



Refugees Welcome Here: Three key issues

Canada has opened its doors to over 25,000 Syrian refugees. The new federal government has made some important commitments to welcome refugees and treat them fairly. Many changes are still needed to ensure refugees are protected and fully welcomed.

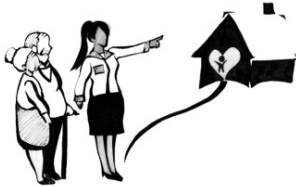
Refugee Family Reunification



Family reunification for refugees is even slower than Canada's Family Class processing. Many children wait **three years** before being able to reunite with their refugee parent in Canada. Some children are separated from both their parents. Many are in countries at war or in precarious situations in a country of asylum.

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

Resettling refugees from other regions



Canadians have offered a warm welcome to thousands of Syrian refugees: we also need to open the doors to refugees from other regions. According to the UNHCR, a third of the world's refugees in need of resettlement are in Africa. We need to apply the lessons from the Syrian experience to make Canada's resettlement program work more effectively for more refugees.

Recommendation: Open the door to refugees from around the world by sustaining the increased resettlement numbers and resolving the restrictions and delays that have been undermining the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.

Protecting refugee claimants



Refugee claimants from Designated Countries of Origin go through a process with such short timelines that they do not have a reasonable opportunity to prove their refugee claims. This is discriminatory treatment that particularly affects Roma, women fleeing gender-based persecution and LGBT refugees.

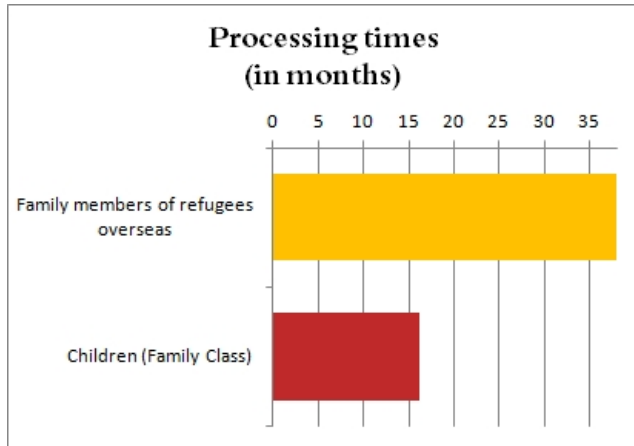
Recommendation: Eliminate the Designated Countries of Origin regime in the refugee determination system.



Reuniting refugee families

Long processing times

Family Class processing times are unacceptably long, but for refugee families, the wait is even longer: **35 months**.



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.

This family may be waiting over **3 years to be reunited**, based on current processing times.

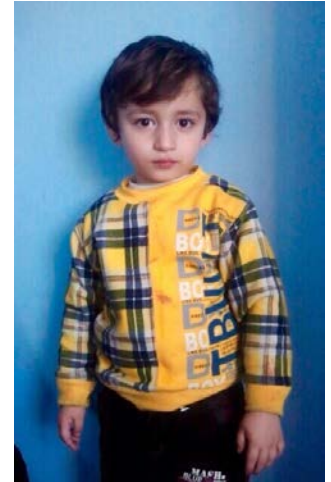
Recommendation

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

Separated, and in a country at war

Even when children are in a country at war, Canada does not expedite processing of family members of refugees.

Arash is just six years old: he has been waiting **over two years** for immigration processing, so that he reunite with his parents who were recognized as refugees in Canada in 2013. Afghanistan is too dangerous a country to deport people there – yet Canada does not act to rescue a small boy separated from his parents.



Excluded family members

Under Regulation 117(9)(d) family members, including children, are excluded and cannot be sponsored if they were not examined by an immigration officer when the sponsor immigrated to Canada. Although this rule was designed to deter fraud, in practice it hurts many families where no fraud was involved and there were compelling reasons the family member was not disclosed. Refugee families are particularly often affected.

Some families are eventually able to reunite through humanitarian and compassionate consideration, but it is a long, difficult and uncertain process.

Recommendation

Repeal the excluded family member rule (Reg. 117(9)(d)). (Cases of suspected fraud can be addressed through misrepresentation provisions).



Resettling more refugees, from other regions

In response to the Syrian refugee crisis, Canada has opened its doors to significantly more refugees than in the past. We need to build on this effort in the coming years, and extend it to refugees from other regions.

Canada can and should commit to resettling each year **20,000 Government-Assisted Refugees**. The government's commitment must be **in addition** to the efforts of Canadians through private sponsorship.

