



# Evaluation of the Consular Affairs Program - Summary Report

## Why is it important?

The Consular Affairs Program is mandated to help Canadians prepare for safe and responsible travel abroad by providing up-to-date travel information and advice. The Program is also mandated to provide routine services and emergency assistance to Canadians in distress abroad.

The Program is delivered through the Consular Policy Bureau, the Consular Operations Bureau and a network of over 250 points of service abroad. The Consular and Travel Communications Division and the Corporate Planning and Information Technology Bureau are key players at Global Affairs Canada in the delivery of the Consular Affairs Program.

- **Evaluation Coverage:** 2012/13- 2016/17
- **Evaluation Completion Date :** May 2017
- **Program Delivery Cost FY 2016-17:** \$137M
- **Full time equivalents:** 387
- **Points of service and delivery:** 250
- **Evaluation methodology:** 130 key stakeholder interviews, survey of consular staff at missions (n=402), document and data review, field visits to 12 missions, and international comparisons.

## What the evaluation assessed:

- Relevance of current domestic and international legal and policy frameworks;
- Efficiency and effectiveness of consular service delivery and case management at headquarters and at mission;
- Effectiveness of the current consular governance / decision making structure;
- Efficiency of consular resource allocation (financial and human);
- Relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of current communication strategies and outreach;
- Relevance and use of current performance measures and risk mitigation strategies.

## Examples of evaluation questions that were asked:

- Are there any gaps in the current consular-related policies, treaties and conventions that affect consular work?
- What have been some of the main challenges in the provision of consular services and assistance to Canadians?
- How would you describe your collaboration with the Consular Operations and the Consular Policy bureaus?
- Are financial and human resources in your mission/division sufficient for delivering the consular program?
- How is the Program taking advantage of information technologies in its outreach to Canadians?
- How do you report on results for your consular work? Do you have specific guidelines, clear requirements and tools for results reporting?



## What the evaluation found

- **The 21st Century Consular Plan has helped missions streamline their priorities and justify outreach initiatives, however the lack of relevant training and adequate levels of human and financial resources has prevented some missions from implementing planned activities and commitments.** The challenges in fully implementing the plan were particularly evident for missions affected by the Electronic Travel Authorization and missions in countries requiring travel to remote destinations.
- **The lack of a formal coordination mechanism for funding and resource allocation between the Geographic and Consular Program makes it difficult to compare and quantify workload discrepancies between missions, as well as between actual staffing needs and perceptions.** The Program has tried to develop a “Resource Allocation Methodology”, however, the lack of consistent and reliable quantitative data sources does not allow for the practical application of this resourcing model. In addition, the Consular Program is not always in a position to implement permanent solutions to identified resource deficiencies at mission since response to resourcing needs has to be coordinated and approved by the geographic bureaus.
- **The functional and physical separation of the main consular elements (policy and operations, communications, information management and information technology) among three branches and various divisions has impacted the efficient and effective management of Consular Affairs as one program.** Over the past five years, the Program has undergone structural and organizational changes which have helped consolidate and streamline some of its functions with those of the Department. These organizational changes, however, were not always supported with the creation of respective governance mechanisms and decision-making procedures. Program staff reported lack of effective coordination mechanisms between policy and operations, and internal communication challenges with the Communications and Information Management/ Information Technology branches.
- **The Program has developed a number of innovative tools and products to engage with Canadians travelling, living and working abroad. Nonetheless, the absence of a comprehensive external communication and outreach strategy has contributed to inconsistent communications and strategic outreach both in Canada and the field.** A Strategic Communications Strategy was developed by the Consular Communications Bureau as an ever green document but it does not include a detailed strategy for how to engage specific stakeholders and the related activities, timelines and expected outcomes. The strategy also does not include a consolidated performance measurement strategy with clear and detailed indicators to measure progress on expected outcomes. For instance, there are currently no tools in place to measure whether outreach tools are meeting the needs of Canadians or reducing the number of consular enquiries. This hampers the ability of the Consular Affairs Program to capture robust data to ensure analytics inform strategic planning.
- **Deficiencies in data collection systems, combined with inconsistent data input at missions, undermines the reliability of current consular-related statistics and performance measurement information.** While the Program compiles data from various sources, the evaluation team could not find evidence of how these data sources are analysed and used to inform decision making. The apparent deficiencies of certain data collection systems, such as the Consular Management Information Program, combined with the lack of interoperability across the current systems, adds to the ambiguity of the reporting and performance measurement approaches.
- **The absence of a sound financial data tracking mechanism for revenues collected from special services and services delivered on behalf of Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, as well as the amounts of loans provided and recovered from the Distressed Canadian Fund has undermined precise revenue reporting and prudent financial management.**

