

**Policy Making in Times of Crisis: The Case of Immigration  
and International Students in Canada During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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## Abstract

This research explores policy making in time of crisis, by examining immigration policy measures introduced in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on international student recruitment and retention in postsecondary education institutions. The study adopts a qualitative research design with policy analysis as a research method, and used elements of Kingdon's multiple streams approach (MSA) (1984) and Keeler's macro-window-opening process (MWOP) (1993) to develop its theoretical framework. Data for this study was gathered through published policy documents as well as semi-structured interviews with diverse policy actors, including civil servants, senior leaders in educational institutions, national and provincial associations, immigration consultants and education agents. Findings of this study suggest that the immigration measures introduced by the Canadian government during the pandemic can be classified into four main types: travel regulations, online learning provisions, work-related measures, and immigration policies (including pathways to permanent residency and immigration level plans). In alignment with the theoretical framework, the study finds that the COVID-19 pandemic served as a crisis that, in combination with the government's pro-immigration policy mandate, helped create a macro-window of opportunity that allowed for major reforms supporting continued international student recruitment and retention, most notably through online learning provisions and work-related policies. Interview participants noted that the government's approach to policy making evolved over time with a noticeable shift from reactive to proactive strategies, that involved increased consultation and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The focus of the policy measures also shifted from public health to economic recovery as the immediate threats of the pandemic were contained. The findings identify chaos and uncertainty in the environment, communication gaps, and tensions between

federal and provincial government as the main limitations that impacted policy outcomes and their scope of achievement. Moreover, the findings emphasize the key role of policy entrepreneurs, including government actors and national associations, in shaping policy decisions. The research highlights gaps in the existing framework and identifies the need for considering variables such as institutional constraints, net impact assessment, geopolitical factors, and policy alignment, especially when studying policy making in an international context. Findings of this study are particularly relevant to inform high-impact and rapid-response policy changes to support the international education sector in Canada.

**Keywords:** Kingdon's multiple stream approach, Keeler's macro-window-opening process, immigration policy, international education, COVID-19, policy measures, window of opportunity, Canadian policy making, online learning, work-related policies.

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## List of Acronyms

ADM	Associate Deputy Minister
AIPP	Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BC	British Columbia
BHASE	Business, Humanities, Health, Arts, Social Science, and Education
CAPS-I	Canadian Association of Public Schools – International
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CBIE	Canadian Bureau for International Education
CBSA	Canada Border Services Agency
CEC	Canadian Experience Class
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CIESC	Comparative and International Education Society of Canada
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
CSHE	Center for Studies in Higher Education
DET	Duolingo English Test
DFAIT	Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
DLI	Designated Learning Institution
EDT	Eastern Daylight Time
EU	European Union
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher Education
HESA	Higher Education Strategy Associates
ICEF	International Consultants for Education and Fairs
IE	International Education
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ILO	International Labour Organization
IP	Immigration Policy
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
IRPA	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act
ISED	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada
MSA	Multiple Streams Approach
MWOP	Macro Window-Opening Process
NAFSA	Association of International Educators
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OISE	Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
ON	Ontario

PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
PGWP	Post-Graduation Work Permit
PGWPP	Post-Graduation Work Permit Program
PHAC	Public Health Agency of Canada
PNP	Provincial Nominee Program
PR	Permanent Residency
PSE	Postsecondary Education
PT	Provinces and Territories
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SDS	Student Direct Stream
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TR	Travel Restrictions
UBC	University of British Columbia
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
VFS	Visa Facilitation Services
WHO	World Health Organization

## Chapter 1: Introduction

“Only a crisis — actual or perceived — produces real change” (Friedman, 2009, p. 14).

The beginning of the 21st century has witnessed multiple socioeconomic challenges, ranging from economic meltdowns to climate crises. Yet, no other event has had such global implications as the COVID-19 pandemic. This unprecedented crisis has tested the resilience, adaptability, and competence of nations, economies, societies, and governance structures worldwide. Governments across the globe have had to grapple with balancing public health safety, socioeconomic stability, and the continuity of essential services. In the early phase of the pandemic, Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government described how the COVID-19 pandemic changed public policy and how this “epochal event has changed the world” (Harvard Kennedy School, 2021, para. 1):

For months, the coronavirus has crawled across the globe. One person at a time, it has passed through millions, reaching every corner of the earth. And it has not only infected people, but every aspect of our human cultures. Policymakers and the public sector face their biggest test in generations—some say ever—as lives and livelihoods hang in a terrible, delicate balance. Facing health crises, economic collapse, social and political disruption, we try to take stock of what the pandemic has done and will do. (Harvard Kennedy School, 2021, para. 1)

The pandemic brought about an unparalleled contraction in global mobility. The International Civil Aviation Organization (2023) noted a decline in airline passengers of approximately 60% (2.7 billion) in 2020 compared to 2019 with an approximate loss of USD \$372 billion of gross passenger operating revenues for airlines. Global scheduled passenger traffic in 2021 compared to 2019 levels saw a contraction of approximately 49% (2.2 billion

passengers) with an approximate loss of USD \$324 billion of gross passenger operating revenues for airlines. In terms of international student mobility, UNESCO (2020) reported that nearly 91% of the world's student population, or 1.6 billion learners across 194 countries, were impacted by institutional closures and disruptions to their education systems (primary, secondary, and higher education) at the peak of the pandemic. Furthermore, in a survey conducted by Quacquarelli Symonds (2020), about 48% of prospective international students stated that they would delay or cancel their study plans due to the pandemic.

This research entailed an in-depth examination of the international education (IE) sector in Canada, specifically how immigration policy measures were enacted in support of the sector to ensure the continued recruitment and retention of international students during the challenging times brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of the analysis lies in how the Canadian government manoeuvred its policy levers in response to the pandemic's disruptions and attempted to protect the international education sector, a sector that has increasingly become a significant contributor to the nation's economic wealth as well as its social, and cultural landscape. The Canadian context presents a unique opportunity to delve into crisis-driven policy making, which stands as a remarkable case of a governmental response to a complex, rapidly evolving global crisis.

### **1.1 Why Study Policy Making During COVID-19?**

It is undeniable that crisis management necessitates strategic, informed, and decisive decision-making. However, the sudden start and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic created an environment of radical uncertainty, demanding urgent and transformative policy responses. The traditional schemas of policy making were severely tested against the unprecedented realities of

the COVID-19 crisis, challenging the adaptability of government systems, policy frameworks, and decision-making paradigms.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented challenges across the globe, and understanding the policy-making processes that were initiated and implemented in response to this crisis offers significant insights into how nations respond to massive disruptions in a highly volatile and uncertain environment. Consequently, studying policy making during the COVID-19 crisis becomes an important endeavour not only to comprehend the actions taken in the face of the pandemic, but also to prepare for future global crises that are certain to arise.

Crisis management scholars redefined crisis by introducing the concept of “transboundary crisis,” (Boin, 2009; Scharpf, 1987; Skocpol, 1979, as cited in Wenzelburger et al., 2019, p. 99). This concept explores the potential of crisis to traverse different boundaries (e.g., geographical—regions and countries; sectorial—from immigration to education; time—duration of the effects). The COVID-19 outbreak, which started as a public health crisis in China, rapidly escalated to cross various boundaries (immigration, economy, education, travel, society, countries, etc.). Dunlop et al. (2020) characterized the pandemic as the “defining policy challenge of an era” (p. 1) testing the agility and robustness of governance frameworks and societal structures across the globe. This portrayal underscores the relevance and urgency of understanding policy making during this crisis, as the insights derived can provide valuable contributions to the science and practice of public administration, public policy, crisis management, and governance.

In the context of Canada, the study of policy making during the COVID-19 crisis becomes especially pertinent when focusing on international education and its connections to immigration. These two key sectors are closely intertwined and contribute significantly to the

Canadian economy, society, and national identity. Canada has long held a reputation as a leading destination for international students, and it also has a well-established policy of using education as a pathway to immigration, thereby attracting global talent and contributing to the development of human capital. Studying the policies crafted and enacted during the COVID-19 crisis in these sectors illuminates how the nation adapted to the new challenges and adjusted its strategies for the recruitment, transition, and retention of international students amid unprecedented obstacles.

International Education and the recruitment and retention of international students is a complex enterprise that involves various stakeholders including students, educators, institutions, government agencies, national associations, and many more. Given the central importance of mobility to IE, understanding the policy responses in this realm sheds light on the ways these different actors collaborated or encountered conflicts in their efforts to navigate the pandemic and its effects. Similarly, immigration, as a complex process involving myriad policies, rules, and regulations, presents a unique set of challenges to continued mobility that were further complicated by the crisis. Analyzing immigration policies during this time provides insights into how Canada managed the delicate balance of maintaining population growth, attracting international students, ensuring the health and safety of citizens and newcomers, and adhering to international norms and responsibilities.

In addition to providing a wide-ranging understanding of the policy-making process in times of crisis, studying the response to the COVID-19 pandemic within the context of international education and immigration also offers valuable lessons for other sectors and jurisdictions. The challenges posed by the pandemic necessitated quick, effective, and innovative policy solutions. Learning from these responses can inform and guide future policy making, particularly in situations of crisis. Additionally, the study of policy making in this specific

context can contribute to theoretical frameworks and policy analysis, enriching academic discourse in these fields.

## **1.2 Setting the Context: Importance of International Education and Immigration to Canada**

Over the past few decades, international education, defined in the Canadian context as generally the recruitment and retention of international students, has emerged as a vital component of Canada's socioeconomic and cultural landscape. Owing to its multicultural ethos, high-quality education system, and welcoming immigration policies, Canada has been a preferred destination for international students seeking a quality higher education experience. During this growth period, federal and provincial governments of opposing partisan views have introduced immigration and labour legislation to position Canada as a desirable destination to attract international students to study and eventually transition to the workplace (Government of Canada, 2014, 2019b). The recruitment and retention of international students as permanent residents and skilled migrants is of particular importance for regions with workforce gaps. Retaining these international graduates provides a new pipeline of skilled labour to positively impact the regions' development and wealth (Government of Canada, 2019b).

The idea that international students can be considered "ideal immigrants" (El Masri, 2019; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a) has led to policy reforms aimed at facilitating the transition of international students to permanent residency (Government of Canada, 2017, 2019b, 2020b, 2020k, 2021e, 2022b, 2022d, 2022j, 2022k, 2022l). It is important to acknowledge that immigration is a foundational element of Canada's economic and demographic future. Immigration policies have a significant impact on Canadian society and are expected to have an even bigger impact in the future. As such, immigration is a priority for the

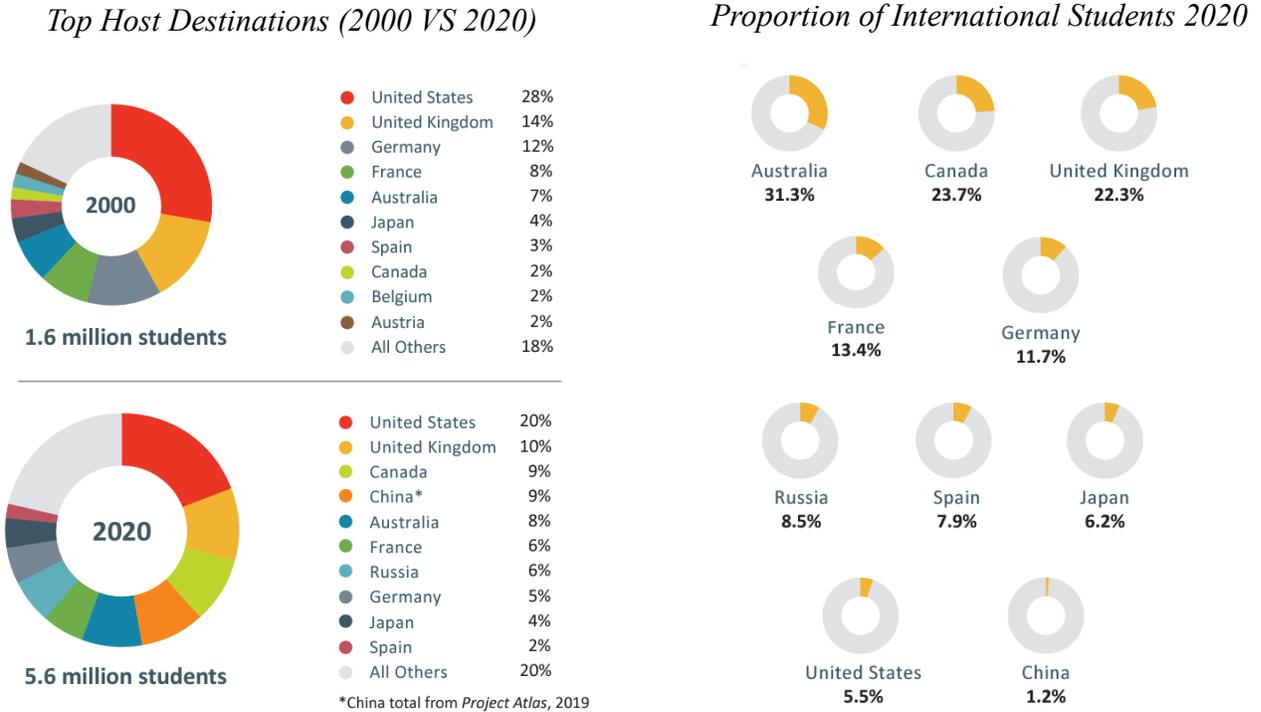
government in response to demographic, labour market, economic, and regional development objectives (Government of Canada, 2020b).

In response to increasing policy measures, international student enrolments in the Canadian postsecondary sector have exploded in recent years. As of December 31, 2019, 498,735 international students were enrolled in Canadian postsecondary institutions, representing a 14.5% increase from 2018. Canada surpassed the United Kingdom to become the third-most-popular destination country among international students globally with an astounding 642,000 foreign students in 2019 (Canadian Bureau for International Education [CBIE], 2020).

Figure 1 depicts global student mobility in higher education in 2000 and 2020, highlighting the top destinations and the proportion of international students in these countries. In 2020, there were over 5 million international students, up from 1.6 million in 2000, studying in higher education institutions. Available data show that nearly half of these students were enrolled in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. Over the last 10 years, the United States has continued to lose its market share as a top host destination. Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom host the largest shares of international students in comparison to their total higher education populations (Project Atlas, 2020).

**Figure 1**

*Global Student Mobility in Higher Education, 2000 and 2020 (pre-COVID)*

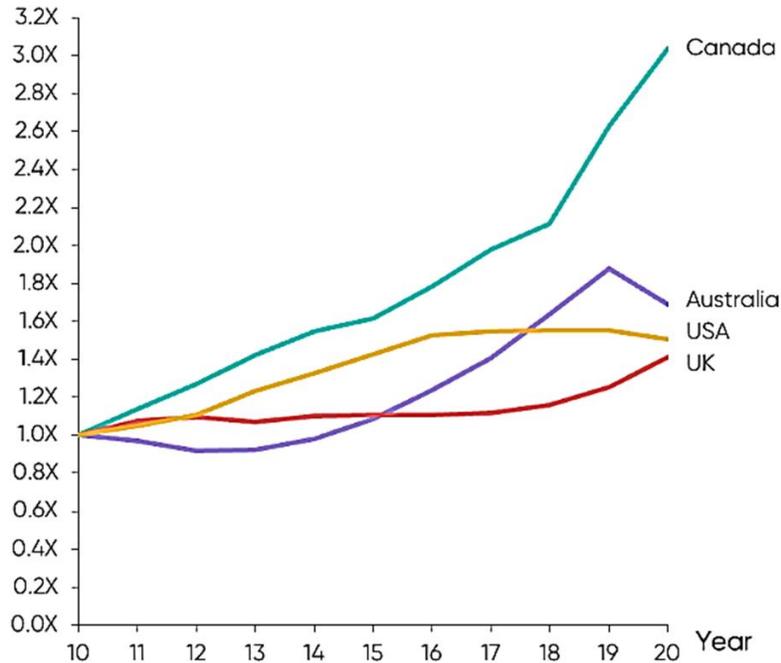


*Note.* From *Project Atlas Infographics*, by Project Atlas, 2020 (<https://www.iie.org/research-initiatives/project-atlas/explore-data/infographics/2020-project-atlas-infographics>).

Figure 2 provides a comparative graph of the growth of international student enrolment in the top four destination countries. Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and United States are commonly referred to as the “Big Four” in international education. As the major English-speaking study destinations, they compete for approximately 37% of the global flow of international students; the United States attracts just under 1 in 5 international students globally. From 2010 to 2020, Canada continued its campaign and achieved 3x growth, with the other three destinations converging around 1.5x levels of growth.

**Figure 2**

*Comparative Growth of the Big Four, 2010–2020 (pre-COVID)*



*Note.* From *US International Education in 2030. 6 Charts, Top 20 Source Countries and Preliminary Forecast*, by HolonIQ, 2023 (<https://www.holoniq.com/notes/us-international-education-in-2030-6-charts-top-20-source-countries-and-preliminary-forecast>).

According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) data, there were 807,750 international students with active study permits in Canada by the end of December 2022, compared to approximately 617,000 in 2021. This striking escalation constitutes a 31% year-over-year growth rate. The enrolment rate surpassed the pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels by 27%, illustrating a 43% increase over the past 5 years and an impressive 170% rise within the last decade (Government of Canada, 2023).

The enhanced recruitment and retention of international students and the rapid growth of the international education sector has exacerbated the postsecondary sector's dependency on international student fees (tuition, residence fees, and other revenues). International student fees added \$3.25 billion to the sector in 2016–2017 compared to a decade earlier and, in some cases, international student fees were a greater funding source than provincial grants were. According to Statistics Canada (2020a), in 2017–2018, almost \$4 billion of postsecondary education annual revenue or 40% of all tuition fees were paid by international students. Further, they spent an estimated \$21.6 billion on tuition, accommodation, and other expenses in 2018, demonstrating that the importance of international students transcends the realm of education. These students contribute significantly to Canada's economy; in 2018, they added billions to the country's GDP (Government of Canada, 2019b) and supported nearly 170,000 jobs (CBIE, 2020). Additionally, international students bring a wealth of benefits beyond economic contributions. They infuse communities with cultural diversity, drive social development, and fulfill demographic goals (Government of Canada, 2019b).

International education and immigration are deeply intertwined, and their relationship substantially influences Canada's international education sector. Through pathway programs, international students have been a key source of skilled immigration, effectively supporting Canada's population growth and labour market needs (Statistics Canada, 2019b). For instance, in 2018, 54,475 former international students transitioned to permanent residents, representing 30% of all economic-class immigrants admitted that year (Government of Canada, 2020b). This heightened reliance on international students for economic stability, demographic growth, and social vibrancy underscores the crucial interconnection between international education and

immigration. This linkage has far-reaching implications for the sector, policymakers, and Canada as a nation (Brunner, 2022).

### **1.3 Impact of COVID-19 on Canada's International Education and Immigration Goals**

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a significant disruption to Canada's international education and immigration goals. At the onset of the pandemic, international travel restrictions, public health safety measures, and subsequent economic downturn severely affected the international education sector.

In this context, international students found themselves in particularly precarious circumstances. With campuses shutting down, travel restrictions in place, and uncertainty looming large, many students had to navigate academic, financial, and personal challenges. According to a survey conducted by the CBIE (2020), 75% of international students experienced high levels of stress due to the pandemic, primarily related to health concerns, travel restrictions, and financial hardship. Additionally, border closures, major disruptions in the travel industry, limited language-testing sites, and halting of operations in visa centres impacted hundreds of thousands of prospective international students enrolled in Canadian colleges and universities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted international student fees, creating unprecedented challenges for postsecondary institutions across Canada. The onset of the pandemic in March 2020 brought about abrupt disruptions to international student enrolment, creating significant financial strain. The number of international students in Canada on study permits saw a decline of 17% in 2020 relative to 2019 (IRCC, 2022). The decline was more prominent in the university sector, which experienced a drop of 37% in study permit holders, in contrast to a 30% decrease in the college sector (Buckner et al., 2022). Similarly, Alhmidi (2021) noted that approximately 25% of Canadian universities lost 10% or more of their overall

international student enrolments in 2021, with an average decline of 2.1% across universities. This decrease in international enrolment has been attributed to closure of internationalization programs as well as global travel restrictions during COVID-19 (Firang & Mensah, 2022).

International students, who typically pay significantly higher tuition fees than domestic students do, make a substantial contribution to Canadian postsecondary institutions' revenues. However, with travel restrictions and uncertainties surrounding the continuity of their studies, many international students deferred their admission or chose to study in their home countries. Matias et al. (2021) projected that Canadian universities could lose \$438 million (−1.0%) to \$2.5 billion (−5.7%) of projected revenues for 2020–2021 due to the decline in international student enrolment. These financial impacts have resulted in severe challenges for Canadian postsecondary institutions, including budget cuts, hiring freezes, potential layoffs, and deferred maintenance (Hoye & Hatherly, 2020). Furthermore, the decline in international student numbers translates to a substantial loss for the local economies where these institutions are located. Communities that depend heavily on spending by international students, including local businesses and rental markets, have been affected.

Statistics Canada (2020a) released a report with five plausible financial projection scenarios to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Canadian PSE. This analysis predicted the sector could undergo revenue losses that range from \$377 million to \$3.4 billion during the 2020–2021 academic year. The projections were based on various modifications in enrolment and research funding. In the release, Statistics Canada (2020a) noted that in 2017–2018, almost \$4 billion in annual revenue or 40% of all tuition fees were paid by international students. In 2020–2021, the average tuition paid by an international undergraduate student was \$32,041, almost five times the average for domestic students, which is approximately \$6,601.

Different levels of government that rely on the economic contribution of the international education sector also experienced significant impacts. Provincially and municipally, reductions in international student numbers have affected economic activity, job creation, and demographic goals, given the key role these students play in addressing skills shortages and contributing to population growth. On a federal level, the sudden halt in international mobility affected Canada's ambitious immigration targets, presenting an unprecedented challenge to the country's strategic demographic and economic goals. For instance, Canada aimed to admit 401,000 new permanent residents in 2021, an increase from 341,000 in 2019 (Government of Canada, 2020b). However, with the pandemic impeding global mobility, it became increasingly challenging to meet these targets during this period. Additionally, the crisis disrupted the regular operations and policy objectives of Canada's immigration system. The COVID-19 pandemic's financial and broader socioeconomic impacts on the international education sector, therefore, were severe and widespread, extending beyond postsecondary institutions to communities and governments across Canada.

#### **1.4 Purpose of This Study**

Given the significance of the international education sector to Canada's socioeconomic fabric, the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this sector necessitates a close examination of how policy adaptations were made during this crisis. Understanding how policy making unfolds during such critical periods is at the core of this study. The examination is centered on analyzing the factors that facilitated or hindered immigration policy measures introduced during the pandemic, with the aim of providing in-depth insights into the intricacies of policy making during a global crisis and drawing meaningful inferences that can contribute to the broader understanding of crisis management and policy change.

As previously noted, the international education sector in Canada has experienced significant growth over the past few years, becoming a critical component of the nation's economic, social, and cultural fabric. Likewise, immigration policy has increasingly been seen as a tool for leveraging the potential of international education, particularly in terms of human capital development and economic growth. This research aimed to scrutinize the dynamics of policy making during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing specifically on Canada's immigration policy and how it was utilized to sustain international education amid unprecedented challenges. The analysis delved into the policy measures and changes introduced during the pandemic, the motivations behind them, and their implementation and impact, providing insights into the intricate process of policy adaptation during a crisis. Additionally, the study assessed and mapped the policy measures introduced to ensure the continued recruitment and retention of international students during the pandemic's disruptions. These measures and their impacts are of considerable interest, given the strategic role that international students play in Canadian PSE institutions and in the broader society and economy. The dual aspects of international education and immigration have become intricately linked and, as such, must be considered together in the context of the unprecedented challenges brought by the pandemic.

In shedding light on these dynamics, this study contributes to a broader understanding of policy making during global crises and highlights the resilience and strategic adaptations of Canada's international education and immigration sectors in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **1.5 Theoretical Frameworks**

This study employs John W. Kingdon's (1984) multiple streams approach (MSA) and John T. S. Keeler's (1993) theory of the macro-window-opening process (MWOP) as theoretical

lenses to examine the policy-making process under conditions of crisis. These frameworks provide a comprehensive perspective on the policy-making process and allow for an in-depth understanding of the various factors that influence policy change. The aim is to understand not just the specific policies enacted, but also the conditions, motivations, and decision-making processes that led to their creation and implementation.

Kingdon's (1984) MSA underscores the complexity of the policy-making process and the interplay between problem recognition, policy generation, and political dynamics. It suggests that significant policy change occurs when these streams converge during a "window of opportunity" that can be opened by societal problems or political developments. Keeler's (1993) MWOP further builds on Kingdon's work, introducing the concept of "macro-windows," which signify substantial changes in the political or societal landscape that trigger profound legislative achievements. The pandemic serves as a powerful example of such a societal change, and the impact on the international education sector and the associated immigration policy changes represent the profound legislative changes. Through the lens of these theories, this research explores the policy making that occurred in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

By integrating these theoretical frameworks, the study aims to illuminate how complex policy changes are shaped during times of crisis. It unravels how a "window of opportunity" was identified and what "window-opening mechanisms" enabled or hindered policy changes. The objective is to understand how these theoretical constructs apply in a real-world crisis scenario and how they can be leveraged to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of policy making during such times.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What immigration policy measures in Canada were considered and eventually introduced to secure the continued recruitment and retention of international students during the COVID-19 crisis?
2. How was a “window of opportunity” envisioned, and what series of “window-opening mechanisms” enabled or hindered proposed policy changes?
3. What does the Canadian case illustrate about the application of the MSA and MWOP as theoretical frameworks for studying policy making in times of crisis?

### **1.7 Research Design**

The study adopts a qualitative research design and applies policy analysis as a research method to explore immigration policy changes in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study focuses on policy measures and changes introduced from March 2020 to December 2022 (summarized in Table 4). The selected period is significant because on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus SARS CoV-2, a pandemic, and December 31, 2022, marks the formal end date of this study. This period saw substantial policy responses to the challenges posed to the international education sector in Canada, particularly to the recruitment and retention of international students, due to the pandemic.

The research design of this study was shaped by a qualitative approach, employing a combination of policy document analysis and semi-structured interviews to investigate the research questions. The rationale behind the choice of these methods was that they aligned closely with the nature of the questions being asked and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. Thus, the implementation of a qualitative research design was fitting. Qualitative research aims to interpret social phenomena in their natural settings to capture the meanings that

people attribute to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It offers a platform for investigating complex phenomena within their contexts, thereby enriching the understanding of processes, experiences, and impacts associated with policy changes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic were not singular events but were deeply embedded in the sociopolitical context, were influenced by numerous stakeholders, and carried multifaceted impacts. The qualitative design allowed for a deep dive into these aspects, providing a comprehensive examination of the research questions.

This study employed policy analysis as its primary research method to examine the intricate relationship between context and policy-making processes. Codd (1988) suggests that policies are rooted in specific contexts, shaped by ideologically charged documents. Echoing this idea, Gale (1999) emphasizes that decisions in policy making are closely tied to the social and material conditions of their times. This perspective is invaluable for examining the various forces—economic, social, political, or cultural—that shape policy, especially in a setting like Canada with its distinct history and international education goals. Further, this approach aligned with the research questions, theoretical frameworks, and the unique context of Canada’s response to the COVID 19 pandemic.

Using policy analysis, this study seeks not just to describe, but to deeply understand the factors and decisions leading to policy changes and implementations. Gale's concept of “intertextuality” emphasizes that policy meanings are deeply intertwined with their surrounding contexts. The research questions guiding this study delve into the intricacies of how specific immigration policy measures were developed and eventually implemented in Canada to sustain the international education sector, particularly the continued recruitment and retention of international students, amid the COVID-19 crisis. Such a methodological approach provides

insights into the intricate mechanics of decision-making, the shifts in policy, and the strategic movements that marked this unprecedented period.

The research methodology incorporated both primary and secondary data sources to develop a comprehensive perspective and answer the research questions. Government policy documents and semi-structured interviews served as primary data sources, offering firsthand insights into the evolution of immigration policy measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviewees were selected based on their direct involvement or expertise in policy making, international education, and immigration during the COVID-19 pandemic. They include policymakers, government officials, higher education administrators, researchers, immigration consultants, and representatives of national associations representing the full spectrum of international education in Canada. These interviews explored individual experiences, opinions, and perceptions of the policy measures enacted during the pandemic. The semi-structured approach allowed respondents the latitude to share their insights freely, while also enabling me to delve into specific areas of interest or concern. Secondary sources, including academic literature, news articles, and other published documents, were used to contextualize the primary data.

In combination, these primary and secondary data collection methods provided a balanced and in-depth understanding of Canada's immigration policy changes during the COVID-19 pandemic, as viewed from multiple angles. They informed not just the description and analysis of the policies themselves, but also the policy-making process, the key actors involved, the challenges faced, the opportunities seized, and the impacts realized. The integration of these data sources ensured the research findings were solidly grounded in both lived experiences and published accounts, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study. These sources thus provided a broad view of the policy landscape, shed light on the chronological

progression of the policy changes implemented, and offered quantifiable data on their impacts. They also helped situate Canada's response within a global context, allowing for comparison with the responses of other nations and international bodies.

The theoretical frameworks, the MSA and MWOP, provided a lens through which the data were analyzed, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the immigration policy-making process and its implications during the pandemic. The interplay between primary and secondary data, underpinned by these theoretical frameworks, offered a multidimensional exploration of the research questions.

### **1.8 Potential Contributions of the Study**

The aim is not merely to document the policy measures enacted but to unravel the dynamics of policy change in the face of an unprecedented crisis. In other words, the objective is to understand “why” and “how” certain policy responses emerged and were implemented in response to the crisis. This study explores how policymakers, under the extraordinary conditions created by the pandemic, were able to perceive and seize a “window of opportunity” for introducing significant policy measures. In examining these processes, this study aims to provide insight into how policies were adapted in response to the rapid changes and uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes analysis of the key actors involved, the scale and scope of legislative achievement, and the institutional constraints faced. Ultimately, the intent is to illuminate how Canada has responded to an unprecedented crisis, the tools it has utilized, the strategies it has employed, and the lessons it has learned. These insights can provide valuable knowledge for future policy making in the face of crises, as well as for the ongoing development of international education and immigration policy in Canada.

Thus, this study has significant potential to contribute to several aspects of public policy and education research. First, it deepens our understanding of policy making during crises, highlighting the complexities and nuances of decision-making in highly volatile and uncertain contexts. Second, the study provides an in-depth analysis of immigration policy making in the international education sector, which is a vital component of Canada's socioeconomic and cultural landscape. It highlights the government's strategic responses to ensure the continuity of international education and immigration processes, thus contributing to the literature in these sectors. Third, the research contributes to the theoretical understanding of the MSA and MWOP, applying these constructs to a real-world crisis scenario and illuminating their utility in explaining policy changes. Finally, by analyzing the policy measures and strategies implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the study provides valuable insights that can inform future policy responses in similar crisis scenarios.

This introductory chapter set the stage for this study of policy making in response to the COVID-19 crisis, focusing on immigration policy and international students in Canada. The chapter began by highlighting the importance of understanding policy making during crisis periods and underscoring the crucial role that international education and immigration play in Canada's socioeconomic and cultural fabric.

In articulating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canada's international education and immigration goals, the chapter captured the profound disruptions caused by the crisis and the urgency of responsive and effective policy making. The chapter also outlined the purpose of the study, setting the scene for an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of policy making during the COVID-19 pandemic. Incorporating theoretical frameworks—the MSA and the MWOP—the chapter mapped out the analytical lens through which the study examined the

factors that facilitated or hindered immigration policy measures introduced during the pandemic. The research questions were articulated, homing in on understanding the policy measures introduced, the nature of “window of opportunity,” and the applicability of the theoretical frameworks in real-world crisis scenarios.

The next chapter presents a literature review exploring the academic discourse surrounding international education, particularly its policy implications and intersections with immigration. Given the impressive expansion of international education over the past few decades, there is a rich collection of scholarly literature available. This chapter aims to navigate this field of study, identifying its key elements, notable contributors, and the trajectory of its development. The focus then narrows to the Canadian context, scrutinizing the distinct attributes and evolution of international education policy in this context. This comprehensive review both captures the current knowledge base and highlights unexplored avenues. Furthermore, it positions this research within the broader academic dialogue, demonstrating its potential contribution to a collective understanding of international education as policy.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The field of international education and a research focus on international student mobility has seen remarkable growth over the last few decades (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In today's interconnected and globalized world, international education has assumed an essential role not just in the sphere of education, but also in broader societal, economic, and political contexts. This is why its significance in national policy agendas has surged, leading to an increase in its study as a distinct domain of policy and practice.

This chapter offers a comprehensive review of academic literature examining international education, concentrating primarily on the recruitment and retention of international students. It delves into internationalization as policy, specifically as it relates to maintaining a steady influx of international students, and its growing integration with other policy areas, notably immigration. The aim of this chapter is to map the academic terrain of this policy area, tracing its development and identifying key scholars and their contributions. The review focuses on the Canadian context, analyzing unique aspects of international education policy in Canada and how it has evolved over time. In addressing what is currently known and what remains unexplored in this area, this review identifies gaps in our understanding and highlights how this study seeks to address these gaps.

### **2.1 Internationalization Policies in Higher Education**

Over the years, internationalization as policy has garnered the attention of numerous scholars and researchers, resulting in an extensive body of literature from various disciplines including education, political science, sociology, and economics (Deem et al., 2008; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Foundational scholars such as Philip G. Altbach, Jane Knight, Simon Marginson, Hans de Wit, Laura E. Rumbley, Liz Reisberg, and others have been at the forefront of research

in this area, driving much of the global conversations. These scholars seek to understand how internationalization policies are shaped and implemented across different countries and contexts while considering factors such as policy drivers, impacts, and different national approaches to international education.

Jane Knight's scholarship has extensively explored how global dynamics have shaped the policy dimensions of international education. She has sought to understand internationalization as a policy and process, offering conceptual frameworks to distinguish between different types of internationalization (Knight, 2015), and has noted that international student recruitment has long been a top priority for traditional host countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States (Knight, 2008). Her work offers a comprehensive analysis encompassing cross-border education, international student mobility, and international institutional partnerships (Knight, 1994, 1997, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2015). Her definition of internationalization, "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education," (Knight, 2015, p. 11) has been widely accepted.

Additionally, she expands on these dimensions:

International, intercultural, and global dimension are three terms that are intentionally used as a triad. International is used to describe the relationship between and among nations, cultures or countries. Today, internationalization is also about relating to the diversity of cultures that exist within countries, communities, and institutions, and so intercultural is used to address this dimension. Finally, global, a controversial and value-laden term these days, is included to provide the sense of worldwide scope. These three terms complement each other and together depict the richness in the breadth and depth of internationalization. (Knight, 2015, p. 3)

Simon Marginson's research on the global landscape of higher education has also provided substantial insights into the policy implications of international education. His focus on the economic, cultural, and social aspects of international education policy, particularly in the context of globalization, has greatly contributed to our understanding of the intersections between education and the global knowledge economy (Marginson, 2006, 2007, 2014, 2016, 2018). His work, along with others', has shed light on international education as an objective to improve the quality of education and research, enhance the employability of graduates, and strengthen the international standing of higher education institutions and countries (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Marginson, 2014).

Hans de Wit is another scholar who has made significant contributions to our understanding of internationalization policies in higher education. His studies typically address the factors influencing the internationalization process, such as institutional policies, national frameworks, and global trends. De Wit's (1995, 2002, 2011) research has often emphasized the importance of a holistic approach to internationalization, one that goes beyond the traditional focus on mobility to incorporate elements of curriculum development, research collaborations, and institutional strategies.

Other scholars have sought to understand international education through the lens of national policy and strategy. Philip G. Altbach (2002), for instance, has analyzed the growth of cross-border education and the development of global "knowledge hubs" as a policy strategy. He has also looked at the international mobility of students and faculty and its implications for higher education policy (Altbach, 2002; Altbach & Knight, 2007). Additionally, Altbach, in collaboration with Laura E. Rumbley and Liz Reisberg (Altbach et al., 2019), has explored

trends in global higher education and the ways in which higher education has responded to the challenge of massification.

Furthermore, the works of Ravichandran Ammigan and Rajika Bhandari have offered a deep dive into the policies related to support services and international student mobility, focusing on the impacts of such policies on the experiences of international students. Their research highlights the often-overlooked perspective of students in the formation and implementation of international education policies (Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Bhandari, 2017).

In the Canadian context, researchers such as Glen A. Jones, Roopa Trilokekar, Merli Tamtik, Qiang Zha, Amira El Masri, Creso Sá, and Emma Sabzalieva, among others, have been leading the study of different policy aspects of international education. For instance, Jones has looked at the internationalization of higher education in Canada and the role of government policy in shaping this process. His work emphasizes the role of government strategy in facilitating the internationalization of Canadian higher education, pointing to a shift from a “hands-off” to a more direct approach to internationalization policy in recent years (Jones 1995, 1996, 1997, 2002, 2009, 2014, 2023). Trilokekar is an expert in the field of Canadian federal policy on international education. Her research provides comprehensive insights into the evolving relationship between state mechanisms, foreign policy, and education, employing a critical comparative approach to policy studies. Moreover, she underscores the instrumental role of varying governmental levels and institutions in moulding international education policy (Trilokekar, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2015). Furthermore, Trilokekar & Kizilbash (2013) conducted a comparative study analyzing the potential for Canada to draw valuable insights from Australia's approach to several key areas in IE including international student recruitment. Particularly, through strategically establishing branch campuses, franchises, and forming

twinning arrangements, Australian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have skillfully capitalized on lucrative opportunities within international recruitment.

El Masri (2019), another key contributor to the field, has directed her research towards international education policy in Canada. In collaboration with Trilokekar, El Masri has undertaken nuanced explorations of the intersections between international education and immigration policy, thus enriching the understanding of how these fields converge and interact (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a, 2016b, 2019). Additionally, scholars such as Creso Sá and Emma Sabzalieva have explored the internationalization policies at the level of higher education institutions, underlining the differing strategies and objectives across various institutions in Canada (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2016, 2018). Moreover, these scholars have conducted longitudinal analysis exploring the politics and public policies that affect international student recruitment, focusing on four major student-recruiting countries: Australia, Canada, England, and the USA (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018).

Lisa Brunner (2017) has specifically examined the relationship between federal and provincial education policies and its impact on postsecondary institutions in Canada. Melody Viczko (2012, 2013) has investigated the governance of higher education by looking at the ways in which different state and nonstate actors interact through policy. Dale McCartney (2016, 2021) has focused on the history of international student policy in Canada and critically examined the internationalization of higher education since the end of World War II.

These scholars, among others, have explored the policy dynamics of international education in Canada, shedding light on its evolution, current state, and potential future directions. While there are many researchers in this field, this summary primarily focuses on those scholars who apply a policy lens to their analyses. Their work sets a solid foundation for

understanding the policy aspects of international education, including the recruitment and retention of international students, which has become an increasingly complex and multidimensional field, though the investigation of international education as a policy domain is relatively recent. A review of the literature also indicates that, historically, the emphasis was on practice-oriented aspects of international education, like student mobility, curriculum internationalization, and faculty engagement in international activities. The shift towards policy examination has emerged in response to the increasing recognition of the strategic role that international education plays in national economic, social, and political agendas (El Masri, 2019; Knight, 2015; McCartney, 2021; Rizvi & Lingard, 2006; Schinnerl; 2021).

## **2.2 Approaches to Studying International Education as Policy**

As stated, approaches to studying international education as policy vary among scholars, and each provides unique insights, employing various methodologies and theoretical frameworks to unpack the complexities of this topic.

Macro-level analyses often examine international education and internationalization as policy in the context of global trends and national strategies. Researchers in this domain focus on how countries tailor their international education policies in response to major global forces. For instance, the pressures of globalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007), the philosophy of neoliberalism (Lingard, 2000; Naidoo, 2010; Olssen, 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009), and the international competition for talent form part of this context (Marginson, 2014; Tremblay et al., 2012). The role of supranational organizations like the European Union, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in shaping international education policy has also been a focus of analysis (Enders, 2004; Horta, 2010; Lawn & Lingard, 2002).

Several studies have explored the evolving stances of states towards international education as policy, noting a rising focus on this policy domain. This increased attention is driven by recognition of the political and economic benefits that international education provides, including its role in fostering a knowledge-based economy (Altbach & Teicher, 2001; Enders, 2004). Specifically, within the Canadian context, studies by Sá and Sabzalieva (2016, 2018), Trilokekar and El Masri (2019), and El Masri (2019) have shed light on this phenomenon. Other scholars have embarked on explorations to deconstruct the discursive strategies employed by states to legitimize their interpretations of international education. These strategies, they argue, have profound implications on the shaping of both national and institutional policies and practices related to international education (Martinen, 2011; McLellan, 2008). In this regard, the Canadian context has been examined in works by Cover (2016), McCartney (2016), Trilokekar and El Masri (2016a), and El Masri (2019), adding valuable insights to our understanding of how such legitimization strategies operate within the sphere of international education.

Micro-level studies delve into the specifics of international education and internationalization as policy, examining aspects such as the recruitment and retention of international students (Cudmore, 2005; Dennison, 2006; Dennison & Schuetze, 2004; Lang & Lang, 2002; Levin, 2002; Walker, 2008) and the function of higher education institutions in executing internationalization strategies (El Masri, 2019; Knight, 2004; Trilokekar & Jones, 2007, 2013; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019). Several scholars frequently employ case study methodologies to provide in-depth analyses of specific policy initiatives or to compare policy approaches across different jurisdictions.

An intersectional approach examines how international education policies interact with other policy areas. For instance, studies have focused on international education as a source of

revenue, human capital development, innovation, and soft power (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Choudaha, 2017; de Wit 2002; Devos; 2003; El Masri, 2019; Hawthorne, 2008, 2012; Knight, 2008, 2012; McCartney, 2016; Stein & Andreotti, 2015; Trilokekar, 2009, 2010; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a, 2016b, 2019).

El Masri (2019) noted that scholars researching international education policy have grounded their studies in theoretical frameworks mostly from political science and public policy, such as policy networks (Padure & Jones, 2009; Trick, 2005), federalism (Trilokekar, 2009, 2010), multiple stream model (Charles, 2011; Howlett, 1998; Rexe, 2014, 2015), advocacy coalition framework (Mawhinney, 1993; Rexe, 2014, 2015), frameworks that stem from science, such as the actor-network theory (Viccko, 2013), and frameworks that stem from critical discourse theories (Cover, 2016; El Masri, 2019, 2020; Karram, 2013; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a, 2016b) and historical lenses (McCartney, 2016).

Critical theoretical frameworks are also brought to bear in this domain, challenging dominant discourses and unveiling the power dynamics inherent in international education policies (Stein, 2013). For instance, scholars like Andreotti (2011) employ postcolonial and decolonial theories to critique the Eurocentric bias and neocolonial tendencies in internationalization policies.

Studies focusing on international student recruitment in the context of Canada have used different theoretical frameworks. For example, James-MacEachern (2018) employed activity theory to explore the tensions and opportunities present within institutional recruitment practices at three universities across three countries (Canada, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom) and demonstrated how internal and external forces as well as institutional culture and history impact international student recruitment practices in educational institutions. Similarly, Nikula and

Kivistö (2018) leveraged agency theory to explore how education agencies are engaged in international student recruitment, noting policy implications to regulate the relationship between educational institutions and agents as part of an international student recruitment strategy. Furthermore, the push-pull theory has been applied in examining Chinese international students' decisions to study in Canada, offering insights into the various factors, including environmental and educational aspects, which influence their choices (Chen, 2016; James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017).

### **2.3 Shifts in the Study of International Education Policy**

In the early stages of the study of development of international education policy, attention was paid mainly to the post–World War II period, when the primary focus was on diplomacy and cultural exchange. Researchers examined international mobility programs, where students and faculty were treated as guests who would carry back with them an understanding of their host countries, fostering international goodwill (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This focus was influenced by a desire to foster mutual understanding and cultural exchange in the wake of global conflict. During this period, various scholarship programs such as the Fulbright Program were established, aiming to promote mutual understanding between the United States and other countries (Kaniuka, 2019). In terms of recruitment and retention, these efforts made international education attractive for students, offering them not just academic knowledge but also cultural experiences. Institutions prioritized the care and support for these “guests,” ensuring they had the resources and environment to succeed and later become ambassadors of goodwill upon their return home (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

In the late 20th century, the focus shifted towards the internationalization of the curriculum and the development of international partnerships and collaborations. This was driven

by the forces of globalization and the increasing demand for graduates with global competencies (Knight, 2004). Internationalization was examined as a response to globalization, but also as a proactive strategy to enhance the quality of education, research, and service provision (Altbach & Knight, 2007). It was analyzed as a policy being driven by a variety of motivations, including financial incentives, reputation enhancement, capacity building, and the desire to foster international understanding and cooperation (Knight, 2004). The move towards internationalizing the curriculum meant that institutions had to adopt recruitment strategies that resonated with a global audience. This evolution also emphasized retention, as institutions sought to provide international students with relevant curricula and support systems, ensuring they would complete their studies and contribute to the global community (Knight, 2004; 2015).

Internationalization as a policy was also viewed as a tool for capacity building and knowledge transfer. This is particularly important for developing countries, where internationalization can contribute to building robust educational systems and research capacities (Marginson, 2014). Additionally, it is used as a conduit for fostering international understanding and cooperation. It brings students from different backgrounds together, fostering an exchange of ideas and promoting global citizenship (Altbach & Knight, 2007). From an international recruitment perspective, this viewpoint positioned international students as valuable contributors to the academic and cultural fabric of universities. By viewing internationalization as a means of capacity building, institutions also became more adapted to the specific needs and challenges of international students, thus developing more effective retention strategies and support mechanisms (Marginson, 2014).

A key shift occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, with the rise of neoliberalism and the increasing commercialization of higher education (Lingard, 2000; Maringe, 2010; Naidoo, 2010;

Olssen, 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Critiques emerged from scholars about the process of internationalization, as they observed a surge in the international student population. This increase has led to financial gain for educational institutions, a fact that has not escaped scrutiny, as explored in subsequent sections. Concerns regarding the commercialization of education have been raised, along with questions about whether the drive towards internationalization is fuelled predominantly by economic interests (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Thus, alongside the benefits, the complexities and challenges inherent to internationalization were being acknowledged. These challenges include issues of equity and access, the commodification of education, potential cultural homogenization, and the need to balance international and domestic priorities (de Wit, 2011).

The prominence of English as a medium of instruction in internationalized curricula sparked concerns about linguistic imperialism and the dilution of local cultures and languages (Dearden, 2014). Furthermore, internationalization was criticized for potentially reinforcing global hierarchies and perpetuating neocolonial patterns of knowledge production (Stein, 2021). This raises concerns about the equitable distribution of benefits and the need for internationalization policies to be developed and implemented in ways that are sensitive to issues of social justice and cultural diversity (Marginson, 2016).

In the 21st century, the focus of scholarship shifted again, this time towards international education as a strategic policy tool for economic, social, and political goals. Literature examined how countries began viewing international education from a strategic standpoint, recognizing its potential to boost their economies, enhance their international standing, and attract global talent. Consequently, scholars wrote about how international education became a key component of

national strategies for economic development, innovation, and global engagement (Altbach, 2002; Marginson, 2007, 2014).

Thus, with the arrival of globalization and the knowledge economy, the focus of international education policy shifted towards talent recruitment and economic considerations. Policies began to emphasize the importance of attracting international students to enhance institutional prestige, gain access to global research networks, and generate financial revenue (Choudaha, 2017; Cover, 2016; Stein & Andreotti, 2015). International students began to be perceived as potential revenue-generating customers, particularly crucial in an era of declining public funding for higher education (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Given the complexities and contradictions within internationalization policies, a holistic and critical approach to research and practice was considered indispensable. For instance, while internationalization policies often advocate ideals of mutual understanding, global citizenship, and international collaboration, they may also reinforce global hierarchies, exacerbate educational inequalities, and perpetuate neocolonial patterns of knowledge production (Stein, 2017a). Thus, understanding internationalization as policy involves critically examining these power dynamics and interrogating the underlying policy rationales and impacts. To this end, scholars have argued for a critical internationalization studies framework that takes into account historical, geopolitical, and sociocultural contexts (Stein, 2021).

Additionally, with the rapid globalization of higher education, focus was placed on how technology plays an increasingly pivotal role in internationalization. Online learning and digital technologies have expanded the horizons of internationalization beyond physical mobility, opening new avenues for cross-cultural collaboration and learning (Shonfeld et al., 2021). This

highlights the need for internationalization policies to keep pace with technological advancements and to harness them effectively.

In sum, internationalization is now understood as a multidimensional, complex, and context-dependent policy area that requires a holistic and critical approach to research and practice (Knight, 2015). It encompasses various activities and is influenced by numerous factors, including global trends, national priorities, and institutional strategies. While the benefits of internationalization are well acknowledged, it is equally important to recognize the inherent challenges and to approach internationalization critically and reflectively. The centrality and dynamism of internationalization policies globally renders this an exciting and important area for ongoing research and development.

#### **2.4 Canadian Scholarship on International Education**

In Canada, the evolution of international education policy reveals pivotal shifts in the national approach towards internationalization. Leading scholars in this domain, Allison (2007, 2016) and Trilokekar (2007, 2010), have provided significant insights into the role of federal organizations in steering international education. While Allison's analysis hinges on the contribution of the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, Trilokekar's research emphasizes the role of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Each underscore two significant periods of transition in the landscape of international education—the early 1970s, which was partly a response to the global economic downturn, and the mid- to late 1980s (Allison, 2016; Trilokekar, 2007).

Furthermore, research suggests that the stage for internationalization in Canada was gradually set by various institutional efforts even before it became a recognized as a national priority. Organizations such as Friendly Relations with Overseas Students, founded in 1949,

pioneered initiatives like student services designed exclusively for international students (Poitras, 2019). Discussions regarding international students also found space within parliamentary debates and the Department of External Affairs (McCartney, 2016; Trilokekar, 2007, 2010), but these dialogues remained rather marginal within their broader institutional contexts.

The period from the mid-1980s up until the introduction of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) of 2001 is often recognized as the initial phase when internationalization emerged as a significant institutional focus. Particularly in terms of international student policy, this period witnessed a consolidation of existing trends, especially differential fees for international students (Holdaway et al., 1988; Zelmer & Johnson, 1988). The establishment of differential fees led to a profound reshaping of the Canadian postsecondary sector, solidifying the role of international students as crucial contributors to its funding.

The term “internationalization” was coined to capture the transformation in higher education incited by the onset of globalization (Beck, 2012). Despite elements of internationalization having been in motion on campuses even prior to the 1990s, the movement of large numbers of students across borders was largely attributed to the institutional and sectoral adjustments to global priorities that marked the end of the Cold War (Kerr, 1991; Wollitzer, 1991). As mentioned earlier, Jane Knight’s influential work provided a comprehensive definition of internationalization, setting the stage for future academic dialogues on the topic (Knight, 1994, 1997, 2004, 2015). Initially, the concept was relatively narrow, focusing primarily on student and faculty mobility. Knight’s (2004) definition has expanded the purview to include international research collaborations, curriculum internationalization, and global strategic partnerships. This extended view encompasses the integration of an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of education.

Essentially, the concept of internationalization intersects deeply with recruitment and retention strategies for international students. The globalized educational market evolved to become competitively dense, with institutions striving to attract and hold on to international students, not merely as learners but also as crucial financial contributors and culture carriers. Such recruitment and retention efforts have intensified due to the array of opportunities and challenges emanating from global mobility (Knight, 2004; Knight & Altbach, 2007). While this view of internationalization emphasizes the influence of international education on teaching, research, and service, it offers less insight into its financial implications (Stein, 2017b). Thus, despite fiscal pressures steering institutional recruitment efforts, public discussions mainly revolved around the intellectual value of campuses with global engagement (Beck, 2012).

The post-2000 period has witnessed a surge of scholarly attention towards international education policy in Canada, with internationalization becoming a central theme (Knight, 2015). From 2010 onward, provincial governments started to define their unique visions for international education, with intentional aim on recruitment and retention of international students, independently from the federal government and each other. This increasing independence hinted at the rising relevance of international education within provincial policy agendas (Kirby, 2008; Sa & Sabzalieva, 2016; 2018; El Masri, 2019). In the past decade, the Canadian federal government has articulated two landmark strategies that underscore the importance of international education. These strategies showcase their interest in growing the international student population and establishing Canada as a premier destination for international education. The first, titled *Canada's International Education Strategy: Harnessing Our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity* (Government of Canada, 2014), marked the government's first-ever national strategy on the subject, in which it recognized

international education as critical to the country's success in the global knowledge-based economy. Following this, the updated *Building on Success: International Education Strategy (2019–2024)* (Government of Canada, 2019b) was launched to further cement the government's commitment to the sector, demonstrating the evolution of international education from a peripheral concern to a core public policy focus.

Given these developments, and in light of the significant variance in international education policy and practice across institutions, jurisdictions, and sectors, scholars have recognized a need for a more comprehensive understanding of internationalization of higher education in Canada. Researchers have aimed to uncover how these governmental policies have emerged, how they interact with and shape internationalization processes within Canada, and how they redefine the purposes, functions, and roles of education and higher education in the country (Tamtik et al., 2020).

The prospect of permanent residency became a significant recruiting tool, featuring prominently in both governmental and institutional promotional materials. In 2008, the federal government launched EduCanada, a national brand designed to differentiate Canada from other host nations by emphasizing postgraduation immigration possibilities (Stein, 2017a; Trilokekar & Kizilbash, 2013). This effort further bolstered the surge in international student numbers. The absence of a federal-level internationalization strategy became a central concern in scholarly dialogues surrounding Canadian international student policy (Government of Canada, 2014). Researchers like Sá and Sabzalieva (2018) have depicted the period before the introduction of a national policy in 2014 as a time when Canada was “playing catch-up” with other Anglo-American nations that attracted large numbers of international students. The establishment of a national policy was seen as a monumental change, marking Canada's entry into a new era of

international student recruitment (Knight-Grofe & Deacon, 2016; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a). This period also saw an increasing interest in the experiences and challenges of international students and their impact on institutions (Cudmore, 2005; Dennison, 2006; Dennison & Schuetze, 2004; Duclos, 2011; Guo & Jamal, 2007; Kenyon et al., 2012; Lang & Lang, 2002; Levin, 2002; Prowse & Goddard, 2010; Samuel & Burney, 2003; Walker, 2008).