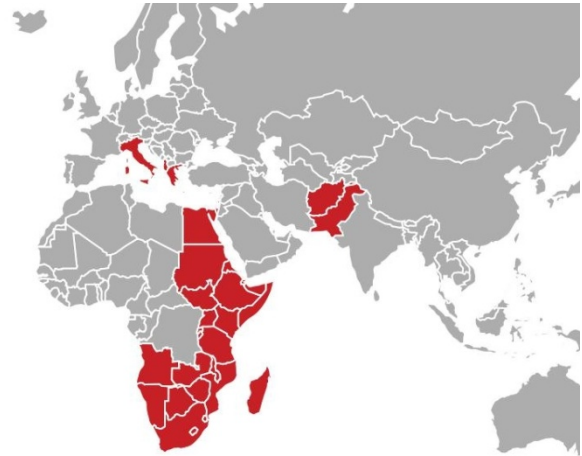
Private sponsorship

Moved by the Syrian 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 are needed. Thanks to special measures, it is relatively quick and easy to sponsor Syrian refugees, but huge barriers remain for other refugees.

These barriers include:

- Very slow processing times (**average 51 months**), especially in some regions of the world such as Africa.

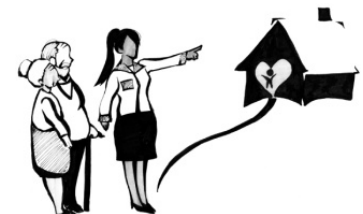
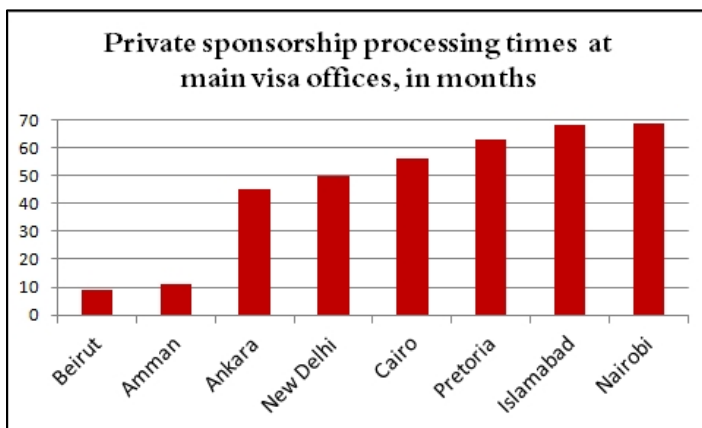
- Restrictive rules limiting which refugees can be sponsored, from where and how many.



This map shows, in red, the countries served by “capped missions”. This means that Sponsorship Agreement Holders can submit few if any applications for refugees in these countries.

Recommendation

Open the door to refugees from around the world by sustaining the increased resettlement numbers and resolving the restrictions and delays that have been undermining the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.





Protecting refugee claimants

In December 2012, Canada's refugee determination system was dramatically changed.

Since then, the number of people who have been able to make refugee claims in Canada has plummeted.

For those who can make claims, the new system does offer protection to many (64% accepted in 2015). But the system is unfair to some.

Not all claimants are treated equally

Refugee claimants from Designated Countries of Origin go through a process with such short timelines that they do not have a reasonable opportunity to prove their refugee claims. This is discriminatory treatment that particularly affects Roma, women fleeing gender-based persecution and LGBT refugees.

In July 2015, the Federal Court ruled that denying refugee claimants from Designated Countries of Origin an appeal is a violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, because it discriminated against them on the basis of national origin. Since then, these claimants do have access to the refugee appeal. But the Court did not address the shorter timelines imposed on nationals of Designated Countries of Origin and they continue to be discriminated against by being subject to shorter timelines.

Despite the short timelines they face, many claimants from Designated Countries of Origin have been accepted as refugees, showing clearly that their countries are NOT safe for many of their citizens. In 2015, the acceptance rates for the following Designated Countries of Origin were:

- Hungary: 71%
- Slovakia: 51%
- Mexico: 44%

It is a basic principle of fairness that the same rules should apply to all.

Recommendation: Eliminate the Designated Countries of Origin regime.

Other ways in which claimants are treated unequally:

- Some claimants are denied access to the refugee appeal (at the Refugee Appeal Division), notably people who arrived via the United States.
- Thousands of people who made their refugee claims before December 2012 are STILL waiting for a hearing, more than three years later. This is because their claims are treated as low priority (**legacy claims**).

