

Canadian Council
for Refugees

Conseil canadien
pour les réfugiés

-
- Ottawa
November 26-28

Reclaiming Public Support: Building
the Movement for Refugee and Migrant
Rights

Fall 2024 Consultation Report

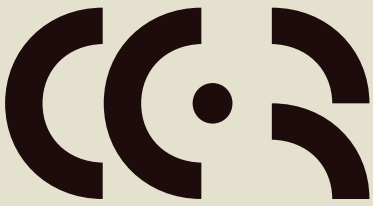
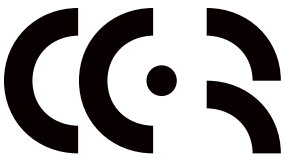


Table of Contents

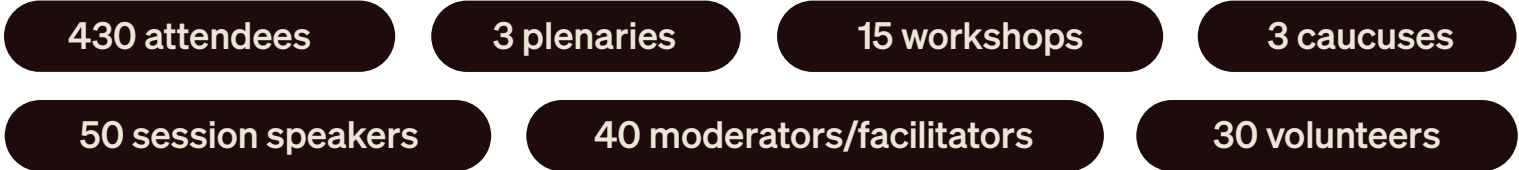
3	Introduction
4	Plenaries
8	Workshop insights
17	Caucuses
18	Outcomes
19	Evaluation results
20	Comments from participants
21	Acknowledgements
23	CCR on the Hill



Introduction

The Fall 2024 Consultation took place in Ottawa, from November 26-28, on the theme **Reclaiming Public Support: Building the Movement for Refugee and Migrant Rights**. Given this was the last consultation before the federal election, the CC worked to draw in a wide cross-sectorial coalition, with the intention of building public and political support for refugees and newcomers. CCR and its members know that there is significant public support and strong values in Canada to welcome refugees and migrants, but this is being beaten down, and the public is being told it is waning. We came together in Ottawa to reclaim this space and work towards maintaining and growing Canadian public support for policies that offer a meaningful future for refugees and (im)migrants.

Participants included newcomers, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) representatives, government representatives and human rights defenders from all over Canada and abroad.

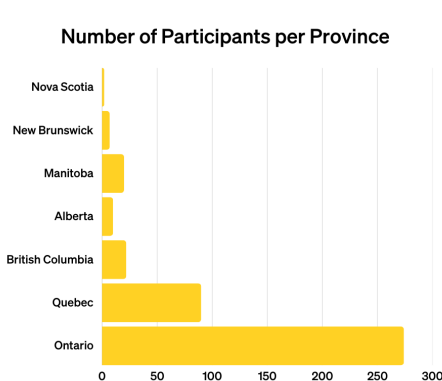


Consultation through the numbers

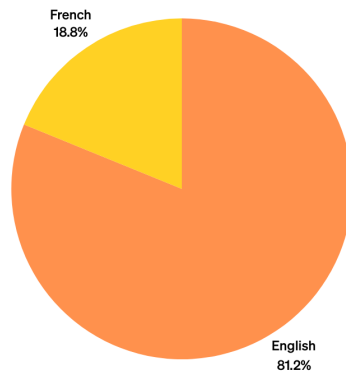
The Consultation consisted of four plenaries, three caucuses, and 15 workshops, where participants were given the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue not only with each other but also with representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government officials from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).

The various sessions culminated in the identification of priority issues and action items for the upcoming year, detailed on pages 5-13 of this report.

The Consultation brought together 430 people, including refugees, immigrants, NGO representatives, human right defenders, government representatives, and academics from across the country and abroad.



Participants' Preferred Language



- Number of plenary speakers: 7
- Number of students notetakers from the University of Ottawa: 63
- Number of participants with EN as their preferred language: 349
- Number of participants with FR as their preferred language: 81

Plenaries

2024 Opening Plenary - Building Power across Sectors: Reclaiming support for refugees and newcomers

Speakers:

- **Stephen Brown** (CEO, National Council of Canadian Muslims)
- **JP Hornick** (President, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union)
- **Debbie Owusu-Akyeeah** (Co-Director of Policy and Advocacy, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights)
- **Catherine Lussier** (Coordinator of Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain)



The opening plenary of the Consultation focused on rebuilding public and political support for refugees and migrants, the importance of counteracting harmful stereotypes through public education and structural reform, and the need to create coalitions that have a shared vision.