## Our Recommendations

**Recommendation 1: Update the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Consular Plan or develop a new Consular Strategy reflective of the evolving consular environment and growing need for further modernization of consular service delivery.**

**Recommendation 2: Revise the Consular Resource Allocation Methodology to ensure that resources are appropriately allocated to consular sections at missions to respond to current and future needs for consular services, in both permanent and temporary circumstances, and supported by HQ.**

**Recommendation 3: Review the current consular governance and organizational structure to ensure sound program management and coordination of the main consular functions: policy development, case management and operations, travel advisories and awareness building, and consular internal and external communications.**

## Program Response and Action Plan

**Agreed.** GAC is continually seeking to adjust to the changing international context and is updating the current consular strategy to continue to improve services to Canadians. Work is underway to advance this renewal, including in the following areas: improved service delivery, enhanced communications with Canadians, more flexible mechanisms to assist vulnerable clients, review and update of the consular response network, emerging areas of action. The consular strategy renewal will strengthen support to our consular network to ensure that consular officers have the necessary resources in the current international context to provide timely and appropriate services to Canadians. It will address some of the new challenges presented by the changing consular landscape and will guide Canada's consular priorities for the next three to five years.

**Agreed.** The variety of ways in which consular resources at missions abroad are allocated will be reviewed with the goal of ensuring that future resource allocation is both appropriate and sustainable. This review will include: 1) **A comprehensive analysis and resultant process map** of the current consular resource allocation process; 2) **Evaluation of options** for a way forward with regards to consular resource allocation abroad; 3) **Refinement of the quantitative collection and comparison portion** of the resource allocation methodology. Given the multiple responsibility centres providing support for consular services, governance among all stakeholders will be strengthened in the areas of program and common services support. New governance mechanisms will be set up to focus on Program Support and on Common Services Support. Analysis will also be conducted in regard to how to expand the resourcing model.

**Agreed.** The Consular Program governance structure will be reviewed to ensure that accountabilities are clear and that objectives are aligned with departmental priorities. CFM will undertake the following activities to enhance program management and coordination of the main consular functions: 1) Review and validate the current Consular Program governance and organizational structures; 2) Identify any gaps and/or opportunities for synergies in the Consular Program governance and organizational structure; Strengthen support to our consular network by developing and implementing a strategy for improved internal communications between Headquarters bureaux, including geographic bureaux, and missions abroad.

**Recommendation 4: Develop a comprehensive Communications Strategy and Implementation Plan, reflecting both internal and external communication goals and objectives with specific timelines and targets.**

**Agreed.** The Consular Communications and Travel.gc.ca unit will develop a comprehensive communications strategy and implementation plan, outlining specific internal and external communications goals and priorities over a multi-year timeframe, as well as timelines and targets for key campaigns and projects. The strategy will leverage current communications strategies and tools, integrate mechanisms to ensure performance measurement through the analysis of user metrics and data, and introduce best practices based on consultations with consular stakeholders and international consular counterparts. The strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis to allow continued refinement of objectives, tools and approaches.

**Recommendation 5: Improve data collection to support enhanced performance measurement and financial tracking systems that inform management decision making.**

**Agreed.** A comprehensive data strategy is under development with a focus on improving performance measurement and the tracking of cases and services. The strategy will support results and delivery of services to Canadians and will inform the modernization of the current case management system to ensure it is both agile and adaptable to evolving operational and management/corporate needs. The data strategy will focus on four core elements: 1) Data quality; 2) Data integration; 3) Data visualization; 4) Data analysis. The Consular Bureau will continue to engage with the Results and Delivery Unit to ensure that both departmental and program performance needs are addressed. We will also continue our collaboration with other programs such as trade to share best practices related to analytics and data integrity and to increase data sharing.