



# Profiling the Canadian International Cooperation Sector:

Analyzing Trends From 2015 to 2023

Prepared for Cooperation Canada

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# Acknowledgements

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This report is part of a larger initiative by **Cooperation Canada** to develop a **dashboard**, which is an accessible, comprehensive and updateable public data resource that maps the Canadian international cooperation sector. The author has worked closely with Anthony Desrochers and Quentin Laborne, University of Sherbrooke and **L&D Strategies Inc.** Anthony and Quentin provided the depth of technical knowledge and the skill to develop the schema, access and organization of the data from **Canada Revenue Agency (CRA)** and from **Global Affairs Canada**, which has made possible the analysis of this report. These are complex datasets and I am grateful for their close collaboration and collegiality.

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The author alone is responsible for the content, calculations and any errors or omissions in the analysis. The resulting report does not imply any agreement by Cooperation Canada or its Board of Directors.

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**AidWatch Canada**

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# About This Summary

This document provides a high-level overview of key trends, findings and insights from the study Mapping the Composition of Canada's International Cooperation Sector. It is intended as an accessible entry point for readers seeking a snapshot of the sector's size, composition, funding patterns, thematic priorities, geographic footprint and emerging trends.

The findings presented here are drawn from a more comprehensive technical report, which contains detailed methodology, analytical frameworks, data limitations and in-depth analysis for each topic area. Throughout this summary, references are provided to relevant sections of the full report for readers wishing to explore specific findings in greater detail.

Together with the Atlas platform, this summary aims to support learning, reflection and evidence-informed discussion about Canada's international cooperation sector. Readers are encouraged to consult the full report for additional context, methodological detail and a more comprehensive examination of the findings.

Access the full [report](#).

## A Summary of Key Metrics and Trends

**An important methodological note:** This analysis draws on two major data sources – the Canadian Revenue Agency's T3010 data (CRA) and Global Affairs Canada's Historical Projects Dataset (HPDS) – each with limitations in applying the data to this study. For this reason, some trends are approximate and affected by data limitations. Please read Methodology **Section Two** of the [full report](#) carefully in interpreting the study.

### A. Revenue/Expenditure Profiles

These profiles are derived mainly from CRA T3010 data, except for colleges and universities, institutions and associations with large programs in Canada. For the latter organizations, GAC HPDS annual disbursements is a proxy for total revenue and expenditures for international activities.

#### 1. Total Revenue in 2023

**The Canadian international cooperation sector had total revenue of approximately \$3.4 billion in 2023 and has been largely stable since 2015.**

The largest share was raised by Faith-Based Organizations (44%), followed by Canadian secular NGOs (29%) and (non-Faith-Based) INGOs (21%). Sixty-three (63) Large and Very Large organizations were responsible for 84% of all revenue raised by the sector in 2023. As in all provider countries, CSO revenue is often concentrated, with 20 Canadian organizations (out of 409 organizations with data) accounting for more than half of revenue in that year. The Mastercard Foundation provided an additional \$2 billion in international cooperation expenditures in 2023. ([Section 3.1](#))

## 2. Location of the sector

**The Canadian international cooperation sector is highly concentrated in Central Canada (64%), with 84% of Large and Very Large organizations located in this region.**

About 32% of organizations can be found in western provinces of which Alberta accounts for 18%. These organizations are mainly Very Small and Small Organizations. Thirteen (13) organizations are located in Atlantic Canada. (Section 3.2)

## 3. Staffing

**In 2023, 8,286 people were employed by international cooperation organizations. As might be expected, full-and part-time staffing is concentrated in 29 Very Large Organizations, with Small and Very Small depending on part-time staffing for close to half of their staffing complement.**

Staffing intensity (average staff per organization) has declined since 2015 for Very Large Organizations and relatedly for INGOs. There are 92 organizations, mainly Very Small Organizations, with no employed staff, which rely entirely on volunteers for their operations. (Section 3.3)

## 4. Trends in Total Revenue for the sector since 2015

**Total revenue for the sector increased by 19% between 2015 and 2023.**

Between 2015 and 2023, **Canadian NGOs** showed the strongest growth with a 41% revenue increase and a rising share of total revenue, while **Faith-Based Organizations** maintained the largest share at 44% despite a mid-period decline and modest overall growth of 7%. **INGOs** saw no real revenue growth over the period and a declining share from 24% to 20%.