The speakers highlighted the importance of educating the public and how ignoring the rise in hate and the structural roots of discrimination can lead us on a dangerous path of authoritarianism. The misconception that refugees are at fault for Canada’s housing shortage, labour shortage, and that they are straining public resources is a far-right narrative that only creates further harm. But the “true enemy” is systemic inequality, not marginalized groups and we need a “unifying vision” to face the fears and division in a world that is changing.

The speakers agreed that to practically support each other to create effective change, everyone needs to be involved, especially those who have felt like they were left on the sidelines.

Some of the final takeaways from the plenary included:

- Understanding that to solve systemic issues, coalition-building is necessary and there needs to be a link between social justice goals and immigration narratives.
- The CCR should consider the need for narratives that will connect the fight for refugee rights to demographic needs and the economy.

2024 Middle Plenary with The Honourable Marc Miller

The second plenary of the Consultation featured The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), whose introductory speech focused on migration flows in Canada and the world at large and how that has affected the country's policy decisions. He used Canada's Afghan Resettlement Program and Economic Mobility Pathway as examples of the work the government does to welcome migrants and refugees. Miller acknowledged the flaws in the current narrative that blames immigrants for Canada's challenges. He also talked about how the country has taken steps to ensure that refugee claims are well supported, such as providing housing assistance programs and through the work done at Rainbow Railroad for those in the LGBTQ+ community.



The Q&A session provided an opportunity for participants to engage in dialogue with Miller and have their concerns heard and responded to. When asked what the new Trump administration would mean for the U.S. border and its impact on vulnerable migrants, Miller responded by saying that despite seeing the challenges at the U.S. border, the Government of Canada would continue to work with the Government of the U.S. to ensure a manageable migration pattern. He also said that Canadians should get used to finding themselves in disagreement with government policy.

The plenary emphasized the importance of collaboration between the government and civil society to address the challenges faced by refugees and migrants.

Some of the final takeaways included:

- Ongoing challenges include addressing misinformation, managing border policies, improving family reunification timelines, and enhancing support for gender-based violence cases.
- Collaboration between federal agencies and nonprofits remains essential for system improvements, and philanthropy can play a larger role in supporting refugee claimants.
- Canada's immigration and refugee policies aim to balance public support with global leadership.

2024 Evening Plenary with Anat Shenker Osorio: Refuge from our Rhetoric: Developing a Narrative that Welcomes and Wins

Host of the Words to Win By podcast and Principal of ASO Communications, Anat Shenker-Osorio examines why certain messages falter where others deliver. She has led research for new messaging on issues ranging from freedom to join together in union to clean energy and from immigrant rights to reforming criminal justice. Anat's original approach through priming experiments, task-based testing and online dial surveys has led to progressive electoral and policy victories across the globe.

Anat's keynote address on rethinking how we use language to make our messages resonate with the wider public primarily focused on the importance of prioritizing empathy over sympathy and leading with values to mobilize our base and persuade the middle.



Anat's organization has many useful messaging guides that we can all incorporate in our work, which are available to download at: asocommunications.com.

Elements of successful messaging (ASO Communications)

1. Lead with values, such as freedom, family and love, naming that they're shared across races, classes, and backgrounds.

While there is an understandable urge to emphasize the horrors experienced by immigrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum, years of research have shown that focusing solely on harms demoralizes and demobilizes people, causing them to turn away rather than take action.

Instead, anchor your message in a shared value, such as freedom, family, or love, and uplift the courage and tenacity of people who move to Canada. Emphasize the connections immigrants and refugees have to our communities; they are integral members of our churches, our schools, our neighborhoods and our families.

Name race explicitly to build an inclusive "us" to push back against the division our opposition stokes. Avoid language like "the border" or "(im)migrant crisis," which bring the opposition's divisive rhetoric of nationalism top of mind; center, instead, people who are seeking a better life for their families.

2. Name the culprits and their motivations in perpetuating harms and scapegoating.

Providing a clear origin story for the current situation is critical. Make it clear who is at fault for the problems we are facing – politicians and corporations who use racial scapegoating to seize and preserve power and sow division among us.

3. Combat cynicism by highlighting past and recent victories we've achieved through collective action and unity.

Citing ways we've acted together in the past to achieve positive change allows us to combat cynicism and withstand false claims from our opponents.

4. Close with a vision for a better future that we will achieve by keeping our communities whole and respecting all families.

We must close with a vision of a beautiful tomorrow that includes safety, justice and prosperity for all. A country that upholds our shared values of love and freedom through a fair immigration process that respects all families.

2024 Final Plenary with Toulia Drimonis: How to Turn Down the Fear and Turn up the Empathy



If we are lucky enough to live in a country that people are escaping to, rather than a place they need to escape, we have the moral and legal responsibility to treat our fellow humans with dignity and care. - from Seeking Asylum: Building a Shareable World, by Toulia Drimonis

Prior to the Annual General Meeting, Toulia Drimonis, a Montreal-based journalist, opinion columnist, news producer, and author of “We, the Others” and “Seeking Asylum: Building a Shareable World”, delivered the final plenary speech of the Consultation. Her presentation focused on the fight against misinformation, how to talk to people about immigration through the implementation of “gentle inclusion”, working together with journalists to tell stories accurately, and the importance of promoting and supporting media literacy.

