# Diasporas: A Policy Review Prepared for the Privy Council Office Hila Olyan Phoebe Smith

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Since its inception, Canada has been shaped by immigrant communities. This trend continues today, with immigrant groups gradually forming larger and more organized diasporas, which play an increasingly important role in shaping Canadian policy. At the same time, a growing number of Canadian citizens are living and working abroad in a multitude of countries. Recent events such as the 2006 Lebanon Crisis and the deployment of Canadian observers to the Ukrainian elections highlight the fact that both diasporas in Canada and the Canadian diaspora abroad present challenges and opportunities for policy formulation. Many political observers are expressing increasing concern for diaspora politics, arguing that partisan pandering to different ethnic communities undermines not only policy formation but national unity in general.

This review offers an overview of the diaspora policy context in Canada and presents an analysis of the varying ways in which the Canadian government can respond to these new demands. Ultimately, a comprehensive diaspora policy is advocated to address three overarching objectives: improving Canada's international standing and promoting Canadian interests, facilitating transfers of knowledge between diaspora groups and the Canadian government, and systematically addressing the concerns of diaspora groups. The key recommendations of this review are to: a) develop a comprehensive and cohesive policy statement, b) form a parliamentary sub-committee on diasporas, c) create diaspora units within key government departments, d) implement knowledge sharing mechanisms, and e) encourage stronger ties between expatriates and their countries of origin.

### **CONTEXT**

### **CURRENT SITUATION**

At confederation in 1867, mostly consisting of Aboriginal people and a growing population of several hundred thousand European settlers, Canada was already becoming a country of immigrants. Immigration to Canada from across Europe and the United States continued<sup>1</sup> and the revision of the Immigration Act in 1967 further opened the borders to immigrants from around the world. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two in five Canadians aged 15 years or older were either immigrants or first generation Canadians.<sup>2</sup> By 2007, 6.18 million Canadians were foreign born, and

Statistics Canada estimates that by 2031, approximately one half of the population of Canada will be immigrants or have at least one parent who was born in a different country.<sup>3</sup> Of these new citizens, many retain close times to their homelands. As immigrant groups have grown and their levels of organization have increased, these communities have come to form significant diaspora groups in Canada.

'Diaspora,' derived from the Greek verb meaning 'to sow or scatter'<sup>4</sup> refers to organized movements of people sharing common national or ethnic identities.

These diasporas have, especially in recent years, become increasingly important to Canadian policy-making and Canada's bilateral and multilateral relations. Largely as a result of increasingly accessible communication technologies and a greater emphasis on multiculturalism,<sup>5</sup> diaspora groups have become more organized and prominent in policy discussions. However, at present informal and somewhat limited relations such as divisional level round table discussions between DFAIT officials and diaspora leaders<sup>6</sup> or Ministerial statements celebrating specific Diaspora Days,<sup>7</sup> form the bulk of communication avenues and diaspora relations.

At the same time as diaspora groups gain prominence in Canada, Canadians, as indicated in figure 1, have increasingly migrated abroad (though at present the trend is decreasing). The United Nations has calculated that migrants comprise 3.0 percent of the global population. By contrast, overseas Canadians constitute a significant 8.3 percent of the Canadian population. These Canadian non-residents, many of whom remain tied to Canada whether through personal identification, familial ties or financial obligations, play an important part in facilitating Canada's relations overseas. These Canadian "pseudo diplomats" serve as an economic bridge to overseas markets and as informal cultural ambassadors. A survey by the Asia Pacific Foundation further emphasizes the importance of the Canadian diaspora which is not only large but exists "[not as] scattered individuals, but as an interactive community with various organizations associated with Canada." <sup>10</sup>

### CRITICAL EVENTS AND EMERGING TRENDS

The political influence that diasporas carry, for better or for worse, has grown. Increased catering to diaspora groups by politicians has led to a debate surrounding the ethics of "diaspora politics." Moreover, several high profile events in recent years highlight the critical gaps in Canadian diaspora policy. The evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon in the summer of 2006, the reaction to the Haitian earthquake, Canadian observation of Ukrainian elections, and the docking of the MV Sun Sea carrying Tamil migrants indicate a need to better communicate with diaspora groups in Canada as well as Canadians abroad. These focusing events further serve to demonstrate the influence of groups within the country and the potential that overseas Canadians may have to influence policy abroad.