The evolution of international education policy research, aimed at the recruitment and retention of international students, in Canada has both mirrored global policy shifts and reflected unique aspects of the Canadian policy landscape. From the initial focus on policy description and comparison, the field has matured to encompass critical policy analysis that interrogates the power dynamics, ideological assumptions, and structural inequalities inherent in international education policy discourses and practices (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Internationalization as a policy process is understood as arising at both levels of government, federal and provincial, and in postsecondary institutions such as colleges and universities (Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit, 2002; El Masri, 2019; Knight, 2006; Stromquist, 2002; Tremblay, 2005). These policies and practices are understood as complex and are influenced by global economic, political, cultural, and technological shifts (Knight, 2006; Trilokekar, 2010; Trilokekar & Kizilbash, 2013; Schoole, 2008) and include numerous activities such as transnational education, student exchange, and research partnerships (de Wit, 2002; Jones, 2009; Knight 2006; Trilokekar, 2010).

According to Ellis (2019), the concept and process of internationalization in Canadian institutions has become a key part of institutional policies and operations. Thus, scholarship on internationalization as policy in Canadian PSE has focused on analyzing policies through the lens of individual stakeholders such as the state (Cover, 2016; Marttinen, 2011; McCartney, 2016; McLellan, 2008; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a) or postsecondary institutions (Andreotti et

al., 2016; Stein, 2013; Stier, 2004; Taskoh, 2014; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016b; Yemini & Giladi, 2015), and internationalization activities such as international student recruitment (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Choudaha, 2017; Devos, 2003; McCartney, 2016; Stein & Andreotti, 2015).

Although there is an expanding body of research that investigates the trends connected to the internationalization of Canadian higher education (Guo & Chase 2011; Jones & Oleksiyenko 2011; Shubert et al., 2009), it is Tamtik, Trilokekar, and Jones (2020) who, in the introduction to *International Education as Public Policy in Canada*, deliver a systematic and analytical examination of international education from a uniquely Canadian perspective, utilizing a public policy lens. From a policy perspective, internationalization is understood not merely as a set of specific policies but as an overarching policy framework that guides and influences a broad range of education policies and practices.

As stated above, it is recognized that internationalization policies are not created in a vacuum but are shaped by various global trends, national priorities, and institutional strategies (de Wit, 2011). Moreover, internationalization is increasingly seen as a policy that intersects with other policy areas, such as immigration, economic development, and national security. Scholars are recognizing that internationalization policies cannot be studied in isolation but need to be examined in the context of these other policy areas. This is particularly evident in the Canadian context, where the integration of international education and immigration policies has become a strategic priority, as further elaborated in subsequent sections (El Masri, 2019; Tamtik et al., 2020; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019).

## 2.5 Key Policy Actors in International Education

The policy actors in international education are numerous and diverse, reflecting the comprehensive nature of international education itself. Key policy actors come from various levels of governance and include global, national, subnational, and institutional actors. These include international organizations, national governments, regional entities like the European Union, and various actors within higher education institutions including administrators, faculty, and students (Knight, 2004).

In terms of key policy actors, the international education policy-making context in Canada has broadened significantly. This expansion reflects the dispersal of political power among a myriad of players (El Masri, 2019). These include the state at both federal and provincial levels and the variety of ministries involved; PSE institutions and their faculty, administrators, and students; national and foreign media outlets; a slew of national and provincial special interest groups that focus on education, economy, innovation, trade, and foreign affairs; labour unions; and sectors including the private sector, housing, and law, to name a few. International actors, such as governments of student-sending countries, parents of international students, foreign media, and transnational organizations and ranking organizations, also feature prominently (El Masri, 2019).

Each of these actors plays a role in shaping the discourse, direction, and practices of international education. At the global level, international organizations such as UNESCO, the OECD, and the World Bank play a key role in shaping international education policies. They set global standards, norms, and benchmarks for internationalization, provide policy advice, and produce influential policy reports and recommendations and fund educational initiatives around the world (Altbach, 2002; Knight, 2011). At the national level, governments play a decisive role

in formulating and implementing international education strategies and policies. They set the national policy framework and quality assurance frameworks, provide funding, and regulate the international activities of higher education institutions (Choudaha, 2017; Marginson, 2014; McCartney, 2016). State actors, including federal and provincial governments and their respective ministries, have increasingly been seen as strategic participants in the international education policy landscape, with the recognition that international education is a critical national policy concern worldwide (Altbach & Teicher, 2001; Enders, 2004; Marginson & Sawir, 2005).

Scholars have noted a trend towards supportive and coordinating policies from these governmental bodies, with an aim to align international education initiatives with national economic, political, social, and cultural interests (de Wit, 2002; Enders, 2004; Kirby, 2008; Tamtik, 2017). The extent of national governments' engagement with international education often depends on factors such as political and economic contexts, geographical location, dominant culture, quality of the PSE sector, historical trends, and the alignment of PSE institutional values, cultures, and traditions with national ideologies and approaches (Cerna, 2014; Stensaker et al., 2008).

In the Canadian context, this shift is also evident (Kirby, 2008; Tamtik, 2017). For example, federal actors such as Global Affairs Canada and various ministries including finance, innovation, and IRCC have been identified as significant influencers in policy making in the PSE sector in Canada (Axelrod et al., 2011; Trilokekar 2009, 2010; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a, 2016b). However, El Masri (2019) also emphasized the vital role other government entities play in shaping policies, particularly the ministries of industry and economic development, employment, and infrastructure.

Higher education institutions are the sites where internationalization policies are enacted and experienced. Leaders, administrators, and faculty at higher education institutions are involved in strategic planning, program design, student recruitment and support, curriculum internationalization, and other aspects of internationalization practice (Hudzik, 2011). Canada's PSE sector comprises the various types of institutions (colleges, institutes, polytechnics, universities) that form a system and also includes scholarship and discipline groups, professional and membership organizations, students, teachers, researchers, administrators, and other advocacy or issue groups (Zha, 2003). They develop and implement their own internationalization strategies, in line with national policies and global trends. They are also the primary providers of international education services, such as international student recruitment and support, study abroad programs, and international research collaborations (Knight, 2004).

The influence of the state as a dominant international education policy actor affects PSE institutions' approaches to international education. These institutions have been seen to respond variably to government policies depending on internal university contexts, the type of university, and local embeddings (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016b). Recent scholarship has shown an increased influence of immigration policies on these institutions' roles, with these institutions increasingly being perceived as gateways to immigration (Brunner, 2017; Hawthorne, 2008, 2012; Morris-Lange & Brands, 2015; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2016, 2018; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016b; Wolfeil, 2010). This has led to institutions taking on a more active role in the selection, training, and retention of international students, often seen as future immigrants. Additionally, big urban PSE institutions and research-intensive universities tend to overshadow their smaller counterparts, leading to discrepancies in their respective abilities to contribute to the policy landscape (El Masri, 2019). Other key actors include faculty, who are responsible for the

internationalization of the curriculum and research, and students, who are the beneficiaries and drivers of international education initiatives. Nongovernmental organizations also play a role, often acting as intermediaries between different actors and promoting international education initiatives at the grassroots level (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Professional associations, networks, and interest groups, whether in the private or public sectors, represent specific interests and advocate for policies that align with these interests. In Canada, organizations such as CBIE<sup>1</sup>, Universities Canada<sup>2</sup>, Colleges and Institutes Canada<sup>3</sup>, and Mitacs<sup>4</sup>, are crucial in influencing the development of international education. These groups bring together stakeholders from academia, government, and the private sector to collaborate and advocate for policies and programs that support the recruitment and retention of international students in Canada. They also act as a source of expertise and research on trends and best practices in international education (El Masri, 2019). Professional organizations and networks have emerged as significant actors influencing international education in Canada. They contribute to policy discourse and development through their reports, strategies, and policy briefs on Canada's potential in international education; strategic planning and advocacy; and enrichment of PSE administrators' knowledge about international education policies and trends (Tamtik, 2017; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016b; Viczko, 2013; Williams et al., 2015). CBIE and Universities Canada, in particular, have been recognized for their role in shaping international

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<sup>1</sup> CBIE, or the Canadian Bureau for International Education, is a national, not-for-profit, nongovernmental membership organization dedicated exclusively to international education. CBIE promotes global learning by mobilizing expertise, knowledge, opportunity, and leadership.

<sup>2</sup> Universities Canada is a nongovernmental, membership-based organization established in 1911 and governed by a board of directors consisting of university presidents.

<sup>3</sup> Colleges and Institutes Canada is a national association formed in 1972 to represent the interests of its member institutions to government and industry.

<sup>4</sup> Mitacs is a nonprofit national research organization that, in partnerships with Canadian academia, private industry, and government, operates research and training programs in fields related to industrial and social innovation.

education discussions in Canada (El Masri, 2019; Tamtik, 2017; Viczko, 2013; Williams et al., 2015).

Beyond the traditional actors, the private sector is also a substantial player in this policy landscape. Included here are legal practitioners, immigration consultants, educational agents (typically, focusing on student recruitment), and investment companies. Their diverse roles range from offering legal advice to institutions and students, serving as intermediaries in student recruitment processes, and providing financial and investment solutions related to international education (El Masri, 2019; Rahilly & Hudson, 2018).

## **2.6 The Unique Context of International Education in Canada**

International education policy and the recruitment and retention of international students in Canada is shaped by several distinctive features resulting from federalism, institutional autonomy, and the immigration context.

First, the federal nature of the Canadian political system, where education falls under provincial jurisdiction, results in a high degree of decentralization and complex interplay of federal and provincial policies related to international education. This federalism impacts the coordination, consistency, and comprehensiveness of international education policies across different provinces (El Masri, 2019; Jones, 1997; Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011; Shubert et al., 2009; Trilokekar & Jones, 2013; Trilokekar & Jones, 2020; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019).

Second, Canadian PSE institutions enjoy a high degree of autonomy. Within the broader national and provincial policy frameworks, this enables them to have significant discretion in shaping their internationalization strategies and practices (Knight, 2004). However, this institutional autonomy can also lead to variations and inconsistencies in how internationalization is approached across different institutions (Jones, 1997; Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011).

Lastly, the immigration context in Canada, which is characterized by a proactive skilled-immigration policy and multiculturalism, greatly influences its international education sector and policies, mainly through an emphasis on recruitment and retention of international students. There is an implicit duality where both IE and immigration policies become critical. Particularly, the immigration aspect, which is also a federal mandate in Canada, plays a crucial role in nurturing an environment conducive for international students and thus, becomes inherently linked to IE policies focusing on recruitment and retention.

### ***2.6.1 Federalism and Its Impact***

Canada is a federation, meaning that power and responsibilities are divided between the federal government and the provinces. The inherent conflict present in federal systems is markedly pronounced in the Canadian context, as the struggle to balance power through “shared rule” has always been at the forefront. Notably, Canada has been characterized as one of the world’s most decentralized federations, with intergovernmental relations — the interaction between federal and provincial governments — largely defined by “executive federalism” (Trilokekar & Jones, 2020).

As mentioned, education, including postsecondary education, is primarily a provincial responsibility under the Canadian constitution. This has resulted in a decentralized system, with each province having its own education policies, institutions, and systems of funding and governance (Jones, 1997). These provincial bodies are central to the coordination and financing of higher education and have established distinctive arrangements within their respective higher education systems to cater to local needs. Although there is no explicit role for the federal government in higher education, particularly within the university sector, it is nonetheless intricately involved in numerous policy areas of critical importance to higher education. These

areas include research and innovation, student financial aid, and international education. The federal government's involvement occasionally overlaps with provincial policy initiatives and interests, forming a convoluted network of relationships and efforts. These undertakings can sometimes be harmonious and complementary, and at other times they may be competing or disjointed (Jones & Young, 2004).

Regarding jurisdictions or subnational units like Canadian provinces, their involvement in governance and policy formulation has experienced a rise instead of a decrease, particularly when compared to the function of the federal government and to the circumstances observed in other federal nations, such as Australia and the United States (Atkinson et al., 2013). As immigration in Canada, international education policy and the recruitment and retention of students exemplifies this scenario as it falls into a jurisdictional gap—it is an intersection of international relations, which is a federal responsibility, and education, which is a provincial one. This, coupled with the absence of a national ministry of education, situates educational policy solely within provincial jurisdiction, a realm that provinces guard vigilantly against federal encroachment (Bakvis & Skogstad, 2008). The federal government has a clearer role, particularly in areas that intersect with federal responsibilities such as immigration, foreign affairs, and international trade (Eastman et al., 2019; Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011). This has led to the development of a range of federal programs and strategies aimed at promoting international education and the recruitment and retention of international students, such as the international education strategies launched in 2014 and in 2019 (Government of Canada, 2014, 2019b).

A noteworthy observation by Shubert et al. (2009) was that Canada lacks a pan-national coordination or policy direction for international education. Instead, the landscape of Canadian internationalization has been characterized by a tapestry of multiple, uncoordinated processes

that have primarily emerged at the local institutional level. Universities, in many instances, have taken the lead in this sphere with little or no national international education agenda (Trilokekar & Jones, 2020). However, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) has stepped in to provide some level of national coordination, attempting to bridge the gap created by the lack of a pan-national policy. GAC has facilitated the development and implementation of Canada's international education strategies, which seeks to advance Canada's commercial and economic interests, particularly in relation to international student recruitment and partnerships with global institutions. Even though the emphasis is often on enhancing Canada's global economic status, GAC's role does play a part in consolidating various efforts, providing a somewhat unified front in the promotion of Canadian education on the international stage (Trilokekar, 2009; 2010).

In today's era of increased global exposure and foreign competition, different levels of government are compelled to interact with each other to address mutual challenges and manage interdependencies. As Bakvis and Skogstad (2008) pointed out, "At a minimum, they need to communicate with one another in order to make adjustments in their respective roles. As policy interdependence increases so does the need for coordination and collaboration" (p. 5). Canada's unique federal structure allows for a high degree of flexibility and innovation in international education policy, as provinces can tailor their international education strategies according to their specific contexts and learn from each other's experiences. However, it also poses challenges in terms of coordination and consistency. Given the complexity of the policy environment, there is a need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between different levels of government to ensure a coherent and effective approach to international education (Eastman et al., 2019; Fisher et al., 2006; Jones & Oleksiyyenko, 2011; Jones & Weinrib 2011).

In the postsecondary context, studies in recent years have shown that coordination and alignment between the two levels of government have improved over time, with a focus on maximizing the economic benefits of international education (El Masri, 2019; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2016; Savage, 2009; Shubert et al., 2009; Trilokekar, 2009, 2010; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016b; Viczzo, 2013).

### ***2.6.2 Institutional Autonomy***

Institutional autonomy remains a defining feature of Canadian higher education, granting universities significant latitude over their academic programs, governance, and operations (Clark, 1983). This freedom extends to their internationalization strategies, permitting them to innovate and adapt within the fast-paced global higher education landscape, all within the constraints of national and provincial regulations, funding conditions, and broader policy frameworks (Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011; Knight, 2004).

However, this autonomy has a flip side. It places a significant onus on institutions to ensure the quality and integrity of their international education programs, necessitating robust internal quality assurance mechanisms and adherence to ethical internationalization principles (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004). While institutional autonomy enhances the flexibility and diversity of the Canadian higher education system, it can also create challenges for policy coordination and alignment. For instance, institutional strategies for international student recruitment may not always align with provincial or federal policy objectives (Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011).

Scholars such as Viczko (2013) have highlighted the tension between university autonomy and state control through internationalization processes. This tension is further accentuated by Cerna's (2014) argument that synergies occur when state and university levels

facilitate or hinder internationalization in unison, while clashes are likely to result from inconsistencies. Canadian higher education is also characterized by a culture of diffused authority at the organizational level, with internal policy processes marked by deconcentrated power (King, 2020). This decentralized governance emphasizes institutional autonomy, often competing with the principle of academic freedom, compelling administrators to consult internal stakeholders when formulating policies (Sabzalieva, 2020). Vickzo (2013) further highlighted tensions between university autonomy and government control regarding internationalization. She stated that the federal government “works to steer policy direction and strategies without having to legislate to do so” (Viczzo, 2013, p. 41). She also questioned the autonomous role of institutions in the context of their role as driver of national economic policies and also challenged the perception of university autonomy when the federal “strategy sets the priorities and steers universities in the setting of their own priorities” (Vickzo, 2013, p. 38).

The idiosyncrasies of each university’s position within the PSE sector, coupled with intraorganizational dynamics, play important roles in explaining Canada’s higher education internationalization. Canadian universities, accustomed to academic freedom and institutional autonomy, are unlikely to accept top-down directives from government bodies. Thus, the policy space is likely to be filled by civil society actors like national associations or international organizations (King, 2020).

### ***2.6.3 Immigration Context***

The integration of international education and immigration policies in Canada has evolved notably over time, driven by the country’s rising reliance on immigration to meet its demographic, economic, and labour market demands. This turn dates to the early 1970s, when the nation’s points-based immigration system emerged, prioritizing individuals with higher

education and language proficiency (Reitz, 2007; Trilokekar & Jones, 2020). The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a gradual shift towards a more integrated approach.

Canada's transformation of international education from a largely philanthropic effort to a strategic policy has been well documented in the literature, with significant economic implications (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2011). Concurrently, there has been a shift in the perception of international students, who are increasingly regarded as potential immigrants offering economic advantages (Brunner, 2017; Choudaha, 2017; McCartney, 2016; Stein & Andreotti, 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a). Research underscores Canada's proactive policies facilitating the journey from international student to permanent resident (Choi et al., 2021; Hou & Lu, 2017). While studies have noted a disconnect between federal and provincial policies and the varying responses of universities (Cover, 2016; Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016b), the policies in general are perceived to enhance the country's appeal as a global study destination (Government of Canada, 2008, 2015) and have significant impacts on a broad range of areas, from student recruitment to student experiences and outcomes (Beck, 2012; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019). The country's immigration policies increasingly recognize international students as a desirable source of skilled immigrants, leading to a growing integration of education and immigration policies, as further discuss below (El Masri et al., 2015; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2016, 2018; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019).

## **2.7 The Nexus of International Education and Immigration Policies**

As discussed before, the relationship between international education and immigration policy is a unique aspect of the Canadian context that plays a crucial role in shaping the country's international education sector and its policies. Canada's history and relatively open immigration policy have long recognized international students as key drivers of the country's

economic and social growth (El Masri, 2019; Hawthorne & To, 2014; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019; Trilokekar & Jones, 2020).

Canada has a well-established policy of using education as a pathway to immigration, which sets it apart from many other countries. This policy is driven by demographic trends and economic needs. Canada has an aging population and a low birth rate, which means it relies on immigration for population growth and labour market replenishment. International students are seen as “ideal immigrants:” they are young, educated, proficient in one or both of Canada’s official languages, and have Canadian experience (El Masri, 2019; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar et al., 2016). This perspective is clearly reflected in the first International Education Strategy launched in 2014 and further solidified in the second iteration in 2019, as will be comprehensively discussed in the next chapter (Government of Canada, 2014; 2019). The evolution of immigration policies, especially those related to student recruitment and retention (i.e., visas, post-graduate work permits, and pathways to permanent residency), are linked with IE policies as they collectively shape the student experience and Canada's appeal as an international study destination. Thus, while provinces direct the educational component, the federal government manages the immigration aspect, collaboratively creating a policy network aimed at attracting and retaining international students, establishing a mutually beneficial relationship between international education and immigration policies (Beine et al., 2014; Hou & Bonikowska, 2016). Furthermore, the deliberate interlinking of immigration policies with IE ones underscores the strategic intent of not merely attracting international students but also retaining them as skilled professionals in the future, underlining the complexity and strategic alignment of multi-jurisdictional policies in Canada.

However, the growing convergence between international education and immigration policies in Canada also poses challenges in terms of ensuring the quality and integrity of international education programs and services and balancing the educational and immigration goals of internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019). The rapid growth of international education sector, through the recruitment and retention of international students, has led institutions to become financially reliant on international tuition fees, often substantially compensating for shortfalls in public funding (Brennan et al., 2021; Cudmore 2005; El Masri, 2019; Esses et al., 2021; Guo & Guo, 2017; Knight, 2008; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar & Jones, 2013; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019).

In recent years, scholars have increasingly examined the discourse and policies of international students as potential immigrants and the role of international education policies in shaping migration outcomes (Brunner, 2017; Hawthorne, 2008, 2012; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a). Policymakers have begun to see international education as a pipeline for skilled migration and have implemented policies to facilitate international students' transition to permanent residency (El Masri, 2019; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2016, 2018; Scott et al., 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019; Trilokekar, 2009, 2010; Viczko, 2013). This shift has been influenced by the recognition of international students' contribution to national immigration strategies and demographic planning (El Masri, 2019).

## **2.8 Summary of International Education as Policy Literature**

El Masri (2019) classifies the expanding literature on internationalization as policy into two primary areas of focus. First, there is ongoing debate regarding who predominantly drives internationalization. Some academics have emphasized the importance of government in establishing national policies on international education and guiding PSE institutions (Enders,

2004; Marginson & Sawir, 2005; van der Wende, 2001). Others, however, have argued that the state's influence is dwindling due to the rise of global and supranational forces (Enders, 2004; Horta, 2010; Marginson, 2002; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2006; Viczko, 2012).

Second, when exploring international education policies, scholars have noted a growing diversification of agendas resulting in intersections between international education and other policy areas. For instance, ties have been observed between international education (including recruitment and retention of international students) and immigration (Brunner, 2022, 2017; El Masri, 2019; Kwak & Kim, 2019; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2016, 2018; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a, 2016b, 2019; Sabzalieva et al., 2022; Schinnerl & Ellermann, 2023; Williams et al., 2015), economic growth (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Tamtik, 2017), and national security (Loveland, 2012). Intersections with innovation (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Choudaha, 2017; de Wit, 2002) as well as foreign affairs and international trade (Eastman et al., 2019; Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011) have also been observed.

In Canada, academic research delving into the intersection of international education and immigration policy has exposed key findings. The literature indicates a pivot in Canada's approach to international education, evolving from a philanthropic endeavour to a strategic policy with substantial economic benefits (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2011). Furthermore, international students are now seen less as diplomatic tools and more as economically advantageous potential immigrants (Brunner, 2017; McCartney, 2016; Stein & Andreotti, 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a). Research also highlights Canada's proactive role in facilitating the transition from international student to permanent resident (Choi, et al., 2021; Hou & Lu, 2017). State policies contribute to Canada's appeal as an international study destination

(Government of Canada, 2008, 2015) and affect everything from student recruitment practices to the experiences and outcomes of international students (Beck, 2012; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019).

The literature also points to a lack of alignment between federal and provincial policies and institutional strategies, leading to varying university responses to state policies (Cover, 2016; Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016b). Additionally, research underscores the strategic value of international education as a vehicle to address demographic challenges and labour market needs. International students, especially those who achieve permanent residency, are seen as pivotal in offsetting the potential ramifications of an aging population and a contracting labour force (Beine et al., 2014; Hou & Bonikowska, 2016).

## **2.9 International Education Literature During the Pandemic**

Exploring the literature of international education and student recruitment and retention during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals a range of challenges and adjustments faced by educational institutions globally. Studies have shed light on different aspects of this issue, offering insights into policy responses as well as their impact on students and academic institutions during this global health crisis. For instance, examining the policy discussion specifically in the context of Canada's educational sector, El Masri & Sabzalieva (2020) explored government measures introduced to support international students during the pandemic. Their study examined actions and coordination levels among three primary actors: the Canadian federal government, the Ontario provincial government, and Ontario's publicly funded colleges and universities. The authors reviewed public announcements and employed an emergency management framework to chronologically compare responses in academic mobility, teaching and learning, research initiatives, and student support.

Furthermore, Esses et al. (2021) provided an exhaustive evaluation of Canada's immigration system before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealing not only its strengths but also exposing weaknesses and vulnerabilities that had developed, and elaborated on over 80 recommendations and insights to optimize the nation's immigration program. The authors underscored the escalating importance of immigration to Canada, advocating for a comprehensive reassessment and enhancement of its immigration and integration policies and programs for immigrants, refugees, temporary foreign workers, and international students, especially considering post-COVID-19 recovery.

Some scholars have highlighted the unique challenges faced by students during this period. Firang & Mensah (2021), for example, noted that the temporary immigration status of international students and lack of support systems in the country makes them particularly vulnerable and prone to financial and psychological stress. The authors provide a range of strategies to address these challenges and emphasize the need to empower international students and support groups to address their distinct needs. Bhavsar et al. (2021) similarly noted that international students in Canada are socially and financially vulnerable as they are not qualified to receive welfare benefits. Bello et al. (2021) also highlighted challenges such as social isolation and discrimination, noting how financial instability and immigration concerns reinforced systemic barriers and structural disadvantages for this group during the pandemic.

Some studies have also examined the impact of the pandemic on post-secondary education institutions. Buckner et al. (2022), for example, explored how the COVID-19 regulations, particularly the travel restrictions implemented in March 2020, impacted international student enrolments in Canada and the United States, analyzing the governmental policy responses and subsequent changes in enrolment patterns in both nations. While the study

reported relatively small declines in enrolment figures, it acknowledged that Canada's federal policies were adapted to support international students, and that the approach was very different in comparison to the more hostile policies mandated by the United States. Additionally, Slade (2022) and Brennan et al. (2021) examined the broader repercussions of the pandemic on various Canadian sectors, emphasizing the significant role of post-secondary education (PSE) in the country's recovery strategy. Their research pointed out the challenges PSE faced, hinting at the importance of bolstering this sector for a more equitable and sustainable future in Canada.

## **2.10 Gaps and Contribution to Literature**

Despite the growing body of research on international education in Canada, there remain several gaps in our understanding. This study contributes to the existing literature in five ways.

First, studies in Canadian education policy research have employed the MSA (Charles, 2011; Howlett, 1998; Rexe, 2014), which has also been adopted to analyze crisis (Birkland, 1997, 1998, 2004; Farley et al., 2007; Saikaly, 2009; White, 2015; Wood, 2004, 2006; Zaychenko, 2013). Particularly, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, studies have been published in the disciplines of health (Jalali et al., 2020; Ng et al., 2020), education (Kippin & Cairney, 2021; Kaur et al., 2020), and public policy (Dunlop et al., 2020; Maor & Howlett, 2020). Additionally, the MWOP has also been employed to examine policy making (Booyesen, 2011; Helfferich & Kolb, 2001; Steger, 2000) and has also been adapted to analyze crisis (Cortell & Peterson, 1999; Helderman, 2015). This study breaks new ground by adapting the MSA and the MWOP, both of which originated from political science, to enrich our understanding of international education, particularly in the context of Canadian immigration policy making during a crisis. As previously mentioned, few studies to date have explored this policy context during the COVID-19 pandemic (Brennan et al., 2021; Buckner et al., 2022; El Masri &

Sabzalieva, 2020; Esses et al., 2021; Firang & Mensah, 2021; Slade, 2022). While these studies have highlighted that immigration policies measures were introduced during the pandemic to support international students, they do not specifically focus on the recruitment and retention of international students. Additionally, a comprehensive analysis of these policy measures as well as the policy making process that enabled these changes to be implemented has not been conducted. This research aims to bridge these knowledge gaps.

Second, further research is required on how these immigration policies to enable the continued recruitment and retention of international students differentially impact various regions and institutions within Canada, considering the diversity of local contexts and impacts. The extent to which different provinces, cities, and institutions benefit from or are impacted by international education and immigration policies may vary significantly, reflecting differing local contexts and institutional capacities. Understanding these differences can inform more responsive, context-specific policy adjustments that consider the unique needs and capacities of different institutions and regions (Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011; Viczko & Tascón, 2016). Additionally, the future of international education in Canada under the influence of these policies calls for more in-depth study. This involves contemplating how global geopolitics, demographics, and technology might shape the trajectory of international education and immigration policies. It is crucial to evaluate the long-term implications of policy integration on the quality and integrity of Canadian higher education. The sustainability of this policy approach in the face of evolving global trends, such as rising competition for international students and the changing geopolitics of higher education, also warrants further investigation (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Choudaha & de Wit, 2014; de Wit, 2011; Knight, 2004).

Third, further exploration is needed on the intersection of international education and immigration policy within the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. This analysis, which is both timely and significant, seeks to understand the policy responses and their implications during this unprecedented disruption (Dunlop et al., 2020; Kippin & Cairney, 2021; Kaur et al., 2020). The examination further extends to the impact of the pandemic on international education and the consequent shift towards digital and virtual mobility, factors that hold substantial implications for the future trajectory of international education (Watermeyer et al., 2021). In sum, this study of policy responses in a crisis will contribute to a deeper understanding of how international education, pivotal to Canada's economy and society, adapts to transformative global events like crises.

Fourth, this study focuses on the linkages between international education and immigration policy in Canada, a topic that has received considerable attention but remains under-researched. By examining how these two policy areas have intersected in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, this study sheds new light on the dynamics of policy making and implementation in times of crisis (Birkland, 1997, 1998, 2004; Farley et al., 2007; Saikaly, 2009; Welch, 2002, 2022; White, 2015; Wood, 2004, 2006). In doing so, it can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of international education policy in Canada and its interconnectedness with immigration policy.

Fifth, regarding the inclusion of various policy actors, this study extends the scope of inquiry beyond federal policies to include local and institutional actors, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of the policy landscape. In doing so, it addresses the call for research on the interrelationships between multiple actors at multiple levels of authority within the Canadian international education policy arena (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Viczko & Tascón, 2016). Thus,

the study adds to the richness and diversity of the literature on international education policy in Canada and offers valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and scholars in the field.

This chapter has provided a robust review of the international education literature, tracing its development over time and outlining the growing integration with other policy domains, particularly immigration. The analysis has shed light on the unique aspects of international education policy within the Canadian context and has also elucidated how it has evolved over time. The gaps identified within this review underscore the need for continued exploration and inquiry, especially concerning the nuanced interplay between education and immigration policies. This literature review positions the present research within the wider academic context, delineating the significant contributions it aims to make in the scholarly understanding of international education as a policy.

The following chapter delves into the intricate connections between international education and immigration policies, with a detailed mapping of the policies from 2002–2020. The objective is to understand and contextualize the policy landscape that shapes Canada’s international education sector. The exploration of these policies, within the constraints and opportunities they present, forms an integral part of the larger narrative, contributing to our understanding of the interconnections within this complex policy ecosystem.

## **Chapter 3: Policy Context (2002–2020)**

The third chapter delves into the intricate connections between international education and immigration policies, along with a detailed mapping of policies from 2002–2020. At the heart of this chapter, is a search to understand and contextualize the policy landscape that shapes the international education sector in Canada. This chapter also includes a detailed profile of international students in Canada, providing a demographic lens to apply to the complex policy landscape.

### **3.1 International Education and Immigration Policies: 2002–2020**

The interplay between Canada’s international education and immigration policies has been a vibrant and complex tapestry, representative of the conscious efforts to position the country as a prominent destination for international students and highly skilled immigrants. Over the decades, these policies have evolved significantly while becoming increasingly intertwined, shaped by numerous socioeconomic factors. The result is a policy landscape that builds on the aspirations of international students, the needs of the domestic labour market, the demands of the global talent pool, and the broader ambitions of the Canadian state. This section sheds light on the numerous policy adjustments that characterize the increasing convergence of international education and immigration policies in Canada.

#### ***3.1.1 Early Emphasis on High-Skilled Migration***

The Federal Skilled Worker Program, instituted by the Canadian government in 1967, marked a significant turn towards a proactive immigration model targeting immigrants based on their capacity to contribute to the economy. Although the focus on skilled migration did not immediately involve international students, the gradual shift in Canada’s immigration policies has been a significant facet of the federal government’s engagement with international education.

Over time, these policies have transitioned from merely facilitating international students' entry into Canada to actively seeking their long-term retention after graduation (El Masri, 2019).

The groundwork for this change began in the mid-1980s when the federal government adopted a national strategy to attract more international students to Canada (Larocque, 2018). This strategy featured several initiatives, including recruitment campaigns, partnerships with provinces, and the granting of on-campus and postgraduate work permits to international students. The goal was to make Canada an appealing study destination, and the plan was effective in its goal of facilitating the recruitment of international students.

The narrative began to change with the implementation of the 2002 IRPA, marking a turning point in Canadian immigration policy. The Act showed a preference for younger workers with trade certificates or higher education credentials (Schinnerl, 2021). It also introduced the International Student Program, which categorized international students as a new type of temporary resident (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2010). This policy measure primarily facilitated the entry of international students into Canada.

Before the IRPA, international students were primarily admitted into Canada on temporary student visas and were not targeted as a potential source of immigration. The suspicion of a "dual intent"—that is, an intention to study and possibly immigrate—made some prospective international students ineligible for student visas. Incentives for students to stay in Canada were scarce, and processing times for eligible students wishing to apply for existing immigration streams were slow. However, this began to change following the implementation of the IRPA (Kachulis & Perez-Leclerc, 2019).

Over the decade following the implementation of the IRPA, Canada's immigration focus gradually shifted. The government began viewing international students as more than temporary

residents; they became potential temporary workers and a pool of qualified potential permanent residents (Larocque, 2018). Policy changes to the International Student Program were increasingly designed to facilitate study and work opportunities for international students, thereby attracting them to Canada and then retaining them. A series of immigration measures, including recruitment campaigns and partnerships with provinces, further facilitated the entry and stay of international students in Canada (Larocque, 2018).

These changes illustrate the strategic direction of Canada's immigration policies. By focusing on international students, the government created an additional pathway for high-skilled migration. After initially being viewed as part of the larger temporary foreign worker population, international students became a potential pool of immigrants, reflecting a significant evolution in Canada's approach to immigration (Kachulis & Perez-Leclerc, 2019).

Overall, the early emphasis on high-skilled migration helped set the stage for subsequent policy changes that would further formalize pathways for international students to become permanent residents from the mid-2000s onwards. These early policies, notably the Federal Skilled Worker Program and the International Student Program, created an environment conducive to attracting, and more importantly, retaining international students. They set a precedent for future immigration policies, laying the groundwork for subsequent policy initiatives, such as the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) and the Express Entry system. This period, therefore, marks a significant shift in the evolution of international education and immigration policies in Canada, as a purely temporary perspective of international students moved towards a more long-term vision of immigration (see Table 1).

### ***3.1.2 Changes to Study Permit Regulations***

On June 1, 2014, IRCC launched a set of new federal regulations on study permits for international students, primarily aimed at enhancing the integrity of Canada's immigration system. These regulations were introduced in response to growing concerns, with individuals using study permits as a backdoor for immigration without genuine intent to pursue education. Moreover, there were instances where some private educational providers were capitalizing on these loopholes, offering subpar educational services or acting as fronts for other, less legitimate activities. The modifications were designed to optimize the system's functionality while addressing and minimizing potential exploitation.

One of the significant changes was the requirement for study permit holders to actively pursue their studies. This initiative was a response to the trend of some individuals obtaining a study visa but not actually participating in any educational programs. In connection to this, it was ruled that study permits would expire 90 days after the completion of studies, thereby preventing abuse of study permits for immigration purposes.

The second major change concerned the issue of study permits. From June 1, 2014, these permits would only be issued to individuals who planned to study at an institution recognized as a designated learning institution (DLI). The DLI system was a quality assurance measure instituted to diminish the number of dubious private educational providers. It ensured that only institutions meeting certain quality standards would be able to receive international students. Public K–12 schools in Canada were automatically granted DLI status. As for postsecondary institutions, provinces provided a list to IRCC of those institutions that met the necessary standards. All public postsecondary institutions were recognized as DLIs, but private

postsecondary institutions had to meet certain quality assurance standards to receive the designation.

To maintain their DLI status, institutions were required to fulfill certain reporting obligations to IRCC concerning study permit holders studying at their institutions. This change marked a significant milestone as it was the first time that educational institutions were obliged to share information on international students directly with the federal government. Consequently, international students were now required to obtain a letter of acceptance from a DLI before they could receive a study permit. Furthermore, DLIs were mandated to report on the status of international students, including whether they were attending classes, making progress, or had completed their studies.

A third crucial change was related to work permissions for international students. The federal government decided that all international students holding a valid study permit (granted through a DLI) could now work off-campus for up to 20 hours per week during academic sessions and full-time when courses were not in session. This update eliminated the need for an additional work visa because study permits now directly and automatically provided access to work authorization. However, students in English- or French-language or general interest programs were not eligible for off-campus work.

The final significant change was allowing foreign nationals visiting Canada to change their status to student from within the country. This was a marked departure from the previous rule, which required applicants to leave Canada to apply and then re-enter when the study permit was granted. This change was important as it provided a different pathway for foreign learners who began as short-term language students and thus did not have a study permit, as it was not required for a stay of less than 6 months. After completing language instruction, if they qualified

for a program at a DLI, they could apply for a study permit without leaving Canada (CIC, 2015d).

In 2018, further enhancements were introduced to the study permit regulations with the introduction of the Student Direct Stream (SDS) program. Aimed at students applying for a study permit from specific countries—initially China, India, Vietnam, and the Philippines—who demonstrated upfront that they had the financial resources and language skills to succeed academically in Canada, the SDS program provided faster processing times, averaging less than 3 weeks (Government of Canada, 2018b). However, students applying under the SDS program were required to immediately meet specific criteria, such as proof of tuition payment for the first year of study at a DLI, purchase of a Guaranteed Investment Certificate of \$10,000, completion of a medical examination, and demonstration of a qualifying language score (Government of Canada, 2018b). In 2019, the SDS program expanded to include students from Pakistan, Senegal, and Morocco (Government of Canada, 2019a, 2019c). As of 2021, the program further expanded to students from Antigua and Barbuda, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, the Philippines, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vietnam (Government of Canada, 2021j) (see Table 1).

These comprehensive changes to study permit regulations, followed by the introduction and expansion of the SDS program, reflect Canada's commitment to attracting and supporting international students while maintaining the integrity of its immigration system.

### ***3.1.3 Post-Graduation Work Permit Program***

Among the earliest policy changes that introduced integration of international education with immigration pathways was the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWPP), which allowed international students to gain work experience in Canada following graduation. This

program marked a key evolution in the Canadian approach to international student integration, although at this stage it was not yet a formal immigration pathway.

Launched in 2005, the PGWPP offered international student graduates the chance to remain in Canada for 1 year if they received a job offer in their field of study in a major city (Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver) or 2 years if they received a job offer in their field of study elsewhere in the country. This was a strategic move to encourage graduates to stay in Canada, with additional incentives designed to promote distribution of graduates outside of major city centres.

While the PGWP did not directly pave the way for immigration, it provided international students with invaluable work experience. This, in turn, facilitated the opportunity for a possible employer-sponsored work permit extension or application for permanent residence through the Federal Skilled Worker Program, the primary economic immigration class at that time. Like other Federal Skilled Worker Program applicants, international students were still required to leave Canada and apply internationally to settle permanently in the country.

The PGWPP saw significant amendments in April 2008, only 2 years after its initial introduction. Notably, there were no longer restrictions on the type of employment for graduates, meaning they could work in any occupation and no longer needed an offer of employment to apply for a work permit. For graduates who had received a minimum 2-year credential from a recognized DLI, the duration of the work permit was extended to 3 years across the country, removing geographical restrictions. Those who completed a program between 8 months and less than 2 years were granted a work permit equal to the length of their studies<sup>5</sup>. The motivation

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<sup>5</sup> There were some restrictions on who could access the PGWPP. Students participating in the Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship Program, or the Government of Canada Awards Program were not eligible, and neither were international students who were studying the English or French language or were on a study exchange from a foreign institution.

behind these changes was to make Canada a more attractive study destination and increase the number of international students accessing the program upon completion of their studies (CIC, 2008). It was also intended to increase the pool of qualified candidates for eventual immigration through the CEC, addressing immediate labour market needs and skill shortages in Canada.

In 2019, further updates were made to the PGWPP. The window to apply for a post-graduation work permit was extended from 90 to 180 days (6 months) after graduation, and graduates could apply for the off-campus work permit from within or outside of Canada (Government of Canada, 2019d). With these changes, Canada offered the most generous post-graduation work policy among all countries receiving international students (Schinnerl, 2021)<sup>6</sup>. The PGWPP became a key driver of international student enrolments, which began growing year over year after 2008, spurred largely by the generous post-study work opportunities and clear immigration pathways it provided.

The PGWPP offers international students a chance to gain work experience in Canada, which counts towards a future application for permanent residency in the country. With subsequent changes in immigration policies, additional points are now awarded for those who have completed postsecondary studies in Canada as well as those with Canadian work experience. This greatly enhances the chances of international student graduates to be selected for permanent residence. These policy developments underscore Canada's strategic approach to cultivating an international student population that can address the country's economic and

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<sup>6</sup> In comparison, countries like the UK initially limited post-study work rights to a period of only two years post-graduation, and Australia restricted its post-study work rights based on the type and location of study. The United States offered Optional Practical Training (OPT), allowing students to work for one-year post-graduation. Hence, Canada's PGWPP, which provided up to three years of work rights, regardless of the field of study, stood out as particularly generous in the global context.

demographic challenges and labour market needs. The PGWPP, in particular, has become a fundamental program in linking international education and immigration in Canada (see Table 1).

### ***3.1.4 Provincial Nominee Program***

Canada's Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) represents an integral aspect of the country's immigration policy, acknowledging the shared responsibility of the provinces and the federal government in managing immigration. Established with the signing of the initial federal-provincial agreements by British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan in 1998, the PNP was later joined by New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador in 1999, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island in 2002, and finally Ontario in 2007. The territories also have nomination agreements. Quebec, however, is a unique case. It does not participate in the PNP because it maintains a separate agreement, granting it exclusive responsibility for selecting its economic-class immigrants (Schinnerl, 2021)

The central purpose of the PNP is to allow provinces and territories to address regional skill shortages across a variety of educational and skill levels. It is also seen as an effective tool for dispersing immigrants more evenly across the country, given the disproportionate concentration of recent immigrants in Canada's three largest cities: Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Each province offers multiple streams, with unique eligibility criteria, resulting in over 60 different immigration streams across the provinces. It is important to note that the PNP does not restrict successful nominees' movement between provinces, as this would infringe upon the mobility rights granted to new immigrants under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The responsibility to ensure that those applying to provincial programs intend to stay and work in those regions falls to the individual jurisdictions (CIC, Evaluation Division, 2011). These

jurisdictions strive to maximize the probability that immigrants will settle in the nominating province.

By 2020, all provinces had established dedicated streams, substreams, or pilot programs offering a PNP pathway to individuals who had completed postsecondary studies in the province, held a post-graduation work permit from a Canadian institution, or both.

For instance, British Columbia's International Graduate category of the British Columbia Provincial Nominee Program (BC PNP) targets individuals who have graduated from a Canadian educational institution within the last three years (Province of British Columbia, 2023). Alberta's Alberta Opportunity Stream, on the other hand, offers a pathway for those who have completed their studies at an approved Alberta institution (Government of Alberta., n.d.). In Atlantic Canada, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (AIPP) includes a dedicated International Graduate stream, which caters to recent graduates from institutions in Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick (Government of Canada, 2023). Similarly, Manitoba's International Education Stream provides pathways for international students graduating from Manitoba institutions, reflecting the province's commitment to retaining international talent (Province of Manitoba, n.d.).

Not only does this highlight a federal-level immigration pathway through the CEC, which acknowledges and recruits international students to stay in Canada, but it also sheds light on the varying provincial programs. These programs feature specialized streams for international students, many of which are eligible for expedited processing through the Express Entry system. Therefore, the PNP plays an increasingly vital role in attracting and retaining international students in Canada (She & Wotherspoon, 2013).

### ***3.1.5 Canadian Experience Class Immigration Program***

The CEC immigration program, introduced by the federal government in 2008, marked a pivotal moment in Canadian immigration policy as it allowed temporary migrant workers, including international students, to apply for permanent residency, and eventually citizenship, while remaining in Canada. This was a departure from previous immigration policies, which necessitated migrants to leave the country to apply for permanent residency. The CEC was constructed to resemble the existing points-based system for economic immigration, but it diverged by specifically rewarding study and work experience acquired in Canada. It primarily targeted skilled workers in professional, managerial, and technical occupations, aiming to enhance Canada's labour market responsiveness and global competitiveness in the recruitment and retention of highly skilled workers and international students (CIC, 2015b).

In contrast to the preceding immigration schemes, the CEC established a bridge from temporary foreign worker status to permanent resident status, which traditionally had been treated as separate categories serving different objectives. This novel approach was influenced by a series of studies ordered by CIC that scrutinized the outcomes of skilled workers with Canadian experience. The studies elucidated the need for an "effective bridge between temporary and permanent resident status" (Fraser, 2009, p. 2), a factor contributing to the inception of the CEC.

Originally, the CEC program encompassed two streams: one for students and another for workers. In 2013, these two streams were harmonized following a series of regulatory changes. The program cap was established at 12,000 applications per year, and subcategories also had caps. Furthermore, a requirement to demonstrate language competency was introduced. Currently, all CEC applicants are mandated to possess 12 months of Canadian work experience,

in a National Occupational Classification level 0, A, or B occupation, within the 36 months prior to applying. They must also meet the language requirements associated with their respective occupational levels (CIC, 2015d).

When the CEC was launched in 2008, the majority of the applications (76.7%) were submitted under the student stream. However, over time, the proportion of applications via the worker stream increased, representing approximately half of applications by 2012. Following the 2013 regulatory changes that merged the two streams, international graduates continued to apply, albeit at a declining rate (47.3%). Notably, from 2008 to 2016, 55% of all immigrants admitted through this stream had Canadian educational experience (Government of Canada, 2019e).

The establishment of the CEC signalled another paradigm shift in Canada's immigration policy, embracing the potential long-term benefits of retaining international students. As part of a series of initiatives aimed at facilitating the retention of highly skilled temporary workers and international students—considered “a key talent pool” (CIC, 2010)—the CEC program echoed research suggesting that skilled workers with Canadian work or study experience had better economic outcomes than did those without this experience (Picot et al., 2007; Reitz, 2007).

The CEC not only facilitated an explicit immigration pathway for international students studying at the postsecondary level in Canada, but also eliminated the previous restriction of declaring a dual intent, thus synergizing with the extended duration of the PGWP to 3 years across the country without restrictions on the type of employment or requirement of a job offer. This was coupled with an increase in visa application approvals for international students under the 2009 Student Partners Program (now known as the Student Direct Stream), further bolstering Canada's appeal to prospective international students. As Diane Finley, then the minister of citizenship and immigration, highlighted, “Our ability to retain international graduates with

Canadian qualifications, work experience and familiarity with Canadian society, will help increase our competitiveness and benefit Canada as a whole” (Government of Canada, 2008, para. 5). This testament accentuated the shift from utilizing traditional economic-class streams towards creating an open, preferential, and dedicated pathway for Canadian international student graduates.

Considering these regulatory amendments and incentives, “two-step” migration—where economic-class immigrants first enter Canada with temporary status as a worker or student and then convert their status to permanent resident—has become a significant part of Canada’s immigration landscape. An expansion in two-step immigration selection is driven in part by substantial changes in the types of programs used to select economic immigrants. Notably, the introduction of the CEC and PNP, which focus on the selection of permanent residents based on their potential to thrive in the Canadian labour market, has significantly contributed to this expansion. For international students who come to Canada on a study permit, the journey towards permanent residency often encompasses “three steps”: studying, acquiring temporary work status, and ultimately pursuing the goal of becoming a permanent resident. The proportion of economic immigrants with Canadian work experience prior to landing rose from 8% in 2000 to 46% in 2018 (Crossman et al., 2020). This underlines how international students have significantly benefited from the new policy framework, with two-step and three-step migration becoming integral parts of Canada’s immigration policy (Crossman et al., 2020).

### ***3.1.6 Express Entry System***

In 2015, Canada introduced the Express Entry system, a profound innovation to the country’s immigration policies. Under this new system, applications for permanent residency from international students who graduated from a Canadian institution were managed along with

applications from other groups of skilled workers and prospective immigrants. Implemented by CIC (which was renamed IRCC in late 2015), this system was not an immigration stream in its own right, but a platform to manage and expedite applications for Canadian permanent residency for eligible skilled foreign workers (CIC, 2015d).

Applicants were required to submit an online profile detailing their basic information, educational background, and work history. All profiles were ranked according to a Comprehensive Ranking System, which awarded points based on English- or French-language proficiency, educational attainment, Canadian work experience, and other factors tied to the potential for success in Canada. The scoring system, which allowed candidates to amass up to 1,200 points, played a pivotal role in determining who would receive an invitation to apply for permanent residency. A substantial boost in scoring was earned by candidates who had a job offer from a Canadian employer or a nomination from a province or territory, known as a Provincial Nominee (CIC, 2015d).

At the heart of the Express Entry system, which was introduced under the federal Conservative government in 2015, was the goal to more closely align immigration with the needs of the Canadian labour market. In its first iteration, the program was designed to prioritize immigration applicants who had job offers and could immediately contribute to the labour market and the broader economy (Keung, 2015a), sparking a debate about the degree to which the system truly promoted access to permanent residency for international students (Keung, 2015b). The Express Entry system was criticized for its lack of recognition of those who had studied in Canada, as it essentially pooled all skilled workers together for selection, failing to highlight the specific value of international students who already had Canadian education experience.

In response to this critique, the Liberals, upon taking office in 2015, made amendments to the Express Entry system. In November 2016, international students were given extra points for Canadian education, thereby restoring their advantage over other skilled immigrants. Candidates received 15 points for completion of a 1- or 2-year program and 30 points for completion of an undergraduate or postgraduate degree program at a Canadian institution. Points awarded for a job offer were decreased from 600 to 200 for senior management positions, while all other job offers were given 50 points (IRCC, 2016).

These changes were anticipated to increase the proportion of Express Entry applications from international students from 30% to 40%, as the added points for Canadian study experience improved their rankings within the pool of candidates (IRCC, 2016). For the first time, Canadian study credentials were formally recognized in the assessment of permanent residency applications, reflecting a further change in policy and highlighting the unique contribution of international students to Canadian society.

Controversy also surrounded the transition of international students from permanent resident status to Canadian citizenship, particularly in relation to the 2014 Bill C-24 (also known as the Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act). It extended the required residency period in Canada for international students from 3 to 4 years before they could apply for citizenship. The Liberals reversed these changes in 2017 through Bill C-6, easing the path to citizenship for international students.

### ***3.1.7 Multiyear Immigration Levels Plans***

In 2017, the Liberal federal government in Canada charted another ambitious path for the country's immigration policy by introducing the first multiyear Immigration Levels Plan. It targeted increasing levels of new permanent residents, starting with 310,000 in 2018, the highest

level in recent history, and gradually increasing to 330,000 in 2019 and 340,000 in 2020 (Government of Canada, 2018a). Ahmed Hussen, then minister of immigration, refugees and citizenship, stated, “Our country’s future success will depend largely on attracting more talented people from around the world. Under this framework, we will bring in more talented workers with the particular skills and expertise that our economy needs” (Government of Canada, 2018a, p. 1). This move demonstrated the government’s commitment to increase the country’s population through immigration over the next few years. To achieve this, the government effectively leveraged the Express Entry system to emphasize the value of human capital, including education, language proficiency, age, and work experience (predominantly in Canada) in selected professions. Moreover, having a job offer in Canada was considered an added advantage for all main applicants in the economic programs. The Canadian immigration point system was designed to favour applicants with high levels of education, particularly those with credentials from Canadian postsecondary education institutions, and several years of work experience.

Additionally, IRCC vowed to continue monitoring and reviewing its existing economic programs to maximize the economic benefits of immigration. The department aimed to attract top talent by reducing wait times for permanent residence applications, adopting innovative approaches in areas like recruitment, and addressing specific skill requirements. Furthermore, IRCC planned to develop new measures to handle the increasing volumes of temporary residents. Part of IRCC’s responsibilities include facilitating the entry of international students, temporary workers, and visitors while ensuring the health, safety, and security of Canadians. The department processes visas, electronic travel authorizations, and work and study permits, acknowledging the economic benefits brought by the individuals who receive them.

In 2018, IRCC examined elements of its Visitors Program to ensure modern security standards were met while facilitating the efficient entry of visitors to Canada. Seven additional visa application processing centres were opened in China in anticipation of an increase in tourism during the Canada-China Year of Tourism in 2018. The electronic travel authorization initiative, launched in 2015 and expanded in 2017, was designed to pre-screen foreign nationals from eligible visa-exempt countries before their air travel to Canada. The success of the expanded initiative was continuously monitored and evaluated in 2018–2019, determining any subsequent steps. Throughout 2018–2019, IRCC also ensured that necessary health screenings were carried out and pursued international collaborations to identify best practices, improve health screening and risk mitigation, and align approaches.

Furthermore, IRCC began to utilize advanced analytics and predictive modelling in selected temporary resident programs in 2018–2019, aiming to streamline application processing, reduce processing times, improve the client experience, and strengthen program integrity. This broad-ranging policy had significant implications for international students. By prioritizing the reduction of wait times and technological innovation, the policy aimed to make Canada a more attractive destination for education. The fact that the presence of international students was explicitly recognized as benefiting the Canadian economy signalled a welcoming attitude, potentially encouraging more students to choose Canada for their studies. The commitment to monitoring and continual improvement in health screening and risk mitigation also indicated a proactive approach to ensuring the safety of international students (Government of Canada, 2018a).

In March 2020, just before COVID-19 related travel restrictions were imposed, the minister of immigration, Marco Mendicino, released the government’s plan for immigration

levels for the period 2020–2022. According to the plan, the number of permanent residents admitted to Canada each year would continue to grow, from 341,000 in 2020 to 351,000 in 2021, and further to 361,000 in 2022 (Government of Canada, 2020b). This new plan showed an increase in the overall numbers of newcomers in two main categories, economic class and refugees and protected persons, but not in the family class. Specifically, the economic class would expand to constitute approximately 60% of all newcomers over the next 3 years, while refugees and protected persons would remain at 14.6%. Conversely, the family class would decrease to 25.2%.

These changes had direct implications for international students, who fit within the economic-class category. This renewed focus on attracting economically productive immigrants, alongside an emphasis on Canadian education credentials, signalled a promising trend for international students seeking permanent residency. Indeed, this approach demonstrated the government’s recognition of the value that international students brought to the Canadian economy and society. Consequently, it promised to significantly benefit international students by further opening pathways to permanent residency in Canada.

Table 1 provides a detailed mapping of immigration policies discussed above, covering changes in the following areas: study permits, the PGWPP, the SDS, immigration streams such as the CEC, and the Express Entry system. The dynamic and interconnected nature of international education and immigration policies is not merely a milieu to international students but actively shapes their academic journey, integration into Canadian society, and potential paths towards permanent residency. The policies and strategies under study have been developed with certain objectives and an overarching focus. They aim to attract a skilled and talented pool of international students, enhance Canada’s competitive standing in the global education market,

and further position education as a vital export industry. Concurrently, these policies look to leverage the potential of these international students as a “ready-made” pool of immigrants who could meet the needs of the Canadian labour market, contribute to the economy, and enhance the country’s demographic diversity.

