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Office of the Honourable
Yuen Pau Woo

CANADIANS ABROAD :

Overview of Recent Research and Implications for Public Policy

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PREFACE

Canada has long been an immigration country and we often take pride in the fact that many of our ancestors settled here to build a better life. Because immigration is such an important part of our identity, our demographics, and our economic development, we spend a lot of time and effort studying both immigration policy and how newcomers settle in Canada.

On the other hand, our knowledge about Canadian citizens who currently live abroad, either temporarily or permanently, is quite limited. Unlike countries where emigration is part of the national discourse, like in Ireland or Portugal, Canadians seldom think about their fellow citizens moving to other parts of the world.

The present report highlights the many gaps in our current understanding of Canadian citizens living abroad. To our knowledge, this is the first substantial report focusing on this topic since the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada published their report back in 2011. This lack of reporting and public discussion shows that the topic of Canadians living abroad is dramatically underexplored. And while in 2022 Statistics Canada provided its only estimate of Canadian citizens living abroad (four million in 2016), we still know very little about key things such as their motivations for moving abroad, their perceptions of Canada, and plans for returning home. Better policies often start from better data, which is why more research is needed in this neglected, yet highly significant, area.

Moreover, the Government of Canada would be well advised to undertake simple actions that could increase awareness towards, and engagement with, Canadian citizens who live abroad. For instance, the creation of a website targeting and engaging with these Canadians would go a long way in providing much needed information to those residing abroad. At a deeper level, unlike other countries, the Government of Canada does not have a clear strategy towards its diaspora, thus missing an opportunity to leverage its existing international networks abroad. This is a pity because Canadians abroad have much to offer the country in economic, political, and social terms. In our increasingly globalized world, we urgently need to increase our knowledge about, and level of interaction with, these Canadians in order to create better policies and services to help them thrive abroad and build international linkages that benefit all Canadians.

Canada is closely intertwined with global migration processes and, while studying immigration and newcomers to Canada remains as crucial as ever, paying much closer attention to Canadian citizens living abroad is imperative if we want to better understand the role and position of Canada in the world.

This report would not exist without the vision and dedication of the Honourable Yuen Pau Woo, who commissioned this report to highlight our lack of focus on the 11% of Canadians currently residing abroad. I am glad and honored that the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada was involved in developing this study and kickstarting a new dialogue on the Canadian diaspora, which I hope many Canadians will engage with regardless of where they currently live. Finally, allow me to thank Lucia Kovacikova for producing such a comprehensive and useful report.

Daniel Béland, Director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada

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ABBREVIATIONS

APFC	Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada
CBSA	Canada Border Services Agency
CRA	Canada Revenue Agency
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada
OAG	Office of the Auditor General of Canada
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SGMUS	Survey of 1995 Graduates Who Moved to the United States
TCS	Canadian Trade Commissioner Service
UN	United Nations
USMCA	United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement
WB	World Bank

KEY FINDINGS

- There are over 4 million Canadians residing abroad, accounting for over 11% of the national population.
- We know relatively little about the Canadian diaspora, their experiences abroad, and how current federal and provincial policies affect them.
- Policy areas that have an impact on the diaspora's experience include consular services, healthcare, taxation, voting rights, and economic and cultural policies among others, which are overseen by various government departments and agencies. Thus, working with and supporting the diaspora requires across-governmental approach.
- Members of the diaspora have the right to vote in national elections and often pay Canadian taxes while residing abroad. They are also unofficial representatives of Canada within their local communities and establish their own professional and personal networks that can aid in promoting Canada's economic development, encourage skill-sharing, research, and innovation, and help build cultural ties between international communities. In short, the diaspora is an active international community and an untapped resource for Canada in the increasingly globalized world.
- The Government of Canada does not have an official strategy for cultivating the diaspora. This contrasts sharply with diaspora engagement policies of other countries, where citizens residing abroad are being actively incorporated into areas like skill sharing, economic development, cultural exchanges, and even foreign policy.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CANADIAN DIASPORA

When asked about migration, most Canadians would immediately think of our nation's stance on immigration. Canada is internationally known for embracing the multitude of cultures and peoples within its borders and for welcoming immigrants and refugees from around the world. In fact, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) estimates that “[by] 2036, immigrants will represent up to 30% of Canada’s population, compared with 20.7% in 2011” (IRCC 2023a). Unsurprisingly, these figures encourage further academic research and generate discourse between governments, academia, and the public.

In stark contrast, however, we know relatively little about Canadian emigration and the needs and experiences of Canadians who choose to relocate to other countries, either temporarily or permanently. In their ground-breaking report, Statistics Canada estimates that approximately 4 million Canadians lived abroad in 2016, accounting for a little over 11% of the country's overall population (Bérard-Chagnon and Canon 2022). This number has increased by approximately 36% since 1990 (UN 2017), a testament to Canadian transnationalism in the age of globalization.

Citizens whose usual place of residence is not Canada are commonly referred to as expats or the Canadian diaspora. While living abroad, these Canadians often retain their civic obligations to their home country (e.g., by paying taxes) and are entitled to certain government services (e.g., exercising their right to vote). However, their place of residence and type of stay often complicate effective enumeration, as well as access to these services. Thus, the experiences of Canadians abroad can vary significantly.

The purpose of this report is to shed light on the hidden Canadian diaspora and the government policies that affect them, as well as to pose questions and propose initiatives that would increase government's engagement with its diverse population abroad.

