



A HALF WELCOME

DELAYS, LIMITS, AND INEQUITIES IN CANADIAN REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP

April 2017

CITIZENS FOR
PUBLIC JUSTICE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the main policy challenges Sponsorship Agreement Holders face today. Drawing on the responses SAH representatives provided through interviews and a survey, this report highlights four main areas of concern.

SAHs find the current protracted nature of application processing very concerning. Many also call for attention to the long wait currently impacting many non-Syrian applications, considering the government's plan to resettle many Syrian refugees in 2015 and 2016. SAHs consider this to be inequity in private sponsorship, and urge the government to ensure more balance in this regard.

SAHs also raised concerns about the allocation limits placed on the resettlement of privately sponsored refugees in 2017, noting that this impedes refugees' opportunities for safety.

Lastly, SAHs opposed the government's decision to waive travel loan repayment requirements for certain refugees. They called, instead, for a transparent process in policy-making on issues like this, so that SAH representatives can be included in the process. The goal of such a measure will be to ensure the reflection of the SAH community's views in policy making pertaining to refugees.

Overall, this report advocates for more governmental efforts in the protection of refugees from harm, citing the speedy processing of applications as key to realizing this objective.



Since its establishment in 1979, Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) has contributed immensely to the resettlement of refugees. Over the years, the program has endured political and policy changes, and has gained much recognition.

Canadians' interest in private sponsorship has soared in response to the surge in refugees resulting from the Syrian civil war. Many citizens and permanent residents formed sponsorship Groups of Five, and some community groups also sponsored refugees. Through private sponsorship, over 14,000 Syrian refugees have been resettled into Canada since 2015. Attention on private sponsorship has not been this high since the resettlement of 60,000 Indochinese refugees in 1979, 34,000 of whom were privately sponsored.

Methodology

The information used in this report was obtained from qualitative and quantitative research. Four SAH representatives from various provinces and organizations were interviewed. From their responses, a survey was created and disseminated to SAHs through the SAH Council, a national organization which represents Canada's SAHs. About thirty-two organizations, significantly faith-based in composition, completed the survey.

When Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) first published a report on Sponsorship Agreement Holders' (SAHs) challenges in 2014, Syria had been in conflict for about three years. Canada's response to the refugee situation was not as spirited as at present.¹ Since then, media attention on the lived experiences of Syrian refugees has moved Canadians to respond. Images of despondent children, mothers, and fathers brought home the horrors Syrians faced at the hands of insurgents and the Assad regime. Canadian communities felt compelled to support refugees. They realized that there was an urgent need to bring as many Syrian refugees as possible to safety in Canada. The drowning of a three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, moved many, particularly because his family had planned to resettle in Canada. The government also responded significantly by resettling more than 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015 and early 2016.

Churches, Community Sponsors, and Groups of Five assumed much responsibility during this period. They filed as many sponsorship applications as they were permitted to, and facilitated community support for the program. Many private actors formed sponsorship groups in churches and other organizations, and others provided financial and social support for resettlement work. Private sponsorship gained renewed prominence in Canada and around the world.

While this attention served to revitalize the PSRP, it also raised concerns about the efficiency of the program. It revealed the policy challenges which impact the ways private sponsors can engage with, and contribute to, Canada's overall humanitarian efforts. This report will highlight these challenges and advocate for improvements to private sponsorship in general.

In 2014, many SAHs we surveyed were very concerned about the government's decision to eliminate healthcare coverage for refugees under the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). Some attributed a decline in sponsorship interest at the time to this policy measure. Although the IFHP has now been reinstated for refugees, the reduction in sponsorship levels when there was no healthcare coverage shows that complicated policies can impede private sponsorship work.

As we have learned through this research, in order to sustain public interest in the program, the government must eliminate the policy hurdles in private sponsorship. The well-being and safety of refugees must remain the focus. Canada's resettlement efforts must be reflective of the surge in global refugee numbers. The government must ensure that the policies which guide private sponsors' work are straightforward and clearly serve the best interests of refugees.



GLOSSARY

BVOR:

The Blended Visa-Office Referred program refers to a form of sponsorship where the government partners with private sponsors to resettle refugees.

CCR:

The Canadian Council for Refugees is a national umbrella organization that advocates for refugee and migrant rights, and resettlement issues in Canada. Organizations directly involved in private sponsorship, resettlement, and advocacy make up the Council.

Community Sponsors:

Community Sponsors comprise groups or organizations that sponsor refugees. They provide emotional and financial support to the refugees throughout the sponsorship period.

CPO-W:

The Centralized Processing Office-Winnipeg is where sponsorship applications are processed in Canada. CPO-W was created in 2012 to streamline the submission of applications and increase processing efficiency.