Some important key takeaways included:

- Organizations need to constantly push back, discuss how to tackle root causes of immigration, not just border control, and make sure that the public knows why immigrants are coming here.
- The importance of creating opportunities for journalists to speak with migration experts—which includes organizations at the CCR consultation—as it allows for the public to get the facts
- Organizations on the ground should create guides explaining how journalists should approach issues related to migrants and refugees.
- Access to truth increases the likelihood that the public will support better public policy which, in turn, increases the likelihood that politicians will support those policies as well.

Workshop insights

Priorities, ideas and/or recommendations for advocacy were identified in each session, reflecting the issues emerging during consultation discussions.

1. The Need for a National Plan for Asylum with Dignity

This workshop provided a check in on the progress of the “Asylum with Dignity” campaign, where participants got to hear from Alexis Graham, Director General, Complementary Pathways and Asylum Services at IRCC, and Deanna Vecchiarelli, who represented the City of Ottawa.

A few key takeaways and concerns highlighted from the workshop included:

- The need for innovative approaches and long-term investments that would allow refugee claimants to relocate into more affordable homes in varied regions.
- Concerns over funding and the restricted access to settlement services and poor communication with intergovernmental processes and policies.
- The necessity for trauma-informed care that is adapted to the varying cultural and linguistic needs of refugee claimants.
- A system specifically designed for refugee claimants that is separate from the shelter system would offer more specialised assistance.

The workshop ended with an agreement that coordination between federal, provincial and local governments was needed and urgent. To guarantee that Canada continues to be a source of hope for those in need requires sustained advocacy and collaboration.

2. International Students: Commodification and system issues setting the ground for exploitation and abuse

As the CCR begins to approach the subject of international students, this workshop provided an opportunity for participants to identify how CCR can support in this area. The workshop gave an overview of the various challenges that international students face such as food insecurity, lack of access to federal funds, lack of institutional support from colleges and universities, as well as how they have been used as scapegoats for the housing crisis.

During the small group sessions, participants were asked to explore what the CCR’s public stance on international student should be. Some of the ideas highlighted during these sessions were:

- Changing the narrative to highlight precarious living conditions that international students live in
- The need for a crackdown on unethical recruiters
- More funding made available to international students
- More support for international students from academic institutions and community organizations
- The need to address the lack of social and cultural integration for international students

3. CCR's Legal Affairs Committee – Public Interest Litigation and Standing

The workshop on the work of CCR's Legal Affairs Committee (LAC) was led by LAC co-chairs Jennifer Stone, Imtenan Abd-El-Razak, and Jamie Liew. They provided an overview of the role of the LAC, which is to seek cases that would benefit from CCR intervention to address policy concerns and improve laws that discriminate against immigrants, refugees, refugee claimants, and other non-citizens. The CCR has been involved in 25 interventions at the Supreme Court alone over the last 25-30 years. The Department of Justice has continued its history of trying to remove the CCR as a public interest party and has attempted to shut down many cases. As of November 26, 2024, the CCR LAC is involved in two cases.

In the second part of the workshop, participants were split into four groups where they were each assigned a question to discuss. Their findings and insights included:

- When advising an organizational client in an unsettled legal environment it is important to understand what the client is looking for in the situation, whether it is advice or full representation.
- It is important for the CCR to be more visible to the public, so the CCR is more approachable as an organization. Communication to the public on the goals and actions of the CCR's LAC can improve the ability for action to be taken.
- For the different sectors of the CCR to stay informed and connected, it is suggested that representatives from each sector present at different important meetings.
- Having some members on the LAC be non-lawyers would allow the organisation to connect to other sectors and the public.
- The CCR should continue adopting the “community lawyering model,” grounded in humility and advancing social movements, which creates greater relations between lawyers and the parties they represent.

4. Mobilizing Our Communities: Service Providers, Advocacy, and Allyship

What are the obligations of service providers when it comes to engaging in advocacy activities? How can settlement organizations act in allyship with the communities they serve to promote their rights? What is the intersection of advocacy and funding opportunities?

In this workshop, participants heard from settlement workers and service users about their experiences building advocacy power within organizations and mobilising service users in political and media advocacy as well as in storytelling and community organizing contexts. This workshop encouraged service providers to take a speaking-with instead of speaking-for approach to advocacy.

Some of the key takeaways from the presentations included:

- Budgetary constraints can limit aid within groups and issues deemed «sensitive,» such as the genocide in Palestine, present significant challenges in securing funding
- By understanding and addressing the fears and needs of refugee claimants, the media can play a vital role in fostering a clearer, more supportive path for them
- Some long-term challenges include managing media pressure and advocating for temporary permits for those facing deportation
- The importance of creating supportive and engaging opportunities for youth leadership, which can help them grow and integrate into their new communities

-
- There is power in storytelling and creative expression when building connections between communities, fostering understanding, and amplifying youth voices

5. Emerging Issues in Immigration Detention

The workshop shed light on the systemic inequities and human rights violations embedded in Canada's immigration detention system, highlighting the pressing need for comprehensive reforms. It brought together legal experts, human rights advocates, and community organizations who each brought their own insights to provide clear directions for advocacy efforts.

