

Evaluation of the Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA) Program



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Executive Summary

Background

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA) program. The evaluation was conducted in fulfillment of evaluation requirements as part of the Treasury Board's Policy on Results (2016) and also fulfils commitments from 2013 and 2016 eTA Treasury Board submissions.

The evaluation examined contributions of the eTA program to expected outcomes of IRCC's Visitors Program and covered the launch of eTA in August 2015, up to the most current information available at the time of data collection, but excludes COVID-19 pandemic impacts.

Summary of conclusions

The evaluation found the program is aligned with objectives and priorities of the Government of Canada, IRCC and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), particularly with respect to safety and security, facilitation, digital transformation and modernization, and cost avoidance. The program also helps maintain commitments to and relations with key bilateral partners.

Initial challenges implementing the eTA have mostly been overcome, and the introduction of the eTA requirement did not negatively impact international travel to Canada. While the eTA introduced an additional step for visa-exempt travellers, the eTA process is largely facilitative, and the program is leveraging automated decision-making. The evaluation also found that the eTA was designed as a light-touch screening tool and is appropriate for low risk foreign nationals.

The evaluation highlighted some potential areas for improvement, aimed at enhancing the security and facilitative objectives of the program, as well as filling any information gaps for processing officers.

Summary of recommendations

Capturing passport information digitally would help improve program integrity while simultaneously mitigating mistakes that could delay a passenger's travel and make it easier and faster for clients to

complete their application. Digital capture is therefore aligned with both security-focused and facilitative objectives of the eTA program.

Recommendation 1: IRCC should develop and implement a strategy to digitally capture information from client travel documents for eTA applications.

The evaluation found that broadening information sharing connections with additional data holdings would enhance program integrity. The evaluation also found evidence that additional risk indicators would assist in triaging cases for manual review, which could strengthen program integrity, but that any changes would need to take into account processing resource capacity and impacts on facilitation for clients.

Recommendation 2: To maximize program integrity while minimizing impacts on facilitation, IRCC should explore and develop a strategy to enhance screening of eTA applicants that:

- A. Incorporates additional information sharing; and
- B. Includes an approach to develop and implement new risk indicators.

More revalidations have been required than initially expected, and a backlog has developed. Revalidation work is resource-intensive and requires manual efforts, but is an under-funded activity. The evaluation found that additional legal authorities could enhance officers' revalidation capacity.

Recommendation 3: IRCC should develop and implement a strategy to ensure that the resources and authorities are in place to more effectively revalidate eTAs.

Many officers, particularly in International Network (IN), felt they would benefit from additional, specific training for processing eTAs. While Centralized Network (CN) does the majority of eTA processing and has formal training in place, IN officers tend to deal with more complex cases, and mostly reported learning how to process eTA applications through informal means.

Recommendation 4: IRCC should develop and implement a strategy to address information and training gaps for officers who process eTAs.

Evaluation of the Electronic Travel Authorization Program – Management Response Action Plan (MRAP)

Program Design / Modernization

The Electronic Travel Authorization Program (eTA) program relies in part on client accuracy when completing applications. When clients make errors unintentionally, they may receive an eTA approval only to be denied boarding at an airport when the information they provided in their application doesn't align with the information contained in their travel documents.

Capturing passport information through digital means, for example, by requiring clients to scan their passports rather than input their information manually, would help improve program integrity while simultaneously ensuring unintentional mistakes do not result in delays or refusals. Digital capture would also provide greater confidence to airlines, travellers and eTA decision-makers that the information contained in applications is accurate. Consequently, digital capture is aligned with both security-focused and facilitative objectives of the eTA program.

As an added benefit, increased efficiency in processing applications may free up Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) resources for other work. A move to digitally capturing client information is also aligned with departmental efforts in digital platform modernization.

Recommendation 1: IRCC should implement a strategy to digitally capture information from client travel documents for eTA applications.

IRCC agrees with this recommendation.

Digital capture technology would improve the accuracy and authenticity of information provided in the eTA application to enhance program integrity.

Extracting information found on a client's travel document to populate the application would reduce accidental transcription errors, while also significantly reducing the ability of individuals to deliberately manipulate biographic data.

Digital capture would improve client service by eliminating confusion with specific fields on the application, such as country of issuance and passport number. It could also reduce frustration caused by data entry errors experienced by clients and commercial air carriers at time of travel.

IRCC conducted testing of digital capture technology that would benefit the eTA program. This initiative was included in IRCC's Visitor Transformation Memorandum to Cabinet ratified in April 2021.

Implementation of digital capture technology in the eTA program depends on securing funding.

Action	Accountability	Completion date
Action 1A: Utilize findings and results of digital capture testing for the strategy to implement digital capture technology in the eTA program.	Lead: Admissibility Branch (AB) Support: Transformation Branch (TB), Immigration Program Guidance Branch (IPG), Centralized Network (CN), International Network (IN)	To be confirmed – Department is seeking source of funds
Action 1B: (Contingent on funding) Implement digital capture to extract travel document information for eTA applications.	Lead: Admissibility Branch (AB) Support: Transformation Branch (TB), Immigration Program Guidance Branch (IPG), Centralized Network (CN), International Network (IN)	To be confirmed – Department is seeking source of funds

The eTA program strives to “push out” the Canadian border by identifying inadmissible foreign nationals before they fly to or through Canada. The evaluation found that while the eTA is preventing some inadmissible individuals from coming to Canada, the program’s contribution to security objectives could be improved through enhanced information sharing and improved risk screening.

Recommendation 2: To maximize program integrity while minimizing impacts on facilitation, IRCC should explore and develop a strategy to enhance screening of eTA applicants that:

- A) Incorporates additional information sharing and;
- B) Includes an approach to develop and implement new risk indicators.

IRCC agrees with this recommendation.

IRCC is pursuing the expansion of information sharing with the United States (U.S.) and connecting with INTERPOL’s Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD). These initiatives were included in IRCC’s Visitor Transformation Memorandum to Cabinet ratified in April 2021.

Implementation of expanded information sharing for the eTA program depends on securing funding.

Implementing real-time risk indicators would enhance eTA application screening. Implementation of a sophisticated, effective solution would depend on securing additional funding given the impacts on resources, IT infrastructure and the program’s legal framework.

Action	Accountability	Completion date
Action 2A: (Contingent on funding) Expand automated biographic-based immigration information sharing with the United States to cover all eTA applicants and screen against more U.S. information holdings.	Lead: AB Support: IPG, Integrity Risk Management Branch (IRM), CN, IN	To be confirmed – Department is seeking source of funds.
Action 2B: (Contingent on funding) Launch a new information sharing connection with INTERPOL’s Stolen and Lost Travel Document (SLTD) database, to prevent the issuance of travel authorizations to clients whose passports have been reported lost or stolen (e.g. potential fraud).	Lead: AB Support: IPG, IRM, CN, IN	To be confirmed – Department is seeking source of funds.
Action 2C: (Contingent on funding) Develop/implement a nimble technical solution that will allow for the management of risk-based drop-out rules based on indicators, governed by a framework.	Lead: IRM Support: IPG, Admissibility Branch, Legal Services, CN, IN	To be confirmed – Department is seeking additional source of funds.

As new information becomes available, officers may manually revalidate active, approved eTAs to ensure that eTA holders remain eligible to hold an eTA. The evaluation found more revalidations have been required than initially expected, and a backlog of these eTAs has developed.

Revalidation work is resource-intensive, but it is presently an under-funded activity. As eTAs cannot be revalidated or cancelled in an automated way, manual efforts are needed for processing. The evaluation noted additional legal authorities could enhance officers’ revalidation capacity.

As the revalidation backlog continues to increase, it becomes more pressing to develop a sustainable solution that ensures that the department has the necessary authorities and resources to revalidate eTAs in a timely fashion.

Recommendation 3: IRCC should develop and implement a strategy to ensure that the resources and authorities are in place to more effectively revalidate eTAs.

IRCC agrees with this recommendation.

IRCC is pursuing more explicit authorities under the Immigration, Refugee and Protection Regulations (IRPR) to cancel eTAs in prescribed circumstances to better equip officers with flexible tools to protect program integrity. This proposal includes new grounds to cancel eTAs when officers have concerns for non-genuine traveller intent (following revalidation in many circumstances).

IRCC is also pursuing authority under the *Immigration, Refugee and Protection Act* (IRPA) to enable the development of regulations that would prescribe scenarios for the suspension (i.e. inactivation) of eTAs (following revalidation in many circumstances).

IRCC explore mechanisms available to seek ongoing and sustainable funding to ensure revalidation resources are available and networks can prioritize revalidation.

Action	Accountability	Completion date
Action 3A: Amend IRPR for more explicit eTA cancellation authorities, including grounds for concerns regarding non-genuine traveller intent (bona-fide concerns) following revalidation.	Lead: AB Support: IPG, IRM, CN, IN	Q4 2023–2024
Action 3B: Amend IRPA to enable regulatory development for the suspension of eTAs following revalidation, along with a resource request to support necessary revalidations associated with these new authorities.	Lead: AB Support: IPG, IRM, CN, IN	Q4 2024–2025
Action 3C: Develop an approach to explore funding mechanisms for dedicated and ongoing resources.	Lead: IPG Support: IRM, CN, IN	Q4 2023–2024

Program Management- Training

The evaluation found many processing officers do not receive formal training on how to process eTA applications. Lack of formal training was especially prevalent for officers in IN, many of whom felt they would benefit from formalized training. To a lesser degree, the evaluation also identified some CN officers would benefit from initial or additional eTA training. Overall, while many officers surveyed felt they would benefit from even basic eTA processing training, some felt they would benefit from training for refusal grounds, as well as revalidations.

The evaluation also found that processing officers in IN and CN have extensive guidance and program delivery instructions at their disposal and nearly all officers surveyed had consulted this guidance. However, officer perspectives indicated guidance could be improved in some areas, notably with respect to clarity, including where to request support when needed.

Recommendation 4: IRCC should develop and implement a strategy to address information and training gaps for officers who process eTAs.

IRCC agrees with this recommendation.

Agents and officers in CN have many opportunities for formal and ad hoc training and to learn more about eTA processing. The volumes sent to individual offices overseas can be very small, but when IN offices encounter an eTA they may need more than the program delivery instructions can provide.

IN Training focuses on delivering training on immigration legislation to decision-makers and covers the regulations related to eTA. Taking note of the recommendation and the upcoming regulatory changes relating to eTA cancellations and refusals on bona fides, there is scope to expand somewhat on the training.

As few IN officers work on eTA applications regularly, but more officers engage in eTA processing from time-to-time, a recorded training session showing common issues may be one method of making a more comprehensive training available to those who need it, when they need it. Currently, eTA drop-outs are a relatively low priority at IN missions; once offices are in a position to begin processing these applications in earnest again, IN could make best practices and/or tips and tricks a subject of discussion at a Temporary Resident (TR) Communities of Practice meeting.