GAR:

Government-Assisted Refugees are usually from the Convention Refugees Abroad Class.ⁱ The Government of Canada or the Government of Quebec provides initial resettlement support for the refugees.

G5:

Groups of Five refer to Canadian citizens or permanent residents who come together to sponsor refugees.

IRCC:

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is the federal government department responsible for Canada's refugee resettlement programs.

Multi-Year Levels Plan:

This refers to a layout of expected refugee resettlement figures for a few years.

PSRP:

The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program allows Canadian citizens or permanent residents to sponsor refugees from other countries. The program has become a core of Canada's overall resettlement efforts.

SAH:

Sponsorship Agreement Holders are organizations (primarily faith-based, e.g. churches) that have an agreement with the federal government to sponsor refugees. SAHs can either do so by themselves or collaborate with community members for this purpose.

"Sub-cap" populations:

The "sub-cap" populations comprise refugees from visa posts with further limitations on allocation capacity (e.g. Nairobi, Cairo, and Islamabad).

ⁱ For more information on Convention Refugees, see <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/applications/guides/E16000TOC.asp>

NAMING REFUGEES FOR SPONSORSHIP

One of the advantages of Canada's private sponsorship program is the ability for sponsors to identify or name the refugees they wish to sponsor. Sponsoring groups can suggest the names of refugees through information received from the refugees' families in Canada, friends, or other organizations that know the refugees. SAHs, Groups of Five, and Community Sponsors can submit named applications to CPO-W on refugees' behalf.

Many refugees resettled in Canada have relationships with refugees in various parts of the world. For example, many Syrian families resettled in Canada joined sponsorship groups to sponsor their families and friends in refugee camps in Turkey and Lebanon, among others. Sponsorship groups can submit applications to resettle these

refugees, on behalf of the families or friends here in Canada. Sponsors may also submit un-named sponsorships. They would then be matched with a refugee by a visa officer.

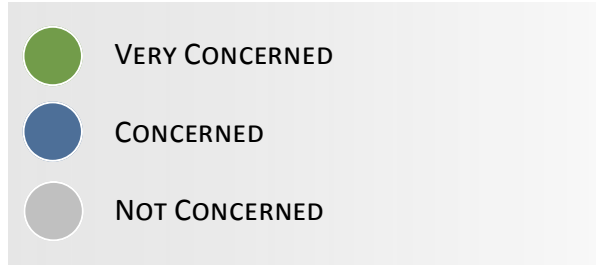
The ability to name refugees for sponsorship enables Canadians to sponsor refugees from target groups which may not be part of the government's resettlement priority at a given time.

However, naming refugees comes with its contentions. Sponsors prefer to submit applications to resettle refugees they know. This poses challenges to the speedy processing of applications, since the government may not have the capacity, in each period, to respond to the huge number of named cases sponsors may submit.

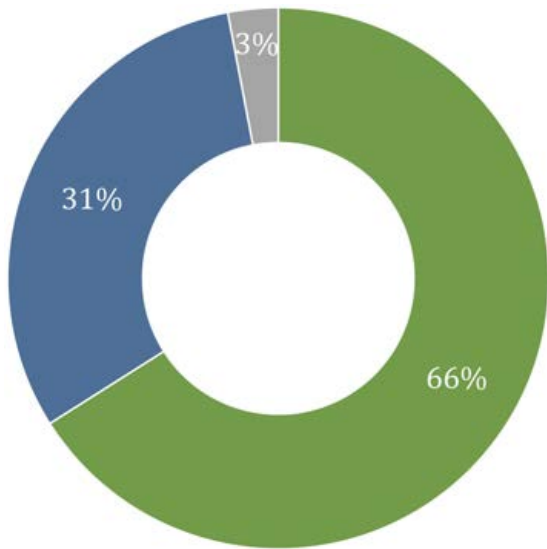


TOP CONCERNS FOR SAHS

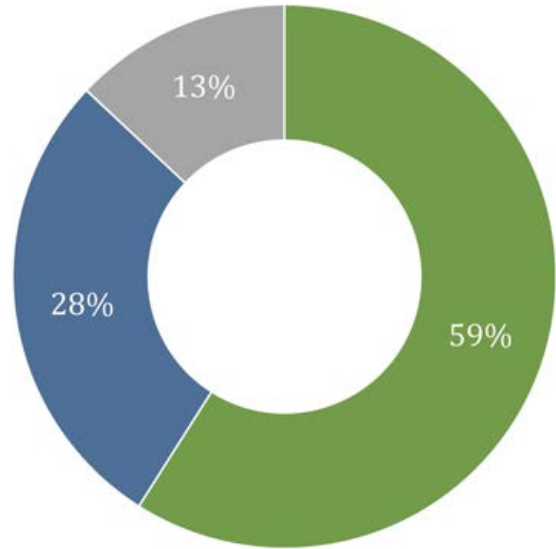
These pie charts represent SAHs' opinions on the policy concerns raised in the research study. They have been arranged in order of issues of utmost concern to SAHs today. A detailed description of each policy concern will follow this diagram.