### The World in Canada<sup>13</sup>

There is a further need to develop the relationship between diasporas and policymakers in Canada. Development, and specifically remittances, standout as areas that can be improved by stronger relations. Diasporas in Canada can and do promote development in their countries of origin. Most significantly, they are a force for mobilizing resources through individual remittances and increasingly through collective donations to fund development projects in their home communities. <sup>14</sup> They also bring to light the intricate challenges facing development programmers in their homelands and can provide valuable insight into priority areas and culturally sensitive issues which Canadian programmers may be ill-trained to address.

### Ukrainian election monitoring

Due in large measure to the efforts of Canada's highly motivated Ukrainian diaspora,<sup>a</sup> in recent years, Canada has taken on a leading role in providing monitors to Ukraine's elections. In 2004, the Ukrainian diaspora and the Canadian Government sent 1000 observers to monitor the presidential election.<sup>15</sup> In 2010 the Ukrainian diaspora deployed 115 observers to monitor the presidential election and was instrumental in the Canadian government's decision to fund an additional 200 observers.<sup>16</sup> These actions have gained Canada recognition for working to advance principles of good governance.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup> through the Canadian Ukrainian Congress and Canada Ukraine Foundation

### Canadians in the World

Despite a sizeable overseas population, Canada has not established a comprehensive policy for responding to the Canadian diaspora. This is problematic because Canadians abroad present opportunities as well as threats to Canadian interests. (See figure II). This shortfall is particularly apparent in light of a recent study which suggests that of non-resident Canadians, 64 percent continue to call Canada their home, and close to 70 percent indicate an intention to return to Canada in the future.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, overseas Canadians are dispersed throughout the globe, sometimes residing in weak and fragile states experiencing instability such as natural disasters in Pakistan and Haiti or political turmoil such as in Lebanon and Sri Lanka.<sup>18</sup> These Canadians occasionally require consular assistance. The Lebanese situation serves as a prime example:

### Evacuation from Lebanon

During the summer of 2006, thousands of Canadians were caught in the cross-fire between Israel and Hezbollah during the Lebanese-Israel War. Appeals for federal government assistance led to the evacuation of some 15,000 Canadian citizens. The event was portrayed by the media as a costly bail-out with a bill of approximately \$94 million, <sup>19</sup> setting the stage for a rise in discussion surrounding dual and multiple citizenships and limits to the extent of Canadian government responsibility.

### **INDICATORS**

The growing presence of diasporas clearly presents both challenges and opportunities for Canada. In order to harness the wealth of information and resources provided by diaspora groups, and to mitigate against adverse repercussions, Canada must establish a formal diaspora policy. The following indicators further serve to illustrate this growing need:

| Indicator  | Policy Concern   | Trend                                  |
|--|--|--|
| Diaspora Groups in<br>Canada                               | As diaspora groups in Canada grow and become more numerous, Canada requires an official policy.  | 1                                      |
| Canadians living abroad                                    | As the number of Canadians living abroad increases, Canada may require more comprehensive strategies for maintaining/severing ties with these citizens.  | 1                                      |
| Remittances from Canada                                    | Remittances leaving Canada are primarily individual contributions to families in countries of origin. Better data and collective donations can be used for more responsible and effective development. | (US \$6.3 billion, twice Canada's ODA) |
| Official government programs/ policies regarding diasporas | Canada requires a comprehensive strategy for utilizing diaspora<br>groups as a resource of information and as a mechanism for<br>promoting relations with other countries.                             | <b>♦</b>                               |

### **POLICY PROCESS**

### **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

As discussed above, there is currently no comprehensive diaspora policy in Canada. The goals of such a policy should support and reinforce the objectives of other government policies toward minority groups such as multiculturalism and immigration, as well as foreign policy objectives such as improved diplomacy and development programming.

### PRIORITY ONE: Improve Canada's International Standing and Promote Canadian Interests

By more effectively utilizing the resources that diaspora groups bring to the country, Canada will be in a position to advance better policies that help tackle issues facing the global community. Strong, well-supported diaspora groups will form ties with other members of their global diaspora, helping build trans-national linkages with civil society actors around the globe. This will increase the potential partners for the Canadian government in pursuit of its international objectives. When combined with the transfer of knowledge, which allows Canada to have a more nuanced understanding of the context when designing and implementing international programmes, more responsible and advantageous policy making is possible.