ENUMERATION CHALLENGES

While estimates indicate that a significant number of Canadians choose to reside abroad, our information about the diaspora remains limited. This gap is in large part due to two ongoing challenges, which continue to hinder today's diaspora research: data availability and the diverse make-up of the diaspora.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The first challenge in researching the diaspora is the lack of accurate up-to-date data, without which it is difficult to measure and track Canadian citizens' migration patterns. As is the case with many jurisdictions, Canada does not require its citizens to fill out exit documentation when leaving the country.¹ The practice would undoubtedly raise privacy and logistical issues but is the only practical method that could capture citizens' exact movements abroad in real-time. It is worth noting that the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) collects exit information on all travellers in the land mode and in the commercial air mode as of June 25, 2020, and can thus generate citizens' travel history reports. However, these reports do not include information on the intended length of stay or the motivations for travel abroad. Moreover, the data is currently unavailable for research use. Without such details, migration data must be sourced elsewhere, and the size of the diaspora can only be estimated using advanced statistical modelling.

In their 2022 report on the Canadian diaspora, Statistics Canada provided a detailed list of existing sources of data alongside their limitations. International migration data sets compiled by the United Nations (UN), the World Bank (WB), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are credible statistical sources that track countries' birth citizens by destination. However, considering only born citizens means that these datasets omit migration data from both naturalized Canadians and Canadians who received their citizenship through descent – groups that have strong connections abroad and form a large part of the existing diaspora. Moreover, international datasets rely on information provided to them by their member states, not all of whom are willing or able to keep their migration data up to date.

There are also various datasets compiled by the Government of Canada ministries and departments for their own purposes. The IRCC maintains data on issued passports, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) provides a voluntary travel registration service, and Elections Canada keeps an international register of electors, which includes a list of Canadians who have

¹ Note that a number of advanced industrialized countries have exit documentation procedures (e.g., European Union, Australia, etc.) and/or have discussed introducing them. The United Kingdom has re-introduced exit checks between 2014 and 2016, and the concluding inspection report recommended re-introducing exit checks permanently (Bolt 2018).

requested to vote by special mail-in ballots while abroad. In all these cases, however, the data was never meant to enumerate the diaspora as a whole and can only provide a skewed estimate of Canadians residing abroad at any given time.

So far, only two sets of studies have zeroed in on the questions of size and composition of the Canadian diaspora. The first is the research program adopted by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APFC) in the early 2000s. The APFC developed a novel statistical model based on the Canadian census data (1941-2006) and the net outmigration when accounting for mortality. The model estimated the size of the Canadian diaspora at 2.7 million in 2001 (Zhang 2006). In conjunction, the APFC also conducted the *Global Canadians* survey of Canadians living in Asia and the United States (APFC 2007) and facilitated an academic conference that highlighted both quantitative and qualitative studies of the Canadian diaspora around the world (APFC 2009). The sole drawback of this research is that APFC's definition of the diaspora did not include citizens by descent, thus overlooking an important subset of Canadians residing abroad.

The second study was published more than a decade later by Statistics Canada. Utilizing data from multiple sources, including the UN and the Canadian census (1921-2016), the report is the first of its kind to include all three types of Canadian citizenship in its model: (1) born Canadians; (2) naturalized Canadians; and (3) Canadians who received their citizenship through descent.² It uses the component method and further accounts for changes in the size of the diaspora due to emigration, fertility, mortality, returning emigration, and the loss of Canadian citizenship (Bérard-Chagnon and Canon 2022). This approach estimates the size of the diaspora at 4 million in 2016, with a range between 3.0 and 5.6 million. It is yet unknown how these numbers may have changed in recent years, for example in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

MAKE-UP OF THE DIASPORA

In addition to this lack of data, discussions of the Canadian diaspora also fail to acknowledge the sheer number of different types of Canadian citizens and their motivations for residing abroad. A significant contribution of the Statistics Canada report is its inclusion of data on all three types of Canadian citizens. The novel statistical model thus improves on the previous estimates by providing a more realistic look at the Canadian population residing abroad.

It is also important to recognize Canadians' diverse motivations for residing abroad. There is a difference in the way governments account for and provide services to the Canadian diaspora based on the purpose and length of their stay abroad. Some examples of motivations for relocation include:

² Canada uses the 'second generation cut-off' rule, which denies automatic citizenship to children born to Canadians who were themselves born abroad. This rule has now been successfully challenged in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice in January 2024, which may lead to an increase in the number of Canadians who receive their citizenship through descent and reside abroad.

- Short- and long-term travel
- Studying abroad, including students taking part in exchange programs, as well as degree-seeking students
- Working abroad, including Canadian government and military personnel stationed overseas
- Full- or part-time international retirement
- Permanent emigration and reverse migration from Canada

Finally, we must acknowledge that the Canadian diaspora also includes children, partners, and other family members of the Canadians choosing to relocate, resulting in a complex, multi-layered network abroad.

Together, these two challenges prevent us from gaining greater understanding of the existing diaspora. Few academic studies have tackled this question, with Kirkey and Nimijean's 2022 edited volume on *The Construction of Canadian Identity from Abroad* being a welcome exception. There is also a relative lack of research on adjacent topics, such as citizens' national pride and their international linkages. For instance, Jeannotte and Aizlewood's innovative report entitled *Drifting Away? Canadian Trust, Hope and Pride in a Global Economy* was published in 1999 and has not been replicated or updated since. The same problem plagues studies using surveys of Canadians residing abroad, such as Frank and Bélair's 1999 study entitled *South of the Border*, which uses the Survey of 1995 Graduates Who Moved to the United States (SGMUS). Newer data and continued research are needed to shed light on the state of the Canadian diaspora and help outline the role the Canadian government should play in serving its citizens abroad.

CANADIANS ABROAD: AN OVERVIEW

DIASPORA BY NUMBERS

Statistics Canada estimates that just over 4 million Canadians live abroad, accounting for over 11% of the national population.³ Citizens by descent make up more than half (i.e., 51%) of the diaspora; a finding that helps highlight the very real discrepancy between the actual composition of the diaspora and the previous estimates drawn solely from data of born Canadians' migration patterns (e.g., based on UN, WB, or OECD datasets). Canadians by birth represent 33% of the diaspora, while naturalized Canadians make up the remaining 15% (Bérard-Chagnon and Canon 2022).

