CCR

Canadian Council
for Refugees

Conseil canadien
pour les réfugiés

- Winnipeg
November 18-20

Better Neighbours: Building
the Communities we Need
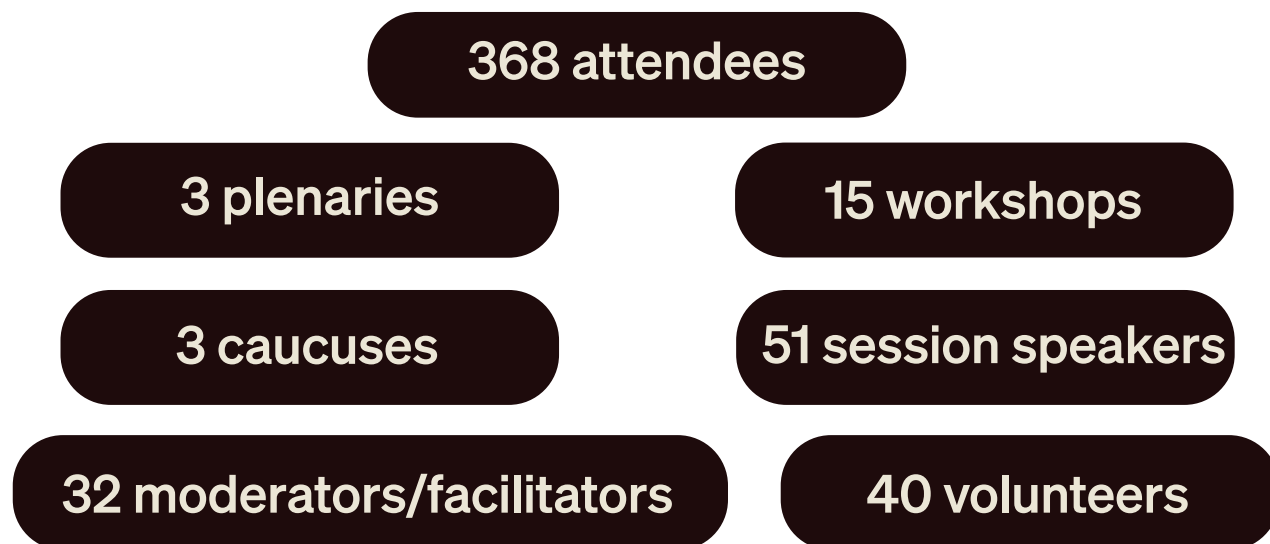
2025 Consultation Report

Introduction

The 2025 Consultation took place in Winnipeg, from November 18-20, on the theme **Better Neighbours: Building the Communities we Need.** Unwavering in our commitment to a pro-mobility, pro-equity and anti-racist case for immigration, this Consultation provided an opportunity to regroup and rethink how we move forward as a sector. The immigration and refugee sector is facing drastic cuts, both in the number of people Canada welcomes and in funding for our organizations, and there is an increasingly prevalent political sentiment that our immigration system is 'broken', In this context, members and partners gathered in Winnipeg to explore how we can deepen relationships in and across our communities, including with Indigenous peoples, to show up for one another in tangible ways and build the communities we need.

Participants included newcomers, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) representatives, students, community members, migrant workers, government representatives and human rights defenders from all over Canada.

The Consultation in Numbers!

368 attendees

3 plenaries

15 workshops

3 caucuses

51 session speakers

32 moderators/facilitators

40 volunteers

Highlights

2025 Opening Plenary: "We're Better Together: Growing Public Support for Immigrants and Refugees"

Panelists spoke from different vantage points in the country about the need for our organizations to shift how we are responding in the face of rising far-right sentiment and rhetoric. The discussion highlighted the need for long term commitment to neutralize divisive rhetoric and grow public support for immigrants and refugees such as through CCR's We're Better Together campaign. Key messages included:

- Intersectional solidarity is the key to mobilizing our communities – different voices bring different perspectives and allow us to reach more people.
- We need to organize around the stories of people with lived experience and allow them to be at the forefront of telling them. These stories will help us reach supporters and ultimately through them other audiences that can be persuaded to feel and realize we are better together.

Middle Plenary: Keynote Presentation from the Honourable. Malaya Marcelino, Minister of Labour and Immigration in Manitoba

Minister Marcelino spoke about "One Manitoba" and the province's efforts to enable First Peoples, refugees, and settlers to work together to build a better future for all. Her key messages included:

- Good immigration policy means bring the whole family. Governments need to move beyond just bringing individuals, because people thrive and contribute with their families around them.
- Organizing and changing public attitudes isn't an easy task, but you have to go and meet people in different spaces, reaching people wherever you can and also letting them know that newcomers have rights.

