



# Priorities for refugees and vulnerable migrants 2019

The Canadian Council for Refugees is calling on Canada to take the following priority actions:

## **Reunite families**

Canada's processing of family reunification for refugees is unacceptably slow. Spouses and children routinely wait years before they can reunite with their family member in Canada.

Migrant workers, trafficked persons and refugees who are under 18 years have no right to family reunification.

Canada must remove the barriers to speedy family reunification for refugees and vulnerable migrants.

## **Resettle 20,000 Government-Assisted Refugees annually**

There are over a million vulnerable refugees in need of resettlement. Around the world countries are offering to resettle only a fraction of that number.

The need is great. Canada has the capacity. That is why we are calling for the government to commit to 20,000 Government-Assisted Refugees annually.

## **Offer basic services to refugee claimants**

Refugee claimants are among the most vulnerable people in Canada: many have fled horrific persecution, many do not speak English or French, or know anyone in Canada. They need to find somewhere to live and navigate Canadian society and the refugee claim process. Yet they are denied access to many services and the federal government provides no funding for basic settlement services.

The Government of Canada should make refugee claimants eligible for settlement services.



# Canada should reunite families of refugees and vulnerable migrants

## Extremely slow refugee family reunification

Canada's processing of family reunification for refugees is unacceptably slow. Spouses and children routinely wait years before they can reunite with their family member in Canada.

In December 2016, the government announced faster processing for non-refugee family reunification (Family Class spousal sponsorships). But no measures have been announced to expedite **family reunification for refugees:**

- Dependants of refugees (DR2) category (for people who were accepted as refugees in Canada), or
- One Year Window applications (family reunification for people who were resettled to Canada as refugees)



Unlike other immigration categories, the Canadian government does not even publish processing times for refugee family reunification. However, based on published times for processing of permanent residence for accepted refugees (22 months as of March 2019), it is clear that families must wait over two years to reunite with an accepted refugee in Canada. Combined with long delays in the refugee determination process, many refugees must wait **five years or more** before they can reunite with family.

## Legal barriers to family reunification

- Minor refugees: Refugees who are under 18 years have no right to reunification with parents or siblings. This is devastating for minor refugees who are on their own in Canada.
- Migrant workers: Canada brings many people to work in Canada on temporary visas. Those in low-skilled positions are not allowed to bring their families with them.
- Trafficked persons: Survivors of trafficking may be given temporary status in Canada, but there is no avenue to permanent residence in the short-term, and no right to family reunification until they have permanent residence.
- Regulation 117(9)(d), the “excluded family member” rule, denies some families the right to reunification. Some family members, including children, are excluded from the Family Class because they were not examined by an immigration officer when the anchor family member immigrated to Canada.

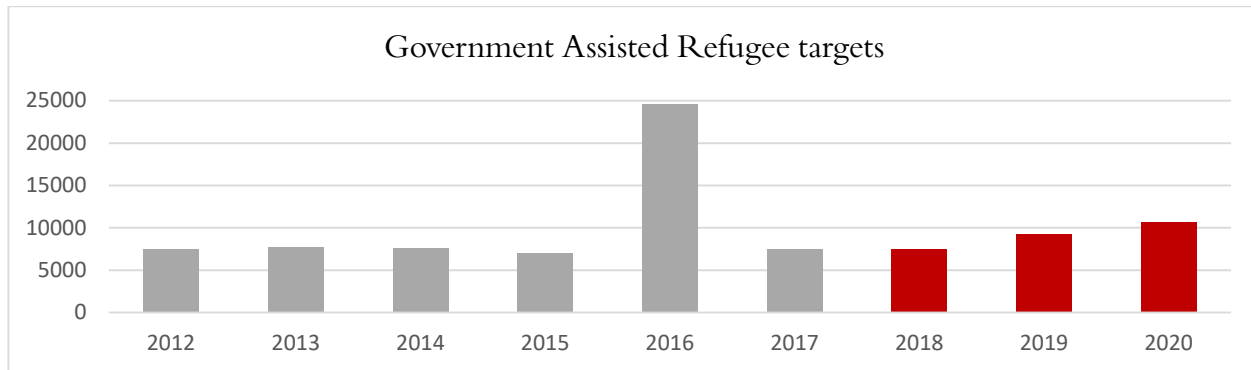
**Canada must remove the barriers to speedy family reunification for refugees and vulnerable migrants.**



