



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

2021 International Experience Canada (IEC) Youth Study

Executive Summary

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This public opinion research report presents the results of a quantitative online survey and a qualitative online community conducted by Environics Research on behalf of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. The quantitative survey was conducted with 2,500 Canadian youth and 1,004 parents of Canadian youth, and the community was conducted with 198 Canadian youth and 43 parents of Canadian youth in March 2021.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre: **Étude sur les jeunes d'Expérience internationale Canada (EIC) 2021**

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Executive summary

Background and objectives

International Experience Canada (IEC) enables young Canadians to work and travel abroad. For Canadian citizens aged 18-35, IEC provides a path to a work permit or visa that lets them work and explore one of over 30 countries and territories. Because it is a reciprocal program, foreign youth from partner countries/territories can do the same in Canada.

IEC is a program managed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and it aims to maximize reciprocity between international youth participation and Canadian youth participation. As a result, the primary objective of this research is to provide insights that will help IEC increase Canadian youth participation in the program. This involves evaluating the knowledge of the IEC program among its target audiences. More specifically, the objectives of the research include measuring:

- previous travel and or work abroad experience (where, main objective of travel, duration, etc.)
- awareness of the IEC program
- motivations and barriers to participating in international work abroad experiences, such as those facilitated by the IEC program
- perceived benefits of travel or work abroad experience
- the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on attitudes and travel intentions

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

Methodology

To meet the research objectives, both quantitative and qualitative research were conducted. The quantitative phase consisted of an online survey with Canadian youth, aged 18 to 35, and parents of Canadian youth attending secondary or post-secondary education. The qualitative phase drew participants from the final sample of both youth and parents.

1. A **quantitative online survey** was conducted February 26 to March 12, 2021, with 2,500 Canadian youth aged 18-35, and 1,004 parents of Canadian youth currently attending secondary or post-secondary education. Both groups were recruited from an online panel. The survey was approximately 10 minutes in length and explored behaviours and attitudes toward international travel, perceived benefits and barriers of an international experience, awareness and perceptions of the IEC program and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel attitudes.
2. A selection of participants from the quantitative survey were screened and invited to participate in a two-day **qualitative online community**. The online community required input from participants on two separate days and was conducted over a total window of three days, from March 17 to 19, 2021. A total

of 241 people (43 parents and 198 youth aged 18-35) from across the country participated and each was given an honorarium of \$100. In order to get input from specific groups of interest to IRCC, youth from each of the following groups were also included: General population, LGBTQ2+ youth, Indigenous youth, youth women in STEM and youth with mobility/hearing impairments.

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

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

Since online panel surveys are not a random probability samples, no formal estimates of sampling error can be calculated. Although not employing 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 \$172,116.06 (HST included).

Key findings

Qualitative phase

Most youth and parents of youth in the online community indicate they have adjusted to life in the pandemic, with new routines and activities to occupy their time. Some note that they appreciate certain benefits, like more time at home with family, time for different pursuits, less commuting, and the ability to save money. While much of the discussion around pandemic life is neutral or positive, youth and parents also note some concerns and challenges they have faced during this time. Youth frequently mention declines in mental health, and the absence of social connection; many parents also notice these effects in their children. When asked to rank different aspects of life that have been impacted by the pandemic, youth widely rank the same items (i.e. mental health and social life) as the changes that are most impactful for them.

Most participants in the qualitative discussion indicate that they (or their child) took at least one international trip in 2018 or 2019, most often for vacations or to visit family and friends, and generally expect to travel again post-pandemic, i.e. within the next three to five years. When discussing their expectations in detail, youth and parents often suggest a sense of pent-up demand or a desire to make up for lost time when travel is possible again. While most participants seem to be optimistic about future travel prospects, there is a smaller faction within both youth and parents who express more uncertainty about future travel, frequently related to current uncertainties and the possibility of longer consequences and financial difficulties.

Thinking about future travel considerations, safety is top of mind for youth and parents, who often say they will be looking for signs that a destination has good control over COVID-19 (e.g. high vaccination, low rates of spread) before planning to travel there. Other considerations not related to safety are secondary to these concerns for most youth and parents. While youth and parents generally have similar views on this, parents also frequently add in concerns about their child's responsibility when travelling in terms of things like taking safety precautions, contingency plans, and spending wisely. While there are differing views on when international travel will be safe and possible again, most expect that it will take at least a year, and that this will vary widely depending on location. One interesting and distinct difference between youth and parents is their view on

quarantine; youth are generally more amenable to the idea of quarantine, if it is required for an international experience while parents, who perhaps think more in terms of short trips, feel that quarantine is a strong deterrent because of its cost in both time and money.