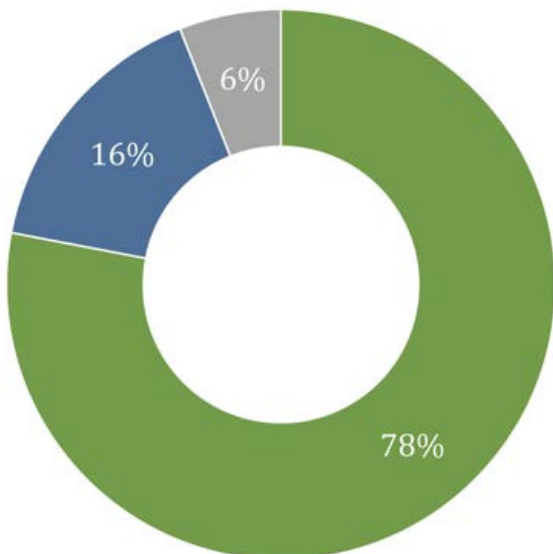
Wait Times



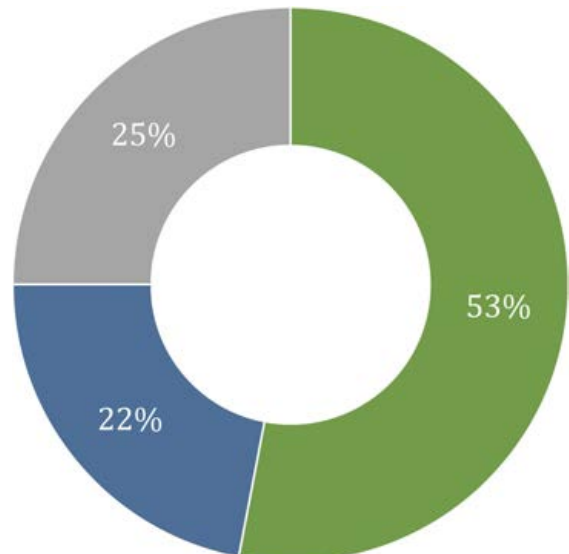
Allocation Limits



Wait Times for Non-Syrian Refugees



Travel Loans



LONG WAIT TIMES

Over 97% of the SAHs who responded to our study were concerned with the long wait period from when an application is filed and when it is assessed to the eventual arrival of the sponsored refugees. One SAH mentioned that some groups have been waiting for about six years to receive the families they are sponsoring.

While the aim is to swiftly resettle refugees from conflict regions (as the Syrian case shows), it often takes an inordinate amount of time for immigration officers to vet each family or individual application before making a decision.

Most delays happen at processing centres overseas. Many factors, such as scarce resources at visa posts, contribute to wait times. The logistical challenges refugees face in supplying application information in arduous situations (e.g. in conflict zones or in refugee camps) also delay the processing of applications.

Delays also occur at the Centralized Processing Office-Winnipeg (CPO-W). SAHs noted that when there are errors in an application sent to CPO-W, the

visa officer may return the entire application package without first reviewing it fully. Therefore, a single application could be returned multiple times if other errors are discovered.

SAHs highlighted that many application errors occur because the application forms and process are quite complicated. As many sponsorship groups formed in response to the Syrian refugee crisis are not as experienced as longtime sponsors, the application process must be clear for new sponsors to follow.

Maintaining Membership Engagement

While some SAHs reported that many groups have maintained their sponsorship commitments, others noted that it is increasingly difficult to keep members engaged. One SAH representative claimed that “protracted wait times inhibit the energy of the group and the ability to sustain interest.” Another said, “we have lost churches who will not wait for six years to see their sponsored family arrive.” These examples (out of many we received in the survey) show that long wait times diminish the motivation of sponsorship groups.

Processing delays also impair SAHs’ ability to plan properly for sponsorship. Many SAHs find it hard to explain the causes of wait times to sponsors, since the quick processing of Syrian applications clearly demonstrates that it is possible to reduce wait times significantly.

