



Refugee and immigration issues: Restoring Canada's humanitarian tradition

The new federal government has made some important commitments to open the door to refugees and to give higher priority to family reunification. Many changes are needed to re-orient immigration policies in favour of valuing families, protecting refugees and respecting the rights and contributions of all newcomers.

Express Entry Family Reunification



Canada's immigration processing for family reunification cases is extraordinarily slow. Many children wait **over two years** before being able to reunite with their parent in Canada. For refugee families, the wait is **35 months**.

Recommendation: Introduce Express Entry family reunification so that children are reunited with their parents in 6 months or less.

Private sponsorship of refugees



Canada has a proud history of resettling refugees through private sponsorship. But the Program has been facing dramatic changes and challenges in recent years. In response to the Syrian refugee crisis, hundreds of groups are now springing up across Canada eager to sponsor refugees. There is enormous potential here to renew the program; however, to take advantage of this new momentum, important changes must be made to the program.

Recommendation: Introduce solutions to the restrictions, bureaucracy and delays that have been undermining the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.

Migrant workers



Canada has been shifting away from permanent immigration towards temporary migration and precarious status. There has been a large increase in the number of migrant workers brought in to fill low-wage, "low-skill" jobs and then forced to leave after four years, rather than being allowed to settle with their families and contribute to the country's social fabric, as so many of our ancestors did. These workers lack access to services and protections, and are vulnerable to abuse.

Recommendation: Open migrant workers' work permits and allow them to access federally funded settlement services.



We need Express Entry family reunification

Our Vision: speedy family reunification, where children are reunited with their parents in 6 months or less

Canada's immigration processing for family reunification cases is extraordinarily slow. Many children wait **over two years** before being able to reunite with their parent in Canada. For refugee families, the wait is **35 months**.



Canada can and must do better.

The federal government has introduced an Express Entry program for economic immigrants. For immigrants with a valid job offer, the government promises to process applications within 6 months.

Shouldn't children be reunited with their parents at least as quickly as economic immigrants are processed?



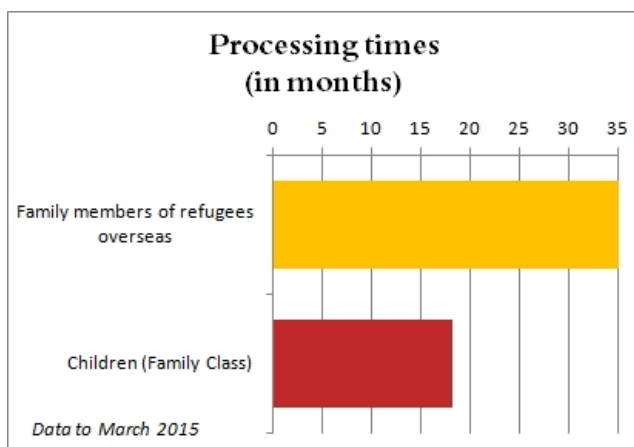
Catherine is desperately trying to be reunited with her two young daughters (3 and 5 years).

Catherine had to flee her country of origin because of her work as a women's rights activist. She has been recognized as a refugee in Canada but she must wait for immigration processing before she can be reunited with her two daughters left behind in Africa.

Current processing times for the region are **3 and a half years (41 months)**!

Recommendation

Introduce Express Entry family reunification so that children are reunited with their parents in 6 months or less.





Renewing Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

Unique in the world, Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program has allowed Canadians to offer protection and a new home to more than 275,000 refugees since its beginning in 1979. Despite its historical success, the Program has faced dramatic challenges in recent years.

In response to the Syrian refugee crisis, hundreds of groups are now springing up across Canada eager to sponsor refugees. There is enormous potential here to renew the program; however, to take advantage of this new momentum, important changes must be made to the program. Thanks to special measures, it is relatively quick and easy to sponsor Syrian refugees, but huge barriers remain for other refugees.

Private sponsorship: the basics

- Privately sponsored refugees are resettled refugees. In other words, they are approved overseas and arrive in Canada as permanent residents. (In addition to resettling refugees, Canada protects refugees who come to Canada and make a successful refugee claim here.)
- Private sponsors are groups of Canadians or organizations. Many sponsors represent faith-based communities. Others are ethno-cultural groups and settlement organizations.
- Private sponsors provide financial support for the refugees they sponsor and help them settle, usually for one year after arrival.

Fundamental principles of private sponsorship

The strength of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program depends on its core principles:

- **ADDITIONALITY:** Privately sponsored refugees are **over and above** the refugees resettled by the government (Government Assisted Refugees). Canadians want to know that their government is fulfilling its responsibility, on behalf of all Canadians, to protect refugees through resettlement, and that any refugees they sponsor are **additional** to those resettled by the government.
- **NAMING:** Sponsors can propose the individual refugees they wish to resettle. Naming allows Canadians to respond to the needs of individual refugees or particular refugee communities that concern them.

Recent changes making it difficult to sponsor non-Syrian refugees include:

- Very slow processing, especially in some regions of the world such as Africa.
- Restrictive rules limiting which refugees can be sponsored, from where and how many.
- Burdensome paperwork: forms are extremely complicated and sponsors no longer have access to government officials locally to guide them.

Renewing the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

In order to maintain a strong private sponsorship program beyond the current focus on Syrian refugee resettlement, we need solutions to the restrictions, bureaucracy and delays that have been undermining the program.



Migrant Workers: Canada should value the contributions of all newcomers

Over the past decade, Canada's immigration program has shifted significantly from permanent to temporary migration. Because of their lack of permanent status and their isolation, low-wage temporary migrant workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, of which there have been many documented cases, some of the most egregious of these amounting to human trafficking. Complaint mechanisms are not easily available to them because of language barriers and physical isolation, and even when they know their rights they are afraid to complain for fear of being dismissed by their employer and forced to return home. Many arrive in Canada in great debt to recruiters who charge exorbitant fees for matching workers with employers, making them completely dependent on their employer. They do not have access to federally-funded settlement services, increasing their isolation and lack of support.



Migrant workers in the low-skilled streams, who have little to no chance of immigrating permanently, are also denied the right to come with family members, and thus go through painful separation from children and family for years at a time.



This shift represents a radical change for Canada: previously, we were a country that welcomed newcomers on a permanent basis, with most becoming citizens. Immigrants have traditionally been perceived as contributors to building the nation and our communities, not simply as contributors of low-wage labour.

With current immigration practices, many of our ancestors would not have been allowed to immigrate to Canada permanently, and would have only been allowed to come as temporary workers, forced to then return to their home countries.

Instead of bringing in a revolving door of underprivileged workers to fill low-wage jobs, shouldn't Canada expand its economic immigration program to reflect the needs of the Canadian labour market by including workers of *all* skill levels?