Many **Small, Medium and Large organizations** graduated into higher revenue groups – increasing the Very Large cohort from 19 to 27 organizations – while the overall number of Very Small Organizations shrank as many moved up the revenue groupings. The one exception is the 144 organizations that remained in the **very small** category throughout the period, whose revenue fell 18% by 2023. (Section 4.1)

## 5. Disaggregating revenue sources

**Revenue sources for the Canadian international cooperation sector are relatively diverse.**

Tax Received Revenue, largely from donations by Canadians, account for 36% of total revenue in 2023, with Government Revenue making up another 25%. Earned Revenue in the sector represented only 2% of total revenue in 2023.

**Growth in revenue for different revenue sources has varied since 2015.** While received donations from the Canadian public remain the sector's largest single revenue source, their share has slipped from 41% to 36% over nine years with less than 2% growth, perhaps signaling a relative plateau in public giving. Government Revenue and transfers from other Canadian charities have filled the gap, growing 38% and 74% respectively and together reflecting a sector that may be increasingly its reliance on institutional and inter-charity funding. (Section 4.2)

## 6. Revenue source trends by organizational classifications

**The different organizational classifications in the international cooperation sector demonstrate different revenue trends and patterns in revenue sources.** Canadian NGOs have been the strongest performers in this period, with total revenue up 41%, driven largely by a doubling of government revenue, while Faith-Based Organizations — despite accounting for nearly half of total sector revenue — grew only modestly at 7%, with Receipted Revenue plateauing and Government Revenue declining by 12%. INGOs were the only group to see overall revenue fall, down 3%, as growth in Government Revenue was insufficient to offset declines in receipted revenue and Revenue from Outside Canada. Shifting revenue sources for a small number of Very Large Organizations in all three classifications heavily shape this overall picture. (Section 4.3)

## 7. Revenue source trends by organizational size

**The different sizes of organizations in the sector also demonstrate different revenue trends and patterns for revenue sources.**

- **Government Revenue** has been the single most powerful driver of organizational growth across all revenue-size categories over the nine years, with dramatic increases at the smaller end — over 200% for Small Organizations' 2015 cohort and 142% for Medium Organizations' 2023 cohort — clearly moving many organizations into higher revenue tiers.
- **Receipted Revenue** growth is significant for smaller organizations that successfully moved up the revenue ladder (80% for Very Small, 45% for Medium's 2015 cohort), while those that remained in lower tiers saw this revenue stagnate or decline and at the Very Large end Receipted Revenue actually fell or flatlined, perhaps pointing to a broader softening of individual donor support among the sector's most established organizations.
- **Revenue from Outside of Canada** may also have provided a very modest boost for some organizations — more than doubling for Small Organizations' 2015 cohort and rising 50% for Medium's 2015 cohort — but has become a declining source of revenue at the top of the sector. In 2023 it is highly concentrated with only five organizations accounting for 81% of this revenue. For Very Large Organizations this revenue remains significant at around 25% of their total revenue. These are international organizations in which finance passes back and forth among affiliates dedicated to projects developed by international affiliates for joint funding. (Section 4.4)

## 8. Trends in other revenue sources

**These other revenue sources provide a small share of the total revenue for most organizations in the sector.**

Faith-Based Organizations receive 63% of **Unreceipted Revenue**, but this revenue is a small share of total revenue for these organizations. These gifts may be anonymous, smaller donations, or have insufficient information for receipting.

- Although **Earned Revenue** is around 7% for Small and Medium Organizations, it makes up a very small share of total revenue for most organizations. About 80% of this revenue is from interest and investments.