Historical Challenge

Long wait times constitute a longstanding systemic challenge to private sponsorship in Canada. In 1990, Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC, now under Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada) sought to review the private sponsorship program for efficiency. The ministry discovered that amid other concerns, sponsors desired faster decision-making by visa officers and increased communication with visa posts.²



To address some of these concerns, the head of the International Refugee and Migration Policy Branch formed the NGO-Government Committee on the Private Sponsorship of Refugees.³ Through this platform, sponsors could dialogue with the government on this issue. However, the Committee was unable to fully address long application processing times.⁴

Prioritizing Faster Processing Times

An interviewee noted that “the government can decide that something is a priority and put their resources into that.” This is correct, as former Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, John McCallum, acknowledged; wait times can be lessened if certain vetting processes are streamlined at immigration offices. He mentioned that while currently unsustainable, the swift resettlement of 25,000 Syrians in 2016 shows that wait times can be reduced, as procedures like “medical processing was done 10 times faster than before, when the military got in there to help.”⁵

To manage this concern, the government announced plans in January 2017 to reduce processing times at all missions to about twelve months by 2019.⁶ This development represents a significant change in governmental approach to wait times. It also signifies increased government responsiveness to the sponsorship community’s concerns. If actualized, it may enhance private sponsorship work, and motivate more Canadians to join sponsorship groups. However, consistent communication between the government, visa offices, and SAHs is necessary to realize this goal.



Consistent Communication

Several SAH representatives stated that inconsistent communication from visa offices affects the speed of decision making. Some visa offices inform SAHs on the progress of each case (e.g. interviews and medical exams), while others do not. SAHs acknowledge that the heavy workload for visa offices slows down the flow of communication, but many hope that as the backlog is addressed, efficient communication will be instituted. Regular and consistent information on cases under review will mitigate the frustrations that wait times pose for SAHs and sponsoring groups.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

The government must ensure that SAH, G5, and Community Sponsor applications are processed in a timely manner. Additional financial and personnel resources should be allocated to processing centres to speed up processing times.

LONG WAIT TIMES FOR NON-SYRIAN APPLICATIONS

“When two families are living in the same place, but one is processed in three months, and the other still has to wait, it’s hard to explain why one deserves to be resettled faster. They are both refugees fleeing for the same reasons, but one comes from Syria, and one comes from somewhere else. It’s not fair.”

—Respondent

Long wait times are a major concern for SAHs in general, but processing delays for non-Syrian applications constitute an especially high concern for SAHs. About 93.7% of SAHs surveyed expressed overall concern on long processing times for non-Syrian cases, but 78% of these SAHs expressed greater concern on the same.

To respond speedily to the refugee crisis in Syria, the government expedited the processing of Syrian refugee applications. Priority was given to Syrian applications at visa posts and the CPO-W.⁷ One SAH member claimed that “our sponsored Syrian refugees have arrived, while, at the same time, our Iraqi applications are still waiting, and not even a word has been given on their status.” Another stated that “our Rwandan case submitted in late 2010 still has no decision, even though the interview process occurred in 2016.”

A recurring theme in the responses we received is that processing delays for non-Syrian applications may signify inequity in application processing. One SAH claimed that “this is a justice issue. There are many people around the world who have been waiting for refuge for [a] long [time], and may simply be forgotten and their needs neglected.”

At the Canadian Council for Refugees’ (CCR) annual consultation in the fall of 2016, many sponsorship group members raised concerns about how the government’s response to refugees has been inequitable. They claimed that the focus on Syrian refugees obscured the conditions and needs of refugees all over the world, many of whom share experiences with Syrian refugees. There are concerns that this has “created a two-tier system and sent the wrong message to other refugees, particularly the sub-cap populations.” Thus, some SAHs urge the government to respond equitably to all applications received, “on the basis of



vulnerability and not nationality.”

The government has acknowledged that Syrian applications were prioritized at the expense of other applications. A commitment was made in late 2016 to process longstanding applications from global visa posts in 2017. Visa post sub-caps have also been removed. While some SAHs consider these reforms as responses to sponsors’ concerns, others are concerned that the impact may not be felt for a while. The government’s commitment to resettle Syrian refugees may mean that non-Syrian refugees who have been waiting for over three years may have to wait longer, until decisions are made on the Syrian applications currently in the

“That high number, they won’t just be Syrians, they’re going to be looking at clearing out the backlogs in other visa offices. Hopefully, as we move forward, we won’t see much of that inequity anymore.”

– Interview Participant

system. A survey respondent noted that this poses grave challenges for refugees overseas, who may feel forgotten, and are “making dangerous journeys in search of help and safety.”



Photo: World Relief Spokane/Flickr

RECOMMENDATION 2:

The processing of backlogged applications from global visa posts should be the government’s priority for the next three years.