Closing Plenary and Annual General Meeting

- Outgoing CCR President Diana Gallego offered remarks reflecting on her time at the CCR and the important achievements of the organization, such as the launch of the We're Better Together campaign and achieving Permanent Residence status for 115,000 Protected Persons. She also spoke of the work CCR must continue to do to protect the rights of refugees, migrants, and all newcomers.

- Asma Faizi (Afghan Women's Organization) was elected as CCR's new President and Basel Abou Hamrah (Edmonton Newcomer Centre) as our new Vice President.

Resolutions

Following discussions held during the Immigration and Settlement (I&S) Working Group Meeting, a resolution was submitted and adopted by the membership during the Annual General meeting. This resolution reaffirms CCR's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous communities.

To read the full text of the resolution, please click here.

Workshop Insights

15 workshops were held, organized by the three CCR Working Groups, including two joint workshops, as well as by the Executive and the Youth Network. Issues were explored from different perspectives, with lessons and possible recommendations for action or advocacy identified in each session. Here are some highlights from a sampling of these workshops:

How to Support People who Lose Status

This workshop sought to deepen participants' understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by individuals who lose their status in Canada.

- Panelists emphasized the need for organizations to keep learning and staying informed about rapidly evolving changes in policies that affect people without status in Canada.
- The term "illegal" should never be used to define a human being. It implies criminality when people are only trying to escape persecution, human rights abuses and poverty.
- Losing status is a profoundly damaging thing and difficult for many to avoid, especially as policies change all the time. We help people come, but we don't necessarily help them stay. This needs to change.

Building Common Ground: Newcomers, Refugees, Settlers, and Indigenous Communities in Dialogue

Participants were encouraged to consider the intersections between Indigenous experiences of racism and colonialism alongside the experiences of newcomers settling in Canada, exploring how those commonalities can bring us together.

- Organizations tend to express strong interest to engage in Indigenous partnership and reconciliation work but with varying levels of readiness to actually do so.
- Pre-workshop survey results suggest that targeted support - such as mentorship on funding, training programs, and shared learning spaces - could significantly strengthen capacity across the CCR network.

Setting Up 'Sanctuary for Scholars' Programs across Canada

This workshop focused on the creation and implementation of Sanctuary Scholars programs, such as those at Toronto Metropolitan University and York University, that provide access to education to individuals with precarious immigration status.

- Programs like this depend on collaboration between various administrative services inside the university to ensure the admission criteria is inclusive and accessible, which can also take time.
- Centering the lived experience of displaced students and scholars is important and should be supported through the creation of targeted education spaces and student associations to raise awareness.
- Even as the post-secondary system is struggling in Canada, there is a growing awareness regarding how universities need to be made more accessible to refugees and migrants.

Nafeer: Root Causes of Displacement in Sudan

With the ongoing conflict and crisis happening in Sudan, this workshop provided an overview of the main causes of displacement, the challenges to creating peace in the region, and options for solidarity and support for Sudanese communities in Canada.

- There is an urgent need for humanitarian support for the Sudanese, and it must be done in collaboration with local organizations.
- Panelists urged for the Canadian government to impose an arms embargo and introduce targeted trade restrictions on the United Arab Emirates until it ceases supplying weapons to the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan.

No Refuge from Racism: Exposing Anti-Palestinian Racism in Canada's Communities, Policies and Refugee System

Speakers in this workshop examined how anti-Palestinian racism manifests in Canada's refugee system, institutions, and the communities meant to welcome newcomers.

- Anti-Palestinian racism is prevalent in different spaces including the refugee and immigration sector, which should be a site of protection, not replication or harm.
- Panelists spoke about how a consistent theme within Canadian immigration policy towards Palestinians is one of dehumanization, where Palestinians are denied basic human empathy and seen as terrorists unless proven otherwise.
- Canada's response to the genocide in Palestine stands in stark contrast with its response to the war in Ukraine, highlighting the deliberate erasure and exclusion of Palestinians.

Breaking Down Silos: Enhancing Collaboration Across Sectors

This workshop considered how coalitions have come together around the challenges they faced, and how they overcame them, particularly in the refugee and settlement sector.

