



December 2020

ENGAGED IN THE WORLD

A systemic investigation into the administration
of postings, assignments and employments of
Defence Team personnel outside of Canada



Submission to the Minister of National Defence
Report from the National Defence and Canadian
Armed Forces Ombudsman

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Letter to the Minister

12 November 2020

The Honourable Harjit S. Sajjan, PC, OMM, MSM, CD, MP
Minister of National Defence
National Defence Headquarters
101 Colonel By Drive,
13 th Floor, North Tower
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K2

Dear Minister Sajjan:

Please find enclosed the report *Engaged in the world: A systemic investigation into the administration of postings, assignments and employments of Defence Team personnel outside of Canada*.

This report makes 13 evidence-based recommendations. If accepted and implemented, we believe that these recommendations will bring long-lasting positive change to all Canadian Armed Forces members, civilian employees at the Department of National Defence, Staff of the Non-Public Funds, and their families who are posted outside of Canada. The report also identifies specific observations that are not under the exclusive control of the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces, however, we hope that they can be of use to you in engaging with your partners and counterparts to address these systemic issues.

This report is submitted to you pursuant to paragraph 38(1)(b) of the *Ministerial Directives* respecting the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. As is standard practice, we will be publishing the report no sooner than 28 days from the date of this letter. We would appreciate your response prior to publication so that it may be included. As in the past, we have offered your staff a briefing on the report prior to publication.

I look forward to your response to our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Gregory A. Lick
Ombudsman

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Mandate

The Office of the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman was created in 1998 by Order-in-Council to increase transparency in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as to ensure the fair treatment of concerns raised by Canadian Armed Forces members, Departmental employees, and their families.

The Office is a direct source of information, referral, and education for the members of the Defence community. Its role is to help individuals access existing channels of assistance or redress when they have a complaint or concern. The office is also responsible for reviewing and investigating complaints from constituents who believe they have been treated unfairly by the Department of National Defence or the Canadian Armed Forces. In addition, the Ombudsman may investigate and report publicly on matters affecting the welfare of Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence employees, and others falling within their jurisdiction.

The ultimate goal is to contribute to substantial and long-lasting improvements to the Defence community. Any of the following people may bring a complaint to the Ombudsman when the matter is directly related to the Department of National Defence or the Canadian Armed Forces:

- A current or former member of the Canadian Armed Forces
- A current or former member of the Cadets
- A current or former employee of the Department of National Defence
- A current or former Non-Public Fund employee
- A person applying to become a member
- A member of the immediate family of any of the above-mentioned
- An individual on an exchange or secondment with the Canadian Armed Forces

The Ombudsman is independent of the military chain of command and senior civilian management and reports directly to the Minister of National Defence.

Executive Summary

Canada's participation in postings outside of Canada (OUTCAN) is essential to help Canada meet international commitments and obligations, in organizations including but not limited to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and North American Aerospace Defense Command.

As of June 2020, there were over 4,000 Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence employees, Staff of the Non-Public Funds and their families posted to 70 countries OUTCAN.

While there is a perception that an OUTCAN posting is highly desirable, there are stressors and challenges unique to this experience.

In the past five years, our office received 61 complaints regarding OUTCAN postings. The complaints focused primarily on the administration of the Programme and perceived unfairness in the OUTCAN posting selection process as a whole. Given the importance of Canada's continued participation in international commitments, we launched this systemic investigation in 2019 to determine if participants of the OUTCAN Programme are being treated fairly.

This report makes 13 recommendations to the Minister of National Defence, 16 findings and 22 observations. If implemented, we believe that these recommendations will have a long-lasting, positive impact on the Defence community, and ultimately, will improve the OUTCAN experience for all participants.

The COVID-19 pandemic began during this investigation which increased existing challenges associated with the OUTCAN processes and highlighted the importance of effective program oversight.

Section I: Summary of Impact on Constituents

OUTCAN Programme covers postings, assignments, and employments¹ to foreign countries. Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence employees and Staff of the Non-Public Funds work abroad to support Canadian defence priorities. The majority of those posted OUTCAN can be accompanied by their families.

This investigation identified areas of concern related to:

- governance and administration;
- selection, screening and pre-posting;
- relocation;
- support services;
- benefits and services;
- health and safety;
- children's education; and
- morale, welfare and family support services.

This investigation identified two general issues, common to all constituency groups, that affect the Department's ability to efficiently manage and support the OUTCAN Programme overall: a general shortage of support staff and challenges related to communication. This investigation also found that, in general, personnel did not feel adequately prepared and informed about the realities of living abroad.

Overall, despite all the challenges reported, most interviewees indicated that they would put their names forward for another OUTCAN posting.

The recommendations made in this report, if accepted and implemented, will contribute toward ensuring that all personnel and their families posted OUTCAN are treated fairly, that the benefits and services offered meet their needs, and that their overall experience is enhanced.

This report identified systemic issues, the resolution of which will contribute to substantial and long-lasting improvement. Where there are specific individual issues, Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence civilian employees, Staff of the Non-Public Funds and their families can contact our office for personalized assistance.

¹ For readability, the terms "posted" and "postings" will only be used in this report in sections pertaining to all Defence Team personnel when referring to OUTCAN postings, assignments, and employments.

The use of “Department” in this report refers to the joint entity of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Department of National Defence and the Staff of the Non-Public Funds organization. Though this office recognizes that the Staff of the Non-Public Funds organization is a separate entity, we are including them in our use of the term “Department” throughout this report for conciseness.

Section II: Introduction

The Department is one of the largest contributors to postings of Government of Canada personnel abroad.² OUTCAN Programme consists of Canada's contribution to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and North American Aerospace Defense Command in terms of defence attachés, military police, support personnel, policy advisors, and Military Family Services personnel, amongst others.

OUTCAN postings allow Defence Team personnel to develop unique skills, knowledge and expertise, and provide them and their families the opportunity to live in foreign countries. Throughout the course of these postings many will face unique challenges and situations that they may never face while posted within Canada.

Over the past several years, this office received 61 complaints related to how the OUTCAN Programme is administered, including the OUTCAN screening process, relocation, and children's education.³ This investigation focuses on the major issues and impacts related to the administration of benefits, programs, and services available to personnel and their families. As part of this investigation, this office reviewed all stages of the OUTCAN posting process – the pre-posting phase, the posting itself, and the reintegration back in Canada.

The objectives of this investigation were to:

- determine if Defence Team personnel and their families are treated fairly in how the OUTCAN Programme is administered;
- determine whether the benefits and services that are available to personnel and their families while OUTCAN meet their needs;
- identify the impacts of OUTCAN postings;
- determine if improvements can be made to the well-being of personnel and their families; and
- increase overall awareness and understanding of the OUTCAN Programme.

² VCDS OUTCAN Analytics Database. [accessed 12 June 2020].

³ *Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman. Complaint Files.*

Information on the data collected and interviews conducted is outlined in *Appendix A – Investigative Methodology*.

The COVID-19 pandemic unfolded during this investigation. The Department was challenged to find effective solutions for business continuity during these unprecedented times, as all organizations experienced. The situation did highlight the importance of effective program oversight and demonstrated the requirement for a re-evaluation of the support resources dedicated to the administration of the OUTCAN Programme. For more information on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the administration of OUTCAN postings, refer to *Appendix B - COVID-19 pandemic impact analysis*.

Section III: Context

The OUTCAN Programme includes all programs and initiatives related to the posting of Defence Team personnel outside of Canada.⁴ The Programme is different from Canadian Armed Forces foreign operations under the responsibility of Canadian Joint Operations Command.⁵

Personnel posted OUTCAN take on several different roles, including:

- Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces contributions to international organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or North American Aerospace Defense Command;
- contributions to the United Nations;
- diplomatic entities, including the Defence Attaché Program;
- exchange of military positions with foreign nations;
- Military Police Security Services to Global Affairs Canada;
- members attending Staff College abroad and occupying positions dedicated towards training at various institutions outside of Canada;
- support staff at units outside Canada;
- defence scientists;
- financial analysts;
- policy advisors;
- Canadian Community Program Coordinators;
- Personnel Support Programs staff; and
- Military Family Services staff.

Each of these roles has unique requirements, from application, selection and training, and occupation-specific qualifications and job duties.

4 OUTCAN. *About "The Program."* 7 August 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/programs/outcan.html>. [accessed 16 July 2020].

5 Canadian Armed Forces operations refer to operational deployments that are different from an OUTCAN posting in many ways. For example, these deployments have an operational mandate, members are deployed without dependants, and for a shorter period of time, members are deployed to an operational camp, the work tempo differs, member status is different, and there are different rules of engagement.

Demographics

Canadian Armed Forces members

There are approximately 4,000 Canadian Armed Forces members, spouses or partners and dependants posted to 70 countries OUTCAN.⁶

Most Canadian Armed Forces members posted OUTCAN are Regular Force members, with only one per cent of the positions occupied by Reserve Force members. This report does not make a distinction between the two.

Department of National Defence civilian employees

Department of National Defence civilian employees are public servants governed by the [Public Service Employment Act](#). There are approximately 45 Department of National Defence civilian, spouses or partners and dependants on assignment OUTCAN.⁷ Most employees assigned OUTCAN are indeterminate and represent various [occupational groups](#).

Staff of the Non-Public Funds, Canadian Forces⁸

While Canadian Armed Forces and Department of National Defence personnel are posted to support Government of Canada priorities, Staff of the Non-Public Funds are employed to support Canadian Armed Forces members and their families. In effect, they are serving those who serve. The Staff of the Non-Public Funds have distinct employment and human resources systems and a separate compensation and benefits package, including for employment outside of Canada.

There are currently 107 occupied Non-Public Funds positions OUTCAN.⁹ Most of the Staff of the Non-Public Funds working OUTCAN are spouses or partners of Defence Team personnel who are hired locally. In addition, there are positions in the United States and in Europe that are occupied by sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds. They are responsible for the management of on-site and virtual services available to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families while on an OUTCAN posting. As long-term employees, they ensure continuity of day-to-day operations and have a greater familiarity with available services and programming such as Fund Grants, CANEX and SISIP Financial services, the Chalet Program in Europe, and fitness training programs and gym facilities.

6 Data current as of 12 June 2020.

7 Data current as of 12 June 2020.

8 For conciseness, “Staff of the Non-Public Funds, Canadian Forces” are referred to as “Staff of the Non-Public Funds” throughout this report.

9 Data current as of January 2020.

OUTCAN issues also faced by personnel posted in Canada

This office recognizes that a number of the challenges experienced OUTCAN presented in this report are not necessarily unique to an OUTCAN posting and are faced by personnel posted in Canada as well. Although the challenges may be similar, given the unique circumstances of personnel OUTCAN, their solutions may be different and require special consideration by the Department.

Outside of departmental authorities

This office recognizes that some of the issues raised in this report are not exclusively within the authority of Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces to resolve, and these have been identified as such. However, this office has decided to report them, as they represent important systemic issues that those posted OUTCAN experience. They are also included herein as they may be helpful for the Department to take into consideration in their interactions with external stakeholders and partners and increase overall awareness.

Section IV: Findings and observations

This report contains both findings and observations. Findings are conclusions based on examination and evaluation of evidence that lead to formal recommendations to the Minister of National Defence for action. Our observations are information for general awareness, or where the matter is not under exclusive National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces control. Recommendations to address these findings are provided in Section VI.

For ease of understanding and readability, the findings and observations in this report have been categorized as follows: general findings and observations that this office found that affect all constituency groups, followed by specific findings and observations related to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families, Department of National Defence civilian employees and their families, and Staff of the Non-Public Funds and their families.

General findings and observations

The following are general findings and observations impacting the Department's ability to efficiently manage and support the OUTCAN Programme.

General Observation 1: The governance structure of the OUTCAN Programme for the Defence Team is well-defined; responsible authorities and their accountabilities are identified.

The Defence Team governance structure is clear and well documented. There are over 125 individual policy documents associated with all phases of the OUTCAN Programme owned by Treasury Board, Canadian Armed Forces stakeholders, Associate Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Civilian), and Non-Public Funds.

Canadian Armed Forces

In June 2006, the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Deputy Minister granted full authority and responsibility for the management of the OUTCAN Programme to the

Vice Chief of the Defence Staff.¹⁰ In June 2018, the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff updated the OUTCAN Governance and Command and Control Instructions¹¹ to better align the OUTCAN Programme with Canada’s Defence Policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*. In addition, these instructions provide the functional authority and operational management of the OUTCAN Programme to the Deputy Vice Chief of the Defence Staff. As such, the Deputy Vice Chief of Defence Staff is assigned the responsibility for Canadian Armed Forces OUTCAN governance.

Department of National Defence

The functional authority and daily administrative responsibility for the Department of National Defence civilians employed OUTCAN resides within the Director Corporate Labour Relations section under Associate Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Civilian).¹² The Director Corporate Labour Relations section is responsible for the administrative support and preparation of Department of National Defence civilians employed outside of Canada. Department of National Defence civilian employees did not report any concerns with respect to the policy framework.

Staff of the Non-Public Funds

Staff of the Non-Public Funds are employed “through a sponsorship agreement approved by the Canadian Forces commanding officer to work for Non-Public Funds in an OUTCAN location but are still considered part of the Civilian Component accompanying the Canadian Armed Forces.”¹³ Sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds are governed by the “*NPF outside Canada (OUTCAN) Relocation and Foreign Service Benefits Policy*”. This policy was initially issued in February 2016 and reviewed in October 2017.¹⁴

No recommendation made as the governance structures of each constituency group are well-defined as are the responsible authorities and their accountabilities.

- 10 OUTCAN. About “The Program.” 7 August 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/programs/outcan.html>. [accessed 16 July 2020].
- 11 VCDS Directive – Out-of-Canada (OUTCAN) Governance and Command and Control. 29 June 2018. [accessed 20 July 2020].
- 12 Stakeholder interviews. Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources Civilian) staff. 27 November 2019.
- 13 NPF Outside Canada (OUTCAN) Relocation and Foreign Service Benefits Policy, Section 32.4 Definitions. 2 October 2017. [accessed 17 December 2019].
- 14 NPF Outside Canada (OUTCAN) Relocation and Foreign Service Benefits Policy. 2 October 2017. [accessed 17 December 2019].

General Finding 1: There are resourcing shortages in support of the administration of the OUTCAN Programme, and there are gaps in the training provided to support personnel.

Resourcing and Support

This office found numerous issues related to shortages in resourcing and overall support for this Programme. The following areas rank among the most important:

- OUTCAN support elements are understaffed;
- priority management, and workload challenges exist for support teams;
- some administrators are undertrained; and
- in some OUTCAN locations, the workload is not divided equitably or efficiently amongst all support staff.

