



February 18, 2026

The Honourable Lena Metlege Diab, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

**Re: Follow-up on the Situation of International Students and Access to Education for Protected Persons**

Dear Minister Diab,

Following our [letter of December 13, 2024](#) to then-Minister Marc Miller and conversations held with our members, we are writing to raise the Canadian Council for Refugee's (CCR) continued serious concerns about the impact of ongoing immigration policy changes on international students in Canada and submit recommendations for a better approach.

We [share the goal](#) of ensuring a sustainable and more balanced immigration system – one that aligns with infrastructure and social capacity, as well as core Canadian values of fairness, compassion and inclusion. We are deeply concerned that the current approach undermines this goal and continues to unfairly disadvantage international students who were here prior to the recent reforms and who have built their lives and futures in Canada in good faith.

International students are vital members of our communities who make significant contributions to Canada's social, academic, and economic fabric. They generate substantial economic benefits through tuition and living expenditures, support employment in local communities, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of post-secondary institutions. Their presence enhances the global reputation and ranking of Canadian universities, promotes international collaboration in research, and strengthens Canada's diplomatic and cultural connections worldwide.

**Continuing Impacts on Current and Future Students**

In the months since our December 2024 correspondence, many international students have continued to report profound uncertainty about their legal status and future prospects. The cumulative effect of federal and provincial policy changes – including modifications to Post-Graduation Work-Permit eligibility (PGWP), restrictions to the list of



PGWP- eligible fields of study, new intake caps, and the suspension of key provincial immigration pathways has left thousands of students in limbo. As a result, some are unable to extend their stay in Canada, creating a loss of skilled talent for the Canadian workforce and undermining the significant investment that universities, employers, and Canada itself have made in training these students over several years. Others face heightened vulnerability to exploitation through informal or unsafe employment.

As we emphasized previously, it is unjust to change the rules mid-course for people who made life-altering decisions under a different framework, especially after Canada and its institutions actively encouraged them to study here with the promise of fair opportunities to transition to work and permanent residence.

CCR members also report that the current environment of uncertainty has increased the vulnerability of international students to misinformation and predatory or fraudulent immigration advice, both in Canada and abroad. Students facing status insecurity may turn to third parties for assistance, sometimes with serious consequences. Strengthening accurate information pathways and protections against exploitation - and ensuring that individuals who act in good faith are not penalized for misinformation, regardless of its source - is therefore an essential component of any fair and sustainable policy response.

Beyond the immediate consequences for those currently enrolled, these policy shifts are also sending a troubling signal to prospective international students around the world. Canada has long been viewed as a stable, fair, and predictable destination for study and long-term opportunity. However, frequent and retroactive changes to immigration pathways risk eroding that reputation, making it more difficult for Canada to remain competitive in attracting top global talent.

### **Need for Clarity and Compassion**

We note with concern that, in much of the public and government discourse on the need for temporary resident caps and immigration levels reductions, international students are increasingly portrayed as a burden on housing or services. This framing obscures the true drivers of the [housing crisis](#) affecting many in Canada and also undermines public understanding of the very real contributions of international students to Canadian communities. These include supporting local economies through tuition and living expenses, enriching campus and community life, advancing research and innovation, and strengthening Canada's global connections and reputation. This negative narrative feeds



racism and misconceptions that international students do not add value to our society, which in turn undermines public support for fair and inclusive immigration practices.

We have noted with alarm public remarks calling into question the legitimacy of refugee claims made by international students—many of whom have substantial reasons for seeking protection. This narrative is particularly associated with the government's case for Bill C-12.

### **New threats for international students: Bill C-12**

As you are aware we are deeply concerned about the negative impacts of Bill C-12 on our refugee and immigration system. This includes key concerns with respect to international students. This bill would grant Canadian government the power to cancel, suspend, modify and impose conditions on study permits if it were deemed to be in the 'public interest' to do so. The bill would also allow authorities to suspend or terminate the processing of student applications or study permits without due consideration for international students' futures and well-being and their positive contributions to Canadian society.

CCR is concerned that the 'public interest' provisions could be used to target students from specific countries or regions in an unjust and discriminatory way, feeding misinformation and hate against specific groups.