The latter percentage may soon rise, however. The Institute for Canadian Citizenship has warned that the country is seeing a steady increase in onward migration (i.e., emigration of immigrants) after four to seven years of arrival in Canada. Between 2017 and 2019, onward migration patterns were 31% higher than average (Dennler 2023, 4), impacting both Canada's immigration targets, as well as transforming the composition of the existing Canadian diaspora. This trend is likely linked to both increasing costs of living in Canada, as well as Canada's inflexible and unrealistic pathways towards recognizing foreign degrees, which prevent immigrants from finding jobs in their chosen fields and building their careers in their new country.

Today, approximately 70% of the diaspora population falls between the ages of 15 and 64, with the largest age group being between the ages of 45 and 54. The average age is 46.2 years, slightly higher than the national average. The diaspora is almost perfectly balanced between men and women, with a sex ratio of 49.4% (Bérard-Chagnon and Canon 2022).

The APFC estimates that the size of the Canadian diaspora as a percentage of the national population is comparable to that of the United Kingdom but is more than five times larger than that of the United States and two times larger than that of Australia (APFC 2009). Canadians' drive to explore the world has thus created one of the largest diasporas among the advanced industrialized countries (by percentage).

³ This report uses the median estimates from the Statistics Canada report.

CANADIANS AROUND THE WORLD

Canadians travel, work, study, and live around the world. By far the largest Canadian population outside of Canada can be found in the United States, though estimates vary widely due to different methodologies employed across studies. The American Community Survey reported that 2.7 million people in the United States have self-identified as Canadian, French Canadian, or Acadian between 2014 and 2018 (Bérard-Chagnon and Canon 2022). Meanwhile, the APFC estimated that 1.1 million of the 2.8 million Canadians abroad in 2009 resided in the United States, accounting for approximately 38% of the diaspora (APFC 2011). The UN’s estimate, based on the migration patterns of born Canadians, puts the number at approximately 890,000 out of 1.4 million in 2017, a staggering 66% of the total (UN 2017).

To illustrate the dispersion of Canadians abroad, the table below replicates the APFC’s 2009 estimates of the size of the Canadian diaspora by location, when accounting for born and naturalized Canadians (APFC 2011). The list shows that Canadians tend to gravitate towards English-speaking countries (e.g. United States, United Kingdom, Australia), but also have a strong connection to East Asia (e.g., Hong Kong, China, South Korea, and Japan).

Table 1. Canadian Diaspora by Location (APFC 2011)

	Number	Percentage
Total	2,800,000	
United States	1,062,640	38
Hong Kong	300,000	11
United Kingdom	73,000	2.6
Australia	27,289	1.0
China	19,990	0.7
South Korea	14,210	0.5
Germany	13,390	0.5
France	11,931	0.4
Japan	11,016	0.4
Egypt	10,000	0.4

GLOBAL CITIZENS

Canadians are known for their international mindset. In the 1950s, Western Europe witnessed a 'Canadian invasion,' as the favorable post-war exchange rate allowed both adventurers and entrepreneurs to cross the Atlantic in search of a new home. This pattern of emigration has steadily grown, in large part due to increasing globalization and the ability of Canadians to compete on the international labour market.

Surveys consistently show that Canadians have a very strong sense of national pride, yet they are also less attached to their country as compared to other advanced industrialized nations. Canadians are more willing to relocate for better job opportunities (Jeannotte and Aizlewood 1999, 8), resulting in a consistent trend of economic emigration. Simultaneously, however, we see a pattern of return emigration, as members of the diaspora decide to come home to be closer to family and friends (APFC 2007, 23).

Existing data thus reaffirms the Canadian commitment to global citizenship and transnationalism. A significant segment of the Canadian population still prioritizes having an international experience and is dedicated to move abroad in pursuit of work, study, or travel opportunities.

CANADIAN DIASPORA AND THE GOVERNMENT

The policies of the Canadian government – at both the federal and provincial level – have a direct impact on the Canadian diaspora. Issues ranging from consular services, taxation, healthcare, economic development, and community-building affect people’s day-to-day lives. It is important to understand which policy areas are of most importance to citizens residing abroad and how to shape policies to address the challenges they face.

Today, two features define the relationship between the Canadian government and the diaspora. The first is a lack of direction. The Canadian government does not have an official strategy towards the growing number of its citizens residing abroad or the types of services they may need. Likewise, the diaspora question receives virtually no attention from the Canadian House of Commons or Senate committees, except in ad-hoc cases (e.g., review of consular services, question of Canadian cultural exports,⁴ etc.). Neither is there a push towards establishing a government agency to coordinate policy issues affecting Canadians abroad, a suggestion that was supported by 73% of Canada-based respondents and 53% of expat respondents in the APFC survey (2011). We also see a gap in communication. As of today, there is no government website dedicated to the diaspora and no easily accessible list of government services and responsibilities that apply to those relocating or living abroad. This likely stems from the fact that so many of Canada’s ministries and departments have a hand in the diaspora’s experience, making it difficult to consolidate relevant information. However, the establishment of an official website can be the first step in addressing the existing disconnect between Canadians abroad and their home government.