The Vice Chief of the Defence Staff is mandated to ensure appropriate resources are available to support the OUTCAN Programme. Over the past five years, there has been significant growth of about 200 OUTCAN positions – including Canadian Armed Forces and Department of National Defence positions. In November 2018, the Deputy Vice Chief of the Defence Staff ordered a review of the OUTCAN support structure.¹⁵ This study was to be completed by spring 2019. Currently, it is still ongoing.¹⁶

A related issue impacting support staff resources is the priority level associated with key OUTCAN military support positions. While all OUTCAN positions are staffed as a top priority (Category A), some key military support positions, such as those at the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff OUTCAN organization, are a lower priority (Category C). The difference between categories is felt at the staffing level, where there is more priority given to filling Category A positions during the posting planning process. Therefore, there are even fewer support personnel available to assist those posted OUTCAN than what actually exists in the Canadian Armed Forces establishment.¹⁷ For example, there are currently vacancies within the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff OUTCAN organization that result in a decreased capacity to fully support the Programme. They are currently operating at 75 percent of their effective strength.¹⁸

15 *OUTSIDE-OF-Canada (OUTCAN) SPRING SENIOR REVIEW BOARD (SRB) 24 MAY 2019 – RECORD OF DECISIONS (ROD)*. August 2019. [accessed 22 July 2020].

16 *Stakeholder interviews. OUTCAN Program Manager*. 15 August 2019.

17 *Stakeholder Interviews. OUTCAN Program Manager*. 15 August 2019.

18 *Stakeholder Interviews. OUTCAN Program Manager*. 15 August 2019.

“The current Vice Chief of the Defence Staff OUTCAN Coordination team is too small to adequately represent OUTCAN equities at all the Canadian Armed Forces central agencies, working groups, planning groups and so OUTCAN only gets reaction when something goes wrong or there is a crisis. Without adequate resourcing, OUTCAN crisis administration will continue to be reactive and not proactive.”

- Stakeholder

The Children’s Education Management group and the medical support staff who are directly involved in personnel pre-posting screenings raised similar concerns. For example, between December and April each year, a team of two education counsellors screen an average of 545 student files¹⁹ – this represents a significant amount of work within a very narrow timeframe.

Training

Most of the personnel providing support to the OUTCAN Programme are Canadian Armed Forces members, who are typically posted to a new position approximately every two years. The majority of support personnel this office spoke to reported that they did not receive sufficient training before assuming their role.²⁰ They indicated that they had little awareness of the OUTCAN Programme prior to their posting. While generic information sessions are held prior to the posting season for administrators, these individuals reported that the overall level of training is insufficient to make them feel confident and adequately prepared to assume their job functions.

In addition, there is no specific training provided for the losing unit²¹ administrators nor for staff in the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration, even though they all play an important support role in the administration of the OUTCAN Programme. This is further amplified when coupled with inconsistencies in their levels of knowledge and experience with the Programme or in policy interpretation. The information provided by these organizations, if unclear or incorrect, can result in financial repercussions for the member and make it more difficult for the OUTCAN support staff to provide efficient services.

This office heard that support is more personalized for Department of National Defence civilian employees during the pre-posting phase.²² Once in the OUTCAN position, Department of National Defence civilian employees often rely on the Canadian Armed Forces support unit for required information and clarification.

19 Stakeholder Interviews. Children’s Education Management staff. 16 December 2019.

20 Stakeholder Interviews. OUTCAN Support Personnel. March 2020.

21 “Losing unit” is defined as the unit from which Defence Team personnel are selected for posting.

22 Stakeholder interviews. Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources Civilian) staff. 27 November 2019.

Defence Team personnel stated that the current support situation results in inconsistencies and delays. However, they understand that the support personnel are doing what they can and are most likely overworked.

General Finding 2: There are communication challenges at all stages, and personnel do not feel adequately prepared for their OUTCAN posting.

Constituents frequently felt that they were insufficiently prepared to undertake the OUTCAN posting process in its entirety -- from submitting their candidacy to moving and working in a foreign country -- because of minimal or incomplete information. They felt that information was not provided unless they specifically asked for it. This was expressed by nearly all first-time participants selected for the OUTCAN Programme, with many interviewees stating a variation of the following phrase: “You don’t know what you don’t know”.

Many senior officers confirmed that the level of information received varied according to rank, status and position in the organization. They admitted having to invoke rank or status to obtain clarification and assistance.

“I do not know how the younger ones do it. They do not have the rank to go and reach out to the Base Commander, whereas I can. That is not how any system should work.”

- Senior Officer
Canadian Armed Forces Member

Given the lack of formal communication tools, OUTCAN candidates often rely on informal networks to get answers to their OUTCAN experience questions, such as:

- social media (e.g. Facebook groups, some of which are official, but most are unofficial groups led by spouses or partners);
- welcome packages provided by support units or Military Family Services;
- assigned sponsors;
- friends and colleagues; and
- previous incumbents.

To address this gap, some Canadian support units and functional advisors developed informal tools to assist Canadian Armed Forces members considering an OUTCAN position. For example, at Canadian Forces Base Kingston, a high-level presentation provides some guidance on the application process and key responsibilities.²³ This presentation is available through the internal network. However, there is no standardization of such initiatives throughout the support units in Canada.

²³ *Outside Canada Postings and Benefits. Canadian Forces Base Kingston. 2 November 2019. [accessed 10 April 2019].*

Some OUTCAN locations have created local sponsorship initiatives to help with knowledge transfer such as those found in Colorado Springs, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom and Belgium. Positive outcomes were reported by the majority of those who were able to have an assigned sponsor.

The position's previous incumbent is often the main source of information, potentially leading to inconsistencies based on personal experiences and preferences. Relying on the previous incumbent for knowledge transfer is also problematic, as work tempo or security concerns could prevent these discussions.

Some sub-programmes, such as Defence Attaché, Military Policy Security Services and Policy Advisors, provide more intensive preparation and training. Those candidates and their spouses or partners felt more prepared for their OUTCAN experience and had a better understanding of what to expect before their arrival at their posting.

During the interviews, constituents shared examples of what they would like to have known earlier in the process, including general financial information and location-specific legal or cultural information.

The Department's lack of a formal and consistent communication plan impacts the ability of applicants to determine if an OUTCAN posting is a suitable option for them, and to adequately prepare them for the experience of living and working in another country.

“I understand that civilians posted OUTCAN is not something that happens often in comparison to military counterparts [...] I was disappointed with the lack of information that was received.”

**- Department of National Defence
civilian employee**

Other issues related to communication were also identified which are specific to each constituency group. These are identified and detailed under each constituency section later.

General Observation 2: There are several recourse mechanisms available to personnel OUTCAN and they are well-defined.

There are several complaint mechanisms and avenues for recourse available to Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence civilian employees, and Staff of the Non-Public Funds. These mechanisms and avenues are well-defined.

Defence Team personnel can raise issues to their chain of command or management to try to resolve them informally and at the lowest possible level. If unsuccessful,

personnel can seek recourse through formal channels including harassment complaints, grievances, adjudication requests related to relocation or other benefits, and submissions to Working Group B for children's education.

Canadian Armed Forces members can request a review of their screening file, including the medical component, if it has been denied. However, this is not part of a formal process.

The Staff of the Non-Public Funds OUTCAN must direct formal requests about the interpretation and application of their OUTCAN policy to the Human Resource Manager in the corporate section.

Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence civilian employees and Staff of the Non-Public Funds may contact this office if they feel that they have been treated unfairly.

Families do not have access to any formal recourse mechanisms other than contacting our office.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness. The recourse mechanisms are available, and Defence Team personnel are aware of them.

Did You Know?

The Office of the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces is a direct source of information, referral, and education for the Defence community. We help individuals access existing channels of assistance or redress when they have a complaint or concern.

This office is independent from the military chain of command and civilian management. If you are a member of the Defence community and you feel you have been treated unfairly, this office is available to help.

Specific findings and observations

Members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families

Governance and administration

Finding 1: There are discrepancies between the Military Foreign Service Instructions and the Foreign Service Directives which can lead to inconsistent interpretation and application of benefits and services.

Two major policy documents identify the benefits and services available to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families for an OUTCAN posting. These documents are the Compensation and Benefits Instructions, Chapter 10 entitled “Military Foreign Service Instructions”²⁴ and the Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program Directive.²⁵ Treasury Board is the approval authority for both policies.

The benefits and entitlements available to federal public servants posted OUTCAN are outlined in the National Joint Council’s Foreign Service Directives. Initially published in June 2003, the latest updates were approved in April 2019.²⁶ The Foreign Service Directives only apply to Canadian Armed Forces members if specifically referred to in the corresponding Military Foreign Service Instructions.

The Military Foreign Service Instructions identify the benefits and services available to Canadian Armed Forces members posted OUTCAN.²⁷ While the Military Foreign Service Instructions are drawn mainly from the Foreign Service Directives, they also consider the unique mandate and realities of Canadian Armed Forces members posted OUTCAN. One example is the requirement for some Canadian Armed Forces members to go on operational deployments and exercises while posted OUTCAN. For this reason, there are key differences between the Military Foreign Service Instructions and the corresponding Foreign Service Directives. These differences help to ensure fair compensation and support.

24 *Compensation and Benefits Instructions. Chapter 10 - Foreign Service Instructions.* 12 October 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/compensation-benefits-instructions/chapter-10-foreign-service.html>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

25 *Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program Directive.* 19 April 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/military-benefits/cfirp/a-pp-005-irp-ag-001-cfirp-eff-19-april-2018.pdf>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

26 *Foreign Service Directives.* 1 April 2019. <https://www.njc-cnm.gc.ca/directive/fsd-dse/en>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

27 *Compensation and Benefits Instructions. Chapter 10 - Foreign Service Instructions.* 12 November 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/compensation-benefits-instructions/chapter-10-foreign-service.html>. [accessed 3 September 2020].

Given that modifications to Foreign Service Directives and Military Foreign Service Instructions are submitted separately to Treasury Board,²⁸ there is an inevitable transition period in which the entitlements may be different.

In 2019, following the approval of amendments to the Foreign Service Directives, the Treasury Board Secretariat reported to the Canadian Armed Forces more than 100 inconsistencies²⁹ between the two policies, including ten items that required immediate attention.³⁰ Attempts were made by the Canadian Armed Forces to submit these changes shortly after the inconsistencies were reported. However, the Treasury Board approval process can be lengthy, and is based on both departmental and governmental priorities.

Finding 2: There are challenges associated with the oversight of the OUTCAN Programme.

There are numerous stakeholders involved in the administration of the OUTCAN Programme. Most of these organizations operate independently of one another, due primarily to the fact that they have different reporting structures and chains of command. This construct increases the risk of communication challenges, inconsistencies, and other related coordination issues. Reporting to the Deputy Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, the OUTCAN Coordination section was created to provide oversight of the OUTCAN Programme.³¹

There are three primary challenges that affect the OUTCAN Coordination section's ability to fulfill their oversight mandate:

- There is inaccurate or incomplete information contained in the OUTCAN database. Difficulties with keeping this information up to date were noted. As a result, there is no readily accessible centralized contact list of all members posted OUTCAN, which could be problematic in the event of an emergency.³²
- There is no overall performance measurement system to provide information on areas of Programme success or areas that need improvement. For example, the OUTCAN Programme does not include:
 - ▷ clear administrative service standards³³ for processes such as applicant screening, medical/social worker review, adjudications for relocation,

28 A Treasury Board submission is an official document, submitted on behalf of the minister, seeking specific authorities or approvals outside of ministerial mandate, in order to implement a new, or updated, governmental program or project.

29 While there are key differences between the Foreign Service Directives and the Military Foreign Service Instruction, these 100 inconsistencies include typos and gaps in the policy documents that could have financial repercussions.

30 Treasury Board Secretariat. *E-mail to the Office of the Ombudsman*. [21 November 2019].

31 *VCDS Directive – Out-of-Canada (OUTCAN) Governance and Command and Control*. 29 June 2018. [accessed 20 July 2020].

32 Stakeholder interviews. *OUTCAN Program Manager*. August 15, 2019.

33 A service standard is defined as a public commitment to a measurable level of performance that clients can expect under normal circumstances.

- claims processing, and children’s education management requests; and
- ▷ formal feedback processes that capture and share information at all stages of OUTCAN. This represents a missed opportunity to improve the overall administration of the Programme.
- There are staffing shortages, which are described in further detail in the section on the General Findings and Observations.

These three challenges reduce the capability of the OUTCAN Coordination section to identify systemic issues, track overall trends, and improve service delivery. They also limit the section’s ability to communicate effectively and respond to evolving issues in a quick and efficient manner. This lack of oversight poses a variety of risks for both the Department and those posted OUTCAN.

Communications

Observation 1: Canadian Armed Forces members experience specific challenges related to the communication and sharing of information at all phases of an OUTCAN posting.

Throughout our investigation, various issues were brought to this office’s attention where the lack of effective communication was an underlying and recurring theme. The findings and observations listed later, while they deal with separate issues, have a communication nexus. These issues amplify the many challenges experienced by Canadian Armed Forces members and their families while posted OUTCAN.

Canadian Armed Forces members reported inefficient and infrequent communications as being one of the biggest areas for improvement, especially because they are expected to perform their duties under clear and concise direction.

Examples of these communication issues exist in the following areas:

- screening;
- obtaining passports and visas;
- relocation support;
- benefit entitlements;
- work descriptions and reporting structures;
- claim processes;
- spouse or partner involvement in administration;
- mail services at post;
- health and safety at post;
- emergency evacuations;
- children’s education;
- morale, welfare, and support services;
- barriers to employment for families;
- impact of isolation; and
- return to Canada.

These areas are addressed in further detail later.

No specific recommendation made as Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Selection, screening, and pre-posting

Canadian Armed Forces members may indicate their interest in an OUTCAN position, but their acceptance into the Programme will depend on their military occupation, rank, and professional background. Canadian Armed Forces members typically apply for OUTCAN positions through a formal call-up process, either in response to an OUTCAN solicitation message, or by indicating their preference for an OUTCAN posting to their career manager, chain of command or branch/military occupation advisor. Canadian Armed Forces members can also be approached by senior officials and offered a specific OUTCAN opportunity. OUTCAN postings are almost always voluntary. However, opportunities at the senior rank level³⁴ are not volunteer-based, but rather, it is the Director Senior Appointments who determines the best-suited candidate for these positions.

As with postings within Canada, there is no standard criteria used to select candidates for OUTCAN positions. Career managers determine the best candidates, based on the input of the occupation advisor and position sponsor. Some military occupations will use selection boards to discuss applicant files and to compare candidate backgrounds and skill sets, while others only require Canadian Armed Forces members to apply.

Candidate selection may be influenced by factors beyond performance and skill set such as:

- member career progression,
- senior officers' selection of candidates based on career manager proposals, and
- country-specific cultural considerations.

