



Immigration and refugee issues: recovering Canada's humanitarian tradition

Questions for federal candidates

Traditionally Canada's immigration program included a strong humanitarian component, but this has been increasingly neglected. It is time to re-orient 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 **31 months**.

Question: What would you do to facilitate 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. We are moving towards a new model, in which the government decides who is to be resettled and private sponsors provide the financial and human resources.

Question: What would you do to restore the private sponsorship program and to ensure that sponsors can choose which refugees they sponsor and that the numbers they sponsor are additional to the government's resettlement commitment?

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 forced to leave Canada 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.

Question: Would you support expanding the criteria for Canada's economic immigration program so that workers of all skill levels who are needed in the Canadian labour market can settle permanently here?



We need Express Entry family reunification

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

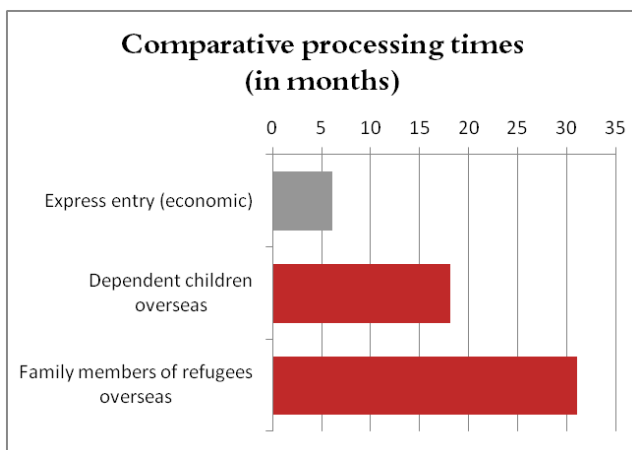
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Canada can and must do better.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has introduced an Express Entry program for economic immigrants. For immigrants with a valid job offer, CIC will process applications within 6 months.

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



*All names are fictitious to protect individuals' safety.

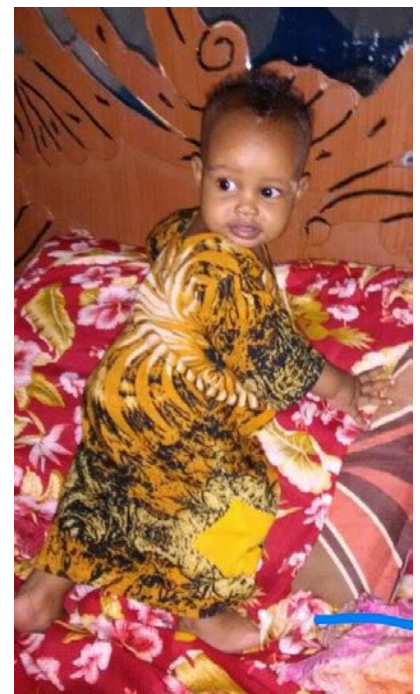
Ahmed* fled Somalia, where he faced persecution from Al-Shabaab, and reached Canada in November 2013. In March 2014 he was accepted as a refugee and was immediately keen to be reunited with his pregnant wife, Hibo, who was a refugee in Nairobi.

Somalis in Kenya were being rounded up by the police at this period: when Ahmed heard that a pregnant Somali woman had been thrown from a balcony to her death, he feared the worst, especially when he could not reach his wife. To his relief, it was not Hibo. She had been detained in the stadium in Nairobi with many other Somali refugees, but was able to get free.

Ahmed and Hibo agreed that she should go to Ethiopia where, in July 2014, she gave birth to a baby girl, without medical assistance, in the house she shares with a relative of Ahmed's.

Hibo and her daughter have no status in Ethiopia, no right to work, and no access to health care. They survive on the money sent by Ahmed.

Based on current processing times for the region, Ahmed's daughter could be **three years old** before he sees her.





Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés Canadian Council for Refugees

Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program Proud history, Uncertain future

Unique in the world, Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program has allowed Canadians to offer protection and a new home to more than 225,000 refugees since its beginning in 1979. Despite its historical success, the Program has been facing dramatic changes and challenges in recent years.