### PRIORITY TWO: Facilitate Knowledge Transfers

Closer linkages between diaspora groups and the Canadian government would also allow Canada to take advantage of the knowledge citizens bring of the cultural, social, economic, and political environments in other countries. This information would then be used to inform foreign policy areas including international development, diplomacy, international trade and investment, technological research and development, and security. Diaspora groups can also act as "cultural brokers," using their knowledge to improve Canada's diplomatic ties with these countries.<sup>b</sup>

### PRIORITY THREE: Systematically Address the Concerns of Diaspora Groups

In the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, the Government of Canada expressed its commitment to "preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians." A policy towards diasporas within Canada would harmonize with this objective by empowering diaspora groups and encouraging them to maintain their heritage. An official policy would allow diaspora groups to feel heard and supported by the government, and could cultivate a spirit of reciprocity, allowing for greater integration in Canadian society while at the same time maintaining links with their countries of origin and with other non-Canadian diaspora members.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>b</sup> Jean Chretien used this strategy when he brought Sikh Cabinet Ministers on a state visit to India, who provided him with insight into their culture that allowed him to build stronger diplomatic relations between Canada and Punjab.

### **KEY PLAYERS**

|                        | Organization   | Interest and Relationship to Policy   |
|------------------------|--|---|
|                        | Privy Council<br>Office                                    | <ul> <li>responsible for coordinating collaboration on complex issues such as multiculturalism<sup>21</sup></li> <li>tasked with providing strategic oversight for proposed diaspora policy</li> </ul>  |
| Government Departments | CIDA   | - implements programmes in a variety of countries, <sup>22</sup> many of which have sizeable diaspora groups in Canada  |
| ment Dep               | DFAIT  | - seeks to promote Canada's international interests which includes supporting Canadians who travel or live abroad <sup>23</sup>   |
| Govern                 | CIC  | - responsible for helping integrate immigrants into Canada and encourages ethnic and religious communities to participate in society <sup>24</sup>  |
|                        | DND, CBSA,<br>CSIS, CSE                                    | -overseas Canadian security including bilateral defence relations, <sup>25</sup> border control, <sup>26</sup> enhancing national security interests and safety of Canadians, <sup>27</sup> and acquiring and using information for foreign intelligence. <sup>28</sup> |
|                        | Diaspora Groups in<br>Canada                               | - interested in gaining a greater role in Canadian politics and advancing the interests of their countries of origin  |
| Non-government         | International and<br>Canadian NGOs/<br>Research Institutes | <ul> <li>available implementing partners, would benefit from linkages with diaspora groups</li> <li>develop opportunities for professionals to return to countries of origin to share their knowledge and expertise.<sup>c</sup></li> </ul>                             |
| Non-g                  | Canadians  | <ul> <li>improved international standing reflects positively on Canadians</li> <li>better integration of diaspora group strengthens Canadian multiculturalism</li> </ul>  |
|                        | Countries of origin for diaspora groups in Canada          | - seek improved relationship and benefits from Canadian connections including in the areas of development, trade, security, etc.  |
|                        | Countries of residence for Canadians abroad                | hanatit trom knowladge and skills brought by Canadian expatriates   |

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>c</sup> For example, the North South Institute's *Giving Back* initiative, seeks to engage the African Diaspora in Canada to strengthen health systems in Southern Africa. (http://www.nsi-ins.ca/english/pdf/African%20Diaspora\_finalV2.pdf)

### **POLICY ANALYSIS**

### ALTERNATIVES, CONSTRAINTS, AND EXPECTED IMPACTS

There are multiple alternatives available to Canada to address diaspora issues. Some alternatives favour more onerous commitments that address complex issues, while others speak to targeted policy changes. The following alternatives are limited to those which address the three major objectives developed in the policy process section of this review. The alternatives examined below, though presented with respective constraints and expected impacts, all seek to achieve the suggested priority goals for Canada:

