

International Experience Canada (IEC): Opportunities Abroad for Students and Youth

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In 1967 the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), the Department of Employment and Immigration (predecessor of CIC and HRSDC) and the Secretary of State (predecessor of Canadian Heritage), and then Cabinet approved the creation of an international travel and exchange program. Since 1986, DFAIT has had the federal responsibility of managing the International Experience Canada (IEC) program.

This program was previously known as the International Youth Programs and the International Exchange Programs. The purpose of these international exchange programs is "to foster close bilateral relations between Canada and other countries through cultural exchanges that give participants a mutual understanding of the other culture through a travel, life and work experience abroad." These programs are also known as Working Holidays Abroad.

Canadians and foreign nationals between the ages of 18 and 35 can benefit from the IEC program under bilateral arrangements on youth mobility established by the Canadian and foreign governments. In addition, organizations recognized and monitored by DFAIT that support youth mobility, such as SWAP Working Holidays (formerly known as Student Work Abroad Program (SWAP)), International Association for Students of Economics and Commerce (AIESEC), Chantiers Jeunesse, Canadian Host Family Association (CHFA), International Rural Exchange (IRE), GO International, and Mennonite Central Committee of Canada can arrange youth exchanges with foreign countries. These organizations have multilateral arrangements with partners in more than 50 countries. The Department of Foreign Affairs also facilitates a number of inter-institutional exchanges.

Other means for obtaining work permits for young foreign nationals in Canada and young Canadians working abroad fall under the following categories:

- Young Professionals
- International Co-op (Internships/Work placements/Inter-institutional agreements)
- International Co-op (On-the-Job training) 18-35 employer-specific 12 months

If there is an agreement with Canada there will be similar programs under the bilateral exchanges with respective countries for Canadian students and youth who wish to travel and work abroad.

These youth international work programs are based on country agreements where their nationals are allowed to visit and work in Canada for a period of time. In return Canadian youths can go to foreign countries and gain foreign experience and see different parts of the world. Since the programs are based on an exchange of young people, they are considered employment neutral. However, many of these programs have quotas so that spaces may fill up quickly. Some of the programs are limited to full time students. Some open work permits also require medicals, or they are subject to occupation restrictions until a medical is obtained.

Similar bi-lateral exchange programs exist for teachers that allow them to work in a foreign country for a specified period of time.

Countries where bi-lateral agreements for Working Holidays Abroad with Open Work Permits are in place.

- Australia – Age 18-30. 24 months. No limit.
- Costa Rica – Age 18-35. 12 months. Two times repeating category is not permitted
- France – Age 18-35. 12 months. Two times repeating category is not permitted.
- Germany – Age 18-35. 12 months. Two times repeating category is not permitted.
- Greece – Age 18-35. 12 months. Two times repeating category is not permitted.
- Hong Kong – Age 18-30. 12 months. One time only.
- Ireland – Age 18-35. 24 months. One time only.

- Italy – Age 18-35. 6 Months. One time only.
- Japan – Age 18-30. 12 months. One time only.
- Korea – Age 18-30. 12 months. One time only.
- Mexico – Age 18-29. 12 months. Two times repeating category is not permitted
- Poland – Age 18-35. 12 months. Two times–Repeat category is not permitted.
- Spain – Age 18-35. 12 months. Two times repeating category is not permitted.
- Sweden – Age 18-30. 12 months. Two times repeating category is not permitted.
- United Kingdom – Age 18-30. 12 months. Two times repeat category allowed.
- Ukraine – Age 18-35. 12 months. Two times repeating category is not permitted.

Bi-lateral youth exchange agreements exist for most European countries and a number of other countries as well.

Applications under International Experience Canada (IEC)

Applications from foreign nationals who want to work in Canada are reviewed first by DFAIT and then by CIC at missions abroad. Qualified foreign nationals holding a valid Letter of Introduction (LOI) may receive a work permit without requiring a Labour Market Opinion (LMO) upon their arrival at a Canadian Port of Entry (POE). IEC participants are exempted from the work permit application processing fee [R299(2)(i)], and, where applicable, the temporary resident visa processing fee [R296(2)(d) & R297(1.1)]. However, qualified foreign nationals are subject to an IEC Program Participation Fee (PPF) of \$150CDN [approved under the *Financial Administration Act* and the *User Fees Act*]. This fee is to be collected by DFAIT. DFAIT does not finance or subsidize any applicants or participants under IEC.