Ryan Malloy from the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) highlighted CBSA's commitment to safeguarding both staff and detainees, particularly in high-risk environments. However, concerns were raised regarding violence faced by undocumented individuals, which Malloy acknowledged as a systemic issue potentially requiring centralized review.

Julia Sande from Amnesty International highlighted the absence of independent oversight of the CBSA as a critical flaw that perpetuates human rights violations.

Hanna Gros of Human Rights Watch cited specific cases where detainees were denied essential medical care due to insufficient staffing or the unavailability of interpreters, highlighting the systemic gaps in Canada's detention system. She recommended abolishing immigration detention altogether, emphasizing that such practices fundamentally incompatible with international human rights norms.

Subodh Bharati from Osgoode Hall Law School and Cory Wanless addressed the legal battle against Canada's use of provincial prisons for immigration detention. They underscored the importance of advocacy efforts beyond the courtroom, advocating for public campaigns to raise awareness and build momentum for systemic change.

Laïla Demirdache from Community Legal Services shared her experiences participating in coroner inquests into deaths occurring in immigration detention, with one case in particular: the tragic story of Melkioro Gahungu, a Burundian refugee who fled his country in 1994 and was resettled in Canada. His death by suicide in 2016 revealed critical systemic failures, particularly in mental health care and language accessibility within detention facilities. Demirdache emphasized the value of coroner inquests as advocacy tools, explaining that jury recommendations from these inquests are made part of the public record, serving as actionable steps to hold government agencies accountable and prevent future tragedies.

During the discussions, the audience raised several pressing issues, including:

- Concerns with the methods employed by agents to coerce detainees into signing documents without proper legal representation
- How detention conditions often mimic the persecution or trauma detainees faced in their home countries
- The inadequacy of training for security staff, especially those coming from private companies, in detention facilities, particularly following the suicide of a detainee in British Columbia in 2022
- Challenges in collaboration between NGOs and the CBSA
- The use of detention as a tool to facilitate deportation and instill fear within migrant communities, moving away from its intended role as a last-resort measure

In response to the concerns, the speakers provided the following recommendations aimed at addressing systemic flaws within Canada’s immigration detention system:

- A need to enhance oversight mechanisms for the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), by establishing a fully independent civilian oversight body
- Regular and independent audits of CBSA practices, detention facilities, and contractors
- Mandatory mental health training for detention staff, focusing on suicide prevention, trauma-informed care, and the destabilizing effects of deportation
- Access to real-time language interpretation and culturally sensitive healthcare to mitigate the ripple effects of trauma and improve care for detainees
- Ending the use of provincial and federal prisons for immigration detention and moving towards community-based alternatives
- Redirecting funds currently spent on detention toward community-based programs, such as case management systems
- The need for comprehensive training programs for detention staff to better address mental health crises and mitigate the risks faced by vulnerable detainees

6. Building Stronger Support Systems for Migrant Workers in Canada

Dedicated to addressing the challenges encountered by migrant workers in low-wage occupations, the workshop explored innovative methods and approaches for establishing robust support systems tailored specifically to migrant workers in the agriculture, food processing, and other low-wage sectors.

Gabriel Allahdua, a former migrant farm worker and the author of the memoir *Harvesting Freedom*, spoke about the vulnerabilities that migrant workers face in Canada, such as being denied basic human rights, excluded from society, and tied to a specific employer, which can lead to exploitation.

Clarizze Truscott, an advocate for temporary foreign workers, gave a presentation about the Kabisig Society of Fort Saskatchewan, a non-profit organization that helps Filipino migrant workers by providing them access to various services including immigrations support, connection to local services, and housing and transportation.

Hannah Deegan, a lawyer who is also a member of the Association for the Rights of Household and Farm Workers, looked at the challenges and successes of class action lawsuits and strategic litigation and the differences between the two. She also discussed the two streams of advancing migrant justice: addressing structural barriers and issues and achieving accountability for exploitation and abuse.

Some other takeaways from the workshop include:

- Calling for an Open Work Permit for all and abolishing the current work permit system
- The need for more migrant workers participation in discussions
- Making funding more accessible to workers and prioritizing organizing on weekends so they can also participate

7. Refugee Resettlement Process from Africa under PSR: Challenges with IRCC and IOM

Despite recent improvements, visa offices located in the African continent continue to have some of the longest wait times when it comes to refugee resettlement under the Private Refugee Sponsorship program. This workshop explored how IRCC is dealing with these issues, including concerns related to systemic racism and equity in responses to crises, as well as the effects for those living through long delays.

Canada's crisis response for Syria and Afghanistan show that Canada has the capacity to do more for places like Sudan but chooses not to. Even worse, as of November 2024, processing times for Sudanese applications have an estimated wait time of approximately 45 months (almost 4 years).