ALLOCATION LIMITS

“The demand for sponsorship exceeds the supply of numbers [for refugee applications], and that’s been a significant challenge.”

– Interview Participant

Prior to 2011, there were no limits on how many applications private sponsors could submit. Allocation limits were introduced to manage the backlog caused by the unlimited submission of applications before 2013. In 2017, SAHs can submit applications for 7,500 persons altogether. Unlike past years, however, all visa posts can now receive new applications under this global cap.

Overall, about 87.5% of SAHs expressed concern over the limited number of spots available for sponsorship applications in 2017. Of this, 59.4% were very concerned that current allocation numbers limit their sponsorship capacity.

An interview respondent noted that there is a large volume of work, and an incredible surge in private sponsorship interest, but there are not enough spots to sponsor refugees. The respondent noted that there are not as many Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) cases as there could be to meet the demand from SAHs. Another SAH member mentioned that “we receive more applications for sponsorship each year that need to be carried to the next year. Our request for sponsorship greatly surpasses our allocations.”

The government placed a limit of 1,000 applications on private sponsorship cases from Iraq and Syria in 2017. Although now closed, this temporary policy, first introduced in 2015 and renewed in 2016, “aimed to enable Canada to implement fair and efficient procedures that maintain the integrity of the Canadian refugee protection system.”⁸

“Sub-Caps” and Processing Times

Until January 2017, “sub-caps” were placed on certain visa posts, to further reduce the backlog in application processing from those posts. Our 2014 report showed that this limited the amount of sponsorship applications from certain global regions.⁹ Many SAHs welcome the elimination of visa post sub-caps, and hope that this will speed up processing times.

While some SAHs believe the elimination of sub-caps bode well for refugees from different global regions, (as it may address issues of inequity in application processing), others do not think it will have any positive impact on the number of applications SAHs can submit. One SAH said “the allocations were gradually increasing so we could work on ramping up our own capacity. Now we have built our capacity, but we are being limited in what we can do in 2017.”

Allocation Limits and Communication

SAHs are worried that communication issues may persist, even with allocation limits in place, (to clear backlogs), because “the problem is elsewhere—in the information technology within the immigration department, and there’s a lot of control over those systems.” Some SAHs believe that the department is aware of the communication issues SAHs face, and is working to address them.

Nonetheless, SAHs find it challenging to plan without a multi-year levels plan,ⁱⁱⁱ which will allow them to know what their allocation may be for a

ⁱⁱⁱ A multi-year levels plan indicates how many refugees the government plans to resettle within a few years.

^{iv} There are usually in-system applications which have to be processed before new applications are assessed.

given period. SAHs get an annual allocation, out of which they determine how many applications to submit. However, they are usually not provided with information from one year to the next on how many applications they will be able to submit momentarily. As one SAH noted, “any applications we submit now (2017) will only land in 2018 or 2019. Canada has not yet released the number of landings for 2018 and 2019.”

IRCC used a multi-year levels plan between 2010 and 2014. However, the department stopped providing it, offering the following explanation:

A few key informants noted that the multi-year commitments did not eliminate or reduce the resettlement program’s overall flexibility to respond to international priorities, as the proportion of refugees to be resettled as part of multi-year commitments accounted for about half of [Government-Assisted Refugee] GAR levels.¹⁰

This explanation does not allay SAHs’ concerns on the multi-year levels plan. Many need to know how many applications they will be allowed to submit a few years in advance. There is no information on global or local resettlement estimates to aid effective planning.

Communication Challenge for SAHs

Lack of information on these issues causes a lot of uncertainty for SAHs. Many cannot provide definitive responses to people who ask about sponsorship possibilities. Some SAHs claim that the government knows how many people will be resettled from different visa posts, “but we don’t see those numbers. We also don’t get to participate in



Photo: Brian Sokol / UNHCR

the decision-making process as to how that is going to be distributed.” Knowing what the numbers will be, especially from the different visa posts, would tremendously enhance SAHs’ ability to plan and communicate with sponsors and families on sponsorship inquiries.

SAHs also believe that IRCC should allocate more resources (financial and human) to respond more effectively to the applications they receive. Resettlement is very resource-intensive, both for the sponsorship groups involved and for the government. Although sponsors bear the financial responsibility for the refugees they sponsor, IRCC still needs to provide resources to process submitted applications at all stages, until refugees are resettled in Canada. Inadequate resources can lengthen processing times, causing delays for private sponsors, and more importantly, for refugees.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The government must provide SAHs with a three-year levels plan that provides estimates on the number of refugees from all sponsorship categories to be resettled within this period.

