualified, high-quality participants into the qualitative online community exercise. The survey screened respondents to ensure they qualify using socio-demographic and program related screening questions to identify the target audience for the quantitative survey and to identify potential participants for the qualitative research.

Once finalized, the online survey was translated into French. The final online survey/screener is included in Appendix B.

Environics' data analysts programmed the questionnaire, then performed thorough testing to ensure accuracy in set-up and data collection. This validation ensured that the data entry process conformed to the surveys' basic logic. The data collection system handles sampling invitations, quotas and questionnaire logic (skip patterns, branching, and valid ranges).

Prior to finalizing the survey for field, a pre-test (soft launch) was conducted in English and French. The pre-test assessed the questionnaire in terms of question wording and sequencing, respondent sensitivity to specific questions and to the survey overall, and to determine the survey length. It also tested the measurement of suitability for taking part in the qualitative online community exercise. As no changes were required following the pre-test, the pre-test cases (10 English, 10 French) were included in the analysis.

### **Fieldwork**

The survey was conducted by Environics using a secure, fully featured web-based survey environment. The interviews took place from February 7 (soft launch pre-test) to February 21, 2020. The average interview length among those who completed the full quantitative survey was 6 minutes.

All respondents were offered the opportunity to complete the survey in their official language of choice. All research work was conducted in accordance with the Standards for the Conduct of Government of Canada Public Opinion Research – Online Surveys and recognized industry standards, as well as applicable federal legislation (Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, or PIPEDA).



## Participation rate

The participation rate for the survey was 10% (calculated as the number of responding units, divided by the sum of unresolved units, in-scope non-responding units, and responding units). The completion results are as follows:

**Table 29: Participation rate**

<b>Total email addresses used</b>	<b>47,859</b>
<b>Invalid cases</b>	<b>0</b>
<i>Invitations mistakenly sent to people who did not qualify for the study</i>	0
<i>Incomplete or missing email addresses</i>	0
<b>Unresolved (U)</b>	<b>42,654</b>
<i>Email invitations bounce back</i>	0
<i>Email invitations unanswered</i>	42,654
<b>In-scope - Non-responding (IS)</b>	<b>347</b>
<i>Non-response from eligible respondents</i>	0
<i>Respondent refusals</i>	0
<i>Language problem</i>	0
<i>Selected respondent not available</i>	0
<i>Early break-offs</i>	347
<b>Responding units (R)</b>	<b>4858</b>
<i>Completed surveys disqualified – quota filled</i>	847
<i>Completed surveys disqualified for other reasons</i>	3,161
<i>Completed surveys</i>	850
<b>Participation Rate</b>	<b>10.2%</b>

## Non-response bias analysis

Since no census data exists of the demographic make-up of the qualified target population, an analysis of non-response bias is not possible.

## Statement of limitations

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.

## **Appendix B: Quantitative and qualitative instruments**

*English and French quantitative and qualitative instruments are provided under separate cover.*