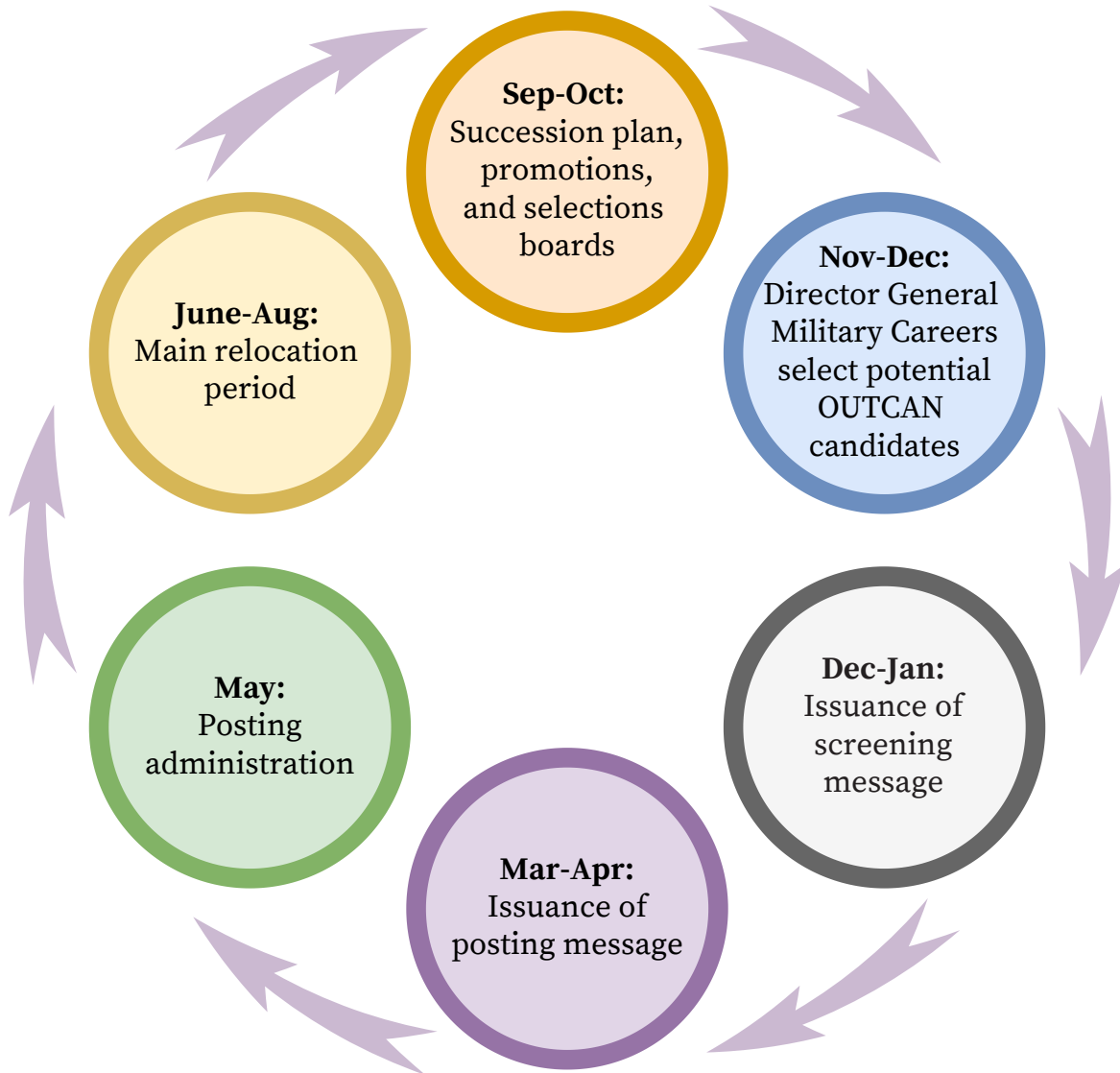
Canadian Armed Forces members who have successfully completed the screening process receive a posting message. The posting message begins the posting process for members and their families. This includes relocation planning, registration for children's schooling, and applying for passports and visas. Although members would know if part of their screening was unsuccessful, they do not receive written notice of final decisions. However, they can ask their career manager for feedback.

³⁴ Senior Rank level represents the rank of Captain (Navy)/Colonel and above.

Military Posting Cycle:

This infographic presents the overall sequence of the OUTCAN posting, including the selection, screening and pre-process.

Active Posting Season (APS) Cycle



Finding 3: The screening process for OUTCAN postings is complex, multifaceted and involves many stakeholders.

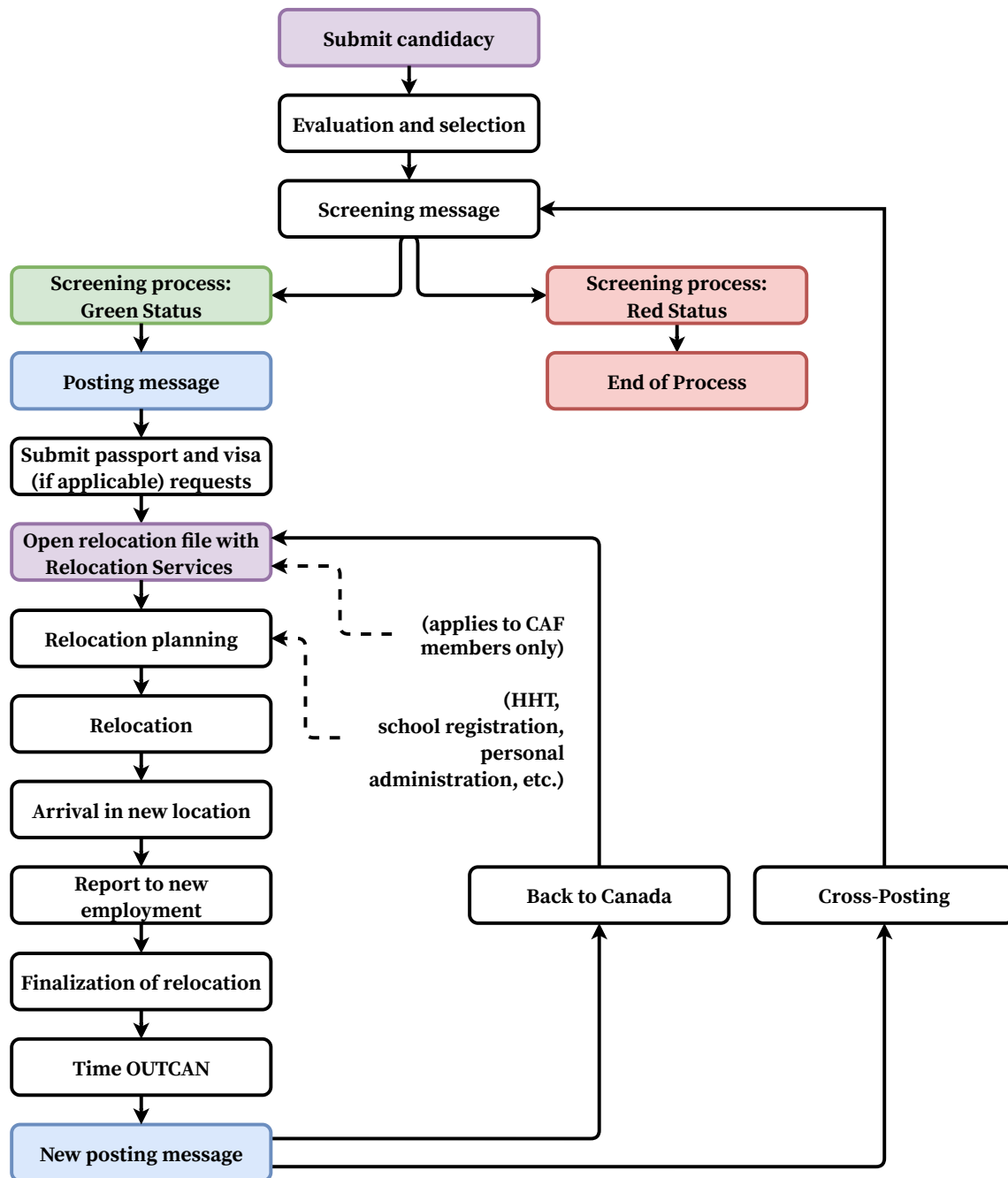
Once a Canadian Armed Forces member is selected for an OUTCAN position, their career manager releases a screening message, formally launching their screening process. While there are no formal service standards or timelines associated with the screening process, the message usually indicates that this process should be completed within a 45 to 60-day window.

The screening process is rigorous. There are up to 13 individual steps that the member and their family must complete.³⁵ Under normal circumstances, this process does not apply for in-Canada postings.³⁶

³⁵ DND4064 – *Outside Canada Posting Checklist*. n.d. [accessed 20 July 2020].

³⁶ Exceptions include isolated and semi-isolated postings and units.

Sequence for OUTCAN



Most Canadian Armed Forces members interviewed, especially those relocating with their families, felt the screening process was long and burdensome.

“Trying to do the screening and maintain my full-time job was challenging. There were career opportunities that I had to decline..”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

The interviewees identified the following screening challenges:

Financial considerations

Although information on benefits and entitlements, such as rent ceilings and the foreign service premium, are accessible on the internal network or directly included in the Military Foreign Services Instructions, typically the screening process does not include a personalized briefing on potential financial entitlements³⁷ or a meeting with a financial counsellor. Canadian Armed Forces members are only required to complete a self-assessment of their finances. There is therefore no tangible way to estimate the overall financial impact of an OUTCAN posting before selection.

Another area of concern raised by constituents was the lack of information about the non-negotiable expenses which are not described upfront. Such expenses can result in the members being out of pocket for several weeks as they go through the pre-posting process. Members can obtain advances or claim for these expenses. However, many mentioned being unaware of having to pay large amounts upfront, such as clearing Canadian vehicle loans, school enrolment deposits and fees, and rental security deposits.

³⁷ However, Children’s Education Management outlines what Canadian Armed Forces members have available to them in terms of educational allowances.

Did You Know?

You cannot ship a vehicle outside of Canada if you do not own it outright. As such, members should consider speaking with their financial institution to discuss their options. Members may also be entitled to a posting loan in accordance with Military Foreign Service Instructions, section 20. In the case of civilians, this is in accordance with Foreign Service Directive 10.

Medical and social worker screening

Canadian Armed Forces members and their families are not usually selected to go OUTCAN if they require specialized medical care or a level of care that cannot be provided at the posting destination. This includes mental health services.

As part of the medical screening, members and their families meet with a Canadian Armed Forces social worker. The remaining portion of the medical screening for Canadian Armed Forces members is undertaken by Canadian Armed Forces medical and dental officers.³⁸

For family members, the medical screening is completed by civilian doctors and dentists. Military families often find it difficult to access a family doctor in Canada. In part, this is due to frequent relocations from province to province resulting in prolonged periods on family doctor waiting lists. If family members do not have a family doctor or cannot get an appointment within the prescribed screening timeframe, this can result in delays in the overall screening for the family. These delays can lead to out-of-pocket expenses for the member and their family. Some families reported having to travel to their previous posting location in Canada – at their own expense – to meet with their former family doctor to complete the medical screening.

“There are not as many family doctors in a small town as there are in a big city. Civilian doctors in [our town] book appointments three months out, which does not fit in with the screening process.”

- Spouse or partner of
Canadian Armed Forces member

³⁸ *Outside Canada (OUTCAN) medical screening*. 19 February 2019. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/bases-support-units/cf-health-services-centre-ottawa/outcan-screening.html>. [accessed 21 July 2020].

It is worth noting that difficulties accessing family doctors and medical care are not unique to OUTCAN postings. Families posted within Canada also face these challenges.

Communication during screening

As the screening process begins, a considerable amount of information and documentation is sent by e-mail to members. This information includes welcome packages, administrative instructions from the support unit and the children education guidance counsellor, and hyperlinks to many policies which are part of the 19-page screening form. Members mentioned also receiving a significant amount of information verbally during the early stages of the screening process. The various platforms through which information is shared, combined with the large quantity of information can be intimidating for members and their families.

Concerns were raised with respect to the lack of standardization in the level of administrative support provided to members completing the screening. They reported that while some support units were able to provide timely and accurate information, others were not able to provide the same level of service.

Some families stated they can only submit their questions or concerns through the serving member spouse or partner or during an interview with a social worker. Some Canadian Armed Forces members and their families reported that they were hesitant to ask too many questions at the screening stage because they worried that this could negatively impact their OUTCAN opportunity.

Lack of digital options

Although efforts have been made to digitize parts of the process during the 2020 Active Posting Season, the screening process remains primarily paper-based. Members have limited or no means to track progress of their file in real time, especially once it reaches the medical evaluation stage. The Canadian Armed Forces faces budgetary, accessibility and security of information challenges in its current efforts to digitize the screening form. Recent improvements have been made in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. More detailed information is presented in Appendix B – COVID-19 pandemic impact analysis.

OUTCAN cross-posting

The term OUTCAN cross-posting refers to the posting of Canadian Armed Forces members and their families from one location outside of Canada directly to another location outside of Canada.

The organizational benefits of posting Canadian Armed Forces members OUTCAN are maximized when members return to Canada immediately after their term to share newly acquired knowledge. The Director Military Careers confirmed that cross-postings are not preferred since they reduce the possibility of immediate knowledge sharing. However, it remains a reality in specific circumstances, especially for some sub-programmes such as Canadian Defence Attachés and the Military Police Security Services.

Canadian Armed Forces members selected for a cross-posting must also undergo a screening process, including the medical and dental screening. This requirement applies to their family members as well. This can be challenging in some locations due to:

- difficulty accessing adequate medical and dental centres in the host country,
- difficulty accessing services in English or French, and
- inability to go to their local support units and meet with the support staff.

The Vice Chief of the Defence Staff OUTCAN Coordination section recently modified the screening process for cross-posting moves. The new screening form, in use since January 2020, contains a clause that eliminates the need for a full screening for candidates slated for a cross-posting which should alleviate the challenges previously identified.³⁹

Passports and Visas

Finding 4: The Canadian Armed Forces does not provide sufficient support to members and their families in applying for, and obtaining, passports and visas.

Canadian Armed Forces members and their family members must travel on special passports when on authorized official travel outside of Canada.

The Canadian Armed Forces Passport National Customer Support Office administers, manages, and monitors the special passport process, including liaison with the

³⁹ DND4064 (APS20) – Outside of Canada (OUTCAN) Posting – Screening Checklist. 2020. [accessed 20 July 2020].

Passport Program at Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada.⁴⁰ The National Customer Support Office provides guidance to Canadian Armed Forces members by way of an instructional e-mail following receipt of their screening message. The e-mail indicates that, if necessary, members are to contact their Orderly Room to obtain support for completing their application form. However, the vast majority of the Orderly Rooms across Canada do not have a dedicated passport and visa section.⁴¹ This office found no evidence of direct liaison or support capability established between the Passport National Customer Support Office and Orderly Rooms.

