

## Resettling Afghan Refugees

### Issue

Given the Government of Canada's commitment to resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees, how can Canada implement a more holistic approach that better addresses the needs of Afghan refugees?

### Background

#### *Federal Policies Concerning Resettlement Criteria for Afghan Refugees*

- The Federal Government has two dedicated programs for resettling Afghan refugees:
  - 1. A Special Immigration Program
    - This program is targeted towards Afghan nationals who, through their employment, helped the Canadian government as interpreters or local staff at the Embassy of Canada to Afghanistan.
    - This program also extends to eligible family members of these individuals.
  - 2. A Humanitarian Program
    - This program is targeted towards Afghan refugees that meet all eligibility requirements including being an Afghan national; residing outside of Afghanistan; without access to a durable solution in a third country; and are part of one the following groups: women leaders, human rights defenders, persecuted religious or ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, journalists and people who helped Canadian journalists.
    - This program requires Afghan refugees to either be referred by a) the UN Refugee Agency, b) the government of the country they are residing in, c) another organization the Federal Government is collaborating with for this program, or d) identified by a private sponsor.

### Key Considerations

Limitations in Scope of Eligibility Criteria: The eligibility criteria for Afghan refugees to qualify and apply for resettlement in Canada are limited in scope. This reduces the number of applicants and restricts many vulnerable applicants from pursuing resettlement in Canada.

Accessibility: Applying for programs targeted at Afghan refugees requires submitting electronic forms. This means that these programs are only accessible to a) Afghan refugees who are aware these programs exist and b) have access to a reliable internet connection. This exacerbates inequities in resettlement opportunities for refugees.

### Policy Recommendations

#### Supporting Equitable Opportunities to Resettlement in Canada

##### *Addressing Inequitable Eligibility Criteria*

- Due to capacity limits, the Federal Government's restrictive eligibility criteria seem reasonable on the surface. However, these criteria should be expanded to enable a larger number of vulnerable Afghan refugees to qualify and apply for resettlement in Canada.
- The Federal Government should increase funding for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the Immigration and Refugee Board–Refugee Protection Division to increase the capacity and speed at which applications are processed. The government should consider increasing the

2022-2023 budgets by a one-time amount of \$5 million respectively, to process Afghan refugee claims.

*Addressing Accessibility of Applicants*

- The Federal Government can liaise with host countries and aid agencies to help provide access to the internet or mobile networks for Afghan refugees seeking resettlement in Canada.

Supporting Sustainable Solutions for Afghan Refugee Resettlement in Canada

*Integration Efforts*

- Skills-based Workshops: As part of investing in the future of refugees, the federal government can collaborate with community centers to host skills-based workshops with an emphasis on transferable skills.
- Employment Opportunities: Employers should be encouraged to hire Afghan refugees to help them become self-sufficient. A proposed policy is for the Federal Government to incentivize companies to create refugee employment quotas, by providing tax relief to companies that meet this pledge. For example, the Federal Government could consider introducing a tax initiative that allows companies to deduct 25% of these employees' salary as a business expense if they are employed for longer than six months.

*Government Engagement*

- Consultation Efforts: Consulting with Afghan refugees who have entered Canada can help ensure policymakers understand the barriers refugees face as newcomers so that future policies and programs address these challenges. Consultation can be conducted in collaboration with NGOs who are working with Afghan refugees.
- Private Sponsorship: The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program allows Canadians to sponsor and resettle refugees in Canada. Although this is a complementary path to government-sponsored refugee resettlement, the Federal Government can encourage these efforts by organizing information fairs, educating Canadian citizens about private sponsorship, bringing together prospective sponsors and eliminating any misconceptions.

## Issue

How can community-based resettlement programs in the cities of Toronto and Calgary better address the needs and integration of relocated Afghan refugees?

## Background

### *Current Resettlement Practices in Calgary*

- The non-profit Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) continues to play a large role, coordinating local efforts to resettle and assist in the integration of newly arrived Afghan refugees. They receive funding from the Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta, the City of Calgary, and private sector donations. Examples of these efforts include:
  - The Centre for Refugee Resilience, which provides culturally appropriate support to refugees including therapy, networking, presentations highlighting the migration process, and language supports (official document translations, English-language skills, etc.).
  - The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), which assists newly arrived refugees with finding permanent accommodations, assisting with mandatory federal/provincial documents, counselling, one-on-one enhanced life skills support, school registration support for children, and language classes for adults.
  - The Margaret Chisholm Resettlement Centre provides temporary housing for up to fourteen days before permanent accommodations are found for refugees.
  - The Employment First program assists refugees with gaining work experience, workplace skills, and individual support to help meet the standards of local employers.