TRAVEL LOANS

IRCC offers refugees a loan to cover transportation costs to Canada, medical exams, fees for travel documents, and other service fees. On average, refugees receive a \$3,000 loan, but most families get as much as \$10,000. They must begin to repay the loans within 30 days of their arrival in Canada.

When the government planned to resettle 25,000 Syrians in 2015, it decided that those resettled after November 2015, but before March 2016, would not have to repay travel loans.

At the same time, all other refugees had to repay travel loans they had incurred on their journey to Canada. About 75% of SAHs are “generally” concerned about this, and 53% of these SAHs are “very” concerned about the policy, which they consider inequitable. For one, providing an exemption for certain Syrian refugees, at the expense of other Syrians, implied that some were financially stable and generally more secure than those for whom the policy had been instituted. A

SAH representative stated that this is “an unfair burden on people who usually come with nothing. Paying this loan significantly impacts refugees’ ability to become financially self-sufficient.”

Currently, only Government Assisted Syrian Refugees do not have to repay travel loans. This adds a level of complexity to the issue of equity. It prioritizes not just some Syrian refugees over other Syrian refugees, but Syrian over non-Syrian refugees. Many privately-sponsored refugees (PSRs) rely financially on their sponsors for a year, and many sponsors do not factor in loan repayments as part of their financial commitments.

Government Response to Loan Policy

The government evaluated the Immigration Loan Program (ILP) in 2015, and acknowledged that “for some loan recipients, requirements to repay an immigration loan are a source of stress and create additional challenges, such as the ability to pay for basic necessities.”¹¹ Statistics Canada revealed that



Photo: World Relief Spokane/Flickr

about 34.2% of new immigrants and refugees live in poverty.¹²

Many of the recommendations¹³ made in the ILP evaluation, to enhance the program, emphasized the need for the ILP not to adversely impact refugee resettlement outcomes. It is not clear that such recommendations have been implemented. One SAH noted that most privately-sponsored refugees try to gain language skills to get decent paying jobs, but many are forced to focus on repaying the loans instead. The pressure that comes with loan repayment means that refugees will not have the opportunity to fully acquire the language and educational skills necessary to contribute more productively to their new communities. Lifting the loan repayment requirement for refugees will enable them to become financially established in their new communities more rapidly.

Resource Limitations

Some SAHs acknowledge that there are limited resources to allow for a general loan repayment exception. They claim that devoting more resources to the loan repayment policy may affect the allocation of resources to other essential public services. On the need to understand the complexities of resource allocation for refugees and other immigrants, former Minister of Immigration, Hon. John McCallum, noted that,

A second thing you can do is reallocate resources. If you have a given amount of money you can have more people doing economic (immigrants) and less people doing family, as the Conservatives did. Or we can do the reverse. We could have more people doing

family and fewer doing economic. Everything has a cost.¹⁴

Although SAHs recognize the costs associated with waiving loans, some argue that the process can be made equitable. One SAH said that the government could either waive the loans for all refugees or for none at all. Another SAH said travel loans should be provided on a financial need basis, making funds available to those who cannot afford their flights and medical expenses (which, in many cases, applies to most refugees). Overall, SAHs ask for more transparency in the decision-making process regarding transportation loan policies, so that concerns about inequity will be better managed.



RECOMMENDATION 4:

The loan repayment program is still inequitably implemented. Thus, the government must totally waive the loan repayment requirement for all refugees, to ensure that the program treats all refugees fairly.

ADDITIONALITY IN PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP

Additionality is a principle of private sponsorship that ensures the PSRP is not overburdened with the resettlement of refugees. As refugee resettlement is primarily the government's responsibility, additionality ensures that privately-sponsored refugees only constitute an addition to the government's refugee resettlement work.

Private sponsorship operates with the understanding that the government can only resettle a small percentage of global refugees, and the private sector can contribute significantly to provide resettlement opportunities for many more refugees.¹⁵ Additionality ensures that private sponsorship would only supplement the government's resettlement efforts.

Some SAHs are concerned that current resettlement efforts may be in violation of additionality. They cite the IRCC's levels plan for 2017 as an indication that the 16,000 PSRs who will be resettled this year, are double the number of GARS (7,500) also to be resettled this year.¹⁶ However, other SAHs note that the high PSR numbers are representative of increased community engagement in private sponsorship.

One SAH said "it is typical of Canadians to step forward. What this does is to recognize how much

involvement there's been by sponsors, and how difficult it's been to deal with backlogs." Another noted that, "it's all about listening to us and responding to the involvement and interest of Canadians."