It is crucial to note that these policies are not standalone entities; rather, they are a part of a larger sociopolitical matrix that reacts to the country’s shifting economic needs, political ideologies, and the global context. As these policy developments are explored, it remains important to view them as part of a continuum of change and response, both driving and responding to shifts in the wider social fabric.

**Table 1***Immigration Policies (2002–2020)*

Year	Policy or program	Description of changes
2002	International Student Program	Introduced international student as a new category of temporary residents to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.
2005	Study Permit	Streamlined the study permit application process, enabling international students to obtain a study permit valid for the full length of their intended period of study. Enabled international students in postsecondary education institutions to transfer between programs of study and institutions (public and private) without first making an application to CIC.
2005	Post-Graduation Work Permit Program	Enabled international student graduates from recognized Canadian educational institutions outside Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver to work after graduation in Canada for an additional year (up to 2 years).
2006	Off-Campus Work Permit Program	Enabled full-time international student at participating educational institutions to work off-campus during their studies for up to 20 hours per week.
2008	Post-Graduation Work Permit Program	Allowed international students to obtain an open work permit (for up to 3 years), with no restrictions on the type of employment and no requirement of a job offer.
2008	Off-Campus Work Permit Program (amendment)	Enabled international students in Canada to apply online for an off-campus work permit.
2008	Canadian Experience Class	Introduced a new immigration stream that allows international student graduates with professional, managerial, and skilled work experience to immigrate, recognizing their education and work experience in Canada as key selection criteria for permanent residence (CIC, Evaluation Division, 2010).
2009	Student Partners Program	Streamlined admission and visa process for Indian international students in Canadian community colleges (International Education Specialists, 2018).
2011	Student Partners Program (amendment)	Extended Student Partners Program to international students from China (International Education Specialists, 2018).

Year	Policy or program	Description of changes
2013	International Student Program (amendments)	Enabled international students to stay in Canada for up to 3 years following graduation. Reduced Canadian work experience requirement for residency from 24 to 12 months.
2013	Temporary Foreign Workers Program (amendments)	Required employers to obtain a Labour Market Impact Assessment to hire foreign nationals
2014	International Student Program (amendments)	Limited the issuance of study permits to applicants who would be studying at a designated learning institution. Required students to enrol and actively pursue their studies while in Canada. Allowed full-time international students enrolled at designated institutions in certain programs to work part-time off-campus and full-time during scheduled school breaks without a work permit (CIC, Evaluation Division, 2015).
2014	International Student Program (amendments)	Removed work permit requirement for off-campus work. Expanded off-campus work to private career colleges.
2014	Bill C-35	Excluded both international education agents, as well as international student advisors employed by Canadian institutions, from advising students on immigration matters unless they completed training and certification as a regulated Canadian immigration consultant with the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council.
2014	Bill C-24 Citizenship Act	Prolonged the period that international students needed to reside in Canada prior to applying for citizenship. Reduced the time international students had to spend in Canada before becoming a permanent resident from citizenship applications.
2015	Express Entry	Advantaged international students with a job offer in their permanent residency application. International students received no extra points in their permanent residency application for their education in Canada.
2016	Express Entry (amendments)	Gave extra point to international students for their education in Canada in their permanent residency application.
2017	Bill C-6 Citizenship Act	Repealed changes introduced by Bill C-24 (Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act) to count a portion of time spent as temporary residents (e.g., international student) in Canada.
2017	Multiyear Immigration Plan	Set out the most ambitious immigration levels in recent history with 310,000 new permanent residents in 2018, growing to 330,000 in 2019 and 340,000 in 2020.

Year	Policy or program	Description of changes
2018	Student Direct Stream	Fast-tracked study permit processing for international students in China, India, Philippines, and Vietnam to under 3 weeks.
2019	Student Direct Stream (amendments)	Included Pakistan, Senegal, and Morocco in the Student Direct Stream.
2020	2020–2022 Immigration Levels Plan	Based on the solid economic foundation of the previous levels plan and continued to responsibly grow the number of permanent residents admitted to Canada each year, from 341,000 in 2020 to 351,000 in 2021 and 361,000 in 2022.

*Note.* Sections of this table are adapted from *International Education as Policy: A Discourse Coalition Framework Analysis of the Construction, Context, and Empowerment of Ontario's International Education Storylines* [Doctoral dissertation, York University], by A. El Masri, 2019, YorkSpace (<http://hdl.handle.net/10315/36726>). CIC = Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

## **3.2 International Education Strategies**

The following sections explore the development and deployment of Canada's two international education strategies, an inaugural strategy introduced in 2014 and a second strategy, a continuation and enhancement of the first, introduced in 2019 to reinforce and reiterate the integral link between international education and immigration in Canada. Both strategies symbolize Canada's understanding of the essential role that international education plays in the country's broader economic prosperity and global standing. The strategies reveal the country's path towards leveraging international education for diverse objectives—boosting economic growth, fostering international ties, promoting global competitiveness, and enhancing the nation's standing in a fiercely competitive landscape—while also highlighting the growing and central importance of attracting and retaining international students and thus the vital link between international education and immigration within the Canadian context.

### ***3.2.1 First International Education Strategy: 2014–2019***

Since 2008, Canada has witnessed a robust and consistent growth in the enrolment of international students, surpassing other OECD nations and accruing a significant market share (OECD, 2014). This growth led the federal government in 2011 to establish a seven-member advisory panel primarily consisting of representatives from the university and college sectors and chaired by Dr. Amit Chakma, president and vice chancellor of Western University. The goal of the panel was to make recommendations that would lay the foundation for an international education strategy for Canada.

The Advisory Panel's recommendations, provided in the report *International Education: A Key Driver of Canada's Future Prosperity* (Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy, 2012), were then integrated into Canada's inaugural international education

strategy, launched in 2014. Titled *Canada's International Education Strategy: Harnessing Our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity* (Government of Canada, 2014), it recognized the role of the federal government in promoting international cooperation in higher education and deemed international education a priority sector. It also recognized the socioeconomic benefits of increasing international student enrolments, which include addressing skilled labour shortages and ensuring long-term labour force vitality.

In terms of the demographic shift, a CIC report cited within the strategy stated that immigration as expected to account for 100% of net growth in the workforce within the next decade, up from 75% in 2014. It highlighted the necessity for a robust international education strategy to secure Canada's long-term prosperity and economic success (Government of Canada, 2014).

**Objectives:** The first international education strategy underscored five pivotal objectives to bolster Canada's role as a global education hub. These objectives reflected a commitment to economic growth, talent acquisition, and enhancement of Canada's international relationships through education. The primary objective of the strategy was to double the number of international students choosing Canada as their study destination by the year 2022, without displacing Canadian students. This translated to attracting more than 450,000 international researchers and students, which was projected to have a substantial positive impact on the country's economy:

- contributing to the creation of at least 86,500 net new jobs, raising the total number of jobs supported by international education in Canada to an impressive 173,100;
- fuelling economic growth and prosperity in every region of Canada through expenditures by international students, which were expected to rise to over \$16.1 billion; and

- providing an approximate \$10 billion annual boost to the Canadian economy (Government of Canada, 2014).

Four other complementary objectives encapsulated the broader vision of the strategy:

- concentrating resources and efforts on priority markets that were in alignment with Canada's Global Markets Action Plan, specifically targeting Brazil, China, India, Mexico, North Africa and the Middle East, and Vietnam;
- developing a unified and compelling Canadian education "brand" that would be used by all partners to appeal to these priority markets;
- enhancing linkages and collaborations between Canadian and international educational institutions and research institutes to foster innovation and knowledge exchange; and
- adopting a pan-Canadian approach in the international education sector, aligning key stakeholders and activities to better advance shared objectives (Government of Canada, 2014).

International students had made significant contributions to the Canadian economy, which the strategy sought to capitalize on. In 2010 alone, they had spent over \$8 billion on tuition, accommodation, and other expenses, supporting over 86,570 jobs and generating more than \$455 million in government revenue. Also, international students paid notably higher tuition fees than did domestic students (almost three times as much at \$19,500 a year versus Canadians' average of \$5,700), reinforcing their financial impact on the educational system and the economy (Government of Canada, 2014).

To ensure the implementation of the strategy, the government committed to a financial investment of \$65 million over 2 years. This funding was intended to support international student recruitment, scholarships, work training programs, and pathways to immigration. The

strategy also aimed to increase the number of international students transitioning to permanent resident status after graduation, a move influenced by Canada's domestic labour market needs, an aging population, and increasing reliance on immigration (Government of Canada, 2014). The strategy also noted:

International students are a future source of skilled labour, as they may be eligible after graduation for permanent residency through immigration programs, such as the Canadian Experience Class (introduced in 2008). International students are well positioned to immigrate to Canada as they have typically obtained Canadian credentials, are proficient in at least one official language and often have relevant Canadian work experience. (Government of Canada, 2014, p. 12)

Following the launch of the first international education strategy, the number of international students in Canada increased by 68% from 2014 to 2018, and a total of 721,205 international students at all levels studied in Canada in 2018 (IRCC, 2020). The amendments to the Express Entry system in 2016 to recognize and award additional points for Canadian educational qualifications and fast-tracked study permit processing through the SDS were important policy measures that supported the aims of the first international education strategy.

### ***3.2.2 Second International Education Strategy: 2019–2024***

In August 2019, Canada rolled out the second federal international education strategy, *Building on Success: International Education Strategy 2019–2024* (Government of Canada, 2019b). In contrast to the first strategy's focus on priority international education markets and targets for attracting international students, the 2019 strategy emphasized the need for diversification in source countries and fields of study along with international study and work abroad opportunities.

Building on the success of the inaugural 2014 strategy, the new strategy aimed to continue the impressive growth observed between 2014 and 2018, during which international student numbers in Canada surged by 68% to 721,205 (Government of Canada, 2019b). The strategy targeted further expansion of the education sector, enhancing Canada's innovative capacity, promoting global ties, and fostering a vibrant domestic economy. A central aspect of the approach was ensuring a skilled, talented workforce capable of competing in global markets.

**Objectives:** As part of the strategy, the government committed \$148 million over 5 years to international education initiatives, followed by a further \$8 million per year of ongoing funding (Government of Canada, 2019b). The new strategy outlined three key objectives:

- to stimulate Canadian students to obtain new skills by studying and working in global markets, particularly in Asia;
- to diversify the source countries of international students coming to Canada, their areas and levels of study, and their host institutions in the country; and
- and to provide more substantial support to Canadian education sector institutions, facilitating the expansion of their export services and exploration of new opportunities abroad.

The focus of the new strategy rested on two key areas: diversifying the source markets for Canadian institutions and encouraging more Canadians to study abroad. The strategy's efforts also extended to expediting visa processing for students applying electronically and meeting additional upfront requirements via the SDS. Initially available to students from China, India, Vietnam, and the Philippines, and later expanded to include Pakistan, the new strategy aimed to extend the SDS to additional markets through 2024.

Notably absent in the updated international education strategy was a target for increased international student numbers. The last strategy set a target of hosting 450,000 international students by 2022, a goal surpassed in 2017 when Canada enrolled 494,525 students—an increase of 20% over the previous year. By 2018, Canada had added another 80,000 international students, reaching a total of 572,415 (CBIE, 2018).

The strategy also emphasized the diversification of enrolment. Building on momentum, the new strategy urged Canadian institutions to broaden their horizons even further by recruiting students from an even wider range of countries. This aligned with Canada’s status as a trading nation, underscoring the need for continual expansion and diversification not just in terms of customers but also potential exporters. An investment of \$24.1 million over 5 years, and \$5.4 million ongoing, was directed towards a new digital marketing effort, aimed at prospective students from several priority targets: Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Morocco, Turkey, France, and Ukraine (Government of Canada, 2019b). It was a clear recognition of the interconnectedness of international education and economic policies, underlining the key role that education can play in shaping a nation’s economic and geopolitical future (Government of Canada, 2019b).

The second international education strategy marked a turning point in Canada’s approach to international education, placing emphasis on both inbound and outbound mobility. While the strategy prioritized diversifying the source markets, it continued to focus on key markets, including India and China. The efforts to attract international students underlined the strategy’s focus on internationalization and increasing international enrolments.

In summary, Canada’s international education strategies illustrate a fundamental shift in policy approach, forging a closer relationship between international education and immigration.

They exemplify a strategic attempt to facilitate Canada's growth, competitiveness, and overall development by leveraging international education as a critical tool. The policy dialogue regarding international students as ideal immigrants initiated by the first international education strategy was strengthened by the second. From a political perspective, both the Conservative and Liberal parties have shown overall support for immigration and international students, with slight variations in approach. While the Conservatives typically emphasize security and economic contributions, the Liberals tend to stress diversity and multiculturalism. Despite these differences, the parties share a common understanding of the benefits of a pro-immigration and pro-international student stance in bolstering Canada's socioeconomic fabric, as reflected in the international education strategies.

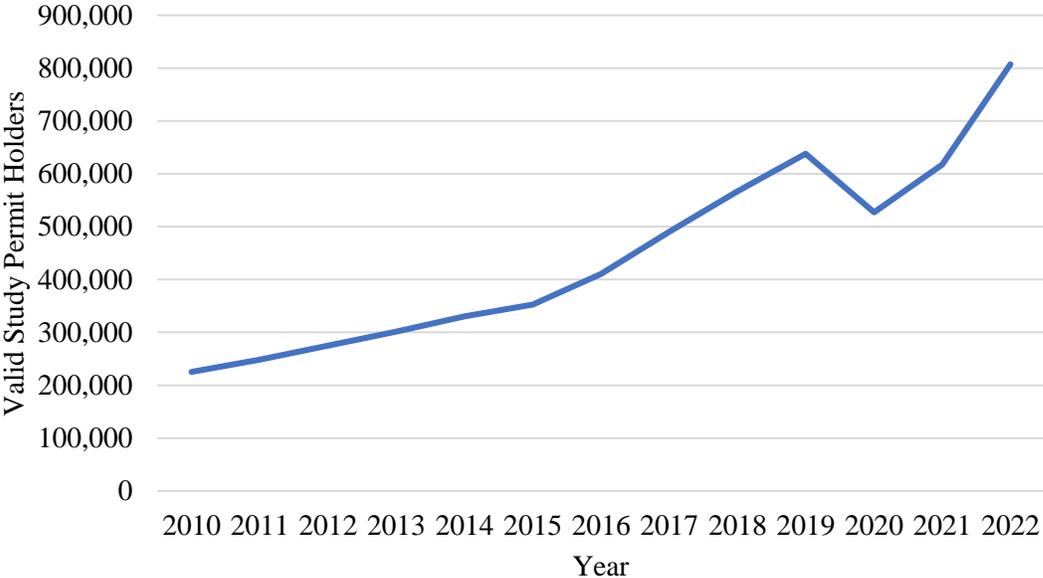
### **3.3 Profile of International Student Growth**

Over the past decade, Canada has witnessed significant growth in the number of international students, which increased by 162.7% from 2010–2011 to 2018-19 (see Figure 3). In 2010, Canada had 239,131 international students, which more than doubled to 642,480 by 2019 (IRCC, 2022). This growth trend signifies the increasing appeal of Canadian educational institutions and the successful efforts of government initiatives aimed at attracting international talent. It also reflects the impact of geopolitical factors, such as changes to immigration and education policies in competitor countries such as the United States and United Kingdom. For instance, during the same period, restrictive immigration policies in the United States, combined with political uncertainties like the Trump administration's travel bans, made it less attractive to prospective international students. In the UK, the decision to leave the European Union (Brexit) and the initial abolishment of the two-year post-study work visa in 2012 created uncertainties for international students regarding both study and post-study opportunities. As a result, Canada

emerged as a more stable and welcoming destination for international students seeking high-quality education and potential immigration pathways. Importantly, this growth has had a broad-based impact on Canadian universities, colleges, and other educational institutions, boosting their revenues and diversifying their student bodies.

**Figure 3**

*International Students in Canada - Growth Trend*



*Note.* From *Canada - Study Permit Holders With a Valid Permit on December 31st by Province/Territory of Intended Destination and Study Level, 2000 – 2022*, by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022 (<https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/90115b00-f9b8-49e8-afa3-b4cf8facaee>).

Following the initial drop in the number of international students at the start of the pandemic, Canadian universities and colleges experienced an unprecedented surge in enrolment

in 2022. As of December 31, 2022, there were 807,750 international students holding study permits in Canada across all levels of education, up from approximately 617,000 in 2021. This striking escalation constitutes a 31% year-over-year growth rate. The enrolment rate surpassed the pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels by 27%, illustrating a 43% increase over the previous 5 years and an impressive 170% rise in the previous decade. For the academic year 2019–2020, the number of international students enrolled in tertiary education alone stood at 373,599. The number of international students in tertiary education increased by 61% from 2010–2011 to 2015–2016, and by 39.6% from 2015–2016 to 2018–2019. The enrolment of international students increased by 13.6% from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020 (IRCC, 2021). While universities saw substantial growth, the rate was particularly pronounced in colleges.

### ***3.3.1 Where Canada Stands***

Global student mobility in higher education has witnessed a surge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century soaring from 1.6 million international students in 2000 to over 5 million in 2020. Almost half of these students have found their way into the higher education institutions of the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (Project Atlas, 2020). In the arena of international education, these countries are commonly identified as the “Big Four.” As the principal English-speaking study destinations, they compete for about 37% of the global distribution of international students. The United States garners the interest of approximately one in five international students worldwide, though it has seen a gradual decline in its market share as a top host destination over the past decade (Project Atlas, 2020).

In stark contrast, Canada has undergone significant growth. Prior to the pandemic, the country’s growth rate in attracting international students was roughly three times that of the other three members of the Big Four, which hovered around a 1.5x growth rate. By 2019, Canada had

surpassed the United Kingdom to become the third-most-sought-after destination for international students globally, boasting an impressive total of 642,000 foreign students (CBIE, 2020).

In 2017, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand accounted for 56% of the international students across the OECD and partner countries. Most of these students hailed from Asia, with a significant proportion choosing to study in Australia, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, or the United States (OECD, 2019). Although Europe also contributed a high number of mobile students, most preferred to stay within the European Union.

As for the United Kingdom, despite remaining the second-most-popular destination for international students in 2018–2019, it has witnessed a general stagnation in demand and loss of market share since 2012. Interestingly, Canada’s international student enrolment was equal to nearly half of the United Kingdom’s by 2015, up from just one-third in 2011. In 2016, while the United Kingdom’s enrolment was declining, Canada saw a rise of 10.6% (Marginson, 2018).

Like Canada, Australia has also seen fairly consistent increases in enrolments since 2012, reaching 420,501 international students in 2019. This is not surprising given that Australia’s international education market is identified as one of five “super growth sectors,” receiving robust support from its national government, which has set a target of attracting 720,000 students by 2025 (Project Atlas, 2019).

Overall, while competition in the international higher education space is increasingly fierce, Canada stands as a strong contender, showcasing remarkable growth in attracting international students and offering robust prospects for the future. While the market share of the United States and United Kingdom has been declining, due in part to restrictive immigration policies, political uncertainties such as Brexit in the UK, and perceptions of being less

welcoming to international students, Canada's share of the global international student population has been steadily increasing from 6% in 2000 to 11% in 2019. Canada's proactive and inclusive policies, combined with a strong reputation for quality education, have contributed to its increasing attractiveness to international students. In terms of growth, the number of study-permit holders increased by more than 400% from 2000 to 2021, demonstrating the competitive position of Canada in the international education market (IRCC, 2021). Several factors contribute to this competitive positioning, including Canada's reputation for high-quality education, welcoming society, and beneficial immigration policies (OECD, 2021).

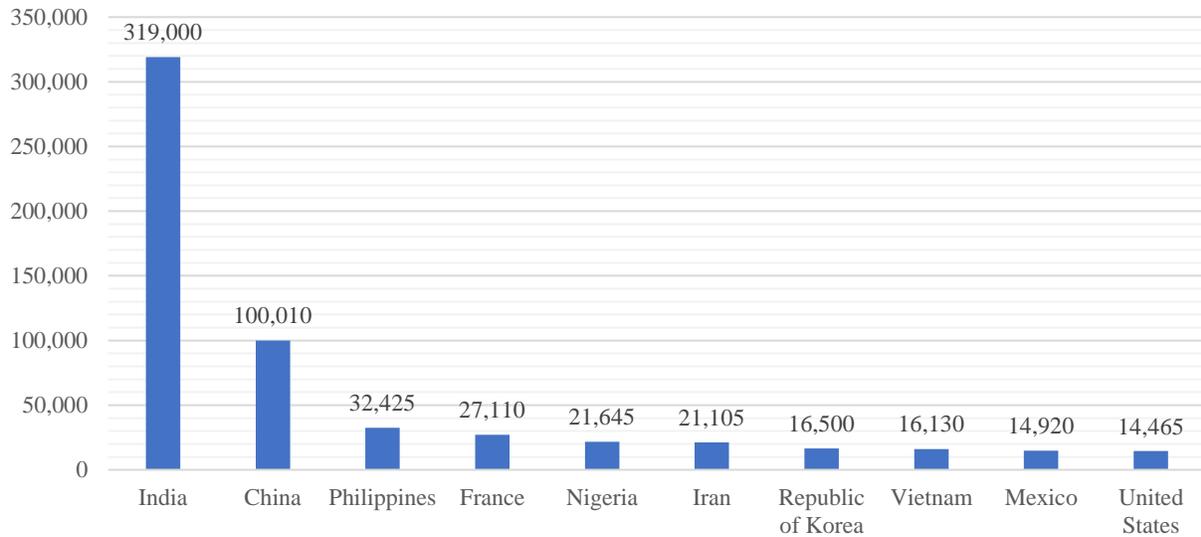
### ***3.3.2 Countries of Origin***

The sources of international students in Canada are incredibly diverse, representing over 200 countries. Most of these students come from Asia, primarily China and India, which aligns with the priority markets identified in Canada's international education strategy (Government of Canada, 2019b). In 2022, India became the primary source of international students in Canadian institutions, boasting almost 320,000 active study permit holders and showing impressive growth of 47% since 2021. India provides nearly 40% of the total international student population in Canada (IRCC, 2021).

On the other hand, China, which held the top position for several years, slid to a 12.5% share of total foreign enrolment in Canada, with just over 100,000 students holding active study permits as of December 2022. Figure 4, which displays the top source countries of international students, shows a 4.3% decline in international students from China compared to 2021. Despite this slight downturn, China still contributes a significant proportion of international students to Canadian educational institutions (IRCC, 2021).

**Figure 4**

*Top 10 Source Countries for Study Permit Holders in Canada (2022)*

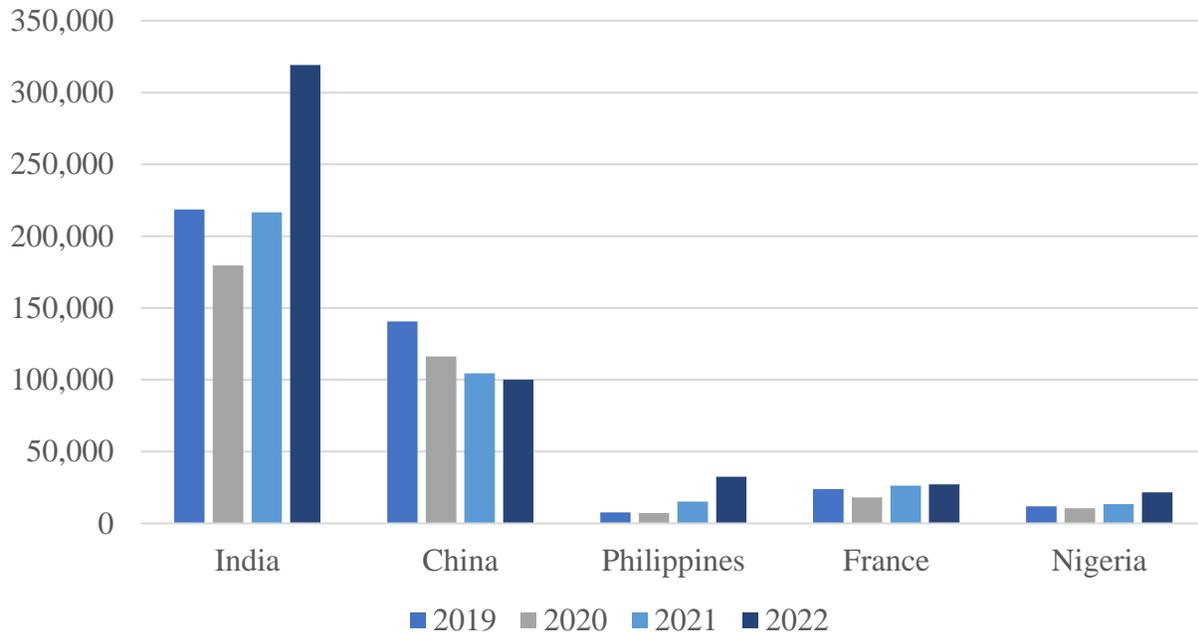


*Note.* Data from *Canada - Study Permit Holders with a Valid Permit on December 31st by Province/Territory of Intended Destination and Study Level, 2000 – 2022*, by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021 (<https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/90115b00-f9b8-49e8-afa3-b4cf8facaee>).

As captured in Figure 5, other countries are quickly emerging as substantial contributors to Canada’s international student demographic, including the Philippines, France, and Nigeria. For instance, from 2019–2022, the Philippines had an astonishing 112.19% increase in students studying in Canada, catapulting it into the top three sending markets for the first time. Additional countries with significant growth rates include Nepal (257.74%), Ukraine (268.56%), Sri Lanka (93.85%), Cameroon (59.49%), and Peru (114.67%; IRCC, 2021).

**Figure 5**

*Growth in Top 5 Source Markets for Foreign Enrolment (2019–2022)*



*Note.* Data from *Canada - Study Permit Holders With a Valid Permit on December 31st by Province/Territory of Intended Destination and Study Level, 2000 – 2022*, by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021 (<https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/90115b00-f9b8-49e8-afa3-b4cff8faceae>).

While India remains, by far, the dominant source of international students for Canadian institutions, there are emerging trends that highlight Canada's attempts to diversify its international student body. However, despite these numbers and Canada's efforts to diversify, it is evident that there is still a significant reliance on India as a primary source country. Examining the data from the top 10 origin countries for study permit holders in 2022 offers insight into the broader landscape of international education in Canada. Although there's been gains in students from countries such as the Philippines, France, and Nigeria, and notable growth rates from

nations like Nepal, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, Cameroon, and Peru, the diversity within the student body remains a challenge. This mix of countries does, however, signify the expansive outreach of Canada's higher education system and indicates a shift in global mobility patterns, especially with a rise in students from Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East in recent years (CBIE, 2021). The continued challenge will be in balancing this growth while ensuring a more diverse representation from various countries.

### ***3.3.3 Distribution by Institutions and Level of Study***

Globally, 80% of international students are enrolled in degree programs, predominantly at universities. Among international students, undergraduate degree programs tend to be more popular than other programs (OECD, 2020). In Canada, the international student body is found across different institution types and degree levels. In the 2020–2021 academic year, most international students were enrolled in universities, accounting for approximately 37.5% (231,291) of the international student population, although the number saw a slight decrease of 1.7% from the previous year. Colleges accounted for approximately 23.1% (142,308) of international enrolments, marking a 7.2% decrease from the prior year. Despite the decrease, it is important to note that over the 5 years preceding 2020–2021, the international student population in colleges experienced impressive growth of 135.9%, while universities saw a growth rate of 37.1% during the same period (IRCC, 2021).

Examining international student enrolments at different degree levels reveals a similar pattern. In the 2020–2021 academic year, most international students in higher education institutions in Canada, approximately 26.1% (160,842), were enrolled in bachelor's degree programs, indicating a growth of 3.7% from the previous year. Meanwhile, master's programs attracted around 7.4% (45,438) of international students, a 5.5% decrease from the previous year.

PhD programs had the lowest number of international students, with around 3.6% (22,083) of enrolments (IRCC, 2021).

### ***3.3.4 Programs of Study***

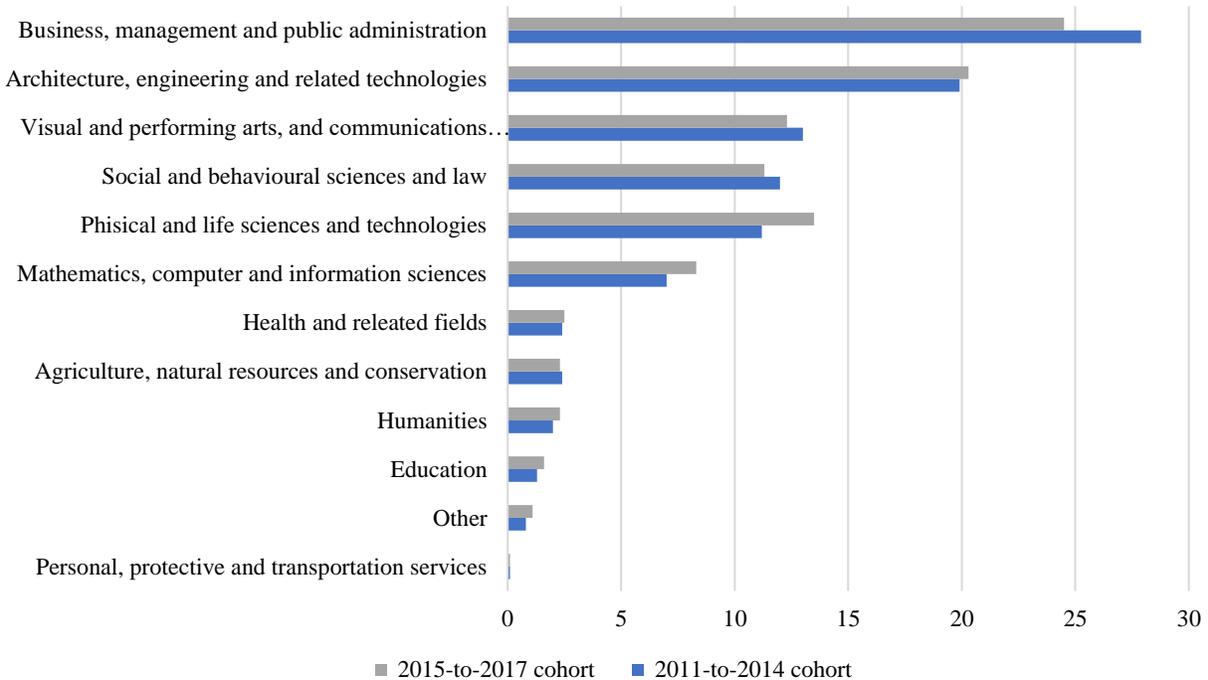
In the context of study programs, it is important to note that Canadian higher education institutions offer a diverse range of subjects, especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and in business, humanities, health, arts, social science, and education (BHASE). These categories are constructed from the variant of Statistics Canada's 2016 Classification of Instructional Programs (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Figure 6 provides a comparative graph of international student enrolment by field of study in postsecondary programs. STEM programs have garnered significant interest among international students, with a total of 133,776 international students enrolled in top STEM subjects in 2021. Engineering and engineering technology attracted the most international students (55,608) followed by mathematics and computer and information sciences (46,827), and science and science technology (35,160). In the BHASE category, business and administration was the most popular field (113,418), followed by social and behavioral sciences (41,016), and arts and humanities (36,330). Some other popular programs include trades, services, natural resources, and conservation (22,521), health care (14,952), education and teaching (3,213), and legal professions and studies (2,124; IRCC, 2021).

Business and management, followed by engineering, emerged as the most popular field of study for international students in Canada. The two fields accounted for 30% and 14%, respectively, of the total international student population. Other popular fields include physical and life sciences, mathematics and computer sciences, and social and behavioural sciences (IRCC, 2021).

**Figure 6**

*International Student Enrolment by Field of Study in Postsecondary Programs*



*Note.* Data from *Canada - Study Permit Holders With a Valid Permit on December 31st by Province/Territory of Intended Destination and Study Level, 2000 – 2022*, by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021 (<https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/90115b00-f9b8-49e8-afa3-b4cff8facee>).

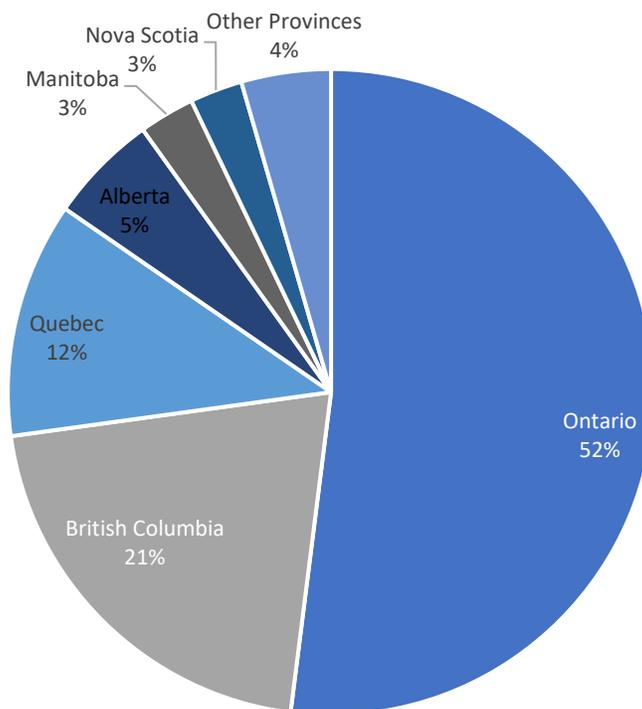
**3.3.5 Regional Distribution (Provincial and Municipal)**

When it comes to regional distribution, international students in Canada are not equally spread across the country’s provinces and cities. Ontario hosts most of these students, and had 411,985 international students in 2022, up from 291,175 in 2021. British Columbia hosts the second-highest number of international students and had 164,875 enrolments in 2022. Quebec comes in third, with 93,370 international students in 2022 (IRCC, 2022). Approximately 80% of

international students in Canada are enrolled in postsecondary institutions in Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec (Hango, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2019b). For a visual representation, Figure 7 provides a comparative chart of provincial distribution of study permit holders in Canada.

**Figure 7**

*Study Permit Holders in Canada by Province (2022)*



Note. Data from *Canada - Study Permit Holders With a Valid Permit on December 31st by Province/Territory of Intended Destination and Study Level, 2000 – 2022*, by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021 (<https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/90115b00-f9b8-49e8-afa3-b4cf8facaee>).

Other provinces also host a significant number of international students, with Alberta accommodating 43,485 international students in 2022. Manitoba and Nova Scotia hosted 22,070 and 20,850 international students, respectively. Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island contributed by taking in a combined total of 35,205 international students. In contrast, the three territories—Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut—collectively hosted 305 international students, a significantly smaller number (IRCC, 2021).

Drilling down to the municipal level, most international students can be found in the country's three largest cities: Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. These cities account for over half of the country's international student population, evidencing their attractiveness as educational hubs (Hango, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2019b). However, provinces in other parts of the country have been making concerted efforts to increase their international student populations, thereby providing alternatives to the most populous provinces. New Brunswick launched a million-dollar retention program specifically for international students that includes resource and support provisions; Alberta established a new bureau focused on boosting its number of international students; and Nova Scotia initiated a new immigration support program for graduates, the first of its kind in the province. These provinces recognize the value of international students and are investing in their attraction and retention (Packer, 2023).

While this dispersion provides a robust and diverse educational landscape for international students, it also brings about various challenges. For instance, smaller communities in Atlantic Canada have seen an uptick in the number of international students but face difficulties in facilitating their settlement and transition to permanent residents. Several factors contribute to these challenges. First, these communities often lack the infrastructure and

resources to cater to the diverse cultural and social needs of international students, making integration more challenging. Second, employment opportunities in specialized fields might be limited in these regions, potentially affecting the students' decisions to settle post-graduation. Additionally, smaller communities might not have the established networks and support systems that larger cities offer to aid in the transition process, such as language support, community integration programs, and guidance on navigating the complex immigration system (Chira et al., 2013). The importance of postsecondary institutions in the social and economic development of these smaller urban and rural communities cannot be overstated, as they play a crucial role in attracting and retaining international students.

### **3.4 Strategy and Policy Outcomes**

Canada's strategic policies have been instrumental in making the country an attractive destination for international students. Initiatives like the SDS, which accelerates visa applications for students from select countries, and the Express Entry system, which prioritizes points for Canadian education, have been influential in shaping this favourable environment. Another important program, the PGWPP, offers international students who have completed a minimum 8-month program at an eligible Canadian institution the opportunity to work in the country for up to 3 years, advancing their career prospects and creating a path to permanent residency. Two main outcomes have resulted from Canadian policies:

1. *Economic success*: International students significantly contribute to the Canadian economy. According to Statistics Canada, during the academic year of 2017–2018, international students were responsible for almost \$4 billion in PSE annual revenue, which represented about 40% of all tuition fees (Statistics Canada, 2020a). This substantial contribution underscores the importance of international students to Canada's

higher education sector's financial health. Further, in 2018, the impact extended beyond the academic sphere, with international students injecting nearly \$22 billion into the Canadian economy (Statistics Canada, 2020a). This investment is not limited to tuition fees and permeates other areas such as accommodation and daily living expenses, thereby stimulating local economies and fostering job creation in their host cities and provinces. For example, in British Columbia, international students spent about \$3.4 billion in 2015 on tuition, accommodation, and discretionary spending, translating into a contribution of \$2.2 billion to the province's GDP (Statistics Canada, 2019a).

2. *Immigrant conversions*: International students significantly shape Canada's immigration landscape. Over half of international students in Canada intend to apply for permanent resident status in the future, revealing a profound connection between international education and immigration pathways (CBIE, 2021). In 2019, over 58,000 former students transitioned to permanent residency, accounting for 40% of all economic-class immigrants admitted that year. This conversion rate highlights the effectiveness of programs such as the PGWPP and the CEC (IRCC, 2020). The Canadian government's emphasis on attracting and retaining international students is also reflected in the revisions to the Express Entry system in 2016, which now awards additional points for Canadian education.

### ***3.4.1 Immigration as Attraction***

Canada's immigration policies play a significant role in attracting international students. Policies such as the PGWPP and the Express Entry system offer students the opportunity to gain work experience in Canada and pathways to permanent residency. These policies are often cited

by international students as key factors in their decision to choose Canada as their study destination (IRCC, 2020).

The 2021 CBIE International Student Survey, conducted in collaboration with over 67 institutions yielding a response from over 40,000 international student participants, provides a robust understanding of international students' intentions for post-study residency and employment. According to the survey, the desire for permanent residency in Canada after graduation is high, with 43.3% of students indicating plans to work for up to 3 years in the country before pursuing permanent residency. An additional 18.8% planned to work in Canada for a similar period before returning to their home country. Significantly, the location of students' postgraduation stay largely aligns with the province where they completed their education. About 33.1% cited enjoyment of the lifestyle in the province as the reason they wanted to stay here, 25.3% were concerned with employment opportunities, and 20.6% wanted to stay close to family or friends.

This aspiration for permanent residency is not gender-specific, as the survey shows no significant gender differences in this regard. 28.4% of students indicated plans to work for a period before resuming studies, and 20.9% planned to continue studies at their current institution or another Canadian institution. Women were less likely to express plans to continue their studies. These figures highlight the important role of Canadian immigration policy in shaping international students' decisions. Around 72.6% of the respondents intended to apply for a post-graduation work permit, while 59.4% planned to apply for permanent residency. However, about one-third of the students were still undecided, and 8.1% had no plans to apply for permanent residency.

### ***3.4.2 Challenges With Policy Outcomes***

Delving deeper into the implications of these policy outcomes, one must consider the challenges associated with the significant growth in international enrolment. While the rising influx of international students brings many benefits, it also reshapes the Canadian landscape in several significant ways. From shifts in disciplines of study and skewed demographics to impacts on local communities and an increased focus on shorter college programs, these changes bring about a set of unique challenges. Moreover, the overall imbalance in the distribution of students across regions and an increasing dependency on international students underscore the need for adequate support for their labour market integration.

**Effect on Disciplines of Study.** The significant rise in international student enrolment has led to substantial changes in the disciplines pursued. Business, engineering, and STEM subjects have seen the most growth due to their global reputation and the lucrative career opportunities they offer. For instance, engineering and engineering technology attracted the highest number of international students (55,608), followed by mathematics, computer and information sciences (46,827; IRCC, 2021). This shift has not only reshaped academic priorities but also altered the dynamics of these fields of study in Canadian institutions (Hawthorne, 2010).

**Skewed Demographics.** The demographic profile of international students in Canada has become increasingly skewed, particularly with the sharp rise in students from India, which now account for nearly 40% of the total international student population (IRCC, 2021). This disproportionate representation from certain countries, notably India and China, has led to less diversity in the student body and pose challenges for integration and social cohesion (Marom, 2022).

**Impact on Cities and Communities.** The growth in international students has had substantial effects on cities and communities. With Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec hosting about 80% of these students, pressure on local resources, particularly housing, has escalated. The influx of students exacerbates existing issues such as housing crises in major cities, leading to increased costs and housing insecurity (Firang & Mensah, 2022; Hari et al., 2023).

**Imbalance and Overrepresentation.** The uneven distribution of international students across provinces, cities, and institutions has led to an imbalance in benefits and challenges associated with international education. The concentration of international students in particular provinces or cities can strain local resources while leaving other regions underutilized. Additionally, the college sector has witnessed substantial growth, partly driven by international students seeking shorter, cheaper programs as a pathway to immigration. Between 2015 and 2020, the international student population in colleges grew by an impressive 135.9%, outpacing growth in universities (IRCC, 2021). This shift has led to overrepresentation in certain programs and institutions and affect the quality of education and services provided (Brunner, 2022).

### ***3.4.3 The Labour Integration Challenge***

While international students are frequently identified by the Canadian Government (2014; 2019) as a potentially inexhaustible pool of skilled labour and future immigrants, the reality can be more complex. International students in Canada, like their counterparts worldwide, particularly struggle when trying to secure employment, both while studying (on and off campus) and post-graduation. The 2021 CBIE survey indicated that of the student respondents who had worked or were working, 43% found it difficult to find work. This difficulty in finding employment showed slight variances between female (44.4%) and male (42%) respondents.

Urban students encountered more challenges in job searches compared to their rural counterparts, except for part-time off-campus work, where rural students reported a higher difficulty rate (31.7% vs. 28.3% for urban students). One intriguing insight from the data was that only 7.1% of rural students found it difficult to secure a co-op position compared to 11.7% of urban students (CBIE, 2021).

This employment challenge is often attributed to international students' lack of understanding of Canadian employers' expectations and prospective employers' unfamiliarity with the regulations for hiring international students. Female students reported more difficulties due to not having enough Canadian work experience or overall work experience. They also found it challenging to describe their skills and exhibited a lower level of confidence compared to their male counterparts (7.9% of women vs. 5.4% of men). These findings underscore the importance of institutions in providing job readiness training, with a specific emphasis on addressing the gender gap. Equally crucial is the need to ensure employers understand the benefits of and processes for hiring international students, especially given the growing labour shortages across Canada. Many international students aim to transition into the Canadian workforce after completing their studies, and lack of support in this transition can hinder their ability to fully contribute to the economy. This calls for more structured and proactive engagement between institutions, employers, business groups, and community economic development authorities (CBIE, 2021).

#### ***3.4.4 Risk Factors in Dependency***

Canada's higher education sector, due to decades-long government funding shortfalls, has become significantly dependent on the financial contribution of international students (Cudmore 2005). The large discrepancy in tuition fees between international and domestic students has

created a lucrative stream of revenue that helps bridge the gap created by reduced government spending (Brennan et al., 2021; El Masri, 2019; Trilokekar & Jones, 2013; Trilokekar et al., 2014, 2016). In some instances, the revenue generated from international students has exceeded that from provincial grants, indicating a growing reliance on this source of income (Cudmore 2005). This dependency has grown aggressively over recent years. In fact, during the 2016–2017 academic year, the revenue from international student fees surged by an additional \$3.25 billion compared to a decade earlier. Such figures demonstrate a stark reliance on this income source, highlighting the sector’s deep-rooted financial dependency on international students (Statistics Canada, 2019a).

There are inherent risks in such a high dependency, given that the influx of international students can be significantly affected by geopolitical changes, global crises, and other unpredictable events. International conflicts, political tensions, or stringent immigration policies in origin countries can all lead to a rapid decline in student mobility. Similarly, global crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, can significantly disrupt the flow of international students, posing a substantial financial threat to institutions that heavily depend on their revenue. The pandemic led to widespread travel restrictions, deferred enrolments, and a switch to remote learning, which put a dent in the expected revenue from international students (Firang & Mensah, 2022).

Demographically, international students provide a crucial contribution to meeting Canada’s population growth and labour market goals. This demographic dependency is particularly significant given Canada’s aging population and the country’s need for young, skilled workers. However, this also puts the country at risk should any drastic changes in student mobility occur. Any decrease in international students could affect not only the financial

sustainability of Canadian institutions but also Canada's demographic and economic targets (Akbar, 2022).

This chapter exposed the growing intricate nexus of international education and immigration policies in Canada. Through a detailed chronological analysis of policy development and alterations from 2002 to 2020, the evolving landscape of policies impacting international students in Canada has been illustrated. These policies do more than merely set guidelines; they significantly shape the international education sector and the lived experiences of international students. It is, therefore, against the context of this policy landscape that the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, a global crisis that tested the resilience of policy frameworks and necessitated strategic adaptations, can be examined.

In the following chapter, the theoretical lenses of Kingdon's (1984) MSA and Keeler's (1993) MWOP are discussed in detail, with an emphasis on how these frameworks can be applied to study the policy-making process under crisis conditions in the Canadian international education context.

## **Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework**

### **4.1 The Study of Policy Making**

Policy making is a complex phenomenon, involving a myriad of processes, participants, and influences. As a strategic exercise intertwining political acumen, decision-making, and public interest, policy making is a fundamental way a government responds to its citizens' needs and global trends (Cairney, 2012; Howlett & Cashore, 2014). As suggested by Sabatier (2006), policy making involves a complex set of interactions among diverse stakeholders in a multi-actor environment.

According to Howlett and Cashore (2014), policy outputs represent the tangible consequences of policy decisions made by governments. These “actions” emerge from the policy-making process, a complex and dynamic exchange where political actors engage in dialogues, negotiations, and interactions within the confines of established and emerging procedures, norms, and institutional structures. The “actions” taken by governments could involve either a decision to act, introducing changes or amendments, or a decision to refrain from action, thereby preserving some aspect of the status quo. Policy making is thus about choices and the exploration of available alternatives, requiring a delicate balance of political insight, foresight, and strategy (Howlett & Cashore, 2014). In this context, policymakers are not merely passive recipients of external influences, but actively shape and define the policy agenda and the subsequent course of action.

Policy analysis has been explored by many researchers in the social sciences (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Howlett, 1998; Kingdon, 1984, 1995; Keeler, 1993; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Although the international education policy research arena continues to be a rich research arena with vast scholarship (Charles 2011; El Masri, 2019; Rexe 2014, 2015;

Sabatier, 2006; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016a, 2016b; Trilokekar & Jones, 2013), few policy theories and related explanatory models have focused on examining policy making during a crisis (Birkland 1997, 1998, 2004; Cairney & Jones, 2016; Farley et al., 2007; Saikaly, 2009; Wenzelburger et al., 2019; White, 2015; Wood 2004, 2006; Zaychenko, 2013) and even fewer studies have focused on international education policy making in times of crisis (Zahariadis, & Exadaktylos, 2016; Al-Youbi et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2022).

This study of Canada's immigration policy response in support of the international education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic examines the unique dynamics that dictate policy choices during crisis management. By doing so, it aims to unpack how the Canadian government manoeuvred its policy levers, while focusing on the unique challenges and opportunities that emerge in times of crisis (Sabatier, 2006). This study recognizes that policy making is an intricate exercise of balancing political insight, strategic decision-making, and public interest.

#### **4.2 The Study of Policy Making in Times of Crisis**

In times of crisis, the dynamic of policy making undergoes dramatic shifts, necessitating a distinct policy-making approach. A crisis can be defined as a sudden, unpredictable, and threatening event that demands quick decision-making under intense pressure (Birkland, 1997). The nature of a crisis is such that it disrupts the normal state of affairs and necessitates an immediate and effective response. The definition of a crisis is inherently linked to the perception of threat and urgency, and the necessity for immediate action.

Crises often act as catalysts for change, shaking up established norms and routines, and opening opportunities for new or previously marginalized issues to gain prominence on the policy agenda. This phenomenon, often referred to as a "focusing event," compels policy actors

to pay immediate attention to the crisis at hand, thereby enabling it to rapidly ascend to the top of the policy agenda as new policy issues are introduced and policy priorities significantly shift (Birkland, 1997).

Crises as “focusing events” have been widely referenced in policy analysis literature as key drivers of policy change. Particularly in the MSA (Kingdon 1984), punctuated equilibrium theory (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Baumgartner et al., 2009), and advocacy coalition framework (Sabatier & Weible, 2007), these events play a major role in illuminating how significant policy change takes place. Kingdon’s (1995) MSA recognizes focusing events, crises, and symbols as catalysts of significant policy change within a policy arena. Focusing events and crises are crucial to the coupling process that enables the opening of policy windows (Kingdon, 1984, 1995). These events are depicted as exogenous shocks from outside the subsystem that draw increased attention to an issue, commence a cycle of positive feedback, and open a “window of opportunity” for major policy change (Wood, 2020). Focusing events or exogenous shocks as such are recognized as one kind of trigger for change (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). This concept of a crisis as a focusing event is crucial to this study and its aim of understanding how crises can reshape the policy landscape and priorities and specifically how the pandemic impacted Canada’s immigration policy landscape.

Crises encompass major focusing events and socioeconomic stresses to which policymakers react and, consequently, major policy changes occur during a crisis. Thomas Birkland (1997, 1998, 2004), a recognized political science scholar specializing in the study of public policy with a focus on natural disasters, has offered a very useful and pertinent set of criteria to differentiate prospective focusing events from other phenomena and explain their influence on group and agenda dynamics. According to Birkland (2004), prospective focusing

events (a) occur suddenly, (b) are relatively rare, (c) are large in scale, and d) surface to policymakers and the public virtually simultaneously. Keeler (1993) used Flanagan's (1973) definition of crisis as "a situation of large-scale public dissatisfaction or fear stemming from wide-ranging economic problems and/or an unusual degree of social unrest and/or threats to national security" (p. 440). Given its grounding in the MWOP, this study adopted this definition of crisis to examine the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for major policy change demanding rapid and robust policy responses.

The unique challenges of policy making in crisis situations cannot be overlooked. The urgency and high stakes associated with crises necessitate swift action, often under conditions of uncertainty, ambiguity, and heightened emotional stress. This can sometimes lead to reactionary rather than strategic decisions, potentially leading to suboptimal policy outcomes (Rosenthal et al., 1989). This research probes these complexities and examines the Canadian government's approach to mitigating these challenges.

The following section provides a description of the premises of MSA and MWOP, how these have been used in education policy research, their key concepts, strengths, and limitations, and what they offer to address my research questions.

### **4.3 Theoretical Framework 1: Multiple Streams Approach**

#### ***4.3.1 Why the MSA?***

The MSA has informed and influenced a remarkable number of studies and related conceptual developments and innovations. It started as a study of policy making of the United States federal government, but it has been used in national, subnational, and international studies and has been cited over 12,000 times (Cairney and Jones, 2016).

The MSA was chosen as a theoretical framework for this study because of its relevance and adaptability to the study of policy making in complex and uncertain environments. It offers a flexible framework for understanding the policy making process and is particularly effective in dissecting policy dynamics during periods of crisis (Kingdon, 1995; Zahariadis, 2003). Thus, it offers valuable insights into understanding Canada's immigration policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a prominent model in policy process studies, the MSA provides a robust framework to understand the alignment of the problem, policy, and politics streams in the context of policy making (Kingdon, 1984; Zahariadis, 2014). In the context of this research, it offers a way to understand the intricate process of how the COVID-19 pandemic (the problem stream) influenced policy changes in the immigration and international education domains (the policy stream), given the wider political climate (the politics stream). It allows for an analysis of how these three streams intersected and how policy entrepreneurs exploited this conjunction to push for significant policy changes affecting international students. Additionally, the MSA helps explain why certain issues are elevated to the governmental agenda while others are not, giving insight into the decision-making process behind immigration policy changes during the pandemic (Birkland, 2015).

#### ***4.3.2 Origin of MSA***

Developed by John Kingdon in the early 1980s, the MSA was primarily formulated to demystify the complexities of policy making in the United States. Kingdon's (1984) foundational work, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, laid out the core tenets of the MSA, explaining how separate streams of problems, policies, and politics could converge to create a policy window, a unique opportunity for significant policy change.

The origins of the MSA can be traced back to the “garbage can model” of organizational decision-making, conceived by Michael D. Cohen, James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen in 1972. The Cohen-March-Olsen model was designed to illuminate the decision-making process within organizations:

[Consider] choice opportunity as a garbage can into which various kinds of problems and solutions are dumped by participants as they are generated. The mix of garbage in a single can depends on the mix of cans available, on the labels attached to the alternative cans, on what garbage is currently being produced, and on the speed with which garbage is collected and removed from the scene. (Cohen et al., 1972, p. 2)

This model conceptualized the decision-making process as comprising four streams: problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities. At its core, it suggests that when problems met their solutions at the right choice opportunities, a logical outcome or resolution will be produced. Conversely, if this alignment does not occur, decisions are not made. This model provided a compelling way to describe the uncertainty and fluid participation inherent in the policy process, underlining that sufficient resolutions are needed to keep the process moving forward (Masuch & LaPotin, 1989).

Building on the foundations of the “garbage can model,” Kingdon developed the MSA, offering a more targeted approach to understanding the governmental policy-making process. Kingdon’s MSA streamlined the Cohen-March-Olsen model’s four streams into three: problem, policy, and politics. Despite this streamlining, the underlying logic of the models remains consistent. In the MSA, policies emerge onto the agenda through the convergence of the problem, policy, and politics streams. These decision opportunities become the “garbage cans” where these streams intersect. The “garbage can” metaphor, which describes a process wherein

ideas make it onto the agenda when “a problem is recognized, a solution is available, and the political climate makes the time right for change” (Kingdon, 1984, p. 93), underpins this approach. Kingdon’s (198) MSA, therefore, offered a more specified lens for exploring policy making, while preserving the emphasis on uncertainty, timing, and alignment central to the original “garbage can model.”