The second feature is the skewed perception of the diaspora at home. In addition to the lack of research, there is little media coverage of Canadians living abroad. When they are mentioned, the discourse tends to lean towards two extremes. The diaspora is often portrayed negatively when in need of emergency consular services. This is most prevalent during international crises when Canadians request assistance with evacuations, for example from Gaza in 2023, Libya and Egypt in 2011, and Lebanon in 2006. Similar problems were highlighted when Canadians needed travel assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. In most of these cases, the public perceives the diaspora as a liability by draining government resources. On the other side of the spectrum are famous Canadians, including entertainers, athletes, or business leaders, who are perceived as promoting Canada abroad. In these cases, individuals within the diaspora are considered to be indispensable assets in creating a positive image for the country (Stackhouse 2020; Global Canada and CIC 2019). And yet, both Canadian evacuees and celebrities make up a very small subset of the overall diaspora

⁴ See meeting no. 43 of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (AEFA): <https://sencanada.ca/en/Committees/AEFA/NoticeOfMeeting/604184/44-1>.

population; for most Canadians abroad, the day-to-day experiences and challenges look quite different and should be explored in relation to the government policies that shape them.

CONSULAR SERVICES

The most common interactions between members of the diaspora and the Canadian government occur in the form of consular services, delivered to citizens by the GAC network. “In 2016–2017, these services cost \$156 million, and were delivered by about 470 Departmental staff in 150 countries, through over 260 offices” (Soreson 2018, 1).

However, consular needs of the Canadian diaspora tend to differ from those of traveling Canadians, who are much more likely to experience emergency situations like losing a passport, facing an arrest, or dealing with medical emergencies. In fact, the needs of the diaspora often fall into two overarching categories. The first consists of passport renewals and citizenship requests, including any issues arising from changes in marital status, births and deaths in the family, and holding a dual citizenship. The second are instances in which all Canadians, irrespective of residency status, must be evacuated from foreign countries due to conflicts or natural disasters.

Consular officers provide fee-based assistance with official government documentation. Services relevant to the diaspora may include:

- Renewal of passports (IRCC 2023b)
- Helping Canadians understand the documentation needed to register a marriage abroad (Travel Canada 2023a)
- Applying for certificates of Canadian citizenship and passports for children born outside of Canada (Travel Canada 2023b); and
- In the unfortunate cases of death abroad, cancelling passports and helping families to obtain necessary documentation from local authorities (Travel Canada).

Issuing of new passports, for example, is a joint endeavor between GAC and IRCC. While the diaspora is usually not facing emergency travel situations, they are nonetheless faced with potential delays. The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) found that between 2016 and 2017, the GAC network was often slow and inconsistent in its data entry, affecting the overall processing times for issuing new travel documents (Soreson 2018). Such problems are in part the result of increasing demand for consular services; GAC’s staff levels have not kept up with the Canadians’ growing interest in traveling and residing abroad. Strengthening the GAC network may not only improve the delivery of existing administrative services but can also expand the list of services tailored towards the diaspora.

For example, Statistics Canada reports that 3.7 million Canadians have dual citizenship (Statistics Canada 2022). While uncommon, some foreign countries may choose not to recognize dual citizens' Canadian citizenship, which in turn prohibits Canadian consular staff from providing assistance (Travel Canada 2023c). It is the dual citizens' responsibility to understand restrictions on travel and consular services abroad, however more information could be provided to the diaspora prior to and during their stay abroad.

Dual citizenship also raises important moral and logistical questions about consular services in times of crises. These issues came to the forefront of the public debate during the evacuations from Lebanon in 2006. To what extent is Canada responsible for dual citizens who have chosen to permanently relocate abroad? Is it justifiable for a country to differentiate between its citizens based on their dual nationality? The frustrations voiced by the public in 2006 were in large part caused by a lack of accessible information about the Canadian diaspora and the steps the government takes during international rescue operations. For example, little was said about the citizens' need to reimburse the government for their evacuation from foreign lands (APFC 2011). In the wake of the 2023 Gaza evacuations, a diaspora-focused website can be an effective way of providing key information about both the diaspora itself and the processes employed to assist them.

Traveling Canadians, including members of the diaspora, are also encouraged to register with the GAC, allowing them to receive notifications about potential emergencies (GAC 2023). This service can also help track Canadians during international crises. However, it is important to note that world governments employ more sophisticated methods to account for their citizens when international crises arise.

HEALTHCARE

Healthcare is one of the most important public services provided by the government to the Canadian public. When considering relocation abroad, Canadians must also take into account the changes to their medical care, as well as the cancellation of their provincial health coverage if they relocate permanently. Access to and quality of healthcare abroad depends on the host country and can often be very expensive without local health insurance.

However, not all members of the diaspora intend to stay abroad indefinitely. Each province has guidelines that allow residents to retain their provincial health coverage during extended absences, provided they produce relevant documentation and want to return to their home province following their stay abroad. Full-time students are allowed to keep their provincial health coverage until the end of their study period irrespective of their length of absence.

Table 2. Duration Allowed for Extended Absence Without Loss of Health Coverage

Province	Duration Allowed for Extended Absence (excluding students)
Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 years (48 months) for work, business, or missionary service • 2 years (24 months) for travel, personal visits, or educational leave (sabbatical)
British Columbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 consecutive months (once in a 60-month period)
Manitoba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 months for personal travel • 24 months for work, research study or sabbatical • Unlimited duration for missionary or humanitarian aid
New Brunswick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 months for personal travel and business • 2 years for out-of-country contract workers
Newfoundland and Labrador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 months (once every five years) for personal travel • 3 years (renewable each year) for work
Nova Scotia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 months (once every six years) for personal travel
Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 years for work and personal travel
Prince Edward Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details unavailable
Québec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 183 days for personal travel • Further details unavailable
Saskatchewan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 months for vacation, visiting, business engagement, or employment within Canada • 24 months for employment contract outside of Canada

Since each province has its own set of policies, the members of the diaspora can have very different experiences with accessing healthcare abroad, depending on their original place of residence. Greater transparency and consolidation of health coverage information is needed to help the diaspora access relevant information prior to and during their stay abroad.

