



The Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association

Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association's Questions on Resettlement for Candidates Running in the 2019 Federal Election

Introduction

The following questions can be addressed to candidates in the upcoming federal election to seek out their views on what they would do to ensure that the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program is a robust, responsive and effective program that offers timely protection and adequate settlement and financial support for privately sponsored refugees.

The 2019 Global Trends Report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states that the number of refugees and internally displaced people continued to grow in 2018 - 70.8 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide, the largest number in the organization's history. Children make up almost half of the world's refugees.

2019 marks the 40th anniversary of the PSR Program. The Government of Canada created the PSR Program in 1979 to allow ordinary Canadians to sponsor refugees fleeing the conflict in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The PSR Program was so successful that in 1986 the people of Canada were awarded the Nansen Medal for their humanitarian work, the only time the medal has been awarded to the people of a country. Over the last 40 years, approximately two million Canadians have helped sponsor more than 327,000 refugees.

The PSR Program is a source of great pride to Canadians and is recognized internationally. Until recently, Canada was the only country in the world that allowed ordinary citizens to sponsor refugees. Other countries are starting to get involved and, in 2016, the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative was established to promote and provide training in other countries on how to set up resettlement programs, based on Canada's history and experience in private refugee resettlement. Nevertheless, only 7% of refugees in need of resettlement found new homes in 2018. Now that the United States has drastically reduced its resettlement program, Canada has become the largest resettlement country in the world.

The benefits of the PSR Program are many including that it:

- Continues Canada's humanitarian traditions by providing refuge to 327,000 refugees who had no other durable solution;
- Ensures Canada's future economic and social wellbeing which depends on immigration, including immigration of refugees through resettlement. Former refugees make strong contributions to Canada's ongoing nation-building; in addition to significant economic contributions, resettled refugees participate actively in the political, artistic, and cultural life of Canada. Additionally, studies have shown that Canada's relatively strong social cohesion has been linked to the diversity of source countries from which newcomers come. Because refugees tend to originate from countries other than traditional immigration countries in non-humanitarian program classes or streams, they bring important diversity and balance to Canada's mosaic;
- Contributes significantly to reducing the cost of resettlement by the Canadian taxpayer and, after a few years, newcomers to Canada with refugee background have been found to pay more income tax to the Canadian Government than those who arrived as investor immigrants.

Questions:

1. Commitment to the PSR Program

In the 20 years between 1995 and 2014, about 3,725 PSRs were settled per year in Canada. Since 2015, this number has increased to about 17,600 PSRs settled per year, which means that since 2015 there have been as many privately sponsored refugees settled as were settled the previous 20 years. The sponsors are Canadian citizens and permanent residents who have greatly appreciated the fact that the federal government has begun to recognize the interest and capacity of private sponsors to partner with the government in addressing the huge global refugee resettlement need.

If elected, will you commit to maintain and/or increase the target levels for the PSR Program reflected in the 2019-2021 Immigration Levels Plan, while also increasing the government commitment through the Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) program?

2. Reducing the Backlog and 12-Month Processing of PSR Applications

Since 2012, the SAH Association has co-operated with the government policy of caps and allocations on the number of refugees that Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) can sponsor through the PSR Program in an effort to reduce backlogs and facilitate faster processing for the benefit of refugees who, by definition, are in danger. However, notwithstanding these long-standing restrictions on SAHs, the backlog of applications in the system has not declined significantly. The current government made a commitment to reduce processing times to 12 months by 2019 and reduce the backlog. While processing times have improved, processing times are not at 12 months and the backlog still exists. Refugees continue to wait too long in unsafe situations and the many Canadians and permanent residents standing by to provide refuge and support grow frustrated and some move on to other volunteer activities.

If elected, what measures will you take to reduce the backlog of PSR applications and achieve 12-month processing?

3. Global refugee resettlement commitment:

Canada has positioned itself as a leader in refugee resettlement. At the same time, the global number of refugees in need of resettlement is at an all-time high.

Canada's resettlement program consists of the following streams:

- Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) Program. The UNHCR provides the referrals for this program. Settlement support is provided by service provider organizations funded by IRCC. GARs receive support for up to one year, or until they are able to support themselves, whichever happens first.
- PSR Program. Private sponsors provide the referrals for this program and assume responsibility for settlement support of PSRs for up to one year, or until they are able to support themselves, whichever happens first.
- Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) Program. The UNHCR provides referrals for this program but settlement support is shared between IRCC and private sponsors.