The new ineligibilities restricting applications to within a year of a person's first arrival in Canada after June 24, 2020 seem specifically aimed at students, Bill C-12 fails to acknowledge that circumstances can change. An individual may come to study but may later require refugee protection due to a change in their own circumstances, such as for LGBTQIA+ individuals, or due to a change of government or significant political unrest in their country of origin.

We reiterate: all individuals have a right to seek asylum. Government commentary must not prejudice access to fair and independent refugee determination. At the same time, if lawyers or consultants are providing incorrect advice or knowingly facilitating fraudulent claims, those individuals should be held accountable for their actions; such misconduct should not be used to discredit or penalize the students themselves, who may be acting in good faith.



## Access to Education for Protected Persons

Finally, CCR members across the country are reporting troubling barriers to post-secondary education faced by protected persons. Despite their recognized status in Canada, some universities and colleges continue to classify protected persons as “international students” and require them to pay international tuition fees.

This situation creates a serious inequity: protected persons—individuals who have already been granted Canada’s protection—should have the same access to education as other residents. Institutional misunderstandings about their status are closing doors to higher education and therefore limiting the educational and professional advancement of individuals who are likely to live in Canada for years or decades to come.

This issue stems largely from a lack of awareness among post-secondary institutions about the rights and entitlements of protected persons under Canadian law and policy. The result is both financially and psychologically devastating for these individuals, who are attempting to rebuild their lives in safety and stability.

We urge IRCC, in collaboration with provinces and post-secondary institutions, to issue clear federal guidance confirming that protected persons are not to be charged international tuition fees; work closely with provincial ministries of education and immigration to ensure institutions are informed and compliant; and facilitate communication materials and training for admissions offices to prevent discriminatory or erroneous practices.

Ensuring access to affordable education for protected persons aligns squarely with Canada’s human rights and humanitarian commitments and its long-standing efforts to promote integration, inclusion, and economic participation.

## Recommendations

CCR urges the Government of Canada to:

1. **Create** fair, transparent and expanded pathways to post-graduate work permits and permanent resident status, as well as access to relevant permits for their dependent family members during and post their study period. Any changes in eligibility for the PGWP should apply to future international students and not to current international students.



2. **Provide interim measures** - including temporary visa extensions and open work permits - to prevent international students affected by the policy changes in 2024 and 2025 from falling out of status while long-term solutions, including pathways to permanent residency, are developed.
3. **Ensure transparent communication** regarding study-permit and work-permit policies, including clear guidance for post-secondary institutions and provinces to avoid contradictory messaging.
4. **Withdraw or significantly amend Bill C-12**, to ensure it meets Canada's human rights obligations under the Charter and international law, per [CCR recommendations](#) to the Senate. This includes deletion of the provisions in Section 7 that grant mass cancellation, modification and suspension powers for immigration documents and applications, and removing the new ineligibilities that will deny many people, including international students, their right to asylum.
5. **Uphold the Right to Asylum for all**, including those with current or previous international student status, ensuring full access to due process under the refugee determination system per the 1985 Supreme Court *Singh* decision.
6. **Foster a welcoming and positive environment** for international students in Canada through government communications with public messaging that conveys the respect and appreciation that these students deserve. **Refrain from scapegoating or messaging that stigmatizes** and play a leadership role in discouraging this type of messaging from others.
7. **Work closely with provincial and territorial governments to coordinate outreach to post-secondary institutions** regarding the rights of protected persons to be treated as domestic students. This includes access to domestic tuition and provincial student assistance programs, as well as fair educational and work integrated learning opportunities for protected persons.
8. **Work collaboratively** with student groups, civil society, and provinces to address systemic vulnerabilities—including exploitative recruitment practices as well as strengthen protections for international students concerning misinformation and the risk of fraudulent immigration advice.



9. **Incentivize provincial/territorial governments** to address gaps in affordable housing for international students as part of a wider national strategy to ensure the right to housing for all.

### Moving Forward

The CCR would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and your senior officials to discuss constructive approaches that balance system integrity with fairness and compassion. We believe Canada can—and must—maintain its global reputation as a welcoming destination for students and newcomers.

We look forward to your response and to continuing dialogue on how IRCC can uphold Canada's human rights obligations, commitments to diversity, higher education, and the values of inclusion and compassion in its policies affecting international students and protected persons.

Sincerely,

Asma Faizi  
President