In addition to physical health, we must acknowledge that the diaspora is often exposed to greater emotional and psychological pressures. Alongside the positive experiences of living and traveling abroad, relocation can also come with culture shocks, linguistic barriers, and stark cultural differences in both personal and professional settings. All of these elements can lead to increased anxiety, stress, exhaustion, and even depression (Kirkey and Nimijean 2022). If individuals' healthcare coverage – retained through the province or obtained in the host country – does not cover mental health, it may prevent individuals from seeking help.

More research is needed to evaluate the psychological impact of relocation on Canadian diasporas' mental health outcomes.

The Canadian government can play two key roles in addressing these challenges. First, it can dedicate resources to cultivating the diaspora, building community linkages, and facilitating dialogue. The mere mention of a Canada club or society abroad can provide an invaluable lifeline for new diaspora members by establishing connections to existing networks; links that can help individuals overcome their initial struggles in a new environment. Second, policymakers may consider including the topic of mental health in communications directed towards the diaspora. For instance, any future diaspora-focused website can include information on culture shocks or applicable Canada Health programs.

Lastly, we cannot separate the issue of healthcare from the question of taxation. At the provincial level, the most pressing question is the return of life-long emigrants after their retirement. The APFC's 2011 report outlines two potential problems for provincial treasuries: "[first], an educated Canada-born citizen who was absent between the ages of 25-61 did not contribute to education costs in Canada via tax payments. The shortfall or tax gap must be made up by resident Canadian tax payers. Secondly, returnees over the age of 61 will not cover their healthcare costs with income taxes alone, unlike Canadians over the age of 61 who never left Canada" (APFC 2011, 46). The report argues that health provision for returning emigrants, and the tax burden associated with it, are being borne by Canadians who remained at home. However, we also see a growing trend of resident Canadians seeking medical care abroad. Therefore, more targeted research is needed to understand the connection between Canadian citizens and their medical care at home and abroad. More specifically, we need to know the number of Canadians going abroad for treatment, as well as the number of returning life-long emigrants in the last two decades, the healthcare needs they have, and any potential tax burdens they create.

TAXATION

There is a common misconception among Canadians that those who relocate abroad are free from their tax obligations. This notion also reinforces negative stereotypes of the diaspora, which can be portrayed as abusing Canadian consular services and being a burden on taxpayers during international crises. However, the reality is quite different; in most cases, the members of the diaspora are required to continue to pay Canadian and provincial income taxes while residing abroad.

The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) determines individuals' residency status based on their declaration of either temporary or permanent relocation (CRA 2023). The CRA recognizes three overarching residency categories:⁵

- **Emigrants:** Permanent relocation (or emigration) means that the Canadian citizen has permanently left Canada, cut all financial ties with the country, disposed of any property, and established residency elsewhere. In these cases, the emigrant is expected to pay a departure tax (i.e., the tax on the capital gain of the deemed disposition).
- **Factual Residents:** If any of the individual's social and financial links remain in Canada, they are deemed factual residents (i.e., residents temporarily outside of Canada). Common cases of factual residency include temporarily working abroad, studying abroad, commuting, and vacationing. For factual residents, income taxes are applied as if they never left Canada.
- **Non-residents:** Individuals who commonly reside in other countries and do not have significant residential ties to Canada are considered non-residents. Non-residents pay taxes only on the income received in Canada, including dividends, rental or royalty payments, pension payments, or annuity payments among others.

In the latter two cases, Canadians living abroad are still required to file annual tax returns and pay taxes on their Canadian income – an obligation that can continue indefinitely depending on their income source. The APFC report (2011) suggests that in order to avoid the annual administrative and financial burdens, many members of the diaspora have been indirectly incentivized to cut their ties with Canada and officially emigrate. This is a worrisome notion; more systematic research is needed to examine any potential unintended consequences of current tax policies and their impact on the Canadian diaspora.

VOTING RIGHTS AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The right to vote is the cornerstone of every democracy. However, globalization has led to increased migration and growing diasporas around the world, forcing governments to adapt to the new circumstances. With large numbers of their citizens residing abroad, modern democracies have had to develop new rules and procedures to accommodate their diasporas and facilitate external voting.

While similarities exist, each country has adopted its own system of external voting. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) tracks these trends and produces research on external voting around the world. The organization recognizes four methods for external voting currently in use: (1) personal voting (i.e., direct voting); (2) postal voting; (3) voting by proxy; and (4) electronic voting (IDEA 2007, 6-7).

⁵ It is worth noting that additional sub-categories also exist, for example the 'deemed non-resident' category, etc. For further details, see <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/living-abroad/taxation>.

Canadians abroad are eligible to vote in federal elections, by-elections, and referendums using a special mail-in ballot only. Individuals must first apply to be added to the International Register of Electors, operated by Elections Canada. This can be done online, by requesting an application form by mail, or by visiting the nearest Canadian Embassy, High Commission, or Consulate. After successful registration, individuals will receive their voting kit in the mail and must send it back by a specific date for the vote to be counted (Elections Canada 2023).

The mail-in method has been effective. In 2019, 34,144 Canadians voted from abroad, out of an international register of approximately 55,000 (i.e., 62%). This represents a significant jump from the 11,000 overseas votes cast in 2015 (Woo, 2021) and the 9,495 overseas votes cast in 2004 (IDEA 2007), both of which represented 69% of registered overseas voters. However, the number of actual and registered external voters is significantly smaller than the size of the diaspora. While some citizens may become disconnected from Canadian politics over time and may become disinterested in voting, others might simply find registering and voting from abroad logistically difficult. As technology evolves, it may be necessary to consider alternative means of voting, including electronic voting. Incorporating a more accessible voting method may have the potential to significantly reduce the barriers to voting for the 4 million Canadians abroad and increase their participation in the political process.