Other key takeaways and findings from the workshop include:

- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) faces criticism in Africa for delaying visa cases, sometimes letting visas expire due to their own negligence.
- Canada has promptly and adequately rescinded to and sponsored tens of thousands of refugees in the past but have failed to show Sudanese applicants the same urgency and concern.
- Across Africa, visa offices from cities like Dar Es Salaam, Nairobi, and Egypt have been unresponsive, taking no action on requests marked with SD202.
- The reason visa offices have continuously failed to prioritize Sudan applications is due to the lack of follow through.

8. Root Causes of Palestinian Displacement and Anti-Palestinian Racism: from 1948 to Today

This workshop focused on the historical and present-day root causes of Palestinian displacement, the main protection gaps for Palestinian refugees, and the legal and geopolitical factors that have led to the differential treatment of Palestinian refugees worldwide.

Mouin Rabbani gave a historical overview of Palestinian statelessness and displacement. With the recent international declarations holding Israel accountable for genocide, Rabbani urged attendees to push for more global accountability.

Dr. Yipeng Gi shared his experiences working in Gaza, providing an account of the humanitarian crisis resulting from the genocide and illegal occupation of Palestine. He highlighted the remarkable strength and perseverance of the Palestinian people and stressed the need for culturally relevant mental health resources to support everyone impacted. Furthermore, he argued that the international community cannot claim ignorance because the atrocities in Gaza are well-documented.

Ameena Sultan, a refugee lawyer and co-founder of the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association, delved into the systemic legal barriers faced by Palestinian refugees. Her presentation emphasized the role of Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR) in perpetuating Palestinian marginalization. To actively combat the erasure of Palestinian identities, she explicitly identifies Israel as the perpetrator of persecution in asylum applications for her clients.

Some of the takeaways from the workshop and the Q&A session included:

-
- The need for both collective action and individual responsibility, and the importance of continued advocacy
 - Anti-Palestinian Racism is evident in Canada's immigration policies, including through barriers to resettlement and seeking asylum and through the extra security measures and overall failure of the Gaza Temporary Resident Visa Public Policy
 - Participants were encouraged to consider not only the end of the violence but the rebuilding process that will follow once the bombs stop
 - The importance of being informed when it comes to voting, noting that Canadians should actively vote for politicians who do not support policies contributing to genocide or violence

9. Untold stories: combating sexual violence against women and LGBTQ+ migrants

With a focus on women and LGBTQ+ migrants and refugees, this workshop shed light on the reality of sexual violence and how its consequences are often overlooked by immigration and settlement services.

Rosa Arteaga from Vancouver-based Battered Women's Support Services talked about how important it is for service providers to work from an anti-oppressive, feminist, intersectional point of view to protect those that they are trying to help.

Deepa Mattoo from the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic in Toronto focused on the communication barriers and the lack of information given to refugee and migrant women. She emphasized that providing survivors with legal support and the proper interpreters has a profound impact on their preparation and anxiety, and this support can help survivors fully understand all the legal steps and feel more comfortable sharing their stories.

Vicky Zoi spoke about Mouvement contre le viol et l'inceste (MCVI), an organization/center located in Montréal that addresses sexual violence, and the development of an approach focusing on what migrant women of all statuses need. One of MCVI's initiatives is called Project Phoenix: La traite des femmes à des fins d'exploitation sexuelle, a project that addresses the experiences of the women who are migrating through the extremely dangerous area of the Darien Gap.

Some other takeaways from the presentations and the breakout groups included:

- More training is needed for professionals to holistically address this matter with clients experiencing it and facilitate the access to the support and services they need, therapy, etc.
- Major systemic change is needed, as the justice system currently in place creates challenges for migrant survivors and their families
- Support should also be provided for the workers who support survivors

10. Unpacking collective care and trauma-informed organizations in the sector

This workshop explored the tension employees faces between being trauma-informed and seeking psychological safety with the moral distress and injury that comes from working in social services. The central question in focus in this workshop was: How are we impacted by the stories that we hear and see?

The panelists discussed the importance of self-care to enable trauma-informed practices, the impacts of vicarious trauma for workers, and the value of having an open and safe workplace.

Some of the takeaways from the discussion and Q&A portion of the workshop included:

- A general concern over the lack of funding and access to resources for traumatized workers and the injustices that certain people may face when asking for it
- The idea that mindfulness and trauma-informed care needs to be taken seriously by every member of an organization
- Organizations needing to start implementing good practices around self-care and creating moments for team members to get together and talk
- Trauma-informed care as a topic that requires reconvening for it to be of quality and durable
- The need to build spaces and create resources for workers to enable reflections on the issues and struggles that we face individually and collectively
- Organizations must set core values in their mandates and that staff training must be based on personal experiences, as it will help build connections and relationships within the workspace

11. Extractive industries and forced displacement in the Democratic Republic of Congo

This workshop examined the historical, social, and political factors driving displacement, the exploitation of natural resources, and Canada's role in addressing these challenges.