- The two examples of collaboration examined during the workshop were those between homeless shelters and settlement agencies in Winnipeg working together to respond to refugee claimants; and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), NGOs, employers and others getting the Economic Mobility Pilot Program (EMPP) off the ground.
- Some of the key takeaways from these examples are: the importance of avoid territorialism; remaining flexible; and that good data collection can support advocacy efforts.

Technology and Surveillance in Migration: Risks and Opportunities

Panelists in this workshop discussed the usage of digital technology in migration, exploring both the risks and opportunities that technology poses to migrants and service providers.

- Presenters highlighted how the discourse surrounding the rising numbers of migrants and refugees and increasing length of processing times could justify the transition into uncertain technologies and algorithms.
- The development of these artificial intelligence tools without transparency or consultation with experts can create significant new risks for migrants and refugees.

Post-Refusal Pathways: Exploring Post-Claim Recourses and Humanitarian Pathways to Permanent Residency

The workshop explored the legal and procedural options available to individuals whose refugee claims have been denied, including Pre-Removal Risk Assessments (PRRA), appeals, and requests for deferrals or stays of removal.

- The appeals process following an asylum application rejection is incredibly complex. There is no direct path, information is sometimes inaccessible, and the risk of deportation is high.
- There is a need to better equip the professionals who support individuals whose claims have been denied, so that they can meet deadlines and always stay one step ahead of subsequent stages.

Challenging the Safe Third Country Agreement: Rethinking Advocacy and Mobilization

This workshop provided an update on the ongoing legal challenges to the STCA, while examining the on-the-ground impacts of its current enforcement and exceptions at the border.

- A speaker from the climate movement explained how the refugee rights movement can use lessons learned from the environmental justice movement to continue to work towards eliminating the STCA.
- Ideas were proposed on how to continue to advocate against the STCA, including highlighting stories of people impacted by the legislation, creating links with people and communities living near the border, forming wider coalitions (such as with First Nations communities and American groups), and working toward achieving narrower objectives.

Resisting Erasure: LGBTQIA+ Rights, Border Bills, and the Fight for Free Movement

Through a specific lens of the experience of LGBTQIA+ migrant and refugee populations, this workshop critically examined Bill C-2 and the broader rhetoric of border security and militarization in Canada and globally.

- A speaker spoke about the need to foster a discipline of fierce hope, as Bill C-2 and Bill C-12 are not minor adjustments.
- Another speaker explained that immigrant and refugee women face higher GBV risk than Canadian-born women, due to intersecting vulnerabilities: immigration status, racism, sexism, and economic precarity.
- It was proposed that the LGBTQIA+ community at the centre of advocacy efforts as they are the most affected by Bill C-12.

Ripple Effects: How U.S. Political Changes Influence Canada's Asylum and Resettlement Landscape

The workshop focused on the ways the rapid changes in US migration policies and programs under the Trump Administration have impacted the global refugee system as well as the resettlement and settlement work of organizations in Canada.

- Panelists highlighted how hard it is to keep up with rapid changes in US policies, which affects how quickly organizations are able to respond and adapt their work.
- With the US scaling back, many are hoping that Canada and other countries will expand their own resettlement efforts. Canada is seen as a "humanitarian leader", with opportunities to expand community sponsorship and complementary pathways.

- However, Canada's current passive response to the US policies is concerning, making it more imperative for civil society to continue to challenge the STCA and call for stronger safeguards for migrants and refugees crossing the border.

Beyond the Bill: Youth Allyship Against Anti-Migrant Laws

Panelists in this workshop spoke about what Bill C-12 (formerly, Bill C-2) and the new approach of the government to border enforcement will mean for young migrants and how we can respond through advocacy and allyship.

- Young migrants and refugees will be directly impacted by Bill C-12 and have the power to stand up against the bill, However, to do so, more platforms, guidance, and advocacy opportunities need to be available and accessible.
- Everyone holds an individual responsibility to advocate against Bill C-12 in their circles and speak up for the people around them who may be impacted by the changing immigration landscape.

Other workshops included:

- Beyond the Broken System: Reimagining Protection Pathways in Canada
- Building Federal – Provincial Cooperation to ensure Asylum with Dignity for Refugee Claimants
- "We're Better Together" Training: How to Use the Messaging and Campaign
- Collective Repair: Exercise for Sustainable Hope

Outcomes

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

Overseas Protection and Resettlement

Action items for the CCR:
- Maintain a focus on Sudan as a key part of advocacy for equitable processes for refugees in Africa.
- Support advocacy to end Canadian complicity in arms exports affecting the war in Sudan.
- Consider ways to engage members in a cross-country week/or day of action to promote public support for greater resettlement of refugees (could be part of the "We're Better Together" campaign).