Action	Accountability	Completion date
Action 4A: <ul style="list-style-type: none">I. Make a call out to CN and IN offices who process eTA applications and collect common questions and concerns.II. Develop and disseminate any new or updated standard operating procedures or functional guidance (program delivery instructions) needed to respond to questions/concerns identified.	Lead: CN, IN. IPG	Q3 2022–2023
Action 4B: <ul style="list-style-type: none">I. Develop and disseminate a recorded training session on common issues for eTA processing.II. Hold a session on best practices and/or tips and tricks at a TR Communities of Practice meeting.	Lead: IN, CN Support: IPG	Q3 2022–2023

List of Acronyms

CBSA	Canada Border Services Agency
CN	Centralized Network
ESTA	Electronic System for Travel Authorization
eTA	Electronic Travel Authorization
eTA-X	eTA Expansion
GCMS	Global Case Management System
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GOC	Government of Canada
IAPI	Interactive Advanced Passenger Information
IN	International Network
IPG	Immigration Program Guidance Branch
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
IRM	Integrity Risk Management Branch
IRPA	<i>Immigration and Refugee Protection Act</i>
IRPR	<i>Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations</i>
OSC	Operations Support Centre
TR	Temporary Resident
TRV	Temporary Resident Visa
UCI	Unique Client Identifier
US	United States

Program Profile

The Visitors Program

As articulated in the objectives of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) facilitates the entry of visitors for trade, commerce, tourism, international understanding and cultural, educational and scientific activities. Visitors benefit Canada by spending money in our communities, bringing fresh perspectives to our institutions, and creating linkages to friends and family around the world.

The Visitors Program balances facilitating the legitimate travel of foreign nationals with protecting the integrity of Canada's immigration system. All persons seeking to come to Canada for a short period, whether to work, study or visit, must meet the requirements for temporary residence in Canada, as set out in IRPA. IRCC's Visitors Program plays a key role in managing the screening of visitors to help ensure those who might present a risk to Canada are prevented from entry and those who are allowed to visit meet program requirements, including any conditions established on their stay.

Under IRPA, every foreign national who comes to Canada needs a Temporary Resident Visa (TRV), unless they are exempt, in which case they may require an Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA)¹.

Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA)

The eTA program was announced in 2011, as a key commitment under the Canada-U.S. *Beyond the Border Action Plan*, to establish a common approach to screening TRV-exempt foreign nationals in order to identify threats before they reach the North American perimeter. The eTA program was launched as a voluntary process in August 2015, and became a mandatory requirement in March 2016². Through eTA, low risk visa-exempt foreign nationals travelling to or transiting through Canada by air must apply for an eTA before travelling to Canada³. Applying for an eTA is an online process wherein prospective travellers provide biographic and passport information⁴, and answer questions about their immigration and travel

history, criminal background and medical history. Applicants also pay a \$7.00 (CAD) processing fee.

Once an application is submitted, the Global Case Management System (GCMS) conducts automated database checks for identity reconciliation and adverse information. In most cases, GCMS automatically notifies the applicant that their eTA has been approved. If there are identity reconciliation issues an application will drop out of the system for manual review, and if the issue is resolved, will be added back to the automated queue. An application can also drop out for manual review if there is adverse information on record for the applicant or if the applicant has self-identified adverse information through their responses to the background/supplementary questions.

During manual review for adverse information, IRCC officers can request additional documents from the applicant to provide them procedural fairness, request security screening by security partners, and/or refer the application to a Migration Office overseas for further review with local knowledge. Based on the information provided, IRCC officers may refuse or approve an application. Applications can only be refused by an officer, and not by the automated process.

Enforcement of eTAs

An eTA does not guarantee entry to Canada or establish the authorized period of stay in Canada, as the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is responsible to make the final admissibility determination of all foreign nationals entering Canada. Due to the electronic nature of eTA, there is no physical counterfoil⁵. The program relies on CBSA's Interactive Advanced Passenger Information (IAPI) system to ensure a traveller is properly documented at flight check-in. More specifically, air carriers with direct flights to Canada use IAPI and inspect the traveller's passport to confirm that they are properly documented (i.e., that the traveller holds an eTA, or TRV if required). If the IAPI system notifies an air carrier that there is no valid travel authorization on file for a prospective traveller, the air

¹ TRV-exempt visitors not travelling by air, as well as U.S. citizens and some other exempted travelers do not require an eTA.

² A leniency period on enforcing eTAs was introduced until November 2016.

³ A full list of nationalities who require an eTA (as of February 2022) is presented in Annex D.

⁴ e.g. family name, given name, sex, date of birth, place of residence.

⁵ eTAs are linked to the eTA holder's passport identified in the eTA application.

carrier receives a “no board” message. The CBSA Air Carrier Support Centre (ACSC) provides assistance to commercial air carriers who receive board and no-board messages (e.g. troubleshooting).

Revalidation

Sections 12.06 and 12.07 of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* (IRPR) provide IRCC with the authority to revalidate, and if appropriate, cancel previously approved eTAs if derogatory information is discovered/obtained after they are issued. GCMS automatically triggers a flag on active eTAs the moment new derogatory information is entered on a client. This flag creates a queue for officers in IRCC and the CBSA to reassess or “revalidate” an eTA to determine if the holder remains eligible and admissible to Canada.

In these instances, following procedural fairness, an officer may keep the eTA active if the holder addresses the officer’s concern(s), can refuse the eTA for A.16 if the holder does not respond to procedural fairness, or they can cancel the eTA and refuse the associated application if the supplementary information provided by the holder of the eTA can not address an officer’s concern(s). Adverse information on an eTA holder may also arise for officers along the travel continuum, such as CBSA’s Liaison Officers, who may encounter an individual before boarding a flight, and the eTA may be cancelled as per existing authorities. IRCC also conducts monthly system checks of active eTAs to identify any new adverse information for revalidation.

eTA Expansion

Budget 2015 proposed to broaden eligibility for the eTA program to a specific subset of TRV-required populations. Under this program, commonly known as eTA Expansion, eligible travellers are defined as travellers travelling to Canada by air, who, at the time of application, held a Canadian TRV within the last 10 years or a valid U.S. non-immigrant visa. These travellers are considered “known” to Canada, because they have previously been screened by Canada or by the U.S., a trusted partner. To ensure that applicants meet eligibility criteria, an information-sharing connection with the U.S. was established to verify U.S. non-immigrant visa validity in an automated way, while previous Canadian TRV holders are checked against IRCC’s immigration records in GCMS.

The initial countries considered for this expansion were Brazil, Mexico, Bulgaria, and Romania; however, before eTA Expansion was implemented in May 2017, the TRV requirement for Mexico was lifted (December 2016), and in December 2017, after six months of expansion, TRV requirements for Bulgarian and Romanian nationals were also lifted. As a result, at the time of data collection, Brazilian nationals were the only population eligible under eTA Expansion.

Applicants under eTA Expansion use a specific stream within the eTA online application form to apply and pay the same \$7 application fee. These foreign nationals are still able to apply for and receive TRVs, since a TRV is valid for all modes of travel (air, land and sea), whereas an eTA is only eligible for air travel to or through Canada.

Evaluation Context and Background

Overview

This report presents the results of the Evaluation of IRCC's eTA program. The evaluation was conducted in fulfillment of evaluation requirements as part of the Treasury Board's Policy on Results (2016). The need for the evaluation was also recognized in foundational documents (e.g. Treasury Board Submissions), and was confirmed in IRCC's 2019/2020 Departmental Evaluation Plan. The purpose of the evaluation was to provide an evidence base overview of the successes and challenges implementing the eTA and eTA Expansion programs, with a view to informing future directions of these programs, the Visitors Program, as well as IRCC's digital platform modernization efforts.

IRCC's Evaluation and Performance Measurement Division conducted the evaluation between July 2020 and November 2021. The design and approach to the evaluation were determined in consultation with IRCC branches involved in the design, management and delivery of the eTA program. IRCC's Performance Measurement and Evaluation Committee approved the evaluation terms of reference in June 2020.

Evaluation Scope

The evaluation assessed the relevance and performance of the eTA program, covering the period from the eTA's launch in August 2015, up to the most current information available at the time of data collection. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were not considered in the evaluation.

Various design features and coordinated programs were considered in-scope for the evaluation, including eTA Expansion and coordination with CBSA's IAPI system.

Evaluation Focus

The primary focus of the evaluation was eTA's early contributions to expected outcomes of the Visitors Program (Annex A), with an emphasis on facilitation, as well as managed migration and protecting the health, safety and security of Canadians. As a secondary area of focus, the evaluation examined implementation, including coordination with partners.

Evaluation questions

To what extent is the eTA program aligned with the priorities and objectives of IRCC, the Government of Canada and other Governmental Departments?

To what extent is the eTA program effectively designed and implemented within IRCC, and coordinated among partner departments and other stakeholders?

To what extent does the eTA program contribute to facilitating travel of TRV-exempt travellers and supporting the Visitors Program?

To what extent does the eTA program contribute to the integrity of the Visitors Program and to protecting the health, safety and security of Canadians?

Methodology

Document Review

Document review was used to gather contextual information about the eTA program, inform survey and interview questions and assess design and performance. The document review included IRCC, CBSA and Government of Canada (GoC) documents, such as foundational and working documents, program delivery instructions, operational bulletins, and other governmental department program evaluations involving the eTA.

Survey of Approved eTA Clients

An online survey was conducted with clients who applied for an eTA between 2018 and 2019, and who had their application approved. Only adult clients (i.e. aged 18 or older) were surveyed. The survey was made available in English, French, Spanish (Latin American), Portuguese (Brazilian), German, Simplified Chinese, Japanese and Korean.

The survey was sent to a random sample of 100,000 clients and was made available for 26 days, between May 12 and June 7, 2021. Responses were received from 6,981 clients⁶, for a response rate of 7.0%. The margin of error for the survey was ± 1.17 with a confidence level of 95.0%.

Survey of eTA Processing Officers

The evaluation included a survey of officers who had experience processing eTAs in migration offices within the International Network (IN), as well as officers in the Operations Support Centre (OSC) in the Centralized Network (CN). The survey was available in English and French, and was sent to 235 officers in total, 14 who were listed as working in CN and 221 who were listed as working in IN. The survey was available for 25 days, between March 29 and April 23, 2021. Responses were received from 69 officers, including 62 with experience processing eTAs in IN and 7 with experience processing eTAs in CN.

Key Informant Interviews

32 interviews were conducted with 43 individuals, including internal and external representatives. Internal IRCC representatives included members of Immigration Program Guidance (IPG) Branch, Admissibility Branch, CN, IN, Integrity Risk Management (IRM) Branch and Communications, while external representatives included staff from the CBSA and GAC, as well as air industry representatives.

Administrative Data Review

Administrative data analysis was conducted using application data for all applications received between January 1, 2017 and December 31, 2019 retrieved from IRCC's GCMS. Data were used to create profiles of unique eTA clients and eTA applications for both eTA and eTA Expansion application types. Data were also used to compare applications across operational variables (e.g. application final decisions, processing times) and sociodemographic variables.

