

## Call for speedy refugee family reunification

Refugees in Canada wait years after their refugee claim has been accepted to be reunited with family members overseas. This is a longstanding problem that urgently requires a solution.

### The problem

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.

The immigration levels set by the government determine the number of Protected Persons and their family members who may receive permanent residence each year (20,000 for in 2026). Yet, the number of people accepted as refugees is regularly larger than the target set (over 50,000 people were [accepted by the IRB in 2025](#)). As a result, the backlog grows and people wait longer and longer.

For applications submitted in June 2026, families [can expect to wait](#) nearly **three years** to be reunited (for refugees outside Quebec).

Unless something is done, the wait time will only get longer. Some short-term relief has been offered by the government’s [one-time initiative for Protected Persons](#), but it does not cover refugees’ family members overseas. As a one-time measure, it also cannot solve the structural problem of the mismatch between the immigration target and the number of refugees eligible for permanent residence and family reunification.

### Practical solutions

The federal government should:

- Issue Temporary Resident Permits to family members overseas of Protected Persons, as recommended by the Canadian Bar Association and the Canadian Council for Refugees (see [April 2024 letter](#)).
- Modernize access to permanent residence for Protected Persons through a redesign of the process so that Protected Persons become permanent residents immediately on refugee determination.

Under the [proposed simplification](#), a person would be deemed to be applying for permanent residence when they make a refugee claim. During the claim process, the medical, criminality and security screenings would be used to flag any issues that might be a barrier to permanent residence. If the person is found to be a refugee, they become a permanent resident, unless an issue of potential inadmissibility has been flagged.

These solutions make sense because:

- Almost all Protected Persons end up getting permanent residence eventually
- Long waits are harmful to children and families and costly to Canadian society
- The current permanent residence process for Protected Persons is inefficient, unnecessary and duplicative.

## Negative impacts of prolonged family separation

Children in particular suffer greatly when family reunification is delayed. In many cases they:

- Live in a situation of conflict or insecurity
- Are displaced from their home and living with precarious or no status
- Have limited access to health care
- Are unable 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 family 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 family
- Experience mental and physical health challenges as a result of the stress

## 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.



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.