



Rebuilding a warm Canadian response to refugees from around the world

The Canadian Council for Refugees welcomes the outpouring of warmth and hospitality towards Syrian refugees demonstrated by countless Canadians, including by offers of private sponsorship.

At the same time the new federal government has made refugees a priority, as shown by their undertakings to resettle Syrian refugees and the inclusion of refugees in the title of the Minister and his department (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship). Provincial and municipal governments have also shown leadership in their welcome of refugees.

The strong responses of all levels of government, of the **labour, business, community sectors** as well as of civil society offer Canada an unprecedented opportunity to reclaim the best parts of our traditions in opening the doors to refugees.

As we prepare to celebrate in 2016 the 30th anniversary of the award of the **Nansen Medal to the “People of Canada”** for contributions to the cause of refugees, the CCR highlights some of the key challenges to be met to ensure that our response is effective:

- **Expanding concern to respond to refugees from all regions**

As we welcome Syrian refugees to Canada, it is important that we remember refugees from elsewhere. **According to the UNHCR**, a third of the more than a million refugees in need of resettlement are in Africa.

- **Respecting the principle of additionality**

Traditionally, privately sponsored refugees are **over and above** the refugees resettled by the government. It is important that the government fulfils its responsibility, on behalf of all Canadians, to protect refugees through resettlement, and that refugees sponsored by the private sponsors are **additional** to those resettled by the government. This principle has been compromised in recent years: it is therefore important that the new government has made a specific commitment to resettle 25,000 refugees from Syria, and to support private sponsors in taking in **even more**.

- **Processing times need to be much shorter**

Current processing times for resettled refugees are unacceptably long. For privately sponsored refugees the **global average is 55 months**. The recent effort with Syrian refugees shows that Canada can process refugees much more quickly. We look forward to refugees in other regions being processed in a matter of months, not years.

- **Overcoming barriers to private sponsorship**

In recent years, the private sponsorship program has been **undermined by a number of obstacles** in addition to the long processing times. These include the allocation system and the documentation requirement for Group of Five sponsorships. These obstacles continue to thwart efforts to sponsor refugees other than Syrians, and need to be addressed so that Canadians can effectively respond to refugees throughout the world.

○ **Reuniting families**

Responding to refugees with family in Canada must be a priority. We continue to be concerned about the lack of a specific response to Syrians with family in Canada. We reiterate our recommendation that flexible measures (such as Temporary Resident Permits) be introduced for Syrians with family in Canada (including those still in Syria, who cannot be sponsored as refugees). Groups interested in private sponsorship can also help by reaching out to Syrian Canadians in their community in order to identify any family members in need of private sponsorship.

○ **Equitable treatment and effective settlement**

We welcome the federal government's decision to exempt some of the Syrian refugees from the burden of the **transportation loans** and to provide them access to full coverage under the Interim Federal Health Program. The transportation loan has a devastating impact on resettled refugees, undermining their settlement process in Canada, while **lack of access to full health care coverage** leaves refugees struggling to cover some health-related costs and deters private sponsors. We hope that the decisions made for Syrian refugees will be extended to all refugees, in order to treat all refugees equitably as well as to give refugees the best chance of settling well in their new homes.