The CBSA also provided tables extracted from GCMS to examine instances of eTA-approved applicants refused at the border by reason of inadmissibility.

⁶ A profile of client survey respondents is provided in Annex B.

Limitations

Overall, the evaluation used complementary quantitative and qualitative data to reduce gaps and create integrated findings based on multiple lines of evidence. Where there were limitations, the evaluation implemented a variety of mitigation strategies where possible, including triangulation with other lines of evidence, to ensure findings were reliable and could be used with confidence. Limitations and their corresponding mitigation strategies are described below.

Business Rules for eTA Data

The evaluation team did not receive documented business rules for departmental reporting on eTA. Business rules are sets of instructions that define how a process is performed (e.g. what constitutes “fully automated” processing” as opposed to cases requiring manual intervention). The lack of business rules presented a challenge for cleaning the dataset, understanding different variables and understanding whether outlier data⁷ were meaningful.

Lack of business rules also had an impact in terms of the consistency of how data are coded. Data on refusal grounds for example, may be coded differently depending on when the data were inputted (i.e. new versus legacy coding) or who entered the data (e.g. A16 (1.1) versus A16 (1(a))). The absence of business rules to this effect make it difficult to categorize, for example refusal grounds⁸.

To mitigate the lack of business rules, significant efforts were put into meeting with program representatives and colleagues from Operational Performance and Planning Branch to help code administrative data and ensure consistent procedures where possible.

Processing Officer Data and Survey Representativeness

While IRCC maintains a list of processing officers currently processing applications at missions, under various circumstances (e.g. temporary duties, assignments, COVID-19) the list of officers is not always complete. Moreover, the list does not detail whether officers have experience processing eTAs specifically. As a result, the characteristics of the population of eTA processing officers are unknown, and survey respondents may not be representative of the population.

To mitigate this limitation, the survey asked officer respondents to self-declare experience processing eTAs. Survey respondents included individuals from CN’s OSC where the majority of manual eTA processing occurs, as well as from missions with higher volumes of eTA and eTA Expansion processing, including London, Mexico, Sao Paulo, Paris and Rome. However, it is important to note that only 7 respondents had experience processing eTAs in CN; therefore, results mostly reflect IN officer perspectives unless otherwise noted.

eTA Client Survey Representativeness

Due to project delays from COVID-19, as well as reduced traveller volumes, the survey collected perspectives of applicants between 2018 and 2019, rather than the entire period under scope. These years were chosen so that perspectives would be recent as the eTA application process is known to be fast and clients may not remember the application years later.

As the application does not collect extensive sociodemographic information, there were insufficient variables for weighting responses. The survey overrepresented males (+5.7%) and underrepresented ages 18 to 29 (-6.3%). While the survey cannot be considered representative of eTA clients, it is worth noting that the top ten countries of citizenship for respondents were all within 5.0% of the distribution in the population.

⁷ e.g. instances where final decision date precedes the date an application was received; instances where the travel document provided on the application was from a visa required country.

⁸ 126 unique refusal grounds were found within the dataset, not including instances of refusal with no refusal ground or “null” refusal grounds.

Profile of eTA Applications

eTA Application Profile

IRCC received 11,527,034 eTA applications between January 1, 2017 and December 31, 2019, of which 98.6% were approved, 0.9% were refused and 0.5% were withdrawn. Of applications which were processed to a final decision (i.e. approved or refused):

- 88.4% were from adults.
- 50.8% were from males.
- 84.4% were completed in English.

While the volume of applications remained steady between 2017 and 2019, the number and proportion of refusals increased each year. The evaluation also found that certain countries accounted for a disproportionate amount of refusals compared to their share of overall applications.

eTA Expansion Application Profile

IRCC received 391,588 eTA-X applications up to December 31, 2019, of which 96.8% were approved, 3.1% were refused⁹ and 0.1% were withdrawn. eTA Expansion applications had similar characteristics to eTA (i.e. 88.4% were from adults; 52.1% were from females), although more were completed in English (98.6%).

The volume of eTA Expansion applications increased from 104,535 in 2017 to 149,733 in 2018, before decreasing to 137,054 in 2019. The proportion of eTA Expansion applications refused was highest in 2017 (3.6%) before decreasing in 2018 and 2019 (2.9% and 3.0%).

Unique Client Profile – eTA and eTA Expansion

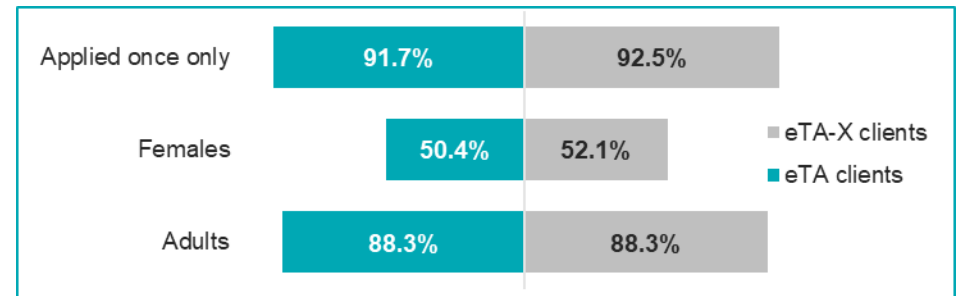
10,530,857 unique clients applied for eTAs and 359,931 unique clients submitted eTA-X applications.

Based on clients country of citizenship identified in their most recent application for eTA or eTA Expansion, the most common countries of citizenship:

- For eTA clients, were the United Kingdom (14.8%), France (13.7%), Mexico (8.9%), Germany (8.5%) and Australia (6.3%). These countries comprise more than half of all eTA clients.
- For eTA Expansion clients, were Brazil (98.0%), Romania (1.5%) and Bulgaria (0.4%). Nearly all clients were Brazilian, aligning with eTA Expansion eligibility since December 2017.

eTA and eTA Expansion clients had similar demographics with respect to age, gender, and having applied only one time.

Figure 1: Demographics of unique eTA and eTA Expansion clients



Source: GCMS

⁹ Stakeholders suggested the higher eTA Expansion refusal rate compared to the eTA refusal rate is largely due to refusals for eTA Expansion ineligibility (a non-issue for eTA applications outside of expansion).

Alignment with Priorities and Objectives

Finding 1: Implementation of the eTA requirement is well-aligned with the priorities and objectives of the Government of Canada, IRCC and the CBSA, in relation to safety and security, facilitation, digital transformation and modernization, as well as cost avoidance and savings.

The evaluation confirmed the eTA program is well-aligned with the priorities and objectives of the Government of Canada (GOC), IRCC and the CBSA through aspects of safety and security, facilitation, cost avoidance and savings, and digital transformation and modernization.

Safety and Security

Protecting the health and safety of Canadians and maintaining security of Canadian society is a core objective in the IRPA¹⁰. IRCC's Visitors Program also lists "Managed migration of visitors that protects the health, safety and security of Canadians" as an outcome. Moreover, the CBSA has a mandate to provide services that support national security and public safety.

Before the eTA program existed, Canada did not screen visitors from visa-exempt countries prior to their travel to Canada. Some interviewees viewed this as a fundamental improvement towards safety and security objectives.

Interviews and foundational documents also highlighted how the eTA program screens visitors for select risk factors¹¹ like criminality and negative immigration history in order to prevent them from travelling to Canada by pushing out the border. As a result, the program is aligned with the GOC commitments¹² to help identify individuals who seek to enter or remain in Canada for mala fide purposes and prevent them from travelling to Canada (i.e. "pushing out the border").

Security features of eTA and eTA Expansion are also notable in the GoC budgets^{13, 14}.

Facilitation

Facilitating legitimate travel to Canada is a core objective of the IRPA¹⁵, and an immediate outcome of IRCC's Visitors Program. The CBSA's mandate, and the GOC commitments/budgets also specify facilitating the free flow of legitimate trade and travel as a goal.

The eTA program was designed for the light touch and efficient processing of applications from low risk visa-exempt nationals via automated decision-making. Interviewees noted that the application for eTA is "light-touch", as it does not require extensive information from clients. The eTA application is also inexpensive (\$7 CAD), consistent with programs in other countries, and provides, relative to competitors, good value with a low cost and long validity period.

Interviewees felt eTA Expansion is particularly facilitative, as it removes the barrier of requiring a visa for known eligible sub-populations within visa-required countries.

While internal stakeholders generally felt eTA was designed to be facilitative for clients, it represents an additional step for visa-exempt travellers, therefore eTA is inherently not facilitative. In addition, some stakeholders noted a higher than anticipated rate of eTAs requiring revalidation and high manual intervention rates negatively impact overall efficiency.

¹⁰ *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, SC 2001, c 27.

¹¹ The evaluation identified opportunities to screen eTA applicants against additional criminality databases.

¹² Canada-United States Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness Action Plan

¹³ Jobs, Growth and Long-Term Prosperity: Economic Action Plan 2013.

¹⁴ Strong Leadership: A Balanced Budget Low-Tax Plan for Jobs, Growth and Security.

¹⁵ *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, SC 2001, c 27.

Digital Transformation and Modernization

Foundational documents for eTA note faster decision-making and automated processing of applications as key goals of the program. **The eTA program builds on the GOC commitments¹⁶ to process applications electronically**, with a view to allocating more resources to tasks that are complex/discretionary, and ultimately, enhancing program integrity.

The eTA application is available for clients twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Moreover, as significant portions of the triaging, identity and admissibility verifications are automated, applicants can be approved at any time.

Other notable benefits aligned with IRCC's digital modernization platform included the expansion of IRCC's e-storage (given the volume of eTA applicants).

Cost Avoidance and Savings

The eTA application fee was established to recover the full costs of the program, and to ensure it did not impose a burden on Canadian taxpayers. Interviewees also lauded the eTA program for reducing the costs of examining, processing and removing inadmissible travellers who arrive at ports of entry.

Alignment with GAC Objectives

Although foundational documents do not suggest an intent to align eTA with GAC objectives, the evaluation found eTA implementation had a negative effect on GAC, particularly at its onset.

First, as Canadian dual nationals are not eligible for eTAs, some were denied boarding by air carriers if they did not travel with a Canadian passport. Interviewees noted this had impacts on GAC staff, and document review confirmed that the introduction of eTA requirements resulted in an increase in demand for passport services, passport application volumes and application backlogs for some missions. The impact was seen to be larger at small missions with little surge capacity. To help resolve this issue, IRCC initially provided additional temporary supports to GAC, including sending temporary duty officers abroad, and setting up a Mission Support unit at national headquarters. Later, GAC negotiated additional funding to address resource issues through their Memorandum of Understanding, signed in 2019.

Second, during eTA implementation, challenges also emerged for some visa-exempt diplomats (i.e. those that were on accreditation). As accredited documents are not accessible in the data systems supporting eTA, these diplomats received "no-board" messages at check-in. A workaround was eventually put in place to address this issue.