Most members reported that the passport and visa application process can be confusing and stressful. While most Canadian Armed Forces members and families understood that the applications had to be done in a timely manner and that they were responsible to apply for the appropriate documents, they felt they did not receive adequate support and direction from the Canadian Armed Forces. In particular, information on the ideal time to apply for their travel documents, how to apply, and what supporting documents were required would be beneficial.

Did You Know?

The Department is not obliged to assist family members in obtaining work visas while OUTCAN.

Canadian Armed Forces members and their families are issued different types of visas, depending on work status and posting location. In some cases, members received their visas before their families, and were required to report to their new posting location while their families remained in Canada. This was reported as a significant source of stress for families. Delays in securing the necessary passports and visas also impact the physical relocation of the member's household goods and effects. The departure from Canada can only take place once the passports and visas are received, as these official documents are required for customs declarations. Some Canadian Armed Forces members reported that they received their travel documents days before leaving Canada, creating uncertainty about the ability to complete the international move on time. Others reported having to resort to visiting the host country's embassy in Ottawa to try and expedite the visa process.

40 Information for clients from Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces. 28 May 2015. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/canadian-passports/official-travel/national-defence-armed-forces.html>. [accessed 16 July 2020].

41 8 Wing Trenton does have an on-site passport section.

“The moving truck was scheduled on Monday and passports were received on Friday.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

Did You Know?

While universities and colleges in Canada traditionally break for the summer for 120 days, some countries limit a visitor’s stay to only 90 days without a visa. As a result, a longer stay will require the Canadian Armed Forces member to obtain a visa for their children.

Relocation

Finding 5: The current Canadian Armed Forces relocation policy does not meet all the unique needs associated with an OUTCAN relocation.

Chapter 12 of the Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program Directive outlines the relocation benefits and services available to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families for OUTCAN postings.⁴² Established in 2009, the most recent updates were published in June 2018.

Many Canadian Armed Forces members said the OUTCAN chapter of the relocation policy does not reflect the realities of relocating to and from an OUTCAN posting. For example, the allocated period to secure adequate housing in the host country is the same duration as what is available for members posted within Canada. Those posted OUTCAN reported facing additional complexities which cannot be addressed or completed during personal time from Canada and must occur while in location, such as:

- the requirement for leases to be translated and reviewed by the support unit prior to signature,
- local banking arrangements to secure housing, and
- evaluating foreign schooling and daycare options.

Canadian Armed Forces members and their families also expressed concerns about other areas of the policy such as shipping family pets, hotel and meal expense

⁴² *Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program Directive, Chapter 12 – Moves to and from Outside Canada*. 19 April 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/relocation-directive/2018/chapter-12.html>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

reimbursement period, the appropriate packing of personal items, authorization for car rentals on location, unexpected customs fees, and car shipment restrictions.

Did You Know?

As the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration does not have the authority to expand benefits without Treasury Board approval, they cannot authorize reimbursement beyond what is specified in the policy, even if the member submits a request for adjudication.

On the other hand, the Canadian Armed Forces members posted OUTCAN noted some positive aspects of the current OUTCAN relocation chapter. These aspects include:

- a day of rest for extended travel periods,
- rental agency finding fee,
- possibility for air priority shipment, and
- private motor vehicle modification reimbursements.

The authority to determine and regulate benefits lies with Treasury Board and is beyond the control of the Canadian Armed Forces.⁴³ Nevertheless, some of these benefits remain a source of frustration for Canadian Armed Forces members posted OUTCAN which they felt should be addressed during future relocation policy reviews.

Finding 6: Support provided to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families for their OUTCAN relocations does not fully meet their needs.

Accessibility of relocation agents

All relocations of Canadian Armed Forces personnel and their families are managed by a private company contracted to provide these services. Under this arrangement, Canadian Armed Forces members call a general information line to obtain relocation information and assistance. Members may speak to a different agent each time they call, and this may result in conflicting information and frustration.⁴⁴ Members also said that they felt agents have minimal experience dealing with OUTCAN relocations, and do not understand the associated complexities and particularities.

Once OUTCAN, members reported challenges with communicating with relocation agents by telephone, as these agents operate within Canadian time zones. Canadian

⁴³ *National Defence Act*, 25 August 2020 <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/N-5.pdf> [accessed 11 September 2020].

⁴⁴ The Director Relocation Business Management confirmed that recommendations made in the *2014 Fall Report of the Auditor General of Canada* prompted the 2018 change from an on-site relocation agent model to the current centralized model. Furthermore, there is no longer any contractual requirement to provide specialized OUTCAN assistance.

Armed Forces members posted OUTCAN reported having to wake up in the middle of the night to speak to relocation agents. Though the relocation website and application are always accessible,⁴⁵ the availability and quality of local telecommunication services and infrastructure vary, and preference is often to speak with an agent directly for complex cases.

“You will speak to whomever is available and the agents did not seem familiar with OUTCAN policies. I was not getting consistent answers, or their answers were wrong.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

Understanding relocation benefits

The Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program Directive states that Canadian Armed Forces members are responsible for understanding relocation entitlements and are financially responsible for any expenses that are not covered by the policy. This applies whether the member misinterprets the relocation directive, or if the service provider provides incorrect information. Although members can request an adjudication, Director Compensation and Benefits Administration cannot create new benefits without Treasury Board approval.

The Director Relocation Business Management section developed on-line relocation information webinars, which are accessible to members relocating within Canada as well as those relocating OUTCAN.⁴⁶ Additionally, a welcome package and relocation assistance document, including a relocation checklist with step-by-step instructions, are provided to all members who register with the relocation service provider.⁴⁷

Finding 7: There are limited mechanisms in place for the Canadian Armed Forces to monitor, track and address issues related to the relocation service provider’s performance, including any policy misinterpretations.

The Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program Directive defines the responsibilities of the various parties involved in relocation: the Treasury Board Secretariat, the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration, the Director Relocation Business Management, the service provider and the Canadian Armed Forces member.

45 During the COVID-19 pandemic, the online chat function and call center were unavailable on a temporary basis. All communication with the service provider took place via e-mail.

46 *The Director Relocation Business Management. E-mail to the Office of the Ombudsman.* 12 August 2020.

47 *Relocation Assistance Document (RAD).* 20 August 2020.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/pay-pension-benefits/benefits/relocation-travel-accommodation/relocation-assistance-document.html>. [accessed 21 August 2020].

The Director Compensation and Benefits Administration, in collaboration with the Director Relocation Business Management, monitors the administration of the Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program and proposes policy changes to the Treasury Board Secretariat.⁴⁸ However, the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration has a limited tracking system in place for adjudication requests. In addition, they advised us that there is no established review cycle for the relocation policy. Prioritization of the submissions to Treasury Board resulting from reviews are based on urgency or number of affected personnel.⁴⁹ Without a consistent policy review cycle and trend monitoring, changes do not occur in a timely manner. This can result in missed opportunities to make evidence-based changes to the relocation contract, policy, and processes which directly affect Canadian Armed Forces members relocating OUTCAN.

The Director Relocation Business Management is responsible for measuring the effectiveness of the Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program, ensuring the necessary financial controls are established and developing and monitoring the current and future relocation contracts.⁵⁰ They confirmed performing monthly and annual sampling reviews of correspondence between members and the service provider but not all correspondence is reviewed. They also conduct surveys to capture the experiences of members relocated in and out of Canada. However, they confirmed that there are no performance measures in the current contract with the service provider, nor are there any consequences for providing incorrect information to members.⁵¹ The Director Relocation Business Management recognizes the particularities associated with moving OUTCAN. In this regard, they are in the process of creating a position responsible for assisting members with questions, and to improve support to the Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program coordinators in responding to OUTCAN relocations queries.⁵²

The Director Relocation Business Management advised this office that as of June 2020 Canadian Armed Forces members can now track their claim reimbursements through the service provider's web portal.

Some of these challenges are not unique to OUTCAN postings; members and their families being posted within Canada reported similar issues to this office.

48 *Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program Directive, Chapter 2 – Administration*. 26 April 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/relocation-directive/2018/chapter-2.html>. [accessed 15 October 2020].

49 *Stakeholder interviews. Director Compensation and Benefits Administration*. 25 November 2019.

50 *Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program Directive, Chapter 2 – Administration*. 26 April 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/relocation-directive/2018/chapter-2.html>. [accessed 15 October 2020].

51 *Stakeholder interviews. Director Compensation and Benefits Administration*. 25 November 2019.

52 No further details about timing, tasks description and team composition are available at this time.

Observation 2: In some locations, finding suitable housing is a challenge.

Crown housing

Canadian Armed Forces members and their families posted OUTCAN may have the option to live in Crown housing or Crown-held accommodation, where available. These accommodations are owned or leased by the Crown or provided by the host government.⁵³

Access to Crown housing is based on location, availability and the member's job duties. This is often made available to personnel working at the Embassy or High Commission such as Defence Attachés. In most locations, there is limited choice, or housing is assigned in advance. Most Canadian Armed Forces members living in Crown housing reported being satisfied with their accommodations, with some country-specific exceptions.

Housing on the economy

Canadian Armed Forces members and their families can also live on the economy, where they become responsible for securing their own accommodation. This includes responsibility for location, lease negotiation, and interacting with lessors. Most Canadian Armed Forces members who are posted outside Canada live on the economy.⁵⁴

Canadian Armed Forces members and families face several challenges in terms of renting in a foreign country:

- the rental agreement may not be written in any language in which the renter is fluent,
- the rental agreement may have stipulations that differ from Canadian standards in areas such as safety deposits, exclusion of wardrobe and kitchen cabinets or responsibility for maintenance and repairs of structures and appliances,
- suitable housing within the rent ceiling may not be close to the place of duty or Children's Education Management approved schools, and
- there may be difficulties in dealing with lessors.

53 *Compensation and Benefits Instructions. Chapter 10 - Foreign Service Instructions. Section 1 - Interpretation, 10.1.01 Definitions and Abbreviations.* 12 October 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/compensation-benefits-instructions/chapter-10-foreign-service.html>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

54 The Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program Directive states that members cannot buy a house while posted OUTCAN.

Rent ceiling

Rent⁵⁵ and utility share⁵⁶ benefits are available to help offset the costs associated with housing OUTCAN. A rent ceiling is established to control the amount of money spent on rent. The rent ceiling is determined for each location either by the Treasury Board Secretariat or by the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration. Rent ceilings are re-evaluated annually using data provided by on-site Housing Officers, contracted agents and input from other government departments, such as Statistics Canada.

Typically, members complete house hunting trips in April of the posting year. While the new rent ceiling rates are normally available in April, they have been published late in recent years due to exceptional circumstances. This was reported as a source of frustration, as affected members looked for accommodations based on the previous year's rates.

The Director Compensation and Benefits Administration has the authority to approve increases of the rent ceiling in exceptional circumstances, such as military employment constraints or security-based circumstances. In those cases, members must submit a request for adjudication to the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Support services at post

Observation 3: There are conflicting reporting structures and work descriptions.

Some members were dissatisfied with conflicting reporting structures and work descriptions while OUTCAN. The issues they raised range from not having terms of reference in advance of their posting⁵⁷ to discrepancies between the Canadian Armed Forces member's expectation of duties upon arrival at the host nation and the actual tasks and responsibilities assigned.

55 Rent share is based on the Canadian Armed Forces member's pay level and the number of people in their household when a lease is signed. The member pays a rent share for the occupied or rented accommodation, with the balance being paid for the member. The amount of rent share is adjusted annually by the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration based on Statistics Canada data.

56 Utility share is based on the Canadian Armed Forces member's pay level and the number of people in their household when a lease is signed. The member must pay a utility share, unless entitled to a waiver or opt-out. The amount for utility share is adjusted annually by the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration as determined by Statistics Canada.

57 This was also noted for newly-established positions OUTCAN.

Work descriptions

Work descriptions for OUTCAN positions are often not readily available or reflective of the actual work requirements. This makes it difficult for members to assess their level of suitability for the position. For example, sending a Canadian Armed Forces member into a high-tempo position requiring participation in deployments and exercises when the work description indicated a corporate or strategic position may create additional stress for the family.

“The job description that I received when I arrived did not match up the with one that I was provided in Canada. The work was more clerical and not working at the strategic level. I think we end up sending the wrong types of people.”

– Canadian Armed Forces member

“I think they should inform members and families early in the process and provide at that time full disclosure [...] of work descriptions. It is exciting and scary and potentially, if you take the wrong type of job, it could be career altering in a negative way. I think that needs to get better.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

Multiple reporting structures

Many Canadian Armed Forces members mentioned having to report to multiple chains of command simultaneously, depending on their assigned position. For example, some Canadian Armed Forces members posted to the United States reported to a sponsoring unit chain of command in Canada as well as to their foreign unit and to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or North American Aerospace Defense Command representative. This can lead to confusion in the prioritization of tasks and duties. This also increases the complexity and the processing time required for leave requests, expense reimbursement and other approvals.

Some members also cited concerns about a fair and accurate assessment of their performance during their employment OUTCAN as a result of reporting to multiple chains of command. They said that they felt that the preparation of their annual performance evaluation report as completed by their Canadian chain of command

may not consider all their tasks and responsibilities in the host country, potentially impacting their career progression.

Some members reported difficulties in accessing their chain of command that is often not collocated with them.⁵⁸ This made it difficult for them to perform tasks and duties and contributed to a sense of isolation.

While Canadian Armed Forces members recognize that adaptability and a high tolerance for change are inherent to the military profession, more clarity in job expectations and reporting structures would allow them and their families to better prepare for the OUTCAN experience.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Observation 4: The claims process for benefits is inconsistent and often confusing.

The claims process is the mechanism by which reimbursements are made to members for various claimable expenses. Claims are managed by different organizations such as support units, the relocation service provider, insurance companies and the Children's Education Management section, depending on the benefit or entitlement. Each of these organizations have their own individual requirements for supporting documentation, forms, and specific guidelines for claim submissions. As none of these processes are the same, there is often confusion on the part of members in determining what paperwork is required. This leads to delays in reimbursement of expenses stemming primarily from the wrong or missing supporting documentation being submitted. While this office recognizes that each organization has its own standard operating procedures and checklists in place, the lack of standardization in processes among the different groups was noted as a source of dissatisfaction for members.

In general, Canadian Armed Forces members also reported a lack of transparency in the claims process. For example, some members described receiving payments for claims as direct deposit in their bank accounts without any explanation or breakdown of the reimbursement. This makes it difficult to track which claims have been processed and reimbursed, as well as what claim amounts have been paid.

⁵⁸ This could present additional challenges for new positions and isolated postings.