- **Gifts-in-kind** are not major revenue sources. In 2023 there were \$98 million in Gifts-in-kind, with 77% recorded by Faith-Based Organizations and one organization accounting for 54% of this total. (Section 4.5)

## 9. An expenditure profile for the sector (administrative and fundraising ratios)

### **Fundraising and administrative ratios are low at 8% and 6% respectively of Total Expenditures.**

86% of expenditures were devoted to international cooperation programming by 293 organizations for which there is data. The combined ratios (14%) are significantly lower than typical Canadian charity benchmarks (20–35%), indicating a high share of funds directed to programming. Faith-Based Organizations have improved these ratios since 2015, while Canadian Secular organizations are largely the same and INGO ratios have deteriorated slightly.

Ratios for Large and Very Large Organizations have fallen since 2015 while ratios for Very Small and Small organizations are relatively high often due to fixed administrative costs. (Section 5.1)

## 10. Mastercard Foundation

**The Mastercard Foundation is a major Canadian provider in international cooperation, with disbursements at \$1,986 million in 2023.** These contributions have almost tripled since 2015. The Foundation’s resources are primarily allocated to Sub-Saharan Africa (98%), with 38% allocated to Mastercard Foundation’s top 5 countries (Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda and Nigeria). (Section 6.1)

## 11. Indigenous organizations in international cooperation

**First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments and organizations from Canada have played a major and decisive role in Indigenous international cooperation.** George Manuel, from the Seewepemc Nation in British Columbia, was the organizer and founder of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1975. He laid the groundwork in the United Nations in the establishment of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982, which ultimately resulted in the adoption in 2007 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

There is limited documentation of First Nations partnerships in international cooperation. But GAC has recently supported First Nation Governments and Organizations in partnering internationally with Indigenous counterparts to support inclusive nature-based and climate adaptation solutions by Indigenous communities and organizations. In 2023/24 GAC provided \$23.6 million to 32 (non-Indigenous) organizations in addressing “Indigenous Issues” in international development cooperation. (Section 6.2)

## B. Sector, Thematic and Geographic Allocations

Sectoral, thematic and geographic trends rely mainly on GAC’s HPDS as there is limited reporting of this information in the CRA T3010. The exception is geographic allocations, where

the trends bring in CRA data where it is comprehensive on an organizational basis. (See [Methodology Section, 2.1 \(i\)](#) for more details.) For this reason, these trends reflect allocations based on GAC disbursement revenue, which may not accurately and/or completely reflect actual allocations of an organization's total revenue.

## 12. Overall sector allocation trends

**Sector allocations by international cooperation organizations have been relatively stable in aggregate since 2015, with some significant variations in key sectors affecting gender equality and women's empowerment.** Health, reproductive health and population account for 25% of allocations, with education at 11%, agriculture at 9% and Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment at 8%. These are all sectors important for addressing poverty and inequalities. Humanitarian assistance averaged 19% of sector allocations over the nine years. ([Section 7.1.1](#))

## 13. Specific sector trends

Highlights for specific Canadian CSO sector trends tracked by GAC data (share of total disbursements to Canadian CSOs) include:

- Support for **basic education** has been increasing as a share of total education support.
- Overall support for **health** has been declining from 19% in earlier years to 11% in the 2021/22 to 2023/24 period, with reduced support for basic health and basic nutrition.
- But **reproductive health and population** investments have seen a dramatic increase from 3% of disbursements in the 2015/16 to 2018/19 period to 13% in the 2021/22 to 2023/24 period.
- Influenced by the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), **women's rights and women's empowerment** has been a new sectoral priority after 2019, increasing from \$40 million in 2019/20 to \$115 million in 2023/24.
- Support for **agriculture**, a key sector for rural poverty, has been declining, from a high of \$129 million in 2015/16, to a low of \$68 million in 2021/22, returning to \$98 million in 2023/24.
- Support for **humanitarian assistance** is a major sector of support, particularly for Faith-Based Organizations (36% of their GAC disbursements over nine years) and for INGOs (34%).
- **Promoting public awareness** of development accounts for an exceedingly small share of sector disbursements (1.8% in 2023/24) but seen through GAC disbursements may be somewhat understated. ([Sections 7.1.2 to 7.1.8](#))