¹⁶ Canada-United States Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness Action Plan.

Finding 2: The eTA has helped maintain commitments and relations with key bilateral partners, particularly the United States.

Relationships with Bilateral Partners

Document review and interviews found [implementing the eTA program adhered to commitments made with the United States \(US\)¹⁷ to work together to enhance security by pushing the border out and accelerating the free flow of legitimate people and goods at and beyond the border.](#)

With respect to expansion, the GOC's 2015 Budget¹⁸ noted the importance of expanding eTA eligibility to low-risk travellers from countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Romania and Bulgaria. While the eTA Expansion program was expanded to Brazil, Romania and Bulgaria in May 2017, Mexico was not included as the GOC lifted visa requirements for Mexico in December 2016¹⁹, and then lifted the visa requirements on Romania and Bulgaria in December 2017²⁰, six months after their inclusion in the eTA Expansion program.

Information Sharing

In July 2016, the GOC established a new automated information-sharing connection with a US database to enable an automated verification of the validity of US NIVs for the (then forthcoming) eTA Expansion program. Visa validation information is exchanged pursuant to an Agreement²¹ and an implementing arrangement²² with the US.

Bilateral Irritants

As the eTA introduced a new travel authorization for visa-exempt visitors from countries that previously had none, foundational documents suggested there was a risk of creating bilateral irritants with such countries, including Member States of the European Union.

While affected clientele from these countries would likely consider the eTA requirement an inconvenience, IRCC implemented a communications strategy to engage with impacted countries at the earliest opportunity. This strategy included outlining the migration management and security benefits associated with eTA, and noting that the eTA would compare favourably with similar costs and validity periods of similar initiatives of the US²³, Australia²⁴ and New Zealand²⁵.

The European Union has since moved in a similar direction, and is currently establishing its own eTA-like system, expected to be launched in 2022. The UK is also planning on implementing an electronic travel authorization in the coming years.

¹⁷ Canada-United States Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness Action Plan.

¹⁸ Strong Leadership: A Balanced Budget Low-Tax Plan for Jobs, Growth and Security.

¹⁹ [Canada lifts visa requirement on Mexico](#), as of November 25, 2021.

²⁰ [Canada lifts visa requirements on Romania and Bulgaria](#), as of November 25, 2021.

²¹ Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Canada for [Sharing of Visa and Immigration Information \(The Treaty\)](#), as of November 19, 2021.

²² Implementing arrangement between the Department of Citizenship and Immigration of Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency, on the one side, and the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security of the United States of America, on the other side, concerning [Exchange of Information for Temporary Entry Document Validation](#), as of November 19, 2021.

²³ The US' Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) costs about \$19 (CAD), and is valid for one year after being issued.

²⁴ The Australian e-visa costs about \$18 (CAD), and is valid for one year after being issued.

²⁵ The New Zealand Electronic Travel Authority costs about \$8 (CAD), and costs are paid concurrent with a larger Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy. The document is valid for two years after being issued.

Design and Implementation

Finding 3: Although there were challenges implementing the eTA requirement, clients are mostly aware of this requirement as a result of significant communication efforts.

Awareness of the eTA Requirement

Foundational documents and interviewees found that marketing efforts aimed to: inform travellers of the new requirement, boost program compliance and avoid irritants that could adversely impact tourism or business travel. Internal stakeholders felt communication strategies were generally effective, with particular efforts focused on visa-exempt countries with high visitor volumes. Air industry representatives felt communications efforts relied too heavily on social media, which led to some travellers arriving at airports unaware of the eTA. Some airlines supported eTA communication efforts by running awareness videos.

Interviewees also noted that as the CBSA was delayed in implementing the IAPI system, eTA awareness was enhanced through a phased roll out. The eTA roll-out was voluntary in August 2015, mandatory in March 2016 and enforced in November 2016, while the IAPI system was implemented in a single day for all air carriers with direct flights to Canada. The rapid IAPI roll-out resulted in unanticipated issues and delays for travellers and gate agents and increased the workload of migration officers and liaison officers.

Most processing officers surveyed felt clients have at least a moderate understanding that they require an eTA to travel to Canada (89.9%) and most surveyed clients were aware of the eTA requirement (85.9%). Processing officers also felt clients have at least a moderate understanding that they should apply for their eTA in advance of travelling (91.3%). Similarly, of clients surveyed who had travelled to Canada, most reported applying for their eTA more than a day before travelling (92.9%). Air industry interviewees suggested that further awareness efforts were required as many eTAs were issued for a 5-year validity period, which has begun to expire. In response, IRCC stakeholders noted pandemic-related travel restrictions have delayed awareness efforts.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement for Communication

Dual Nationals

As Canadian dual nationals are not eligible for eTAs (i.e. need to travel to Canada using their Canadian passport), some were denied boarding by air carriers, or were unaware they could not travel to Canada using an eTA with a passport from their second nationality. Document review found insufficient communication between partners resulted in inefficiencies in reaching dual nationals, as well as significant operational pressures for processing passports in GAC's eTA-affected missions, in particular for countries with large volumes of dual nationals.

Permanent Residents of Canada

Canadian PRs must hold a valid PR card or travel document to fly to Canada. However, some PRs were not aware of this requirement, or were unaware they were not eligible for an eTA, resulting in delays travelling to Canada for PRs who needed to obtain a PR travel document from a mission. Similarly, former PRs with expired residency must renounce their PR to apply for an eTA.

Brazilians Arriving in Canada by Land or Sea

eTA Expansion is available to eligible Brazilians arriving by air, however, all Brazilian travellers arriving at sea or land POEs still require a visa. The evaluation noted that some Brazilians arriving in Canada by land or sea (e.g. cruise ships) were not aware that their eTA Expansion was not valid for all modes of travel.

Foreign Nationals who hold Diplomatic or Official Passports

Foreign nationals who hold GAC-issued acceptance counterfoils are exempt from the TRV and eTA requirement. However, acceptance counterfoils are not recognized by CBSA's IAPI system, nor are they stored in GCMS, which resulted in a number of diplomats being issued erroneous "no board" messages, when the IAPI system was implemented in 2016. In 2016, IRCC agreed to an interim solution to solve this problem. The workaround, which is in its sixth year, is resource intensive and involves manual imputation by GAC and IRCC. Of note, this only applies to foreign nationals who are on accreditation.

Finding 4: Communication and coordination related to the eTA program within IRCC has been generally effective. However, challenges in communicating and coordinating between IRCC, CBSA and GAC were noted, particularly at the time of early implementation.

Governance Mechanisms

Document review and interviews identified a wide array of communication and coordination mechanisms for eTA (refer to Annex C) including mechanisms within IRCC, between IRCC and partner departments (e.g. CBSA), and with stakeholders (e.g. airlines). While evidence suggested good collaboration between stakeholders and appropriate multi-level governance for IRCC and the CBSA²⁶, some challenges emerged, though mainly relevant for eTA implementation.

Officer Ratings of Coordination and Communication

IRCC officers surveyed felt that roles and responsibilities were clear within CN and IN, as well as between IN/CN, NHQ, Migration Offices, OSC, and the CBSA. Moreover, officers rated coordination and communication as mostly effective within one's own office, with NHQ, the OSC, migration offices, the CBSA, GAC and US information sharing partners. Officer perspectives on coordination and communication can be found in Annex C.



Challenges in Coordination and Communication

Coordination between IRCC and GAC

Document review identified passport processing pressures linked to eTA and a lack of formalized contact channels between IRCC and GAC at missions which negatively impacted role clarity. While differences in mandate and objectives posed initial challenges, coordination improved over time.

Coordination between IRCC and the CBSA

Document review found insufficient coordination between the CBSA and IRCC. Issues related to the IAPI system, differences in departmental mandates, program ownership, and personnel not understanding the other department's projects affected relations, particularly during implementation. Staff turnover within the CBSA and lack of relevant processing experience also presented challenges.

Application Form and Design

Document review identified that earlier engagement of Communications in designing the online application could have helped address usability issues (e.g. application timing out, group applications for families).

Public communications

As clients encountered technical/usability issues (e.g. submitting supporting documents, inputting passport data), communications staff needed to develop ad hoc materials. This was felt to be less effective/efficient than ensuring the system functioned from the onset.

Client Support

While extensive information for eTA applicants is available online (e.g. frequently asked questions, multilingual help guides), there are no real-time communication mechanisms for clients to ask questions, which impacts workloads of gate agents, CBSA liaison officers, and mission staff.

Managing non-official language content

eTA's help guide is available in sixteen non-official languages. As the application changes, help guides need to be updated; however, there is no ongoing funding to manage non-official language content. This could result in input errors and confusion on the part of clients.

²⁶ Citizenship and Immigration Canada: Electronic Travel

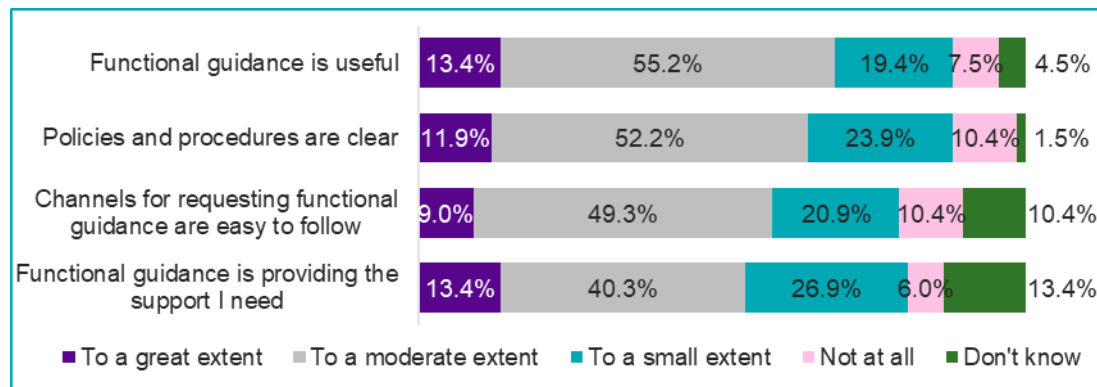
Finding 5: While officers who process eTAs are aware of and use functional guidance in place, a need for additional training was identified.

Functional Guidance

The evaluation found extensive guidance for processing officers via Program Delivery Instructions and Standard Operating Procedures on a wide range of eTA-related subjects including eligibility, automated processing, enforcing eTA requirements²⁷ and manually processing eTA applications²⁸. Program Delivery Instructions and Standard Operating Procedures generally include steps in GCMS with pictures for officers, and include details on the location where steps ought to occur (i.e. in IN or CN) and the level of decision-maker required.

While nearly all processing officers surveyed reported having consulted functional guidance (97.1%), some felt that functional guidance was hard to find (34.8%). For officers who had consulted functional guidance, the survey of processing officers identified several areas where functional guidance could be improved, including clarity, requesting support, and to a lesser extent, usefulness.