In 2010, DFAIT (IEC unit) prepared a *Standard Operational Procedures* (SOP) manual to improve the management of the *International Experience Canada* (IEC) program worldwide. Relevant DFAIT, CIC and CBSA officers and immigration

lawyers are encouraged to consult this manual, which is available by request through DFAIT (IEC unit).

Role of DFAIT/CIC/CBSA

- DFAIT-NHQ (IEC unit), in consultation with CIC-NHQ, negotiates a treaty, memorandum of understanding or diplomatic exchange with foreign governments to establish bilateral arrangements on youth mobility. In October each year, DFAIT-NHQ determines annual numerical limits, in consultation with CIC-NHQ, for the admission of foreign participants to Canada under the various bilateral youth work programs.
- DFAIT staff at missions abroad promotes this program in foreign countries that are participating in the exchange. They also serve as the contact for foreign IEC applicants. DFAIT staff receives the IEC applications. The officials then verify that the applicants meet the IEC's program requirements. They also collect the IEC *Program Participation Fee* (PPF) from qualified applicants. DFAIT personnel then transfer all applications that satisfy IEC's program requirements to the appropriate CIC unit for further processing. In applications where fraudulent information is found, DFAIT staff also transfers these applications to the appropriate CIC unit and notifies CBSA of the attempted fraud.
- CIC unit at the respective missions abroad receives applications from DFAIT staff and processes them in accordance with the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA). The CIC unit sends out letters of refusal or a *Letter of Introduction* (LOI) to successful applicants. The validity period of LOIs issued to participants under the working holiday category is 12 months. The validity period of LOIs issued to participants under employer-specific categories is based on the terms of their contract of employment. CIC staff should also include any other relevant information in GCMS (e.g., if a participant is accepted under the International Co-op or the Young Professional category, CIC staff are to indicate in the remarks the participant's career-related field).
- CBSA officers at POE review the LOI and may issue a work permit (LMO exemption code C21). CBSA officers may refuse to issue a work permit if the LOI holder cannot to

show proof of health insurance that is valid for the entire duration of their expected stay. Proof of health insurance is a program requirement under IEC. At the Port of Entry CBSA officers may refuse entry to Canada if the applicant cannot provide a proof of health insurance or is deemed inadmissible to Canada. CBSA should enter "open" under the "Employer" section of the work permit for participants under the Working Holiday category.

As of November 1, 2010, Ports of Entries (POEs) stopped processing changes to work permits for IEC and other youth exchange programs (OB 242).

Application Processing

An IEC application package consists of two parts: 1) IEC's program requirements as set by DFAIT; and 2) immigration requirements for a work permit as set by CIC (in most cases, CIC's [IMM1295b] is used). Please note that under IEC, applicants may not use a representative to conduct business on their behalf with DFAIT.

All foreign nationals must submit their IEC application package from outside of Canada at the appropriate CIC Embassy. They may not apply to participate in the program when they are entering Canada. There is an exception for U.S. citizens who may submit their work permit application when entering Canada [R198(2)(c)].

Although Canada and the U.S. currently do not have a formal bi-lateral arrangement concerning youth mobility, U.S. citizens may benefit from the IEC program through recognized organizations such as SWAP. They may apply for a C21 work permit at a Canadian consulate or POE [R198(2)(c)] as long as they hold a valid acceptance letter from the recognized organization. See "Organizations supporting youth mobility" under *Appendix E* in the *Foreign Worker Manual (FW 1)*.

All application packages must be sent directly to the proper IEC unit at the mission and NOT to the CIC unit. If a CIC unit receives an IEC initial application package in error, the application should be forwarded to the proper IEC unit at the mission.

Citizenship and Residency

Foreign nationals applying under a bilateral arrangement must be a citizen of one of the countries with which Canada holds a

bilateral arrangement on youth mobility. Some bilateral arrangements require that the applicant be residing in the country of their citizenship at the time of application (See "*Formal Bilateral Arrangements*" under *Appendix E* in *Foreign Worker Manual (FW 1)* for details). Other bilateral arrangements allow applicants to submit their application to the Canadian mission responsible for the country where they are present and have been legally admitted [R11(2)]. However, it is advisable that applicants submit their IEC application to the Canadian mission responsible for their country of citizenship to avoid confusion and lengthy delays.