SAHs are concerned that the government has not optimized Canadians' interest in private sponsorship. Regarding the resettlement of Syrian refugees in 2016, an interview respondent suggested that "instead of the government being so hard pressed to bring in the quota they had promised, they could have put more cases out there through the BVOR list for sponsors to take." Generally, SAHs do not feel overburdened by the high number of PSR cases. One survey respondent said the government is "responding to what Canadians want to do."

Overall, SAHs want the government to make sponsorship easier and more sustainable for sponsors, and responsive to global refugee needs. In addition to focusing on the issue of additionality, SAHs urge the government to address the current concerns that inhibit their work. They say that increased allocation numbers will encourage more Canadians to sponsor refugees regardless of concerns on additionality.

EQUITY IN PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP

SAHs raised concerns about the prioritization of Syrian refugees in the speedy processing of applications, the allocation of application numbers, and the travel loan policy. SAHs' responses in this study indicate that the Canadian government's policies on private sponsorship need to be reformed.

Others raised concerns on how settlement resources are allocated in different provinces and cities. They claimed that rural Canadian areas do not get as many resources for settlement as cities do. Another SAH member highlighted that even in

cities, there is an imbalance in refugee resettlement, as many are resettled "where resources are already very stretched". Instead, "There should be a deliberate focus on designating resettlement roles to smaller cities outside of the...Regional District."^v In sum, SAHs generally agree that the program can be made more equitable than is currently the case.

While SAHs acknowledge the government's efforts to address inequity in sponsorship, they suggest that it must be fully consultative and broadly supported by the sponsorship community.

SAH-GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

In our 2014 study, many SAHs were concerned that the government had not consulted with the community on some of the private sponsorship policies that were implemented.¹⁷ They noted that meaningful consultation was key to the sustainability of the PSR program.

While many SAHs in our 2017 survey expressed concerns over the lack of government consultation on timelines, allocation limits, and the travel loan policy, a significant number of others believe the government's overall responsiveness to SAHs' concerns has increased. One SAH member emphasized that a few changes to private sponsorship in 2016 were first proposed by the SAH community. Representatives of IRCC have periodically met with members of the SAH community, to learn more about the challenges that impair private sponsorship work. A SAH representative noted that current consultations provide direct answers to SAHs' questions, which they would otherwise receive by email or other correspondence.

Still, other SAHs believe benefits will be realized only when their views are fully incorporated into government policy. SAHs want the decision-making process to significantly reflect local views and concerns. Furthermore, SAHs think the consultation process should transcend initial meetings to when the policies are fully implemented. Many also want more government consultation and communication on providing a multi-year levels plan as IRCC discussed at some consultations in 2016. Proper and consistent communication between the government and the SAH community is necessary to sustain SAHs' trust in the government.

The SAH Council spends a lot of time in dialogue with the government on policy issues. An interview