Figure 2: Officers’ ratings of functional guidance, policies and procedures



Source: eTA Officer survey

Training at IRCC

Few processing officers surveyed reported learning about how to process eTAs through formal training (15.9%); however, a greater share of officers with experience processing eTAs in CN reported receiving formal training²⁹ (57%) compared to officers in IN (11%). Overall, many officers surveyed reported teaching themselves via functional guidance (81.2%) or learning informally (e.g. being shown by colleagues) (65.2%).

In general, while officers felt the informal (82.2%) and formal (90.9%) training they received was useful to a moderate extent or greater, about two-fifths (42.0%) felt they needed additional training—although these were primarily officers in IN. While CN does the majority of eTA processing and has formal training in place, IN officers tend to deal with more complex cases. The most common open-ended response for which additional training would be beneficial was for eTA-specific training (i.e. eTA 101), followed by additional training on refusal grounds and revalidations.

Training at the CBSA

Internal documentation at the CBSA found that joint training for staff at the CBSA’s Air Carrier Support Centre and processing staff at IRCC would have been beneficial, but did not occur.

²⁷ e.g. identifying applicants, automated search, triage, and approvals, manual intervention, refusals and fees.

²⁸ e.g. identity reconciliation, hits against databases, Canadian citizens and PR applications, eTA Expansion, assessing applications, admissibility, revalidations, inactivations, work sharing with migration offices, establishing eTA validity, paper applications and multiple applications.

²⁹ Interviewees in CN noted formalized training is available for officers who process eTAs.

Effectiveness

Finding 6: While the eTA program has introduced an additional step for visa-exempt travellers, the process for obtaining an eTA is facilitative in that it is fast, affordable, and easy to complete.

Facilitation

Interviewees noted that as eTA is an additional step for visa-exempt travellers, it is not facilitative. Conversely, **eTA Expansion is facilitative as the application is less demanding, faster and easier to complete than a visa.** While interviewees felt eTAs are not facilitative inherently, they felt that the eTA was designed to be as facilitative for clients as possible. Client perspectives on the speed, easiness and affordability of the eTA application were largely positive. **The majority of surveyed clients felt the application process was fast** to at least a moderate extent (92.3%), and nearly three-quarters (71.8%) reported they completed their application in 30 minutes or less. Nearly all surveyed clients also felt the application was **easy to understand** (94.6%) and **easy to complete** (94.0%) to at least a moderate extent. Surveyed clients **rarely indicated making mistakes when applying for their eTA** (3.1%) and many who did make mistakes simply reapplied (61.8%). Most clients also agreed the **application fee is affordable** (93.4%).

The evaluation also found eTA help resources to be facilitative. The eTA help guide is available in 18 languages, including English and French. Nearly all clients surveyed who used a help guide were able to do so in a language of fluency (89.8%), and felt the help resources they used were easy to understand (92.9%) and helped resolve their issues (84.7%) to at least a moderate extent.

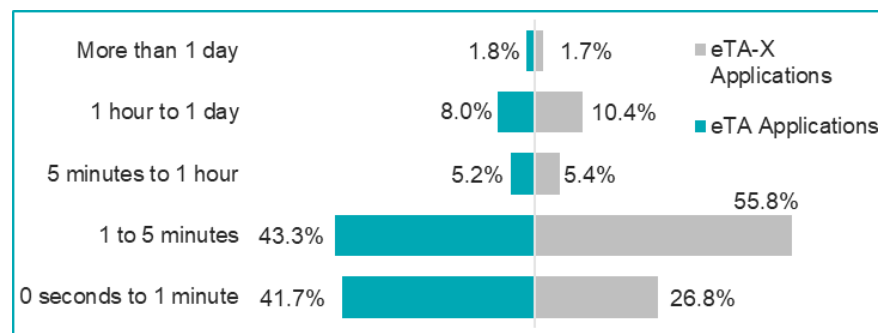
eTA processing was also found to be fast. Between 2017 and 2019, **85.2% of eTA applications, and 82.6% of eTA Expansion applications were processed in five minutes or less.** Median processing time³⁰ was 1.1 minutes for eTA applications and 1.3 minutes for eTA Expansion applications. Nearly all surveyed clients (95.4%) agreed their eTA (or eTA Expansion) approval was timely.

Enhancing eTA Facilitation

While the eTA application and approval processes are designed to be facilitative, interviewees noted facilitation could be improved. For example, interviewees felt that the inclusion of save³¹ and preview³² functions could help the application be more facilitative. Similarly, some surveyed clients felt the lack of save (31.3%) and preview (28.8%) functions were a challenge to a moderate extent or greater.

Interviewees also noted other challenges for applicants, including clients not understanding statutory questions, entering their passport information incorrectly, and taking too long to respond to requests for documents.

Figure 3: Processing time for eTA and eTA Expansion applications 2017–2019



Source: GCMS *Note: Excludes system missing and negative processing times (<1%)

³⁰ Calculated as creation of application up to time of finalized decision.

³¹ In the absence of a save function, if a client leaves their application, or loses connection to the internet, they need to restart from the beginning.

³² In the absence of a preview function, a client is not able to review or correct their entered information before they submit their forms.

Finding 7: Visitors to Canada bring economic, social and cultural benefits. Evidence suggests that the introduction of the eTA did not negatively impact international travel to Canada.

Benefits of Visitors to Canada

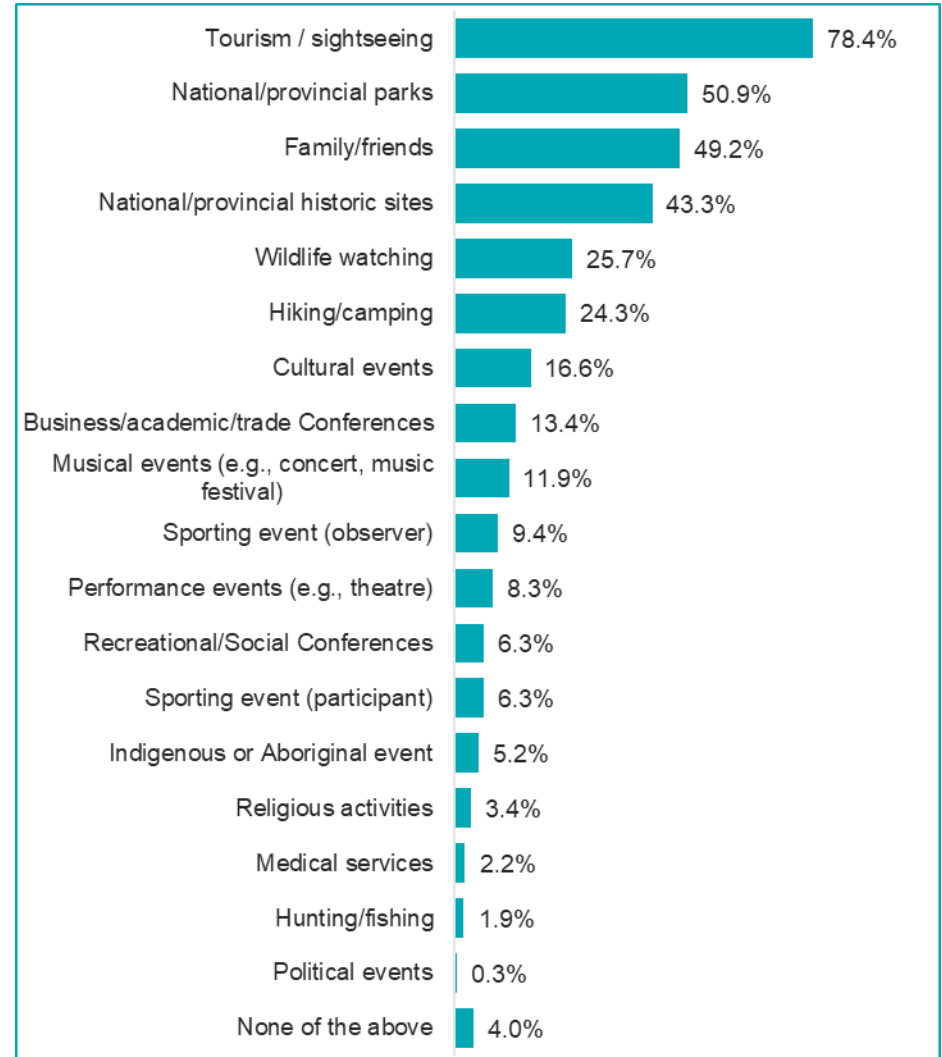
“Canada benefits from the economic, social and cultural contributions of Visitors” is an intermediate outcome of IRCC’s Visitors Program. Many individuals who acquire eTAs intend to visit Canada, which generates benefits in the form of tourism. While IRCC does not collect data on the travel of eTA holders to Canada, data from Destination Canada³³ suggest that overall traveller volumes from common countries of eTA-holder citizenship were not adversely impacted by the introduction of the eTA.

Some air industry representatives felt that while travel to Canada was not impacted, some travellers were avoiding transiting through Canada to avoid needing multiple eTA-like documents (e.g. an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)). Interviewees noted that transit through Canada is a significant revenue stream for airlines.

Interviewees and document review identified that the eTA also saves money indirectly. For example, pre-screening foreign nationals was seen as beneficial for avoiding costs associated with removing inadmissible persons, chartering return flights, and conducting appeals processes. Interviewees felt that **the true economic benefits of the eTA are in expanding to populations within visa-required countries.** Likewise, 63.7% of processing officers surveyed felt eTA Expansion contributes economic benefits to Canada. Air industry stakeholders voiced strong support in favour of expanding eTA Expansion membership to more visa-required countries.

Surveyed clients were asked about their travel to Canada. Of surveyed clients, 92.2% reported having travelled to Canada, and 33.0% reported travelling to Canada more than once. Of clients who travelled to Canada, 81.4% reported spending more than \$1,000 on their travel, with 27.6% reporting spending more than \$5,000. Clients reported spending some of this money on restaurants/food/beverages (89.4%), transportation to Canada (86.4%), accommodation (71.6%), transportation in Canada (69.3%) and clothing/footwear/accessories (56.2%).

Figure 4: Reasons for travelling to Canada



Source: eTA Client survey

³³ Refer to Table 24-10-0041-01 “[International travellers entering or returning to Canada](#) by type of transport” and Table 24-10-0003-01 Non-resident travellers entering Canada, by country of residence (excluding the United States).

Finding 8: The eTA program has leveraged automated decision-making for the majority of applications. However, more applications have required manual processing and revalidation than initially anticipated and technical challenges were noted.

Automated and Manual Processing

While the application process is mostly automated, eTA and eTA Expansion³⁴ applications may undergo manual review for identity reconciliation or for adverse information³⁵. For identity reconciliation, the officer must match the applicant with an existing unique client identifier, create a new client, or refer the client for in-depth examination. For adverse information, an officer must be satisfied that an applicant is eligible to hold an eTA and admissible to Canada before issuing an eTA³⁶.