Foreign nationals applying under a Canadian organization recognized by DFAIT (IEC unit) may submit their application to any Canadian mission abroad. The Canadian organization representing these foreign nationals must first contact DFAIT (IEC unit) to find out the appropriate contact at the mission.

Dependant(s)

Applicants may not list a dependant or dependants (i.e., common-law partner/spouse and child(ren)) on their application to benefit from the IEC program. This is a program requirement. Family members cannot be part of a single IEC application. However, this requirement does not prevent dependant(s) from submitting their own individual request to come to Canada under the same or different IEC program.

Accordingly a spouse/common-law partner of an IEC participant is not eligible to receive an open work permit by virtue of the participant's IEC application. The Labour Market Opinion (LMO) exemption code C41 applies only to spouses/common-law partners of workers under CIC's *Temporary Foreign Workers Program* (NOC Levels 0, A & B).

Likewise, the child(ren) of an IEC participant is/are not eligible to obtain a study permit by virtue of their parent's participant's in the IEC program.

Dependents must submit their own application for a study permit if they intend to attend school in Canada.

Different IEC categories

In general, foreign nationals fall under one of the following three IEC categories:

- Working Holiday – for applicants whose intention is to travel in Canada and work in order to supplement their financial resources. For tracking purposes, officers enter Special Program Code ‘WHP.’
- International Co-op – for IEC participants who are registered post-secondary students in their home country and who are fulfilling part of their academic curriculum in Canada by completing a pre-arranged work placement that is related to their field of study. CIC officers should enter Special Program Code ‘ICP’ for tracking purposes.
- Young Professionals – for IEC participants whose intention is to gain work experience in Canada under a pre-arranged contract of employment in support of their professional development. For tracking purposes, CIC officers should enter Special Program Code ‘YPP.’
- Summer Job (France only) – officers should enter Special Program Code ‘JOB.’

Different countries may have different names for these categories as well as variations (e.g., the MOU between Canada and the Republic of Korea only offers the working holiday category). The work to be performed by foreign nationals under IEC, in general, is remunerated.

As of March 2011, the Special Program Code ‘IYP’ is no longer valid. Officers are required to enter the Special Program Codes identified above, or enter ‘IEC’ for ‘other’ programs that do not fall under these main categories.

Conditions of a work permit:

Participants under the working holiday category may receive an open work permit with a validity period of 12 to 24 months. (See *Appendix E* in *Foreign Worker Manual (FW 1)* for details.) Participants under one of the other two categories may receive employer-specific work permits with a validity period that reflects the length of their contract of employment. Participants holding an employer-specific work permit must submit an application either online or by mail to CPC-Vegreville if they want to change the conditions imposed on their work permit including a change in employer.

(Use the following link for instructions on how to do this: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/applications/extend-worker.asp>).

The validity period of a C21 work permit may not exceed the validity period of a participant’s passport. IEC participants may not request to extend their stay under IEC unless the extension is within the original authorized period of stay as per their *Letter of Introduction (LOI)*.

Repeat participation

Foreign nationals applying under a bilateral arrangement are permitted to benefit from the IEC program, in most cases (Australia being an exception), twice in their lifetime. However, they generally need to apply under a different category (i.e., Working Holiday, International Co-op or Young Professionals) each time. In addition the two stays must be not continuous. See “*Formal Bilateral Arrangements*” under *Appendix E* in *Foreign Worker Manual (FW 1)* for more information.

The guidelines on repeat participation vary for foreign nationals applying under a Canadian organization. Again see *Appendix E* in *Foreign Worker Manual (FW 1)* for the particulars.

Organizations supporting youth mobility IEC also recognizes a number of organizations that have multilateral arrangements with partners in foreign countries. For a complete list and where they operate, see *Appendix E* in *Foreign Worker Manual (FW 1)* under Multilateral Exchanges.

For more information regarding the IEC program, please send an e-mail to experience@international.gc.ca.

See also *Student Work Abroad Programme (SWAP)* and *Working Holiday Abroad (WHP)*. This short review is based on *Foreign Worker Manual (FW 1)* dated March 3, 2013.

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