



Ending inequity in processing of resettled refugees, particularly from Africa

*This is one of five issue papers outlining priority issues for advocacy identified by the CCR's **Anti-Racism project**. The identification of priorities has been informed by member organizations and consultation with people with lived experiences, particularly those of African descent.*

Summary of the issue

Every year, tens of thousands of refugees are offered protection and a permanent home in Canada through resettlement. Often, they have spent years waiting for processing of their applications to Canada. The wait times vary dramatically by region of the world. Processing times out of sub-Saharan Africa are consistently among the slowest, evidence of the barriers created by systemic racism.

Delays and barriers for resettled refugees

The inequities in processing of resettled refugees affect several immigration categories:

- Government-Assisted Refugees – refugees referred to Canada by the UNHCR because of a particular need for resettlement due to vulnerabilities.
- Privately sponsored refugees – refugees sponsored by organizations or groups of individuals in Canada who undertake to support them financially and morally for one year after their arrival.
- One Year Window applications – immediate family members of refugees resettled who were not in the same location and need to reunite with their spouse or parent in Canada.

A number of factors result in processes being particularly long and difficult in Africa:

- Visa offices in Africa are few in number compared to the population, and chronically under-resourced.
- One Year Window applicants in Africa are more likely to face barriers such as being required to do DNA testing or to travel to another country for some processing steps.
- When Canadian immigration resources are redirected to an emergency response in another region of the world, applications out of Africa are further delayed.

Documenting delays in Africa – a lack of transparency

The CCR has long been concerned about Canada’s particularly slow processing of refugees out of Africa, as illustrated by its 2009 report, [Nairobi: Protection Delayed, Protection Denied](#), which highlighted the extraordinarily long processing times at the Nairobi visa office. CCR continued to monitor inequities in processing times, but in 2016 the Canadian government stopped publishing processing times by visa office or region. As a result, it became difficult to analyze inequities in processing.

The Auditor-General of Canada [recently found](#) “higher backlogs and longer processing times for refugee applicants in sub-Saharan Africa because these offices were often under-resourced.”

Mismatch between caseload and resources

- Nairobi visa office had about half the staff but almost double the workload as Ankara.
- Dar es Salaam had a similar number of staff but 5 times the workload of Rome.

[Auditor-General’s report, 2023](#)

Impacts of slow processing

- The long delays force people to wait years in precarious situations, without security or an ability to get on with their lives. When they are finally resettled to Canada, it is then much harder for them to integrate because of the long years in limbo, often without access to schooling, adequate health care or food.
- Processing delays feed on themselves: while applicants wait, medicals expire and have to be redone, babies are born leading to a need for more paperwork, people are forced to move to a different country (for example, following the outbreak of civil war in Sudan).
- Example of impact on individuals: A mother resettled to Canada as a Government-Assisted Refugee applied in 2022 to be reunited with her six children, all minors, still in Somalia. Two years later, processing is only at the early stages. DNA testing has been requested for one of the children – and may well be requested later for the other children: involving huge expenses for the mother and further delays.

Recommendations

- Ensure equitable processing times for resettled refugees across regions, and in particular end the consistently slow processing times out of Africa, through clear policy commitments, service standards and adequate resourcing.
- Publish processing times by region and immigration category for transparency and accountability.

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