Other barriers to external voting have also been challenged in recent years. Prior to 2019, the *Canada Elections Act* stated that only “citizens who had been living abroad for less than five years, and who intended to return to Canada, could... vote in federal elections” (Supreme Court of Canada 2019). This law has been challenged in the Supreme Court by Dr. Frank and Mr. Duong, who argued that over a million Canadians have been unable to exercise their right to vote due to the time restrictions placed on their residency abroad. In January 2019, the Supreme Court ruled that restricting Canadians’ right to vote after living abroad for more than five years is unconstitutional. The ruling reinforced legislation passed by the Liberal government in 2018 that guaranteed voting rights to all eligible members of the Canadian diaspora.

Similar ‘voters for life’ legislation was passed in the United Kingdom in 2022 and 2023 and is expected to come into effect in January 2024. The new election laws remove the 15-year limit on overseas voters, allowing all 3.5 million British expats to vote in the upcoming 2024 election. This represents a significant increase from 1.4 million eligible expat voters under the 15-year rule (Johnson and Uberoi 2023). The push for these electoral changes came after a number of high-profile votes and referendums in the United Kingdom, including the Brexit referendum in 2016.

It is important to note that this loosening of barriers to external voting simultaneously opens up new questions about political campaigning abroad and the potential effects of incorporating the diaspora in domestic political debates. So far, we know little about the long-term impact of these legislative changes. However, as diasporas continue to grow, and as more countries reconsider and expand their external voting, we will likely see more attention being placed on eligible voters abroad.

Both the Canadian and the British systems of external voting have relied on registration of voters in their former constituencies. As a result, the votes of the members of the diaspora are counted towards their original home country district. While voter registrations by the diaspora remain very low (e.g., of the 22.5 million registered voters in the 2004 Canadian general election, less than 14,000 were overseas voters), this process can theoretically leave the door open for the diaspora's increased influence in swing districts. In contrast, other countries – including France, Italy, Portugal, Croatia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Algeria, Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique (IDEA 2007, 28) – allow their diasporas to elect their own representatives to the national legislature, whose responsibility it is to present the diasporas' perspectives. Interestingly, this approach has been used only in countries with proportional representation voting in the lower house. It is thus possible that adding diaspora-focused representatives in district-based majoritarian voting systems may pose a very different set of challenges.

Finally, we must address the complexities of external voting in a federation. In Canada, provincial elections are an important part of citizens' political lives. With the exception of full-time students, government employees, and military personnel, the diaspora is not allowed to participate in provincial elections unless they meet specific criteria. Even when voting from abroad is allowed, not all provinces accommodate voters who have relocated abroad for an extended period of time. The most lenient rules apply to residents of Ontario and Québec, where the provincial governments accept voting from abroad for up to two years after the date of departure. It is worth noting that the criteria for external voting in provincial elections are not always clear and cannot be accessed or compared using any centralized website. Each Canadian citizen abroad is thus responsible for familiarizing themselves with their province's absentee voting requirements, which vary widely from one province to another. Any future centralized website dedicated to diaspora issues should also include information on both federal and provincial voting regulations to help avoid confusion.

Table 3. Criteria for Voting in Provincial Elections from Abroad

Province	Voting from Abroad	Voting Criteria
Alberta	Yes	The absentee voter must have their ordinary residence in Alberta and intends to return to Alberta
British Columbia	No	The voter must be a resident of B.C. for the six months before Final Voting Day
Manitoba	Yes	The absentee voter must have resided in Manitoba for at least six months immediately before election day and intends to be away for no more than six months
New Brunswick	No	The voter must be an ordinarily resident in the province for 40 days immediately preceding the date of the election, and ordinarily reside at their N.B. address
Newfoundland and Labrador	No	The voter must be an ordinarily resident in the province on the day before polling day, as well as in the district and polling division on polling day
Nova Scotia	No	The voter must have lived in Nova Scotia for at least six months before the day the election was called
Ontario	Yes	The absentee voter must be temporarily absent (for up to two years from the date they left Ontario), has been a resident of Ontario for at least 12 consecutive months before leaving, and intends to return to Ontario
Prince Edward Island	Yes	The absentee voter can be attending school, travelling, or temporarily reside outside the province and is unable to attend at the advance poll days or ordinary polling day
Québec	Yes	The absentee voter must have been domiciled in Québec for at least 12 consecutive months prior to departure, intends to return to Québec, and must be outside of Québec for less than two years
Saskatchewan	No	The voter must be a Saskatchewan resident for at least the last 6 months prior to the election

ECONOMIC EMIGRATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Canadians' embrace of transnationalism has been evident since the 1990s. Compared to other advanced industrialized nations, Canadians are more "[willing] to leave the country in order to improve [their] living and working conditions" (Jeannotte and Aizlewood 1999, 8). This pattern of economic emigration is especially prevalent among young, well-educated Canadians and represents the chief reason for relocation from Canada. In their survey of the Canadian diaspora in Asia and the United States, the APFC reported that nearly two-thirds (i.e., 65%) of respondents left Canada to pursue "job and career opportunities" (APFC 2007).

The Canadian 'brain drain' is perhaps unsurprising when given the country's proximity to the United States. As the largest economy in the world, the United States produces not only more jobs, but more higher paying jobs. It is also similar in its corporate culture, its use of the English language, and allows for the free movement of professionals listed under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). These features make the United States an appealing destination for well-educated, career-oriented, and internationally-minded Canadians.

Nonetheless, many Canadians who relocate for professional development eventually return home. The Survey of 1995 Graduates Who Moved to the United States (SGMUS) reports that "over 40% of respondents who were still in the United States in 1999 intended to return to Canada" (Frank and Bélair 1999; Bérard-Chagnon and Canon 2022). What is more, returning Canadian émigrés are more productive and Canadian-born émigrés experience a significant income gain as a result of their foreign experience (APFC 2011).