#### ***4.3.3 Description and Outline of Basic Tenets***

Guided by three fundamental assumptions (Zahariadis, 2014), the MSA provides a dynamic, multifaceted framework for understanding the policy-making process. First, it centers attention and search activities on the sequence in which alternatives are considered, recognizing that this order significantly influences the ultimate decision outcome. This assumption acknowledges that political systems, comprising numerous subsystems, attend to a multitude of issues concurrently. Thus, the MSA seeks to extract rationality, theorizing from the macro level to the micro level. The second assumption stipulates that policymakers operate under substantial time constraints or urgency, limiting the range and number of alternatives considered. Finally, the MSA suggests that the streams flowing through the system can be thought of as independent entities.

As discussed, the MSA envisions policy making as a process involving three separate but interrelated streams in the policy-making process: a problem stream, which recognizes, defines, and contains data about various problems and their advocates; a policy stream, which involves the generation and development of policy alternatives and the advocates of solutions to policy problems; and a politics stream, which includes factors such as the national mood, public opinion, and changes in administration and can influence policy direction (Kingdon, 1984). These streams typically operate independently, but when they align, a “window of opportunity”

opens, providing an occasion for significant policy change. The “policy entrepreneurs”—individuals or organizations with a vested interest in the issue—capitalize on this policy window to influence policy direction (Kingdon, 1984, 1995).

This theoretical framework acknowledges that the ebb and flow of issues and policies within a political system is not necessarily logical or predictable, but contingent and unpredictable. The model provides several interconnected concepts—such as windows of opportunity and entrepreneurs—that help to understand the rise and fall of issues and policies over time. It speaks to how in specific moments, the alignment of the politics stream (national mood and party ideology), problem stream (sudden events, alarming indicators, or feedback), and policy stream (acceptability and feasibility of available options) opens a window of opportunity, and key policy entrepreneurs can successfully combine certain issues and policies (Kingdon, 1995).

In practical research applications of the MSA, scholars have followed a six-step process as outlined by White (2015):

1. Classify the actors and processes related to the emergence and stagnation of any given issue-policy coupling into three streams: politics, problem, and policy.
2. In the politics stream, analyze the national mood and/or party ideology during the period when the issue-policy coupling surfaces in the political landscape.
3. In the problem stream, scrutinize how the issue influences policy actors and makers (through focusing events, shocking socioeconomic indicators, or alarming feedback).
4. In the policy stream, assess potential reactions to the issue within relevant policy networks, considering the technical feasibility and acceptance in the policy community.

5. Investigate how the three streams combine and align to privilege a certain issue-policy combination.
6. Study the role of key actors or entrepreneurs in aligning the three streams and combining the associated issue and policy.

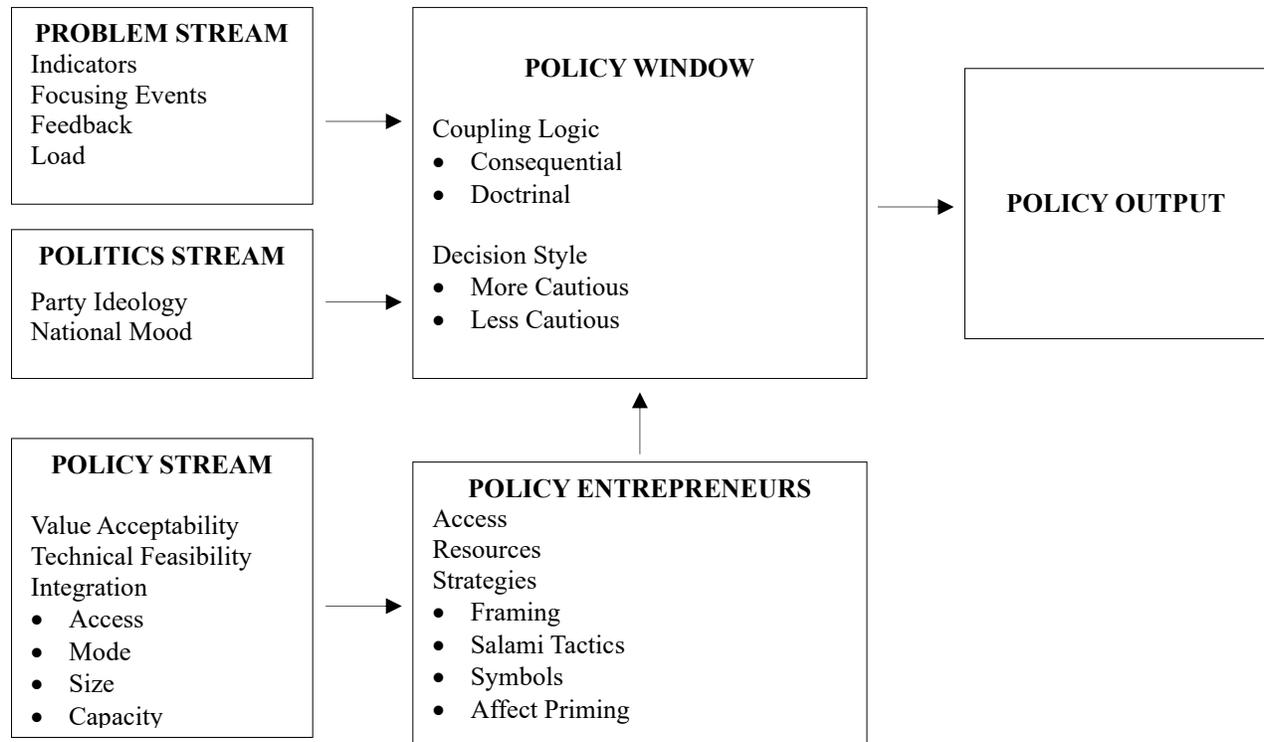
By employing these steps, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the MSA and its practical application in illuminating the complexity and dynamics of the policy-making process.

#### ***4.3.4 Model and Description***

The MSA is an intricate policy framework that illustrates the complexities of the policy-making process. The model comprises five structural features, namely problems, policies, politics, policy windows, and policy entrepreneurs, which together influence the policy output (Zahariadis, 2003). Figure 8 demonstrates how these elements or streams interact and flow within the policy-making process, serving as the framework's backbone. This interaction and interplay underscore the dynamic nature of the MSA, emphasizing how the streams come together to influence policy outcomes.

**Figure 8**

*Multiple Streams Approach*



*Note.* Adapted from *Ambiguity and Choice in Public Policy: Political Decision Making in Modern Democracies* by N. Zahariadis, 2003, Georgetown University Press.

**Problem Stream.** The problem stream within the MSA refers to the recognized societal issues or conditions that demand the attention of policymakers and the public (Kingdon, 1995). These problems often arise through indicators like reports, studies, and datasets, focusing events such as crises or disasters, or feedback from the public or media. A problem usually becomes prominent when a crisis or focusing event brings attention to it, or when indicators signal a significant change (Kingdon, 1995). Public opinion also plays a significant role, as shifts in public sentiment can accelerate policy change (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Birkland, 2004; Stimson, 2018; Wood, 2020).

**Policy Stream.** The policy stream is a metaphorical “primeval soup” where potential policy solutions evolve, combine, compete, and either fade away or survive (Kingdon, 1995). These solutions are created and promoted by policy communities, consisting of experts like academics, bureaucrats, researchers, and legislators, who use their influence and network to forward their proposals (Kingdon, 1984). The survival of these ideas, and ultimately their incorporation into policy, largely depends on their technical feasibility and value acceptability (Kingdon, 1995). Proposals that are technically feasible and agreeable in the policy community will probably gain the attention of decision-makers: “The policy stream thus produces a short list of proposals. This short list is not necessarily a consensus in the policy community on the one proposal that meets their criteria; rather, it is an agreement that a few proposals are prominent” (Kingdon, 1995, p. 151).

**Politics Stream.** The politics stream comprises elements such as public mood, election results, partisan or ideological distributions in the legislature (i.e., Congress), and changes in administration (Kingdon, 1984). The shifting nature of the political landscape often determines whether a policy solution reaches the policy agenda. The politics stream considers various factors including organized political forces like electoral, partisan, and pressure groups; government factors like the turnover of key personnel and jurisdiction; and consensus-building factors like bargaining, bandwagons, and tipping (Kingdon, 1984). The perception of and interaction with these political elements determines which policies are prioritized by decision-makers over others. In this stream, consensus is achieved through bargaining as actors and entrepreneurs attempt to sway systems to align problems with policies.

**Policy Windows.** Policy windows are opportunities where the problem, policy, and politics streams converge, presenting a unique opportunity for significant policy change and

offering a chance for advocates of certain proposals to push their preferred solutions or to direct attention to their specific problems (Kingdon, 1995). These windows are characterized by their infrequency and short duration. Despite these restrictions, significant changes in public policy often result from the appearance of these fleeting opportunities (Kingdon, 1995). Each of the three streams has a unique impact on the opening of a policy window. The problem and politics streams tend to affect the agenda more, whereas the policy stream mainly influences the selection of alternatives (Kingdon, 1995).

Changes within the problem stream, such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks, can create conditions that enable specific policies to be passed. On the other hand, alterations within the politics stream, like transitions in government administration, can lead to shifts in ideals and priorities. For example, when a problem becomes pressing and opens a window, the proposed solutions that fare best are those that meet political acceptability tests. Similarly, when a political event opens a window, participants often seek a problem to which their proposed solution can be attached (Kingdon, 1995).

The unpredictable timing of changes within the three streams greatly influences the agenda-setting process, as changes in each stream occur mostly separately and independently from the others. If the problem is not evident, a solution is not available, or the political circumstances are not ideal, a potential policy issue might not make it to the agenda. Kingdon (1995) underscored this point, noting that “if one of the three streams is missing, then the subject’s place on the decision agenda is fleeting. The window may be open for a short time, but if the coupling is not made quickly, the window closes” (p. 187).

Mucciaroni (1992) further added that the alignment of the three streams at these critical junctures is crucial for effective coupling. If the streams are adequately aligned, they have the

potential to generate substantial policy change. This dynamic demonstrates the profound importance of timing, alignment, and the convergence of the three streams in the policy-making process under the MSA.

**Policy Entrepreneurs.** The role of policy actors in the policy-making process is of paramount importance, as underscored by Hofferbert (1974), who highlighted that “human beings have to act for there to be a policy” (p. 226). Scholars such as Birkland (1997, 1998, 2004), Boin et al. (2005), and Wenzelburger et al. (2019) have stressed the critical role these actors play, particularly during policy crises. The role and significance of individuals and groups in the policy process remains a vibrant area of literature (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). Nonetheless, policy research necessitates examination of the individuals and groups in the policy arena, as well as the interests, ideas, and values that shape policy decisions.

Within the MSA, the concept of a policy entrepreneur is introduced, emphasizing the collective actions of individuals or interest groups and their potential to effectively impact policy changes (Kingdon, 1995). These actors can become influential policy entrepreneurs, taking central roles in the policy process. As Kingdon (1995) asserted, policy entrepreneurs are essential to the agenda-setting process, investing resources—time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money—in hopes of a future return.

Policy entrepreneurs play a crucial role in seizing windows of opportunity and in determining the convergence of the three streams by coupling policy problems and solutions with political opportunities (Béland & Howlett, 2016; Shanahan et al., 2015). Their endeavours must be strategic and intentional to capitalize on these openings and bring the problem to the agenda at the appropriate time before conditions change. Kingdon (1984) likened policy entrepreneurs to

surfers, eager and ready to ride the wave of opportunity, with their success largely attributed to their ability to harness forces beyond their control.

Identified extensively in the literature, policy entrepreneurs are key actors in coupling policy streams or disrupting subsystem politics. They take on roles as persuaders, educators, opinion leaders, advocates, and brokers (Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom, 1997; Sabatier, 2006; Schneider et al., 1995; Wood, 2004, 2020). Furthermore, Gladwell (2000) characterized these actors as (a) connectors, who maintain extensive personal networks of acquaintances, (b) mavens, experts who compulsively collect and disseminate information about every new product or service they encounter, and (c) salespeople, persuasive individuals whose charisma enables them to quickly build trust and rapport. These traits are not only characteristic of successful politicians but can be found in many individuals within and outside of the government.

Policy entrepreneurs represent a diverse range of individuals and groups, all uniquely positioned to catalyze policy change. Their influence and effectiveness often stem from their professional roles, personal networks, or expert knowledge. Extensive literature in public policy has sought to categorize these individuals based on their distinctive characteristics and roles. In addition to the roles already outlined, policy entrepreneurs can be technocrats or bureaucrats with specialized knowledge and experience that make them invaluable in shaping policy directions (Roberts & King, 1991; Zahariadis, 2003). They may be particularly instrumental in complex policy domains where expert knowledge is critical. Elected officials can also serve as policy entrepreneurs. As Zahariadis (2003) explained, elected officials can wield substantial influence and possess the authority to bring issues to the policy agenda. They can often determine which policy proposals are taken seriously, thereby defining the parameters of policy debates. Academics and researchers, often providing the scientific and empirical evidence needed for

policy decisions, can act as policy entrepreneurs as well (Kingdon, 1995; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Their research can identify emerging issues, provide evidence for the existence of a problem, or propose innovative solutions. Nongovernmental organizations and advocacy groups can also act as policy entrepreneurs (Mintrom & Norman, 2009). These entities are frequently involved in policy development, pushing for changes in specific areas of public policy based on their mission or the interests of their constituents. The media can also function as policy entrepreneurs, especially in the digital age. By shaping public opinion and directing attention to specific issues, media outlets can influence the policy agenda (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Lastly, private sector actors, such as industry leaders or lobbyists, can be significant policy entrepreneurs (Ballas & Theoharakis, 2003). Their influence comes from their economic power, access to resources, and ability to lobby government officials.

**Policy Output.** Policy outputs are the tangible outcomes of the policy-making process. They reflect the decisions made by the government to act or not to act, to change or maintain some aspect of the status quo (Howlett & Cashore, 2009). The outputs are a result of the interaction, negotiation, and communication between political actors within the constraints of formal and informal procedures, rules, and institutions (Howlett & Cashore, 2009).

As previously noted, Kingdon (1995) argued that coupling, or the key moment of convergence, provides the optimal condition for policy change, as it allows for the issue at hand to gain prominence, a relevant policy solution to be identified, and the political will to implement the change to coalesce. Additionally, focusing events and crises are key to the coupling process that enables the opening of policy windows. Respondents in Kingdon's (1995) study categorically portrayed government action as mostly reactive to emerging problems instead of strategic in creating programs. One respondent explained, "Until there's a crisis, it's just one of

many issues. Governmental policy has been, and always will be, a function of crisis” (Kingdon, 1995, p. 96). The interplay of the five structural features within the MSA highlights the complex and dynamic nature of policy making, particularly during a crisis. Each feature plays a unique role in shaping policy outcomes, underscoring the importance of understanding this interplay in policy analysis and decision-making.

#### ***4.3.5 Strengths and Limitations of MSA***

Over the last decades, the MSA has been further developed and vastly used in policy analysis literature. Studies on Canadian education policy have employed the MSA (Charles, 2011; Howlett, 1998; Rexe, 2014). Globally, researchers have also adopted the MSA to analyze crisis (Birkland, 1997, 1998, 2004; Farley et al., 2007; Saikaly, 2009; White, 2015; Wood 2004, 2006). Particularly in the COVID-19 pandemic context, studies using the MSA have been published in the disciplines of health (Jalali et al., 2020; Ng et al., 2020), education (Kaur et al., 2020; Kippin & Cairney, 2021), and public policy (Dunlop et al., 2020; Maor & Howlett, 2020).

The MSA offers notable strengths in policy analysis. One of its major attributes is the ability to capture the complexity and disorder of the policy-making process, accounting for the nonlinear nature of policy making. It provides a realistic explanation of how policy changes occur in response to problems, policy alternatives, and political contexts (Zahariadis, 2014).

Another major strength lies in its simplicity and its adaptability. The streams metaphor used by the MSA simplifies the intricate dynamics of policy making, making the process more comprehensible and manageable for study (Cairney & Jones, 2016). Furthermore, the model has been deemed “universal,” meaning it can be applied to nearly any context. It is a widely applicable tool for policy analysis, having been applied across a wide range of policy domains

and governmental systems such as health care, education, and environmental policy (Cairney and Jones, 2016; Zahariadis, 2014).

Additionally, it acknowledges the importance of timing and chance in policy making. The MSA uniquely addresses how fleeting policy windows can shape the trajectory of policy change (Kingdon, 1995). It also underlines the importance of policy actors, particularly policy entrepreneurs, and acknowledges their role in coupling policy streams and pushing their solutions during policy windows (Zahariadis, 2003).

Lastly, it integrates several theories into a framework that considers policy problems, solutions, politics, and actors simultaneously, combining elements of rational choice theory, organizational theory, and political theory (Cairney & Jones, 2016). In times of crises, the MSA proves particularly relevant as it acknowledges the critical role of windows of opportunity that are often opened by crises, and the ensuing changes in attention, search, and selection processes that these windows entail.

It should be mentioned, however, that the MSA has some limitations that must be acknowledged. While it provides a helpful framework for understanding past policy changes, it lacks predictive power due to its emphasis on chance and timing, thus not offering a way to anticipate when policy windows will open or when changes will occur (Cairney & Jones, 2016). Furthermore, the MSA might underestimate the influence of systematic forces such as institutional arrangements, economic structures, and cultural norms on the policy process (Ackrill et al., 2013). The broad definition of key concepts in the MSA, such as “policy windows” and “policy entrepreneurs,” can lead to varied interpretations and applications in research, making it difficult to compare studies (Herweg et al., 2023).

Additionally, the approach does not adequately address the power dynamics and conflicts that often play a crucial role in policy making, overlooking how power disparities can influence the process of agenda-setting and policy adoption (Cairney & Jones, 2016). Finally, although the MSA offers a simplified model of policy making, critics argue that it might oversimplify the complexity of real-world policy processes. Some policy changes may not neatly fit into the three-stream model, and not all policy changes require the alignment of all three streams (Zahariadis, 2014).

Despite these limitations, the MSA remains a widely used and highly relevant theoretical framework for the study of policy making, offering valuable insights into the policy process, especially in times of crises. This study leveraged the strengths of MSA while addressing these limitations, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of Canada's immigration policy response to the pandemic.

#### **4.4 Theoretical Framework 2: Macro-Window-Opening Process**

##### ***4.4.1 Why the MWOP?***

While the MSA provides an essential foundation for understanding how policy changes occur, there are limitations to its application, especially during crisis-driven scenarios (Jones, 1994; Zahariadis, 2014). This necessitates a complementary framework, such as Keeler's (1993) MWOP theory, which can further illuminate the mechanisms of policy making during crises.

Addressing limitations in the MSA, particularly its somewhat implicit temporal dynamics and suitability for incremental rather than radical policy changes, Keeler (1993) expanded on Kingdon's (1995) MSA with the introduction of the MWOP. The MSA's limited temporal framing can hinder its effectiveness in capturing the sequential unfolding and conditions precipitating the opening of policy windows, a shortfall that becomes critical during crisis

situations that often demand swift policy changes under a clear understanding of temporal dynamics (Zahariadis, 2014).

Furthermore, the MSA's traditional application to incremental policy changes presents a challenge during crises that frequently catalyze radical reforms (Kingdon, 1984). The MWOP responds to these challenges by offering a more robust framework that specifically examines significant policy changes during crisis situations. Unlike MSA's focus on micro-level interactions and processes leading to policy change, the MWOP presents a conceptual evolution by introducing the idea of macro-windows. These are periods of profound crisis or political shifts with the potential to trigger substantial policy reform. By highlighting the role of crises and political dynamics, the MWOP not only deepens our understanding of the mechanisms that open policy windows but also how these openings can lead to substantial policy transformations (Keeler, 1993).

The MWOP framework and its features has been employed and adapted for various policy research and analyses (Boin & 't Hart, 2003; Booysen, 2011; Cortell & Peterson, 1999, 2001; Schmidt, 1996; Steger, 2000; Surel, 2000;) and leveraged to explore policy making during crisis (Boin & 't Hart, 2022; Helderma, 2015; Yan et al., 2020). Its application has led to a deeper understanding of the processes and rationales behind critical political transformations. Furthermore, Keeler's (1993) theory provides practical insights for policymakers and political actors, stressing the importance of leveraging specific periods, or "windows of opportunity," for effecting reform.

First, the MWOP's treatment of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as potential catalyst for substantial policy reform is an invaluable aspect of the framework. This strength is exemplified in the research of Helderma (2015), who studied health care policies in the

European Union during the economic crisis. Here, the MWOP features allowed Helderman to analyze how the economic crisis precipitated a shift in policy orientation. The crisis created a sense of urgency and fear that opened a macro-window for policy change. As economic stability became a dominant concern, a critical reconsideration of existing health care policies was ignited, leading to a reframing of health care policies that emphasized cost efficiency and financial sustainability. In this context, the MWOP provided a useful lens to examine how the crisis altered the policy landscape, leading to significant shifts in health policy discourse and reforms in the European Union.

Second, the MWOP's focus on the size of governmental mandates as a crucial factor influencing policy changes offers a nuanced understanding of political dynamics. Steger's (2000) research on electoral mandates in a historical context employed Keeler's (1993) theory to shed light on these dynamics. In his study, Steger examined a series of political mandates and their impact on policy reforms. By applying the MWOP, he elucidated how larger mandates often created an environment conducive to significant policy changes by conferring greater legitimacy and authority to the government. This situation, in turn, enabled the administration to advance its policy objectives more forcefully, leading to substantial shifts in policy direction. Steger's study, therefore, underscores how the MWOP can help in comprehending the intricate interplay between political mandates and policy reforms.

Third, the MWOP's comprehensive approach to policy analysis, accounting for a variety of factors such as the severity of the crisis, size of the mandate, scope of legislative change, and other influential variables, offers a detailed and holistic examination of policy changes. This approach was well illustrated in Booyesen's (2011) study on policy transitions in democratic South Africa. In this complex and rapidly evolving political landscape, the MWOP structural

features offered a valuable framework for tracing the trajectories of policy change. Applying the MWOP helped Booysen dissect the complex policy dynamics at play, elucidating how elements such as the severity of Apartheid's legacy (a crisis in its own right), the size of the African National Congress's mandate, and the scope of necessary legislative changes interacted to shape policy transformations in post-Apartheid South Africa.

In conclusion, the MWOP represents a very useful evolution to the MSA, providing a more nuanced and robust framework for analyzing policy changes, particularly during crisis situations. By broadening our understanding of how macro-windows open and how they can lead to significant policy shifts, the MWOP offers a potent tool for both academic research and practical policy making. The following sections provide a detailed examination of Keeler's (1993) MWOP theory, including its origins, tenets, and limitations. The goal is to offer a robust understanding of this theory and its potential for elucidating the processes and rationales behind significant political transformations, particularly during times of crisis.

#### ***4.4.2 Origin of the MWOP***

The theory of the MWOP originates from the seminal work of political scientist John T. S. Keeler, specifically his 1993 publication "Opening the Window for Reform: Mandates, Crises and Extraordinary Policy-Making". As an expansion of and complement to John Kingdon's (1984) MSA, the MWOP provides a more explicit understanding of the temporal dimensions and specific factors contributing to the opening of substantial policy windows. Keeler's innovative approach to policy reform has its roots in the rich intellectual tradition of political science and public policy studies.

This theory offers a framework for comprehending the dynamics of political reform and suggests that certain conditions must align in a specific sequence for substantial political change

to occur. Central to this theory is the idea that political reform is not an ongoing process but happens during specific periods known as windows of opportunity, which are formed when a combination of external and internal factors creates a favourable environment for reform (Keeler, 1993).

#### ***4.4.3 Description and Outline of Basic Tenets***

Keeler's (1993) MWOP theory provides a sophisticated framework for understanding the dynamics of ambitious and fast policy reforms in established democratic political systems. In his seminal work, Keeler set out to evaluate the conditions under which governments can initiate significant changes in policy. He explored the factors that contribute to the opening of policy windows, the size of these windows, and the timing of their opening to allow for specific policy solutions or major reform.

Keeler (1993) defined reform as “a policy innovation manifesting an unusually substantial redirection or reinforcement of previous public policy” (p. 424). This definition underscores the significance of MWOP theory in understanding not just minor tweaks to existing policies but profound shifts in policy directions. Keeler argued that two categories of factors, political developments and societal problems, could separately or in tandem catalyze policy window openings. Ordinary policy making typically involves less dramatic, limited scope factors, giving rise to what Keeler described as “micro-windows” limited to specific issue areas.

Keeler (1993) emphasized the importance of understanding how during periods of extraordinary policy making, dramatic and wide-ranging developments on the political and societal scene combine to generate macro-windows, which enable substantial policy innovations across diverse issue areas. The size of these macro-windows and the degree of policy innovation

or change they allow are primarily shaped by two integral elements: the magnitude of the government's mandate and the crisis severity.

Essentially, Keeler's (1993) MWOP theory presents a comprehensive and dynamic understanding of policy reform. It portrays policy change not as a linear or continuous process, but as a phenomenon shaped by specific periods or windows where substantial redirections of public policy can occur. The opening of these windows is contingent on a blend of political, societal, and situational factors, making the MWOP a versatile tool in policy analysis. In Keeler's theory, the size of the government's mandate and the severity of the crisis act as independent variables, influencing the size of the policy window (the dependent variable). This dynamic relationship suggests that larger mandates and more severe crises tend to open larger windows for policy reform or innovation.

Thus, the MWOP theory is built around several key tenets: the size of the government's mandate, the severity of crisis, and the consequential size of the window for reform. The first tenet, the size of the government's mandate, implies that substantial electoral victories can open a macro-window for meaningful political reform. The second tenet, the severity of crisis, is instrumental in the MWOP model. Keeler (1993) described crises as situations of large-scale public dissatisfaction or fear that can drive policy change. Crises can catalyze the window-opening process through its impact on elections or exert more direct impacts, like triggering urgency or fear mechanisms. The final tenet, the size of the window for reform, is determined by the size of the mandate and the severity of the crisis. Keeler posited that significant political change usually occurs when macro-windows open due to a combination of sweeping changes on the political or societal landscape.

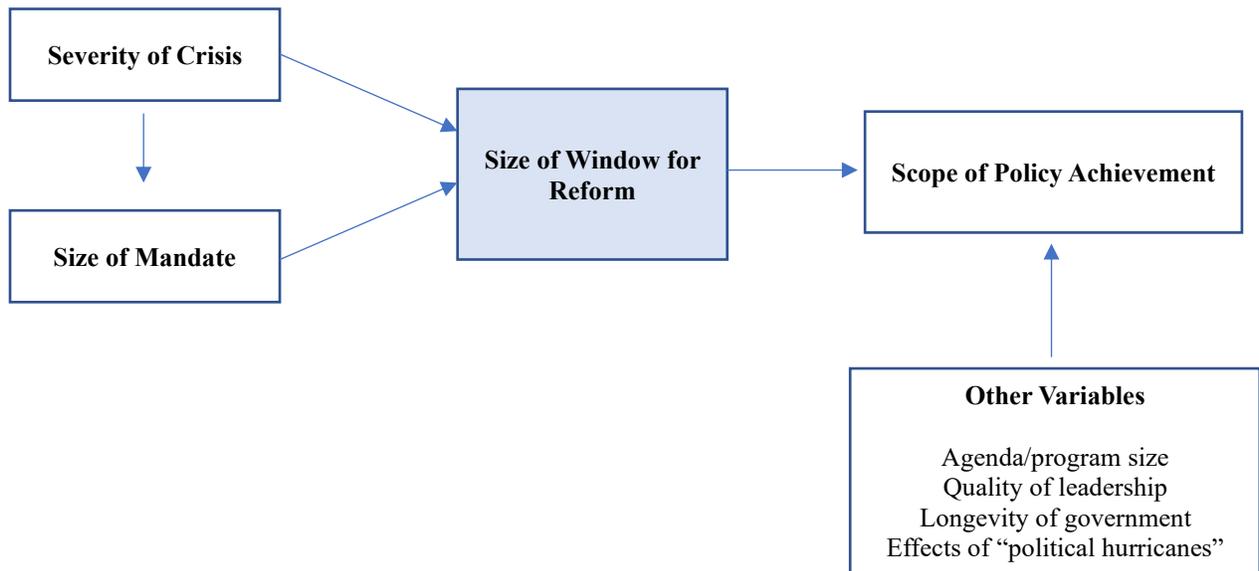
Additionally, Keeler’s (1993) MWOP theory accounts for other variables such as the size of the political agenda, the longevity of the government, the impact of political events, and the quality of leadership, exemplifying the theory’s intricacy and comprehensiveness. These elements collectively shape the MWOP dynamics, providing a comprehensive understanding of the conditions propitious for significant policy reform.

**4.4.4 Model and Description**

The MWOP theory comprises five structural features: the severity of crisis, size of the government mandate, size of the window for reform, other variables (including agenda size, government longevity, the impact of political hurricanes and leadership quality), and the scope of policy achievement (Keeler, 1993), as outlined in Figure 9.

**Figure 9**

*Macro Window-Opening Process*



*Note.* Adapted from “Opening the Window for Reform: Mandates, Crises, and Extraordinary Policy-Making,” by J. T. Keeler, 1993, *Comparative Political Studies*, 25(4).

**Severity of Crisis.** The severity of a crisis, defined by Keeler (1993) via Flanagan (1973), plays a significant role in the window-opening process. Keeler (1993) posited two ways a crisis influences this process. First, a crisis can sway the election results by discrediting the incumbent government and producing a substantial mandate for the opposition. Second, it can have a direct effect that bolsters the mandate mechanisms or function in their absence.

Keeler (1993) proposed three mechanisms via which a crisis can affect the window-opening process: the crisis-mandate mechanism, the urgency mechanism, and the fear mechanism. These mechanisms elucidate how crises can spark public dissatisfaction, fear, and urgency, leading to policy windows for reform. In the first, the crisis-mandate mechanism, a crisis helps to discredit the government leaders and their ideas, influencing negative voting and producing an unusually impressive mandate for the opposition party. In the second, the urgency mechanism, a crisis can produce a perception of urgency with the belief that already serious problems will be intensified by inaction. In the final one, the fear mechanism, a crisis featuring socioeconomic problems and an uncommon degree of social mobilization (e.g., strikes and demonstrations) demanding reform can create an environment of genuine fear with the belief that inaction may endanger lives and property or even trigger a revolution. In the case of urgency or fear mechanisms, both government and the political and the social opposition (e.g., business community) will support the government's proposal to defuse the protest and restore order.

**Size of the Mandate.** According to Keeler (1993), a substantial electoral victory can open a macro-window for political reform. He identified three mechanisms by which a large mandate can open a macro-window for reform: the authorization mechanism, the empowerment mechanism, and the party pressure mechanism. In the authorization mechanism, the mandate of a government makes it appear authorized by the public to enact its program, reducing political and

institutional opposition to policy innovation. In the empowerment mechanism, an impressive mandate empowers a government to implement its program by providing a large majority for the governing party or parties in the legislature. In the party pressure mechanism, a large mandate may create pressure from party activists who expect the government's commitments to be fulfilled, and thus make reform politically unavoidable. Keeler argued that the larger the mandate, the greater the potential for reform because a larger mandate amplifies these mechanisms, thus opening wider windows for substantial policy innovation.

**Size of Window for Reform.** As previously mentioned, Keeler (1993) differentiated between micro-windows and macro-windows. Micro-windows, often associated with minor changes, open when enablers are limited in scope. In contrast, macro-windows, linked with profound legislative achievements, open when dramatic or wide-ranging changes occur on the political or societal scene. These changes often result from a landslide election victory or a crisis triggering urgency or fear mechanisms.

**Other Variables.** Other variables influencing the scope of a democratic government's legislative achievement include the size of the agenda or program, the longevity of the government, the effect of political hurricanes, and the quality of leadership (Keeler, 1993).

- *Agenda or Program Size:* This refers to the breadth and depth of the policy issues that a government or leadership intends to address. It essentially encompasses the set of policy initiatives and legislative actions that the leadership intends to undertake. Larger agendas or programs can lead to broader macro-windows as they tend to encompass a wide range of issues. Keeler (1993) suggested that larger mandates often come with bigger agendas or programs, which can contribute to the opening of macro-windows for significant policy changes.

- *Quality of Leadership*: Keeler (1993) emphasized the importance of leadership quality in the MWOP theory. Effective leadership can be a key driver in opening macro-windows for policy reform. Leaders with clear vision, strong persuasive skills, and the ability to make strategic decisions are more likely to seize the opportunities presented by crises and political shifts to enact substantial policy changes. Leadership quality, thus, plays a critical role in determining whether the opened policy windows will lead to significant policy transformations.
- *Political Hurricanes*: In the context of the MWOP theory, political hurricanes refer to dramatic political events or upheavals that can trigger the opening of macro-windows. These can include major shifts in public sentiment, significant political scandals, or other political events that can dramatically alter the policy landscape. These political hurricanes can create an environment conducive to significant policy changes by disrupting the status quo and creating new policy opportunities.
- *Longevity of Government*: The term of a government can influence the policy-making process significantly. A longer term can provide more opportunities for a government to implement its agenda, especially if it coincides with the opening of a macro-window. The longer the government is in power, the more chances it has to address a wide range of policy issues, potentially leading to major policy reforms.

Keeler (1993) emphasized that the potential for significant policy innovation from the government is primarily determined by the size of the reform window. This window, in turn, is mostly shaped by the size of the government's mandate and the severity of the crisis at the time of the government's election and the onset of its term in office.

#### ***4.4.5 Strengths and Limitations of the MWOP***

As previously stated, the MWOP theory by Keeler (1993) holds several strengths, each facilitating important insights and considerations for its application in academic research and policy making during crisis, including the present study on immigration policy changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Keeler's theory has been employed in various studies to understand significant policy shifts in times of crisis or political change, including transitions in South Africa (Booyesen, 2011), health care policies in the European Union (Helderman, 2015), domestic institutional change (Cortell & Peterson, 1999, 2001), and electoral mandates (Steger, 2000).

One of the core strengths of the MWOP is its central tenet that extraordinary policy making typically ensues when a macro-window for reform opens due to a combination of window-opening mechanisms. In the case of this study, the size of the government's pro-immigration mandate and the severity of the COVID-19 crisis served as window-opening mechanisms.

However, the MWOP theory is not without its limitations. First, a major challenge lies in quantifying some of its crucial components for empirical research, including crisis severity or governmental mandate size (John, 2013). Assigning numeric values to inherently subjective and context-dependent factors such as crisis severity or political mandate could introduce bias and reduce the reliability of findings.

Second, while the MWOP theory provides a rich understanding of the conditions leading to policy window openings, its predictive power is limited (Herweg et al., 2023). The unpredictability and complexity of the factors that precipitate the opening of macro-windows restrict the MWOP's ability to accurately forecast when these windows might open and the

extent of policy change that might follow. This limitation underscores the need for complementary theories or models that can enhance the predictability of policy change.

Third, although not relevant to this study, the MWOP's primary reliance on crisis as a catalyst for significant policy change could limit its applicability in noncrisis scenarios (Jones, 1994). Policies can change significantly in times of stability as well, driven by factors such as demographic shifts, ideological change, or technological advancements. This suggests a potential need for a broader conceptualization of what constitutes a "crisis" or "major political shift," to allow the MWOP to be more effectively applied in a wider range of contexts.

While the MWOP offers an innovative and useful theoretical lens through which to understand and analyze policy change in times of crises, minor adjustments were implemented for the purposes of this study. This adaptation of the MWOP model included a broader array of critical components and actors that influence policy making during a crisis. The following section delves deeper into the specific components of the adapted model, providing a robust explanation of each and their significance within this study.

#### **4.5 Adapted MWOP Model and Description**

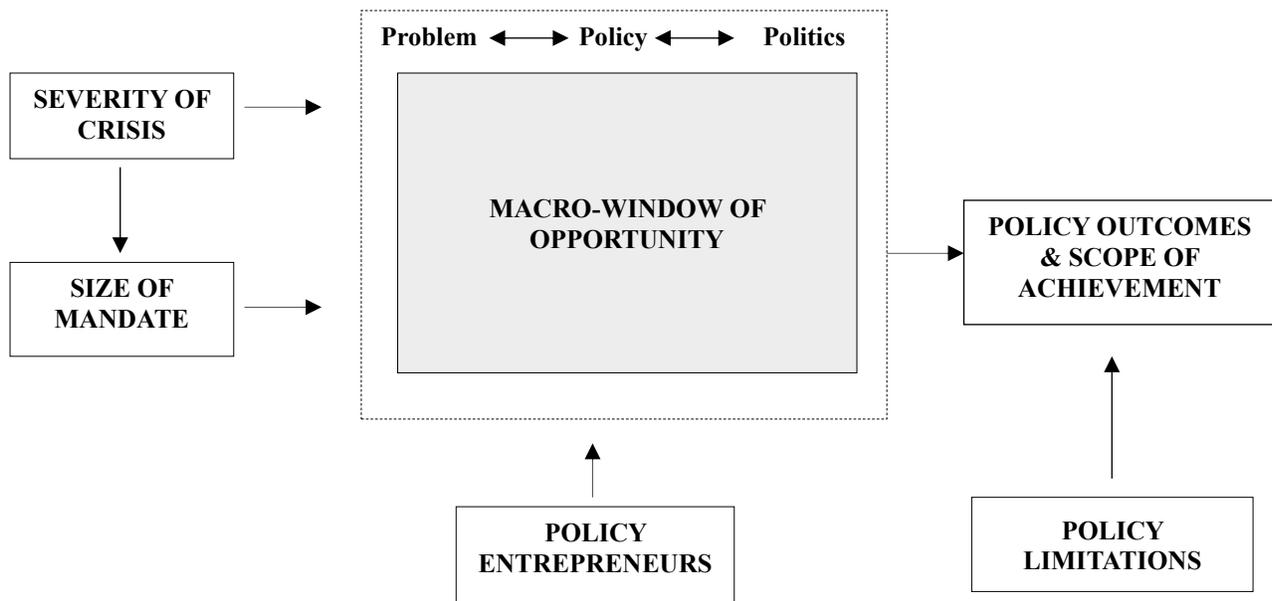
This study adapted Keeler's (1993) MWOP theory by integrating and examining the role of policy entrepreneurs (including individual actors and interest groups) from Kingdon's (1984) MSA and emphasizing policy limitations or challenges that might hinder the implementation or scope of policy outcomes. The adapted model is illustrated in Figure 10.

**Severity of the Crisis.** COVID-19 brought about a global crisis of unprecedented magnitude that significantly impacted the international education sector in Canada. In terms of Keeler's (1993) MWOP framework, the severity of the crisis triggered urgency and fear mechanisms, pressing both governmental and nongovernmental actors to propose substantial

changes to restore normalcy. The severity of this crisis influenced every stage of policy making, from the emergence of issues onto the government’s agenda to the formulation and implementation of new policies. This crisis severity guided every stage of policy making, facilitating the opening of a macro-policy window for reform, and influencing the nature and scale of new policies and interventions during this period.

**Figure 10**

*Adapted MWOP Model*



**Size of the Mandate.** The size of the government’s mandate is the second important factor that drives major policy change, according to the MWOP framework. As the public approval for decisive actions increased during the COVID-19 crisis, the Canadian government was provided with a substantial mandate to enact policy measures and changes. This mandate in effect opened a macro-window of opportunity for considerable policy outputs to be enacted within the sectors of international education and immigration, as proposed by Keeler’s (1993) MWOP theory.

**Size of the Window for Reform.** The COVID-19 pandemic, due to its severe nature and the expansive mandate given to the government, opened a wide window for policy reform. The scale of this window for reform significantly impacts the scope and depth of the policy changes, as seen in the substantial shifts in policies during the crisis.

**Other Variables.** The next structural feature of Keeler's (1993) MWOP framework is other variables, which includes agenda or program size, quality of leadership, longevity of government, and the effects of political hurricanes. In the context of this study, agenda or program size refers to the extensive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which required a comprehensive governmental agenda to address a broad range of issues in the international education sector and immigration policies. Similarly, Canadian leadership was crucial, and its quality was tested in navigating the crisis and implementing policy responses in the international education sector (Harris, 2020; Stefan & Nazarov, 2020). In addition, since the Liberal government has been in office since 2015, the stability and longevity of the government during the COVID-19 pandemic provided an extended time frame in which to address a broad range of policy issues, leading to major policy reforms.

While these other variables are captured when establishing the policy context, considering the scope of this research, the emphasis of the study lies in the examination of factors that might impede policy implementation or limit the extent to which policy outcomes are achieved. Specifically, the study explored the challenges faced by policymakers and their influence on the overall scope and effectiveness of policies. Consequently, the adapted model places emphasis on studying the role of policy limitations or challenges on policy outcomes. Finally, given that political hurricanes pertain to substantial political events or upheavals capable

of drastically altering the policy landscape and triggering the opening of macro-windows (Keeler, 1993), this variable was deemed unsuitable for this study.

**Policy Entrepreneurs.** Drawing from the MSA, this study also incorporates the role of policy entrepreneurs, referring to individuals or interest groups that significantly impact policy changes (Kingdon, 1995). As Kingdon (1995) argued, policy entrepreneurs are integral to the agenda-setting process, investing time, energy, reputation, and, in some cases, money in anticipation of future returns. In the face of the COVID-19 crisis, policy entrepreneurs and interest groups seized the opportunity to couple policy problems with solutions, leveraging political opportunities. Political entrepreneurs may assume various roles, acting as persuaders, educators, opinion leaders, advocates, and brokers in shaping policy direction (Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom, 1997; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Schneider et al., 1995; Wood, 2004, 2020). For instance, elected officials wield significant influence on the policy agenda, defining policy debates (Zahariadis, 2003). Similarly, technocrats, with their specialized knowledge, are instrumental in complex policy areas; academics provide necessary scientific evidence for policy decisions (Kingdon, 1995; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993); and nongovernmental organizations and advocacy groups push for policy changes (Mintrom & Norman, 2009). The media plays an important role in shaping public opinion, directing attention to critical issues, and industry leaders use their economic power to influence policy making (Ballas & Theoharakis, 2003). Finally, interest groups, encompassing professional associations, networks, and advocacy organizations, represent specific interests, advocate for policies in line with these interests, and have an influential role in shaping policy directions during crisis.

In the Canadian context, significant policy influence comes from professional organizations and networks, such as the five national associations representing the full spectrum

of international education, which are Universities Canada, CBIE, CICan, Canadian Association of Public Schools – International (CAPS-I<sup>7</sup>), and Languages Canada. These entities play a pivotal role in shaping international education by driving advocacy efforts, producing policy briefs, and conducting studies and strategies on Canada’s potential in international education (El Masri, 2019). They foster collaboration among stakeholders from academia, government, and the private sector, advocating for policies and programs that support the recruitment and retention of international students in Canada. As sources of expertise and research, they disseminate information about trends and best practices in international education.

In the context of crisis, policy entrepreneurs typically help define policy issues, present possible solutions, and lobby for necessary policy changes. Consequently, their role cannot be understated in the development of policy responses during the pandemic. By incorporating policy entrepreneurs (including interest groups) as a standalone variable, the adapted MWOP model in this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the policy-making process during the COVID-19 crisis. This inclusion acknowledges the critical role these entities play in shaping policy directions, particularly during a crisis, and further refines the analysis of crisis-driven policy changes in Canada’s international education and immigration sectors.

**Policy Outcomes and Scope of Achievement.** In alignment with the MSA and MWOP frameworks, this study examines the key policy decisions or outcomes resulting from the creation of the window of opportunity. These include the policy measures introduced during the pandemic to support the recruitment and retention of international students in Canada. This variable considers the scope of legislative change resulting from the alignment of the model’s structural components.

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<sup>7</sup> The Canadian Association of Public Schools – International (CAPS-I) is a non-profit association comprised of 128 publicly-funded school districts/boards.

**Policy Limitations or Constraints.** The final component of the adapted model is policy limitations or constraints. Of particular importance here is the role of institutional constraints, as institutions and their structures may significantly impact the development of policy outcomes (Ostrom, 1990). In the context of the present study, it is important to consider conflicts between federal and provincial governments, and how internal and external structural limitations of government departments may impact policy change. Similarly, university-government relations that allow university institutional autonomy may constrain government policy making in areas of international education.

In addition, policy making during a crisis is distinct from policy making during conventional times, presenting a scenario where policy actors are confronted with highly complex issues lacking evident and accessible solutions, leading to heightened uncertainty. The exceptional and time-sensitive nature of the situation further compounds challenges, potentially hindering the implementation or scope of policy outcomes as policy actors grapple with uncertain paths to solutions and their own pursuits (Wenzelburger et al., 2019). The adapted model, therefore, identifies policy limitations as an additional variable, exploring in detail which challenges or limitations emerged during the pandemic and possibly deterred the execution or scope of policy achievements.

In summary, this adapted MWOP framework provides a robust theoretical lens for understanding the dynamic policy-making process in the face of an unprecedented global crisis. The interplay of these various components—the severity of the crisis, the size of the mandate, the size of the window for reform, policy entrepreneurs, policy limitations, and the scope of legislative change—provides critical insights into how Canada navigated international education policy challenges.

This chapter has explored the MSA and the MWOP as significant theoretical frameworks for understanding the policy-making process during times of crisis, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic. These models provide a comprehensive perspective on the alignment of problem, policy, and politics streams and the size and opening mechanisms of policy windows, offering valuable insights into why, when, and how policy changes are made.

The chapter also established the value and relevance of using these theoretical frameworks in the context of studying immigration policy measures enacted in Canada in support of the international education sector during the pandemic. The nature of the COVID-19 crisis as a severe and wide-reaching global event aligns with key elements in the MWOP theory, making it a suitable model for analyzing the decision-making process and its outcomes in this context.

The frameworks provide a comprehensive perspective on the policy-making process and allow for an in-depth understanding of the various factors that influence policy change. The MSA and MWOP frameworks underscore the factors and mechanisms at play that facilitated the opening of policy windows, leading to significant policy measures and changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of this study, the size of the government's pro-immigration mandate and the severity of the COVID-19 crisis served as these window-opening mechanisms. The exploration of these theories and their application to the study of policy changes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic provides the theoretical grounding for the research questions at the heart of this study. Understanding not just the specific policies enacted, but also the conditions, motivations, and decision-making processes that led to their creation and implementation, underpins the investigation.

The next chapter details the methods and approaches employed to answer the research questions of this study. It elaborates on the use of a qualitative research design and policy analysis and outlines the method of data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes with a reflection on my researcher's positionality as it relates to the topic under study and the research process, followed by an overview of methodological limitations.

## **Chapter 5: Research Methodology**

The choice of research method was directed by the nature of the research questions and the chosen theoretical frameworks. This study adopted a qualitative research design using policy analysis as the methodological tool to examine immigration policy measures introduced in Canada during the pandemic, and their implications for the recruitment and retention of international students. The overall analysis of the data is guided by the application of the adapted MWOP model, derived from Kingdon's (1984) MSA and Keeler's (1993) MWOP framework.

### **5.1 Research Questions, Theoretical Framework, and Choice of Research Method**

This study poses the following three research question:

1. What immigration policy measures in Canada were considered and eventually introduced to secure the continued recruitment and retention of international students during the COVID-19 crisis?
2. How was a "window of opportunity" envisioned, and what series of "window-opening mechanisms" enabled or hindered proposed policy changes?
3. What does the Canadian case illustrate about the application of the MSA and MWOP as theoretical frameworks for studying policy making in times of crisis?

To address the first research question, this study primarily relied on secondary data, which included government policy documents, news articles, and various publications outlining the immigration policy changes introduced in Canada during the pandemic. The remaining two questions were predominantly informed by integrating insights drawn from both published documents and semi-structured interviews, where participants' responses were cross-validated and complemented through information presented in published sources.

Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of the MSA and the MWOP, this study focuses on understanding how a crisis can catalyze significant policy changes. By applying the MSA and MWOP frameworks, the study seeks to interpret and understand how the alignment of problem, policy, and politics streams, combined with the influence of policy actors and entrepreneurs, and the size of the policy window, led to significant policy measures and changes during the COVID-19 pandemic (Keeler, 1993; Kingdon, 1984). The frameworks provide a lens to understand not just what policy changes were made but when why and how they were made and who influenced decisions (Birkland, 2015; Zahariadis, 2014).

This research examines policy measures and changes introduced from March 2020 to December 2022 (detailed in Table 4). This timeframe is significant, beginning with the WHO declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, and concluding on December 31, 2022, the official end date of this investigation. Throughout this period, considerable policy responses emerged in Canada in response to the adversities of the pandemic on the international education sector, especially regarding the recruitment and retention of international students.

A qualitative approach, combining policy document analysis and semi-structured interviews, was employed to answer the three research questions. The choice of research method was directed by the nature of the research questions and the chosen theoretical frameworks. The method provided a dynamic avenue to obtain firsthand insights from diverse policy actors and offered an in-depth examination of the policy documents, thus allowing for a nuanced understanding of the research questions.

## **5.2 Why a Qualitative Research Design**

Considering the research questions and theoretical frameworks of this study, the use of a qualitative research design was well suited for this study for several reasons.

First, as a methodology, qualitative research facilitates the understanding of social phenomena in their natural settings, aiming to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It allows for the investigation of complex phenomena in their natural settings, thereby providing a rich and nuanced understanding of the processes, experiences, and impacts associated with policy changes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The policy changes that occurred in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were not isolated events; they were deeply rooted in the sociopolitical context, influenced by various stakeholders, and had multiple impacts. The qualitative research design made it possible to delve into these aspects, providing a multidimensional examination of the research questions. This approach allows for a deep, contextual exploration of the processes, experiences, and impacts associated with policy changes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Given the complexity of immigration policy measures, particularly those occurring during the crisis, this depth and contextual understanding are vital for comprehending the distinct realities faced by policymakers during this time.

Second, qualitative research is particularly attuned to the interpretative focus of both the MSA and MWOP theoretical frameworks (Yin, 2009). These frameworks aim to understand the perspective of policy actors, the convergence of different policy streams, and how policy windows open and close to enable changes (Birkland, 2015; Zahariadis, 2014). Qualitative research, with its emphasis on meanings, experiences, and the views of participants, aligns seamlessly with these theoretical requirements (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2009). It enables the capturing of the experiences and perspectives of various stakeholders—including PSE institutions' senior administrators, educators, researchers, civil servants, and policymakers, among others—that are central to understanding the policy measures and changes in question.

Finally, given the nature of the research questions which required an in-depth analysis of policy changes and examining when, why, and how they were made, a qualitative research design provided the necessary flexibility for a dynamic and iterative investigation (Bryman, 2008), which is particularly crucial in the rapidly changing context of the pandemic and the corresponding policy landscape.

### **5.3 Why Policy Analysis**

This study adopts policy analysis as a research method, focusing on the relevance of context in understanding policy-making processes. Gale (1999) notes that the understanding of policy as process rests on the basic premise that policy operates in a context — “decisions are influenced by the material and social circumstances within which those decisions are made” (p. 398). This provides a lens through which one can discern how various dynamics —economic, social, political, and cultural—shape policy (Taylor, 1997). Central to this methodological approach is the understanding that “policy documents... are ideological texts that have been constructed within a particular context” (Codd, 1988, 243-244). The objective is to deconstruct the existing narratives by recognizing, analyzing, and understanding that very context.

Policy Analysis becomes particularly relevant given that it enables examining specific historical, economic, and political contexts that have influenced the emergence of policy agendas in relation to the recruitment and retention of international students in Canada. The intent is to trace the intricate dynamics of policy formation, its shifts, and therefore its broader implications. Such analysis supports comprehensive investigation to better understand policy as a complex social phenomenon (Lichtman, 2012).

This context-rich exploration also finds resonance in Gale's (1999) emphasis on the notion of intertextuality. Gale notes that policy texts derive their significance and interpretation from surrounding contexts, acting as a web of interconnected narratives. In essence, “contexts are collections of texts connected together” (p. 399). Such a perspective exposes how different contexts manifest varied material possibilities, subsequently influencing policy adoption and outcomes. This is particularly relevant given the involvement of multiple sectors, such as international education, immigration, labour market, and health, in policy decisions. Adopting policy analysis as a methodological approach helped explore the intricate dynamics at play between each of these sectors and examine how they interacted to create a particular context for policy making on the recruitment and retention of international students during the pandemic.

It is also important to understand that policy reforms are typically developed in continuity, drawing upon the legacy of past policies, and shaped by the interplay of various stakeholders and policy sectors (Hall, 1993). This is central to the study’s focus on different policy actors and entrepreneurs, and particularly to the second research question which examines the mechanisms that enabled or hindered the proposed policy measures. With a multitude of policy actors and entrepreneurs, each possessing varying degrees of influence, interests, and ideological positions, the policy-making landscape transforms into a complex tapestry of negotiations and power dynamics (Kingdon, 1995). The MSA and the MWOP highlight the pivotal role these actors play in orchestrating policy making, especially during times of crisis (Walgrave & Varone, 2008; Zahariadis, 2014). They depict how these actors can seize a window of opportunity to promote their policy objectives, adding a layer of complexity to the policy-making process (Birkland, 1998).

Policy analysis thus allows for a rich and detailed analysis of policy contexts and their influence on policy decisions. The research questions guiding this study delve into the intricacies of how specific immigration policy measures were deliberated upon and eventually implemented in Canada to sustain the international education sector, particularly the continued recruitment and retention of international students, amid the COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, adoption of policy analysis, as a methodological tool, aligns well with the study's concentrated focus on the Canadian context, providing the opportunity to comprehensively explore the interplay of various factors in the policy-making process and developing a holistic understanding of Canada's distinctive experience and response to the challenges imposed by the pandemic on the recruitment and retention of international students.

#### **5.4 Research Site**

As a result of border closures and international travel restrictions that prevented international student mobility, the pandemic had a significant impact on the international education sector globally. This research focuses on Canada as the site for examining immigration policy measures introduced during this time due to the dramatic growth of international students in Canada just prior to the pandemic, the growing economic dependence on this growth and the increased interlink between immigration and international students' recruitment and retention policies.

Canada, as the geographical site of this study, is interesting for three reasons. First, Canada stands out due to its significant and rapid success in drawing international students before the pandemic hit. Its inviting immigration policies and highly regarded educational institutions position it as the third largest destination for students from around the world. This booming growth in student recruitment encountered a sudden halt due to the pandemic, creating

a notable challenge. Canada, having become substantially connected with and reliant on international students, was tasked with navigating through this abrupt and profound disruption. Thus, evaluating Canada's strategies and policy changes during the pandemic becomes an engaging and crucial subject for international education research.

Second, it offers a unique backdrop that sets it apart from other international education destinations. This is mainly due to Canada's geo-political standing, coupled with its more positive stance on immigration and multiculturalism, which has traditionally offered it an advantage in the global international education market. In recent years, while other countries have exhibited restrictive or fluctuating immigration policies, particularly its neighbour the U.S., Canada has remained open and therefore attractive to international students. This same approach defined Canada's response in support of international students' recruitment and retention during the pandemic and set it apart when compared to other leading destination countries.