Foundational documents for eTA estimated that 6.0% of eTA applications (210,000) would be referred for in-Canada processing annually and that 0.6% (21,000) would be referred to migration offices annually. Overall, the evaluation found that of eTA applications received between 2017 and 2019 and processed to a final decision, **82.5% were fully automated**. However, an average of about 670,000 applications were referred for manual processing annually.³⁷ eTA Expansion foundational documents provided higher estimates for referrals for identity reconciliation and database hits (8.0% and 6.0% respectively). However, due to data limitations, the evaluation was unable to confirm the proportion of eTA Expansion applications that were fully automated.

Some interviewees attributed higher than expected manual intervention volumes to a higher proportion of cases requiring identity reconciliation (e.g. applicants with same name, date of birth). Nevertheless, administrative data showed that **most eTA (98.6%) and eTA Expansion (96.2%) applications were finalized in an automated way**.

Revalidation

Officers manually reassess or “revalidate” active eTAs to ensure approved eTA holders remain eligible to hold an eTA, for example in instances where new derogatory information is found. As of July 2021, of approved **eTA and eTA Expansion applications received between 2017 and 2019, 70,623 were flagged for revalidation at least once**³⁸. Based on the most recent revalidation, 46.0% were cancelled and 9.8% were maintained (i.e. not cancelled). The evaluation also found that certain countries accounted for a disproportionate amount of revalidations compared to their share of overall applications.

Interviewees reported that the volume of revalidations exceeded initial estimates. As eTAs cannot be revalidated or cancelled in an automated way, manual efforts are needed in processing. Interviewees felt that manual pressures have resulted in a backlog. Administrative data confirmed that 36.4% of eTAs identified for revalidation were awaiting a final decision. The evaluation found that additional legal authorities could enhance officers’ revalidation capacity. Interviewees also noted that revalidation efforts were under-funded, so there is no team dedicated to handling high volumes.

³⁴ eTA Expansion applications also undergo additional automated eligibility checks.

³⁵ i.e. applicant’s passport hits against derogatory information databases.

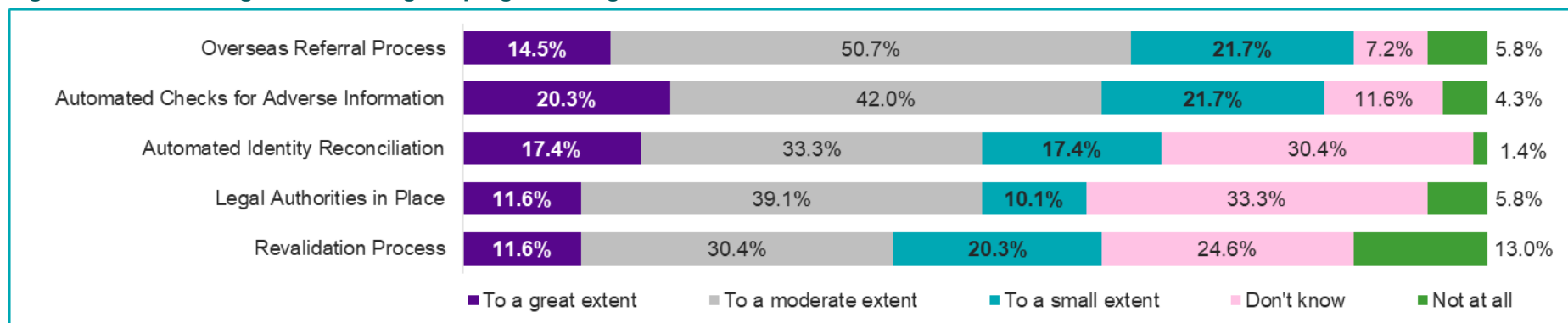
³⁶ IRCC has extensive internal program delivery instructions for assessing eTA applications.

³⁷ Though the data obtained for the evaluation did not distinguish between in-Canada and overseas referrals, document review found overseas referrals were consistently less than expected between 2016–2017 to 2019–2020 (on average, less than 5,000 annually).

³⁸ Applications can be flagged for revalidation for more than one reason.

Overall, when asked about the effectiveness of different program design features, processing officers surveyed had mixed perspectives.

Figure 5: Processing officers' ratings of program design feature effectiveness



Source: eTA Officer survey

Technological Challenges of eTA

Interviewees, surveys and document review stressed that technology supporting eTA is not nimble.

GCMS Change Requests and Technical Challenges

Interviewees noted change requests in GCMS are slow, and nearly all surveyed officers also felt GCMS capability was a challenge to at least a small extent (91.3%). For example, Interviewees reported being unable to add COVID-19 context to letters sent automatically to approved eTA applicants³⁹. The evaluation also identified areas where the IT infrastructure and information sharing supporting the eTA program could be improved to enhance overall program integrity.

Manual Data Entry

The evaluation highlighted challenges with manual data entry, including that clients may make unintentional errors when entering data, such as passport numbers, which could lead to problems at boarding.

Outages

Interviewees and document review found that planned and unplanned outages can have impacts on clients (e.g. unable to apply for an eTA, unable to travel) as well as processing (e.g. contributions to processing backlog). Though clients are asked to apply in advance, outages still have impacts on border services officers, air carriers and travellers. While some interviewees noted that outages had reduced since eTA was implemented and efforts have been made to bolster IT infrastructure, the majority of surveyed officers (82.6%) felt network outages were a challenge to at least a small extent. Some CBSA interviewees noted airlines do not always receive no board messages during outages, resulting in confusion for all parties. Air industry representatives interviewed were particularly critical of outages to eTA payment systems, noting that while these issues affect eTA regularly, they are rare with other countries (e.g. US ESTA).

³⁹ Some approved clients were alleged to have purchased flights to Canada based on their approval without realizing additional measures (e.g. testing, quarantine, travel bans) may bar or delay their travel.

Finding 9: The eTA was designed as a light-touch screening tool and is appropriate for low-risk populations.

Light Touch Screening Tool

As the eTA program was developed to help screen visa-exempt travellers, screening is lighter-touch to allow for faster processing. Nearly no clients surveyed reported needing to provide things like police certificates (<1%) or court records (<1%) as part of their application process.

Document review, key informant interviews and survey results of officers highlighted that the eTA was not designed to assess higher-risk groups. However, eTA Expansion allows for flexibility to provide the option of an eTA to low-risk client groups within a larger visa-required population, representing a step away from purely nationality-based visa requirements to a more nuanced assessment of individual travellers.

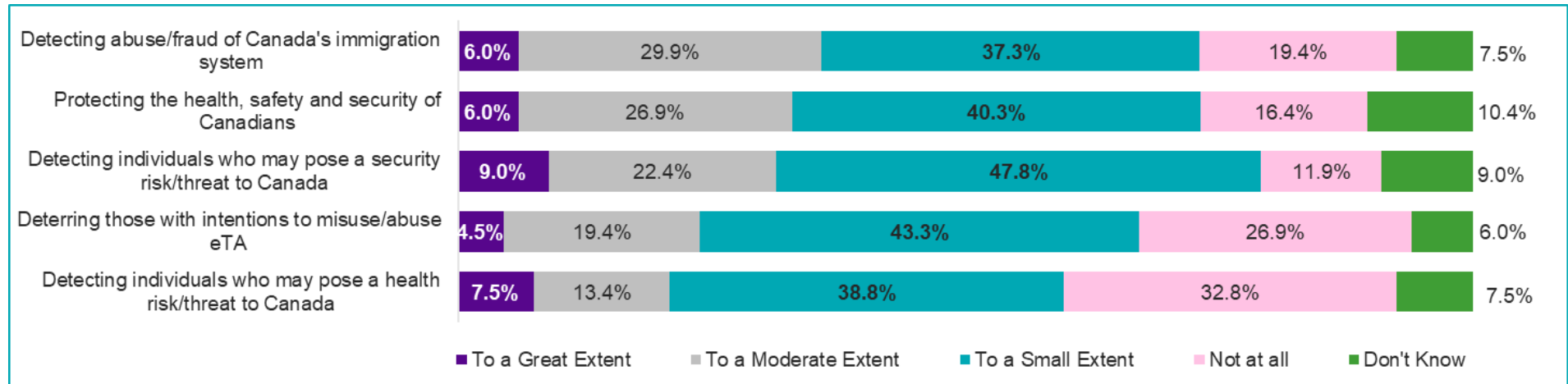
In addition, interviewees felt further investments in enhanced information sharing would improve eTA program integrity. The evaluation also highlighted areas where additional risk factors could be incorporated into eTA application screening, as well as noted technological barriers that, if overcome, may enhance program integrity.

Some interviewees felt additional risk indicators would assist in triaging high-risk cases for manual review which would strengthen eTA program integrity. However, any changes to drop-out criteria would result in more manual processing required, and would need to take into account processing resource capacity and impacts on facilitation for clients, as well as consider the authorities and tools needed by officers to support manual decision-making.

Biographic Data and Application Information

Interviewees felt that digitally capturing passport information (i.e. scan passports rather than manually entering information) would improve program integrity and ensure unintentional mistakes do not result in delays or refusals.

Figure 6: Officers' ratings of desired program outcomes



Source: eTA Officer survey

Finding 10: While the eTA program is identifying some inadmissible individuals before they travel, it is unclear to what extent it is preventing them from coming to Canada and helping to protect Canada’s safety and security.

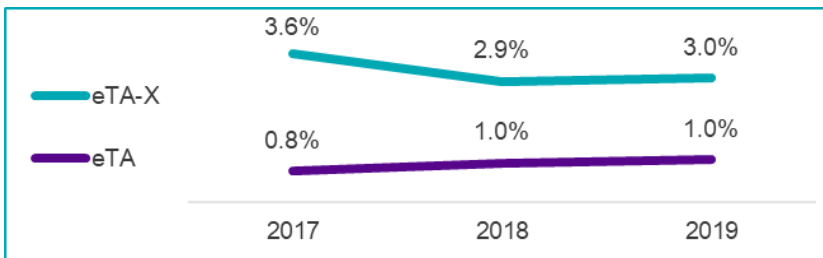
Refusals Before Flying to Canada

Interviews and document review confirm that “pushing out the border” (i.e. identifying inadmissible foreign nationals before flying to Canada) is a key tenet of the eTA program. Pre-screening is theorized to deter irregular migrants and mala fide travellers. Foundational documents note refusals as a key indicator in this respect.

Between 2017 and 2019, 104,839 eTA applications (0.9%) and 12,227 eTA Expansion applications (3.1%) were refused. While the number and proportion of eTA applications being refused increased each year, the number and proportion of eTA Expansion applications fluctuated. Stakeholders suggested the higher eTA Expansion refusal rate compared to the eTA refusal rate is largely due to refusals for eTA Expansion ineligibility (a non-issue for eTA applications outside of expansion).

eTA and eTA Expansion applications can be associated with multiple refusal grounds. The most common refusal reasons overall were A16 (59.6%), “Other” (13.5%), R7 (9.7%), A40 (7.3%) and A36 (7.1%).