“A lot of the claims that you have to submit are very confusing. When you learn to deal with the forms, there is all kinds of documentation. Sometimes, the documentation you provide is not accepted because of some technicality. Those things just frustrate people. In some cases, we gave up on submitting claims; we rather pay the smaller bills than to have to claim them.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

Medical claims

Generally, while the quality of medical care and services received OUTCAN met or surpassed the expectations of Canadian Armed Forces members and their families, the medical claims submission process was reported as being challenging.

Canadian Armed Forces members and their families located in the contiguous United States⁵⁹ can submit their medical claims electronically. Personnel posted outside the contiguous United States prepare their claims using paper format with original receipts and send them using mail services. (Refer to the section on mail services.)

Depending on location, members and their families may be required to pay upfront for medical expenses and then apply for reimbursement. Advances to cover medical expenses may be authorized by the support unit. It is also possible, in specific situations, to get supplementary reimbursement for costs in excess of the normal coverage. Requests for excess costs are managed by the support units and require approval from the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration.

Respondents reported the following challenges associated with the medical claims process:

- excessive processing time from the time the claim is mailed until reimbursement,
- description of services in foreign languages, requiring translation,
- description of services not recognized by insurance providers or that are not equivalent to what would be provided in Canada,
- itemized medical bill codes that are not aligned with Canadian codes, and
- additional justification requirements that delay reimbursement.

“Submitting to [Insurance Provider] in Canada is very frustrating with translation and needing to go back and forth between doctors.”

- Family member

⁵⁹ Contiguous United States include the 48 states that are adjoining. This excludes the states of Hawaii and Alaska as well as other American territories.

Did You Know?

Prior to being posted, all Canadian Armed Forces members must register for Comprehensive Coverage under the Public Service Health Care Plan. This plan covers reasonable and customary costs related to medical, dental, and eye care for Canadian Armed Forces members and their families while OUTCAN.⁶⁰

No recommendation made as this is not a matter under exclusive National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces control. This office is unable to make recommendations to organizations outside its mandate. It does, however, encourage consideration for future collaboration with external stakeholders.

Observation 5: Spouses or partners cannot officially contribute to administrative tasks.

Many spouses or partners expressed a desire to help on the administrative front, including dropping off invoices to the support unit Orderly Room, filling out forms, initiating claims for rent and utilities shares, claiming fees associated with their children's education, or using the military mailing system to send claims. They stated that it is not clear why they are prevented from assisting with household-related administration.

The ability for spouses or partners to assist in administrative tasks varies from location to location. Support personnel reported that they can contact their support unit should they require clarification or general information about a claim or other administrative task. However, service provision is generally limited to Canadian Armed Forces members due to liability, privacy, and security reasons.

⁶⁰ Comprehensive Coverage, *The Public Service Health Care Plan*. n.d. <http://www.pshcp.ca/coverage/comprehensive-coverage.aspx>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

“My [spouse or partner] does not have the time to help us, but it is all on their shoulders. If you ask questions about the rate or anything else, you are being told that the Orderly Room mandate is to support the member not the families. Which leaves the families orphaned. Inconsistency in the message of support is being sent to families.”

- Family member

Support unit staff also mentioned that if Canadian Armed Forces members are away on deployment or physically unable to conduct their administration, family members may do so on their behalf, provided they have written permission from the Canadian Armed Forces member.⁶¹ However, each situation is evaluated on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the best interests of the Canadian Armed Forces member.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and there are liability, privacy, and security considerations. Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Benefits and services

Observation 6: Benefits and services available to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families while OUTCAN generally meet their needs.

Canadian Armed Forces members and their families reported an overall high level of satisfaction with the level of coverage the current benefits and services framework provides. They generally felt that the financial entitlements they received allow them to maintain a quality of life comparable to what they had in Canada.

Some entitlements offset the extra costs associated with living in a foreign country, such as the rent and utility share, Post Living Allowance⁶² and Foreign Service Premium.⁶³ These entitlements help cover day-to-day living costs.

When posted to non-English or non-French speaking countries, language training was one area Canadian Armed Forces members felt was lacking in the benefits framework. Learning the local language is often critical to navigating daily life, including purchasing groceries, communicating with their lessor, or calling a plumber. With

⁶¹ Stakeholder Interviews. OUTCAN Support Personnel. March 2020.

⁶² The intent of the Post Living Allowance (PLA) is to assist a member at a post if the cost of living is higher than in National Capital Region.

⁶³ Foreign Service Premium is an allowance payable to a member in recognition of service at a post outside of Canada.

the exception of specific positions including those involving representational duties, language training is not offered to Canadian Armed Forces members.

Some members also mentioned other potential gaps in entitlements such as the absence of a benefit to cover the loss of spouse or partner income.

No recommendation made as this observation found that, overall, the benefits and services available to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families meet their needs.

Observation 7: Depending on the location, the mail services OUTCAN may not be efficient and dependable and can also be expensive.

In Canada, there is less dependence on domestic mail services due to the availability of many online services. However, once OUTCAN, Canadian Armed Forces members often rely on mail services for day-to-day administration. In some cases, the Canadian Armed Forces provide mail services or members can access services when co-located with other departments. In other locations – especially remote or with newly-established positions – Canadian Armed Forces members rely on mail services that may not be as efficient, secure, reliable, or cost-efficient as in Canada.

“It costs about \$90 to send one letter by registered mail.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

“The local mail here is unreliable; they open almost everything.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

Canadian Armed Forces members and their families may need to use mail services for important matters such as:

- family-member voting in Canadian federal elections;
- reimbursement claims, especially for medical insurance where online submissions are not accepted;
- annual Personnel Evaluation Report signatures; and
- new uniform item orders.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Health and safety

Finding 8: Canadian Armed Forces members and their families are concerned about their level of awareness of health and safety in the host country.

While Canadian Armed Forces members may receive informal health and safety briefings prior to their departure, it is an inconsistent practice that depends on the position or OUTCAN location. Often, information related to health and safety is provided by the assigned sponsor or the previous incumbent.

If the position is new, the dissemination of this information can be even more challenging as there is no previous incumbent. For example, some Canadian Armed Forces members and their families reported not receiving clear guidance in relation to air and water quality. One Canadian Armed Forces member stated: “They gave us about a four-hour fire hose treatment; we tried to understand as much as possible [...]” while others stated that: “We got nothing besides a short e-mail.”

Canadian Armed Forces members normally receive required vaccinations prior to an OUTCAN posting. Family members are expected to get the vaccinations from civilian health care providers in Canada. Family members indicated that it was not always easy or possible to get the required vaccinations prior to their posting. Some countries require specific vaccinations that are not normally provided in Canada. One such example is the rabies vaccine, which is more difficult to obtain through Canadian clinics during the pre-posting phase.

“Screening did not provide accurate information about vaccination and we are still trying to figure out this issue here abroad. The local medical services here are not up to Canadian standard and there are no military health services available for families.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

Members also noted that in many locations, there are no emergency services equivalent to Canada’s 9-1-1 emergency line. Local services can vary and are not always provided in either of Canada’s official languages.

“[...] then security is provided by the host nation and the response is very different, and there is a language issue. For example, if there was burglary you would need to sometimes wait 24 hours before someone comes to your house.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

“It was a challenge in a way. We did not even have 9-1-1. One night, we are like we do not even know how to call an ambulance if something were to happen right then. Which doctors to go to. [...] We were not given specifics. The package should have had more.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

Finding 9: There are gaps in existing emergency evacuation policies.

The benefits associated with the Emergency Evacuation and Loss for Canadian Armed Forces members and their families are addressed in Military Foreign Service Instructions Chapter 10.25. The Director Compensation and Benefits Administration manages these benefits in Canada, while the OUTCAN support units are responsible for administering these benefits at location.⁶⁴ This policy directly refers to the application of Foreign Service Directive 64.⁶⁵ Currently, that Directive does not consider the unique aspects of the Canadian Armed Forces military mandate and mission. The recent natural disasters in Florida (Hurricane Michael and Dorian), Alaska (earthquake) and the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of the Canadian Armed Forces having its own detailed policy for circumstances requiring emergency evacuation.

Some families reported concerns with the Emergency Evacuation Plans specifically in cases where the Canadian Armed Forces member is not part of a larger Canadian military or diplomatic contingent. For example, in 2018 numerous exchange officers who worked directly for American military units were not included in Canadian-led evacuation plans during Hurricane Michael in Florida.

In 2019, the Strategic Joint Staff, in collaboration with the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, began a review of all OUTCAN locations to address gaps in emergency preparedness plans.⁶⁶ They recognize the importance of including all stakeholders involved in emergency management. They also collaborated with Global Affairs

64 *Compensation and Benefits Instructions. Chapter 10 - Foreign Service Instructions. Section 25 – Emergency Evacuation and Loss.* 12 November 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/compensation-benefits-instructions/chapter-10-foreign-service.html>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

65 *Foreign Service Directives. FSD 64 – Emergency Evacuation and Loss.* 1 April 2019. <https://www.njc-cnm.gc.ca/directive/d138/v274/en>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

66 *Virtual Questionnaire. Strategic Joint Staff.* 27 January 2020.

Canada during this review for the Canadian Armed Forces members posted in Canadian Embassies and their families. The intent is to draft a new annex to the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff OUTCAN Directive that includes emergency management guidelines. However, no anticipated completion date has been provided to this office and, given that the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff OUTCAN Coordination organization has reported a severe staff shortage, they face many challenges in drafting this guidance.⁶⁷

Children's education

Children's Education Management supports the educational needs for the families OUTCAN. This group offers multiple services, including managing the education of children abroad through all phases of an OUTCAN posting.

Specifically, this group is responsible for:

- providing guidance counselling services,
- completing educational screening,
- managing education-related allowances and benefits,
- managing Canadian Armed Forces schools abroad, and
- representing Canadian Armed Forces educational interests and needs at interdepartmental committees (e.g. Education Sub-Committee and Working Group B).⁶⁸

Did You Know?

Canadian Armed Forces members indicate their educational preference on the educational screening form prior to meeting with a guidance counsellor. Given that these meetings are tailored in accordance with the preferences listed on the form, it is important that members select all potential options that may be of interest to them, such as distance learning, or homeschooling, in order to receive the pertinent information.

With the assistance of Children's Education Management, the foreign services interdepartmental coordinating committee (Working Group B) verifies the compatibility of schools OUTCAN with those in Ontario. In accordance with the Military Foreign Service Instructions and the National Joint Council's Foreign Service

⁶⁷ *Stakeholder Interviews. OUTCAN Program Manager.* 15 August 2019.

⁶⁸ *Children's Education Management Brochure.* n.d. <https://www.cafconnection.ca/getmedia/7b5b28af-a9e5-452a-94b4-18351012c3c1/CEM-brochure-English.pdf.aspx>. [accessed 21 July 2020].

Directives, the Children's Education Management section considers various criteria when determining the appropriate education options for a child.

The criteria includes:

- commanding officer advice,
- relevant experiences from other governmental departments at location,
- concerns of parents (e.g. Canadian Armed Forces member and spouse or partner),
- Educational background and any other pertinent factors related to the child's education, and
- safety.⁶⁹

During the decision-making process, the Children's Education Management section must consider all risks of educational issues and potential future challenges.

⁶⁹ *Military Foreign Service Instructions Chapter 10, Section 12 – Education and Related Care of Dependent Children.* 12 October 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/compensation-benefits-instructions/chapter-10-foreign-service.html#sec-10-12-01>. [accessed 3 September 2020].

The following is a description of the roles and responsibilities of each interdepartmental committee involved in the evaluation of education requests:

Working Group A

- Senior interdepartmental Committee
- Hosted by the Treasury Board Secretariat
- Provides policy direction to Working Group B
- Involved in the cyclical review of Foreign Services Directives

Working Group B

- A subcommittee of Working Group A that seeks clarification, when necessary, from Working Group A
- The interdepartmental coordinating committee for the purposes of Foreign Service Directive 34, Education Allowances
- Interdepartmental participation ensuring a uniform application of the Foreign Services Directives
- Provides recommendations and interpretation
- Canadian Armed Forces members have the right to submit a request to this group through their support unit
- Meets monthly – hosted by Global Affairs Canada
- A Department of National Defence representative (normally within the Children’s Education Management section) attends these meetings
- Provides a guideline and template for member use when submitting requests
- Each case is considered individually, and decisions are documented
- Record of decision is given to each of the group members, who share results with support units
- Additional expenses and certain specified benefits cannot be approved by the department unless they are recommended by Working Group B
- Some requests go directly to Working Group B for approval (e.g. Roman Catholic Education) as per Foreign Service Directive 34
- Maintains the list of approved schools (available on Children’s Education Management’s website) as prepared in collaboration with Canadian Armed Forces members and public servants on site

Education Sub-Committee

- Monthly meetings normally scheduled the week before the Working Group B meeting
- A Department of National Defence representative sits on committee and reviews all submissions before forwarding to Working Group B, submitting each with no name or personal identifiers
- All cases reviewed and recommendations are made to Working Group B
- Cases are submitted and ensure they are on the agenda for the next Working Group B meeting

Finding 10: There are varying levels of satisfaction with the management of education needs by the Children's Education Management section.

When a child's education needs fit within the parameters of policy, constituents reported a high level of satisfaction with how their needs were managed by the Children's Education Management section.

In more complex cases, challenges with the management of the children's educational needs were reported. Canadian Armed Forces members and their families reported a lack of transparency and compassion on the part of the Children's Education Management group to help find solutions.

Some families stated that they faced additional frustrations regarding their communication with Children's Education Management, especially when their situation required special approval from Working Group B. Although there is a clear process established for such submissions that is duly followed by Children's Education Management, a personalized and comprehensive approach is missing. Every step of the process is completed through the support units with limited details, and the families feel left out. They reported not being adequately informed of the status of their request and unsure of how the information is presented on their behalf. Many of the concerned members reported not feeling confident about the representation provided by the Children's Education Management section during the hearing of their case and most importantly, they were not provided with rationale for the final decision rendered, especially when facing a denial.

Process for educational requests outside established parameters

- Children's Education Management receives case-specific request from an OUTCAN support unit. In accordance with policy, a member's request may be denied, and the member informed. Members are informed that they must seek a decision from Working Group B before another mechanism (i.e. grievance) can be pursued.
- Members request their education issue be brought forward to Working Group B.
- Unit should provide member with the Working Group B guideline and template for submissions.
- Request is submitted to Children's Education Management through the support unit.
- Children's Education Management reviews the case and it goes to the Education Sub-Committee for review, with all personal identifiers removed.
- Education Sub-Committee makes recommendations to Working Group B on education cases.
- The file is put in review cycle for Working Group B.
- Working Group B reviews the file with no identifiers and decides based on policy. Should the issue be urgent, the case may be submitted to Working Group B for secretarial review (meaning that the Working Group does not convene in person but reviews the document electronically). If Working Group B is unable to arrive at a decision, then Working Group A provides clarification on the intent of the Foreign Service Directive.
- The decision on the member's case is communicated through a record of decision, which is forwarded to the support unit. The record of decision does not contain any individual identifiers; the support unit must know to whom the decision pertains.