### *Current Resettlement Practices in Toronto*

- COSTI Immigrant Services is the designated provider of the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. To date, COSTI has provided essential services to 1,920 Afghan refugees who have resettled in the city.
  - Many of these refugees have expressed a desire to remain in Toronto. As the GTA is home to the largest Afghan community in Canada (approximately 50 percent of the total population), COSTI anticipates this trend will continue.
- The City's Toronto Newcomer Office (TNO) is coordinating resources and working with partners to implement the RAP to ensure that public support systems are available upon arrival of Afghan refugees, including access to resources such as city settlement workers, which most (85%+) Afghan refugees have used to aid their transition.
- Several third party community partners, including non-profits such as United Way and Polycultural Immigrant and Community Services, are offering free or low-barrier access to essential services for newly arrived Afghan refugees including legal services, language training, and assistance for children including healthcare and educational aid.

## Key Considerations

*Educational & Language Differences:* Adult Afghan refugees have varied levels of education and English-language proficiency. This makes it challenging for adults to obtain well-paying jobs, impacting overall labour market outcomes for resettled refugees. Language barriers and educational differences also pose considerable obstacles to children's integration into schools.

*Necessity of Trauma Informed Counselling:* Locally-driven third party organizations, such as Lifeline Afghanistan, report that access to trauma informed counselling in Pashto, Dari, and Uzbek is often inaccessible and with long waitlists (particularly for child counsellors) and few practitioners available to

serve the diverse needs of Afghan refugees. Along with technological barriers, resettled Afghans often have difficulty trying to access limited counselling resources themselves, creating a reliance on volunteers and city workers to access essential care services.

*Capacities of Resettlement Organizations:* Organizations spearheading the resettlement process have run into significant issues regarding securing adequate funding, food, and clothing for Afghan refugees arriving in Toronto and Calgary. These organizations rely heavily on donations from the private sector and individual Canadians in order to meet the basic needs of refugees.

### **Policy Recommendations**

*The Cities of Toronto and Calgary should ensure that long-term English language programs are available to resettled refugees.*

- A 2009 Canadian Government report found that refugees require 83 more hours of language instruction in order to complete a basic language course compared to other classes of immigrants.<sup>1</sup>
- Currently, the federally-funded language initiatives are short-term programs that are insufficient. Providing greater access to longer programs will ensure refugees have the linguistic skills needed to thrive in Canada.
- Standardized curriculums should be introduced for city-funded programs to ensure that all participants receive the same quality of education.

*Introduce programs dedicated to assessing the educational needs of resettled children.*

- Educational assessment of resettled children will ensure their education placement reflects their education received to date.
- Provide resettled children with specialized academic supports to ensure their long-term academic success and integration into schools.

*The Cities of Toronto and Calgary should ensure trauma-informed counselling measures are accessible and available to resettled refugees in their native languages.*

- The Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy highlighted in a 2017 report that offering trauma-informed counseling for refugees is critical for successful integration.<sup>2</sup>
  - Under the Syrian Refugee program, only a fraction of newcomers had access to high quality, long-term counselling, which created barriers to future employment and social inclusion.
- Address mental health needs by increasing refugees' access to trauma- and culturally-informed counselling services, thus improving both physical and social determinants of health, offering foundational wellness as a springboard to future prosperity.
- Expand primary care programs to create targeted health plans and educate diverse populations about available resources.

*The Cities of Toronto and Calgary should commit to partnering with more third party organizations in order to expand their reach and harness the resources of local communities to increase their capacity.*

- The efforts of CCIS and several Toronto-based charities highlight the positive potential of these organizations to bolster Canada's capacity to assist Afghan refugees without increasing government funding.
- Galvanizes local communities and utilizes their existing resources in order to ease refugees' entry into these new communities.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/research-stats/linc-indicators.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/article/view/61156/pdfhttps://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/article/view/61156/pdf>