# Canada should resettle 20,000 Government-Assisted Refugees annually

According to the UN, close to 1.4 million refugees are in need of resettlement. The UN counts just the most vulnerable – the total number searching for a durable solution is much higher. Globally, countries have only pledged 60,000 resettlement spaces, leaving a huge shortfall in spaces for vulnerable refugees.

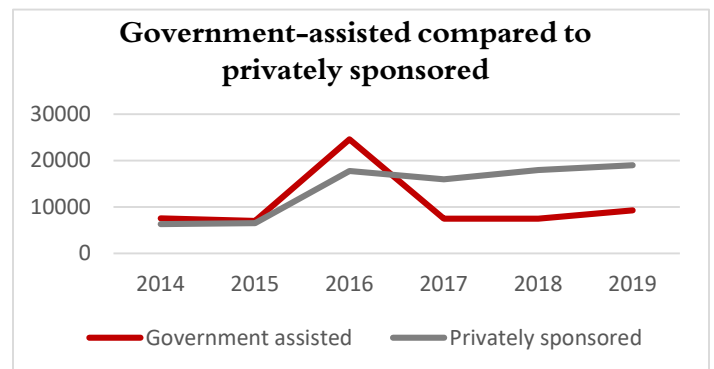
In 2016, the Canadian government committed to resettle 24,600 government-assisted refugees, as part of the Syrian response. Since then, however, the commitment shrank dramatically.



The need is great. Canada has the capacity. That is why we are calling for the government to commit to 20,000 Government-Assisted Refugees annually.

## Five reasons why:

- Refugees are our neighbours, part of our global family. We need to help our neighbours.
- Government-Assisted Refugees are the most vulnerable people, chosen by the UN because of their particular need.
- In our response to the Syrians, we have shown that we have the infrastructure and the capacity to resettle.
- Refugees contribute in many ways to our communities once given the time and access to services to help them re-start their lives and become citizens.
- The government must take the lead on resettling refugees, on behalf of all Canadians. For 2019, the government's plan is to resettle 9,300 Government-Assisted Refugees and to rely on private citizens to resettle 19,000. The government is shifting the responsibility to protect refugees to civil society.





# Canada should offer basic services to refugee claimants

Refugee claimants are among the most vulnerable people in Canada: many have fled horrific persecution, many do not speak English or French, or know anyone in Canada. They need to find somewhere to live and to navigate Canadian society and the complicated refugee claim process.

Despite their obvious need for orientation and support, refugee claimants are not eligible for settlement services funded by the federal government. NGOs that attempt to fill the gap in services for refugee claimants do not receive any funding from the federal government for these basic services.

## **The Government of Canada should make refugee claimants eligible for settlement services.**

One of the first needs facing refugee claimants is to find temporary and then more permanent housing. In the context of shortages in affordable housing in many parts of Canada, claimants struggle to find decent housing.

Experience shows that it is crucial for long-term success to provide support to claimants at the beginning, including offering the right information.

## **All levels of government should work together, in collaboration with NGOs, to ensure that refugee claimants have access to decent and appropriate shelter.**

All levels of government have a part to play in ensuring that refugee claimants' basic needs are met: they need to work together, putting the claimants' interests first.

Everyone loses when the needs of refugees are sacrificed to political battles between levels of government on who should fund necessary services, such as legal aid.

## **All levels of government should work together, in collaboration with NGOs, on a comprehensive plan to meet the basic needs of refugee claimants.**

Providing basic support to refugee claimants from the beginning has long-term benefits for all: claimants navigate the determination process more smoothly and integrate more quickly, leading to Canada benefitting much sooner from their contributions to the Canadian economy and society.