Observation 8: The schooling systems in many countries have an enrollment schedule that conflicts with the Canadian Armed Forces screening and pre-posting timelines.

Most screening messages are released between November and February, with posting messages typically released at the end of March. Canadian Armed Forces members cannot secure housing or incur any expenses related to education until they have successfully completed their screening and have received a formal posting message.

In many countries, school enrollment begins as early as February and requires a local address and a monetary deposit. As a result, the screening process timeline does not often allow Canadian Armed Forces members and their families to make timely decisions about schooling or to comply with enrollment requirements. For example,

one family had pre-selected a school near their future work location. Children's Education Management section advised them not to register before receiving their posting message, since that would make them responsible for any expenses incurred. Once they received their posting message, the school no longer had vacancies, and their child was waitlisted. Another family cited having to commute significant distances to a school across town for drop off and pickup, as the local school was at capacity by the time the family was approved for registration.⁷⁰ These situations resulted in increased uncertainty and stress for the families.

The lack of concurrence between the OUTCAN Programme cycle and the school registration is a stressor for Canadian Armed Forces members with school age children.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Observation 9: There are gaps in the internal communications between Children's Education Management, the Director Military Careers, the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration, and the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff OUTCAN Coordination section.

Any changes to the OUTCAN footprint have a direct impact on the Children's Education Management section. As Children's Education Management is not part of the decision-making process or included as an observer during the Senior Review Board, their ability to provide timely information to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families about education options for these new locations is limited.

Even in locations where the Canadian Armed Forces has a long-standing presence, there is a lack of communication between the organizations involved in the OUTCAN Programme, as expressed during the interview with Children's Education Management guidance counsellors:

“Sometimes there are issues with the career managers who have a lack of knowledge about the school systems, it sets everyone up to not succeed if they want to send someone where their kids cannot go. We would be happy to communicate and collaborate with the career managers to prevent screening people for places where they cannot go.”

- Children's Education Management

⁷⁰ *Constituent interviews.* [3 September 2019 – 26 November 2019].

Further, any reviews and updates on education-related policies under the responsibility of the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration directly impact all organizations involved in the OUTCAN posting process. The absence of formalized communications and collaboration between these groups have direct repercussions on Canadian Armed Forces members and their families.

For example, in 2019, amendments to Foreign Service Directive 34 – Education Allowances resulted in a reduced scope of eligibility for shelter assistance reimbursement. Formal notification of these changes was not provided efficiently which limited Canadian Armed Forces members and their families’ ability to consider the impacts of these changes on their personal finances and make fully informed decisions.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Observation 10: The potential impact of an OUTCAN posting on secondary school students’ education creates concern for Canadian Armed Forces members and their families.

Some Canadian Armed Forces members and families were concerned about the impact an OUTCAN posting could have on their high-school aged children’s post-secondary education. Families expressed that it would have been helpful to better understand earlier in the process that, upon return to Canada, their children might have to repeat a school year or take additional courses in order to be accepted into a Canadian university.

“The one thing we need to improve is the transition from an American high school back to a Canadian university. We had no idea what the process was and if they will consider our child an American graduate or a Canadian graduate.”

- Family member

Children’s Education Management guidance counsellors confirmed that this information is shared with families during the initial screening interview. However, they also recognized that there is also a lot of information provided to families during this busy period. Accordingly, they have made tools and reference material

such as frequently asked questions and informative presentations available on their website that is accessible at any given time. The link for their website is indicated on the screening form, sent to the families by e-mail following the interview with the guidance counsellor and can be provided by the support unit as well.

The large volume of files in relation to the number of guidance counsellors limits their capacity to provide extensive support. However, the guidance counsellors encourage families to use the resources available on their website, and they can answer specific questions or assist in a more personalized way upon request.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Morale, welfare and family support services

Observation 11: Services and programming offered by the Military Family Services vary from one location to another.

Military Family Resource Centres exist in Canada to support military families. Outside of Canada, they are known as Military Family Services, and are funded by Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services in Ottawa. There are Military Family Services locations across Europe and the United States.

Military Family Services programs and services may include:

- welcome and orientation programs,
- information packages,
- spousal or partner employment seminars and referrals,
- childcare referrals,
- second language or local language training programs,
- spousal or partner events and activities, and
- children's events and activities.⁷¹

Military Family Services is governed by the “Military Family Services Program: Parameters 4 Practice.”⁷² This document covers everything from the requirement to provide services in both official languages in accordance with the needs of the local Canadian Armed Forces community to the context for volunteering and a code of ethics.

71 *About the Military Family Services Programs. Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services*. n.d. <https://www.cfmws.com/en/AboutUs/MFS/Working%20Groups/Pages/Parameters.aspx>. [accessed 13 August 2020].

72 *Military Family Services Program: Parameters 4 Practice. Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services*. 2017. <https://www.cfmws.com/en/AboutUs/MFS/ResourcesMERCs/Documents/2017%20Documents/Parameters%204%20Practice/Parameters%204%20Practice%20E%20NEW%20DEC%202017.pdf>. [accessed 22 July 2020].

Military Family Services initiates contact upon receipt of the posting message by sending a welcome e-mail and a community guide (if available) to the member. Once the family is established in their new location, they are contacted within 45 days and are encouraged to check in with the closest point of service in person or by telephone.

In some locations like the United States⁷³ and Europe, an introductory document is also available online and contains a comprehensive list of topics.⁷⁴

In locations where there is no physical Military Family Services office, Canadian Armed Forces members and their families are assigned a virtual coordinator in another location. For example, those posted to Romania are supported by the Military Family Services in Naples, Italy. The information and services provided virtually can be limited and may not be tailored to their location.

Virtual services can include:

- information session recordings,
- e-mail information for connecting with other families on location,
- social media channels,
- meetings and workshops, and
- book clubs.

Interviewees reported the following inconsistencies in the provision of services:

- Bilingual services were not available consistently in all OUTCAN locations when needed.
- The Military Family Services staff reported inconsistencies in the allocation of funds. Although the basic mandated services are fully funded, some locations reported not having sufficient funding to offer other services, such as non-mandated or site-specific activities. Others mentioned having an overall excess of funds for their location.
- There is a lack of customized programming for teenagers.⁷⁵

Military Family Services is recognized as a major contributor to the quality of life OUTCAN, often serving as the only social connection for families. In general, families reported a high level of satisfaction with Military Family Services and the programs which they stated met their expectations. However, some integration challenges were noted for specific groups:

- single Canadian Armed Forces members who do not always feel included or welcomed due to a lack of programming for them, and
- in a few locations, some spouses or partners reported not feeling welcome to visit or join activities due to language or diversity barriers.

73 *Military Family Services US – Family Guide*. 2020. <https://www.cafconnection.ca/getmedia/fa97bfe7-779d-44e4-90bc-6861341711ca/MFS-Family-Guide-2019.pdf.aspx>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

74 These topics include contact information for each local Military Family Services as well as information on living in the United States, living in larger cities, expectations about the commute, culture shock and programs offered on location or virtually.

75 It is worth noting that Military Family Services in Europe is creating programs to address this challenge, such as the Youth Employment Program and the Youth Leadership Conference.

The programming provided by Military Family Services is generated and driven by community needs.⁷⁶ They offer several standardized services such as:

- volunteering programs,
- emergency childcare, and
- language instruction.

For example, in terms of volunteering opportunities for families, the “Military Family Services Program: Parameters 4 Practice” indicates that families should be offered volunteering opportunities with Military Family Services points of services regardless of the location. However, some spouses or partners have indicated that these volunteer opportunities are not always promoted and are only offered to those who inquire about them. In addition, a Vulnerable Sector Check is required for volunteer opportunities. In most cases, such a check cannot be conducted once a family has relocated outside of Canada. This further limits volunteer opportunities, although Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services attempts to provide these checks whenever feasible.

In terms of Personnel Support Programs, the interviewees indicated that there is OUTCAN provision of fitness and programs services such as gym, sport equipment and wellness training. They mentioned that programming is also available for many OUTCAN locations, but their efforts and funding are mostly centered on the United States. In some locations, such as Naples (Italy) and Germany, locally engaged staff are providing services.⁷⁷

Military Family Services has been diligent in providing information to Canadian Armed Forces families. However, as previously noted, the amount of information provided and the method of delivery are inadequate for many newly-posted families during a time when they are also trying to adjust to a new culture, language and education system. Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services publishes information about their policies and programs on the internal network and the internet.⁷⁸

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

⁷⁶ Stakeholder interviews. Military Family Services staff. 22 November 2019.

⁷⁷ Stakeholder interviews. Personnel Support Program staff. 26 November 2019.

⁷⁸ Programs and Services. Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services. n.d. <https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/Programs-Services.aspx>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

Observation 12: In general, there is a low level of awareness of the barriers to family employment while OUTCAN.

Family members who may wish to seek employment while OUTCAN can face restrictions and other challenges such as:

- inability or difficulty in obtaining visas and work permits,
- lack of job opportunities available in their field,
- inability or difficulty in obtaining required accreditation for specialized fields such as nursing, teaching and law,
- limited knowledge of the local language,
- restrictions due to diplomatic status, and
- unavailability of suitable or affordable daycare.

Many Canadian Armed Forces members and their families reported not being fully aware of these barriers to family employment prior to their arrival. As a result, they were not prepared for the impact this would have on family income. Even when family members can find employment, they are often paid in accordance with the local minimum wage. This may be much less than the average Canadian minimum wage.

It is worth noting that provision of such information varies depending on location or sub-programme employment. For example, the families posted to the North American Aerospace Defense Command are briefed on dependant employment during their house hunting trip. This information is also included in their Welcome Book. For Defence Attachés, the member and their spouse or partner are briefed on the employment restrictions stipulated in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations during their training week.

Employment Insurance

Eligibility for Canadian Employment Insurance depends on the location of the OUTCAN posting.⁷⁹ In the United States, there is an arrangement in place to allow the receipt of Employment Insurance on a case-by-case basis. Information is not readily available prior to being posted OUTCAN, which makes it difficult for Canadian Armed Forces members and their families to make fully informed decisions affecting their financial situation.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

⁷⁹ *Employment insurance available to military families. Office of the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman.* 10 June 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/ombudsman-national-defence-forces/education-information/military-families/employment-insurance.html> [accessed 11 September 2020].

Observation 13: Families posted OUTCAN face a high level of isolation.

While the transition from one posting to the next within Canada can be difficult, OUTCAN postings present different challenges for military families as they settle into new communities abroad. Many families reported a sense of isolation once OUTCAN. The loss of employment opportunities for spouses or partners, differences in local cultural practices and norms, security concerns, and social and language barriers are all contributing factors to this sense of isolation. Families reported feeling even more isolated when their serving spouse or partner's position required them to be away from home for extended periods.

While Canadian Armed Forces members maintain a sense of structure and routine through their military status, official functions, and job duties, some family members also reported a loss in their sense of self-identity. The use of the term “dependant” to refer to family members was noted as demeaning and contributing to feeling the loss of self-identity and isolation.⁸⁰

Although families are briefed on the realities and impacts of isolation during the medical and social worker portions of the OUTCAN screening process, it was reported to this office that the level of isolation actually experienced once posted was worse than expected.

“To be honest, there are highs and lows.
The kids had a hard time the first months.”

- Spouse or partner of a
Canadian Armed Forces member

⁸⁰ Most of the spouses/partners interviewed mentioned they dislike the use of the term “dependant” because they find it to be disrespectful.

Mental health support

There are several support services in place for mental health for families posted OUTCAN:

- The “Military Family Services Program: Parameters 4 Practice” indicate that only short-term counselling, for issues not requiring the involvement of a doctor, is available through their points of services.⁸¹
- Military Family Services in Europe and the United States have a dedicated social worker to provide direct support to families in person, virtually and through psycho-educational opportunities. This support is geared to helping individuals and families deal with challenges.
- In other locations, there is no in-person social worker support. Canadian Armed Forces members and their families can access limited services by telephone or videoconference. Chaplain services are also available in some locations.⁸²
- The Canadian Forces Member Assistance Program provides support services to military members and their families and is accessible via a toll-free number, including internationally.⁸³
- The Family Information Line provides counselling and guidance 24 hours a day, seven days a week. International access to the Family Information Line is now available. This change was prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸⁴

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness.

81 *Parameters 4 Practice*. Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services. 2017. <https://www.cfmws.com/en/AboutUs/MFS/ResourcesMFRCS/Documents/2017%20Documents/Parameters%204%20Practice/P4P%20FINAL%20EN%20NEW.pdf>. [accessed 22 July 2020].

82 *Mental Health Programs and Services*. Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services. n.d. <https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/Programs-Services/Mental-Health/Mental-Health-Programs-and-Services.aspx>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

83 *Canadian Forces Member Assistance Program (CFMAP)*. 28 August 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/guide/programs-canadian-forces/cfmap.html#:~:text=%20Canadian%20Forces%20Member%20Assistance%20Program%20%28CFMAP%29%20,Sessions%20will%20normally%20consist%20of%20a...%20More%20>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

84 *Family Information Line*. Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services. n.d. <https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/Stay-Connected/Family-Information-Line.aspx>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

Return to Canada

Observation 14: The return to Canada involves fewer steps than the pre-posting process.

The first step in the return to Canada is the career managers' issuance of a posting message, which triggers the related administrative processes. The member then engages with the Relocation Service Provider to begin the relocation process. Canadian Armed Forces members reported similar concerns with the relocation back to Canada, including issues related to communicating with relocation agents.

Military Family Services offers services to assist spouses or partners and family members to reintegrate back into Canada. These services include:

- resume and interview preparation through the Spousal Employment Program;
- the Military Spousal Employment Network;⁸⁵
- assistance in creating a professional social media account; and
- access to various programs, workshops and second language training.⁸⁶

Most Canadian Armed Forces members indicated that in general the transition back to Canada was easier. They reported delays in obtaining new driver's licenses and health cards upon return to Canada.

“[...] dealing with Service Ontario and getting new licences, registrations, health cards was tricky [...]. We made multiple visits to Service Canada.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

In some cases, reintegration of children into the Canadian schooling system was challenging, particularly for students entering their last two years of high school. These challenges relate to differences in the standards of education and curriculum between the OUTCAN school and the Canadian school. Tutoring support can be provided, based on approval, upon return to Canada. However, this tutoring is not available to children who were home-schooled during the OUTCAN posting.⁸⁷

These challenges also affect members relocating within Canada. To that end, Seamless Canada was launched in June 2018. The overall intent of this initiative is to “better align programs and services for military members and their families that are subject

85 This is a network of employers, links, job fairs and job boards.

86 *Employment. Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services*. n.d. <https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/Programs-Services/Employment.aspx>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

87 *Children's Education Management. Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services*. n.d. <https://ml-fd.caf-fac.ca/en/2018/07/16985>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

to change within different jurisdictions across the country. These include education, health, employment credentials, and licensing for drivers and vehicles”.⁸⁸

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness.