Victor Setibo, the Country Director of Jesuit Refugee Service Democratic Republic of Congo (JRS DRC), highlighted the humanitarian impact of this displacement crisis, emphasizing the plight of women and children. He concluded by urging Canada and other nations to address the root causes of displacement by promoting better governance in the DRC, regulating the international trade of conflict minerals, and providing direct humanitarian aid to affected populations.

Catherine Coumans from Mining Watch Canada, a nonprofit organization dedicated to advocating for communities impacted by mining activities, expanded on the topic of resource exploitation in the DRC. She noted that mining operations often contaminate water sources, destroy habitats, and leave local populations with few resources to survive.

Further takeaways from the workshop included:

- Calling for Canada to take a leadership role in addressing these issues by enforcing stricter regulations on its mining companies and supporting affected communities in the DRC
- The importance of international cooperation and accountability in curbing the exploitation of natural resources
- The need for humanitarian aid and governance reforms in the DRC
- The need for Canadian mining companies to be held accountable for their overseas operations
- Coming up with sustainable solutions that prioritize the well-being of displaced populations and the equitable use of natural resources

12. Training Workshop: Messaging for Reclaiming Public Support for Refugees and Migrants

This workshop explored how CCR members can develop messages that maintain and grow Canadian public support for refugees and (im)migrants. The workshop featured presentations from representatives from UNHCR Canada, The Breach, and Refugee613. They each presented messaging resources they have developed and deployed.

Some of the takeaways from the presentations/discussions were:

- Narratives are not a single story. They shift, evolve, and they are the product of many stories coming together
- It is essential to identify our target audience and clearly define what we aim to achieve
- Effective communication should focus on building support for our organizations while minimizing potential obstacles
- Importance of actively working to counter misinformation about refugees

Highlights from the Q&A portion of the session included:

- Translating documents, messages, and resources into French is a key step to reaching more communities
- The importance of tailoring messages to resonate with public sentiment and advocating for the prioritization of refugee challenges in government policy
- The role of public awareness campaigns in building empathy and influencing policy discussions at a national level
- Aligning global challenges with local advocacy efforts ensures that both public and governmental stakeholders recognize the need for continued support
- Getting feedback from refugees and migrants about the challenges they face allows organizations to diminish the gap between what people really need and what is being offered

13. Government Dialogue: Accountability for Advancing Anti Racism in Refugee and Immigration Policy

This workshop provided a platform for CCR members and the government to discuss their commitments towards advancing anti-racism. The speakers of the workshop were representatives from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), and representatives from CCR's African Refugee Network. The workshop explored the need to address the stigmatization of black refugees and refugee claimants in Canada, as well as how to identify and remove barriers for refugee claimants in Canada.

Some of the takeaways from the presentations/discussions were:

- In the Federal Government, it can be difficult to convince employees that systemic racism exists
- Systems of oppression are invariably characterized by those in power separating the oppressed into those that they deem deserving of help and those that are undeserving, influencing immigration policy
- True progress means diverting resources from immediate needs to areas that will cause long term change

-
- Anti-racism is heavily intertwined with other forms of oppression and must be considered when developing solutions
 - DEI training in the workplace gives people the vocabulary to call out racism when they see it
 - Systems of transparency and accountability need to be put in place, especially when it comes to the unequal treatment of African migrants and refugees

14. Current Immigration Policies and their Effects on Young Newcomers

This workshop provided perspectives on what the current immigration and refugee policy landscape means for young newcomers who seek a safer and more stable life in Canada. The three panelists, Almustafa Abbas, Yankish Chahar, and Ana Zavalza, are all young migrants and core team members of the CCR's Youth Network. The panelists' presentations focused on the equal treatment of refugees, having more control and accountability from the Canadian government, expanding the definition of family, keeping families together through migration processes, reducing financial strains and pressures on international students, and implementing policies that create opportunities instead of limiting them.

Additional highlights and takeaways from the workshop included:

- The need to increase sensitivity and support for young newcomers based on their backgrounds, as different backgrounds/experiences will require different integration services
- The difficulty young migrants face when trying to access healthcare, particularly reproductive care and mental health care
- Resolving the lack of collection of statistics on youth migrants when they are dependents, unaccompanied or have dual citizenship by agencies like the IRCC
- The police and judiciary systems need to be better educated on youth migrants and the challenges they face specifically
- How less selective advocacy will make youth more comfortable in reaching out for support

15. Looking globally, thinking locally: Best Practices for Building Public Support

In this workshop, a panel made up of representatives from UNHCR, Carlton University, and the Environics Institute for Survey Research discussed global efforts to mobilize for refugee rights and explored different policy suggestions and advocacy practices. Panelists talked about how to address shifting narratives and public concern surrounding welcoming refugees into Canada, how government officials and organizations can combat and correct misconceptions, and what Canada can learn from immigration practices in other countries.