From 1994 to 2014 Canada landed twice as many GARs as PSRs. From 2015 to 2019 the ratio has shifted to private sponsors landing 5 refugees for every 3 government sponsored refugees. In other words, the proportion of refugees resettled by Canada's government has decreased while the need for global resettlement is at a historic high and the global number of available resettlement spaces is decreasing.

If elected, will you show global leadership by setting annual resettlement landing targets that are substantially in proportion to global resettlement needs as identified by the UNHCR and increase the GAR proportion of the resettlement target?

4. Refugees and Canada's nation-building history

There is growing concern about the rise in national populism and anti-immigration sentiments in the world, including in Canada. The anti-immigration, anti-refugee rhetoric of some Canadian political parties and measures being undertaken, or promised to be undertaken, by political parties in Canada that would make Canada a less welcoming country defy Canada's humanitarian traditions, international commitments and legal obligations.

If elected, how will you uphold the dignity and human rights of refugees and help Canadians understand how refugees, as part of Canada's nation-building history, have benefited Canada?

5. Multi-year Immigration Levels Plan

Strong programming in every sector is contingent on good planning. When the federal government released multi-year levels for the first time in 2017 and then again in 2018, stakeholders working in the immigration and refugee sector to support the successful integration of newcomers (including municipal and provincial levels of government) applauded the ability to plan beyond one year.

If elected, will you continue this best practice of releasing multi-year immigration levels plans?

6. Strong Settlement Support

Canada will continue to need to rely on immigration for nation-building and economic prosperity. Therefore, adequate resources for settlement and integration will be necessary to assist all categories of newcomers, including refugees, to integrate and contribute to Canadian society.

If elected, will you ensure that the necessary resources within the jurisdiction of the federal government will be allocated and the necessary support will be provided to other levels of government to maximize settlement outcomes and integration?

7. Family Reunification

Family reunification is included as one of the objectives of Canada's immigration legislation and policy. With the arrival of resettled refugees through the GAR, PSR and BVOR programs comes the plea to private sponsors to sponsor their family members who have been left behind in similar situations of danger. Bringing families together contributes positively to the settlement outcomes of resettled refugees already in Canada, as well as to the settlement outcomes of their sponsored relatives newly arriving. When a resettled family in Canada continues to worry about family who are still refugees overseas, focussing on their own settlement and integration into society can take a back seat. In addition to the time and emotional energy devoted to loved ones overseas, financial resources that might be devoted to housing, school or food here may be diverted to support them. This so called "echo effect" cannot be absorbed within the PSR Program. The family class sponsorship program is too small and narrowly defined. In the past, Canada's immigration system included an assisted relative class that facilitated family reunification more broadly, contributed to successful integration and relieved pressure on the PSR program.

If elected, will you re-instate the assisted relative class or introduce other viable measures to re-unite families in Canada?

8. Complex Bureaucratic Processes for the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

IRCC requires numerous and lengthy forms to be completed by the refugees to be sponsored and by the sponsors under the PSR Program. These complex forms take many hours – as many as 100 hours - to complete. IRCC also expects refugees to use a computer to complete the forms and requires the forms to be in English or French. The incredible amount of detail that persecuted and traumatized refugees are supposed to remember is astonishing. Small errors can result in forms being returned and can unreasonably diminish credibility. Recently a quality assurance program was introduced by IRCC without adequate input or collaboration with private sponsors in its design and implementation. This has added significantly to the workload of private sponsors, many of whom are volunteers. The combination of bureaucratic processes prevents private sponsors from being able to quickly respond to any refugee need and is impacting their capacity and willingness to participate in the PSR Program.

If elected will you immediately take measures to simplify and streamline the process of sponsoring refugees under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program and to reduce the bureaucratic processes that hinder private sponsors from working effectively?

9. Consultation

PSR landings have quadrupled from 4,560 in 2014 to 18,760 in 2018. BVOR landings have increased seven-fold from 177 in 2014 to 1,150 in 2018. PSR landings were more than double GAR landings in 2018 and a similar ratio is planned for 2019. Sponsorship Agreement Holders collectively hold Canada's expertise in the private sponsorship of refugees. Without private sponsors, Canada's refugee resettlement program would be small and unexceptional, and Canada would not be viewed, or enjoy respect, as a global leader in resettlement.

If elected will you commit to meaningful partnership and collaboration with the Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association and ensure effective consultation with regard to all government initiatives affecting the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program?

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