Canadians' international labour market appeal and the impact of the skills they bring back to Canada following their residence abroad may soon be diminished, however. Unlike in other advanced industrialized nations, where international learning is actively promoted among students as an important part of succeeding in the globalized world, the Canadian government has not systematically focused on the issue of global education for young Canadians (Study Group on Global Education 2017). Canadian students are falling behind their peers from other countries in international learning, which may have an impact on their future competitiveness on the labour market, as well as their ability to adapt to changes in global communications, technologies, and practices.

Canadians moving abroad in search of economic opportunities are also likely to become members of industry associations and other professional networks, which can be invaluable for Canada's long-term economic development. In the age of globalization, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), promoting trade, and maintaining productive relationships with

existing industry, research, and government partners are key objectives for both the provincial and federal governments. The diaspora – and especially the professionally-focused Canadian diaspora – is an untapped resource for the Canadian government, whose officials may benefit from the diaspora’s connections to local industry and academia.

An important part of this professional network includes Chambers of Commerce, especially those dedicated to promoting trade between Canada and other world regions (e.g., the Canada-United Kingdom Chamber of Commerce, The European Union Chamber of Commerce in Canada, etc.). While the GAC and the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service (TCS) regularly engage with Chambers of Commerce abroad, these professional linkages are inconsistent across locations and are not guided by an overarching strategy beyond the focus on short-term trade and investment objectives. A more consistent engagement is needed to leverage the existing professional networks of both the diaspora and the Chambers of Commerce abroad. A complete enumeration of the relevant Chambers of Commerce can also help with identifying best networking opportunities in the future.

The importance of the diaspora in economic development is reinforced by the work of international development scholars and international organizations, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), who have long recognized expats’ ability to spur development in their home countries. While most existing research has relied on data from developing nations, there are important lessons here for advanced industrialized countries as well. For example, IOM proposes five objectives of engagement with diasporas, namely (1) knowledge and skills transfer; (2) investment generation; (3) philanthropy; (4) community identity building; and (5) the development of tourism/ heritage/ nostalgia industries (IOM 2021). Note that three of the five objectives are focused on economic development. The IOM objectives are thus an excellent starting point for building a new government strategy focused on cultivating and engaging with the Canadian diaspora.

CULTIVATING THE DIASPORA

The absence of a wider diaspora strategy prevents the Government of Canada from developing stronger ties with its citizens abroad. While social and cultural interactions between diplomats and the diaspora used to be commonplace, such activities have been deprioritized over time. In fact, modernization of the foreign service – while necessary – went hand in hand with undervaluing the benefits of having a well-established expat community. Today, engagement with the diaspora is more likely to involve events with high-profile Canadian figures as opposed to grassroots, community-focused activities.

In contrast, IOM's research on diasporas highlights two crucial cultural objectives, namely philanthropy and community identity building. Both prioritize the cultural and societal ties that bind citizens residing abroad with those residing at home. The governments' role is to encourage stronger and more sincere interactions between all members of its population by placing the focus on meaningful causes (i.e., philanthropy) and creating more organized diaspora communities abroad that reflect core Canadian values.

However, cultivating the diaspora is a challenging task. It is often difficult to quantify and track the success of community- or identity-building initiatives abroad. The APFC suggests seven mechanisms for cultivation, which present a helpful starting point for establishing a new government strategy. These include: (1) celebrating national holidays abroad; (2) honouring expatriates with awards; (3) convening diaspora congresses; (4) proclaiming affinity with and responsibility for the diaspora; (5) issuing special identifications or visas; (6) providing national language and history education; and (7) extending media coverage of Canadians abroad (APFC 2011, 22).

Examples abound of successful implementations of similar policies elsewhere. Ireland's *Global Ireland* strategy (2019) adopts a wide-ranging definition of the Irish diaspora, which includes all Irish citizens, descendants of Irish citizens, those who have resided in Ireland for any period of time, and even those who identify with and appreciate the Irish culture. Of course, not all of these individuals would be considered Irish citizens. However, Ireland's non-exclusionary approach to diaspora building has helped to successfully raise the country's international profile and build a positive image of Ireland abroad. The strategy attracts more international students to Ireland and promotes international work opportunities, including within the EU. In collaboration with other government departments, *Global Ireland* initiatives have also opened doors to new export markets in China, Kuwait, and Qatar (Department of the Taoiseach 2019, 23).

The British approach to their growing diaspora of approximately 5.5 million citizens is even more transparent. The United Kingdom has created an active national conversation about British expats around the world, including establishing a designated BBC website that features data and accounts from citizens living abroad (BBC 2009). Moreover, recent changes to UK's overseas voting rules, as well as continued academic research and policy reports on Brits abroad (e.g., Drewand Sriskandarajah 2006) have strengthened the idea of the British diaspora and their value and contributions to the United Kingdom. Simultaneously, the diaspora itself has developed a strong online presence, with online forums like *British Expats* helping both new and established members of the community to access relevant information and learn about existing resources while residing abroad.

China has dedicated large amounts of resources to its diaspora engagement. IOM estimates that the greater Chinese diaspora – including Chinese citizens and their descendants – includes approximately 60 million people around the world (Guotu 2021). These communities receive a lot of attention from the Chinese government. China hopes to incentivize members of its diaspora to share professional expertise in China, contribute to various government, academic, and business programs, and even support its foreign policies (Zhang 2023). Moreover, China has focused on promoting its traditional culture, especially among the younger diaspora members who have been raised overseas (Zhang 2023; Suzuki 2019). Alongside its well-established soft-power initiatives, such as the Confucian Institutes, China has actively engaged with – and tried to mobilize – its diaspora for cultural, economic, and even political purposes.