Some other key takeaways from the discussions included:

- It is important to use the media to your benefit and to provide information that can be accurately relayed to the public
- Shifts in the laws do not impact public opinion, but public opinion directly impacts policies and laws, especially when there is a lack of trust in the system
- The narrative on refugees must highlight refugees' contributions for governments to make legitimate, effective, and accountable policies
- It is essential to hold elected officials accountable, but we must also know how to engage with them

Caucuses

Palestinian refugees - From reflection to action... How can we get involved? (OPR)

The caucus created space for members who participated in the «Root Causes of Palestinian Displacement and Anti-Palestinian Racism: from 1948 to Today» workshop to gather and discuss next steps.

- The objective was to turn the learnings from the workshop into meaningful actions that both CCR and its member organizations can take to support Palestinians facing genocide and to hold the Canadian government accountable for its complicity in a genocide impacting a population of mostly internally displaced persons.
- Various organizations spoke about the different ways they have been mobilizing such as writing statements, creating opportunities for learning, and joining calls for an arms embargo as well as joining the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement.
- Participants also had an opportunity to discuss ways to set precedence during an unprecedented time.

Ensuring the safety of staff and volunteers supporting migrants: Tackling Intimidation and Organized Crime (I&S)

The goal of this caucus was to collaborate on solutions that enhance safety and security for those working with vulnerable populations and to share best practices for effectively addressing organized crime's impact on their work.

- Need for protocols to protect workers and case staff, especially in remote areas or dangerous situations.
- Advocacy for mandatory legal protections for workers and organizations dealing with organized crime.
- Establish channels for reporting incidents, sharing risks, and improving police collaboration.

Secondary migration of refugee claimants (IP)

This caucus explored the reasons why many refugee claimants choose or are forced to relocate elsewhere after arriving in Quebec, Ontario, and other major cities in Canada.

- Reasons for choosing new communities include existing cultural, linguistic or faith communities; access to jobs, social services, housing and education; and other factors such as favourable policies, weather/climate, and proximity to family.
- Challenges in secondary migration include limited housing, employment, settlement services, language barriers, social isolation, high costs, and difficulties in navigating systems and bureaucracy.

Outcomes

The Working Groups met twice during the Consultation. Each group discussed priority issues, elected Co-Chairs and voted on the action items below.

Immigration and Settlement

Action items for the CCR include:

- Make space for discussions on trauma-informed practices and host workshops throughout the year to promote sustainability and support for migrant and refugee communities.
- Advocate with the IRCC to address the impact of trauma on migrant workers and promote more flexible and work-centered immigration policies.

Action items for members include:

- Encouraged to create a newsletter account to stay informed about CCR activities and to promote the work of the CCR to their networks.

Inland Protection

Action items for the CCR include:

- Call for an audit of detention and expand the CBSA audit.
- Work to stimulate intergovernmental coordination.
- Create a public education campaign to build support for refugees.

Action items for members include:

- Networking regionally about the interim housing assistance program.
- 5 pillars of national asylum with dignity.
- Work to involve users in community advocacy involvement and mobilization activities.

Overseas Protection and Resettlement

Action items for the CCR include:

- Continue to address the reduced immigration levels.
- Continue to address the challenges on Quebec's sponsorship program.
- Continue to address the broader global displacement issues stemming from conflict, war, and exploitation.

Action items for members include:

- Encouraged to stay engaged, continue collaborating, and support the implementation of the resolutions.
- Development of educational resources on Palestinian displacement and the need for further engagement with Palestinian civil society.
- Pushing for better training and transparency in the visa officer decision-making process, particularly regarding Sub-Saharan refugees.

Evaluation results

Evaluation forms were handed out when the event ended, and sent by email in a follow-up with participants.



98%

said that the Consultation was well organised



98%

said that the Consultation provided sufficient opportunities to participate



89%

said that the diversity of the sector was well represented amongst speakers and moderators



97%

stated that they would attend future CCR Consultations



91%

felt like the Consultation was sufficiently bilingual



89%

said that the in-person interpretation was useful



99%

said that the overall program was strong, including quality of sessions and mix of plenaries, caucuses, and workshops



88%

said that their accessibility needs were met

Comments from Participants



“The opening plenary and the evening plenary were definitely the highlights! They both gave concrete ideas AND inspiration. I think both will lead us to action. I REALLY appreciated the introduction of collective action across sectors from the opening plenary. We should continue to work with all of the speakers! And I hope that we continue to work with Anat moving forward.”

“It was the best of the 3 consultations I’ve attended. I saw much more refugee representation than I saw in other consultations, which is so important. I also saw CCR members implementing the wheel of power by re-ordering speaker lines to be sure people with less power could speak. That spoke volumes.”

“The two sessions I found most useful and practical were Messaging for Reclaiming Public Support, and Refuge from our Rhetoric. Both offered excellent practical steps for positive messaging and bringing community onboard.”

“Thank you for the staff and those who worked for this event. I was inspired by their passion.”