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.)
- Private sponsors are groups of Canadians or organizations. Many sponsors represent faith-based communities. Others include ethno-cultural groups and settlement organizations.
- Private sponsors provide financial support and settlement assistance for the refugees they sponsor, 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 means that Canadians can respond to the needs of individual refugees or particular refugee communities that concern them.

Recent changes and challenges make private sponsorship more difficult. They include:

- New restrictive rules limiting which refugees can be sponsored, from where and how many.
- More burdensome paperwork: forms are extremely complicated and sponsors no longer have access to government officials locally to guide them.
- Very slow processing, especially in some regions of the world.
- Shortcomings in communication and consultation with sponsors by the Canadian government.
- New government expectations that sponsors will resettle refugees identified by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, while the government is itself resettling fewer refugees.

The Future?

We seem to be moving towards a new private sponsorship model, in which the government decides who is to be resettled and private sponsors provide the financial and human resources.

Alternatively, we can recommit to the core principles of additionality and naming (the principles that motivate people to get involved in refugee sponsorship), and seek 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?





Seven Keys to Protecting and Welcoming Refugees and Newcomers: A vision for Canada

Traditionally a leader in welcoming refugees and other newcomers, Canada can and must renew its efforts to protect their rights. This means acting in seven key areas:

Making status in Canada secure

This means:

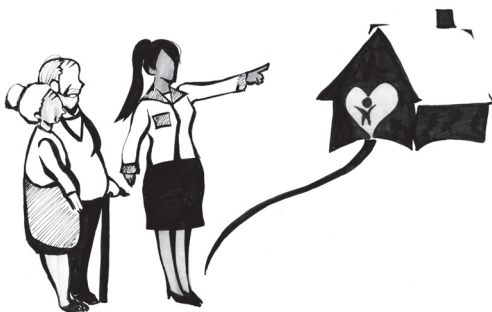
- Making pathways to permanent residence open to all, including:
 - migrant workers
 - persons who have been trafficked
- Permanent residence for sponsored spouses is unconditional
- Access to Canadian citizenship



A broad, inclusive and effective refugee resettlement program

This means:

- The government resettles a significant number of refugees to Canada
 - particularly the most vulnerable
 - from around the globe
 - without discrimination
- The private sponsorship of refugees is quick and simple, and respects the principles of additionality and naming



Access to protection

This means:

- Opportunities for refugees to reach Canada
- A fair refugee determination system, without discrimination
- Effective protection for trafficked persons without permanent status
- Adequate support for refugee claimants and trafficked persons
- Adequate protection in the immigration system for women in situations of violence





Speedy family reunification

This means:

- Express entry family reunification
 - where children are reunited with their parents in 6 months or less
- The definition of family member is broad and inclusive
 - reinstating the previous age of dependants
 - eliminating the ‘excluded family member’ rule
- Government makes family reunification a top priority

Rights and dignity for all

This means:

- Access to essential healthcare
- Access to Canada’s social safety net
- Protection from exploitation for migrant workers
- Immigration detention is reduced to a minimum
 - respect for non-citizens’ fundamental right to liberty



Accountable immigration enforcement

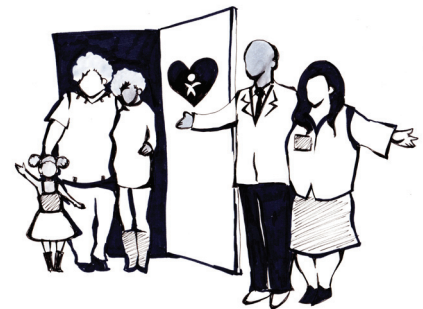
This means:


- An independent and effective complaints and monitoring mechanism oversees Canada’s border agency (CBSA)

Welcoming communities

This means:

- By words and actions, governments and civil society show they are proud to protect refugees
- Governments and civil society honour and celebrate the contributions of newcomers



 For more information: ccrweb.ca/en/refugees-newcomers-vision-Canada