## 14. Thematic trends

It is important to note that GAC data differentiates between projects where the theme is the principal purpose of the project and projects where the theme is one or more objective, but not the main objective of the project. For the latter projects, this analysis discounts

the disbursement by a coefficient which is an estimate related to the theme. (See the [Methodology section, 2.1 \(i\).](#))

### Highlights for specific themes tracked by GAC data include:

- **Gender equality** is a central objective of international cooperation organizations' activities in support of FIAP, with 97% of activities including at least one gender equality objective. These organizations implement more than half of GAC's principal purpose gender equality projects. Just under half of these organizations receiving GAC funding had principal purpose gender equality projects in 2023/24.
- **Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (RMNCH)** has been a major priority for International cooperation organizations, but allocations to these purposes have been declining since 2018/19. Five organizations delivered 60% of projects in 2023/24 for this purpose.
- **Child issues** as a focus has also declined over the nine years, with 15% of activities in 2023/24 reflecting mainly principal purpose child focused programming. Five organizations accounted for 82% of average principal purpose disbursements in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 period.
- **Inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities** has been a modest part of investments by international cooperation organizations, with GAC disbursements peaking at \$32 million in 2019/20 (3.2%) and have come down to \$25 million in 2023/24 (2.5%).
- **Climate related initiatives** have become more central to the programming of Canadian international cooperation organizations over time. They have become significant actors for **climate adaptation** programming in recent years. CSOs are implementing 37% of Canada's adaptation commitments in Canada's five-year \$5.3 billion climate pledge to date (March 2026). Disbursements for these purposes are 10% of total sector disbursements for the 2021/22 to 2023/24 period. There have been minimal investments in **climate mitigation** activities.
- **Biodiversity** has seen an increasing, but still modest, contribution from international cooperation organizations toward Canada's biodiversity target (20% of the \$5.3 billion five-year climate pledge).
- **Indigenous issues** have received steady funding through international cooperation organizations over the nine-year period, averaging 2% of GAC disbursements to these organizations. Most investments have been as part of projects with other objectives (significant purpose).
- **Food security** funding has declined from a high of \$253 million in 2016/17 to \$180 million in 2023/24, with a corresponding 10% drop in food security's share in total GAC disbursements for international cooperation organizations. This decline is accounted for by declines in resources for both agriculture and basic nutrition, already noted. ([Sections 7.2.1 to 7.2.8](#))

## 15. Geographic trends

**Canadian international cooperation organizations are highly invested in Sub-Saharan Africa**, a region with very high levels of extreme poverty, with 56% of their expenditures/disbursements located in that region in the 2022/23 to 2023/24 period, up slightly from 53% in the earlier 2019/20 to 2021/22 period.

These commitments to Sub-Saharan Africa rank much higher than Global Affairs Canada funding through other channels (discounting Canadian CSO disbursements), with only 38% of total disbursements going to this region, increasing to 48% when support for Ukraine is set aside. (2022/23 to 2023/24 average).

These organizations provided 47% of their resources to **Least Developed Countries and Other Low-Income Countries**. If regional programming (15% of the total) is set aside, this share to LDCs and Low-Income Countries increases to 55%. Another 25% is devoted to Lower Middle-Income Countries. ([Section 8](#))

### Continue Exploring

This summary provides a snapshot of key trends shaping Canada's international cooperation sector. Readers are encouraged to explore the data through Atlas, an interactive platform designed to support learning and sector-wide understanding and to consult the full report for detailed methodology, analysis and additional findings.

[Explore Atlas](#)

[Read the full report](#)



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## Land Acknowledgement

Cooperation Canada acknowledges the historical and ongoing oppression and colonization of all Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and lands in what we now know as Canada. The land on which Cooperation Canada's office is located is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabe People. We believe that social justice in Canada and globally depends on reconciliation with all Indigenous peoples, including the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, who are the original guardians of the land we are grateful to be sharing.

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