Third, policy decisions within the Canadian context are particularly complicated given its decentralized federal structure and the jurisdictional tensions between the federal and provincial governments. Effectively collaboration and cooperation are extremely challenging, yet Canada managed to respond through different approaches during the COVID-19 crisis. The uniqueness of the context thus merits research attention to explore the dynamics of policy making, especially during a global crisis.

## **5.5 Data Sources**

This study strategically incorporated both primary and secondary data sources to develop a comprehensive perspective and answer the research questions. Each data source contributed a distinct piece of the puzzle, creating a more complete picture when brought together. These

diverse sources facilitated an understanding that not only captured the explicit elements of immigration policy changes but also the underlying dynamics that led to these shifts.

Secondary sources of data included government policy documents, news articles, and other publications outlining the immigration policy changes administered in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. Government policy documents in particular served as an authoritative and direct source of information, outlining the changes made to immigration policy. They illuminated the specific measures enacted and offered a glimpse into the government's policy intentions and official stance, as well as provided the context within which the policy decisions were made.

Primary data were collected using semi-structured interviews, which provided firsthand insights into the evolution of immigration policy measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews added a layer of depth and complexity to the data and were instrumental in capturing the individual perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of those directly involved in the policy-making process. These narratives yielded a wealth of qualitative data, which provided a more nuanced understanding of how policy decisions were made, implemented, and experienced on the ground (outside and inside of government).

The reciprocal relationship between primary and secondary data sources played a critical role in this study. Secondary sources contextualized the primary data, providing a backdrop against which the government's policy decisions and stakeholders' experiences were analyzed. They helped to situate the primary data within broader sociopolitical and historical narratives. Simultaneously, primary data informed the interpretation and understanding of secondary sources, enabling a more critical reading of the policy documents and news coverage.

The MSA and MWOP provided a lens through which the data were analyzed, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the immigration policy-making process and its implications

during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interplay between primary and secondary data, complemented by these theoretical frameworks, provided a multidimensional exploration of the research questions. The two data sources were used sequentially, whereby the review and analysis of the policy documents, published reports, and news articles was conducted first to provide an overview of policy changes introduced during the pandemic, followed by the interviews to explore the perceptions of key stakeholders who experienced the policy-making process firsthand. Combining the two data sources provided complementarity, such that each source addressed a specific aspect of the research. The document analysis also helped inform the interview discussions and facilitated the conversations with the key stakeholders.

### ***5.5.1 Policy Documents***

**Rationale.** Policy documents are fundamental sources for understanding official governmental responses to a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. By analyzing these documents, researchers can uncover a government's strategies and decisions along with factual information on the actions taken in response to the pandemic (Bowen, 2009). In this study, policy documents served as a reliable source of information that provided the groundwork for understanding the policy measures enacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Choice.** Policy documents were selected for their context and richness of data. These sources offer a detailed account of governmental actions, policy measures and changes, and strategies during the pandemic, making them invaluable for painting a comprehensive picture of the situation.

**Document Identification.** The first step for using documents for analysis was identifying relevant policy documents for review. Documents reviewed for this study included federal policy announcements, reports, position papers, and statements from government bodies, including

regulations, programs, and other relevant documents. With the guidance of York University librarians, a systematic search was conducted on government and key organization websites using relevant search terms such as “international students,” “COVID-19,” “immigration policy,” “immigration,” and “Canada.” Through this search process, 101 documents were identified preliminarily. An additional seven documents were subsequently added to this list based on interviewees’ recommendations, resulting in a total of 108 documents to be reviewed.

**Document Collection.** The identified documents were collected for detailed examination. The sources of these documents were diverse and included federal agencies such as IRCC, Statistics Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Transport Canada, the Department of Finance, and Global Affairs Canada, along with other groups such as CBIE, the Royal Society of Canada, OECD, and the WHO.

**Document Sorting.** To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the policies and to capture the evolution of policy measures throughout the pandemic, the documents were sorted in chronological order and by the issuing organization (Yin, 2009). Table 2 provides a categorization of the 108 reviewed documents by source category and publishing organization. As previously noted, although CIC was renamed IRCC in 2015, documents from CIC and IRCC are listed separately in this table.

**Table 2***Categorization of Policy Documents*

Source category	Organization	Count
Federal government	Citizenship and Immigration Canada	17
	Department of Finance	2
	Department of Public Works and Government Services	1
	Economic Council of Canada	1
	Global Affairs Canada	4
	House of Commons	2
	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada	39
	Office of the Auditor General of Canada	1
	Public Health Agency of Canada	3
	Standing Committee on Immigration	1
	Statistics Canada	15
	Transport Canada	2
National interest groups	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada	1
	Canadian Bureau for International Education	3
	Environics Institute	1
	Royal Society of Canada	2
Other global organizations	International Civil Aviation Organization	1
	International Labour Organization	1
	International Monetary Fund	1
	NAFSA: Association of International Educators	1
	OECD	5
	United Nations Development Programme	1
	UNESCO	1
	World Health Organization	1
World Trade Organization	1	

*Note.* OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; UNESCO = United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

**5.5.2 Interviews**

**Rationale.** According to Patton (2002), interviews allow for an in-depth exploration of individual perspectives and provide context that might not be observable otherwise. The decision to conduct interviews for the present study was anchored in the desire to access the subjective

experiences and perspectives of policy actors directly involved in the policy-making process during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to international student recruitment and retention in Canada's PSE sector. Their involvement in policy making equips them with unique knowledge about the rationale behind policy measures, and the perceived impact of these measures on international students.

**Choice.** The choice to conduct interviews came from a need to complement the findings obtained through document analysis. Policy documents, though useful, often present a formal and macro-level perspective of policy changes. Interviews, conversely, allow the researcher to delve into the micro-level processes of policy making and implementation, illuminating the intentions, challenges, conflicts, and nuances that might not be evident in official policy documents (Yin, 2013). Thus, interviewing policy actors provided more complete, rich, and nuanced insights into the immigration policy-making process and its effects.

**Interview Guide.** The selection and use of the MSA and MWOP models for interview analysis were instrumental in shaping the research process, from data collection to analysis. Components of the two models were transformed into questions as seen in Table 3, which guided the creation of the final interview guide. The guide was designed to correspond with the themes identified in the table, providing a logical flow that mirrored the structure of the models (Patton, 2002). This alignment between the table and the interview guide ensured the research questions' coherence and relevance.

**Table 3***Adapted Model for Interview Guide*

Model components	Questions
Severity of crisis	What was the public mood? What was the socioeconomic landscape? What were the characteristics of the COVID-19 pandemic? How did the pandemic impact the postsecondary sector? What was the economic impact of the pandemic to the sector? How was the pandemic framed as a policy issue to influence policy reform?
Size of mandate	What was the government's public and opposition approval? What were the size and characteristics of the immigration policy mandate? What indicators were used to consider the size of the mandate?
Size of window for reform	What were the specific conditions at the time of the policy change that enabled the opening of the window for change? What was the size of the policy window?
Policy entrepreneurs	Who were the policy actors? What and whose interests were being promoted? Who determined whether the proposed solution was viable? Did elected officials control the policy process? How much influence did policy entrepreneurs and interest groups have in the policy process? What strategies did they use? To what extent did they generate policy solutions? Did policy entrepreneurs and interest groups share similar beliefs and was there consensus regarding the proposed policy solutions?
Other variables or challenges	Which political party was in office and what impact did it have on the policy changes? What was the position of the government? What was the role of university-government relations, institutional autonomy, and jurisdictional structures in COVID-19 responses? What were some challenges?
Scope of policy achievement	How was the agenda advanced and by who? What were the immigration policy changes and how many were there? Were the policy changes temporary or permanent?

The interview questions corresponded with the themes and subthemes identified from Table 3, ensuring a consistent and coherent exploration of the research topic. The semi-structured

nature of the interview guide, encompassing open-ended questions, encouraged participants to freely express their views and experiences, thereby generating nuanced and detailed qualitative data specific to the Canadian PSE sector's international student recruitment and retention and related immigration policy (Patton, 2002).

The interview guide was reviewed to ensure clarity and alignment with the research objectives. Redundant or overlapping questions were merged or reframed as probing questions, enhancing the depth and breadth of data collected (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The final interview guide comprised 13 open-ended questions, with each question further broken down into several subquestions to address all aspects of the study comprehensively. Questions explored the interviewees' knowledge and perspectives in areas such as immigration and international education before the pandemic, growth trajectory of the international education sector in Canada, COVID-19 as a global crisis disrupting the education and international education sectors, the federal government's approach to immigration policy making, key stakeholders within government involved and engaged in immigration policy making during this period, and Canada's approach to immigration policy making and international education during the pandemic. This approach ensured that the collected data were rich, broad, and directly relevant to the research objectives.

**Interview Process.** The interview process involved several steps. Prospective participants were first identified and contacted by email, in which they were provided a brief overview of the study and its main objectives (see Appendix A). Participants agreed to participate in the study by signing an informed consent form, ensuring their voluntary and informed participation (see Appendix B).

At the start of each interview, participants were reminded of the purpose of the study, that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without negative repercussions. They were also assured that their data would be treated confidentially and would not be linked to them personally unless they gave their consent. This commitment to ethical research practices helped establish trust with the participants, encouraging them to speak candidly during the interviews.

The semi-structured interview format enabled the participants to provide detailed responses and allowed me to request clarification and additional details during the session (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The interview guide of 13 open-ended questions was designed to elicit in-depth responses on various aspects of the research topic (see Appendix C). The questions ranged from general inquiries about the participant's role in PSE, international education, and immigration policy making, before and during the COVID-19 period, to specific queries about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international student recruitment and retention and the in postsecondary sector in Canada. Providing the participants with the guide before the interviews gave them the opportunity to prepare thoughtful responses (Patton, 2002).

The interviews, each of which lasted about 1 hour, were recorded and transcribed verbatim, maintaining a comprehensive record of the participants' responses. During the interview process, I took care to limit bias by not interrupting participants and using probing questions to seek further information or clarification when needed. These strategies are fundamental to eliciting meaningful and unbiased data from interviews (Brinkmann, 2013).

**Sampling and Categories of Interviewees.** The study adopted a purposive sampling method. According to Bryman (2008), this nonprobability sampling technique involves selecting participants based on their knowledge and experience regarding the research topic. The choice of

purposive sampling was guided by the need to gain detailed insights from individuals who have firsthand knowledge of the policy-making process in relation to international student recruitment and retention during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Categories of interviewees were defined based on their roles and involvement in immigration policies and measures affecting international students during the pandemic. The identification of these categories was crucial in capturing a range of perspectives and actors and understanding the complexity of the policy-making process. The two-stage identification process (Lichtman, 2012) ensured the inclusion of relevant policy actors. The first stage involved the identification of prospective participants through archival document analysis, which provided valuable information about key actors in the policy-making process. The second stage was more organic, relying on snowball sampling to identify additional relevant participants as the research unfolded (Lichtman, 2012).

The resulting interview sample consisted of a range of policy actors, including civil servants, interest groups, postsecondary institution senior administrators, researchers, education agents, and immigration consultants. This diversity allowed for a comprehensive examination of the policy-making process from various angles, thereby enabling a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study. Additionally, it was notable that some of the participants held multiple roles during the period examined.

Fifteen invitations were sent to prospective participants, seven of whom agreed to participate (46.7% response rate). These seven participants were located in four provinces and represented one or more national and provincial organizations falling under the categories of government (i.e., IRCC), colleges and universities, national associations (i.e., Colleges and Institutes Canada [CICan], CBIE, Universities Canada, Languages Canada), provincial

associations (i.e., International Education Newfoundland and Labrador, Council of Ontario Universities), immigration consultants and law firms, and education agencies (namely, focusing on student recruitment). The interviewees had an average of 20 years of experience in international education, immigration policy, or both. Throughout their careers they held multiple roles, including senior administrators at postsecondary institutions, researchers, leaders in provincial and national international education organizations, and provincial and federal levels of government. Some of these details have been omitted to maintain confidentiality and prevent identification of the participants.

Online one-on-one interviews were scheduled during February 2022 and September 2022 with the seven individuals who agreed to participate in the study. Their diverse backgrounds and expertise offered unique perspectives and valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced in navigating the complexities of policy making in the international education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Ethics Process.** In alignment with the established ethics protocol for conducting interviews, the study followed guidelines for ethical conduct for data collection by ensuring that participants provided signed informed consent to confirm their participation in the study. In addition, all participants received a brief description of the study and were informed how their provided responses would be used. Participants retained the option to stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if they so decided. They were informed that their decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, would not affect their relationship with the researcher or York University. It was ensured that, should a participant choose to withdraw from the study, all data collected from them would be immediately destroyed wherever possible. None of the seven participants chose to withdraw from the study or withhold response

during the course of the study. Additionally, participants did not express any concerns during the interviews or in a subsequent communication.

As required by the ethics approval granted by York University for this study (see Appendix D), the data collected through interviews were held in strict confidence using a password-protected USB and stored in a secure location. All information has been reported in such a way that individual persons cannot be identified, and all raw data (digital audio recordings and notes) will be destroyed 3 years after the completion of the study). Confidentiality was provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

## **5.6 Data Analysis**

The data analysis process for this study comprised several meticulously implemented steps, each serving a distinct purpose and collectively contributing to the study's strength.

### ***5.6.1 Analysis of Policy Documents***

The analysis of policy documents was carefully designed to ensure the comprehensive examination and interpretation of relevant data. This process aimed to achieve a profound understanding of the research subject. It was integral in assembling a robust empirical framework to support the investigation of the immigration policy measures impacting international students in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the documents were classified, based on their source, type, and primary subject matter, encompassing areas ranging from immigration policy changes to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on PSE institutions (Ritchie et al., 2013). The identified policy documents were subsequently summarized in a table format to allow for better accessibility and comprehension. These documents, including policy measures and changes, were then arranged chronologically and by the issuing organization to capture the evolution of policy measures throughout the pandemic and

gain a comprehensive understanding of the policies. Most of the documents fell into four main categories: travel regulations (including study permits and public health guidelines), study provisions (mainly online learning), work-related measures (such as work permits and post-graduation work permits), and immigration policies (with a focus on pathways to permanent residency).

This compiled information was shared with participants prior to their interviews. The aim was to equip them with a comprehensive background of the policy changes, which helped foster more informed and meaningful discussions during the interviews. This integrated approach not only provided a detailed policy landscape for the participants but also reinforced the validity and depth of the research. The findings derived from the document analysis are provided in Chapter 6.

### ***5.6.2 Analysis of Interview Transcripts***

The analysis process started after the interviews, with participants' responses being transcribed verbatim using word-processing software. This transcription process ensured an accurate and reliable record of the participants' narratives, an indispensable resource for subsequent qualitative content analysis (Silverman, 2013). Next, qualitative content analysis, which forms the backbone of this study's analytical process, was employed to facilitate a nuanced and profound exploration of the participants' responses. This strategy was chosen for its versatility and suitability in analyzing textual data to identify and interpret patterns relevant to the research's theoretical frameworks. It was an iterative and reflexive process involving repeated close reading of the transcribed responses, aimed at uncovering key themes that aligned with the MSA and MWOP theoretical frameworks (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

As the next step in the analysis, the interview transcripts were transferred to a spreadsheet, and data coding was carried out using the constant comparison method (Stuckey, 2015). This method was pivotal in highlighting and categorizing the distinct elements of the interview narratives. Each term or phrase that held significant meaning or presented new information was assigned a unique open code. These codes served as identifiers that facilitated the systematic organization and retrieval of the data for subsequent analysis stages (Boeije, 2002). The use of the spreadsheet allowed for sorting and filtering codes and organizing themes as they emerged.

The open coding phase that followed next involved a meticulous line-by-line examination of each transcript. This rigorous and inductive approach ensured that all potential themes and subthemes were identified as they naturally emerged from the data, thereby minimizing the risk of oversight or misinterpretation (Charmaz, 2006). This in-depth process resulted in the identification of 127 open codes. Each open code was then subject to an iterative review process. This process involved assessing each code for similarities in meaning, leading to the merging of compatible codes to form axial codes. Axial coding, an analytical technique derived from grounded theory, was employed to identify relationships between the open codes and to facilitate a deeper understanding of the data (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

The axial codes were similarly reviewed and then assigned to thematic codes. These thematic codes were derived from the MWOP and MSA frameworks and were intended to represent the policy-making process and its key outcomes. Specifically, these outcomes pertained to the recruitment and retention of international students within the context of immigration policy. The use of this systematic approach to qualitative data analysis allowed for an in-depth, comprehensive, and accurate representation of the data in relation to the study's theoretical

frameworks. The meticulously documented stages and their rationale served to maintain the integrity and reliability of the analysis, contributing to the robustness and validity of the study's findings.

### ***5.6.3 Integrating Data From Primary and Secondary Sources***

As stated previously, the empirical data for this study were gathered through published documents as well as semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the analysis was to first identify the key policy changes (through document analysis) and assess how these policy changes were interpreted by key stakeholders (through semi-structured interviews). The analysis of the data was guided by the theoretical frameworks used to better understand the immigration policy changes implemented in Canada during the course of the pandemic. For document analysis, data saturation was ensured by reviewing all relevant policy documents released during March 2020 to December 2022 in alignment with the scope of this research. Similarly, data saturation was reflected through informational redundancy evident from participants' responses and theoretical saturation (Saunders et al., 2018; Starks & Trinidad, 2007) was achieved when the complete set of variables outlined in the adapted MWOP framework were represented by the data.

The use of the two data sources helped the study to both identify the relevant policy measures through a review of policy documents and explain how and why they were introduced using insights from the participants. Conducting the interviews following the document analysis also supported the collection of primary data by identifying specific policy actors that were contacted for the interviews. To integrate insights from these two data sources, recurring patterns identified through document analysis (provisions for online learning, study permit process, PGWPP exceptions, etc.) were used to inform the conversations carried out during the

interviews. This helped assess how well the policy changes were implemented and their perceived impact on international students.

Similarly, the timing and scope of changes identified during the document analysis were discussed during the interviews, which in turn highlighted some of the key challenges faced by institutions and advocacy groups. In this way, policy documents helped contextualize the participants' responses collected using interviews and helped develop a comprehensive understanding of how government's policy decisions were made. In addition, the comprehensive analysis of both secondary and primary data sources using the MSA and MWOP frameworks provided a sound theoretical basis to develop policy recommendations and further enhancements to the models.

Collectively, the two data sources contributed towards developing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that facilitated or hindered immigration policy measures introduced during the pandemic to support the recruitment and retention of international students in Canada. While the nature and scope of policy measures was evident from the published sources, insights from participants provided an overview of the contextual dynamic underlying these policy measures and helped recognize the different policy actors and their roles in the policy making process. Interviews with key policy actors also complemented the findings derived from secondary sources by highlighted how the pandemic enabled a unique opportunity to implement significant policy measures as well as the distinct challenges of policy making under highly dynamic conditions.

The use of both primary and secondary data sources also helped triangulate the findings of the study. Data triangulation, as a methodological approach, seeks to improve the reliability, validity, and interpretive potential of research findings by cross-validating data collected from

different sources or through different methods (Flick, 2004). By employing this approach, researchers can explore different dimensions of the same phenomenon and enhance the credibility and depth of their results. In this study, data triangulation was used to foster a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the immigration policy-making process and its impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study relied on multiple data sources, including policy documents and interviews, which were cross-verified to confirm the findings and interpretations (Flick, 2004).

The triangulation process involved several steps. Initially, an examination of policy documents was undertaken, providing an understanding of the policy landscape, the measures that were enacted, and the rationales provided for these shifts. Following this, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders including civil servants, interest groups, postsecondary institution senior administrators, researchers, educational agents, and immigration consultants. The insights gained from these interviews were then cross-referenced with the information gleaned from the policy documents, allowing for a robust analysis of the policy-making process and its outcomes.

The data triangulation process also involved continuously revisiting the emerging themes against the theoretical frameworks and research questions throughout various stages of the study to ensure that the findings were consistent and valid (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). This iterative process, wherein the research questions and findings were continually checked against the data and theoretical frameworks, helped maintain the research's alignment and ensured a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, the triangulation of data was critical in validating the study's findings and ensuring their reliability and credibility.

## 5.7 Researcher Positionality

As a researcher, it is imperative to consider the role of positionality and how it can shape the process and outcomes of research (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As an immigrant who settled in Canada as a permanent resident in 2010, I bring a unique perspective to this study. My career in the Canadian PSE sector, which spans roles at three universities, including my current role as the inaugural executive director of International Student Enrolment, Education & Inclusion at Toronto Metropolitan University, provides me with a privileged understanding of the immigration issues impacting the recruitment and retention of international students, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having unique access to relevant policy actors and key decision-makers involved in this issue has greatly enriched the data collection process of this study. I can understand the language, jargon, and subtleties of policy discourses, which enabled me to ask probing questions and interpret responses in a nuanced manner. My insider positionality allowed me to navigate the intricacies of this sector and tap into otherwise inaccessible networks (Berger, 2015). My personal interest in higher education, public policy analysis, and international student issues further facilitated my engagement with the topic and participants.

The insider positionality, however, was not without its challenges. It necessitated maintaining a balance between objectivity and subjectivity to ensure that my insider perspective did not cloud my interpretation of the data (Berger, 2015). This required a continuous reflexivity throughout the research process, ensuring that my personal experiences and biases did not unduly influence the research outcomes (Bourke, 2014). While conducting interviews, I had to consciously separate my professional and researcher roles to ensure the collected information was unbiased and genuine (Hodkinson, 2005). Acknowledging my personal relationship with

some of the participants as peers and colleagues in the field, I took necessary precautions to mitigate potential risks during the interviews. I approached the interviews with the mindset of a student researcher, ensuring that my professional and researcher roles remained distinct and impartial. Adhering to ethical guidelines, I maintained confidentiality and privacy throughout the study to protect the participants' identities and trust. This approach helped ensure that the data were reflective of the participants' perspectives, contributing to the validity and credibility of the research findings.

Furthermore, my personal and professional lived experiences complement this study. Raised in Panama and educated in the United States as an international student, I bring a diverse, multicultural perspective to this study. My diplomatic work for Panama at the consulates in New Orleans and Montreal provided me with a deeper understanding of international relations and public administration, which, I believe, has shaped my perspective on the study's topic.

During data analysis, my background allowed me to approach the data with a multifaceted lens, appreciating the complexities and nuances involved in the policy-making process and its impacts on international students. While reporting the study, my professional experiences assisted me in understanding the implications of the findings and in making practical, real-world recommendations (Gair, 2012).

In conclusion, my positionality as an immigrant, an educator, a policy actor, and an advocate for international students has undoubtedly shaped this research. It has influenced the way I framed the research questions, the lens through which I interpreted the data, and the way I presented the findings and recommendations. In every step, my positionality has served as a guide, a lens, and a touchstone, steering this research towards a rich and multifaceted exploration

of policy making during a crisis and the immigration policies measures impacting international student recruitment and retention during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **5.8 Limitations**

Inherent to any research are certain limitations that may confine the scope or impact of the investigation. This study is not exempt from such constraints. The first limitation of this study lies in its domain focus. While the research has examined the federal immigration policy-making process related to international education in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not delved into specific policy alterations at the provincial level. Given that PSE is a shared jurisdiction in Canada, this could present a gap in understanding the overall policy landscape during this critical period. However, since immigration policy predominantly falls under federal jurisdiction, the focus of the study was intentionally oriented towards federal policy (El Masri, 2019; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019; Trilokekar & Jones, 2020).

This study considers policy measures impacting a segment of the international education sector, prospective and current international students enrolled in public PSE institutions during the pandemic, and excludes international students pursuing language training or university pathway programming. It focuses on the public PSE sector and excludes private colleges. Defining the scope of this research in this way allowed for a deeper analysis. Nevertheless, these exclusions might have restricted the study's wider applicability. Future research could examine these overlooked categories to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the policy effects on the diverse international student population in Canada (Knight, 2015).

An additional limitation pertains to the study's ability to assess the full impact and success of policy changes. Specifically, due to the research's time frame (March 2020 to December 2022), this study has limited capacity to measure the long-term effectiveness and

outcomes of the policy measures implemented during this period. The complex dynamics between policy implementation, international education, and immigration outcomes make it challenging to directly attribute specific results to individual policy measures, thereby complicating the process of evaluating policy effectiveness. While the research offers valuable insights into the nature and immediate effects of these policy changes, a comprehensive assessment of their long-term impact requires an extended evaluation period beyond the scope of the current study. Future research, therefore, would benefit from incorporating longitudinal studies to track the sustained effects of these policy measures, employing clear metrics and benchmarks to gauge their impact over time. This additional dimension would significantly enhance understanding of these policy measures' success in achieving their objectives and aid in the continual refinement of policies in these domains.

Access to key policy actors also imposed limitations on this research. Attempts were made to secure interviews with bureaucrats from federal agencies including the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), PHAC, Global Affairs Canada, and Transport Canada. Despite numerous outreach efforts, no responses were received, thus rendering the viewpoint of these key actors unattainable through direct interviews. Nonetheless, it should be noted that their perspectives were indirectly gleaned through document analysis and conversations with other stakeholders (Yin, 2009). Despite these limitations, the study, while focusing on a specific subset of the policy landscape, contributes valuable insights into the dynamics of policy making in crisis situations and its impact on a critical sector: international education in Canada.

In conclusion, this chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the methodological approaches employed in this study, including participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and the process of triangulation. It illustrated the systematic and meticulous strategy

implemented to garner in-depth knowledge on the impact of policy making during a crisis and how immigration policy measures and changes were enacted to sustain the international education sector in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rigorous research design—utilizing multiple stakeholder interviews and comprehensive policy document analysis—ensured the robustness and credibility of the data. The data analysis was a step-by-step process that allowed for thorough examination and interpretation of the participants’ responses and policy documents. Data triangulation was adopted to cross-validate findings, enhance their credibility, and foster a comprehensive understanding of the study’s subject matter. Lastly, my researcher’s positionality as an immigrant, a policy actor, and an advocate for international students played a crucial role in shaping this research, from the formation of the research questions to the interpretation of findings.

The next two chapters document the findings of this study to address the research questions. Chapter 6 comprehensively reviews the specific immigration policies implemented from 2020 to 2022, focusing on the international education sector. It also includes a chronological summary of significant policy interventions, serving as a snapshot of the Canadian government’s approach to maintaining a steady influx of international students during the pandemic, and consistent emphasis on the value of international students to the country’s economy. Chapter 7 analyzes the factors that influenced these policy changes, examining the overall policy making process in light of the adopted MWOP framework.

## **Chapter 6: Immigration Policies During the Pandemic: The Canadian Case**

This chapter further explores international education and immigration policies, providing a comprehensive examination of policies from 2020 to 2022. Policy measures and interventions imposed by the federal government throughout the pandemic, ranging from the processing of study permit applications to newly introduced provisions for online learning, impacted international students in a variety of ways.

Table 4 provides a chronological summary of key measures implemented from March 2020 until December 2022. The chosen time frame for this study, spanning March 11, 2020, when the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, to December 31, 2022, serves as a significant period marked by notable policy responses to the unique challenges faced by the international education sector in Canada during the pandemic. A review of these measures indicates the emphasis placed by the government on attempting to maintain a steady influx of international students throughout the pandemic even when travel restrictions prevented them from arriving in Canada.

The range of measures and changes documented in this section were sourced from policy documents, announcements, and other official notifications issued by various government entities, including IRCC, PHAC, Transport Canada, the Department of Finance, House of Commons, and others. The title for each measure has been directly replicated from its corresponding policy document. These policy measures can be broadly classified into four primary categories: travel regulations (including study permits and public health guidelines), study provisions (notably, online learning), work-related measures (such as work permits and post-graduation work permits), and immigration policies (with an emphasis on pathways to

permanent residency and immigration level plans). Within each category, the measures have been arranged in chronological order for improved coherence and ease of understanding.

The landscape of immigration policies, particularly in the context of recruiting and retaining international students, underwent significant transformations throughout the timeframe of this study. Overall, policy measures and changes can be roughly divided into two predominant phases, each characterized by its own overarching thematic emphasis and approach.

**Phase One: Emergency Response (March 2020 - October 2020).** During the initial phase, from March 2020 to October 2020, the focus was mainly centered on addressing the emergent health crisis triggered by the outbreak of COVID-19. Measures enacted during this period were visibly reactive and were designed to comply with prevailing public health guidelines and to address emerging concerns stemming from the pandemic. The federal government enacted a range of stringent measures, such as the implementation of lockdowns and vaccination requirements, to significantly limit the potential health risks.

During this phase, the recruitment and retention of international students was supported through measures such as: extension of deadlines to meet study permit requirements, travel exemptions, introduction of online learning provisions, and ease of restrictions for international students working in an essential service. Gradually, measures progressively transformed and transitioned from an initial focus on healthcare systems to an increasing concern on mitigating the economic impacts of the pandemic.

**Phase Two: Economic Recovery (October 2020 - December 2022).** A review of policy measures indicates that, starting from October 2020 onwards, there is a shift towards formulation of policies that focused on economic recovery. A transition into this phase is prominently demonstrated by the introduction of new immigration level targets by the federal government on

October 30, 2020 (Government of Canada, 2020k), which were devised explicitly to reinforce the Canadian economy amidst its recovery from the adverse impacts of COVID-19. The increase of work-related measures (PGWP extensions and exemptions) and immigration policies (immigration level plans and pathways to permanent residency) are prime examples around policy actions taken in response to COVID-19 that were not directly focused on address health concerns, but rather the economy.

As indicated in Table 4, the broad classification of policy measures into the two phases signifies how the government's initial response to the pandemic evolved into more focused measures directed towards the revitalization of the economy. This was accomplished by leveraging immigration policies, particularly focusing on the recruitment and retention of international students, as a vital tool to navigate the evolving nature and ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 4***Policy Measures Impacting International Students During COVID-19 (2020–2022)*

Date	Policy or program	Type	Description of changes
<b>Phase One: Emergency Response (March 2020 - October 2020)</b>			
February 29, 2020	Expansion of special measures to Iran and South Korea	IP	Special measures (initially announced for China) extended to Iran and South Korea to provide flexibility to applicants affected by COVID-19 and unable to meet IRCC requirements by the stated deadlines. Students who had applied for a study permit from these countries were given additional time to complete requirements.
March 2020	COVID-19 measures related to international students (study permits, online learning, work eligibility, and PGWP eligibility)	TR IP	Exemption to travel for international students with valid study permits or approvals on or before March 18, 2020. Allowance to work (on- or off-campus) during online learning, part-time studies, or break due to the pandemic. PGWP eligibility allowed for international students completing more than 50% of program online. Allowance to work more than 20 hours weekly off-campus if employed as essential service or function, until August 30, 2020. Those starting in spring, summer, or fall 2020 semesters could begin studies online without impacting PGWP eligibility as long as at least 50% of their program was completed in Canada. Those starting in spring, summer, or fall 2020 semesters would not have time deducted from their PGWP for studies outside of Canada.
April 22, 2020	Removal of barriers for international students working in essential services to fight COVID-19	IP	Temporary rule change to support health care facilities and other workplaces under pressure due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The change removed the restriction limiting international students to 20 hours of work per week while classes were in session, provided they were working in an essential service or function such as health care, critical infrastructure, or the supply of food or other critical goods.
May 14, 2020	Flexibility in PGWP rules to help international students and Canadian postsecondary institutions	IP	Policy change allowed international students to undertake their fall 2020 courses online without affecting their PGWPP eligibility, even permitting up to 50% of their program to be completed via distance learning. Additionally, any studies completed outside of Canada until December 31, 2020, were not deducted from the duration of their future PGWP.

Date	Policy or program	Type	Description of changes
July 7, 2020	Temporary exemption for out-of-status foreign nationals	IP	Eligible international students were allowed additional time to restore their temporary resident status and exempted from the stipulation that a study permit would not be issued unless they met specific temporary resident conditions.
July 14, 2020	Online learning initiative	IP	Measures to prioritize processing study permit applications submitted online and implementation of a temporary two-stage study permit approval process to count online learning towards PGWPs once students receive approval-in-principle, prior to submitting remaining documents to receive the approved study permit and travelling to Canada.
July 15, 2020	Biometrics collection exemption	IP	International students applying for new or renewed study permits from within Canada exempted from requirement to provide biometrics to process applications.
August 26, 2020	PGWP eligibility for international students studying online	IP	International students who submitted study permit applications for the spring, summer or fall 2020 semester or January 2021 semester could study online from abroad until April 30, 2021, with no deductions from the length of a future PGWP if at least 50% of the program was to be completed in Canada; students enrolled in an 8- to 12-month program starting May to September 2020 could complete the entire program online and remain eligible for a PGWP; students graduating from more than one eligible program could combine the program lengths when applying for a PGWP if 50% of total studies were completed in Canada.
October 2, 2020	Update on travel restriction exemptions for international students	TR	Amended travel restrictions allowed international students to enter Canada if their designated learning institution had an approved COVID-19 readiness plan in place.
<b>Phase Two: Economic Recovery (October 2020 - December 2022)</b>			
October 30, 2020	2021–2023 Immigration Levels Plan	IP	New levels introduced to help the Canadian economy recover from COVID-19: 401,000 permanent residents in 2021, 411,000 in 2022, and 421,000 in 2023.
November 25, 2020	Visa application centres in India	IP	Limited biometrics appointments made available with prioritized processing for students applying through India.
December 20, 2020	Updated: Temporary exemption for out-of-status foreign nationals	IP	Temporary policy allowing eligible international students additional time to restore their temporary resident status and exempting them from the stipulation that a study permit would not be issued unless they met meet specific temporary resident conditions remained valid until August 31, 2021.

Date	Policy or program	Type	Description of changes
January 8, 2021	PGWP extension	IP	International students with expired or expiring PGWPs were able to apply for another open work permit for 18 months to allow them to remain in Canada, seek employment, and build their future in the country.
February 12, 2021	New Canadian border measures announced to stop the spread of COVID-19	TR	New measures included mandatory PCR testing at the border for travellers entering Canada, in addition to the negative COVID-19 test they had to present. A mandatory quarantine for up to 3 days at a designated hotel was at their own expense (~\$2,000). After a negative test result, they had to complete the rest of the mandatory 14-day quarantine at home, under heightened surveillance.
February 12, 2021	PGWP COVID-19 measures extension	IP	Extension and expansion of temporary changes to the PGWPP to assist international students by ensuring that studies completed outside Canada counted towards a future PGWP, and by allowing them to complete their entire program online from abroad and still be eligible for a PGWP.
February 13, 2021	Canadian Experience Class candidates invited to apply for permanent residence	IP	Approximately 27,300 skilled workers with Canadian experience received an invitation to apply for permanent residence. These workers fell under the Canadian Experience Class of the Express Entry pool.
April 14, 2021	Pathway to permanent residency for international students	IP	40,000 international students who graduated from a Canadian institution could apply for permanent residency.
April 12, 2021	IRCC resumes processing applications in progress	IP	IRCC would no longer automatically extend deadlines for submitting required supporting documentation except for applicants affected by COVID-19 disruptions.
April 28, 2021	Study permit application for the fall 2021 semester	IP	Students had to submit their study permit application by May 15, 2021, to receive a decision by August 6, 2021, in time to attend the fall term.
June 21, 2021	Easing of border measures for fully vaccinated travellers	TR	As of July 5, 2021, fully vaccinated international students with a valid study permit were exempt from Canada's quarantine requirement upon entry.
July 9, 2021	Student Direct Stream expanded in the Americas	IP	Student Direct Stream expanded in the Americas with the inclusion of Antigua and Barbuda, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.
July 19, 2021	Easing border measures for fully vaccinated	TR	On August 9, 2021, Canada implemented changes in areas of entry to the country, testing requirements, temperature screening requirements, and quarantine

Date	Policy or program	Type	Description of changes
	travellers entering Canada		requirements, and eased quarantine and testing requirements based on vaccination status. Fully vaccinated U.S. citizens and permanent residents were permitted entry for discretionary purposes. On September 7, 2021, other fully vaccinated foreign nationals were permitted entry for discretionary purposes.
November 2, 2021	Additional Canadian airports accepting international flights	TR	Effective November 30, 2021, international flights carrying passengers were permitted to land at additional Canadian airports.
November 19, 2021	Government of Canada announces adjustments to Canada's border measures	TR	Adjustments to Canada's border measures announced, exempting fully vaccinated individuals with the right of entry from a pre-entry molecular test if they re-entered within 72 hours from November 30, 2021, onward. From January 15, 2022, certain previously exempt groups could only enter Canada if fully vaccinated, and vaccination became mandatory for travel within and out of Canada.
February 7, 2022	PGWPP extension of provision until summer 2022	IP	The provision allowing international students enrolled in a PGWP-eligible program from March 2020 until summer 2022 to complete their entire program outside of Canada while retaining their eligibility for the PGWPP was extended until August 31, 2022 (previous provision expiration was December 31, 2021).
February 14, 2022	2022–2024 Immigration Levels Plan	IP	The government's Immigration Levels Plan for 2022–2024 projected 431,645 new permanent residents in 2022, 447,055 in 2023, and 451,000 in 2024.
April 21, 2022	Temporary policy for the issuance of permanent resident visas for foreign nationals refused under the "Temporary Resident to Permanent Resident Pathway"	IP TR	This interim public policy eased restrictions on the issuance of permanent resident visas for applicants under the Temporary Resident to Permanent Resident Pathway, which recognized Canada's continued need for skilled immigrants. Considering delays in processing times and international travel, some applicants awaiting decisions had to travel outside Canada. Applicants who met all program requirements except for being in Canada at the time of the decision could return to Canada to receive permanent resident status.
April 22, 2022	New measures to address Canada's labour shortage	IP	A temporary policy allowed recent international graduates whose temporary status to stay in Canada was ending more time to work and qualify for permanent residency. Starting in summer 2022, former international students in Canada with a PGWP expiring January–December 2022 qualified for a supplementary open work permit of up to 18 months.

Date	Policy or program	Type	Description of changes
April 28, 2022	Express Entry changes	IP	Federal government proposed new fast-track immigration program for temporary foreign workers and international students, along with changes to Express Entry.
June 22, 2022	Implementation of a measure to protect the integrity of the International Student Program in Quebec	IP	New measure limited PGWP availability for graduates of certain unsubsidized private learning institutions, following an investigation by Quebec's Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur.
July 28, 2022	Temporary public policy to facilitate the issuance of an open work permit to certain former or current PGWP holders	IP	This temporary public policy facilitated the issuance of open work permits to PGWP holders whose permit expired or would expire between September 20, 2021, and December 31, 2022. It allowed eligible former PGWP holders in Canada to work for a short period without authorization; PGWP holders and former PGWP holders to apply from Canada for a new open work permit and facilitate restoration of their status; and current and former PGWP holders who left Canada to apply for a new open work permit from overseas.
August 2, 2022	New measures for foreign nationals with expired or expiring PGWPs and applicants to the temporary resident to permanent resident pathways	IP	IRCC implemented measures for former international students with expired or expiring PGWPs, and for temporary resident to permanent resident pathway applicants (i.e., issuance of open work permits to holders of expired or expiring PGWPs, holders of PGWPs expired or expiring from September 20, 2021, to December 31, 2022 were eligible to work in Canada for an additional 18 months by either extending their work permit or applying for a new one, individuals in Canada were eligible to work in the interim while their permit was being extended or a new one was being issued).
August 25, 2022	Transition period for distance learning measures	IP	Distance learning measures were extended to August 31, 2023, but reduced in scope to transition back to pre-pandemic requirements.
September 1, 2022	A stronger immigration system that better serves newcomers	IP	New online services across Canada's immigration system aimed to enhance client experience and reduce the backlogs (i.e., lower wait times, increase online applications for permanent residence, offer better information to clients, and modernize the citizenship program).
September 15, 2022	Strategy to expand transitions to permanent residency	IP	A new strategy with five pillars was introduced to provide a variety of pathways to transition from temporary to permanent residency, reinforce Canada's ability to

Date	Policy or program	Type	Description of changes
			address extensive labour needs and meet long-term labour shortages, and support community and regional needs.
October 7, 2022	Limit on off-campus work hours to be lifted temporarily	IP	Temporary lifting of the 20-hour-per-week cap on the number of hours that eligible postsecondary students were allowed to work off-campus while class was in session from November 15, 2022, until December 31, 2023.
October 7, 2022	Pilot project to automate the processing of study permit extensions	IP	Pilot project to automate the processing of study permit extensions was announced. The pilot includes applications with high approval rates and of applicants previously approved to study in Canada.
November 30, 2022	Shaping the future of immigration through Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy	IP	An investment of \$74.6 million over 5 years, and \$15.7 million ongoing, was announced to boost application-processing capacity domestically and in the Indo-Pacific region—including New Delhi, Chandigarh, Islamabad, and Manila. Considering the Indo-Pacific region has accounted for almost two-thirds of international students in Canada, the funding also aimed to bolster Canada's International Student Program and enhance diversity in the region.

*Note.* IP = immigration policy; IRCC = Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; PCR = polymerase chain reaction; PGWP = post-graduation work permit; PGWPP = Post-Graduation Work Permit Program; TR = travel restrictions. Immigration policy covers regulations related to study permits, post-graduation work permits, and pathways to permanent residency. Travel restrictions involve border closures and regulations related to air travel as informed by public health measures.

## **6.1 Travel Regulations (Including Public Health Guidelines and Study Permits)**

### ***6.1.1 Public Health Guidelines***

As health and safety concerns associated with COVID-19 became evident, new border measures were instituted to restrict the spread of the virus, such as mandatory vaccination and quarantine requirements as well as polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing for travellers entering Canada.

**Update on travel restriction exemptions for international students (Government of Canada, 2020j).** On October 20, 2020, Canadian authorities amended travel restrictions, enabling more international students to enter Canada, provided their DLI had an approved COVID-19 readiness plan in place. These readiness plans, assessed by provincial and territorial governments, were required to include specifics on pre-arrival health and travel information for international students, support with quarantine plans, guidance on obtaining necessities such as food and medicine during quarantine, and protocols for dealing with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases at the institution.

The government listed DLIs with approved COVID-19 readiness plans on the IRCC website, updating it regularly as more schools were approved. The amendment affected all international students, regardless of their origin or when their study permit was approved. However, students were advised not to make travel arrangements until they had met all requirements and received necessary authorizations.

The travel of asymptomatic international students to Canada was considered nondiscretionary and nonoptional, unless clear evidence indicated a discretionary or optional purpose. Immediate family members might accompany an international student to Canada if their travel was nonoptional or nondiscretionary, such as to support the student's study program. All

travellers, including students and their families, were subject to a mandatory 14-day quarantine period upon arrival in Canada.

**Government of Canada expands restrictions to international travel by land and air (Government of Canada, 2021c).** On February 12, 2021, the Canadian government announced enhanced travel and border measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and its variants. Acknowledging the increasing detection of new COVID-19 variants, these changes were aimed at avoiding reacceleration of the pandemic and controlling further outbreaks.

From February 15, 2021, all travellers entering Canada by land were mandated to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 molecular test result taken in the United States within 72 hours prior to arrival, or a positive test taken 14 to 90 days prior to arrival. Furthermore, from February 22, 2021, these travellers had to take a COVID-19 molecular test on arrival and towards the end of their 14-day quarantine. As of February 22, 2021, air travellers were similarly required to take a COVID-19 molecular test upon arriving in Canada, and another towards the end of their 14-day quarantine. Air travellers were also required, with limited exceptions, to reserve a 3-night stay in a government-authorized hotel before departing for Canada. Booking for these stays was available from February 18, 2021. All travellers, regardless of their mode of entry, were required to submit travel and contact information, including a suitable quarantine plan, electronically via ArriveCAN before crossing the border or boarding a flight, starting February 22, 2021. ArriveCAN is a free digital platform by the Government of Canada that enables travelers to securely submit essential entry details, including COVID-19 vaccination evidence and quarantine specifics, prior to and after arriving in Canada. Patty Hajdu, the minister of health, emphasized the importance of these measures, saying, “We continue to detect variants of

concerns, and this is why we are putting these additional measures in place. Now is not the time to travel, so please cancel any plans you might have.” (Government of Canada, 2021c, para. 7).

These stricter measures came with penalties for noncompliance. Canadian citizens, persons registered under the Indian Act, and permanent residents who failed to present a valid COVID-19 molecular test upon arrival by land could face a fine of up to \$3,000 per day or criminal prosecution. Foreign nationals with an exemption to enter Canada could be refused entry if they did not have a valid test result. Failure to provide accurate information or comply with quarantine instructions could also result in serious penalties, including 6 months in prison, \$750,000 in fines, or both.

For international students, these measures had significant implications. They had to comply with stricter testing and quarantine requirements when entering Canada, which may have affected their travel and study plans. This could have deterred some international students from studying in Canada or returning to the country after a visit home.

**Government of Canada’s first phase to easing border measures for travellers entering Canada (Government of Canada, 2021i).** On June 21, 2021, PHAC announced the initiation of the first phase for easing border measures for travellers entering Canada. The decision was influenced by the success of the country’s vaccination rollout and compliance with public health measures, with adjustments commencing from July 5, 2021, at 11:59 p.m. EDT. Under this new regulation, travellers who had received full doses of a COVID-19 vaccine approved by the federal government at least 14 days prior to entering the country were no longer required to quarantine or undertake a COVID-19 test on the eighth day following their arrival. Moreover, air travellers in this category did not need to stay at a government-authorized hotel. COVID-19 vaccines recognized by the government included those from Pfizer, Moderna,

AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD, and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson). For verification purposes, travellers were mandated to provide supporting documentation for their vaccination in English or French; certified translations were required for documentation in other languages.

For international students, this policy had significant implications. Those who were fully vaccinated and met all mandatory requirements, including pre- and on-arrival testing, could avoid quarantining. However, they were still required to present a suitable quarantine plan and be prepared to quarantine in case it was determined at the border that they did not meet all the conditions required to be exempt from quarantine. The policy did not change the situation for tens of thousands of students who were not fully vaccinated; they had to continue adhering to the current testing and federal quarantine requirements. Unvaccinated air travellers were also required to book a 3-night stay at a government-authorized hotel before their departure to Canada.

Despite these eased measures, the government extended the temporary travel restrictions on discretionary (nonessential) international travel until July 21, 2021, and maintained the existing international flight restrictions that funnelled scheduled international commercial passenger flights into four major Canadian airports. Restrictions for direct commercial and private passenger flights to Canada from India were extended until July 21, 2021, due to high COVID-19 case numbers. As of June 21, 2021, any foreign national who held a valid Confirmation of Permanent Residence was allowed to travel to Canada.

Overall, this policy change meant that international students who were fully vaccinated could find their travel and quarantine requirements eased, making it easier for them to arrive and settle in Canada for their studies. Unfortunately, many international students did not meet the

conditions of the new policy and were deemed not vaccinated. Consequently, the existing restrictions and requirements remained in place.

**Government of Canada announces easing of border measures for fully vaccinated travellers (Government of Canada, 2021k).** On July 19, 2021, the Canadian government unveiled a series of measures to ease border restrictions, primarily for fully vaccinated travelers. The initial phase commenced on August 9, 2021, allowing vaccinated U.S. citizens and permanent residents to enter Canada for nonessential purposes. As per the plan, from September 7, 2021, the borders were to be opened to fully vaccinated individuals from all countries, given a favourable domestic epidemiological situation. Travellers were mandated to meet specific requirements and use the ArriveCAN platform for information submission.

Also on August 9, 2021, five more Canadian airports were allowed to receive international flights. All travellers were still required to take a pre-entry COVID-19 molecular test, but fully vaccinated individuals could bypass postarrival testing unless randomly selected. The 3-night mandatory hotel stay requirement for all air travellers was eliminated.

The government urged Canadians to avoid nonessential travel outside Canada due to differing global epidemiological situations and vaccination rates. It was also indicated that border measures could change with the evolving situation. Direct commercial and private passenger flights from India remained restricted until August 21, 2021.

**Government of Canada announces additional Canadian airports accepting international passenger flights (Government of Canada, 2021l).** On November 2, 2021, Transport Canada expanded the existing Notice to Airmen to allow international flights to land at eight additional Canadian airports from November 30. This decision, part of the government's risk-based approach to border reopening, increased the number of international passenger–

accepting airports from 10 to 18, in consideration of the improving epidemiological situation and rising vaccination rates. The government stated it could add more airports based on various factors and emphasized its commitment to protecting travellers and workers.

**Government of Canada announces adjustments to Canada's border measures (Government of Canada, 2021m).** On November 19, 2021, PHAC announced several adjustments to Canada's COVID-19 border measures effective on November 30, 2021, and January 15, 2022. Notably, fully vaccinated individuals with the right of entry to Canada, who left and re-entered the country within 72 hours, were exempted from presenting a pre-entry molecular test from November 30. This exemption was specific to fully vaccinated Canadian citizens, permanent residents, and individuals registered under the Indian Act and included accompanying children under 12 and those with medical contraindications to vaccination. The list of accepted vaccines was also expanded to include Sinopharm, Sinovac, and COVAXIN.

From January 15, 2022, certain groups of travellers, formerly exempt from entry requirements, could only enter Canada if fully vaccinated with an approved vaccine. These groups included international students over 18 years old. Unvaccinated or partially vaccinated foreign nationals could only enter Canada under limited exceptions. Moreover, vaccination became mandatory for travel within and out of Canada from November 30, 2022. A valid COVID-19 molecular test was no longer accepted as an alternative unless the traveller qualified for one of the limited exemptions. The government assured the public that, as the situation evolved, it would consider additional targeted measures at the borders to ensure the health and safety of Canadians. It also launched an Advance CBSA Declaration feature in ArriveCAN for arrivals at certain airports, aiming to expedite the processing of travellers.

### **6.1.2 Study Permits**

The immigration policy measures specifically related to the study permit processing were significant for international students looking to start their programs in 2020–2022. To facilitate incoming international students, several measures were introduced including exemptions from biometric collections, expansion of the SDS, and a temporary two-stage study permit approval process. These measures are discussed below.

**Special immigration measures expanded to applicants in Iran and South Korea affected by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) (Government of Canada, 2020a).** On February 29, 2020, in response to the escalating COVID-19 crisis, IRCC expanded its special measures to include applicants from Iran and South Korea, following the initial implementation for Chinese applicants on February 7, 2020. The measures provided flexibility for applicants unable to comply with requirements due to circumstances beyond their control. For instance, applicants for visitor visas, study permits, work permits, or permanent residence who were unable to provide fingerprints and photos (biometrics) within the given deadline were granted additional time. The announcement noted: “IRCC, along with all its government partners, will continue to closely monitor the situation and any impacts on clients and our operations” (Government of Canada, 2020a, para. 4).

**Measures to support international students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Government of Canada, 2020c).** International students holding a valid study permit, or who had been approved for a study permit on or before March 18, 2020, were exempted from the travel restrictions barring most foreign nationals from countries outside the United States from entering Canada. However, students, including those entering Canada from the United States,

were only admitted to Canada if their travel was deemed essential and they possessed a credible 14-day quarantine plan (Government of Canada, 2020c).

**Temporary public policy to exempt certain out-of-status foreign nationals in Canada from immigration requirements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic**

**(Government of Canada, 2020f).** On July 7, 2020, IRCC introduced a temporary public policy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to address the challenges faced by temporary residents, including international students, in Canada. This policy was implemented to mitigate the adverse effects of travel restrictions, service limitations, and other disruptions caused by the pandemic on the legal status, employment, and education of these individuals. Effective from its initiation until December 31, 2020, the policy specifically catered to foreign nationals who were present in Canada with valid temporary resident status as of January 30, 2020, but had lost their status within 90 days due to the pandemic. There were two key provisions:

1. The policy granted eligible foreign nationals, including international students who fell out of status during the pandemic, additional time to restore their temporary resident status, ensuring that their education plans and future plans in Canada were not severely compromised.
2. These foreign nationals, including international students, were exempted from certain temporary resident conditions that might have otherwise hindered the issuance of work or study permits.

To be eligible for the benefits of the policy, international students needed to have been present in Canada with valid temporary resident status as of January 30, 2020. Furthermore, they were required to have lost their temporary resident status more than 90 days prior to their application for restoration. The submission of a restoration application and payment of the

associated processing fees were also necessary. For international students who held a valid study permit in the year preceding their restoration application, they were expected to apply for a study permit for specific educational purposes and demonstrate their intent to study at the DLI mentioned in their offer of acceptance.

**COVID-19 update: New public policy on biometrics collection exemption for temporary residence applicants from within Canada in effect until further notice (Government of Canada, 2020h).** On July 15, 2020, IRCC implemented a public policy to alleviate the impact of Service Canada Centre closures due to COVID-19 on temporary residence applicants within Canada. The policy exempted these applicants from biometric collection requirements, enabling full processing and decision-making on their applications. This policy covered individuals in Canada applying for work permits, study permits, visitor visas, visitor records, restoration of temporary resident status, or temporary resident permits. Applicants were advised not to pay the biometric fee, even if prompted by the system. Those who had already paid would receive a refund. IRCC assured the public that alternative screening methods would continue to ensure Canadian safety and security. It was also considering options to aid permanent residence applicants within Canada.

**Visa application centres in India offering limited biometrics appointments for spouses, partners, dependent children and students (Government of Canada, 2020i).** On November 25, 2020, IRCC announced that visa application centres in India, temporarily closed due to COVID-19, would resume limited biometrics appointments for eligible clients. Priority was given to individuals planning to permanently reunite with family in Canada or study at an approved DLI. Those applying for a study permit for an approved DLI or permanent residence under the family class could book biometrics appointments at any visa application centre in

India. However, clients could not submit paper applications at the visa application centres or register biometrics for other application types. Students wishing to enter Canada required a valid study permit and attendance at a DLI with a COVID-19 readiness plan approved by the province or territory where the DLI was located.

**Updated: Temporary public policy to exempt certain out-of-status foreign nationals in Canada from immigration requirements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (Government of Canada, 2020m).** On December 20, 2020, Minister Mendicino extended a temporary public policy designed to exempt certain foreign nationals who had fallen out of immigration status from the regular immigration requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This new policy was effective until August 31, 2021. The policy was designed to help eligible foreign nationals (including international students, visitors, and temporary workers) who lost their status between January 30, 2020, and May 31, 2021. It provided exemptions to these individuals from the stipulation that a work or study permit could only be issued if they had complied with certain temporary resident conditions.

**Applicants should start collecting supporting information as IRCC resumes processing of applications in progress (Government of Canada, 2021f).** On April 12, 2021, IRCC stated that it would no longer be automatically extending deadlines for submitting required supporting documentation for immigration applications, given that many IRCC offices, visa application centres, and application support centres had reopened. However, extensions would continue to be provided for clients affected by COVID-19 disruptions. The new policy required applicants to submit the necessary supporting documents to facilitate timely decision-making, minimize impacts on future processing times, and expedite travel to Canada when restrictions

eases. Foreign nationals approved for a visitor visa or permanent residence were still not eligible to travel to Canada unless exempt from travel restrictions.