The Indian diaspora is considered to be the largest in the world, comprised of approximately 32 million people. India's diaspora policies are overseen by India's Ministry of External Affairs and form a part of the country's official foreign policy. The diaspora includes both Non-Resident Indians and People of Indian Origin. In addition to actively enumerating the members of the diaspora using identification cards, India is famous for celebrating the diaspora's successes. Pravasi Bharatiya Divasis an annual celebration held on January 9th of each year to celebrate the contributions of Overseas Indians. Meanwhile, the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award is the highest Indian award given to an Overseas Indian (or an overseas Indian-led organization) that has made exceptional contributions in a chosen field. It is awarded by the President of India and has contributed to knowledge sharing and strengthening of ties between the diaspora and their home country. In addition, India has adopted a program to promote its traditional culture to younger diaspora members under the auspices of its Know India Programme.

These international examples show that the definition of – and engagement with – the diaspora communities rests in the hands of governments. Whether the diaspora is actively defined, celebrated, supported, or encouraged depends on strategic action that begins at home.

CONCLUSION

Canadians' embrace of globalization and transnationalism has helped shape the country's diverse diaspora, totalling over 4 million people in 2016. However, despite accounting for over 11% of the national population, Canadians abroad have received little attention from governments, researchers, and even the public.

Recent contributions have brought the Canadian diaspora back into the national conversation. New data modelling by Statistics Canada has helped approximate the current size of the diaspora (Bérard-Chagnon and Canon 2022), while a handful of new publications has tackled the question of Canadian identity formation abroad (Kirkey and Nimijean 2022; Stackhouse 2020). Changes in external voting rules have also allowed the diaspora to participate in Canadian elections irrespective of the length of their stay abroad, thus eliminating arbitrary barriers to voting.

Nonetheless, many government policies affecting Canadians abroad have not been evaluated from the diaspora's perspective and remain unchanged despite being unclear or posing unnecessary administrative burdens. From consular services, to healthcare, taxation, and community building, the diaspora has been largely left to its own devices. Perhaps the most glaring example of this oversight has been the complete absence of an official government strategy towards Canadian expats.

The first step in addressing these issues must be the creation of a working definition of the Canadian diaspora, which should embrace inclusivity and diversity. Non-Canadian alumni of Canadian universities, those focusing on Canadian Studies, members of Canadian volunteer organizations and/or clubs, and employees of Canadian multi-national corporations, among others, are closely connected to the country and would only contribute to future community- and diaspora-building abroad. Moreover, an engaged and active support for the diaspora creates a stronger Canadian international network; a community that not only votes and pays taxes, but that has the ability to promote Canada abroad, contribute to economic development and professional networking, encourage skill-sharing, research, and innovation, and forge closer ties between various communities at home and abroad.

SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The table below summarizes the policy recommendations outlined in this report.

Table 4. Summary of Policy Recommendations

Issue	Description	Relevant Government Bodies
Data availability	Need for more granular and more frequent data collection on Canadians traveling and residing abroad	Statistics Canada, IRCC, GAC, CBSA, Elections Canada
Academic research	Need for more diverse and long-term academic research on the Canadian diaspora	Statistics Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
Centralized information for Canadians living abroad	Need for an official website that hosts all information relevant to the Canadian diaspora, including the citizens' obligations and rights	GAC, IRCC, Elections Canada, CBSA, CRA, Canada.ca
Strategy on engaging with and servicing the diaspora	Need for an overarching government strategy on the engagement with – and cultivation of – the Canadian diaspora, including the potential of establishing an agency that coordinates policies related to citizens residing abroad. The five IOM objectives of engagement provide a helpful outline for the creation of a feasible government strategy.	GAC, IRCC, Elections Canada, CRA, CBSA, Office of the Prime Minister, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat
Consular Services	Need to expand the consular services tailored to the Canadian diaspora, as well as the information available on key consular issues	GAC, Travel Canada, Canada.ca
Healthcare coverage	Need to centralize information about available healthcare coverage for Canadians who choose to relocate permanently or apply for extended absence	Health Canada, Provincial Health Ministries, Canada.ca
Mental health awareness	Need to provide basic information on culture shocks and/or other mental health issues common among the diaspora community and outline potential resources available through Health Canada and/or other programs	Health Canada, Provincial Health Ministries, Canada.ca
Medical care at home and abroad	Need to examine the number of returning life-long emigrants, the healthcare needs they have, and any potential tax burdens they create, versus the number of Canadians who seek medical treatments abroad	Health Canada, Statistics Canada, Provincial Health Ministries, CRA

Issue	Description	Relevant Government Bodies
Tax policy	Need to examine the indirect incentives of existing tax policies applicable to Canadians residing abroad	CRA, Statistics Canada
External voting	Need to re-examine the efficacy of the current mail-in voting method and consider adopting electronic voting from abroad	Elections Canada, GAC
Voting Regulations	Need to centralize information about federal and provincial voting regulations applicable to citizens residing abroad	Elections Canada, Provincial electoral bodies, Canada.ca
Economic Development Engagement	Need to strengthen the connection between Canadian representatives abroad and the diaspora, as well as its professional network. More transparent and strategic engagement is needed by overseas GAC and TCS teams	GAC, TCS
Chambers of Commerce	Need to enumerate relevant Chambers of Commerce that include members of the Canadian diaspora and help expand Canada's professional networks abroad	GAC, TCS, Canada.ca
Cultivating the diaspora	Need to create strategic programs to strengthen and support the Canadian diaspora by encouraging community-and identity-building. The seven APFC mechanisms for cultivation of diasporas provide a helpful outline for the creation of a feasible government program.	GAC, Heritage Canada, Canada.ca, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

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