

Refugee Advocacy Talking Points - Fall 2017

Canada has a long history of “welcoming the stranger,” as evidenced by decades of strong leadership in refugee action. Recently, many countries have looked to Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program as a model for refugee resettlement. Still, issues concerning lengthy wait times and inadequate spaces for resettlement have undermined the efficiency of the system and left many wanting more. Canadians recognize that refugees are an essential part of our communities, culture, and history. Below are a few key areas in which you can advocate for better public policy in refugee resettlement.

Policy Ask #1 - Eliminate the backlog of Private Sponsorship Applications by 2019, and lower processing time to 12 months.

The government has been vocal in its commitment to clear the backlog of private sponsorship applications by 2019, but it’s important they be encouraged to carry this out.

- Many refugees and their sponsors have grown tired or lost enthusiasm while waiting for their applications to be processed.
- At times, months become years with little to no information about when resettlement will occur.
- **It’s essential that the government maintain its commitment to fix issues that have rendered the Private Sponsorship system slow and inefficient.**

Policy Ask #2 – In getting the backlog down, make sure that the focus stays on processing and not on limiting intake.

In the government’s efforts to eliminate the backlog of private sponsorship applications, it’s essential that their plan focus on processing and not on “intake controls.”

- Quite simply, when the targets for refugee arrivals are lower than the number of filed applications, backlog is inevitable.
- Historically, limits have been placed on the number of SAH applications available, but only in providing an adequate target for the number of processed applications can the government clear the backlog.
- **It’s essential that whenever there is an increase in intake of files or exceptions are made to the caps that there is a solid commitment to process those in a timely manner and not just add them to the backlog.**

Policy Ask #3 – Increase Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) numbers, but not at the expense of Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) numbers.

While it is commendable that the government has committed to increase PSR numbers between 2018-2020, a lack of movement in GAR numbers is concerning.

- Recent official refugee plans (“2018-2020 Immigration Levels Plan”) show a shift away from government leadership towards a deepening reliance on civil society for refugee resettlement.
- GARs are a reflection of Canada’s overall commitment to those the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) determines most vulnerable. The PSR Program should *supplement* those resettlement efforts undertaken by the government on behalf of all Canadians.
- In today’s global refugee crisis, 2018 resettlement targets (7,500 GARs and 18,000 PSRs) are insufficient, as needs have increased across both categories.
- **It’s essential that the government maintain its commitment to the most vulnerable refugees by increasing GAR numbers, while maintaining ambitious PSR levels.**

Key Message:

Processing times for PSRs have been too long for too many years. While the commitment to clear the backlog of private sponsorship applications and reach a processing time of 12 months by 2019 is commendable, the government must not lose sight of this goal. PSRs settle well and contribute to their communities, but currently the system is cumbersome and slow. It is cruel to make people wait years to resettle. It is also frustrating and disempowering for sponsors who are forced to wait through long processing times. Since 2012, the government has relied on intake controls to solve the backlog issue, but this approach has not worked. It is important for the government to maintain a high level of PSR landing spots to solve this problem. This commitment should not, however, squeeze other humanitarian programs, as each part functions together. The world is looking at Canada's refugee sponsorship model and it is essential, perhaps now more than ever, to get it right.

A Note for Advocates:

As you prepare to discuss these points with your Members of Parliament please resist the temptation to treat the MP’s office as a place for sponsorship case management. Our goal for these visits is to address policy issues that affect sponsorships across the country that may be demonstrated by a sponsorship case you may be working with. Make it clear that you are not there for a fix for a single case or two but are interested in a better functioning sponsorship system, for the sake of both refugees and sponsors.

Thank you for speaking up with refugees and Sponsorship Agreement Holders like World Renew and the Mennonite Central Committee!

We are happy to support your advocacy efforts. Please contact our offices if you have further questions.