1. Improve Canada's international status and reputation and promote Canadian interests.

| Alternative   | Constraints   | Expected Impact   |
|---|---|---|
| Allocate funding for initiating conversation with diaspora groups <sup>d</sup>                                | -funding -trained personnel -initiating conversation may falsely imply a commitment to policy change.   | -facilitates information gathering so as to strategize partnerships, trade-relations and development initiatives -promote government- relations and encourages civil society involvement -indicates the high value of multiculturalism within Canada  |
| Create a fund to be used by Canadians abroad to assist vulnerable populations in emergencies. <sup>e</sup>    | -funding -personnel -potential for inefficient or inappropriate spending due to immediacy of need   | <ul> <li>-encourages Canadians to rapidly assist in international disasters</li> <li>-shows a commitment of Canada to assist in times of need</li> </ul>  |
| Restructure remittance policies to encourage collective donations and allow for greater tracking <sup>f</sup> | - informal nature of some remittances is not amenable to such policy -privacy concerns -lack of capacity to manage volume/intricacies of data | -collective remittances are viewed as contribution by Canada rather than by individuals thus enhancing Canada's reputation -larger funding can be used to promote more complex, long-term development initiatives rather than short term, individual, "band-aid" solutions -would allow better tracking on funds leaving Canada thus mitigating against the use of Canadian funds in illegal activities or to promote sectarian conflict <sup>29</sup> - capital is removed from the Canadian economy |
| Utilizing diaspora<br>members as cultural<br>brokers and<br>mediators   | -costs associated with meetings -perceptions of group favouritism -difficulty evaluating quality of assistance                                | -promote better personal/ political/trade relations -assist Canada in making informed decisions -promotes Canada as a multi-cultural country and as a 'good' place to live -increased Canadian visibility   |

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>d</sup> this alternative address all three goal areas

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>e</sup> This idea has been previously proposed by CANADEM

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>f</sup> For example, working with FINTRAC (http://www.fintrac-canafe.gc.ca/fintrac-canafe/1-eng.asp) to lower transaction costs and manage data.

### 2. Facilitate knowledge transfers

| Alternative  | Constraints  | Expected Impact   |
|--|--|---|
| Allocate funding for research<br>and data collection by<br>independent research<br>institutes                                  | -costly -may not be perceived as a good use of tax dollars by some Canadians -difficulties related to availability of information                                | -should be used to inform and create Canadian diaspora policies -research can measure the activities/impacts of diaspora groups   |
| Re-introduce the mandatory long-form census including questions pertaining to diaspora issues                                  | -expense of designing and<br>facilitating the survey<br>process<br>-privacy concerns<br>-political party opposition  | -better understanding of diaspora communities -improved data regarding remittances -important for creating/adapting appropriate policies -more accurate information due to mandatory nature of the census as compared to current voluntary form |
| Task Canadian Embassies and High Commissions with creating programming for Canadian expats and increasing registration abroad. | -costs -level of interest from non-resident Canadians - host country approval  | - knowledge transfer between Canadians and government -better relations with Canadians abroad -may encourage ties to Canada which increase investment, remittances, and repatriation -encourages "global citizenship"                           |
| Promote dual-citizenship   | -may be unpopular with<br>some Canadians<br>-potential for another<br>"Lebanon."<br>-encouraging ties to<br>countries of origin may<br>jeopardize national unity | -promotes multiculturalism -recognizes the ties of Canadians to Canada as well as other countries -encourages circular, cross-border mobility thereby increasing the potential for knowledge gain and foreign experience                        |
| Facilitate debriefings with<br>Canadians who<br>have spent time<br>living/working overseas                                     | -lack of incentives to<br>participate<br>-limits of individual<br>experience   | - additional sources of information outside of the formal diplomatic processes/personnel which could be used to better inform foreign policy (ie. development, election monitoring, defence/peacekeeping)                                       |

### 3. Systematically address the concerns of diaspora groups in Canada.

| Alternative  | Constraints   | Expected Impact  |
|--|---|--|
| Create divisions within federal government departments tasked with diaspora relations  | - costs -requires trained personnel -possible cross-departmental contradictions | -would establish a concrete mechanism for channelling disapora concerns/interests relating to both domestic and foreign policy <sup>g</sup> -would assist in communicating with diaspora groups  |
| Provide training and technical assistance to diaspora groups in order to enhance organization.  -may be considered "pandering" to diaspora politics -may create perceived/actual favouritism between diaspora groups and non-diaspora communities -could increase tensions and conflict between groups |   | <ul> <li>higher quality policy making as a result of increased collaboration</li> <li>channels allowing competition between groups based of efficacy would mitigate against diaspora politics</li> <li>better planning and implementation of development projects due to availability of specialized partners with knowledge and experience in the area</li> </ul> |

g

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>g</sup> For example, the Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (ICAD) reported that HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects Canadians of African heritage. Of approximately 56 000 Canadians living with HIV, approximately 10 percent are of African heritage while the population group constitutes only 2.2 percent of the Canadian population. This same group is also disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. (http://www.icad-cisd.com/pdf/HIV-AIDS\_AfricanDiaspora\_EN.pdf)

### PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are largely cross-cutting and address the goals and objectives identified above. Though divided according to primary target groups, the recommendations serve to benefit a wide range of stakeholders. The implementation timeline is summarized in figure 3.

### Diasporas in Canada

### 1. Develop a Policy Statement on Diaspora Groups

The Canadian Government should release a comprehensive policy statement for engaging with diaspora groups. The policy statement should address the ways in which the government will coordinate its efforts for the common goals of improving Canada's international status, facilitating knowledge transfers, and addressing the concerns of diaspora groups in Canada. The Privy Council Office should monitor and evaluate implementation of the policy statement and foster coordination between government departments to achieve the objectives set forth.

| Costs    | - focusing attention on this policy area may result in less consideration of other important priorities   |
|----------|---|
| Benefits | <ul> <li>encourages a whole-of-government approach to addressing diaspora groups</li> <li>establishes a set of comprehensive guidelines to drive policy formulation</li> <li>helps to mitigate against negative effect of diaspora politics through providing a systematic, depoliticized approach to diaspora groups.</li> </ul> |
| Timeline | Release statement by April 2012   |

### 2. Create a House of Commons sub-Committee on diasporas to provide strategic oversight

The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (CIMM) should create a sub-committee on diasporas with a mandate to collect information. The first task of the committee should be to compile research for a report measuring the role and potential of diaspora groups in affecting foreign policy. Important areas to cover would include remittances, migration patterns, and networks, with an emphasis on ascertaining the opportunities and risks presented by diasporas in Canada. The sub-committee should also be tasked with monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the policy statement and making recommendations for revisions if necessary.

| Costs    | - minimal operating costs - potential difficulties in delineating responsibilities between diaspora divisions in different government departments may result in disputes over who may claim ownership of the policies  |
|----------|--|
| Benefits | - bi-partisan membership ensures a variety of perspectives will be considered - sub-committee consults with a wide variety of actors in the epistemic communities, which results in better informed policy formulation |

| Timeline | Create sub-committee upon release of the policy statement. First report should be complete by October 2012 in order to inform the federal budget for the following fiscal |
|----------|---|
|          | year  |

# 3. Create diaspora engagement programs within public engagement divisions in key departments $^{\rm h}$ (and create public-engagement divisions where necessary) $^{30}$

These programs/divisions would be responsible for increasing public engagement including diaspora groups in policy development as well as overall adherence to the policy statement.

| - monetary costs for setting up and running a department division - human resources requirements may result in understaffing of other divisions |          |  |
|---|----------|--|
|   | Benefits | <ul> <li>allows each department to capitalize on the knowledge and skills of diaspora groups, using this to improve a variety of policies</li> <li>building linkages between government and key organizations in different countries</li> <li>may identify partners to coordinate with toward shared objectives</li> </ul> |
|   | Timeline | Divisions should be established at the beginning of the 2013-14 fiscal year  |

### Canadian Diaspora

### 1. Task the Sub-Committee on Diasporas with a report on Canadians living abroad

The goal of the report should be to better understand the opportunities and threats posed by the Canadian expatriate population, with a focus on strategies to maximize their utility to Canada.

| Costs    | - minimal operating costs  |
|----------|--|
| Benefits | - greater understanding of the potential for Canadian diaspora to improve different areas of government policy |
| Timeline | Begin after completion of first report, complete by fiscal year end 2013-14                                    |

### 2. Improve knowledge sharing between Canadians abroad and the Canadian government

Canada should seek to maximize the utility of Canadians living abroad. There is a limit to the number of government officials that conduct official diplomatic efforts. Thus, embassies and Canadian High Commissions should be mandated with improving engagement with expatriates who often possess strong cultural-linguistic skills. Through the Registration of Canadians Abroad (ROCA) service provided by DFAIT,<sup>31</sup> these offices should develop strategies for greater communication with Canadians.