⁸⁸ Canadian Armed Forces ‘Seamless Canada’ initiative launches in Toronto. *The Maple Leaf*. 27 July 2018. <https://ml-fd.caf-fac.ca/en/2018/07/16985>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

Department of National Defence civilian employees and their families

Observation 1: Department of National Defence civilian employees are impacted by communication challenges.

The findings and observations listed later, while they deal with separate issues, have a communication nexus. These issues can amplify the challenges experienced by Department of National Defence civilian employees and their families while assigned OUTCAN.

In particular, this office identified communication issues in the following areas:

- screening,
- support services at post, and
- emergency evacuation plans.

These areas are addressed in further detail later.

No specific recommendation made as Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Selection, screening, and pre-posting

Finding 1: While the civilian employee selection, screening and pre-posting process is more defined and tailored than the process for Canadian Armed Forces members, there were noted challenges.

Department of National Defence civilian employees apply for OUTCAN assignments as they would for any other staffing opportunity within the Federal Public Service. Once the application is submitted, the sponsor organization will assess all applications and select the most suitable candidate. Selected applicants are required to complete a screening process. Department of National Defence civilian employees can normally receive a one-on-one preparation briefing provided by the Foreign Service Program section of the Director Corporate Labour Relations section, either in person or by telephone.

Civilian employees and their families reported that they must complete an Occupational Health Assessment Report, administered by Health Canada.⁸⁹ They further reported receiving information about subjects such as air quality at location during this health assessment.

⁸⁹ *Occupational Health Assessment Report*. Health Canada. February 2012 (version 3.86). [accessed 20 July 2020].

Although the selection and screening process is simpler and more personalized for Department of National Defence civilian employees, it was reported that the information provided was limited. In addition, obtaining timely and accurate information such as financial details was challenging. While civilians reported fewer but similar problems than Canadian Armed Forces members, they also mentioned that the Foreign Service Program would benefit from better organization, monitoring and management.

Similar to the experience of the Canadian Armed Forces members, most Department of National Defence civilian employees indicated they had difficulties in obtaining required travel documents quickly. They also did not feel adequately supported by the organization.

The responsibility for ensuring that the screening process is complete rests with the employee.

Relocation

Observation 2: Relocation policies and authorities are well-defined and available.

The relocation entitlements, benefits and services for the Department of National Defence civilian employees and their families are detailed in the Foreign Service Directive 15.⁹⁰ The Foreign Service Program section of the Director Corporate Labour Relations team administers relocation services.

There is no contracted relocation service provider. The responsibilities for all phases of the move resides with the Department of National Defence civilian employees and their families. As with Canadian Armed Forces members, there are two OUTCAN housing options for Department of National Defence civilian employees. They may be pre-assigned Crown Housing or live on the economy. Department of National Defence civilian employees face the same issues as reported by Canadian Armed Forces members in the Relocation section above. Department of National Defence civilian employees are also entitled to similar benefits such as rent and utility share.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness.

⁹⁰ *Foreign Service Directives. FSD 15 – Relocation*. 1 April 2019. <https://www.njc-cnm.gc.ca/directive/d110/v247/en>. [accessed 21 July 2020].

Support services at post

Observation 3: The support services for administration at location is not consistent.

Department of National Defence civilian employees do not have official on-site support. Instead they rely on contacts with the Foreign Service Program section in Ottawa and their sponsoring unit in Canada, if applicable. However, it was indicated they receive more specific, pertinent and detailed information upon request once on location. Most of the time Canadian Armed Forces or other governmental departments support units provide this information.

Some OUTCAN local support units provide access to administrative resources as well as Personnel Support Program and Military Family Services to Department of National Defence civilian employees and their families. However, currently there is no formal agreement in place for the provision of such services.

No specific recommendation made as Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Health and safety

Finding 2: There is no formal emergency evacuation process for civilian employees.

In the event of an emergency evacuation, Foreign Service Directive 64 – Emergency Evacuation and Loss is applicable. As stated in the Directive:

It is the responsibility of individual Departments which are or may be involved in evacuation procedures to coordinate the implementation of the provisions of [Foreign Service Directive] 64 and related directives. [...] The Deputy Head, or where insufficient time or inadequate communications exist, the senior officer at the mission, may authorize the emergency evacuation.⁹¹

The manager of the Foreign Service Program maintains an understanding of the authorities and processes in place in the event of emergency evacuations. This includes an informal partnership with the Deputy Vice Chief of the Defence Staff organization. The Foreign Service Program recognizes that this partnership and the process for emergency evacuations may not be well-known or communicated to Department of National Defence civilian employees assigned OUTCAN. There is currently no formal evacuation process in place for employees assigned OUTCAN should an emergency occur.

⁹¹ Foreign Service Directives. FSD 64 – Emergency Evacuation and Loss. 1 April 2019. <https://www.njc-cnm.gc.ca/directive/d138/v274/en>. [accessed 20 July 2020].

Staff of the Non-Public Funds and their families

Communications

Observation 1: Staff of the Non-Public Funds are impacted by communication challenges.

The findings and observations listed later, while they deal with separate issues, have a communication nexus. These issues can amplify the challenges experienced by Staff of the Non-Public Funds and their families while employed OUTCAN.

More specifically, this office identified communications issues in the following areas:

- screening, and
- emergency evacuation plans.

These areas are addressed in further detail later.

No specific recommendation made as Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.

Selection, screening, and pre-posting

Finding 1: There is no selection, screening, and pre-posting process.

Currently, there is no screening process in place such as medical or psycho-social evaluations for the sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds. Those we interviewed stated that the absence of a formal screening process prevents the organization from determining the suitability of applicants and their families to live outside of Canada.

Canadian Armed Forces members and Department of National Defence civilian employees and their families receive information about the expected work and life conditions at post during their screening processes. The lack of such a screening process for sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds therefore limits the opportunity for formal sharing of information about the types of challenges they may face prior to accepting the OUTCAN position.

OUTCAN coordinators in the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services Corporate section indicated that they are currently looking to find better ways to screen candidates for OUTCAN opportunities.

It is important to note that the locally engaged Staff of the Non-Public Funds this office spoke to were spouses or partners of military members. As such, they were screened

through the Canadian Armed Forces' screening process and hired locally by the Non-Public Funds organization upon arrival.

Relocation

Observation 2: Relocation policies and authorities are available and well-defined.

The relocation entitlements for sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds and their families are detailed in the Non-Public Funds outside Canada (OUTCAN) Relocation and Foreign Service Benefits Policy. The Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services section manages these entitlements.⁹²

Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services is responsible for informing sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds employed outside of Canada about the relocation policy. The responsibilities of the move reside with the Staff and their families, with some support provided by the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces. There is no contracted relocation service provider.

Again, it is important to note that the locally engaged Staff of the Non-Public Funds this office interviewed were spouses or partners of military members. As such, they were relocated by the Canadian Armed Forces.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness.

Benefits and services

Observation 3: The sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds have their own benefits and services policy.

The sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds have their own benefits and services policy, which includes entitlements applicable while employed outside of Canada. While this office did reach out to sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds, the small number of these staff outside of Canada combined with the response rate would make any statements easily attributable to them, thereby compromising the confidentiality of this investigation. For these reasons, we are unable to draw definitive conclusions on whether the benefits and services policy meets their needs.

⁹² *NPF Outside Canada (OUTCAN) Relocation and Foreign Service Benefits Policy*. 2 October 2017. [accessed 17 December 2019].

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness.

Health and safety

Finding 2: There is no emergency evacuation policy and process for Staff of the Non-Public Funds.

There is no dedicated internal emergency evacuation policy and process for Staff of the Non-Public Funds. Sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds are not governed by the Foreign Service Directives. As such, they are not subject to Foreign Service Directive 64, which provides entitlements and structure to the other constituency groups for evacuation of personnel. In the event of an emergency, and in the absence of clear processes or guidelines, staff may be left to their own devices to try to determine how to proceed.

The lack of formal and easily-accessible instructions or plans affect those at Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services who would be responsible for the coordination of an evacuation, as well as OUTCAN sponsored staff impacted by the evacuation.

Section V: Conclusion

This office set out to examine the major administrative issues as they affect the delivery of benefits, programs, and services to personnel and their families posted outside of Canada. This investigation included members of the Canadian Armed Forces members and their families, Department of National Defence civilian employees and their families, and Staff of the Non-Public Funds and their families.

The stakeholder groups we consulted as part of the investigation demonstrated exemplary cooperation and professionalism. These groups included the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, Military Personnel Command, Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources-Civilian) and Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, as well as all Defence Team personnel who participated in interviews. The Department's commitment to improving the overall management and administration of the OUTCAN Programme is demonstrated by their collaboration with this office during the course of this investigation.


While the OUTCAN Programme is large and multifaceted, there are systemic issues. This investigation revealed overall communication and support challenges. This office believes that improvements in these areas will enhance the overall experience and well-being of Defence Team personnel posted OUTCAN.

Our investigation also revealed specific areas for improvement. These areas include:

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

While OUTCAN postings are great opportunities to contribute to Canada's international priorities as well as for personal advancement, they are not without challenges and stressors. Sometimes, these difficulties are underestimated, as Defence Team personnel try to adapt and settle with their families in new locations. They can also face a higher level of isolation than anticipated, due to reduced access to their support systems in Canada as well as language and cultural differences.

Our investigation found that the benefits and services available to personnel and their families generally meet their needs. Moreover, many past participants indicated they would apply for a future OUTCAN posting if the opportunity were to present itself.



“I know all the administrative burden is not easily resolved, but I would absolutely do it again.”

- Canadian Armed Forces member

Periods of adjustment and uncertainty will always exist with an OUTCAN posting. However, our recommendations, if accepted and implemented, will enable the Department of National Defence, Canadian Armed Forces and the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services to take measurable steps towards improving the well-being of Defence Team personnel and their families.

Section VI: Findings, Observations, and Recommendations

General Findings

General Finding 1: There are resourcing shortages in support of the administration of the OUTCAN Programme, and there are gaps in the training provided to support personnel.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: By September 2022, the Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services ensure that:

1.1 Any gaps in the resourcing of support personnel within the OUTCAN Programme are identified and addressed; and

1.2 All support personnel and stakeholders involved in the OUTCAN Programme are well informed of their responsibilities, and that mechanisms are put in place to validate the effectiveness of this process.

General Finding 2: There are communication challenges at all stages, and personnel do not feel adequately prepared for their OUTCAN posting.

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

Findings pertaining to Canadian Armed Forces members

Recommendations

Finding 1: There are discrepancies between the Military Foreign Service Instructions and the Foreign Service Directives which can lead to inconsistent interpretation and application of benefits and services.

Recommendation 3: By January 2023, the Canadian Armed Forces conduct:

3.1 A comprehensive comparative review to identify and address all sections of the Military Foreign Service Instructions that are a duplication of the Foreign Service Directives; and

3.2 A review to validate the sections in the Instructions that address specific military requirements or mandate.

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

Finding 2: There are challenges associated with the oversight of the OUTCAN Programme.

Recommendation 4: By January 2023, the Canadian Armed Forces strengthen oversight of the OUTCAN Programme, by:

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

Finding 3: The screening process for OUTCAN postings is complex, multifaceted and involves many stakeholders.

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

Finding 4: The Canadian Armed Forces does not provide sufficient support to members and their families in applying for, and obtaining, passports and visas.

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

Finding 5: The current Canadian Armed Forces relocation policy does not meet all the unique needs associated with an OUTCAN relocation.

Finding 6: Support provided to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families for their OUTCAN relocations does not fully meet their needs.

Finding 7: There are limited mechanisms in place for the Canadian Armed Forces to monitor, track and address issues related to the relocation service provider's performance, including any policy misinterpretations.

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

6.1 The number of inaccuracies in information being provided to members; and

6.2 Detailed trends in adjudication requests and associated decisions. This data should be used to make evidence-based improvements to day-to-day service provision and to future relocation policy changes.

Finding 8: Canadian Armed Forces members and their families are concerned about their level of awareness of health and safety in the host country.

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

Finding 9: There are gaps in existing emergency evacuation policies.

Recommendation 8: By January 2022, the Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services conduct a review of and update the Emergency Evacuation plans. This review should consider all Defence Team personnel and their families.

Finding 10: There are varying levels of satisfaction with the management of education needs by the Children’s Education Management section.

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

Findings pertaining to Department of National Defence civilian employees

Recommendations

Finding 1: While the civilian employee selection, screening and pre-posting process is more defined and tailored than the process for Canadian Armed Forces members, there were noted challenges.

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

Finding 2: There is no formal emergency evacuation process for civilian employees.

Recommendation 11: By January 2022, the Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services conduct a review of and update the Emergency Evacuation plans. This review should consider all Defence Team personnel and their families.

Findings pertaining to Staff of the Non-Public Funds

Recommendations

Finding 1: There is no screening, selection and pre-posting process.

Recommendation 12: By January 2022, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services establish a formalized screening process for the sponsored Staff of the Non-Public Funds.

Finding 2: There is no emergency evacuation policy and process for Staff of the Non-Public Funds.

Recommendation 13: By January 2022, the Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services conduct a review of and update the Emergency Evacuation plans. This review should consider all Defence Team personnel and their families.

General Observations

Comments

General Observation 1: The governance structure of the OUTCAN Programme for the Defence Team is well-defined; responsible authorities and their accountabilities are identified.

No recommendation made as the governance structures of each constituency group are well-defined as are the responsible authorities and their accountabilities.

General Observation 2: There are several recourse mechanisms available to personnel OUTCAN and they are well-defined.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness. The recourse mechanisms are available, and Defence Team personnel are aware of them.

Observations pertaining to Canadian Armed Forces members	Comments
Observation 1: Canadian Armed Forces members experience specific challenges related to the communication and sharing of information at all phases of an OUTCAN.	No specific recommendation made as Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.
Observation 2: In some locations, finding suitable housing is a challenge.	No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.
Observation 3: There are conflicting reporting structures and work descriptions.	No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.
Observation 4: The claims process for benefits is inconsistent and often confusing.	No recommendation made as this is not a matter under exclusive National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces control. This office is unable to make recommendations to organizations outside its mandate. It does, however, encourage consideration for future collaboration with external stakeholders.

Observation 5: Spouses or partners cannot officially contribute to administrative tasks.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and there are liability, privacy, and security considerations. **Recommendation 2** addresses the overall communication challenges.

Observation 6: Benefits and services available to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families while OUTCAN generally meet their needs.