Figure 7: 2017–2019 Refusal rates for eTA and eTA Expansion applications



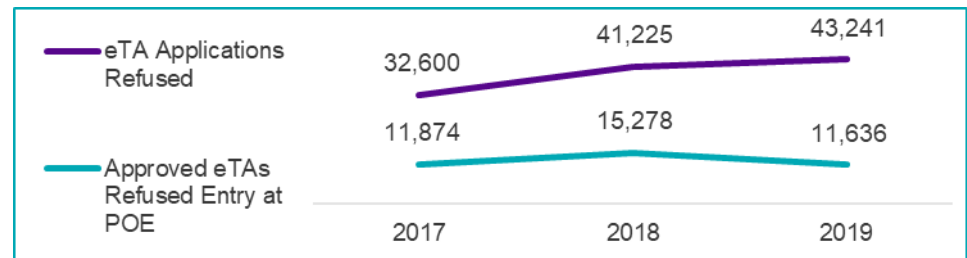
Source: GCMS

Preventing Inadmissible Travel to Canada

While some prospective travellers are refused eTAs prior to travelling to Canada, 38,788 eTA holders were refused entry at the border for inadmissibility between 2017 and 2019. Refusals at the border increased between 2017 and 2018, before decreasing to 2017 levels in 2019. The majority of eTA refusals at the border were based on an A36 refusal ground, indicating serious criminality and/or an A40 refusal ground, indicating misrepresentation. Interviewees highlighted that those with malicious intent, including associations with fraud and human trafficking/smuggling movements, have found workarounds.

Moreover, surveyed officers generally felt the eTA contributes to a small or moderate extent to security-related outcomes. In particular, less than a quarter felt eTA contributed to deterring those with intentions to misuse/abuse eTA.

Figure 8: 2017–2019 Refusals for eTA and eTA Expansion applications



Source: GCMS

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of IRCC's Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA) program. The evaluation was conducted in fulfillment of evaluation requirements as part of the Treasury Board's Policy on Results (2016) and fulfils commitments from the 2013 and 2016 Treasury Board submissions. The evaluation examined contributions of the eTA program to expected outcomes of IRCC's Visitors Program, covering the period from the launch of eTA in August 2015, up to 2021.

The evaluation found the program is well-aligned with the objectives and priorities of the Government of Canada, IRCC and the CBSA, particularly with respect to safety and security, facilitation, digital transformation and modernization, and cost avoidance/savings. The eTA program also helps maintain commitments to and relations with key bilateral partners, particularly the US.

Although there were initial challenges implementing the eTA, most clients who need eTAs to travel to Canada are now aware of this requirement. Similarly, challenges in coordination and communication between IRCC, the CBSA and GAC were noted at the program's onset, but have mostly been resolved. With respect to program management, the evaluation identified a need for additional training for eTA processing for officers.

The introduction of the eTA requirement did not negatively impact international travel to Canada. While the eTA introduced an additional step for visa-exempt travellers, the evaluation found the eTA process is fast, affordable, and easy to complete. While the program leverages automated (positive) decision-making for the majority of applications, the evaluation found more applications have required manual processing and revalidation than initially anticipated, and the program has encountered some technological challenges.

With respect to future directions of the eTA program, the evaluation found that the eTA was designed as a light-touch screening tool and is appropriate for low risk foreign nationals. Moreover, while the eTA program is identifying some inadmissible individuals before they travel, it is unclear to what extent it prevents them from coming to Canada and helps protect Canada's safety and security.

With this in mind, the evaluation proposes 4 recommendations.

Recommendation 1

The eTA program relies in part on client accuracy when completing applications. When clients make errors unintentionally, they may receive an eTA approval only to be denied boarding at an airport when information doesn't align with their travel documents.

Capturing passport information through digital means (i.e. scanning passports to collect client information rather than requiring clients to input the information manually) would help improve program integrity while simultaneously ensuring unintentional mistakes do not result in delays or refusals. Digital capture may also provide greater confidence to airlines, travellers and eTA decision-makers that applications contain accurate details.

As a result, digital capture is aligned with both security-focused and facilitative objectives of the eTA program. As an added benefit, increased efficiency in processing applications may free up IRCC resources for other work. A move to digitally capturing client information is also aligned with departmental efforts in digital platform modernization.

Recommendation 1: IRCC should develop and implement a strategy to digitally capture information from client travel documents for eTA applications.

Recommendation 2

The eTA program strives to push out the border by identifying inadmissible foreign nationals before they fly to Canada. Although the eTA is identifying some inadmissible individuals from coming to Canada, the evaluation identified some areas where the eTA could be improved to better meet security objectives.

The evaluation found that broadening information sharing connections with additional data holdings would enhance program integrity. The evaluation also found evidence that additional risk indicators would assist in triaging cases for manual review, which could strengthen program integrity, but that any changes would need to take into account processing resource capacity and impacts on facilitation for clients.

Recommendation 2: To maximize program integrity while minimizing impacts on facilitation, IRCC should explore and develop a strategy to enhance screening of eTA applicants that:

- A. Incorporates additional information sharing; and
- B. Includes an approach to develop and implement new risk indicators.

Recommendation 3

As new information becomes available, officers may manually revalidate active, approved eTAs to ensure that eTA holders remain eligible to hold an eTA. The evaluation found more revalidations have been required than initially expected, and a backlog of these eTAs has developed.

Revalidation work is resource-intensive, but it is presently an under-funded activity. As eTAs cannot be revalidated or cancelled in an automated way, manual efforts are needed for processing. The evaluation noted additional legal authorities could enhance officers' revalidation capacity.

As the revalidation backlog continues to increase, it becomes more pressing to develop a sustainable solution that ensures that the department has the necessary authorities and resources to revalidate eTAs in a timely fashion.

Recommendation 3: IRCC should develop and implement a strategy to ensure that the resources and authorities are in place to more effectively revalidate eTAs.

Recommendation 4

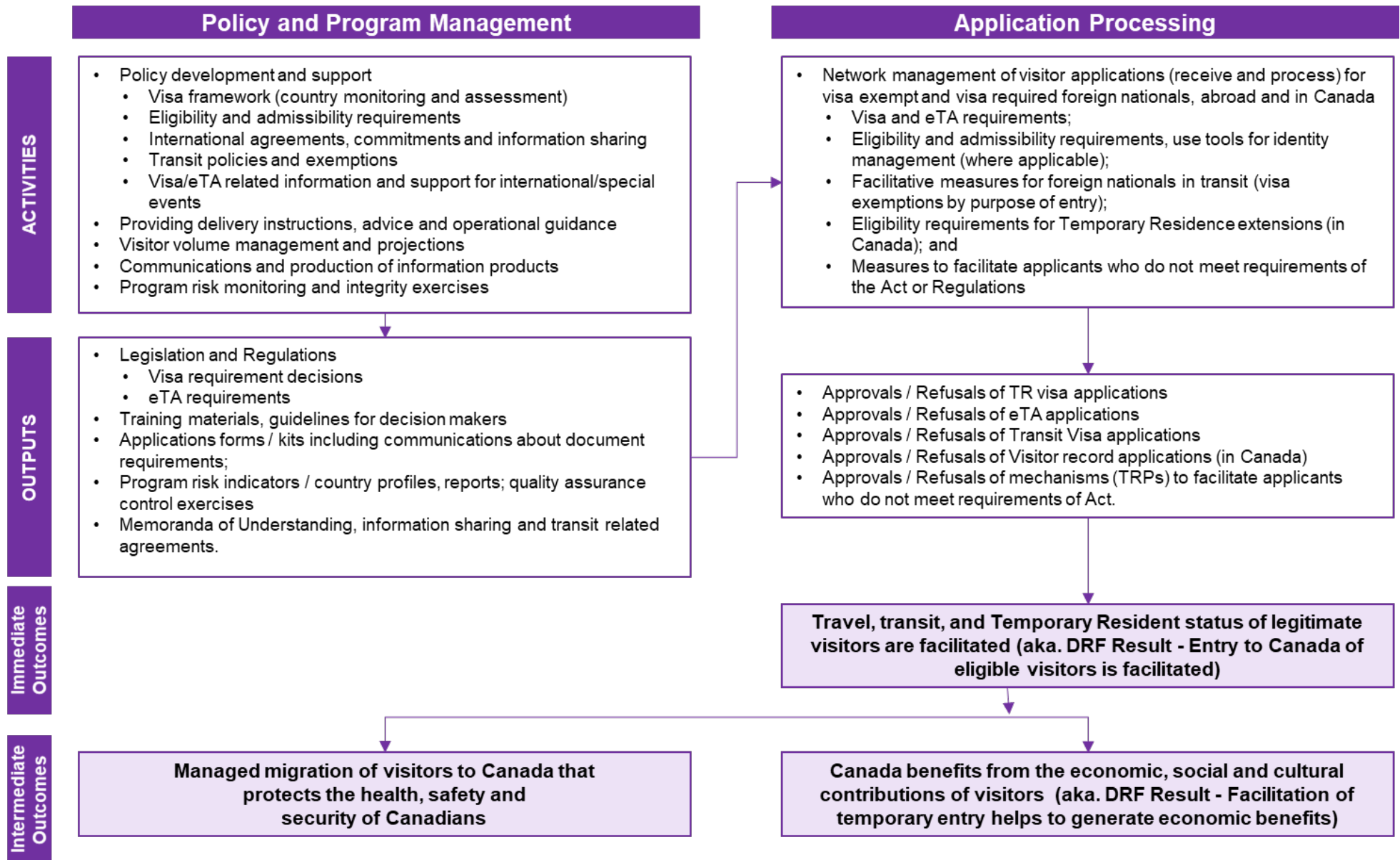
The evaluation found that many processing officers learn how to process eTA applications through informal means (e.g. functional guidance or being taught by colleagues). Many officers, primarily those in IN, did not report receiving formal training specifically related to the eTA program. While CN does the majority of eTA processing and has formal training in place, IN officers tend to deal with more complex cases. Moreover, many officers, primarily in IN, felt they would benefit from additional eTA-specific training. Suggestions included basic eTA processing training, as well as training specific to refusal grounds, and to revalidations.

The evaluation also found that processing officers in IN and CN have extensive guidance and program delivery instructions at their disposal and nearly all officers surveyed had consulted this guidance. However, officer perspectives indicated guidance could be improved in some areas, notably with respect to clarity, including where to request support when needed.

Recommendation 4: IRCC should develop and implement a strategy to address information and training gaps for officers who process eTAs.

Annex A: Visitors Logic Model

Figure 9: Logic model



Logic model – accessible text version

The logic model for the Visitors Program has two program streams:

- Policy and Program Management
- Application Processing

Activities and Outputs

The activities and outputs related to the Policy and Program Management stream feed into the activities of the Application Processing stream, as the policies and management practices developed and communications produced provide the framework guiding how travel documents are processed. The outputs originating from each of these two streams in turn facilitate program outcomes and contribute to the overall goals of the Department.