In terms of their future vision of post-pandemic travel, three distinct groups emerge among youth. A small group indicates that they are ready to travel, with little fear or hesitation about the pandemic at all. Another group is quite opposite to this, taking a very cautious approach to travel, often mentioning contingency and safety plans, and being very mindful of potential risks like crowds. Most youth fall into a middle range, expressing reserved enthusiasm for travel and expecting some health measures to persist, either due to requirements at the destination, or by personal choice. Parents mostly fall into this middle category as well, and compared to youth, tend to express higher levels of concern about safety and responsibility when thinking about future travel for their children.

Quantitative phase

Canadian Youth

International travel in general is common among Canadian youth age 18 to 35, with most (86%) reporting at least one international trip for leisure or business in their lifetime, and four in ten travelling specifically for a work, study, or volunteer experience. Of those who have travelled for work, study, or volunteering, about half say they have obtained a visa for this purpose.

Young travellers most value these experiences for the opportunity to learn about new cultures, the adventure, and personal growth. New language or career skills are noted as key benefits less often, and only half of Canadian youth with international experience say they have included this experience on a resume, often due to a lack of relevance to a specific role. While career development may not be a primary reason for youth who seek international opportunities, six in ten do agree that they are eager to share their experience with prospective employers.

Just under one in ten Canadian youth say they have participated in the IEC program, most using the open work permit option. Among IEC participants, total satisfaction (84%) and likelihood of recommending the program (80%) are both strong. Above all else, IEC participants attribute their satisfaction with the program to a great overall experience (37%).

Awareness of the IEC program is generally low among Canadian youth, who mainly learn about the program by word of mouth from family or friends or general internet searches. Though awareness is limited, one in three express interest in learning more about IEC, and indicate that general internet searches, school resources, and word of mouth are the best channels to reach them.

Young Canadians are mindful of safety concerns surrounding travel and COVID-19, with six in ten (58%) saying they will feel more comfortable about travelling once they are vaccinated, and about half (53%) saying they won't feel comfortable living in another country until their COVID-19 rate approaches zero. Despite this caution, there is pent-up demand for travel among youth, with six in ten (58%) agreeing they are more likely to travel when they can, because travel has been off-limits for so long. Despite this interest in travel, a sizeable proportion of youth express long-term concerns about travel after the pandemic: four in ten (40%) say there are places in the world they would no longer consider living in, and similar numbers (38%) say they are less likely to live outside of Canada in the future because of the pandemic; this suggests that education and reassurances about safety may be required in order to rebuild interest in international travel experiences. Overall, most youth

(75%) say they are likely to travel for leisure or business before they turn 35, one in three (35%) say they are likely to travel for work, and one in five intends to travel abroad for study (21%) or to volunteer (21%).

Future travel motivations generally match the benefits mentioned by past youth travellers, with adventure and learning about a new culture topping the reasons they would consider travelling for work, study, or volunteering. Asked about the barriers that hold them back from travelling abroad, most mention finances, language, or obligations at home. About half say they just don't know how to get started, and a similar proportion feel they would have difficulty finding work in another country; in the short to medium term, these latter barriers may be easier to alleviate to increase potential participation in programs like IEC. About one in three Canadian youth say they are likely to participate in IEC or a similar international program in the future.

Parents of Canadian Youth

Among parents of Canadian youth enrolled in secondary or post-secondary education, fewer than one in ten say their child has obtained a visa for international work, study, or volunteer experiences, and 5 percent say their child has participated in IEC. Among parents themselves, fewer than one in five (16%) have obtained a visa for work, study, or volunteering abroad, and 3 percent are past IEC participants.

As with youth, parents have low awareness of IEC and most often learn about the program by word of mouth. Despite this low awareness, half of parents say they are interested to learn more about the program, preferring general internet searches, school resources, or information sessions as the best channels to reach them.

The parent responses also suggest some degree of pent-up demand for international experiences. Despite concerns about the pandemic and doubts about the potential safety of travel in some parts of the world, six in ten parents say they would recommend that their child travel internationally for work, study, or to volunteer.

Political neutrality statement and contact information

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