



• July 28, 2025

2026 Immigration Levels

CCR Comments

Introduction

The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) welcomes the opportunity to give input as part of the planning for the immigration levels for 2026 and beyond. The immigration levels to be announced this fall come in the context of **dramatic cuts** to targets made last year alongside an important **Throne Speech** commitment that the Government is “dedicated to rebuilding the trust of Canadians in immigration by restoring balance to the system”.

CCR supports the **call for a better balance** between the economic, family and refugee pillars of the immigration system. In defining how and for whom rebalancing is needed we must take into account our values and identity as a welcoming nation, the many Canadians across the country ready to commit time and resources to supporting refugees, and the global **humanitarian context**, where Canadian leadership is sorely needed.

Currently, Canada’s humanitarian immigration levels are very low, making processing times for refugees chronically among the longest of all categories. These disproportionate restrictions erode the well-being not only of affected families, but the fabric and health of our whole society.

Canadians are looking to our leaders to build an inclusive, diverse future, based on respect for human rights and recognition and support of the many ways newcomers contribute to our society.

1. Refugee Resettlement

CCR welcomes the Government’s platform commitment that in a time of rising global conflict and authoritarianism, Canada will lead where many are stepping back. The US retreat to isolationism--ending its refugee resettlement program, slashing humanitarian aid and withdrawing from UN institutions—is causing shockwaves of harm around the world.

With refugees left more vulnerable than ever, Canada’s resettlement commitment is even more necessary. However, despite Canadians’ significant capacity, skills and requests to do more, our targets are declining. Currently humanitarian resettlement represents only 9% of Canada’s immigration levels. Better balance is needed.

a. Privately sponsored refugees

The levels for privately sponsored refugees must be dramatically increased, to reflect the capacity and desire of Canadians to offer refugees a home.

- Thousands of Canadians stand ready to welcome refugees in need of a home, providing them housing and financial support. Close to 100,000 people have been sponsored and are currently waiting for processing. Canadians have the capacity to sponsor far more, but their generosity is being held in check by the low immigration levels. Intake of Group of Five sponsorship applications has been completely halted for 2025, and Sponsorship Agreement Holders face restrictive caps.
- Last year the government made **huge and disproportionate cuts** to the levels for privately sponsored refugees. This means most people in the backlog face years more of waiting, even though many are in situations where their lives are daily at risk.

b. Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs)

Overall, while there were no new cuts to GARs added in last year's announcements, GAR targets are decreasing following the close of the special Afghan initiative and will be down to 15,250 this year. At a time when the need for resettlement is acutely increasing, Canada should not be reducing its commitments to refugees.

- Government-Assisted Refugees are among the most vulnerable people, chosen by the UNHCR because of their particular need. With the withdrawal of the US, the UNHCR is relying on Canada more than ever.
- The federal government must take the lead on resettling refugees, on behalf of all Canadians, ensuring numbers match or exceed the efforts of private sponsors.

Recommendations for refugee resettlement:

- Towards the goal of better balance, resettled refugees (Government-Assisted and Privately Sponsored Refugees) should represent at least 15% of total immigration admissions.
- Increase the immigration targets for Privately sponsored refugees to a level that will allow the large backlog to be absorbed, and to allow new G5 applications to be submitted starting in January 2026. The current suspension of G5 intake must not be continued into 2026.
- Commit to a minimum of 20,000 Government-Assisted Refugees resettled per year.

2. Refugees in Canada and their families overseas

The immigration levels must also ensure that those whose refugee claim is accepted in Canada can get on with their lives and reunite with immediate family members without delay.

- Refugees are waiting years to get permanent residence and reunite with family – this prevents refugees from getting on with their lives and violates Canada’s legal obligations to reunite children with their parents.
- The delays are going to get worse. Last year the **levels for this category were slashed by 31%** – at the same time as application numbers are going up, since more refugee claimants are being accepted. Current processing times are **over four years** for refugee family reunification. Based on the proposed immigration levels, a child overseas waiting to reunite with a parent just accepted as a refugee can expect to wait until 2030 or beyond.

Recommendations:

- Ensure targets for “Protected Persons in Canada and Dependants Abroad” are high enough to achieve processing times of 12 months.
- Until that target is reached, **Temporary Resident Permits should be issued** to dependants abroad of Protected Persons.

3. Temporary Residents

The introduction last year of levels for temporary residents (Temporary Foreign Workers and International Students) is not the way to address the problem of their precarity. The CCR also remains deeply concerned by the false narrative linking temporary and permanent resident numbers to pressures on housing and other services. When political leaders point the finger at newcomers, public support and confidence in the whole immigration system is weakened.

- People who have only temporary status in Canada are vulnerable – they lack access to many legal protections and services that they pay into, and are under constant threat of being forced to leave Canada. This precarity and isolation expose them to exploitation.
- Individuals are protected and all of Canadian society is strengthened when people have permanent status.

Recommendations:

- Review immigration policies to ensure that people who will be living here long-term either arrive as permanent residents or are able to transition quickly to permanent residence.

- Ensure better protections from exploitation for people with temporary status, including through provision of **open work permits**, and equal access to social services.
- Work with provincial counterparts to reform housing laws, policies and programs to ensure the right to housing, and abandon dangerous narratives that falsely connect immigration to the availability of housing and other core services for all in Canada.
- Honour the commitment to regularize those who have been living and contributing to our country for years without status or benefits.