IRCC officers would be contacting applicants on a case-by-case basis to request supporting documents or an explanation if COVID-19-related disruptions prevented them from providing the required information. Applicants still needing to provide documentation were advised to prepare in advance, as they would have 30 days to submit documents upon receiving the request from IRCC. If affected by a COVID-19 disruption, applicants were required to provide a reasonable explanation within 30 days from the date they received the request. Depending on the explanation, the deadline could be extended for an additional 30 days, or a decision would be made based on the existing information. If IRCC did not hear from the applicant by the 30-day deadline, a decision would be made, potentially resulting in refusal.

This change affected international students, along with citizenship, permanent residence, and temporary residence applicants, as they were required to provide supporting documentation to continue their application process. This meant that students needed to start collecting necessary documents promptly to meet potential upcoming deadlines. Overall, this policy brought about a significant shift in the processing of immigration applications, requiring international students and other applicants to adapt quickly to the changing circumstances and to take proactive measures to gather and submit the necessary documents.

**Processing study permit applications for the fall 2021 semester (Government of Canada, 2021h).** On April 28, 2021, IRCC set a deadline of May 15, 2021, for receiving complete study permit applications, including biometrics and immigration medical examination results, to ensure a decision by August 6, 2021, ahead of the fall semester. Applications submitted after May 15, 2021, would be processed as quickly as possible, but a final decision

before the start of the fall semester was not guaranteed. Incomplete applications or those requiring additional information could take longer. For Quebec students, an official copy of the Quebec Acceptance Certificate needed to be submitted by June 30, 2021, for timely processing.

**Student Direct Stream expanded in the Americas (Government of Canada, 2021j).**

On July 9, 2021, the Canadian government expanded the SDS to seven more countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. The SDS, initiated in 2018, supports expedited processing of study permit applications for eligible postsecondary students by allowing them to provide additional information upfront. The inclusion of these countries brought the total number of countries offered the SDS to 14, reflecting Canada's commitment to diversifying its international student population as part of its international education strategy (2019–2024). In the announcement, Minister Mendicino expressed optimism about the future of international education in Canada and its role in the country's post-pandemic recovery. He stated, "By expanding the Student Direct Stream to a more diverse range of prospective students, we have great optimism that international education will recover, and indeed flourish, as Canada emerges from the pandemic" (Government of Canada, 2021j, para. 6). Students abroad planning to start or continue in-person studies in Canada were advised of ongoing travel challenges due to reduced flight availability and COVID-19 regulations, including a 14-day quarantine upon arrival. Students had to submit quarantine and vaccination details using the ArriveCAN app before travelling, with fully vaccinated travellers potentially exempt from quarantine.

**Pilot project to automate the processing of study permit extensions (Government of Canada, 2022i).** On October 7, 2022, IRCC launched a pilot project to automate the processing of study permit extensions. The pilot targeted a select group of applicants, all of whom had

previously been approved to study in Canada and exhibited a high approval rate. The goal was to speed up processing times for these extensions, improving client service. If successful, the pilot would be expanded to allow officers to focus on more complex applications.

### **Shaping the future of immigration through Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy**

**(Government of Canada, 2022m).** On November 30, 2022, Sean Fraser, now the minister of immigration, announced an investment of \$74.6 million over 5 years, and \$15.7 million ongoing, as part of Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy. The aim is to increase Canada's visa application processing capacity domestically and in the Indo-Pacific region, including New Delhi, Chandigarh, Islamabad, and Manila, in order to alleviate high volumes of visa applications from the region, improve processing times, and strengthen people-to-people ties. This will facilitate more visits, studies, work, or permanent immigrations to Canada from the region. Minister Fraser underscored the significance of the Indo-Pacific region for Canada's immigration strategy:

The Indo-Pacific region is vital for Canada's immigration and will continue to be in the future. Today's announcement brings significant new funding to help boost Canada's visa application processing capacity at home and abroad. As we look to record growth in admissions in the years ahead, this funding will help promote greater diversity among those looking to visit, study, work or live in Canada. (Government of Canada, 2022m, para. 5)

The Indo-Pacific region has historically been a major source of newcomers to Canada and international students, contributing significantly to the country's social and economic fabric. Approximately 65% of Canada's international students are from the Indo-Pacific region. In 2021, the top three source countries for permanent residents to Canada were India, China, and the Philippines, accounting for 44% of combined admissions. Led by Global Affairs Canada, the

Indo-Pacific Strategy includes multiple departments and proposes initiatives and investments of nearly \$2.3 billion over the first 5 years. The strategy also encompasses the Canada-ASEAN Scholarships and Educational Exchanges for Development program, which will provide \$14.2 million in funding over 5 years to encourage educational and research exchanges in shared areas of interest. The investment is intended to further diversify and strengthen Canada's International Student Program, providing students with access to permanent residence and job opportunities. Many of these students transition into highly skilled workers that contribute to Canada's economy.

## **6.2 Study Provisions (Online Learning)**

As postsecondary institutions across the world transitioned to online learning, several policy measures were introduced by the Canadian government to ensure international student enrolment and retention. These measures were closely tied to easing regulations related to study permit processing and flexibility with post-graduation work permits to encourage international students to continue their education at Canadian institutions. Subsequently, significant delays in study permit processing due to an extensive backlog of pending applications with IRCC resulted in an extension of distance learning provisions until August 31, 2023.

### **Measures to support international students during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**(Government of Canada, 2020c)** Students beginning a new study program in the 2020 spring, summer, or fall semesters could start their classes online from abroad without affecting their eligibility for a post-graduation work permit, provided they were able to complete at least 50% of their program in Canada. Moreover, students starting a program in these semesters would not have time deducted from the length of their post-graduation work permit for studies completed from outside Canada until the end of 2020.

These policies underscored the Canadian government's commitment to supporting international students and the educational sector during the pandemic, ensuring that students' immigration status, study plans, and future employment opportunities in Canada were not adversely affected by COVID-19.

**Flexibility in post-graduation work permit rules to help international students and Canadian post-secondary institutions (Government of Canada, 2020e).** On May 14, 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international students, IRCC made significant adjustments to its PGWPP rules, which usually limited distance learning and deducted time spent studying outside Canada from the work permit eligibility. The altered rules stated that eligibility for the PGWPP would not be affected for international students whose fall 2020 courses were conducted online because of the pandemic. Students could start their courses outside Canada and complete up to 50% of their program via distance learning. Moreover, no time would be deducted from their future post-graduation work permit for studies completed outside of Canada, up until December 31, 2020.

**Changes to facilitate online learning for international students (Government of Canada, 2020g).** On July 14, 2020, Minister Mendicino announced additional measures to aid international students planning to start a new program online in the fall, given the prevailing health and travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes were designed to assure students of their ability to enter Canada and work after graduation, even if their studies had to commence online from abroad.

The key measures included priority study permit processing for students submitting a complete application online and allowing the time spent studying online abroad to count towards their eligibility for a post-graduation work permit, if they submitted a study permit application

and at least 50% of their program was completed in Canada. The government also implemented a temporary two-stage approval process for those students unable to submit all required documentation for their applications due to pandemic-related closures. With an approval-in-principle, students could commence their studies online from abroad, with the time counting towards their post-graduation work permit. This process was available for students starting a program in the fall semester and submitting a study permit application before September 15, 2020. However, commencing studies online from abroad following approval-in-principle of a study permit application did not guarantee full approval of the study permit application or authorization to pursue their studies in Canada. The final decision could be negative based on factors such as criminality, security reasons, or unpredictability of the COVID-19 situation and related travel restrictions.

In this announcement, Minister Mendicino highlighted the contributions of international students, noting:

The pandemic has had a significant impact on international students and the Canadian institutions and communities that host them. This is why we have implemented a series of measures to support them. We value the contribution of young people seeking a high-quality education in Canada, and we're making every effort to minimize how current challenges affect their plans and dreams for the future. (Government of Canada, 2020g, para. 9)

**Important new measures on post-graduation work permit eligibility for students beginning programs online (Government of Canada, 2020i).** On August 26, 2020, IRCC announced three new measures to address the uncertainties faced by prospective international students due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. The changes were aimed at providing flexibility in

the eligibility rules for the PGWPP for students beginning their Canadian study program online from overseas.

1. Students were allowed to study online from abroad until April 30, 2021, without time deducted from the length of a future post-graduation work permit, provided 50% of their study program was eventually completed in Canada.
2. Students enrolled in an 8- to 12-month program, with a start date from May to September 2020, could complete their entire program online from abroad and still be eligible for a post-graduation work permit.
3. Students enrolled in a program with a start date from May to September 2020 and studying online up to April 30, 2021, could potentially combine the length of their programs of study when applying for a post-graduation work permit, as long as 50% of their total studies were completed in Canada.

Eligibility for these measures required students to have submitted a study permit application before starting a program of study in spring, summer, or fall 2020, or the January 2021 semester. All students eventually needed an approved study permit. The easing of COVID-19 related restrictions would be dependent on progress in containing the spread of the coronavirus.

**Transition period for distance learning measures (Government of Canada, 2022i).**

On August 25, 2022, IRCC announced a transition period for measures that allowed international students to study online from abroad due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while maintaining their eligibility for a post-graduation work permit. After consultations with provinces, territories, and educational stakeholders, IRCC extended the distance learning measures until August 31, 2023, but reduced their scope.

Students studying online from abroad or who applied for a study permit before August 31, 2022, were able to complete 100% of their program online without affecting their PGWPP eligibility. However, any study time from abroad starting on September 1, 2023, would be deducted from the length of their post-graduation work permit, regardless of when their studies began.

For those beginning programs from September 1, 2022, to August 31, 2023, two measures applied: no more than 50% of credits earned could be completed outside Canada in order to maintain PGWPP eligibility, and studies completed online from outside Canada starting on September 1, 2023, would be deducted from the length of a future post-graduation work permit.

IRCC acknowledged increasing global interest in Canada, but noted that responding to humanitarian crises, updating technology, and prioritizing study permit applications had led to processing delays and longer wait times. The transition back to prepandemic requirements, combined with ongoing processing delays and unprecedented backlogs, added some complexity for students planning to study in Canada.

### **6.3 Work-Related Measures (Including Student Work Permits and Post-Graduation Work Permits)**

#### ***6.3.1 Student Work Permits***

Policy measures relevant to student work permits involved regulations that allowed students to work during their study period on- or off-campus as well as ease of restrictions for certain out-of-status foreign nationals.

**Measures to support international students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Government of Canada, 2020c).** As classroom learning was severely restricted due to the

pandemic, students residing in Canada who were forced to switch to online learning, reduce their studies to part-time, or even took a break from their studies, were allowed to continue working on- or off-campus, provided their study permit allowed it. The policy was “intended to support international students, learning institutions and other stakeholders in Canada’s education sector.” (Government of Canada, 2020c). International students were also allowed to work more than the standard 20 hours per week off-campus during their academic session if they were employed in an essential service or function.

**Removing barriers for international students working in essential services to fight COVID-19 (Government of Canada, 2020d).** On April 22, 2020, the Canadian government introduced a temporary rule change to support health care facilities and other workplaces under pressure due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The change removed the restriction limiting international students to a maximum of 20 hours per week of work while classes were in session, provided they were working in an essential service or function such as health care, critical infrastructure, or the supply of food or other critical goods. The change recognized the significant contributions that international students, particularly those in health- and emergency service-related programs, could make in meeting the challenges of the pandemic. In relation to these changes, Minister Mendicino stated,

Immigrants, temporary foreign workers and international students are making important contributions as frontline workers in health care and other essential service sectors. We know and value their efforts and sacrifices to keep Canadians healthy and ensure the delivery of critical goods and services. (Government of Canada, 2020d, para. 4)

**Updated: Temporary public policy to exempt certain out-of-status foreign nationals in Canada from immigration requirements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic**

**(Government of Canada, 2020m).** On December 20, 2020, Minister Mendicino extended a temporary public policy in response to the ongoing challenges faced by foreign nationals residing in Canada amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This policy was designed to enable foreign nationals, including visitors, temporary workers, and international students who lost their temporary resident status between January 30, 2020, and May 31, 2021, to restore their status.

The policy exempted eligible foreign nationals from certain requirements, such as needing to meet certain temporary resident conditions in order to receive a work or study permit. It also allowed eligible temporary workers with a job offer to work while awaiting a decision on their restoration application. The policy included three specific sets of eligibility requirements, all centered around the applicant having held valid temporary resident status within the defined time frame and having applied for restoration of such status. Depending on the individual conditions met, applicants could be exempted from different requirements of the IRPA and its regulations. The policy, which came into effect on December 20, 2020, remained valid until August 31, 2021. It specified that foreign nationals eligible under this policy would still be subject to all other legislative obligations and requirements not exempted under this or another public policy.

Importantly for international students, they were exempt from the stipulation that a study permit could not be issued if they had engaged in unauthorized work or study in Canada or failed to comply with a condition of a permit or authorization. This policy provided students with more flexibility and allowed those who had fallen out of status to have more time to restore their status and continue their education in Canada.

**Limit on off-campus work hours to be lifted temporarily (Government of Canada, 2022i).** On October 7, 2022, Minister Fraser announced the temporary suspension of the 20-

hour-per-week limit on off-campus work for eligible international postsecondary students in Canada. Effective from November 15, 2022, to December 31, 2023, the policy aimed to address labour shortages and support economic recovery. The policy also applied to international students who had already submitted a study permit application as of the announcement date, conditional on approval. The measure was intended to give international students more opportunity to gain valuable work experience in Canada, and augment the workforce to sustain postpandemic growth. However, students were still expected to balance their academic and work responsibilities, as those who ceased studying or shifted to part-time study were ineligible for off-campus work. There were over 500,000 international students in Canada at the time who could potentially work additional hours.

The off-campus work hour relaxation was among several initiatives aimed at benefiting international students and graduates, improving client service, and reducing application processing times. Other recent measures included a transition period for remote study from abroad and an opportunity for individuals with expiring post-graduation work permits to acquire an additional 18-month open work permit. In the first 8 months of 2022, IRCC processed over 452,000 study permit applications, a 23% increase from the same period in the record-setting year of 2021. In 2021, IRCC processed nearly 119,000 study permit extension applications with a 97% approval rate, and more than 135,000 in the first 8 months of 2022, with a 96% approval rate.

The goal of these changes was articulated by Minister Fraser:

With the economy growing at a faster rate than employers can hire new workers, Canada needs to look at every option so that we have the skills and workforce needed to fuel our growth. Immigration will be crucial to addressing our labour shortage. By allowing

international students to work more while they study, we can help ease pressing needs in many sectors across the country, while providing more opportunities for international students to gain valuable Canadian work experience and continue contributing to our short-term recovery and long-term prosperity. (Government of Canada, 2022l)

### ***6.3.2 Post-Graduate Work Permits***

The immigration policy measures and interventions related to the PGWPP aimed to facilitate the issuance of open work permits for former or current holders of post-graduation work permits so they could continue to live and work in Canada.

**Canada announces new policy to help former international students live in, work in, and continue contributing to Canada (Government of Canada, 2021a).** On January 8, 2021, Minister Mendicino announced a policy providing former international students in Canada who had held in the past or currently held a post-graduation work permit an opportunity to apply for an open work permit. This policy was enacted in response to the pandemic-induced uncertainties that had endangered the work experience accumulation required by many international students for their permanent residence applications. Under the policy, international students in Canada affected by the pandemic, whose post-graduation work permits had expired or were close to expiration, were given the unique chance to apply for another 18-month open work permit. This would allow them to stay in Canada, continue job hunting, and establish their futures in the country.

The move was part of Canada's strategy to attract skilled immigrants for its recovery plan and long-term prosperity, given the key role international students play in the economy filling labour shortages and contributing to the community. Minister Mendicino highlighted,

Their status may be temporary, but the contributions of international students are lasting. This new policy means that young students from abroad who have studied here can stay and find work, while ensuring that Canada meets the urgent needs of our economy for today and tomorrow. (Government of Canada, 2021a, para. 6)

Applications were open from January 27 to July 27, 2021. The policy was expected to benefit up to 52,000 graduates with expired or expiring post-graduation work permits. The announcement underscored the significance of immigrants for Canada's demographic balance and economy, particularly with the shrinking ratio of working-age individuals to retirees.

**Government of Canada announces further measures to support international students (Government of Canada, 2021b).** On February 12, 2021, Minister Mendicino announced further measures to support international students affected by the pandemic. The measures expanded on the PGWPP, allowing international students to count studies completed outside Canada towards a future post-graduation work permit. Students could complete their entire program online from abroad and still be eligible for a post-graduation work permit. The policy applied to students enrolled in an eligible program and meeting all PGWPP criteria.

This policy aimed to address Canada's demographic challenges by attracting skilled immigrants and enabling more graduates to contribute to areas like health care and technology. Minister Mendicino noted,

Whether as health workers on the pandemic's front lines, or as founders of some of the most promising start-ups, international students are giving back to communities across Canada as we continue the fight against the pandemic.... Our message to international students and graduates is simple: We don't just want you to study here, we want you to stay here. (Government of Canada, 2021b)

**Program delivery update: COVID-19 – Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWPP) (Government of Canada, 2022a).** On February 7, 2022, Canada extended its facilitation measures for international students until August 31, 2022. Previously set to end on December 31, 2021, the measures allow students enrolled in an eligible program from March 2020 through the summer 2022 semester to complete their entire program outside Canada while maintaining their eligibility for the PGWPP.

**Policy to facilitate the issuance of an open work permit to certain former or current post-graduation work permit holders (Government of Canada, 2022g).** On, July 28, 2022, IRCC announced significant measures to support the national economy in response to labour shortages exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with estimates suggesting a deficit of up to 1 million positions. It recognized the valuable role that post-graduation work permit holders play in addressing these shortages and their potential contributions to economic recovery, especially as many transition towards permanent resident status. However, due to the pandemic and operational constraints, a pause was imposed on Express Entry invitations for Federal High Skilled streams (CEC, Federal Skilled Worker Class, and Federal Skilled Trades Class) from September 20, 2021, to July 6, 2022. This pause affected foreign nationals' transition to permanent residency, particularly for those with post-graduation work permits due to expire in 2022.

Under the new policy, individuals whose post-graduation work permits expired or would expire between September 20, 2021, and December 31, 2022, could maintain or restore their legal status in Canada. They could continue working, supporting themselves, and filling acute labour market needs. They were also exempt from the requirement to have work authorization

until May 31, 2023. Those who had left Canada could apply for a new open work permit, allowing them to return.

Eligibility extended to former post-graduation work permit holders currently in Canada, who could now work without authorization in the short term. Additionally, both current and former post-graduation work permits holders could apply for a new open work permit from inside Canada, facilitating the restoration of their status if applicable. Those who had left Canada could apply for a new open work permit from outside Canada. Conditions for eligibility were detailed and divided into four parts applicable to (a) all applicants, (b) applicants in Canada with status or eligible for restoration, (c) those in Canada but not eligible for restoration, and (d) applicants outside Canada. They primarily centered on individuals whose permits expired or will expire within the stipulated time frame and involved various requirements regarding the application process and conditions for restoration of status.

The policy outlined several exemptions, applicable under specific conditions, related to various aspects of work authorization, application procedures, and conditions of stay. It highlighted that foreign nationals eligible under this policy were subject to all other legislative and regulatory obligations and admissibility and selection requirements not exempted under this or another public policy. This new policy, replacing a temporary public policy signed on April 14, 2022, came into effect upon signature and was set to expire on December 31, 2022, with the provision that it might be revoked at any time. Applications received during this period would be processed under this public policy.

**New measures for foreign nationals with expired or expiring post-graduation work permits and applicants to the temporary resident to permanent resident pathways (Government of Canada, 2022h).** On August 2, 2022, IRCC announced new measures to

support international students and applicants for the Temporary Resident to Permanent Resident (TR to PR) pathway. In the announcement, the federal government said it “recognizes the tremendous social, cultural and economic benefits that international students bring to Canada” (Government of Canada, 2022h, para. 1) and implemented provisions for those with expiring or expired post-graduation work permits.

International students whose work permits would expire from September 20, 2021, to December 31, 2022, were given an opportunity to extend their permit or apply for a new one, enabling them to work in Canada for an additional 18 months. This covered individuals already in Canada, who were permitted to work while their new permits were processed. Details regarding the application and extension process were provided and included different scenarios based on individuals’ permit expiration dates, address, and passport validity. Guidance was given on how to receive an updated work permit, including instructions for maintaining up-to-date contact information and ensuring passport validity. The announcement also introduced an interim work policy, effective from August 8, 2022. It permitted individuals with post-graduation work permits that had expired or would expire from September 20, 2021, to December 31, 2022, to continue working until May 31, 2023.

Additionally, applicants for the TR to PR pathway were given the opportunity to apply for an open work permit, ensuring they would not lose their status or ability to work while awaiting finalization of their permanent residence application. Work permits with an end date of December 31, 2024, were offered, given that applicants’ passports were valid through that date. For applicants who previously received work permits ending December 31, 2022, emails were sent notifying them of the potential to update their permits to the later date.

On June 7, 2022, Jean Boulet, Quebec’s minister of labour, employment and social solidarity’ minister of immigration, francization and integration, and minister responsible for the Mauricie region, together with federal Minister Fraser, announced a new measure to limit access to post-graduation work permits for graduates from certain unsubsidized private learning institutions. This corrective action came in response to gaps identified by Quebec’s Ministère de l’Enseignement supérieur concerning specific unsubsidized private colleges. The Quebec government requested that IRCC harmonize the eligibility rules for post-graduation work permits with those in other provinces, thereby preventing Quebec from being used as a backdoor for permanent settlement in Canada. In other provinces, international students from unsubsidized programs of study typically do not have access to these work permits.

The number of international students at unsubsidized private learning institutions has significantly increased from 4,900 (2016–2018) to an estimated 11,500 (2019–2021), a trend that began in 2018. This new measure will ensure that only graduates from a subsidized program of study can access post-graduation work permits (Government of Canada, 2022f). However, it will take effect on September 1, 2023 and remains out of the scope of this study.

## **6.4 Immigration Policies (Pathways to Permanent Residency and Immigration Level Plans)**

### ***6.4.1 Pathways to Permanent Residency***

Given the impact of the pandemic on the Canadian economy and labour market, several immigration policy measures were introduced to provide pathways to permanent residency for skilled workers and international graduates, and a strategy was developed to expand transitions to permanent residency. These measures are discussed below.

**Thousands of skilled workers in Canada invited to stay permanently (Government of Canada, 2021d).** On February 13, 2021, IRCC announced new measures to bolster the

country's economic recovery from the pandemic by offering permanent residency to approximately 27,300 workers already living in the country. These workers, classified under the CEC of the Express Entry pool, had at least a year of Canadian work experience and had contributed to the Canadian economy through work and taxes.

Candidates receiving an invitation to apply for permanent residence were given 90 days to submit complete applications. Notably, around 90% of CEC candidates were already residing in Canada, meaning they were not subject to the travel restrictions and documentation challenges faced by overseas applicants. However, candidates invited to apply who were not currently living in Canada were reassured they would be able to travel once restrictions were lifted.

IRCC emphasized the essential role of immigration in Canada's "short-term recovery and long-term prosperity," noting that one-third of businesses with employees were immigrant owned and that immigrants had contributed significantly to Canada's pandemic response, making up over a third of the country's doctors and pharmacists (Government of Canada, 2021d).

**New pathway to permanent residency for over 90,000 essential temporary workers and international graduates (Government of Canada, 2021e).** On April 14, 2021, Marco Mendicino, Canada's minister of immigration, introduced a new initiative to provide over 90,000 essential workers and international graduates an innovative pathway to permanent residency. The policy targeted individuals already in Canada, contributing to the economy, and possessing the skills necessary for pandemic recovery. The initiative focused on temporary workers employed in hospitals, long-term care homes, and other essential sectors, and international graduates with the potential to drive the future economy. To be eligible, workers needed at least 1 year of Canadian work experience in a health care profession or a preapproved essential occupation. International

graduates had to have completed an eligible Canadian postsecondary program within the last 4 years, and no earlier than January 2017.

Starting May 6, 2021, IRCC began accepting applications under three categories: 20,000 applications for health care temporary workers, 30,000 applications for temporary workers in other selected essential occupations, and 40,000 applications for international students who graduated from a Canadian institution. Additionally, to support French-speaking or bilingual candidates, three additional streams without intake limits were launched.

The measures, which remained open until November 5, 2021, or until they reached their limit, were part of Canada's response to serious demographic challenges. The aim was to admit up to 90,000 new permanent residents and thus help meet the 2021 Immigration Levels Plan target of welcoming 401,000 new permanent residents.

**Temporary public policy for the issuance of permanent resident visas for foreign nationals, who have been refused under the “Temporary Resident to Permanent Resident Pathway” (Government of Canada, 2022c).** On April 21, 2022, Minister Fraser issued a temporary public policy introducing the TR to PR pathway, a program made up of six public policies. This program was opened to applications from May 6, 2021, to November 5, 2021, or until a specific stream reached its intake cap. This pathway was designed to grant permanent residency to some foreign nationals living outside Quebec who had graduated from a Canadian postsecondary institution or had gained recent Canadian work experience in an essential occupation.

The policies required applicants to reside in Canada with valid temporary resident status and be physically present in the country when the application was received and when it was approved. However, recognizing that some applicants had to travel outside of Canada due to

prolonged processing times and border reopening, an adjustment was made. The policy allowed applicants who were outside of Canada at the time of the final decision to still be granted permanent residency, if they met all other conditions, rather than be refused for the sole reason of being outside Canada when the decision was made.

This change was driven by public policy considerations. Canada's economy depends on immigration to fill critical labour market needs across various occupations and sectors. This reliance has been accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pathway acknowledged the economic contribution of temporary residents and Canada's continuing need for skilled immigrants. The amended policy established the conditions that applicants and their family members must meet to be considered for an exemption from the standard immigration regulations. For example, foreign nationals had to apply under one of the public policies comprising the pathway, have been advised in a letter that they may apply under this policy if their application was refused due to their physical absence from Canada, and meet all the conditions of the public policies except for the requirement to reside in Canada. The policy also provided for conditions applicable to family members both inside and outside Canada, allowing them to be included in the application for permanent residency. All applicants under this policy remained subject to all other legislative obligations and admissibility and selection criteria not otherwise exempted. The policy remained in effect until it was revoked, with prior applications being processed under the policy even after revocation.

**New measures to address Canada's labour shortage (Government of Canada, 2022d).** On April 22, 2022, Minister Fraser made a series of announcements reflecting the country's increased reliance on immigration to fill numerous job vacancies as the economy recovers from the pandemic. He announced that Express Entry draws would resume in early July.

These had been paused during 2020 and 2021 due to travel restrictions, leading to an increased inventory of applications. To manage this inventory, IRCC temporarily paused invitations to the program. The pause resulted in a more than 50% reduction in this inventory, from 111,900 people in September 2021 to 48,000 by March 2022, allowing the department to work towards their previous service standards.

Minister Fraser also announced a temporary policy allowing recent international graduates with soon-to-expire temporary status to stay longer in Canada, thereby gaining more work experience and increasing their chances of qualifying for permanent residency. Starting in summer 2022, former international students whose post-graduation work permits would expire during that year would qualify for an additional open work permit of up to 18 months. Over 157,000 former students became permanent residents in 2021, with more than 88,000 transitioning directly from a post-graduation work permit to permanent status.

In addition to these changes, the minister announced measures for those who applied for permanent residence through the TR to PR pathway in 2021. These applicants would no longer be required to remain in Canada while their application was processed, and those who applied for an open work permit while awaiting the processing of their permanent residence application would receive permits valid until the end of 2024. Also, immediate family members outside of Canada included in a principal applicant's permanent residence application would be eligible for their own open work permit.

These policies were part of broader government efforts to address the labour shortage in Canada and support the country's ongoing economic recovery. Minister Fraser remarked:

With the economy growing faster than employers can hire new workers, Canada needs to look at every option so that we have the skills and labour needed to fuel our growth.

Immigration will be crucial to easing our labour shortage, and these measures aim to address pressing needs in all sectors across the country, while providing more opportunities for recent graduates and other applicants to build their lives in Canada and continue contributing to our short-term recovery and long-term prosperity. (Government of Canada, 2022d, para. 9)

**Government of Canada introduces legislation to grow our economy and make life more affordable (Government of Canada, 2022e).** On April 28, 2022, Chrystia Freeland, deputy prime minister and minister of finance, introduced Bill C-19, a piece of budget implementation legislation. Among other measures, this bill proposed to strengthen the government's ability to select permanent resident applicants from the Express Entry system to match Canada's economic and labour force needs. A key impact for international graduates was an amendment to the Express Entry system, Canada's main immigration application system, which may influence their eligibility for permanent residency. The bill's focus on aligning immigration with the country's economic and labour requirements may potentially benefit graduates with skills and qualifications in high-demand areas.

**A stronger immigration system that better serves newcomers (Government of Canada, 2022j).** On September 1, 2022, Minister Fraser announced various measures to modernize and digitize the country's immigration system. Visiting an application processing centre in New Waterford, Nova Scotia, he outlined plans to reduce wait times and improve client experiences. One significant change involved exempting certain in-country permanent and temporary residence applicants from immigration medical examinations. This action would save clients time and money, with an estimated 180,000 clients affected.

Minister Fraser also announced that most permanent residence applicants could now access the online application portal. By September 23, 2022, IRCC aimed to transition most permanent residence programs to 100% digital applications. To enhance information provision, IRCC had launched an application status tracker for permanent residence applicants and their sponsors earlier in the year. This tracker would be expanded to include more permanent and temporary residence programs by spring 2023. In parallel, the department improved its online processing times tool for more accurate estimations. Additionally, IRCC also offered online options for citizenship applicants, including virtual ceremonies and online tests. In August 2021, a new tool was launched for online citizenship applications for adults, with plans to extend this to minors by year's end.

In 2021, Canada admitted a record 405,000 new permanent residents. By August 22, 2022, over 300,000 new permanent residents had been welcomed, putting the country on track to achieve its target of 431,000 for the year. From April 1 to July 31, over 116,000 new citizens were welcomed, compared to 35,000 in the same period of the previous fiscal year. These changes underlined Canada's continued commitment to being a destination of choice for immigrants worldwide.

**Strategy to Expand Transitions to Permanent Residency (Government of Canada, 2022k).** On September 15, 2022, the federal government released a Strategy to Expand Transitions to Permanent Residency. This comprehensive document followed the approval of Private Member's Motion M-44 at the House of Commons, put forward by Randeep Sarai, a Liberal Member of Parliament for Surrey Centre on May 11, 2022. The motion urged the government to publicize a plan to expand economic immigration pathways to accommodate workers across all skill levels and facilitate their transition from temporary to permanent resident

status. The motion recognized the significant contributions of temporary foreign workers and international students to Canada's economy.

In line with the motion, the Canadian government outlined a five-pillar approach to promote pathways to permanent residency, address long-term labour shortages, and support regional needs:

1. Pillar 1 involved leveraging the increased immigration levels outlined in the 2022–2024 Immigration Levels Plan to provide Canada with a larger, permanent labour supply. This would increase opportunities for more temporary workers to transition to permanent residence, fuelling post-pandemic economic growth.
2. Pillar 2 aimed at reforming the Express Entry system. The proposed changes would increase flexibility in immigration selection tools and allow the minister to respond to labour market needs and regional economic priorities. The Comprehensive Ranking System criteria under Express Entry, especially points awarded for Canadian work experience and education, language proficiency, and job offers, would also be reviewed.
3. Pillar 3 involved improving permanent economic immigration programs to help transition essential workers in high-demand occupations from temporary to permanent residence. This included adopting the National Occupational Classification 2021 (the most recent revision), improving newcomers' access to information, exploring ways to transition high-demand essential workers, and enhancing pilot programs for in-home caregiving occupations and the agri-food sector.
4. Pillar 4 focused on supporting communities in attracting and retaining newcomers, including through Francophone immigration. A new Municipal Nominee Program was in

development to help municipalities attract and retain newcomers to meet local labor needs.

5. Pillar 5 focused on increasing processing capacity, enhancing client experience, and modernizing the immigration system through technological improvements.

Through these strategic pillars, the Canadian government planned to provide a smoother transition for temporary residents to permanent residency, including international graduates, balancing immediate employer needs with medium- to long-term economic goals while protecting vulnerable workers and providing opportunities for domestic workers (Government of Canada, 2022k).

#### ***6.4.2 Immigration Levels Plans***

The impact of the pandemic on Canada's economy also led to developments in the multiyear Immigration Levels Plans that aim to ensure a steady intake of immigrants for the country. The updated plans focused on revised immigration targets and new initiatives focusing on health care sector and expansion of the Federal High Skilled category for new permanent residents.

**2021–2023 Immigration Levels Plan (Government of Canada, 2020k).** On October 30, 2020, Minister Mendicino announced the 2021–2023 Immigration Levels Plan. It outlined responsible increases to immigration targets to help recover from COVID-19's impact on the Canadian economy, stimulate future growth, and create jobs for the middle class. The COVID-19 pandemic had underscored the critical role of immigrants in Canada's health care system and various other sectors like information technology, agriculture, and production. However, global travel restrictions and capacity constraints resulted in fewer admissions than planned.

The new plan sought to fill this gap and maintain Canada's competitiveness by welcoming immigrants at a rate of about 1% of the population. The targets included admitting 401,000 permanent residents in 2021, 411,000 in 2022, and 421,000 in 2023, which represented an increase from previous targets of 351,000 in 2021 and 361,000 in 2022. The plan ensured the health, safety, and security of Canadians by strengthening health screening at the border and monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

The multiyear plan recognized the importance of family reunification, protection of refugees, and economic growth, with about 60% of admissions expected to come from the economic class. It also emphasized innovative and community-driven strategies to meet diverse labour and demographic needs nationwide, digital transformation in Canada's immigration system, and additional points for French-speaking candidates to promote Francophone communities outside of Quebec. Additionally, the plan committed to admitting up to 500 refugees over 2 years through the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot. It also provided a pathway to permanent residency for eligible asylum claimants who worked on the pandemic's front lines, providing direct care in health care institutions.

The Immigration Levels Plan highlighted the significant contribution of immigrants, with 33% of all business owners with paid staff being immigrants and 25% of workers in the health sector being immigrants. The plan's implementation was designed to boost economic growth, reunite families, fulfill Canada's humanitarian commitments, and establish Canada as a top destination for talent. Highlighting the crucial role of immigration in various aspects, Minister Mendicino emphasized,

Immigration is essential to getting us through the pandemic, but also to our short-term economic recovery and our long-term economic growth. Canadians have seen how

newcomers are playing an outsized role in our hospitals and care homes and helping us to keep food on the table. As we look to recovery, newcomers create jobs not just by giving our businesses the skills they need to thrive, but also by starting businesses themselves. Our plan will help to address some of our most acute labour shortages and to grow our population to keep Canada competitive on the world stage. (Government of Canada, 2020k).

**2022–2024 Immigration Levels Plan (Government of Canada, 2022b).** On February 14, 2022, the Canadian government announced its 2022–2024 Immigration Levels Plan, setting higher targets for immigration to help the economy recover from the pandemic and address the challenges of an aging population and declining fertility rates. The plan aimed to solidify Canada’s status as a top destination for talent, reunite families, and fulfill humanitarian commitments.

The plan followed a successful year in 2021, in which Canada welcomed a record number of 405,332 permanent residents, despite the challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic. This momentum was expected to continue into the subsequent years with the following permanent resident admission targets: 431,645 in 2022, 447,055 in 2023, and 451,000 in 2024. These numbers had a flexible range to account for potential ongoing pandemic-related impacts.

The government’s multiyear immigration plan centered on three key objectives: securing long-term benefits for Canada, fostering short-term economic growth, and ensuring a well-managed migration system. These objectives were underpinned by plans for incremental funding, which would be sought through Supplementary Estimates in the 2022–2023 fiscal year.

In 2021, the government had been able to exceed its immigration target through a number of strategies, such as creating processing efficiencies, digitizing services, and focusing on critical

processing categories like family reunification and Afghan refugees. These strategies were supported by innovative programs like the temporary TR to PR pathway for temporary workers in health and essential sectors and student graduates.

The announcement stated that public polling had shown that support for immigration remained strong as of March 2021, with Canadians believing that new immigrants would positively impact the economy. However, concerns about absorption capacity were raised in cities such as Toronto and Vancouver. Meanwhile, integration outcomes remained strong for first-generation immigrants and continued to improve in subsequent generations.

Overall, the 2022–2024 Immigration Levels Plan was a crucial part of Canada’s strategy to drive economic growth and recovery. It was created following consultations with provinces and territories, and in alignment with statutory requirements. By planning for multiple years, the government aimed to establish a longer-term vision and secure the necessary approvals and investments for its realization. This plan was a critical communication tool, setting transparent priorities and targets for the Canadian immigration system.

In conclusion, to address the first research question, this chapter has carefully examined and contextualized the numerous policies and interventions introduced by the Canadian government from 2020 to 2022 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These immigration policy measures, directly impacting the international education sector, marked the government’s robust efforts to navigate the unprecedented challenges the pandemic posed. Key developments were summarized chronologically, highlighting the government’s strategy to maintain a steady influx of international students despite significant obstacles, such as global travel restrictions. The analysis revealed four primary policy categories: travel regulations, study provisions, work-related measures, and immigration policies. Each category was dissected to facilitate a

comprehensive understanding of the policy response. Through this careful analysis, the chapter painted a vivid picture of the governmental response, capturing the intricacies of policy making in the wake of a global crisis.

It should be mentioned here that, while the government introduced a range of different policy measures over the course of the 2 years, the messaging surrounding the policy measures consistently focused on the importance of international students. From the initial stages of the pandemic and throughout its course, the Canadian government unequivocally demonstrated its recognition of the value of international students to the country. As discussed in this chapter, Minister Mendicino and Minister Fraser consistently emphasized the value of international students throughout the crisis as important players in the country's post-pandemic recovery (Government of Canada, 2020d, 2020g, 2021b, 2022d). This, paired with practical policy measures, underscored the significant place these individuals hold in the socioeconomic fabric of Canada.

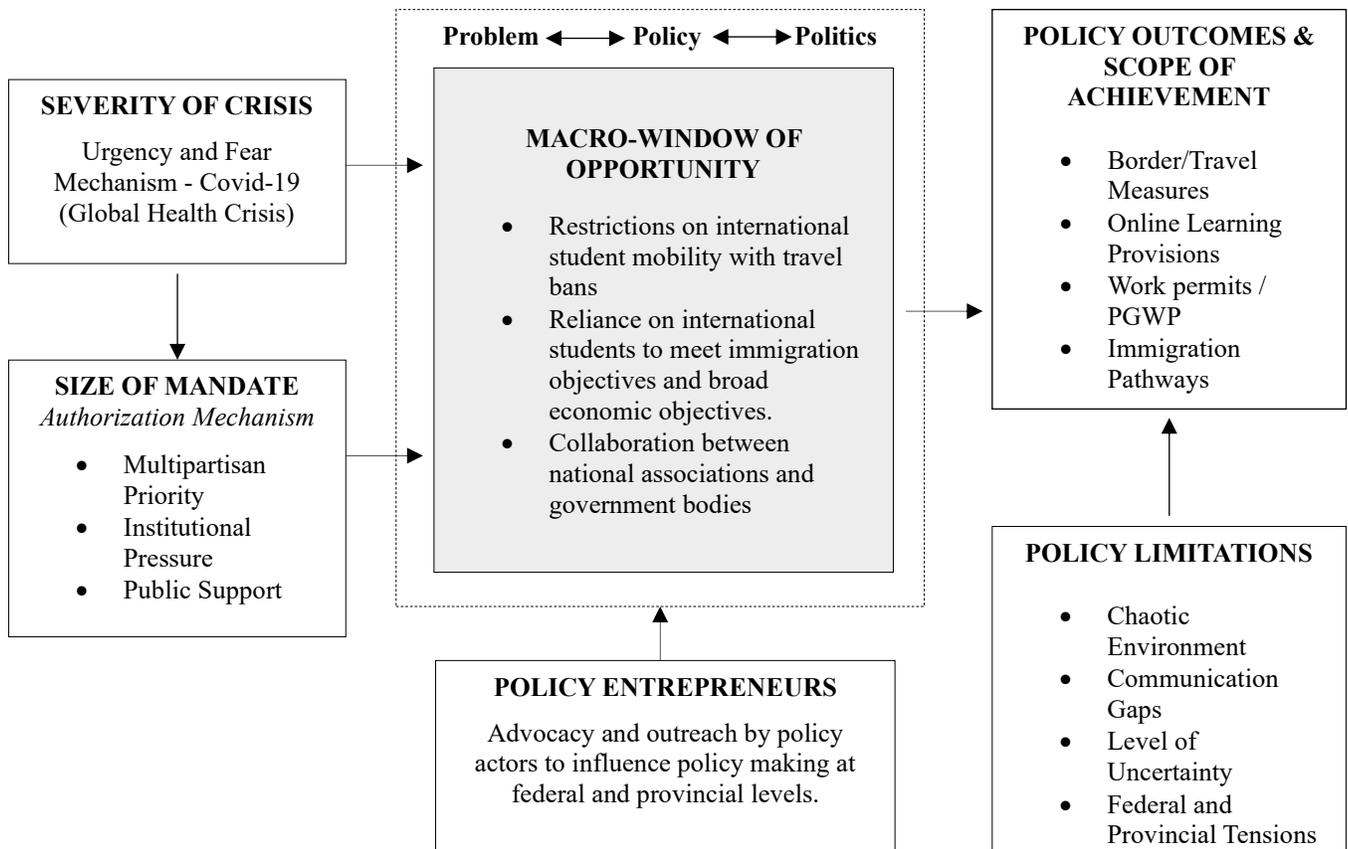
The next chapter focuses on the remaining two research questions, specifically how a window of opportunity was envisioned during the pandemic to facilitate immigration policy changes relevant for international students in Canada, and what the Canadian case illustrates about the application of the MSA and MWOP frameworks for studying policy making in times of crisis. The chapter applies the adapted MWOP framework to examine the notion of the window of opportunity in the context of the present study, analyzes the factors that influenced policy changes, and discusses the key policy limitations.

## Chapter 7: The Macro-Window of Opportunity

A primary aim of this study was to examine the window-opening mechanism and immigration policy measures introduced in Canada during the pandemic using the adapted MWOP framework. In this chapter, the government's approach to policy making as well as key policy outcomes are examined through the adapted framework and analyzed using insights from the interviews and policy documents. As outlined in Figure 11, the chapter focuses on how the pandemic's severity and the government's strong emphasis on immigration and international education helped create a macro-window of opportunity that led to policy measures to help recruit and retain international students.

**Figure 11**

*Application of the Adopted MWOP Framework*



The findings of this study are also used to highlight the intricacies of policy making during times of crisis, identify policy limitations, and discuss how and why Canada prioritized aspects of international education through policy measures such as changes in travel restrictions and provisions for online learning. The chapter concludes with a re-evaluation of the MWOP framework as a model to study policy making in times of crisis.

## **7.1 Severity of the Crisis: COVID-19**

### ***7.1.1 Global Public Health Emergency***

In March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the WHO (2020). The global crisis significantly altered daily life and economic activity, evolving as the most severe health and economic disaster since World War II (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020). The International Monetary Fund estimated a global economic contraction of 3.5% for 2020, which resulted from public health measures such as lockdowns, social distancing, and travel restrictions (Barrett et al., 2021). Furthermore, the World Trade Organization (2020) estimated a 13-32% drop in world merchandise trade volume for 2020. The pandemic also triggered global unemployment, with an estimated 8.8% decrease in global working hours for 2020, equal to 255 million full-time jobs (International Labour Organization, 2021).

In Canada, the economic impact of the pandemic was equally severe, especially for sectors reliant on physical interactions such as retail and hospitality (Slade, 2022). Real GDP was estimated to have contracted by 5.4% in 2020, the sharpest annual decline since the Great Depression (Canadian Press, 2021). The unemployment rate increased significantly in the early months and during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching a peak of 13.7% in May 2020 and representing a significant increase from the pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 5.6% in February 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2020b). The severity of the crisis was further exemplified as

growing public health concerns resulted in lockdowns and stricter COVID-19 regulations (Unruh et al., 2022), creating a sense of urgency and fear—two important factors that link a crisis to the window-opening process (Keeler, 1993).

### ***7.1.2 International Education Sector—One of the Hardest Hit***

The impact of the pandemic specifically on the international education sector was also dramatic, as border closures, travel restrictions, and the shift to online learning disrupted the plans of millions of international students. According to UNESCO (2020), nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries were affected by school and university closures at the peak of the crisis. In many countries, the number of international students declined significantly, with prospective students choosing to defer or cancel their study plans (Kanwar & Carr, 2020).

For most countries, including Canada, pandemic-related restrictions on travel were enacted and borders were closed in March 2020. Canada is one of the largest recipients of international students, and global travel restrictions severely impacted the country's ability to maintain a steady influx of incoming students. One participant shared, for example, that “there was [an] immediate impact to the bottom line because no one was being mobile, and that put in jeopardy [our] existing or future cohorts” (Participant 6, National Association). Another participant noted that “the number of students who were able to come in the first year of the pandemic was almost halved” (Participant 7, National Association).

Universities and colleges, forced to pivot abruptly to remote learning, confronted a range of challenges including economic setbacks triggered by the wider slowdown. Concurrently, institutions embarked on cost-saving measures including budget cuts and staff layoffs, exacerbating the upheaval within the sector. Addressing this point, one participant noted: “The PSE sector was in sort of complete disarray. Different places across Canada have suffered in

different ways. The economy suffered in some places and some provinces, which of course has impacted and made budget cuts for universities” (Participant 2, PSE Institution and Provincial NGO).

In the Canadian language sector, the abrupt interruption of in-person classes, coupled with the restrictions on international travel, severely reduced the flow of international students. This was particularly detrimental for language schools that heavily relied on these students. Cost-saving measures such as budget cuts, unfortunately, had limited effectiveness in ameliorating the financial hardship these institutions faced. As described by one participant: “In the education sector it was devastating. The whole education system, the COVID pandemic has brought us to our knees, especially if you are talking about the language sector—they were almost wiped out, many schools” (Participant 5, International Education Agency and Immigration Consultant).

International students, in particular, faced difficulties in returning to and leaving for Canada due to travel restrictions and quarantine measures, with many stranded in their home countries. One participant reflected: “Our sector was one of the hardest hit for sure.... The Canadian border was closed down to all but the most essential travel from late March 2020 until October 20, 2020, and at that time there was a massive sector-wide pivot to deliver courses online.... I can’t say for sure whether student numbers would have continued to be at the same level that they were in 2019 in the absence of border closures, but the policy decision to keep the border closed to international students for those 6 months was massive blow to the sector” (Participant 1, National Association).

The restrictions and suspension of visa services during the initial stages of the pandemic also led to a substantial decline in matriculations. Data from CBIE (2020) reveals that international student enrolment in Canada experienced a notable decrease of 42% in 2020, with

the most significant declines observed at the undergraduate level (43%) and the graduate level (40%). Participants in this study noted that this decline in international student enrolment had significant economic consequences, highlighting the sector's dependency on global mobility. For instance, one of the interviewees described the early impacts of the pandemic on the sector thus:

It goes without saying that there was an immediate and devastating impact as soon as the pandemic was declared back in March of 2020. So much human activity, human mobility, grind to an absolute halt. We saw institutions had to physically close down premises. We had students ... that were basically ejected from residences because of the restrictive public health measures that institutions had to navigate. You saw contraction just out of the sheer lack of human mobility. (Participant 6, National Association)

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, it became evident that stakeholders in the international education sector, including the presidents of national associations, were shifting their focus toward the overarching goal of maintaining the flow of international students to Canada. For example, in April 2020, Paul Davidson, president and CEO of Universities Canada, conveyed the sentiment of this strategic realignment when he stated, “(If the infection) curve is not flattened, and in the event that visa processing takes a little longer, we would very much like to be able to onboard students online in the fall—its in the realm of contingency planning at this point” (Keung & Teotonio, 2020, para. 15).

This urgency to adapt to the rapidly changing situation and find swift resolutions was further reiterated by Denise Amyot, president and CEO of CICan, who stated, “the evolving nature of the situation requires that we engage in constructive dialogue and quickly find solutions to emerging issues, including those related to the ongoing processing of study permits given continued service disruptions” (Keung & Teotonio, 2020, para. 12). These quotes from the media

serve as a testament to how the policy actors and related networks pivoted during the pandemic, emphasizing the core objective of ensuring a continued influx of international students to Canada.

### ***7.1.3 A Problem Requiring Policy Action***

Participants agreed that the decline in international students needed immediate and significant policy actions to address the financial and economic concerns of the international education sector as well as the country's labour market needs and long-term immigration objectives.

**Impact on Institutions.** According to Statistics Canada (2020a), international students contributed nearly \$4 billion of revenue in the academic year 2017–2018, making up approximately 40% of all tuition fees. The financial implications of declining international enrolment, therefore, exacerbated the severity of the crisis. One participant in this study highlighted that “economically, international students paid two to three times more tuition fees to colleges and universities.... They bring in a lot of revenue to the country” (Participant 3, PSE Institution). The pandemic caused a substantial decline in these numbers, which was a major setback to the Canadian economy and its international education sector. The reduced matriculations led to a steep fall in this crucial source of revenue for postsecondary institutions across Canada. One participant expanded on this point: “[For] institutions there were certainly financial implications and concerns about, you know, what the lack of students could mean to their bottom line. You know, not to sort of sugarcoat it, that is a big part of the overall revenue” (Participant 7, National Association).

**Impact on Canadian Economy.** In addition to the critical role of international students in the public PSE system, Canada's increased reliance on these students to meet its immigration

and economic objectives also appeared to be one of the reasons contributing to the severity of the crisis. The review of policy documents and discussion with interviewees suggested that the potential role of international students to fill labour gaps and become future immigrants was a key concern. The disruption in international student mobility directly affected the pool of potential skilled immigrants, posing difficulties in achieving Canada's immigration targets and long-term economic and demographic goals. Additionally, pathways to permanent residency for international students, like other immigration programs, experienced major delays, were temporarily suspended, or were modified in response to the crisis.

When discussing the motivation behind the policy changes, one of the participants explained:

I think definitely the acknowledgement that international students are very important for the sustainability of our public postsecondary system ... [and] some of the decisions have been made in that vein and looking out for Canadian small business ... and, for sure, there is that longer-term vision on we have to keep the flow of international students into Canada because these international students become the best immigrants and we need that right now. (Participant 1, National Association)

Participants also highlighted that international students' contributions to the Canadian economy extend beyond tuition fees. International students also stimulate local economies by spending on accommodations, discretionary items, and other daily living expenses. In 2018, international students added nearly \$22 billion into the Canadian economy (Statistics Canada, 2020a). The steep decline in international student numbers, therefore, caused a significant economic shock to the broader Canadian economy and to local communities. One participant explained:

I mean the ripple effect when you think of the community, if you don't have students coming in, you know ... all of the families in the communities who are relying on the rental spaces that they have in their basements that students have occupied ... to small and medium business enterprises that were relying on students present in communities who aren't consuming their services or their goods or their foods or whatever that might be. (Participant 6, National Association)

Particularly hard-hit was the local labour market, which often depended on the off-campus work contributions of international students. As noted by participants in this study, the decline in student enrolment sparked a labour shortage affecting both small and midsize businesses. This seems counterintuitive given that many businesses, especially in the hospitality sector, had to shut down during the pandemic. However, even during closures, there was an ongoing need for front-line staff, roles that were frequently occupied by international students. Sectors like retail, food, and essential services persisted in their operations and required hands-on support. The pandemic-induced uncertainty also led to fewer domestic workers being available or willing to fill these roles due to health and safety concerns, leaving a palpable void in the workforce. For instance, one of the interviewees reported:

The local employment market was affected because many low-skill jobs [were unfilled]. International students have an off-campus opportunity to work for 20 hours. Many employers were struggling to find employees. Every small business, and midsize businesses, the pandemic affected also due to the labour shortage. Especially the hospitality industry was closed. Many industries ... which were dependent on international students were seriously affected as well. Given that students would not come and graduate, the qualified professionals [were absent] also for 1 year, all the

businesses were closed. And so that had a terrible effect as well. (Participant 5, International Education Agency and Immigration Consultant)

**Impact on International Students.** At the same time, the pandemic's economic fallout cast a pall of uncertainty over international students grappling with concerns of meeting their tuition and living expenses in Canada. They struggled with the loss of financial backing from families or sponsors reeling from the global economic downturn. With job losses soaring due to the severe restrictions and closures of campuses across Canada, securing or retaining employment became a critical issue, directly impacting students' ability to fund their studies. One participant highlighted this, noting:

One-third of our students rely on jobs in Canada while they are studying to be able to support their studies. A lot of that disappeared either permanently or at least on a temporary basis and so it created fragility, both on an individual level ... [and] in economic terms. (Participant 6, National Association)

Participants' responses also suggested that, for international students who were able to travel, the imposition of mandatory quarantine measures and the transition to online learning posed significant challenges and fundamentally altered the educational experience. While institutions endeavoured to mitigate these challenges by implementing flexible learning plans and virtual support services, the traditional appeal of studying in a foreign country was greatly diminished due to the limitations and disruptions caused by the pandemic, as noted by one of the participants: "I think that there is a lot of that fatigue with online courses. I think students want the whole experience of being in Canada, being on campus and all of that" (Participant 3, PSE Institution).

The severe blow to the international education sector and consequential economic implications for Canada, alongside disruption in immigration pathways for prospective skilled talent, underscored the need for policy shifts to respond to the crisis and bolster the resilience of these interlinked sectors. In essence, the severity of the crisis, triggered by the fear and urgency of the situation, necessitated rapid responses and flexibility in policy and institutional norms to address the negative impacts, potentially opening a policy window for reform. As discussed next, the development of relevant policy measures and their subsequent implementation requires a strong political mandate or authority, specially to enact policy innovations.

## **7.2 Size of the Mandate**

The MWOP framework describes achievement of a sizable mandate as the quintessential window-opening political development (Keeler, 1993) that can trigger significant reform. In the context of this study, the size of the mandate is derived from Canada's pro-immigration and pro-international student policy agendas, and its endorsement by Canadians through the "authorization mechanism" (Keeler, 1993). This mechanism positions the government as representative of the public will to execute its program, which limits political and institutional opposition to policy innovation. As outlined in the MWOP framework, this strong mandate coupled with the severity of crisis created a macro-window of opportunity, allowing for substantial immigration policy outputs with direct implications for the international education sector in Canada.