No recommendation made as this observation found that, overall, the benefits and services available to Canadian Armed Forces members and their families meet their needs.

Observation 7: Depending on the location, the mail services OUTCAN may not be efficient and dependable and can also be expensive.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and **Recommendation 2** addresses the overall communication challenges.

Observation 8: The schooling systems in many countries have an enrollment schedule that conflicts with the Canadian Armed Forces screening and pre-posting timelines.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and **Recommendation 2** addresses the overall communication challenges.

Observation 9: There are gaps in the internal communications between Children's Education Management, the Director Military Careers, the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration, and the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff OUTCAN Coordination section.

No specific recommendation made as **Recommendation 2** addresses the overall communication challenges.

Observation 10: The potential impact of an OUTCAN posting on secondary school students' education creates concern for Canadian Armed Forces members and their families.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and **Recommendation 2** addresses the overall communication challenges.

Observation 11: Services and programming offered by the Military Family Services vary from one location to another.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and **Recommendation 2** addresses the overall communication challenges.

Observation 12: In general, there is a low level of awareness of the barriers to family employment while OUTCAN.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and **Recommendation 2** addresses the overall communication challenges.

Observation 13: Families posted OUTCAN face a high level of isolation.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness.

Observation 14: The return to Canada is less complex than the pre-posting process.

No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness.

Observations pertaining to Department of National Defence civilian employees	Comments
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Observation 1: Department of National Defence civilian employees are impacted by communication challenges.	No specific recommendation made as Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.
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Observation 2: Relocation policies and authorities are well-defined and available.	No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness.
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Observation 3: The support services for administration at location is not consistent.	No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness and Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.
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Observations pertaining to Staff of the Non-Public Funds	Comments
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Observation 1: Staff of the Non-Public Funds are impacted by communication challenges.	No specific recommendation made as Recommendation 2 addresses the overall communication challenges.
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Observation 2: Relocation policies and authorities are well-defined and available.	No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness.
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Observation 3: The staff of the Non-Public Funds have their own benefits and services policy.	No recommendation made as this observation is for general awareness.
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Appendixes

Appendix A – Investigative methodology

This investigation focused on the administration of OUTCAN postings for members of Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence civilian, Staff of the Non-Public Funds, and their families. This office conducted the investigation within the context of the following three main phases of an OUTCAN posting:

- selection, screening and pre-posting,
- posting, and
- return and reintegration back to Canada.

During this investigation, this office set out to:

- determine if applicants and those posted outside of Canada are treated fairly by the Department,
- determine whether the benefits and services provided Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence civilian employees, Staff of the Non-Public Funds, and their families outside of Canada are sufficient to meet their needs, and
- determine the impacts of postings outside of Canada (including the pre-posting, posting and reintegration process) on Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence civilian employees, Staff of the Non-Public Funds, and their families.

This investigation does not:

- include Canadian Armed Forces operational deployments,
- include Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence civilian employees or Staff of the Non-Public Funds posted within Canada (except those recently returned from an OUTCAN posting),
- include employees of other federal departments who also have large numbers of employees posted abroad,
- include contractors, or
- review policies, services, and benefits other than those brought to our attention prior to or during the course of this investigation.

All Defence Team personnel interviewed as part of this investigation volunteered to participate. This office recognizes that the experiences relayed and opinions expressed may not necessarily represent the views of all Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence civilian employees, Staff of the Non-Public Funds and their families who are or were posted OUTCAN.

Investigative Plan:

This investigation included both the qualitative and quantitative research and data listed as follows:

1) Documentation research and literature review

Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces

- *National Defence Act*
- Defence Policy – *Strong, Secure, Engaged*
- *Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Forces*
- Compensation and Benefits Instructions, including Chapter 10 – Military Foreign Service Instructions
- Canadian Forces Integrated Relocation Program Directive
- Defence Administrative Orders and Directives
- Canadian Forces General Messages
- Various Standard Operating Procedures
- CAF Connection website
- VCDS Directive – Out-Of-Canada (OUTCAN) Governance and Command and Control
- Relocation Experiences, The Experiences of Military Families with Relocations Due to Postings – Survey Results (2018)
- Screening forms, files and instructions
- E-mails, presentations, transcripts and other informal/internal written directives provided by stakeholders

Non-Public Property

- Non-Public Funds outside Canada (OUTCAN) Relocation and Foreign Service Benefits Policy

Ombudsman Office

- Complaints files from internal database

Other government departments

- Foreign Service Directives
- National Joint Council website
- Public Service Health Care Plan Directive
- Occupational Health Assessment Report

2) Interviews with constituents

All interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis. Interviews were conducted on-site in one-on-one interviews and focus groups, as well as by telephone and virtual questionnaire.

These interviews took place from 21 June 2019 to 29 January 2020.

In total, this office spoke to 207 members of the Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence civilian employees, Staff of the Non-Public Funds and 53 family members located in 33 countries. This geographic representation ensured our office had a global understanding of the OUTCAN experience.

In addition to the telephone interviews, members of the investigative team travelled to the following countries to interview constituents in person:

- Belgium,
- Germany,
- Italy,
- Latvia,
- the United Kingdom, and
- the United States.

3) Interviews with Department of National Defence, Canadian Armed Forces and other government departments stakeholders

The investigative team consulted the following organizations:

- Assistant Deputy Minister – Policy
- Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources - Civilian)
- Canadian Defence Liaison Staff
- Canadian Forces Health Services
- Canadian Forces Support Units
- Children’s Education Management
- Director Compensation and Benefits Administration
- Director Foreign Liaison
- Director General Integrated Conflict and Complaint Management
- Director General Military Careers
- Director Medical Policy
- Director Relocation Business Management
- Director Pay Policy and Development
- Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Directorate (Military Personnel Command and Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Civilian))
- Global Affairs Canada
- Military Family Resource Centres
- Military Family Services
- Military Foreign Services Section

- Military Personnel Generation Training Group
- Military Police Service Section
- National Joint Council
- OUTCAN Clerks
- Strategic Joint Staff
- Personnel Support Program
- OUTCAN Coordination section, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff
- Treasury Board Secretariat

These interviews took place from 21 June 2019 to 29 January 2020. A subsequent questionnaire was sent to specific stakeholders during summer 2020 in order to obtain information about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their business operations.

Bias and discrimination

Constituents and stakeholders interviewed were asked if they had experienced, witnessed, or identified situations of bias or discrimination. There were no reports of systemic bias and discrimination on human rights grounds in the way in which the Department administers the OUTCAN Programme.

However, about 53 percent of constituents interviewed did report situations where they felt they witnessed bias or discrimination. These reported incidents were mostly related to cultural and social norms in the host country and not within the control of the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces.



Appendix B – COVID-19 pandemic impact analysis

The COVID-19 pandemic began during this investigation. The Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces were challenged to find effective solutions to continue business operations during unprecedented times. This office conducted a supplementary analysis to determine to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic affected the administration of OUTCAN postings. To that end, this office consulted with stakeholders within the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces.

Most stakeholders indicated that their staff had transitioned well to working remotely and were able to deliver services with minimal interruption. While some groups noted increased workloads due to COVID-19, there were solutions to digitize and streamline processes. For example, stakeholders highlighted the greater acceptance of digital signatures, which helped improve overall processing times. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also brought challenges to the administration of OUTCAN postings. For example, the temporary restriction on the Defence network and system access precluded some units from fully performing their duties. In addition, not all personnel initially had the necessary technological equipment to work remotely.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased existing challenges associated with the OUTCAN processes such as the coordination of decision-making efforts and communication related to evacuations. Many monitoring and tracking methods were developed on the spur of the moment, underscoring the importance of having accurate, detailed, and updated information about personnel posted OUTCAN.

The active posting season and associated relocations during the summer period were also impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Where possible, procedures were amended to account for reduced availability of international flights and imposed quarantine periods. However, there were also challenges noted. For example, this requirement to quarantine after international travel meant that Canadian Armed Forces members had to request an extension to their house hunting trip and periods of travel to new location. These requests had to be submitted to the Director Compensation and Benefits Administration for adjudication, which created delays in obtaining advances and claims approvals.

Overall, all stakeholders stated that they transitioned well to working remotely, having adapted to ensure that OUTCAN personnel and their families were provided with as much information and support as possible as the situation evolved. While this office recognizes the extraordinary circumstances posed by the pandemic as well as the efforts made by the Department to adapt and adjust accordingly, the situation highlighted the importance of effective program oversight and demonstrated the requirement for a re-evaluation of the support resources dedicated to the administration of the OUTCAN Programme.

Appendix C – Glossary⁹³

Assignment: A posting, attached posting or attached posting (temporary) to a permanent or training position outside Canada at a post other than a Chief of the Defence Staff designated International Operation.

Cross-posting: A posting from one post outside Canada to another post outside Canada.

Crown-housing: “Crown-held accommodation” as accommodation owned, leased or controlled by the Crown other than family housing as defined in paragraph (2) of the Charges for Family Housing Regulations or single quarters and, unless the Minister otherwise directs, includes accommodation provided directly to a member by the host government.

Dependant: Refers to

- the spouse or common-law partner of a Canadian Armed Forces member, Department of National Defence civilian employee, or Staff of the Non-Public Funds,
- the member’s child,
- the member’s special dependant, or
- A student who is not residing at the same location of the Canadian Armed Forces member, Department of National Defence civilian employee, or Staff of the Non-Public Funds because they are registered as student in full-time attendance at a recognized educational institution.

Family or family member: In this report, the term “families” has been employed instead of using the terminology of *Dependant*. The same definition as above applies.

Foreign Service Directives: Embody the Treasury Board approved entitlements of Public Service employees with respect to their service outside Canada. Thus, it is applicable to Department of National Defence civilian employees. It is only relevant to Canadian Armed Forces members when the Military Foreign Service Instructions reference it.

Furniture and effects: Household goods and effects including furniture, household equipment and personal articles of the member and of the member’s dependants. It excludes personal motor vehicles, livestock or pets.

93 The definitions listed herein have been paraphrased from the following sources to include all constituency groups, namely Canadian Armed Forces members, Department of National Defence civilian employees, Staff of the Non-Public Funds, and their families:
Compensation and Benefits Instructions. Chapter 10 - Foreign Service Instructions. Section 1 – Interpretation, 10.1.01 Definitions and Abbreviations. 12 November 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/compensation-benefits-instructions/chapter-10-foreign-service.html>. [accessed 24 July 2020].
Foreign Service Directives. FSD 2 – Definitions. 1 April 2019. <https://www.njc-cnm.gc.ca/directive/d110/v247/en>. [accessed 24 July 2020].
NPF Outside Canada (OUTCAN) Relocation and Foreign Service Benefits Policy, Section 32.4 Definitions. 2 October 2017. [accessed 17 December 2019].

Gaining unit: The unit to which the member is being posted.

Losing unit: The unit from which the member is being posted.

Leave: Authorized absence from duty such as vacation leave, sick leave, special leave, compassionate leave, and foreign service leave.

Lessons learned: The adding of value to an existing body of knowledge or seeking to correct deficiencies in areas of concepts, policy, doctrine, training, equipment or organizations, by providing feedback and follow-on action.

Living expenses: Actual and reasonable expenses for accommodation, meals, laundry, dry cleaning, valet services and attendant gratuities.

Locally engaged staff: In this investigation, the locally engaged staff this office interviewed were hired by Military Family Services or other Non-Public Funds organizations. Locally engaged staff are often spouses or partners of Defence Team personnel.

Military Foreign Service Instructions: Detail the compensation and benefits available for Canadian Armed Forces members and their family while members serve outside Canada. Their intent is to ensure that, as much as possible, members should be neither better nor worse off than their counterparts serving in Canada.

Orderly Room: In the military, it represents the location used for general administrative purposes and for record keeping.

On the economy: When a member lives on the economy (not in Crown housing), they are responsible for securing their own accommodations. They make their own arrangements, including choosing the location, negotiating the terms of the lease, making rent payments, etc.

OUTCAN Programme: The OUTCAN Programme encompasses programs and initiatives within the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces that involve the establishment of OUTCAN positions as well as the posting or assignment of Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces personnel. This excludes operations and deployments.

OUTCAN support units: These are units that are responsible for providing administrative support to members OUTCAN and are the approving authority. These units are Canadian Forces Support Unit Europe, Canadian Forces Support Unit Colorado, Canadian Defence Liaison Staff Washington, Canadian Defence Liaison Staff London, and Military Foreign Service Section.

OUTCAN sub-programmes: There are several sub-programmes that fall under the governance of the OUTCAN Programme. With a dedicated number of positions allocated to each, some of these sub-programs are Defence Attaché and Defence Diplomacy, Canadian Armed Forces Support Units, Military Police Security Services, Exchange and Liaison, United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, North American Aerospace Defense Command and Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers

Europe. These programmes have unique requirements that range from different external relationships and agreements with different countries to occupation-specific qualifications and duties.

OUTCAN functional advisors: To balance needs of each sub-programme, there are many functional authorities who are tasked with achieving the Department's core responsibilities OUTCAN. The functional authorities are Air and Space, Logistics and Support, Army, Cyber and Computer Information Systems, Intelligence, Navy, Military Police and Health Services.

Place of duty: A location in Canada or a post at or from which an employee's duties are ordinarily performed, including any area which, according to local custom, is within commuting distance of the place of duty.

Post: A city, community, or other geographic locality where the working environment is permanently situated.

Posting: The period from receipt of the posting message, until the receipt of the posting message back to Canada.

Principal residence: A single-family dwelling owned or rented by the employee or dependant residing with the employee which is continuously occupied by the employee or a dependant at the time of the relocation, and which is recorded as the employee's permanent address in the headquarters city on the departmental or agency personnel file. Temporary or seasonal accommodation is excluded from this definition.

Rent ceiling: The maximum amount payable by location to a Canadian Armed Forces member or Department of National Defence civilian employee to secure a rental accommodation, in accordance with the applicable benefits policy.

Return to Canada: The period from receipt of the posting message back to Canada until reintegration to Canada, including the settlement into the new community.

Relocation: The authorized geographic move of an employee or dependant between a place of duty in Canada and a place of duty at a post, or between a place of duty at one post and a place of duty at another post.

Spouse or partner: A person who is legally married to Defence Team personnel or in a recognized common-law partnership.

Selection, screening and pre-posting: The period from when an OUTCAN position was open for candidacy, to the time the screening process was completed, and the posting message was received.

Unaccompanied: An employee who is not accompanied by a dependant.

Working Group A: An interdepartmental committee chaired by the Treasury Board Secretariat that provides policy direction to Working Group B and is responsible, in collaboration with the National Joint Council, for the cyclical review of Foreign Service Directives.

Working Group B: An interdepartmental sub-committee of Working Group A that provides recommendations on specific interpretations and applications on the provision of Foreign Service Directives, including that of children’s education outside Canada.

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