

Call for speedy refugee family reunification

Once a person in Canada has been accepted as a refugee (known as a “Protected Person”), they can apply for permanent residence for themselves and their immediate family members (spouse and children). Family members who are overseas must wait for their permanent residence application to be processed before they can travel to Canada. This takes many years.

Temporary Resident Permits (TRPs) should be issued to family members of refugees so that they live in Canada while they wait for their permanent residence applications to be processed.

How long are families waiting to be reunited?

According to the government, family members overseas are waiting **over four years (51 months)** from the time their parent or spouse in Canada (the Protected Person) applied for permanent residence (as of January 2026). See [processing times](#).

How many people are affected?

Over 130,000 people in Canada are waiting for permanent residence as Protected Persons. Nearly 70,000 of their family members are waiting overseas to reunite with them in Canada.

Why the long processing times?

The number of Protected Persons and family members given permanent residence each year is determined by the target set by the government as part of the immigration levels (20,000 for Protected Persons and their family members in 2026).

The number of refugees accepted has increased in recent years but the target has gone down – as a result, each year more people apply than receive permanent residence, and the backlog grows bigger and bigger.

What will be the impact of the government’s special initiative for Protected Persons?

In November 2025, the government announced a [welcome initiative](#) to provide permanent residence to 115,000 Protected Persons by the end of 2027. This provides some hope for people who have already been waiting years for family reunification.

However, the initiative is designed for people already in Canada, so the implication for family members overseas is not clear. The current size of the backlog also means that only some people who are waiting will qualify.

The targets thus remain woefully inadequate for the numbers of people applying. 37,000 people had their claims [accepted by the IRB in 2025 \(January to September\)](#), yet the 2026 target is only 20,000.

What are the impacts of prolonged family separation?

Children in particular suffer greatly as a result of the long wait. They may:

- Be living in a situation of conflict or insecurity
- Be displaced from their home and living with precarious or no status
- Have limited access to health care
- Not be able to go to school regularly
- Develop trauma as a result of forcible separation from their parents

Parents in Canada waiting to be reunited with their children also suffer. They often:

- Struggle to move forward with their life in Canada, because their mind is with their family overseas
- Need to send money overseas to support their family
- Live with feelings of guilt because they are not able to protect their children
- Experience mental and physical health challenges as a result of the stress



Tooba, who drew this picture, is 9 years old and lives in Afghanistan with her mom and 3 siblings. Her father is in Canada.

The family has already been separated for two and a half years.

What are the costs to Canadian society of keeping refugee families separated?

There are [severe health, social and economic costs of prolonged family separation](#), including:

- Mental health consequences with costs for provincial health services
- Social and financial costs of family breakdown
- Reduced economic contributions of Protected Persons who are unable to contribute to their full capacity
- Loss of money sent abroad to support family members, instead of being spent in Canada.

What is the solution?

As a temporary solution, Temporary Resident Permits should be issued to family members overseas, as recommended by the Canadian Bar Association and the Canadian Council for Refugees (see [April 2024 letter](#)). In the longer term, a more permanent solution is needed.