Several factors demonstrate Canada's need to grow its international student base and the government's emphasis on international student enrolment, thereby supporting the sizable mandate required for political reform.

### ***7.2.1 National Priorities***

International education in Canada holds a distinctive and important place, recognized consistently as a multipartisan priority by various government administrations. This multipartisan consensus on the crucial role international students play in the country's economy has increasingly remained resolute, irrespective of the political party in power. The federal government and most provincial governments, irrespective of political leanings, have adopted pro-immigration and pro-international education policy agendas that underscore the importance of these students. At the federal level, most recently, this consensus can be traced back to the launch of the first comprehensive international education strategy in 2014 by the Conservative Party under the Harper government. This strategy was renewed by the Liberal Party in 2019, illustrating the continuity and significance of international education across Canada's political spectrum (Government of Canada, 2014, 2019b).

The MSA argues that policy outcomes are significantly influenced by organized political forces, administrative factors, and consensus-building elements. The perception of and interaction with these political factors determine which policies are prioritized and how decision-makers align problems with solutions (Kingdon, 1984). In this study, the multipartisan support for international education indicates a uniform understanding of the role that it plays in not only fostering Canada's economic prosperity but also enhancing the country's global standing. Both the 2014 and 2019 strategies shed light on Canada's trajectory of leveraging international education for diverse goals such as accelerating economic growth, nurturing international ties, amplifying global competitiveness, and improving the nation's position in a competitive landscape. Central to these strategies is the importance of attracting and retaining international

students, underlining the strong link between international education and immigration within the Canadian context.

Expanding on how the government's pro-immigration stance is tied to international education, a participant highlighted:

Just late last year ... the Liberals announced new immigration targets that [were] ... very ambitious. We have a massive labour shortage right now in Canada. The tourism sector is struggling to rebuild itself ... so there is an acknowledgement that immigration is an important part of addressing Canada's current labour shortage. And the international students play a big part in helping to fill that gap. So, I think we will see along with the sort of booming return of international students to Canada, but we will be seeing a greater number of international students being funnelled through Canada's immigration channels.

(Participant 1, National Association)

Hence, international students have become an important stream of newcomers, making up nearly 40% of new economic-class immigrants. Annually, about 17% of all new permanent residents and almost 40% of immigrants in the economic category have prior Canadian study experience (IRCC, 2022). Highlighting the efforts of the government in this regard, one participant noted:

Our Canadian government, from a communication standpoint, over the last number of years has become much more explicit ... in terms of our desire to harness not only the global talent pipeline for Canada's benefit. Also making explicit in their communications the recognition that our future growth, our future prosperity in Canada very much hinges on us embracing, you know, deeper and broader pathways towards immigration. A large part of the success of that pathway hinges on pathways through education. I think that is

significant and certainly has helped to position us in a positive way. (Participant 6, National Association)

As mentioned previously, Canada's immigration framework offers a range of pathways for international students to gain employment and become permanent residents in the country, which in turn helps attract and retain talented and skilled individuals from around the world. The direct linkages between international education and immigration policy are part of Canada's value proposition in its positioning as a desirable destination for newcomers. To this point a participant noted: "Immigration policy is a huge element of our [international student] recruitment strategy. Canada is very attractive destination with work permit and to eventually to get PR [permanent residency] and to get Canadian citizenship" (Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution).

The economic value of immigrants entering through the education route is substantial, creating a ripple effect across the broader economy. A comparison of wage rates reveals this impact. In 2018, the median annual earnings of study and work permit holders was \$44,600, compared to \$25,700 for immigrants without Canadian work or study experience (Statistics Canada, 2021). This earnings performance has expanded over time (Statistics Canada, 2022a). These international students, enriched with diverse skills, help fill gaps in the labour market. A participant similarly added:

Making it easier for students to get student visas, allowing them to stay and work afterwards, all those things have a huge impact on immigration. A lot of students come here because they know they can work for 2 years afterwards. That is a huge factor in their decision-making. (Participant 3, PSE Institution)

The PGWPP has proven to be a cornerstone in the student immigration pathways. In 2021 alone, over 157,000 former students became permanent residents, with more than 88,000 transitioning directly from a post-graduation work permit (IRCC, 2022). One interviewee shed light on the significance of immigration policies:

The decision to roll out the post-graduate work permit and the ability for students to be able to enter the labour market postgraduation for a period of time to be able to gain valuable labour market experience, or to be able to create a pathway for those postgraduation who may desire a pathway to permanent residency, are very attractive elements that certainly have helped draw students. (Participant 6, National Association)

This statement underlines the instrumental role of strategic policy design in Canada's successful attraction and retention of international students. Essentially, international students are more than just students—they are future immigrants, potential entrepreneurs, and invaluable assets to Canada's diverse labour market. The government's policies and initiatives, mirroring Keeler's (1993) authorization mechanism, demonstrate a strategic approach to harness their potential, ultimately contributing to Canada's socioeconomic resilience and growth.

### ***7.2.2 Institutional Pressure***

The international education sector made up about 12% of Canada's services exports in 2019, underlining its significant economic contribution (Government of Canada, 2019b). Even though in 2018–2019 international students accounted for less than a fifth of university enrolments, they contributed to a third of tuition fees paid, with their fees on average three times those of domestic students (Statistics Canada, 2021). With the stagnation of domestic tuition fees and declining public funding per student across several provinces, DLIs in Canada have turned to the growing pool of international students.

Additionally, between 2016 and 2020, the representation of international students in Canada's postsecondary education system increased from 12% to 24% (Bergman, 2022). This increase aligns with the rise in international student enrolment at Canadian postsecondary institutions, which expanded from 7.2% in 2010 to almost 20% in 2020. Notably, since 2016, enrolment growth at these institutions has been driven entirely by international students (IRCC, 2022). The financial implication of a sudden decline in international enrolment was, therefore, a key driver to support a pro-international student mandate. One participant explained:

I think there were very much based on the economic rationale.... We are going to have huge hit to our sector if you can't adapt and make these changes.... And the need for the economy to at least have one industry that was somewhat impacted but not impacted in a negative way that would be long-lasting. (Participant 2, PSE Institution and Provincial NGO)

The relative importance of this sector and the projected decline in international enrolment due to the pandemic placed institutional pressure on the policymakers to introduce measures and interventions to support international education during this time.

### ***7.2.3 Public Support***

Public opinion in Canada strongly aligns with national demographic and economic challenges and, therefore, supports a pro-immigration and pro-international student mandate. Canadians largely recognize the crucial role of immigration in the nation's economic and social development. Data from the Environics Institute's Focus Canada program in September 2021 reveals that a majority of Canadians acknowledge the need for more immigration for population growth and believe in its positive impact on the economy. As the country navigated through the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and immigration and multiculturalism took a

temporary backseat in the public discourse, the Canadian public's attitude towards immigration remained essentially unchanged from prepandemic times. Approximately 57% of Canadians agreed that the country needs more immigration to boost its population, indicating a significant shift from the attitudes of the 1980s and 1990s, when such a notion was largely rejected. Furthermore, 80% of the Canadian public concurred that immigration has a positive impact on the country's economy, suggesting that support for immigration is rooted in the belief that it enhances economic prosperity. Canadians view immigrants as enriching the nation through their contributions to diversity and economic growth (Environics Institute, 2021).

Interestingly, Canada's international reputation as a diverse nation seems to underpin these attitudes. Ranked as the most diverse country outside of Africa (World Population Review, n.d.), Canada's cultural and ethnic diversity is a point of pride for many Canadians. A significant number of Canadians (48%) define their country's distinctiveness in terms of its multiculturalism, inclusiveness, and acceptance of immigrants and refugees, ranking these factors above attributes like freedom, democracy, the land, and health care (Environics Institute, 2021). This perception of diversity and inclusivity as a defining characteristic of national identity underscores the critical role that immigration, including through international students, plays in shaping Canada's social fabric. It also signals a strong public endorsement for policies that facilitate the integration of international students into Canadian society and the labour market, thereby contributing to the nation's demographic resilience.

Considering the adapted MWOP, this analysis suggests that the size of the government's mandate, amplified by the COVID-19 crisis, played a key role in the extensive policy output. As revealed by the participants in this study, international students significantly contribute to the Canadian economy, driving growth in the education sector and beyond. As a critical talent

pipeline, they also strengthen the country's labour market, providing skills needed in various sectors, and infuse fresh perspectives into the workforce. Furthermore, they offer a solution to Canada's pressing demographic challenges, filling gaps in an aging workforce. Importantly, their integration into Canadian society aligns with the public perception of Canada as a multicultural, inclusive nation that embraces diversity (Environics Institute, 2021). In conclusion, the mandate granted during the pandemic allowed for extensive policy making, illustrating the potency of macro-windows of opportunity as conceptualized by the MWOP theory.

### **7.3 Macro-Window of Opportunity**

As discussed previously, the MSA argues that the alignment of problem, policy, and politics streams creates windows of opportunity—that is, unique instances where issues that require attention get highlighted in the right political climate and are addressed through appropriate policy measures (Kingdon, 1995). In the present case, the problem stream focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on the international education sector and the resulting impact on the Canadian economy, the politics stream includes a pro-immigration mandate and focus on international education in Canada as a bipartisan priority (including both international education strategies), and the policy stream encompasses provisions such as study permits, post-graduation work permits, and online learning options that were aimed at supporting international student recruitment and retention during the pandemic. As proposed by the MSA framework, the alignment of these three streams created a policy window, enabling the Canadian government to enact relevant policy measures to ensure that international students were able to study and stay in Canada during the pandemic.

### ***7.3.1 Size of the Window***

While the window opportunity is created with the alignment of the three streams, its size is determined by the severity of the crisis and the relative strength of the government's mandate (Keeler, 1993). While undramatic and noncrisis events create micro-windows impacting a limited number of sectors and resulting in small-scale changes, events with widespread effects on multiple sectors result in macro-windows with the potential for significant legislative reforms. In the context of the present case, the pandemic (crisis) and Canada's pro-immigration policy agenda and program and understanding of the importance of international students to the country (size of the mandate) opened a macro-window that created opportunities for major reform.

Essentially, as the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world, it created a macro-window in the form of a global health crisis with a fundamental need for political reform if Canada was to maintain its focus on international student enrolment and meet its ambitious immigration targets. One of the participants noted:

As a whole, the government understood how important the sector's success was to Canada's economic prosperity and how critical that was for many, many communities. And so, part of it was a drive to mitigate the impacts on our economy that could potentially arise were we not mitigating the impacts on our international education sector ... and linked to that, of course, our reputational piece—wanting to continue to position Canada and Canada's brand, you know, as being open, as being progressive, as being supportive. (Participant 6, National Association)

### ***7.3.2 Significant Reform***

Participant responses suggested that, given the severity of the crisis and the reliance on international students for Canada's immigration and economic objectives, the pandemic provided

a favourable environment for immigration policy reforms. One of the participants commented on the significance of the policy changes:

I think one of the drivers to lift the travel restriction at the beginning of the pandemic for international students was the economy, right? And the contribution of international students to the Canadian economy in terms of tuition and rent and food and everything. And so, it was important for us to allow for that exception to happen. And also, to allow for the education to continue. So yeah, I guess the pandemic was huge.... I think what was done was remarkable.... There were policies that were introduced that were totally *jamais vu avant*. Like never seen before. Just the allowing of distance learning, like I said, full-time, that was like huge. (Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution)

This reflection indicated that the size of the policy window directly influenced the scale and novelty of the policy outcomes. As the participant highlighted, the government had responded to the broad and profound challenges imposed by the pandemic with the introduction of unparalleled policy changes, such as lifting travel restrictions for international students and allowing full-time distance learning. These policy modifications demonstrated the extent of significant reform that a large policy window could enable during a crisis.

Participants viewed the changes implemented during the pandemic as significant, particularly in terms of flexibility for international students. These changes, such as allowing students to study from their home countries and still be eligible for the post-graduate work permit, played a crucial role in retaining their interest and commitment. One participant explained:

I mean, the changes were really significant. We haven't seen those kind of open, the openness to flexibility, especially around students who were having to remain in their countries and study from home. The promises that they would still have the post-graduate work permit—that is really quite astonishing to me. It helped with the retention.... I think any international students already in the pipeline, you know, were very frantic: "What is going to happen? I can't come.... I am not going to lose out on this opportunity. The reason that I wanted to come to Canada was the post-graduate work permit. And now I can't come." So, I think that they were very, very significant [changes]. (Participant 2, PSE Institution and Provincial NGO)

### ***7.3.3 Novelty of Approach***

The findings of this study also validate the creation of a macro-window as Canada was more supportive of international students through its introduction of policy measures than were other countries where borders were closed with no possibility of exceptions. One participant explained:

Not everyone handled things in the way that Canada did. Look at a country like Australia, they not only closed the borders but there was just no possibility for any kind of movement.... Those approaches weren't necessarily as supportive to students as the Canadian policy changes. (Participant 6, National Association)

Similarly, another participant noted:

We will have been recognized, despite the pandemic, as a destination that welcomes international students and that does what it can to make things work.... I think we may have gotten a little bit of an edge as well in terms of keeping that international education sector healthy—keeping that recruitment flowing during the pandemic when other

destinations were closed. (Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution)

Canada's approach was shown effective as educational institutions witnessed an exceptional surge in enrolments by the end of 2022, with 807,750 international students holding study permits across all educational levels, compared to roughly 621,000 in 2021 (IRCC, 2021). Based on 2021 enrolment levels with 621,565 study permits, Canada had almost completely recovered from the pandemic, compared to the end of 2019 with 638,380 study permits (ICEF Monitor, 2022a). Without the government's policy measures, it is likely that the recovery trend would have been much longer. One participant noted:

Canada had a strong brand going into the pandemic. So, I think, our sector would have recovered. But we would not have positioned ourselves with the kind of strength and momentum coming out of the pandemic, which allows us [to], I think, much more quickly and readily recover. And to continue to grow in a positive sense. (Participant 6, National Association)

Therefore, by effectively using the macro-window of opportunity to introduce relevant policy measures, Canada was portrayed in a positive light. It bolstered the country's reputation as a welcoming destination for international students, one that wanted and needed them and was ready to support them.

#### **7.4 The Role of Policy Entrepreneurs**

Kingdon's (1984) MSA emphasizes the role of policy actors or entrepreneurs in shaping policy decisions when the three streams of problem, policy, and politics align to create a window of opportunity. Policy entrepreneurs play an important role in this process by identifying and

promoting policies that align with the problem and policy streams, and by building coalitions and garnering support to push through policy changes during the window of opportunity.

The study identified several important policy actors, ranging from elected officials to national associations that were directly involved in the policy-making process and helped institute the major policy changes introduced during the pandemic. Their role in advocating for international students and the effective use of the window of opportunity to introduce relevant policy measures is discussed next. A complete list of policy actors identified in this study is available in Appendix E.

#### ***7.4.1 Role of Government Actors***

**Key Agencies.** As previously mentioned, a broad range of government bodies were involved in the policy-making process during the pandemic, demonstrating the collaboration among various agencies in addressing the crisis. One participant highlighted the role of key departments engaged in formulating and implementing policies affecting international students during this period, noting:

When I am talking about the federal government, I am really referring to a handful of departments that we would have been engaging with. That would be IRCC, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Global Affairs to a lesser extent. Increasingly as the pandemic continued, Transport Canada and CBSA.... Those were the main government departments that we were engaging with. (Participant 7, National Association)

Another participant elaborated on the involvement of other critical entities at various government levels. Emphasizing the roles of provincial entities and the political mechanism in policy decisions during the crisis period, the participant commented:

There is the Centre of course, the Privy Council Office and the Cabinet. The political side of things. But I think in terms of the federal government, that covers it off. Then PTs [provinces and territories] we were always dealing with both the education side and the immigration side. And then the pandemic that also brought in their PT health ministries. So, three different bodies at the PT level. (Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution)

**New Players.** Given that the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a global health emergency, the crisis introduced a key new player, PHAC, which became an essential participant in addressing the challenges and implications of international education during this period. One participant explained:

Traditionally, the government departments that were engaged in international education were IRCC obviously and Global Affairs and a bit of ISED [Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada] as I mentioned. But of course, the pandemic brought in a new player, and that was the Public Health Agency of Canada. (Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution)

The pandemic resulted in a unique scenario where public health measures were a driving force behind immigration policy decisions. Another participant added:

I think public health and public safety was at top of mind. Especially, you know, closing the border with the United States. You know, looking at the number of deaths and the way they were treating the pandemic in the United States, I didn't have any problem with the border being closed. (Participant 3, PSE Institution)

**Shifting Roles.** While typically Global Affairs' International Education team, which is responsible for overseeing the international education strategy, would lead policy changes

relevant to international education, participants in this study shared that Global Affairs was the least engaged party in the discussion and that they had direct lines of communication with federal departments such as IRCC, CBSA, PHAC, and Transport Canada. One participant explained:

The one piece that has always struck me in all of this, I mean, we have Global Affairs ... they engaged the least. And we all communicated with them the least out of all of the federal families throughout this whole process.... You could see the frustration because none of us were relying on them as the entry point to then forge relationships or to engage with bureaucrats in the other departments and IRCC in particular.... So, that was interesting as well because frankly they were pretty absent in all of this. (Participant 6, National Association)

Given Global Affairs' limited interactions with the international education sector during the crisis, the engagement dynamics between IRCC and the national associations evolved, as the department relied on valuable insights from educational institutions to inform its policy decisions. At the same time, regular interactions with IRCC helped national associations keep abreast of ongoing developments relevant to the sector. One participant added:

IRCC had fairly limited engagement with education associations prior to the pandemic. Like it would be more ad hoc. It became much more regular and that was sort of needed on both sides, right? The federal government needed the intel from the institutions and the institutions needed to know what was going on. (Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution)

Participants attributed Global Affairs' lack of engagement to the fact that it was primarily focused on repatriating Canadian students abroad in the early months of the pandemic and did

not have the bandwidth to play a major role in leading national associations to engage with federal departments. Therefore, associations predominantly engaged directly with IRCC, CBSA, PHAC, and Transport Canada. Expanding on this point, one participant added:

[Global Affairs] were so fixated because of the consular affairs side of it... In the initial stages their priority was repatriating Canadian students abroad. And that was a big part of the Global Affairs effort in the first early months of the pandemic. But, honestly, they were kind of the afterthought in all of this. We engaged most actively with IRCC, with CBSA, and with the Public Health Agency and Transport Canada directly. (Participant 6, National Association)

#### ***7.4.2 Role of Nongovernmental Associations***

While the policy-making process was driven by the government actors, participant responses highlighted the pivotal role played by nongovernmental associations and organizations during the pandemic, as they acted as essential conduits for crucial information flow and as advocates of policy change. Their significant involvement emphasizes how the crisis facilitated a shift in policy-making structures and highlighted the importance of effective stakeholder engagement and advocacy, as discussed next.

**National Associations.** The success of certain policies enacted during the pandemic can be attributed to the focused advocacy from the educational sector, especially from the five national associations representing the spectrum of international education (Universities Canada, CBIE, CICan, CAPS-I, and Languages Canada). Participants agreed that these organizations tirelessly championed the needs of the international education sector to senior government officials, making a compelling case for its significance to Canada's socioeconomic fabric. Their efforts paid off, with the government prioritizing measures that would mitigate the detrimental

effects of the pandemic on the international education sector. One participant offered a perspective on this point:

There was fairly good coordination among the national associations ... where we were having fairly regular engagement with IRCC at working level and on occasion sort of larger working groups of federal departments depending on the topic.... There were a number of occasions where we were involved in discussions with multiple departments at once, looking at issues that kind of spanned their respective realms of responsibility.

(Participant 7, National Association)

Another participant expanded on the collaborative effort:

As a result of the very intense advocacy that came from our sector in particular, I would say champion cabinet ministers who sat at that kind of whole government cabinet table and looking at the impacts of the pandemic on Canada, you had, and you were able to cultivate and sustain, the sensitivity of senior leaders within the federal government to recognize that we needed to have focus and concerted effort and priority placed on mitigating the impacts on international education sector in Canada.... I truly believe [it] is in large part because of the effectiveness of the advocacy of those in the sector, I would say in particular our national associations, who were able to cultivate that sensitivity, you saw a willingness on the part of the key federal government cabinet ministers as well as key federal bureaucrats to take a strong position and to take a strong stance, which is why the Order in Council around the public health measures, around the emergency measures, [there] were exceptions for international students. And they were one of a very finite list of exceptions that the government was going to entertain. (Participant 6, National Association)

Further elaborating on these emerging collaborative networks, participants mentioned engagement with multiple federal departments and highlighted the concerted efforts of national associations in supporting the broader education sector and aligning their advocacy initiatives.

As a participant noted:

In times like this, we often make a really coordinated effort to try and support the sector more broadly and align on the needs and the advocacy points that are going to be most impactful.... From that perspective, that was sort of our own kind of internal coordination among like-minded associations. And we were often engaging with those federal departments in concert. (Participant 7, National Association)

**Other Associations.** In addition to the national associations, other organizations, such as polytechnics, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada, the Canadian Federation of Students, and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, also advocated for the international education sector and the need for policy measures supporting international students. One participant expanded:

You would have others...polytechnics for example... in a more kind of passive way. You would have other associations... They weren't necessarily at the Global Affairs convened table but there were other separate conversations and other tables.... There were many others ... [and ] stakeholders who were involved. (Participant 6, National Association)

While these stakeholders were not present at the meetings convened by Global Affairs or IRCC or discussions with the national associations, they played supportive roles and engaged in separate conversations or other coordination efforts within the sector.

In comparison to the five national associations that played a central role during the pandemic and were involved in high-stakes discussions and the shaping of policy responses, the

other associations were considered secondary or tertiary players in the overall engagement process. One participant explained:

We would have a war room meeting and talking about ... the changes to the order of counsel [but] none of those groups were at that table. It was more that we were engaging with them or convening other tables to talk about issues or to try to kind of coordinate advocacy issues across the sector. But they weren't present. If IRCC convened a meeting it was the five national associations.... But there were many others that were kind of involved or trying to play a supportive role. (Participant 6, National Association)

**Advocacy and Impact.** As previously stated, the advocacy efforts of the national associations during the pandemic had a significant impact on the policy outcomes and proved to be a major factor in mitigating the negative effects of the crisis on the sector. One participant explained that national associations had “an impact on those policy decisions just by virtue of their ear to the ground with what’s happening in the sector and their ability to then convey that and turn that into government conversations” (Participant 6, National Association).

The work of the national associations and other key policy actors during the crisis did not just involve advocating for their sector but also ensuring that government leaders understood the depth and breadth of the issues at hand. Their efforts were directed toward showcasing the long-term benefits of decisive action to Canada and not just highlighting the potential threats posed by the pandemic. Furthermore, some participants in this study believe that the positive outcomes of these efforts will continue to benefit the sector for years to come. One participant added:

Once we were able to make that case and the government supported and understood the potential ramifications without action you, then saw willingness to engage. And what we saw, which wouldn't be something that would have been visible from the outside, is once

they got it and they understood it, and at that government table it was made clear from the most senior level—so, coming from the prime minister’s office, coming from the deputy prime minister’s office—that this was a priority that cascaded down across the different ministries and just became one of those operating assumptions. But I think their willingness to kind of accept the advocacy that was aggressively delivered had a really profound impact. And then we saw that translate into, you know, policies that were supportive and exceptionally supportive. And we did not see that in so many other sectors. And so, I think that really was a game-changer in terms of mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on our sector. And I think that will benefit us for many years to come.

(Participant 6, National Association)

In alignment with Kingdon’s (1984) views of policy entrepreneurs, these actors were able to seize the window of opportunity that arose during this crisis, effectively altering policy outcomes and directing the course of action in response to the pandemic. Key government departments like IRCC and PHAC as well as national associations emerged as important policy actors. IRCC transitioned from occasional interactions with national associations to consistent dialogues, acting as policy entrepreneurs influencing the policy agenda. PHAC, with its public health expertise, significantly contributed to the policy decisions during the health crisis. The national associations also stepped up as policy entrepreneurs, utilizing the crisis to enhance their advocacy and influence policy decisions, thereby alleviating the pandemic’s impact on the international education sector.

## **7.5 Policy Outcomes and Scope of Achievement**

The period marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, from March 2020 to December 2022, was characterized by a series of transformative policy measures and interventions. The policy

measures, ranging from changes in study permit applications to the introduction of online learning provisions, significantly impacted the landscape for international students. The summary outlined in the previous chapter underscores the government's commitment to maintaining a consistent influx of international students, even as travel restrictions created formidable barriers.

The subsequent analysis delves deeper into the four key areas of policy changes—travel regulations, study provisions, work-related measures, and immigration policies—examining the implemented policies, their responsiveness, and their implications for the international education sector in an era marked by unprecedented challenges.

### ***7.5.1 Travel Regulations***

**Travel Exemptions.** As previously noted, during the pandemic, the government introduced measures that allowed exemptions from travel restrictions for certain groups of international students. Amid general restrictions on nonessential travel, these exemptions permitted international students to travel to Canada for the purpose of continuing their studies. Regarding these measures, one participant noted that it helped in “demonstrating that the safe return of international students to Canada was possible.... Based on that, as well as other efforts by other sector stakeholders, being able to get that trickle of international students back into Canada following the October 20 [2020] exemption of international students from Canada's travel ban was huge” (Participant 1, National Association).

All participants in this study agreed that the quick enactment of most interim measures by the government allowed for student mobility with a guiding principle of and desire to protect the international education sector and its institutions. One participant noted: “I think the short-term impact is on international students coming. And everybody's numbers of international students. I

think that is going to be a challenge for all while until immigration offices figure out what's going on" (Participant 3, PSE Institution). Another participant expanded: "I do think that what we were able to achieve collectively and the policy changes that were put in place did significantly help institutions to continue to recruit students" (Participant 7, National Association).

Similarly, the implementation of quarantine plans allowed international students to be exempt from the full 2-week quarantine period upon providing a negative COVID-19 test. This measure was crucial in minimizing disruptions to their studies and ensuring public health safety. However, it placed a considerable burden on postsecondary institutions and their staff. On this point, one participant expanded:

Some of those measures like the COVID readiness plans put a significant burden on institutions in terms of managing risk, in terms of legal liability, and in terms of resources that needed to be invested to manage—so, hiring the staff, having the capacity to be able to manage some of those legal obligations. That being said, I think the return on investment is still a positive one overall. (Participant 6, National Association).

**Public Health Measures.** Participants in this study noted that the initial border closures and travel restrictions imposed as precautionary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Canada were very restrictive, making it difficult for incoming international students to arrive in the country to attend their classes. Some policy measures also appeared to be not well planned, particularly those involving compliance with vaccination requirements. One participant explained:

[As] an example of the shoot first, ask questions later.... There was also inconsistency at that time in the list of approved vaccines across provinces. British Columbia

acknowledged the WHO list but most other jurisdictions across Canada did not. Transport Canada was saying but you needed to be fully vaccinated by their definition in order to leave. So, students who were in full compliance with their vaccination policy to attend campus in Vancouver, to go to UBC [University of British Columbia] or whatever, then they were being told that the vaccine that was approved in British Columbia wouldn't be recognized for them to get on a plane for them to return to their home country. The inconsistency in some of the policies across jurisdictions has also been a major headache, let's put it that way. (Participant 1, National Association).

To address this, national associations made efforts to broaden the list of accepted vaccines in Canada, which was initially limited to four options. Advocates aimed to have Canada use the WHO list of vaccines to prevent the exclusion of vaccinated international students. The focus was on demonstrating a significant impact in terms of student numbers to engage policymakers, considering the urgency and national scope of the crisis at hand. One participant noted:

There was a lot of advocacy put into place because we wanted them to broaden it and accept the WHO list, because we knew otherwise it would exclude a huge segment of our international students who then wouldn't be able to come. Even though they were vaccinated but it was with one that they didn't recognize. Well, the bottom-line question was how many students this would impact. We will look at expanding the list if you can give us a sense of sheer numbers. So, if we could show them, you know, an impact that was on a significant scale then there was a willingness to engage. (Participant 6, National Association)

Participants noted that, initially, there was apprehension regarding the requirement of full vaccination for entry into Canada. Concerns arose about potential challenges associated with this mandate. However, Canada took a proactive step by expanding the list of approved vaccines to align with the WHO on November 30, 2021 (Government of Canada, 2021m). One participant recalled:

You had to be fully vaccinated in order to get into the country. And I have to say that we had some concern that this was going to be a major challenge. But then you know Canada went ahead and expanded the list of approved vaccines to align with the World Health Organization. (Participant 1, National Association)

**Study Permits.** Various policy changes were deemed crucial to address the challenges posed by the pandemic. These included measures related to exemptions and adjustments in the administrative process, particularly regarding immigration processing, such as study permits. As highlighted by a participant, these policy changes had a positive impact by mitigating potential issues and ensuring the sustainability of the international education sector beyond the pandemic:

I think changes were critical. The kinds of measures in terms of exemptions, in terms of adjustment around the actual administrative process as related to our immigration processing—for example, study permits. All those different policy changes had a positive impact. They helped to mitigate because there was more that could have happened. They were elements that helped to mitigate and helped ensure that, you know, we would continue to have a viable international education sector coming out of the pandemic. (Participant 6, National Association)

An aspect that Canada successfully addressed in terms of immigration policies was allowing exemptions for international students. Even if a study permit was required for any

duration, including less than 6 months, this flexibility proved essential. However, challenges arose in certain countries due to the closure of visa application centres, making it difficult for students to submit the required biometrics information for study permit applications, highlighting ongoing obstacles:

There were major challenges in certain countries with students being able to submit the necessary biometrics information in order to get the study permit because the visa application centres were closed. So still a lot of challenges. (Participant 1, National Association)

Visa application centres around the world were closed or operating at reduced capacity, causing significant delays in the processing of study permit applications. Moreover, some international students faced difficulties in obtaining the necessary documentation or completing the online application process due to the closure of institutions and other disruptions caused by the pandemic. One participant pointed out that the closure of VFS Global, the world's largest visa outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions, posed a particular problem:

For postsecondary it was really difficult, especially the first year when the VFS offices were closed. VFS supports Canadian visa offices with the visa process and career services and visa services were closed. Everything came to a stop and there was not really anything that could be done. Basically, the entire two intakes were probably affected by this. Especially from countries like India, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, the VFS office was completely closed for functioning. (Participant 5, International Education Agency and Immigration Consultant)

IRCC demonstrated great ambition in its approach. The implementation of a two-stage application process, which was strongly recommended by national associations and others, aimed to provide students with a sense of certainty and facilitate their studies. This approach considered the immigration framework and eligibility requirements, ensuring that students understood the importance of providing their biometrics to ultimately receive study permit approval. Although the process created logistical challenges for IRCC, it simplified certain aspects and achieved positive outcomes, benefiting institutions as a whole:

I think the department, IRCC in particular, was very ambitious, when I think back to the two-stage application process, which again was something that we as a national association and others really recommended. We were looking at ways to provide students with some certainty, etc. Understanding how the immigration framework is constructed, looking at eligibility from an admissibility and eligibility perspective, we thought that this would be a way to encourage students to take up their studies knowing that without providing their biometrics they could eventually still receive a study permit approval. I think that was helpful in the moment. I understand that it created a lot of logistical and operational challenges for the department [IRCC].... I think what was accomplished was very positive in many ways. (Participant 7, National Association)

Despite these efforts, the processing of study permit applications was significantly delayed during the pandemic and hundreds of thousands international students faced lengthy wait times to have their applications processed. As of September 2022, IRCC reported that there was an ongoing backlog of 151,000 study permit applications (Sachdeva, 2022). One participant expanded:

Certainly, with this current academic year, we can see in terms of the study permit numbers there is pent-up demand. There are those who planned to study who have to defer in the last 2 years who were trying to catch up. Study permit processing, the backlogs, if we can't get the basics right and we are saying come, how are they going to see that we are serious about investing in their success over the long term? (Participant 6, National Association)

### ***7.5.2 Study Provisions***

In response to the pandemic, institutions were compelled to adapt and find innovative solutions to ensure students could continue their studies seamlessly through online platforms. This necessitated administrative problem-solving and strategic planning for future semesters and academic years, given the uncertainty that prevailed. As expressed in the interviews, the ability of the international education sector, along with the broader education sector in Canada, to swiftly pivot to virtual delivery overnight was an extraordinary achievement, with over 95% of institutions successfully transitioning.

This level of agility and adaptability surpassed many other countries, where infrastructure, administrative leadership, and basic necessities posed significant challenges:

Students were able to study and able to continue their studies seamlessly online. Not everyone was in a position.... It forced institutions to kind of innovate or get creative in terms of problem-solving administratively.... It also meant for our sector institutions having to give serious thought to planning for that next semester and for that next academic year because there was much that was unknown.... It was a Herculean effort that happened overnight. But when you think that over 95% of our international education sector, and our education sector broadly in Canada, was able to pivot to

virtually exclusively online delivery overnight, it was quite phenomenal. You didn't necessarily see that kind of pivoting in in many other countries, in many cases because of lack of infrastructure, a lack of administrative leadership, and many other challenges, just other basic necessities that needed to be met. (Participant 6, National Association)

One of the most significant measures implemented during the pandemic was Canada's provisions about distance or online learning to support international students by allowing them to continue their studies even if they were unable to physically attend classes. However, as mentioned in an interview, there was a later shift regarding distance learning in immigration policies. According to an interviewee:

The flexibility in terms of distance learning in regard to our immigration policy are going to be coming to an end. International students won't be able to study 100% online and ... still be eligible for the PGWP [post-graduation work permit]. There will be still some permissions for distance learning, but I think it is 50% of your program. But yeah, there will be sort of a more moderate approach and a less flexible approach. (Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution)

Additionally, institutions were expected to adapt and integrate new teaching methods, acknowledging the advancements made in online education during the pandemic. An interviewee recalled:

I think postsecondary institutions will have to be fairly flexible, adaptive and integrate new ways of doing things, new ways of teaching. The online elements were advanced very quickly in this period of time. There is a lot of things that we can learn and take from those experiences. Institutions have developed new offerings that are online or

hybrid or hyflex. I mean, from what I hear, is that there is more of a desire to kind of meet students where they are. (Participant 7, National Association)

Regardless of these challenges, most participants endorsed and were supportive of the provisions for online learning. Participants in this study voiced their hope that these instructional formats become a permanent feature of postsecondary international education in Canada.

Additionally, participants agreed that distance learning has untapped potential to support student success in terms of its affordability and access and hoped that these positive measures would continue. To this point, one participant explained:

I don't think they fully understand and appreciate how rapidly and how significantly things have changed in our education sector in Canada and globally. And so, there is some catch-up there in capacity building that is going to be needed to help policy- and decision-makers understand how we are in a different place now in terms of how education happens, how it is consumed, and how prospective students, both domestic and international, may choose to engage and make decisions about their education. So, I think that is one key element. (Participant 6, National Association)

### ***7.5.3 Work-related Measures***

The Canadian government's pandemic response included unprecedented adjustment in work-related policies for international students, and participants discussed the need for rethinking and updating the immigration policy framework regarding international students.

Three measures introduced during the pandemic were highlighted by participants in this regard: increasing the 20-hour-per-week work limit for international students while studying, flexibility around PGWPP eligibility for part-time students, and tailored pathways to permanent residency for international students.

One participant shed light on the necessity for an ongoing conversation about such policies, specifically questioning the restriction on work hours for international students. They pointed out the importance of reviewing the implications of these constraints for international students, their studies, and their financial circumstances:

I think one of the other conversations that we need to be having in this country around that immigration framework is we had a limit of 20 hours of work while studying. I understand why it was introduced in the beginning because there were concerns that they wanted to be assured that students were coming here for the priority purpose of study. But given the fragility that we see globally and given our desire to keep students coming, you know, we have to be looking at, is 20 hours of work for the third of our international students who rely on that income as a way to finance their studies, is that realistic? And two, it creates a two-tiered system where our domestic students don't have any of these limitations. They can work however they choose. (Participant 6, National Association)

Thus, the debate over the 20-hour work limit for international students underscores the complexities of balancing the academic and economic interests of students and institutions, while at the same time raises concerns around equity and inclusion as international students do not have the same access to opportunities as their domestic counterparts. One participant explained:

The business community is clamouring, saying remove the limit because we have all of these labour market needs. I understand from an institutional perspective there are challenges because, and I've heard this from institution leaders, like do not remove the 20-hour cap because our students are going to be suffering academically.... But at a certain point, you know, to what extent do we empower the students to make those choices, right, and then accept responsibility for the consequences of those decisions? I

don't know, I think that is one of the areas where we need to see some policy changes and some rethinking. (Participant 6, National Association)

Participants also remarked on the importance of offering flexibility around PGWPP eligibility for part-time students, considering the diverse reasons leading students to choose part-time study. As this participant noted, policy changes accommodating part-time students can enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion within Canada's international education sector. A participant noted:

There are a lot of reasons why, you know, students rather study part-time, right? COVID obviously had an impact on students' ability to study full-time, whether it was voluntarily or involuntarily, based on courses offered and so on. In terms of when you think of diversity and inclusion, I think that is something for IRCC to look at going forward.

(Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution)

Furthermore, the establishment of formal pathways for international students transitioning to permanent residency was highlighted as a significant policy innovation during the pandemic. Participants reflected on the success of these newly established streams and recommended further incorporation and explicit recognition of these pathways in future planning. For instance, a participant mentioned:

They opened up a stream [of] 40,000 on the English side and an unlimited number of students on the Francophone side to become permanent residents. I mean, I think that is something that the government should be more explicit about, and build into some of its kind of planning going forward, and looking at that as a bit of a success and maybe replicating it in some ways. (Participant 7, National Association)

#### ***7.5.4 Immigration Policies***

In response to the pandemic, several unprecedented changes were made to existing pathways to permanent residency for international students and new ones were introduced, including the expedited transition from temporary resident to permanent resident status via the Express Entry system, the PNP, and the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (Government of Canada, 2020h; 2021d; 2021e; 2021f; 2022g, 2022h). The introduction of policy flexibilities during the pandemic was greatly appreciated and had a significant impact on institutions, helping them navigate the challenges in the pipeline for the upcoming academic years. One participant explained: “Those policy flexibilities that were introduced that were very, very welcome and certainly helped institutions mitigate kind of that pipeline for ... one and two academic years” (Participant 6, National Association).

Furthermore, the announcement of increased immigration levels in 2020 signalled the government’s commitment to supporting positive immigration policies and sending a clear message to international students and economic immigrants considering Canada as their destination of choice. This policy change was seen as beneficial overall, as highlighted in an interview:

In 2020, the government announced the immigration levels. Increasing the immigration levels from the previous levels to cover up what was happening due to the pandemic was also a big sign that the government of Canada, the IRCC will continue to support, you know, immigration policy, positive immigration policy, increasing numbers that send a very clear signal to all international students and economic immigrants who are considering Canada as a destination of choice. ... Overall, you know, the policy changes

were very helpful. (Participant 5, International Education Agency and Immigration Consultant)

The federal government responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic by temporarily pausing the Express Entry system. However, in 2021, it introduced the TR to PR pathway, which proved to be instrumental in facilitating immigration for international student graduates. Addressing these measures, one participant stated:

The government of Canada put a pause to the Express Entry due to the pandemic, but in 2021 the government of Canada came up with the TR to PR programs, and almost about 90,000 international student graduates were approved through the policy for immigration. Given the target of 400,000+ which the government had, it did meet partway because of international students. (Participant 5, International Education Agency and Immigration Consultant)

In comparison to other countries like Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, Canada gained a significant advantage through its strategic approach. Canada implemented a streamlined pathway and fast-tracked international students and graduates, paving the way for simplified immigration processes. An interviewee expressed confidence in the country's progress towards achieving its immigration targets, stating:

The decision for the government of Canada compared to Australia, New Zealand and the US as well ... Canada had a big advantage. It was a brilliant plan where the government of Canada fast-tracked international students and graduates with a simplified pathway. I think if we are looking at the numbers, the targets of what the government actually wanted it to achieve, it is on its way to hit the next year's numbers as well. (Participant 5, International Education Agency and Immigration Consultant)

Recognizing the importance of meeting immigration objectives during stricter border measures and limited mobility, the Canadian government acknowledged the need to establish pathways that would facilitate immigration. International students were identified as a group that could contribute to these objectives. As stated by a participant:

From the Canadian government perspective, there was recognition that these pathways needed to be created for Canada to continue to meet some of its immigration objectives. International students were seen as one of those groups that could help meet some of our immigration objectives in a period where mobility and border measures were stricter. (Participant 7, National Association).

## **7.6 Policy Limitations**

The policy measures enacted during the pandemic were fundamentally conceived to aid the international education sector. However, the participants' experiences indicated that these measures often entailed volatility, ambiguity, and insufficient communication. This was reflective of an approach that seemed to lack long-term perspective and effective coordination. A further analysis of these policy limitations and challenges is presented in the subsequent sections.

### ***7.6.1 Chaotic Environment***

Given the scale and severity of the crisis, the response to the pandemic period was characterized by chaos and constant change, leading to substantial communication difficulties and inconsistencies in policy execution, particularly visible at border controls. The fluctuating policies were not adhered to systematically, leading to a lack of coherence and possible confusion for those the policies were designed to support. This situation underscores the complexities in managing such a dynamically evolving crisis and the crucial role of communication, consistency, and systematic implementation in effective policy management.

One participant commented: “I think the problem with that was just it was chaotic, it was constantly changing, it wasn’t very well communicated. So, you had, you know, changes being made but not followed in a systematic way at the border” (Participant 3, PSE Institution).

The continuous and rapid adaptation of policies during the COVID-19 pandemic was a key feature, as highlighted by the participants’ remarks. This consistent transformation, driven by the evolving nature of the pandemic, created a challenging landscape for stakeholders navigating these changes. For instance, the unexpected and abrupt shift to a predominantly virtual mode of education caught many off-guard at the onset of the pandemic. One of the participants noted: “I think at the beginning of COVID nobody realized how much of their degree they would be doing virtually” (Participant 3, PSE Institution).

Navigating the pandemic presented numerous challenges, including the struggle to establish an evidence base for decision-making. A participant explained:

We were in a vacuum where even from a public health perspective, I mean the (... public health folks were struggling just to get a handle on the evidence base upon which they were making decisions because it was changing. Early screenshots from the Public Health Agency and the government of Canada [show], where for the first 2 months of the pandemic [even after it has been declared] they were saying that the risk to Canadians of contacting COVID was low. (Participant 6, National Association).

The rapidly evolving nature of the evidence further complicated the decision-making process.

Furthermore, the pace at which decisions had to be made added another layer of complexity. With evidence changing by the hour, decision-makers were faced with an intricate task. As noted by one participant: “The pace at which this was happening—and because, as I mentioned, you were making decisions, you were trying to make evidence[-based] important

decisions. But the evidence is literally changing like by the hour.... It made it very complex” (Participant 6, National Association). However, those outside of the government had the advantage of being able to provide a more introspective perspective and offer insights into the impact of contemplated decisions. This was particularly beneficial in the international education sector, as the same participant noted:

We were enough on the outside looking in that we were able to talk to them about the whole COVID readiness framework and any of the restrictions that they were trying to put on to the DLIs in order to allow all of these exceptions to play out through our sector, something that most sectors in Canada didn’t have the benefit of. (Participant 6, National Association)

### **7.6.2 Communication Gaps**

Several participants shed light on significant communication gaps that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly between various governmental departments with postsecondary institutions and international students. The findings elucidate the tension, inconsistencies, and challenges these gaps posed for students seeking clear guidance in an already stressful and uncertain situation.

Participants drew attention to a communication rift between IRCC and CBSA that was exacerbated during the pandemic. This disconnect led to a problematic scenario where information relayed by IRCC to students was frequently contradicted by agents at the border, resulting in confusion and uncertainty for the students. For instance, one participant noted:

There wasn’t really great communication between IRCC and Border Services for a while. We would tell students something that we learned from IRCC, and students would get to the border, and they would have a different response. That happened before the pandemic

but was particularly acute when it happened in the pandemic. (Participant 2, PSE Institution and Provincial NGO)

The lack of predictable protocol left students in a precarious situation at the border, and educational institutions could only do their best to prepare them for the range of possible outcomes. The uncertainty introduced by the CBSA was highlighted as a significant source of tension, complicating the interpretation of federal regulations and reinforcing the already existing communication gaps between IRCC and the CBSA. This scenario, as outlined by the participants, highlights a stressful and disjointed system that lacked the coherence and clarity needed during a crisis of the pandemic's magnitude. One participant expanded:

I think the problem with Canadian Border Services is that the rules were followed completely arbitrarily. We got so many phone calls from students at the border saying, "Now what do we do?" We were always warning them that they could be turned back. So, they had to make sure that they had enough money for a return flight. We try to give them the best advice that we could in terms of what they needed to have, the paperwork that they needed to have on hand to convince Canadian Border Services. Canadian Border Services was definitely a wild card. You are never quite knew how they were going to interpret the federal regulation. So that was definitely a tension between IRCC and Canadian Border Services. (Participant 3, PSE Institution)

Transport Canada also posed some issues around interpretation of measures, such as with the type of documents students required. Airlines did not always have the latest information, and students were turned away. Addressing some of these instances of lack of coordination between federal agencies, one participant summarized:

In certain instances where IRCC is saying apply for your study permit as soon as you can, but on the ground visa officers refusing permits because they are receiving applications for studies that are starting in 8 to 9 months. They are saying, well this is too soon. Even CBSA turning people away because they are trying to come 6 months before their studies, when you know the message overall is “apply early, arrive early.” There were certain things like that that I think were frustrating and pointed to sort of a lack of coordination between those departments. (Participant 7, National Association)

Finally, participants emphasized a noticeable absence of continuous dialogue between postsecondary institutions and IRCC. Given the fluid and ever-evolving situation, the lack of direct communication was especially problematic. It hampered the ability of institutions to anticipate changes, formulate their responses, and ultimately support the broader policy objectives being set at the federal level. One participant explained:

The decisions did come to many institutions as a surprise at the last moment. Institutions actually had to scatter and get things ready fast to support the decisions coming in from the federal government. I felt the federal government was making decisions based what was happening today and tomorrow but again didn't really have a constant dialogue with the institutions. It was such a serious scenario with the pandemic changing, very dynamic, very fluid situation on a daily basis. But again, I think institutions lacked direct dialogue with IRCC as to, you know, the policy which had been shaped for a better response. (Participant 5, International Education Agency and Immigration Consultant)

Conflicts and frustrations arose among provinces and territories regarding their roles and input into policy changes. They questioned why national associations were privy to certain information and consulted on the potential impact of policy changes, while they were not

included in the same manner. This dynamic played out with provinces and territories trying to navigate their own paths and find solutions to mitigate the pandemic's impact. In this context, national associations emerged as influential actors, significantly shaping the government's approach based on their insights and perspectives. One participant added:

There were points of conflict and frustration on the part of the provinces and territories as jurisdictions because it was like, well why do associations know these things? Or why are you coming to them for input on the impact on the policy change that you might be contemplating and not consulting with us in the same way? And so, a lot of that played out. Provinces and territories were struggling to kind of keep pace because they were focused on how they could chart their own paths and solutions and mitigating the impact of the pandemic. But in that vacuum, [national associations] were really the ones having the most significant impact on how the government was conceptualizing the approach.

(Participant 6, National Association)

### ***7.6.3 Level of Uncertainty***

Exceptionally complex issues without evident solutions are ever-present during a crisis, and unpredictability has been one of the key characteristics of the pandemic. The global public health crisis and its evolving nature created a lot of uncertainty regarding policies, and in some cases, these uncertainties influenced policy shifts. Even though many policy changes were welcomed by key stakeholders in the international education sector, much complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity remained.

The unanticipated shifts and unpredictable nature of the crisis complicated attempts at effective policy making and created a web of inconsistencies across geographical areas. This was especially true when measures needed to be adjusted in response to changing pandemic

circumstances, creating a myriad of contradictions that policymakers needed to reconcile. A participant explained:

Part of the unpredictability too is that COVID impacted different parts of the world at different times. We might be loosening up, but the pandemic is increasing in certain countries. And how do you work with those kind of contradictions? (Participant 3, PSE Institution)

Similarly, the policy implications of the recurrent appearance of new COVID-19 variants forced a re-evaluation of previously implemented policies, further intensifying the state of uncertainty and complicating the overall response strategy. A participant explained:

So, you think that you are in the clear and that the pandemic has stabilized. And then all of a sudden there is a new variant. And so that policy that had been introduced and was going to be lifted basically can't be lifted because just around the corner there is another variant. So yeah, the uncertainty, I think, made things complicated. (Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution)

Finally, the policy-making landscape was described as “shifting ground” and likened to quicksand to emphasize the instability and swift changes that characterized the situation. The disconnect between federal and provincial governments in dealing with international education and immigration issues, coupled with each province’s individual approach to managing the pandemic, introduced an additional layer of complexity and uncertainty into the policy landscape:

The pace at which this was happening was a real challenge for government because they were making decisions on shifting ground. And quicksand in many ways. The federal government was very focused on trying to mitigate the broad national impact. There was

a vacuum in which provinces were making decisions based on their own ideas about how this needed to play out. And obviously, that was very different across the country. But there was a disconnect on immigration on the international education file. (Participant 6, National Association)

This narrative underscores the considerable challenge that uncertainty posed to all levels of government in effectively managing the crisis.

#### ***7.6.4 Federal and Provincial Tensions***

One of the significant challenges faced during the pandemic was the jurisdictional aspect, particularly in a federation like Canada. As the events unfolded in real time, it became evident that there were diverse and sometimes disparate approaches to handling the crisis. From differing public health strategies to province-specific approaches, the variability and pace of the response was both astonishing and challenging to track. A participant noted:

One of the real challenges that we saw in this whole process, and it's just the reality of a federation such as ours, was the jurisdictional piece. I mean, this was all happening in real time. It was painful to watch. We saw 13 different approaches to the pandemic, right? You have the Atlantic bubble, then you had individual maritime provinces with their own approaches. You had radically different approaches on the public health side, you know, if you compare for example Ontario to BC. The variation across the country was staggering. And it was a pace where you could barely keep up. (Participant 6, National Association)

The levels of coordination, communication, and contention between the two levels of government and the international education sector have been evident during the pandemic in relation to public health measures, such as lockdowns and closings, and economic measures aimed at combating the financial costs of the pandemic. The evolving landscape and rapid pace

of developments put significant strain on both federal and provincial levels of government and the various stakeholders within the international education sector. The complexities of navigating policy coordination during the COVID-19 pandemic are clearly demonstrated through the experiences shared by some of the participants. This disconnect between the federal and provincial governments made unified decision-making a challenge, particularly while the federal government was attempting to harmonize its own internal departments and operations. One participant explained:

I think there was a real disconnect between the feds and the provinces and territories on this particular file, I don't think because of the radically different approaches to managing the pandemic generally speaking within the provincial and territorial jurisdictions. It was difficult to find a coordinated approach on the part of international education folks from the provinces and territories. I think they struggled in their engagement with the federal government because frankly the federal government was overwhelmed and trying to manage what was happening. The federal government was focused on trying to get its own departments and its machinery working and in step. And that was a challenge given the pace in which all of this was happening. (Participant 6, National Association)

The constant race to keep up with evolving scenarios, particularly where control overlapped between federal and provincial authorities, was an apparent issue in areas such as the regulation of airspace and port entries. A participant noted:

On the international immigration side, where it got crazy was you have the provinces and territories, obviously doing their pieces. You had the federal government, because of the Emergencies Act, trying to navigate these overlays because of course they control federally regulated airspace. They control what happens in terms of port of entry. There

was a need for a lot of coordination. But everyone was constantly trying to catch up and understand what was happening because every morning you would wake up and say, “Okay, what does the landscape look like today?” And the puzzle pieces just changing. And it was difficult to predict at times. (Participant 6, National Association)

The dynamics of engagement between federal departments, provinces, territories, and national associations in the policy-making process were intricately intertwined during this period. These entities, each with their specific concerns and interests, interacted in parallel channels with the federal government. At this time, there were multiple avenues of engagement and consultation between different levels of government and stakeholders. One participant expanded:

There was direct engagement at a higher level, or at political level, [with] Minister Mendicino [IRCC] office and eventually Minister Fraser [IRCC]. And at the same time, IRCC and other federal departments were also engaging with the provinces and territories on a lot of these issues. I think from their perspective those were probably two of the main interlocutors if you will. On one hand, you had sort of the provinces and territories, and on the other, dealing with national associations who were, you know, doing their best to represent the needs of the sector. (Participant 7, National Association)

As policies evolved throughout the crisis, provinces and territories increasingly expressed the need to be involved in the consultation process. However, an area of missed opportunity was apparent, as there seemed to be no comprehensive platform that allowed all these groups to convene for coordinated discussions and decision-making, which could have fostered a more coherent response. One participant expanded:

Increasingly the provinces and territories wanted to be consulted on how that policy continue to evolve. They were more and more interested in what that would mean for them, for their education networks. [It was] one area where there wasn't a whole lot of coordination. The federal government wouldn't typically bring together sort of the provinces and territories and the national associations. They sort of dealt with those two groups separately. (Participant 7, National Association)

Although the interplay between the federal and provincial governments and policy actors during the pandemic helped create a window of opportunity supporting the international education sector, participants highlighted the uncertainty of the situation and coordination issues between both levels of government as some of the key challenges that prevented policy measures from being proactively introduced and implemented. As presented in the adapted MWOP model, these institutional constraints, such as Canada's distinct constitutional jurisdictions, played a significant role in shaping immigration policy outcomes within the international education sector during the pandemic (Keeler, 1993).

### **7.7 The Evolution of Policy Making**

As presented in the previous chapter, the Canadian government introduced several policy measures and changes during the pandemic to facilitate the recruitment and retention of international students. These policy measures and the government's approach to policy making evolved over time as the government became more proactive with increased consultation and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. This section centres on the progression of policy responses over time, from an initial reactive phase to a more proactive approach as the immediate threats of the pandemic were contained. Participants' responses reflect different stages

of this trajectory and provide their perspective on the effectiveness of policy-making approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***7.7.1 Shift in Approach: Reactive to Proactive Strategies***

According to participants, the government's approach to the pandemic evolved from reactive to proactive measures. Most agreed that the measures were taken in response to public health guidelines including the changing infection rates and the need to control the spread of the virus. Participant responses also suggested that the government's approach to policy making during the pandemic balanced the need for protecting the sustainability of the international education sector with the requirements imposed by public health guidelines.