Action items for members:
- Consider how to advocate for the use of complementary pathways, and for the creation of additional pathways. Connect with UNHCR, Talent Beyond Boundaries and WUSC to learn more and collaborate on innovative complementary pathways programs.
- Participate and engage local network in the week or day of action CCR may organize to promote public support for greater resettlement of refugees.
- Promote the Africa report, by approaching MPs, engaging with African community organizations, faith groups & SAHs and broadcasting messages through social media.

Youth Network

Action item:
- Consider action between CCR staff and the Youth Network to ensure there are messaging strategies specific to young people and students developed to address anti-immigrant sentiment.

Inland Protection

Action items for the CCR:
- Participate in government discussions about the use of artificial intelligence in migration.
- Support the Youth Network in creating a toolkit for youth advocacy on Bill C-12.
- Organize creative sessions to help facilitate brainstorming on systems change in the sector.

Action items for members:
- Organize a webinar on technology and migration.
- Encourage youth to be more active against Bill C-12 and within the CCR Youth Network.
- Collect data of deported individuals who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Immigration and Settlement

Action items for the CCR:
- Engage with the National Newcomer Collective for Truth and Reconciliation (NNCTR) to develop plans for how to ensure CCR's commitment to reconciliation is reflected in membership engagement and events.
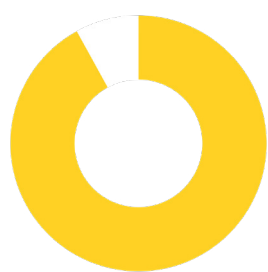
Action items for members:
- Engage in learning and reflection about Indigenous histories, rights and current realities, including through training, partnerships, advocacy and community dialogues.
- Additionally, the working groups discussed possible a future action item related to identifying barriers to primary and secondary education faced by children and parents with precarious or no immigration status across the country that could inform future advocacy with provincial members.

Evaluation results

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

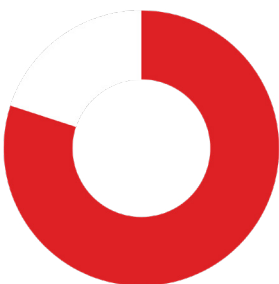98% said the Consultation was well-organized

92% said the diversity of our sector was well represented at the level of speakers and moderators

93% said they would attend future CCR Consultations
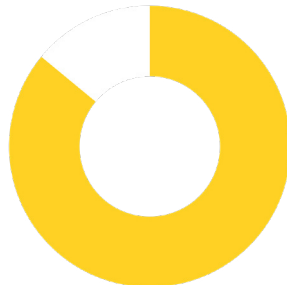
88% said the Consultation met their expectations

80% said their accessibility needs were met

84% said the Consultation was sufficiently bilingual

91% said that they felt like their contributions were encouraged and valued

86% said the overall program was strong, including quality of sessions and mix of plenaries, caucuses, and workshops

Participants shared their thoughts!

"Every session I attended was useful and informative!"

"Indigenous community, newcomers, refugees in dialogue - really appreciated hearing the Indigenous speakers and would like to hear more from Indigenous communities (their perspectives on refugees, etc), and also how to approach Indigenous communities in the right way."

"Great job! Always such a pleasure to be with others working in the sector and it is clear that you have worked so hard to make a great experience and opportunity for learning and exchange!"

"All of the activities and sessions around building solidarity between newcomer and Indigenous communities were very interesting and useful. Winnipeg seems to have so many inspiring initiatives in this regard and it's heartening to see many newcomer organizations working alongside Indigenous elders and communities."

"The session on Sudan was very enlightening. We were provided with a broad range of Sudanese voices and experiences, as well as direct and measurable examples of discrepancies in attention that IRCC and the Federal Government provided Sudan when compared with other countries who experienced humanitarian crises, such as Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan. I feel that meaningful and reasonable action items were drawn from this session."

The volunteers did such an amazing job - it felt really well organized!

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the financial support from our sponsors and grantors:

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:

- Healthy Muslim Families (HMF)
- Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM)
- Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO)
- Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network
- New Journey Housing
- Newcomers Employment & Education Development Services (N.E.E.D.S)
- Regional Connections Immigrant Services
- Resilia Community Wellness Centre
- Somali Help-Age Association