The activities of the **Policy and Program Management** stream consist of:

- Policy development and support, in relation to: the visa framework (country monitoring and assessment); eligibility and admissibility requirements; international agreements, commitments and information sharing; transit policies and exemptions; and visa/eTA related information and support for international/special events;
- Providing delivery instructions, advice and operational guidance;
- Visitor volume management and projections
- Communications and production of information products; and
- Program risk monitoring and integrity exercises.

Corresponding outputs consist of:

- Legislation and Regulations, including: visa requirement decisions and eTA requirements;
- Training materials, guidelines for decision makers;
- Applications forms / kits including communications about document requirements;
- Program risk indicators / country profiles, reports; quality assurance control exercises; and
- Memoranda of Understanding, information sharing and transit related agreements.

The outputs from these activities, are inputs into the activities of the **Application Processing** stream. Activities under this stream deal with the network management of visitor applications (received and processed) for visa exempt and visa required foreign nationals, abroad and in Canada, which consider the following:

- Visa and eTA requirements;
- Eligibility and admissibility requirements, use tools for identity management (where applicable);
- Facilitative measures for foreign nationals in transit (visa exemptions by purpose of entry);
- Eligibility requirements for Temporary Residence extensions (in Canada); and
- Measures to facilitate applicants who do not meet requirements of the Act or Regulations.

Activities under the Application Processing stream then lead to the following outputs:

- Approvals / Refusals of TR visa applications
- Approvals / Refusals of eTA applications
- Approvals / Refusals of Transit Visa applications
- Approvals / Refusals of TR (Visitor) Extension applications (in Canada)
- Approvals / refusals of mechanisms (TRPs) to facilitate applicants who do not meet requirements of Act

Immediate Outcomes

The activities and outputs of the two streams lead to the immediate outcome of Travel, transit, and temporary resident status of legitimate visitors are facilitated, which is linked to the Departmental Results Framework (DRF) Result of Entry to Canada of eligible visitors is facilitated.

Intermediate Outcomes

The immediate outcome leads to the two separate, but equal in terms of program influence, intermediate program outcomes in the medium term: Managed migration of visitors to Canada that protects the health, safety and security of Canadians, and Canada benefits from the economic, social and cultural contribution of visitors, which is linked to the DRF Result of Facilitation of temporary entry helps to generate economic benefits.

There is no long-term or ultimate outcome for the Visitors Program.

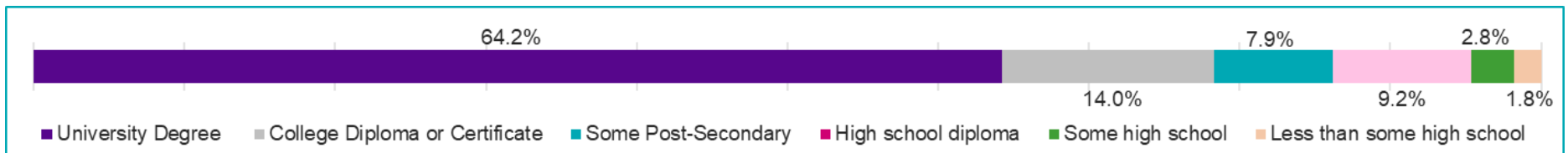
Annex B: Profile of eTA Client Survey Respondents

Figure 10: Client survey respondents by gender



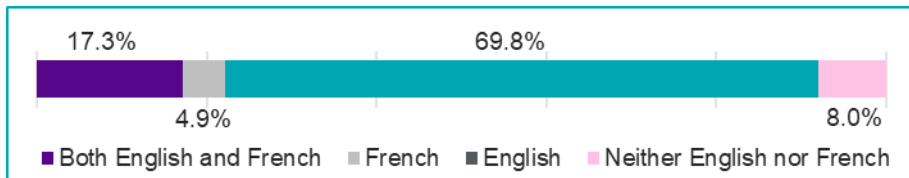
Source: eTA Client survey and GCMS

Figure 11: Client survey respondents by education



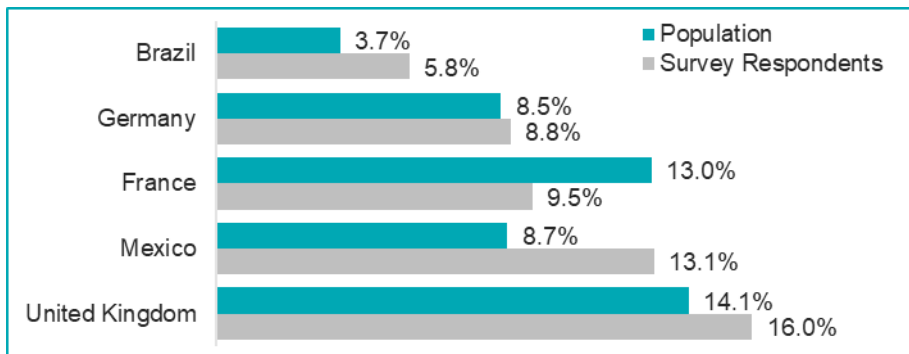
Source: eTA Client survey

Figure 12: Client survey respondents by official language capacity



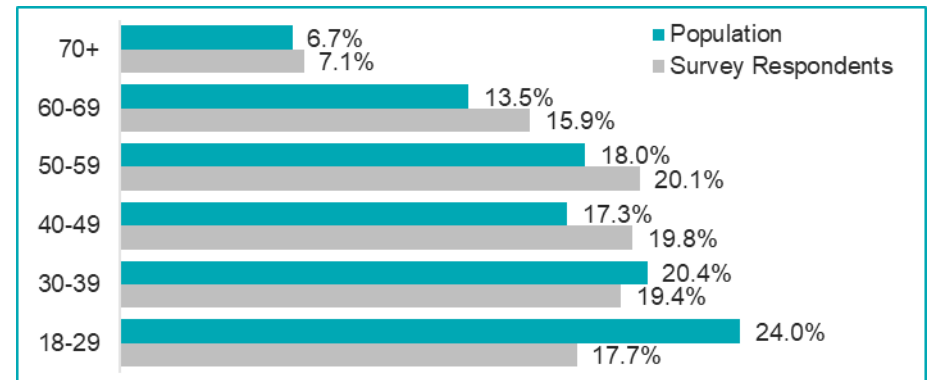
Source: eTA Client survey

Figure 13: Client survey respondents by top 5 countries of citizenship



Source: eTA Client survey and GCMS

Figure 14: Client survey respondents by age



Source: eTA Client survey and GCMS

Annex C: Coordination and Communication Mechanisms for eTA

Document review and interviews highlighted a wide array of coordination and communication mechanisms which discussed eTA in part or whole.

Within IRCC

- Executive Committee
- Priorities and Investments Committee
- Policy Committee
- Business Operations Committee
- eTA Business Working Group
- IPG's Strategic Initiatives and GCMS Coordination Division
- Ad Hoc communication as necessary

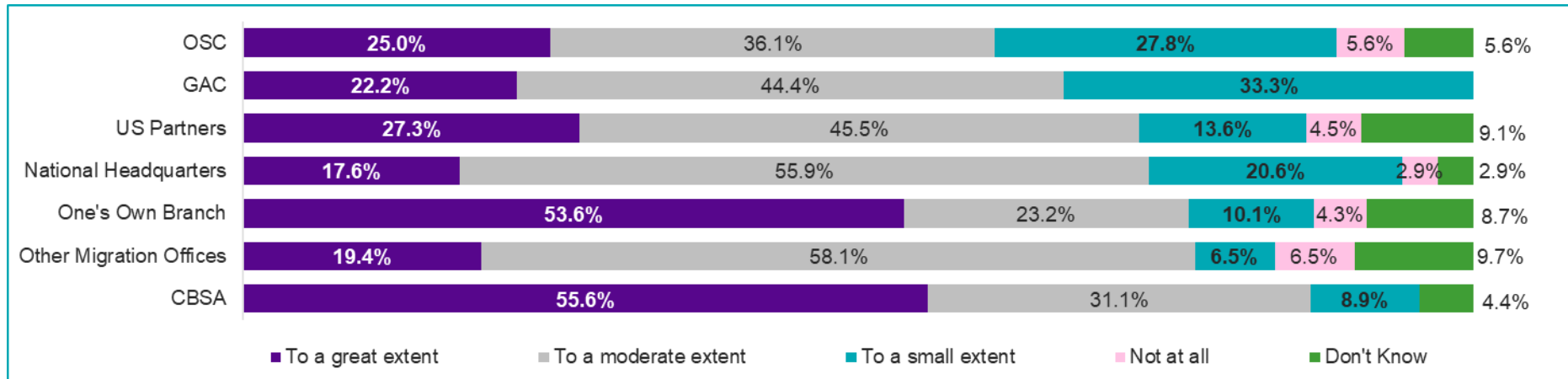
Between departments

- Interdepartmental Working Group
- Joint Advisory Committee
- Joint Consultative Committee
- Core Border Action Plan Committee
- Perimeter Initiatives Interdepartmental Committee
- Advance Passenger Information / Passenger Name Record Program Mailbox
- eTA Working Group (including membership with IRCC, CBSA and Public Safety)
- Joint IRCC-CBSA Risk Reports
- Ad Hoc communication as necessary

Multi-stakeholder groups

- Airline Industry Working Group
- Airline Industry Technical Working Group
- Air Carrier Support Centre
- Monthly meetings between IRCC, Shared Services Canada and the Canadian Tourism Commission
- Air Consultative Committee
- Facilitation and Security Issues Sub-Committee
- Transport Policy Issues Sub-Committee
- IRCC-CBSA-National Airlines Council of Canada Committee on Immigration and Border Control

Figure 15: Officer ratings of coordination and communication effectiveness with other groups



Annex D: Nationalities who Require an eTA

Nationals of the following nationalities require an eTA to travel to Canada, as of November 26, 2021:

- Andorra
- Australia
- Austria
- Bahamas
- Barbados
- Belgium
- Brunei Darussalam
- Bulgaria
- British overseas territories
- Chile
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Italy
- Japan
- Korea (Republic of)
- Latvia
- Liechtenstein
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Mexico
- Monaco
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Papua New Guinea
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania⁴⁰
- Samoa
- San Marino
- Singapore
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Solomon Islands
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United Arab Emirates
- United Kingdom

Foreign nationals who hold various travel documents also require an eTA. These documents include:

- A passport or travel document issued by the Holy See
- A national Israeli passport
- A passport issued by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China
- A passport issued by the United Kingdom to a British national (overseas), such as a person born, naturalized or registered in Hong Kong
- A passport issued by the United Kingdom to a British subject that contains the observation that the holder has the right of abode in the United Kingdom
- An ordinary passport issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Taiwan that includes the personal identification number of the individual

⁴⁰ Electronic passport holders only.