“Truly amazing - it is clear that so much thought, work, and care goes into planning, and it is a pleasure to attend. I really appreciate the power wheel and efforts to constantly remind people of it and ensure that the consultation is carried out in a way that responds to various power dynamics. Well done to the CCR team :)”

“YOU ARE ALL AMAZING!! I can’t even begin to express how much gratitude I and so many attendees have for the work that makes this possible. I think I have attended something like 15 consultations, and this is hands down the best one. On top of excellent content, it was very well run. And lunch was a great idea -- it enhances opportunities for networking and keeps people at the site/prevents coming back late to sessions.”

“«Labor Immigration Justice for All was incredibly helpful to me as a newcomer in Canada. It taught me so much about the workplace system and the nuances of Canadian culture, often referred to as a «silent culture.» The Gender-Based Violence Framework also had a profound impact on me. As a Black woman and a member of the LGBTQ+ community, it opened my eyes to new perspectives on this critical issue. I initially believed Canada to be a completely safe space, but hearing the stories shared made me realize there are still challenges and risks here that I hadn’t been aware of.”

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the financial support from our sponsors:

Canada 



Fondation du Grand Montréal

CUPE·SCFP / Canadian Union of Public Employees
Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique



Canadian
Race Relations
Foundation

Fondation
canadienne des
relations raciales





The workshops were organized by many volunteers across Canada, and we are deeply grateful for their contributions. We also thank the panellists and moderators, on whom the Consultation's success depends!

We wish to thank the members of the Local Organizing Committee for their commitment, time, and energy:

- *Burundi We Want - Camille Kamanzi*
- *Capital Rainbow Refuge - Maria Hamber*
- *Catholic Centre for Immigrants - Myriam Mekni and Bryn Johnson*
- *Conseil Économique et Social d'Ottawa Carleton (CÉSOC) - Mirela Dranca and Natacha Jackson*
- *Citizen for Public Justice - Emilio Rodriguez and Asvini Uthayakumaran*
- *Community Legal Services of Ottawa - Laura MacLean*
- *Canadian Union of Public Employee - Kelti Cameron and Aditya Rao*
- *Refugee 613 - Louisa Taylor, Ben Sylvester and Elham Ghadieh*

And many thanks to organizations and individuals lending materials:

- *Burundi We Want - Camille Kamanzi*

We thank Professor Christina Clark-Kazak and her students at the University of Ottawa for taking notes during the sessions.

Finally, our gratitude goes to the local volunteers and Workshop Organizing Committees whose contributions make the Consultation possible.

CCR on the Hill



On November 25, 2024, over 50 advocates, from the membership and staff, gathered in Ottawa for ‘CCR on the Hill,’ to meet with Members of Parliament, Senators, and senior officials to advocate for and reinforce Canada’s commitment to and compassion for refugees and migrants. With a federal election rapidly approaching, the need to remind leaders to reject and counter a public narrative that scapegoats refugees and migrants is more critical than ever. The results of the US elections have only underscored the importance for the sector to reclaim public support and ensure Canada stays an open and welcoming place for refugees and immigrants.

In 43 meetings with parliamentarians across party lines, CCR members raised their voices in support of several key messages:

People in Canada are proud of living in a country that welcomes refugees and immigrants

- People in Canada have rallied over and over to respond to the needs of those fleeing danger—whether from the crisis in Syria, Afghanistan, or Ukraine. Refugees and migrants are us—our neighbours, our friends and people we work with. The result has been the enrichment of our communities, our economy and our democracy
- This is an issue of national pride and global leadership

All parties have a role in keeping compassion and leadership on refugees and migrants central to who Canada is in the next federal election

- People who shame and blame refugees and immigrants are stoking fear and division. It divides Canadians instead of uniting us. Let’s avoid the divisive rhetoric we see in other countries
- If any one of us feared for our life or for our family we’d like to know that others would help us to safety
- Canadians have a right to demand action to address gaps in our housing, health care system—we don’t have to choose between action for those rights and actions to provide a safe future for people fleeing danger and persecution

It's time for a fair and effective system for Asylum with Dignity for people who come to Canada seeking safety in our borders

- Canada knows how to welcome and assess the cases of those seeking asylum effectively and fairly
- Our organizations work every day with refugees and migrants, and we know the solutions that work—and at a fraction of the cost of what government is spending. If we scale up known community solutions, we can save money and save lives
- The federal government has pledged important new resources and action to move us towards a system that can ensure Asylum with Dignity (with investments in housing, legal aid, and ways to improve the asylum process). Let's ensure efforts are directed at the right solutions that can help achieve an end to homelessness and the well managed asylum system that Canadians want

In each meeting members called on parliamentarians to stay #CommittedtoCompassion. Parliamentarians were asked to take action; to speak up in their communities and in their party to remind elected leaders that how they talk to Canadians and what gets offered in the election platforms matters for the lives of refugees and migrants and the well being of all in Canada.

CCR was thrilled to have received such an amazing response and participation from members for CCR on the Hill and hopes that it becomes a regular part of CCR programming.

The local and global rights of refugees and migrants are at stake and the challenges they face are daunting. It is through the help of committed individuals and organizations who are working tirelessly to change their communities and urging their leaders to ensure refugees and migrants find safety, compassion, and the support to thrive and contribute to our collective future that we remain hopeful.