<sup>h</sup> For example, DFAIT has a Consultation and Liaison Division which provides an avenue for trade-related consultation.

| Costs    | - minimal costs for debriefings, primarily on a volunteer basis -decentralizing diplomatic efforts results in weaker capacity to present unified diplomacy strategy  |  |
|----------|--|--|
| Benefits | <ul> <li>improved information flows between Canadian citizens and diplomatic offices</li> <li>information can be passed on to relevant departments, informing a variety of policies in the region</li> <li>builds a variety of linkages between Canada and the host countries</li> </ul> |  |
| Timeline | Begin immediately, ongoing   |  |

### 3. Enhance relationship between expatriates and their countries of origin.

Canada should maintain a dual citizenship policy and promote initiatives to improve ties between Canada and other countries. There are many opportunities for increasing investment, tourism, and information exchange regarding areas including health, environment and technology. Engagement can be improved through the implementation of policies designed to encourage overseas voting, membership in professional organizations, and economic contributions via taxes, investment, business, and remittances. Programs such as the Renfort Programme proposed by CANADEM, which seeks to provide monetary resources to expatriates to facilitate an immediate response to humanitarian crises could also strengthen inter-country relations and advance Canada's international image.

| Costs    | <ul> <li>potential for another crisis like the Lebanese evacuation</li> <li>encouraging migrants to maintain ties to their countries of origin may create barriers to national unity in country of residence</li> </ul>  |
|----------|--|
| Benefits | - encourages highly skilled foreign-born workers to become Canadian citizens as they can do so without sacrificing their sense of belonging to their countries of origin. Immigrants currently account for more than 70% of labour force growth <sup>32</sup> - recognizes the reality that a large number of Canadian immigrants - especially those of working age spend much time in their countries of origin as well as in Canada - encourages Canadian-born citizens to work abroad and bring their knowledge and understanding of different regions back to Canada |
| Timeline | Begin immediately, ongoing   |

Particularly in the wake of a shifting global order in which Canada's influence seems to be declining, drawing on the strong ties between diaspora groups in Canada and their countries of origin, and engaging non-resident Canadians, can serve to provide Canada with a wealth of information while reinforcing Canadian multiculturalism and enhancing Canada's place in the world.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>i</sup> CANADEM is a Canadian NGO. ( www.canadem.ca)

### **APPENDIX**

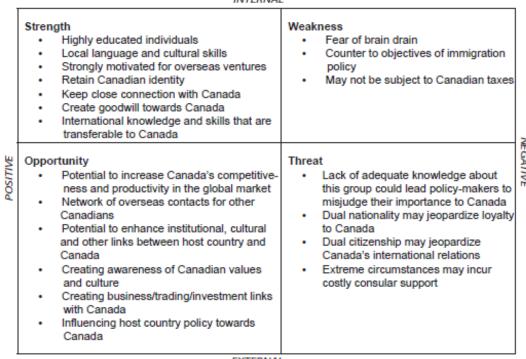
Figure 1: Rate of Canadian Departures from Canada per year (migration)



Source: Statistics Canada

(http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/Statcan/11F0019MIE/11F0019MIE2006288.pdf)

Figure 2: Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (SWOT) Analysis of Canadians Living Abroad INTERNAL

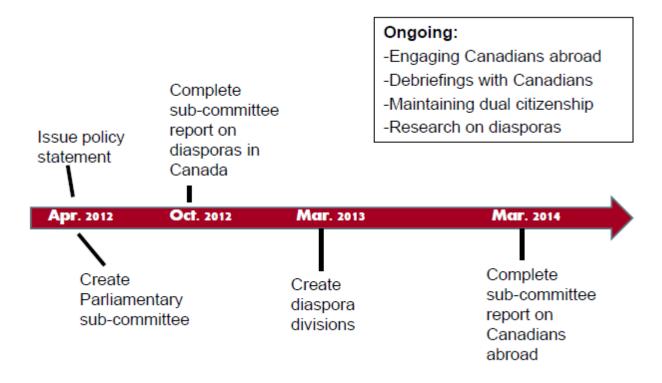


EXTERNAL

Source: Asia Pacific Foundation

(http://www.asiapacific.ca/sites/default/files/archived\_pdf/commentary/cac46.pdf)

**Figure 3: Implementation Timeline** 



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