Acknowledging the unprecedented nature of the pandemic and the challenges it presented, participants recognized the reactive nature of the government's early measures. As one participant stated,

I think they were certainly reactive. I don't know that there has ever been this level of a crisis before, you know a worldwide pandemic. So, it's hard to say. You know it's hard to say at this point whether they were the right thing to do or not. (Participant 3, PSE Institution)

During the initial phase of the pandemic, the focus was primarily on reactive and immediate actions, given the urgency of the situation. For example, for a brief interval, international students could arrive in Canada unvaccinated, but could not board a connecting flight due to domestic travel restrictions. A participant noted: "We tended to call it flavour of the month. Like, what's the latest fire that we have to put out here" (Participant 1, National Association). Dealing with the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, participants recognized the challenges of

anticipating the next wave of obstacles: “We just didn’t know what wall you were going to hit.... They were still in reactive mode” (Participant 6, National Association).

However, as time progressed, there has been a noticeable shift towards a more proactive approach, with IRCC now having the capacity to consider long-term strategies. For example, a participant noted:

In that first year there wasn’t time to be proactive. We were trying to get them working on two parallel tracks, you know, reactive and immediate, but starting to shift the focus to more proactive. And I would say that it is only in this last maybe 6 to 9 months where we have seen an openness in the department where you can see a little bit of mental breathing room to start to think about that. And they are keen to engage on that.

(Participant 6, National Association)

Another participant reflected on the federal government’s approach to grappling with the emerging challenges posed by global COVID infections:

I don’t think there would have been any other alternative approach. I think what the government of Canada has done is the best approach in the current situation, where we didn’t know what to expect with COVID infections going on globally and in Canada.... I think it was really good strategy ... reactive based on what is happening in the

community. (Participant 5, International Education Agency and Immigration Consultant)

Participants appreciated the strategic combination of reactive responses to immediate circumstances and adaptability based on community dynamics. This adaptive approach, considering the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, was regarded as prudent in navigating the challenging landscape.

In reflecting on the policy measures implemented during the pandemic, one participant expressed a positive perspective, acknowledging the combination of reactive and strategic elements:

I found them positive. They were probably reactive. But in some ways I did find them strategic. Like, we weren't expecting it. They were probably reacting to something. But to us on the ground, they seemed to be quite proactive because we weren't aware that we were even having those discussions, that they were even considering some of the changes that they made. (Participant 2, PSE Institution and Provincial NGO)

The participant noted that the sudden nature of the policy announcements, appearing seemingly out of the blue, brought about significant changes and demonstrated a proactive approach.

Overall, they viewed these measures as positive, appreciating the unexpected and timely adjustments made to address emerging needs and challenges.

In managing the intricacies of governance during the pandemic, one participant shared insights into the difficulties encountered by the federal level of government: "The reality of governance at all levels but certainly at the federal level, there wasn't the breathing room or the space to do anything but be reactive" (Participant 6, National Association). Despite the constraints, the participant acknowledged a degree of proactivity once there was a recognition of the importance of mitigating impacts on the international education sector. They stated, "Once there was a whole of government acceptance that mitigating impacts on this sector was a priority, you start to see proactivity in terms of planning for the next stage of being reactive to whatever was happening with the pandemic" (Participant 6, National Association). This highlights the shift from a reactive to a more proactive approach in addressing the needs of the international education sector.

During the ever-changing landscape of the pandemic, one participant highlighted the continued state of reactivity, noting, “They were still in reactive mode because they didn’t know what the next tidal wave would be coming” (Participant 6, National Association). This unpredictability was exemplified by the arrival of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, causing constant shifts in strategies and plans. Despite this reactivity, the participant acknowledged that administrative processes demonstrated a proactive approach in considering the needs of international students amid the decision-making process. This balancing act between reactivity and proactive measures aimed to address the evolving challenges faced by the international students.

In the face of unprecedented challenges and the necessity for constant adaptation, the government’s commitment to addressing the sector’s needs and integrating them into their planning processes is seen as a positive shift towards proactive policy making. This shift highlights the recognition of the evolving nature of the situation and the importance of proactive approaches in effectively navigating the complexities and uncertainties posed by the pandemic. At the same time, some participants acknowledged that the government’s approach could be considered proactive in light of the other options:

The government could actually have stopped under the public pressure or the risk of having internationals travelling here and the increase the risk of infections like what Australia and New Zealand and other countries did... Decisions were made very fast, but strategically they were very good decisions, positive decisions. (Participant 5, International Education Agency and Immigration Consultant)

In conclusion, these findings portray an evolution of policy responses during the pandemic, from an initial phase characterized by reactive measures to a later phase marked by

increased strategic planning and foresight. Despite the unprecedented challenges and continuous shifts required, the government's effort to maintain a focus on the sector's needs and consider them in their planning was highlighted as a positive shift towards more proactive policy making. Nonetheless, the experiences underline the complex and evolving nature of decision making during this crisis.

### ***7.7.2 Shifts in Policy Image: Health Threat to Economic Recovery***

According to Baumgartner and Jones (1991), the policy image of the COVID-19 pandemic has been extensively utilized by policy actors and entrepreneurs to shape public opinion and influence policy outcomes. Initially, the pandemic was framed as a public health concern, but over time the policy image shifted to prioritize economic recovery. This strategic framing by those in power reflects the manipulation of policy images to maintain their position. Baumgartner and Jones (1991) argued that changes in policy images can lead to radical policy transformations. In the case of COVID-19, the shifting image increased the likelihood of punctuated equilibrium, where significant policy actions were driven by economic considerations. This had far-reaching impacts on various sectors, including international PSE and its institutions, as policies were framed within the context of economic impacts.

Considering the direct relationship between being infected with COVID-19 and mortality, COVID-19 was quite evidently a health issue; consequently, the "COVID-19 policy image" was one of public health and related policy actions. For instance, extreme lockdown procedures were implemented to protect the health of the population, especially older adults and immunocompromised individuals. Further, the policy image was not just concentrated on public health, as actions to "flatten the curve" were designed to protect the health care system and ensure it was not overloaded. This sentiment was echoed by one participant, who acknowledged

the importance of restrictions for the sake of public safety, noting: “I don’t think ease of entry of international students was top of mind. So, I think public health and public safety was at top of mind” (Participant 3, PSE Institution)

However, the policy image shifted over time. Extreme actions to control and mitigate the critical potential health risks of COVID-19, including total lockdowns, border closures, and travel restrictions, directly impacted the economy. Consequently, COVID-19 issues evolved from concentrating on health and the health care system to focusing on the economy (Amri & Drummond, 2021). Since policy images are centered on both empirical knowledge and values, public perception of policies varies with different frames. With the framing of the pandemic around health, lockdowns, border closures, and travel restrictions were largely well received at the beginning of the crisis. But, as the months passed, the policy image became more focused on the economy. One participant observed that these changes were linked to the increase in international students and connected to the broader context of pandemic economic recovery, stating:

It is not that it is a measure. It is a change that happened during the pandemic. And when the announcements came out like particularly (...) The way that the announcement came out, they tied it back to the increase of international students and then they linked it in some ways to the pandemic recovery. (Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution)

In February 2021, the federal government made two significant announcements regarding the retention of international students, aligning with Canada’s immigration and economic recovery goals. In the first announcement, with pandemic recovery as a key message, the government introduced a policy to invite approximately 27,300 skilled workers with Canadian

experience to apply for permanent residence under the CEC. This initiative aimed to support the country's recovery from the pandemic and boost the economy. The policy provided an opportunity for international students and workers already residing in Canada to apply for permanent residency, highlighting the importance of immigration for the country's economic recovery and long-term prosperity. As stated by the government, "Immigration is crucial to Canada's short-term recovery and long-term prosperity" (Government of Canada, 2021d).

In a second announcement, IRCC introduced measures to support international students during the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on economic recovery. The changes to the PGWPP allowed studies completed outside Canada and online to count towards a future post-graduation work permit. These measures aimed to ensure that international students could pursue employment opportunities in Canada after graduation and contribute to the country's economy. Minister Mendicino emphasized the government's commitment to international students, stating, "This new policy means that students hoping to work in Canada after graduation won't miss out on opportunities, while ensuring that Canada meets the urgent needs of our economy for today and tomorrow" (Government of Canada, 2021b, para. 6). This is an example of how the policy image of COVID-19 progressed from one focused on health to economy, yielding policy changes.

### ***7.7.3 Shift in Interactions: Increased Collaboration and Consultation***

This section focuses on how the pandemic catalyzed new forms of interaction, alignment, and cooperation between the federal government and its key departments, provinces and territories, national associations, and postsecondary institutions.

The five largest national associations representing the spectrum of international education, including Universities Canada, CBIE, CICan, CAPS-I, and Languages Canada,

experienced an exceptional increase in collaboration, alliance building, and advocacy efforts, forming a strong network of cooperation within the sector. These organizations worked in concert with government departments such as IRCC, PHAC, CBSA, Global Affairs, and Transport Canada to address the evolving challenges confronted by international students. This joint effort was facilitated through working groups, consultative dialogues, and the unification of national associations to bolster the sector and harmonize advocacy strategies. The principal objective was to follow the evolving policy landscape, offer support, and shape policy decisions to favour the international education sector. The success of the national associations in effectively advocating for mitigation measures during the pandemic can be attributed to their coordinated and focused approach. Explaining this point, one participant noted:

I saw all of the collaboration and interaction. It was because of the nature of the beast; it was mainly through postsecondary education associations ... a lot of collaboration....

The associations were the spokespersons for the sector. So, lots of engagements, lots of meetings. I mean, institutions needed to understand what was happening, right? And what the new policies were.... They were shifting quickly.... There was a lot of sorts of outreach done. (Participant 4, Federal Government Department and PSE Institution)

The crisis also led to the emergence of new collaboration methods and channels, particularly between the large national associations. These associations were key players in coordinating responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic. A participant expanded:

We basically had a war room where on an hourly basis in those early days practically, we had a WhatsApp group, we had everything.... We were coordinating ... we were all keeping our ear to the ground, we were strategizing around, okay what was the most important ask ... making sure that we were covering absolutely every possible

government official with consistent messaging [and] sharing what we were hearing so that that can inform the next conversation. So, there were some interesting consultations.

(Participant 6, National Association)

At the federal level, an interdepartmental working group led by IRCC was established, involving key federal agencies such as PHAC, CBSA, and Global Affairs, to foster a multidimensional approach to the crisis in consideration of diverse perspectives and expertise. This collaboration extended beyond the federal sphere as the interdepartmental working group engaged with the national associations representing the international education sector, ensuring policies were responsive to sector needs while considering practical possibilities and restrictions. The level of coordination also extended to other federal agencies, including PHAC, CBSA, Global Affairs, and Transport Canada, resulting in a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to policy challenges. However, sporadic engagement from Global Affairs' International Education team highlighted the need for sustained and enhanced consultative mechanisms to ensure continued whole-of-government engagement in the policy-making process.

In a manner unparalleled before the pandemic, the national associations collaborated with the government departments such as IRCC, PHAC, CBSA, Global Affairs, and Transport Canada to address the emerging issues faced by international students. IRCC's working group provided a forum to address concerns and make necessary adjustments in policies, thus highlighting an enhanced level of interagency and interassociation communication during the pandemic.

Expanding on this point, one participant noted:

A working group convened at the ADM [associate deputy minister] level by IRCC with PHAC, CBSA, and Global Affairs on the line. Several times now they have gotten together with that group and with Languages Canada, CBIE, Universities Canada, and

Colleges and Institutes Canada and Canadian Association of Public Schools – International, which represents the international student education interests of the K to 12 sector.... You've had the sort of consultative phone calls where, you know, with all of those government bodies on the line, the national associations representing the spectrum of international education. We have actually been able to talk through some of the issues and ask them all of the questions that we have and raise all of the red flags, which has in turn allowed them to sort of go back internally and deliberate and make some small tweaks. And so there has been a general sort of approach, collaborative approach.

(Participant 1, National Association)

In conclusion, these findings uncover that the COVID-19 pandemic led to an unprecedented degree of coordination and consultation at various levels in Canadian policy making for the international education, representing an unprecedented milestone in the country's policy history. At the peer level, the national associations developed stronger links, coordinating efforts, and advocacy points to present a unified front and to support the sector more broadly. This collaboration extended to their member institutions, creating a more interconnected and responsive network able to address the specific needs and concerns of individual educational institutions, enhancing their ability to navigate the rapidly changing circumstances. One participant explained:

I have to say that our experience is that government got better, has gotten better as things moved on, in terms of rather than doing sort of internal consultations and then having one point of contact come back ... to the national associations, sort of making it more of a regular thing to have these consultative group discussions. They've recognized the benefit in that. (Participant 1, National Association)

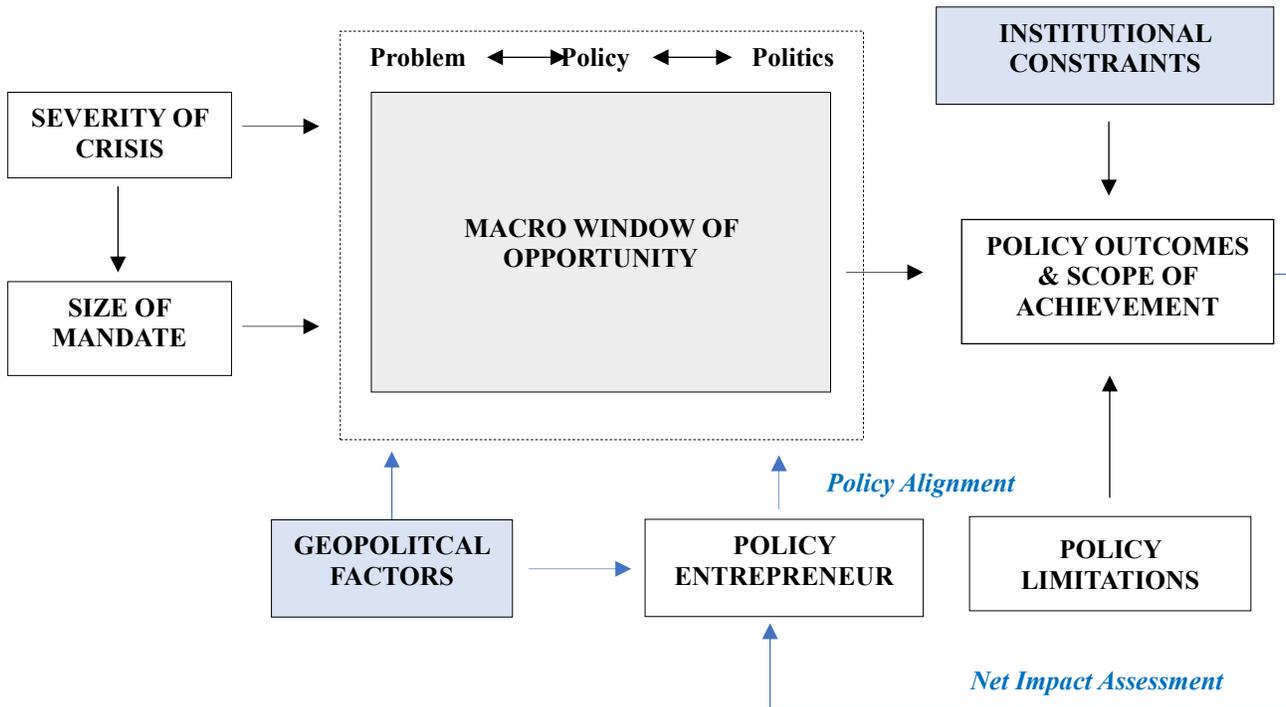
Furthermore, these national associations collaborated extensively with provincial and territorial bodies, fostering a new level of alignment between different administrative tiers. This coordinated approach helped bridge the divide between federal directives and local implementation, ensuring that responses were locally relevant and contextually appropriate.

### **7.8 Re-Evaluating the MWOP**

As previously stated, the MSA developed by Kingdon (1984), and the MWOP developed by Keeler (1993) are two theoretical frameworks that have been extensively used to study policy making in times of crisis. However, while both frameworks are useful in understanding policy making, they also have limitations. This study modified Keeler’s MWOP framework by including the role of policy entrepreneurs from Kingdon’s (1984) MSA model and an emphasis on policy limitations that may restrict the implementation or scope of policy outcomes.

While the adapted framework provides rich insights into the policy-making process in times of crisis, some gaps needed to be addressed. More specifically, application of the model for studying immigration policies introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic helped identify four additional elements—institutional constraints, net impact assessment, geopolitical factors, and policy alignment—that appeared to be significant to how the policies were developed and implemented. Expanding the framework by including these elements makes it more comprehensive and relevant for examining major policy reforms, specially in an international context (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12**  
*Re-Evaluating the Adapted MWOP Framework*



### 7.8.1 Institutional Constraints

One of the key limitations of the MWOP framework is the lack of recognition of the role of institutional constraints in shaping policy outcomes. Institutional constraints include the formal and informal rules and procedures that shape policy making. These constraints can include the rules of the legislative process, the constitution, and the bureaucracy. Theoretical models like Ostrom’s (1990) Institutional Analysis and Development and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith’s (1993) Advocacy Coalition Framework consider these institutional constraints as key factors. They help shape policy outcomes by limiting the kinds of policy proposals that are recommended and approved in the legislative process. Bureaucracy, for instance, can mould policy outcomes by steering the creation and execution of policy propositions, with bureaucratic actors contributing expertise, resources, and exclusive access to information. Likewise, a

country's constitution regulates the ambit of policy proposals by delineating the rights and obligations of citizens and government entities.

Institutional constraints are a significant element to consider while studying policy making during a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These barriers, deeply embedded within institutional frameworks, can hinder the formation and progression of policy propositions during the legislative process (Ostrom, 2019). In the context of this study, such restrictions were evident within federal government agencies, such as IRCC, which faced both internal and external structural limitations for policy adaptation. For example, the rapid policy transformations implemented by IRCC created flexibilities to support the sector as well as new administrative challenges for the department itself. Reflecting on this, one participant shared:

The other element of course was we had those policy flexibilities that were introduced that were very, very welcome and certainly helped institutions mitigate kind of that pipeline for ... one and two academic years. That being said, administratively for the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, it also created new burdens in terms of how they manage demand, how they provide clarity around frameworks that were evolving at a pace where we were all struggling to keep up. (Participant 6, National Association)

Findings of this study suggest that institutional constraints, particularly government's responsiveness, bureaucracy, and constitutional and jurisdictional structures, played an important role in immigration policy making in the Canadian international education sector during the pandemic. Canada's distinct constitutional jurisdictions add an additional layer of complexity when examining the roles of the federal and provincial governments and how their policies impacted international education. During the pandemic, Canada's federalism manifested as an

institutional constraint, leading to a variety of policy responses across its different jurisdictions, which in turn had substantial direct impacts on international students and the sector. As one participant illustrated: “For example, I mean in Quebec we saw because of the public health measures we saw a full-scale ejection of students from residences. We saw perhaps more a measured approach in many other jurisdictions” (Participant 6, National Association).

### ***7.8.2 Net Impact Assessment***

While the MWOP framework helps examine the policy-making process and how major policy measures come into place in times of crises, it does not provide a mechanism to assess the effectiveness of these policy measures. Net impact assessment is an important part of studying policy changes and helps evaluate the cumulative effect of an intervention as well as the extent of an impact, the population it influences, and its overarching social, economic, and cultural implications (DeFilippis et al., 2020).

Participants in this study also highlighted the importance of measuring impact when evaluating proposed changes to policies. For instance, one participant discussed policies around vaccination requirements:

If you tell us, well... this is the vaccine that all Indian students are using and they are our primary source of students as part of the recovery, okay then we will look at that. But if you are telling us that it relates to [only] a few thousand students, well then, frankly, in the hierarchy of priorities we don't have time to really help that. And so, it was always at the end of the day [based on] net impact. (Participant 6, National Association)

To some extent, the effectiveness of the immigration policy measures introduced during the pandemic can be assessed through the increase in international enrolment in Canada following the initial decline in 2021 (ICEF Monitor, 2022a); however, the MWOP framework does not

allow for this assessment or review. To address this limitation, it is important that the framework consider the assessment of policies and their impact so policy entrepreneurs can better advocate for and justify relevant adjustments to policies.

### ***7.8.3 Geopolitical Factors***

Another limitation of the MWOP model lies in its inadequate accounting of the role of geopolitical factors and changing country priorities. The model does not explicitly explore the influence of external geopolitical developments and how these might intersect with internal policy decisions, which is increasingly relevant when studying policy changes in an international context.

The absence of geopolitical considerations limits the model's efficacy when analyzing policies in sectors that are particularly susceptible to global forces and transnational changes, such as international education. Indeed, in an era of increased globalization, the implications of geopolitical events and broader global discourse cannot be understated. For instance, the geopolitical landscape, encompassing global political dynamics, economic alliances, health considerations, and global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, plays an important role in shaping policy environments across nations. This includes the risk assessments, international collaborations, and mitigation strategies countries adopted in response to the pandemic. For instance, the geopolitical landscape and specific country priorities significantly influenced Canada's policy environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The election of President Donald Trump in the United States and the ensuing policy changes in the country during the pandemic created a ripple effect globally. As one participant pointed out:

[One] complexity that we saw emerge in the international arena which positively benefited Canada ... [was] what was happening south of the border with the election of

Trump.... Or much more polarizing and controversial changes within many countries around the world ... for example, Europe or Hungary or others where you just started to see different, you know, elements emerging within society that were having an impact on other receiving markets, and how they were being perceived by internationally mobile students. (Participant 6, National Association)

The impact of these external geopolitical shifts on Canada's policy landscape was profound. The alterations in the U.S. policy environment inadvertently enhanced Canada's attractiveness as a destination for international students, a factor that the MWOP model does not adequately capture. A participant expanded on this:

I would probably say that the political and economic conditions in other countries would probably affect Canada as well. So, it is not just the pandemic I would probably say.

President Trump came into the U.S. and they made a lot of changes, which added a lot of value to what Canada was doing. So, you know if the trajectories of other countries and Canada keeps on supporting international students then I think yes, then Canada can continue to be the destination of choice. (Participant 5, International Education Agency and Immigration Consultant)

#### ***7.8.4 Policy Alignment***

Another inherent limitation in the MWOP model revolves around the element of policy alignment. The notion of policy alignment extends beyond the coordination of different actors; it also involves aligning policy goals and objectives with the broader social and economic needs of the country (Boon & Edler, 2018). The MWOP model, as it stands, may not effectively address the degree to which alignment between different policy actors and government levels can influence the course of policy changes.

In the case of Canada during the pandemic, policy alignment was instrumental in ensuring that international students could continue their studies and contribute to the economy. It involved bringing together multiple parts of government, national associations, institutions, and the international education sector at large to align their efforts towards this shared objective. This critical component of policy alignment, where both horizontal (among policy actors) and vertical (across different levels of government) coordination are central to effective policy making, is an aspect that the MWOP model could benefit from integrating. Without a high degree of policy alignment, policy entrepreneurs and interest groups can face significant challenges in pushing their agendas forward. By incorporating this element, the MWOP model could offer a more robust and realistic framework for understanding and analyzing policy changes in times of crisis.

Thus, while the MWOP framework provides a useful lens to examine macro-level policy windows and understand the catalysts for policy changes, it may not fully encompass the intricate, context-dependent considerations that inform operational-level decisions, specially when studying policy changes in the international context. Addressing some of these gaps in the framework would help researchers explore not only the larger policy windows and roles of policy actors, but also system-wide constraints that restrict policy making, and the overall impact of the policy changes. Such an approach would render a more comprehensive understanding of policy shifts during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

This research adopted the MSA and MWOP frameworks to conduct an in-depth examination of immigration policy measures that impacted the international education sector in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on comprehensive analysis of policy documents and interviews with relevant stakeholders, the study explored the policy measures introduced to support the recruitment and retention of international students during the pandemic, and examined the rationale behind, and perceived impact of, these measures in light of the broader political and societal context. This chapter summarizes the overarching findings of this study to address the three main research questions and highlights the theoretical and practical implications of the key findings particularly for policy-making processes in times of crisis. The chapter concludes with suggested areas for future research.

### **8.1 Pandemic as a Catalyst for Policy Change**

A primary aim of this study was to systematically examine immigration policy measures introduced during the pandemic to support the recruitment and retention of international students in Canada. This objective closely aligns with the first research question probing into the specifics of “what immigration policy measures in Canada were considered and eventually introduced to secure the continued recruitment and retention of international students during the COVID-19 crisis?” In response, findings of this study indicated that, from the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 to December 2022, the Canadian government enacted several significant policy measures that can be broadly classified into four areas: travel regulations (i.e., changes relevant to public health guidelines and study permit processing), study provisions (i.e., online learning), work-related measures (i.e., work permits and post-graduation work permits), and immigration policies (i.e., pathways to permanent residency).

Participants in the study concurred that the comprehensive array of policy measures underscored Canada's commitment to preserving a robust international education sector, and that the policy shifts played an important role in mitigating some of the barriers imposed by global travel restrictions and helped maintain a steady influx of international students. It is important to note that Canada's agile and supportive policy response stood in stark contrast to its international counterparts' (Cheng, 2020; Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020). Participants in this study indicated that the measures implemented by Canada were essential considering the country's reliance on international students to meet its immigration objectives and address labour market needs. In particular, the provisions for online learning and relaxation of travel restrictions were identified as vital strategies for sustaining international student recruitment. Similarly, participants noted that, by swiftly responding to the crisis and prioritizing the needs of the international sector, Canada leveraged the pandemic as an opportunity to strengthen its position within the global education landscape.

As countries across the globe continue to navigate the shift towards a "new normal," the end of the COVID-19 pandemic marks a period of evaluation and reflection. This reflection process is particularly pertinent in the domains of online learning and work-related policies, two key areas identified in this study as experiencing substantial evolution during the pandemic. For instance, the rapid transition to online learning posed significant challenges, including issues of accessibility, digital literacy, and maintenance of academic integrity (Naffi et al., 2020). However, it also offered advantages, such as increased flexibility and the opportunity to integrate technology-enhanced learning tools into mainstream pedagogical practices (Naffi et al., 2020). Similarly, adaptations to work-related policies were instrumental in ensuring international students could continue to contribute to Canada's economy during the crisis.

## 8.2 Macro-Window of Opportunity

The second research question of the study focused on how a 'window of opportunity' was envisioned, and the series of 'window-opening mechanisms' enabled or hindered proposed policy changes. Given that Canada has emerged as a leading destination for international education over the last decade (Buckner et al., 2022), the global health and economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated policy measures to support international students who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic through disrupted studies, travel restrictions, and financial pressures (Firang, & Mensah, 2022). The study finds that the severity of the crisis and the government's strong pro-immigration mandate were important factors that led to the creation of a macro-window of opportunity to introduce policy measures that would enable Canada to continue to recruit and retain international students during the pandemic.

A review of policy measures and discussion with participants indicated that the policy measures evolved over the course of 2 years. The direct association between COVID-19 infection and mortality made the pandemic an immediate health concern, and the initial policy measures were directed at "flattening the curve" of infections and prioritizing public health guidelines. However, as stringent public health measures affected economic activities, the policy emphasis began to shift towards economic recovery.

The study also highlights the role of policy entrepreneurs who played an important role in advocating for international students and were directly or indirectly involved in the policy-making process. In alignment with the MSA framework (Kingdon, 1984), policy entrepreneurs seized the window of opportunity that the crisis presented, leveraging it to effect meaningful policy outcomes. Participants in this study identified several prominent policy actors, including IRCC and national PSE associations (Universities Canada, CBIE, CICan, CAPS-I, and

Languages Canada). As the pandemic unfolded, PHAC emerged as a new actor, playing an essential role in addressing the complex challenges and implications faced by international education in response to the public health crisis.

The pandemic-induced crisis also saw an increase in collaboration efforts, partnerships, and advocacy among the five national PSE associations. These bodies worked closely with governmental departments such as IRCC, PHAC, CBSA, Global Affairs, and Transport Canada to tackle the evolving challenges faced by international students. This collaboration was fostered through working groups and dialogues, as well as through the unification of national associations, which collectively strengthened the sector and unified advocacy efforts. This exceptional escalation in collaborative efforts highlighted the ability of policy entrepreneurs to steer policy agendas under pressing circumstances (Keeler, 1993). Additionally, participants in the study observed that the Global Affairs International Education team, which is responsible for overseeing the international education strategy, had limited engagement in the pandemic response, whereas the involvement of IRCC became more frequent and consistent compared to its previous sporadic pre-pandemic interactions with the national associations.

While participants in this study agreed that most policy measures were designed to support international student enrolment, they also highlighted the need for holistic and robust support mechanisms for international students, given that they were unduly impacted by the pandemic. International students have been particularly vulnerable to certain impacts of the pandemic such as financial challenges, immigration issues, academic challenges, discrimination, racism, and housing and food security (Firang, 2020). Investing in and improving support systems for international students is particularly important to realize Canada's immigration objectives (Brennan et al., 2021). Esses et al. (2021) recommended enhanced immigration

support, targeted labour market integration programs, and community integration plans to retain international students in Canada.

### **8.3 Policy Making in Times of Crisis**

The final research question of the study dealt with what the Canadian case illustrates about the application of the MSA and MWOP as theoretical frameworks for studying policy making in times of crisis. Analysis of the participants' responses indicates that, in the pandemic's backdrop, the Canadian case provides a rich illustration of policy making in times of crisis. With the swift changes and prevalent uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants in the study described the policy-making landscape as "shifting ground" or "quicksand." Moreover, the findings of this study demonstrate that jurisdictional coordination in a federation, such as Canada, can add another layer of complexity and uncertainty to the policy-making process, particularly during a crisis. The disconnect between federal and provincial governments' responses to international education and immigration issues (El Masri & Sabzalieva, 2020), coupled with each province's individual pandemic management approach, made unified decision-making a significant challenge.

Participants noted that these challenges were accentuated when developing policy responses, notably where control overlapped between federal and provincial authorities such as the regulation of airspace and port entries. Specifically, when examining policy decisions in terms of the components of MSA and MWOP theoretical frameworks, these challenges reflect the convergence of multiple policy streams and actors within a window of opportunity, defined by the crisis, leading to significant policy activity (Kingdon, 1984).

While most measures were designed to aid the international education sector during the pandemic, their effectiveness was hindered due to factors such as volatility, ambiguity, and

inadequate communication. When discussing the policy outcomes and scope of their achievement, participants in this study described the initial approach of the government as reactive and chaotic, noting that the process lacked a long-term perspective and efficient coordination across various constituencies and stakeholders. Inadequate communication further exacerbated these challenges, creating information gaps and misinterpretations. Finally, the lack of cohesive collaboration across government departments and differing government levels limited synergies, creating frustration and tension, which further impacted the scope of policy achievement.

Despite these challenges, the pandemic concurrently created opportunities for policy innovation and adaptation. Conservative in nature, policy making in international education seldom sees rapid and radical shifts (McCartney, 2021). The rapid shift to online learning is one such instance, offering a glimpse into the future of international education. This kind of policy innovation, especially in the sphere of online learning, would likely not have been realized as promptly or as effectively without the unique challenges and necessities presented by a crisis, like the pandemic (Kingdon, 1984; Keeler, 1993). In a country like Canada, this policy evolution is particularly notable, given its substantial international student population and its strategic approach towards integrating international education with broader immigration goals (McCartney, 2021; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019). Similarly, the creation of formal routes for international students to obtain permanent residency represented a significant policy innovation, with participants encouraging further development and recognition of these pathways in future strategies.

Overall, the policy responses to the pandemic were characterized by an evolution of reactive to proactive measures, and a shift from short-term strategic responses to more long-term

changes. Participants noted that short-term changes, such as the two-stage approval process for study permits, were strategic responses aimed at minimizing the potential disruptions for current and prospective international students. More substantial changes in work-related policies for international students, on the other hand, underscored the government's interest in protecting the international education sector and supported the need for more adaptable, student-centric immigration policies, and were supported by advocacy of relevant policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon, 1984)

Findings of this study also highlight the need for rethinking the immigration policy framework to better serve international students, particularly with regards to work permit regulations and pathways to permanent residency. In line with the last research question, this comprehensive review of Canada's policy responses within the context of the MSA and MWOP frameworks provides a deeper insight into the dynamics of policy decision-making and outcomes, especially in times of unprecedented change. It is important that policymakers consider the long-term implications of these measures, including their financial impact, equity between domestic and international students, and the disparate views held by the business and education sectors.

#### **8.4 Looking Forward: Changes to Be Retained**

Among the policy measures introduced during the pandemic, participants in this study identified two key policy areas that underwent significant transformations during the crisis period: distance learning and work-related policies. These domains were marked by unprecedented interventions and innovative policy solutions, which participants suggested might shape future policy making in Canada. For instance, policy measures around provisions for online learning enabled postsecondary institutions to experiment at scale with new forms of

instruction, such as blended, hybrid, hyflex, and online learning. The widespread and successful transition to online learning across Canadian institutions signifies the potential for institutional innovation, the fostering of partnerships, and greater mobility for international students between destination countries.

Similarly, a critical adaptation during the crisis was the temporary removal of the 20-hour weekly work limit for international students engaged in essential services or functions, including health care and critical infrastructure, as well as the introduction of new pathways to permanent residency. These shifts not only alleviated the strain on crucial sectors such as health care during the height of the pandemic but also acknowledged the valuable contributions that international students made to the Canadian economy. The study finds that these measures were especially helpful for recruiting and retaining international students during the pandemic and set important precedents to shape future immigration policy making in Canada.

It is clear that the pandemic, while posing substantial challenges, concurrently created opportunities for policy innovation and adaptation. As the temporary provisions introduced during the pandemic will likely soon come to an end, participants noted that it will be important to review current policy frameworks and adjust them to incorporate some of the high-impact changes implemented during the pandemic. The rapid shift to online learning as well as flexibility in work provisions and pathways to permanent residency offer a glimpse into the future of international education in Canada.

Although the significant shifts and innovations were expedited due to the pressing constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have been instrumental in helping Canada's recovery from the crisis. In a country like Canada, this policy evolution is particularly notable, given its substantial international student population and its strategic approach towards

integrating international education with broader immigration goals. While the full implications of this shift remain to be seen, it is evident that the policy landscape has been irrevocably altered, paving the way for a more flexible and adaptable approach to international education.

### **8.5 Key Contributions**

Findings of this study bring forward several key contributions towards the field of policy making in the context of the international education sector in Canada. First, the adaptation of the MSA and MWOP frameworks from political science and its unique application to international education and Canadian immigration during a crisis has provided a new lens. This approach not only exposes new insights about policy making during a crisis but also effectively addresses a knowledge gap by focusing on exploring this policy context during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings also emphasize the need to understand how these policies impact Canada's diverse provincial and institutional landscape. Recognizing that provinces, cities, and institutions across Canada are affected differently, it is important to consider this diversity to shape more targeted and efficient policies. Looking ahead, it is also important to consider how global geopolitics, demographics, and technology might influence Canada's international education sector and its ties with immigration policy.

This study also offers an in-depth analysis of the linkages between international education and immigration policies during the pandemic. The findings highlighted how policies changed and their implications during this unprecedented disruption. Additionally, as the world grappled with the crisis, the movement towards digital and online learning became more pronounced. Understanding this shift is important, not just for current realities and adjustments but also to prepare for the future as international education continues to evolve. In addition, this study explored various policy actors, not just at the federal level but also incorporating local and

institutional perspectives. By doing so, it gives a clearer picture of how different groups are involved in Canada's international education and immigration policy making. This broader approach offers a richer and more holistic view of Canada's international education landscape and highlights the interconnectedness of actors at various levels.

## **8.6 Implications for Theory**

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by adapting Keeler's (1993) MWOP framework and integrating key variables proposed by Kingdon's (1984) MSA. The use of the MWOP framework within the context of immigration policy making in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic extends the application of Keeler's framework and offers a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence policy changes during times of crisis.

In alignment with previous studies (Ostrom, 1990; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993), the current findings suggest that institutional constraints can act as significant barriers to progression of policy proposals. These constraints were inherent within government institutions like IRCC, which faced both internal and external limitations, thereby impacting policy decisions. In the present context, the study also highlighted the interplay between federal and provincial jurisdictions and how lack of coordination can further complicate policy making in uncertain conditions. By identifying and investigating the role of institutional constraints and the alignment of policy actors in decision-making processes, this study provides insights that could lead to further theoretical developments in understanding policy changes.

The study also emphasizes the limitations of the MWOP framework in areas such as net impact calculations, geopolitics, and country priorities. By addressing the concept of net impact (to measure the cumulative effect of a policy intervention), the study highlights the importance of assessing the effectiveness of policy measures. Such calculations consider various factors,

including the extent of impact, the affected population, and broader social, economic, and cultural implications (DeFilippis et al., 2020). Similarly, by highlighting the interconnectedness between global geopolitical shifts and internal policy decisions, the current study illustrates how external factors can shape a country's attractiveness in the international education arena, and advocates for a more comprehensive and holistic approach in policy analysis.

Finally, the study highlights the essential role of policy alignment in crisis times. This includes the coordination of different policy actors and government levels and the alignment of policy goals and objectives with the broader social and economic needs of a country. For instance, the realignment of policy actors, with IRCC assuming a more central position in shaping policies, played a crucial role in responding to the crisis. Similarly, the alignment of policy goals and objectives with Canada's broader social and economic needs helped ensure the continuity of international students' studies and contributions to the economy. As such, the current study underscores the need for theories like the MWOP framework to be adaptable and responsive to the complexities of real-world scenarios, such as those witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **8.7 Implications for Practice**

The examination of the policy-making response to the COVID-19 pandemic within the MWOP framework, as presented in this study, offers valuable insights that can inform future policy-making practices. Findings of this study underline the importance of urgency, the significant role of policy entrepreneurs, the necessity for clear communication, and the advantages of widespread collaboration in shaping effective policy responses. Implementing these insights into future policy-making processes could greatly enhance the agility, coherence,

and efficacy of responses to crises, ultimately fostering resilient systems capable of withstanding future challenges.

One of the primary implications of this research is the important role of timely decisions during periods of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic, a global crisis of immense severity, necessitated rapid policy responses, especially in the international education sector, to mitigate the negative impacts. The ability of the government to showcase flexibility and enact timely policy measures, ranging from study permit processing exemptions to online learning provisions, is an important example of agility and adaptability in policy development. These principles should be embraced even in noncrisis situations, enabling effective responses to emerging challenges and facilitating responsive policy implementation.

The study also emphasized the important role of policy entrepreneurs in navigating policy changes during the pandemic. These actors, such as national associations (Universities Canada, CBIE, CICan, CAPS-I, Languages Canada), IRCC, PHAC, and others, significantly influenced the policy-making process during the crisis in Canada. Future policy-making efforts should consider the invaluable role of such entities in effecting change and ensuring their involvement in the early stages of policy formulation and implementation. Understanding the influence of these policy entrepreneurs and strategically involving them in decision-making processes could significantly enhance the effectiveness and relevance of policy outcomes.

Based on the findings of the current study, communication gaps appear to have been a notable challenge during the pandemic response, particularly between key stakeholders like various governmental departments, postsecondary institutions, and international students. Furthermore, the lack of continuous dialogue between postsecondary institutions and IRCC hampered the ability of institutions to anticipate changes, formulate their responses, and align

these responses with broader policy objectives. It is recommended, therefore, that Canadian policymakers prioritize establishment of consistent communication channels among all stakeholders, including government departments, educational institutions, and policy recipients. The experience from the pandemic underscores the importance of transparency and coherence in communication for effective policy implementation, particularly during crisis scenarios.

The pandemic response also exhibited an extraordinary increase in collaboration and consultation across different policy-making levels within the international education sector. This involved key national associations, federal agencies, provincial and territorial bodies, and educational institutions forming an interconnected network to address sector-specific needs. This collaboration, while prompted by the crisis, facilitated a comprehensive, contextually relevant approach to policy making. The lessons from this collaborative approach should guide future policy-making strategies, where all relevant stakeholders are involved and contribute to policy decisions.

## **8.8 Limitations and Areas of Future Research**

This study examined the context and processes of immigration policy making during a crisis, focusing on a critical sector—international education in Canada. Given the aims and scope of this research, the study primarily examined federal immigration policy measures and changes without engaging in a comprehensive examination of corresponding policy changes at the provincial level. Considering that PSE is a shared jurisdiction in Canada, this omission potentially creates a gap in the understanding of the comprehensive policy landscape during this period of crisis. While the focus on federal policy, which dominates the immigration domain (El Masri, 2019; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019; Trilokekar & Jones, 2020), was intentional, future

studies should consider incorporating provincial-level policy changes to present a more holistic picture of the policy-making process during crisis.

Moreover, the research parameters were narrowly defined to include policy measures impacting a segment of the international education sector, specifically, prospective and current international students enrolled in public PSE institutions during the pandemic. This narrow focus excluded international students pursuing language training or university pathway programming as well as those attending private colleges. Although such delimitation allowed for in-depth analysis, it possibly restricted the broader applicability of the study's findings (Knight, 2015). As such, future researchers may decide to include additional categories of international students, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of policy impacts on the diverse international student population in Canada.

Another limitation is the restricted capacity to fully measure the impact of the policy changes and the extent to which they met their objectives. The study's time frame, constrained to the period from March 2020 to December 2022, limits the ability to draw comprehensive conclusions on the policy measures' long-term effectiveness and impact. Furthermore, the complex interplay between international education and immigration policy outcomes poses an inherent challenge in attributing specific results to individual policy measures. This can make the evaluation of policy effectiveness a complex task. As the landscape of international education and immigration in Canada continues to evolve, it is critical that these policy measures are systematically evaluated over time. Future research could focus on developing robust methodologies to measure policy impact, including establishing clear metrics and benchmarks, and conducting longitudinal studies to assess the sustained effects of these changes. Such studies would provide valuable insights into the success or failure of these policies in achieving their

stated objectives, help identify areas where adjustments may be needed, and contribute to the ongoing refinement of policies in these domains.

The generalizability of the current findings is also limited due to restricted access to key policy actors, resulting in a relatively small sample size. Interviews with bureaucrats from federal agencies such as CBSA, PHAC, Global Affairs, and Transport Canada could not be secured, despite numerous attempts. Although these actors' perspectives were partially accounted for through document analysis and interviews with other stakeholders, the lack of direct interaction may have resulted in a less comprehensive understanding of their perspectives. Future studies could incorporate these viewpoints more effectively, enriching the narrative with a diverse range of policy perspectives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the policy landscape in Canada, particularly in the areas of online learning and work-related policies for international students. Similarly, the innovative changes in work-related policies highlight the valuable contributions that international students can offer in times of crisis and the need for more flexible and student-focused immigration policies. The long-term implications of these policy changes on international education and immigration in Canada are yet to be fully understood, thus warranting further research and scrutiny in the post pandemic era.

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## Appendix A: Invitation Email to Prospective Interviewees

Hi Prospective Interviewee,

Hope you are doing well, safe, and healthy. I believe you might be able to contribute to a research study conducted at York University's Faculty of Education, focusing on immigration policy making in Canada to support the recruitment and retention of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This project looks to analyze how COVID-19 as a global societal and health crisis had and continues to impact immigration policy making, specifically related to international students in Canada postsecondary institutions and how policy makers have made policy changes to adapt to new realities yet meeting immigration policy objectives of recruiting and retaining international students. The study aims to provide insights about how policy changes have occurred and what variables, such as the role of key policy actors, the national and international contexts and other factors influenced immigration policy making towards international students during the COVID-19 period.

### **What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:**

Participants will be invited to participate in one-to-one interviews. Interview discussions will be open ended but based on a few key questions related to the objectives of this study. Each participant will participate in one interview. Interviews are expected to take about one hour and will be conducted virtually and will be recorded using Zoom. All interviews will be scheduled based on your availability. If you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer any questions and/or withdraw from the study at any time.

### **Confidentiality:**

All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in the doctoral dissertation or any publication of the research (unless you give consent). I will be using audio recording for the interviews. The data collected through interviews will be held in strict confidence using password protected USB and stored in a secure location. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons cannot be identified, and all raw data (digital audio recordings and notes) will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study). Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

I am looking forward to your response. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you so much for considering this request.

Sincerely,  
Isaac

Isaac Garcia-Sitton  
PhD Candidate  
Faculty of Education  
York University  
Email: xxx@yorku.ca

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form

**Date:** October 9, 2021

**Study Name:** Policy making in times of crisis: The case of immigration and international students in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Researcher:** Isaac Garcia-Sitton, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education – York University  
Email:

#### **Purpose of the Research:**

This research aims to examine immigration policy making in Canada to continue recruitment and retention of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic. It looks to examine how COVID-19 as a global societal and health crisis impacted immigration policy making, specifically related to international students in Canada postsecondary institutions and how policy makers made policy changes to adapt to new realities yet meeting immigration policy objectives of recruiting and retaining international students. The study aims to provide insights about how policy changes occurred and what variables, such as the role of key policy actors, the national and international contexts and other factors influenced immigration policy making towards international students during the COVID-19 period.

There are three research questions guiding this study.

1. What immigration policy changes in Canada were considered and eventually made to secure the continued recruitment and retention of international students during the COVID-19 crisis?
2. How was a “window of opportunity” envisioned and what series of “window opening mechanisms” enabled or hindered proposed policy changes?
3. What does the Canadian case illustrate about the application of the multiple streams approach and the macro-window-opening process as theoretical frameworks for studying policy making in times of crisis?

#### **What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:**

Participants will be invited to participate in one-to-one interviews. Interview discussions will be open ended but based on a few key questions related to the objectives of this study. Each participant will participate in one interview. Interviews are expected to take about one hour and will be recorded.

**Risks and Discomforts:** I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** By providing information on your perceptions and experiences with immigration policy making in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic, you will:

1. deepen our knowledge of and produce new insights into immigration policy making, particularly during a time of crisis;

2. provide insights of the environment, key actors, and the enablers that influenced immigration policy making during COVID-19 crisis and its impact on PSE internationalization strategies, and student enrolment, retention, and mobility;
3. contribute to highlight and deepen our understanding of how Canada prioritized international education, notably the recruitment and retention of international students, and related immigration policy changes during the COVID-19 pandemic;

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with the researcher and/or York University either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**Confidentiality:** All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in the doctoral dissertation or any publication of the research (unless you give consent). I will be recording and transcribing the discussions from the interviews. Your data will be safely and securely stored. All hard copies of the data will be secured in my office. I will be the only person to have access to this information. All data will be stored for three years and then destroyed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Isaac Garcia-Sitton either by telephone at (XXX) or by e-mail ([igarcia.sitton@gmail.com](mailto:igarcia.sitton@gmail.com)) or Prof. Roopa Desai- Trilokekar, dissertation supervisor, on [RDesaiTrilokekar@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:RDesaiTrilokekar@edu.yorku.ca). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail [ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)).

**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participate in the study: **Policy making in times of crisis: The case of immigration and international students in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic** conducted by Isaac Garcia-Sitton. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Participant

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator

## Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Guide

1. Can you speak to your specific role in postsecondary education (PSE)/international education/immigration policy making, before and during the COVID-19 period?
2. Reflecting on your role and/or your knowledge of immigration and international education before the pandemic:
  - a. How would you evaluate the changes that have taken place in international education in Canada in the past 5 years?
  - b. How would you compare and contrast these changes to other major international education destinations like Australia and the U.S.?
  - c. Would you say that Canada has positioned itself well as a desirable international education destination based on its immigration policy?
3. International student enrolment in the Canadian postsecondary sector has been booming in recent years with international students contributing billions of dollars to the Canadian economy. The 2019-2024 International Education Strategy noted that in 2018 international students injected an estimated \$21.6 billion to PSE institutions, communities, and Canada's GDP (Government of Canada, 2019b). As of December 31, 2019, 498,735 international students were enrolled in Canadian post-secondary institutions (CBIE, 2020).
  - a. Before we move to the topic of COVID-19, based on your knowledge and experience around immigration policy making/international education in Canada, would you say that international education in Canada would have continued its exponential growth trajectory? Why?
  - b. In your opinion, what is the importance of immigration policy in Canada related to the recruitment and retention of international students?
4. COVID-19 as a global crisis disrupted the education sector at-large and international education specifically, based on your knowledge and experience in this area,
  - a. How would you describe this disruption in education/economy/immigration?
  - b. How would you characterize the PSE sector during the pandemic?
  - c. What would you predict the short/long term impact of this disruption will be on:
    - i. Postsecondary Education?
    - ii. International student mobility?
    - iii. Immigration policy impacting international students?
5. What is your perception of the federal government's approach to immigration policy vis-a-vis international student changes during the pandemic?
  - a. Please consider changes in public health guidelines, social distancing, lockdowns, online education, travel restrictions, work eligibility for international students, and pathways to permanent residency for international students.
6. In your view how well did the federal government work with the PSE sector in implementing immigration and other policies related to international students during the pandemic? What organizations did they work with? What were some challenges? What could have been improved in terms of coordination or communication?
7. Who according to you were key stakeholders within the federal government who were involved and engaged with the relevant immigration policy changes? Can you identify a few key leaders?

8. Who according to you were key non-government stakeholders who were involved and engaged with the relevant immigration policy changes? Can you identify a few key leaders?
9. Knowing that education in Canada is a provincial mandate, would you say that the provincial governments are/were aligned with the federal approach regarding policy changes impacting international students and international education (e.g., public health guidelines, social distancing, lockdowns, online education, travel restrictions, work eligibility for international students, and pathways to permanent residency for international students)? How would you describe this relationship, especially considering that eight out of the ten provinces have Conservative governments working with a Liberal federal government?
10. Looking at the many policy changes that took place during this last year and a half in international education (will provide Table 3 Immigration policy changes: COVID-19 pandemic (2020 – Present) to the interviewee to show policy changes and timelines),
  - a. How would you describe these changes and their impact to the continued recruitment and retention of international students?
  - b. Would you describe them as reactive or proactive and positive or negative?
  - c. What do you think the impact of these changes are in both short and long term on immigration and PSE?
  - d. What and whose interests were being promoted?
11. Would you say that there would have been a better approach to immigration policy making and international education during the COVID-19 period? If yes, please describe what it would be?
12. Which of the changes that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in international education and immigration you would recommend retaining moving forward post pandemic and why? What policy changes or regulations would you change?
13. To conclude our discussion, is there anything that you would like to add that would help us better understand the immigration policy changes impacting international students during the COVID-19 crisis? Are there others that you recommend I should speak to?

I will email you my written summary and findings for your review and confirmation. I welcome any feedback you might provide. Please feel free to contact me if anything arises. Thank you again for your time today.

## Appendix D: Ethics Approval



OFFICE OF  
RESEARCH  
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<b>Certificate #:</b>	<b>STU 2022-002</b>
<b>Approval Period:</b>	<b>01/06/22-01/06/23</b>

### ETHICS APPROVAL

**To:** **Isaac Garcia-Sitton**  
Graduate Student of Education  
[igarcia.sitton@gmail.com](mailto:igarcia.sitton@gmail.com)

**From:** Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Director, Research Ethics  
*(on behalf of You-ta Chuang, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)*

**Date:** Thursday, January 6, 2022

**Title:** **Policy making in times of crisis: The case of immigration and international students in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic**

**Risk Level:**  Minimal Risk  More than Minimal Risk

**Level of Review:**  Delegated Review  Full Committee Review

I am writing to inform you that this research project, “Policy making in times of crisis: The case of immigration and international students in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic” has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University’s Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Note that approval is granted for one year. Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics ([ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)) as soon as possible.

For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, “RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE”.

*Please note that due to ongoing changes with the pandemic, all researchers must review the procedures on the [YuBetter website](#) (Section: Coming to Campus) as there may be changes to protocol requirements.*

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: 416-736-5914 or via email at: [acollins@yorku.ca](mailto:acollins@yorku.ca).

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM  
Director,  
Office of Research Ethics

## Appendix E: List of Policy Entrepreneurs

Policy Actor	Description
Canadian Alliance of Student Associations	An influential advocacy organization representing post-secondary students in Canada. It works to improve the accessibility, affordability, and quality of education through evidence-based policy recommendations and collaboration with governments and stakeholders.
Canada Border Services Agency	A federal agency responsible for border enforcement, immigration enforcement, and customs services in Canada.
Canadian Association of Public Schools – International	A nonprofit association of Canadian public-school districts and boards offering programs for international students.
Canadian Bureau for International Education	A national nonprofit organization that promotes international understanding and development through the mobility of students, scholars, and professionals across borders.
Canadian Federation of Students	The largest student organization in Canada, representing over 500,000 students from across the country. It advocates for high-quality, accessible post-secondary education.
Canadian Mental Health Association	The most established and extensive community mental health organization in Canada. It provides advocacy, programs, and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses.
Colleges and Institutes Canada	A national, voluntary-membership organization representing publicly supported colleges, institutes, CEGEPS, and polytechnics in Canada and internationally.
Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada	It partners with postsecondary institutions, employers, government, and students to champion work-integrated learning. The aim is to develop future-ready students and graduates.
English-language test providers	Organizations that offer standardized assessments to measure proficiency in the English language. They design and administer tests like the IELTS (International English Language Testing System), TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), and DET (Duolingo English Test), which are widely recognized and accepted by academic institutions and immigration authorities worldwide.
Global Affairs Canada	A federal department that manages Canada’s diplomatic and consular relations, promotes the country’s international trade, and leads Canada’s international development and humanitarian assistance.

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Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada	A federal department with responsibility for matters dealing with immigration to Canada, refugees, and Canadian citizenship.
Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	A federal department with a mandate to foster a growing, competitive, and knowledge-based Canadian economy.
International Education Newfoundland Labrador	An organization working to promote Newfoundland and Labrador as a high-quality education destination for international students.
Languages Canada	A not-for-profit association representing more than 210 private and public members that offer accredited English and French programs.
Postsecondary institutions	Universities, colleges, and technical institutes that offer education beyond the secondary level. These institutions provide a wide range of programs and degrees, including undergraduate and graduate studies, vocational training, and professional development, contributing to the development of a highly regarded and diverse educational landscape in the country.
Privy Council Office and Cabinet	The Privy Council Office provides nonpartisan advice and support to the Canadian prime minister and cabinet (a group of the government's top ministers chosen by the prime minister).
Provinces and territories	Canada is divided into 10 provinces and three territories, each with its own government with certain powers and responsibilities.
Public Health Agency of Canada	A federal agency responsible for promoting improvement of and protecting the health of Canadians. It also prepares for and responds to public health emergencies.
Standing Committee on Immigration	A parliamentary committee responsible for examining and reviewing immigration policies and programs in the country. It plays a crucial role in shaping immigration legislation, conducting studies, and making recommendations to the government to ensure an effective and fair immigration system.
Transport Canada	A federal agency responsible for developing regulations, programs, and services of road, rail, marine and air transportation in Canada.
Universities Canada	An organization that provides university presidents with a unified voice for higher education, research, and innovation. It advocates for these issues nationally and internationally, facilitates cooperative efforts among universities and governments.

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