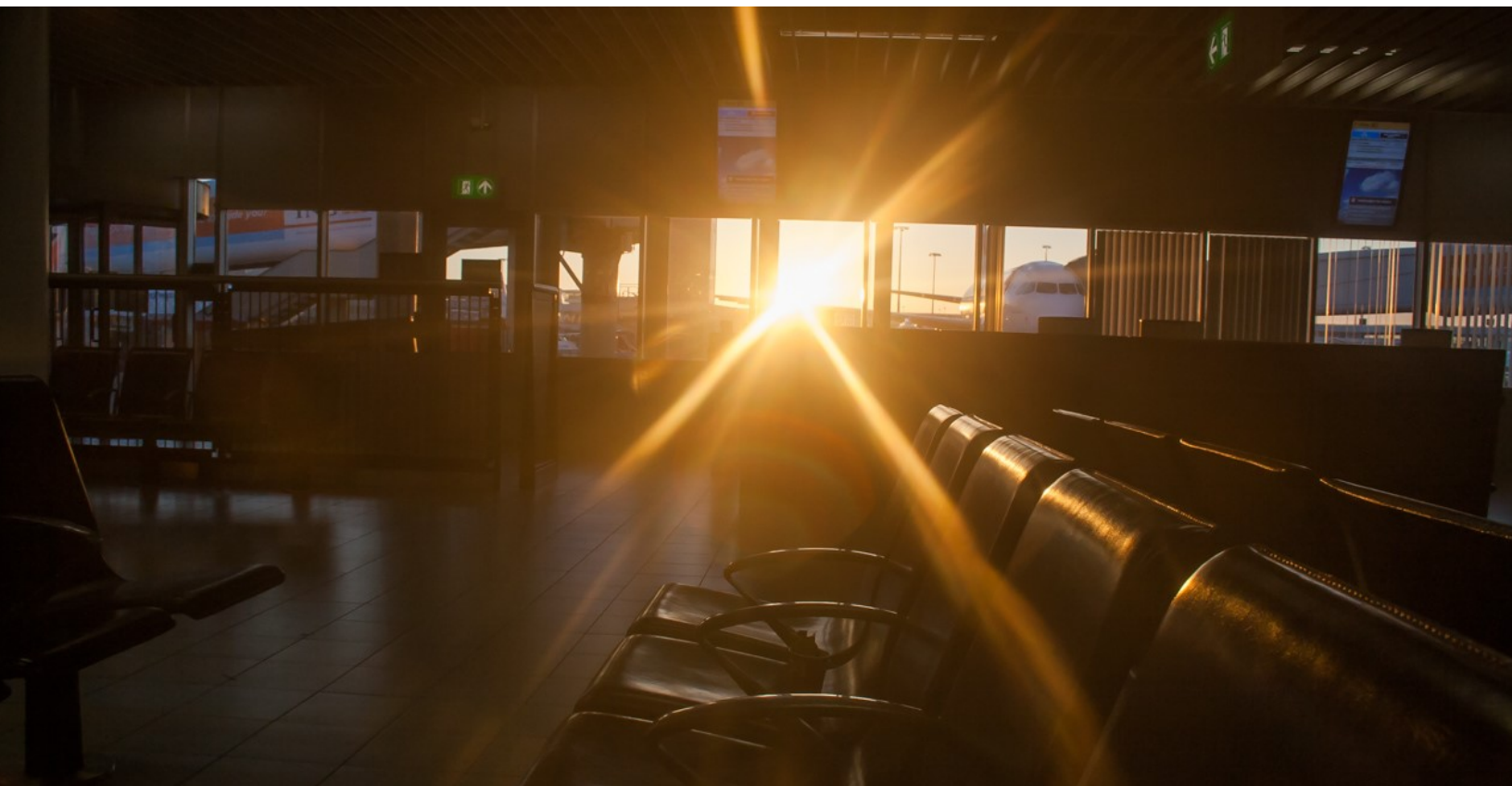


Photo: tavker/Flickr

respondent indicated that many in-person meetings and conference calls take place between the government and the Council on a regular basis. SAHs are concerned that they are not able to participate fully in these dialogues. The overall workload for each application precludes many members from engaging with the government more broadly in policy dialogues. Nonetheless, SAHs are confident in the SAH Council's ability to represent their concerns at these policy meetings.

While sponsors bear the responsibilities that come with private sponsorship, the government must continue to contribute its "fair share", in terms of resource allocation, responsive policy initiatives, and constant communication to enhance sponsors' work. SAHs want to build a sustainable working relationship with the government. They realize that dialogue is the most beneficial way to do so, provided the government makes more attempts to enhance cooperation.

^v For a breakdown of refugee resettlement numbers by province/territory and city, see <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/map.asp>.



CONCLUSION

Since its introduction in 1979, Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) has contributed significantly to the resettlement of over 275,000 refugees from across the globe. In recognition of the PSRP's place in Canada's refugee resettlement framework, former minister of immigration, John McCallum, noted that "Canada can offer protection to a greater number of refugees than those directly supported by the government..." because of the work that private sponsors do.¹⁸ He urged other countries to adopt Canada's private sponsorship model to tackle the world's refugee crisis. Some countries have approached Canada to learn about best practices on the private sponsorship system.^{vi}

The success of Canada's private sponsorship

program is dependent on full cooperation between the government and the sponsorship community. This will require regular public-private consultations, to ensure that information provided to our global partners is truly reflective of SAHs' experiences and recommendations.

Many Canadians have expressed tremendous support for refugees through private sponsorship since 2015. One SAH representative noted that "to have so much participation in sponsorship is so wonderful." This increased engagement in private sponsorship is vital for the resettlement of many more refugees, and must be sustained by straightforward, simple, and equitable government policies on private sponsorship (as it concerns Groups of Five, Community Sponsors, and SAHs).

vi See UNHCR, Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative promotes Canada's private refugee sponsorship model <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2016/12/58539e524/global-refugee-sponsorship-initiative-promotes-canadas-private-refugee.html>

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The government must ensure that SAH, G5, and Community Sponsor applications are processed in a timely manner. Additional financial and personnel resources should be allocated to processing centres to speed up processing times.
2. The processing of backlogged applications from global visa posts should be the government's priority for the next three years.
3. The government must provide SAHs with a three-year levels plan that provides estimates on the number of refugees from all sponsorship categories to be resettled within this period.
4. The loan repayment program is still inequitably implemented. Thus, the government must totally waive the loan repayment requirement for all refugees, to ensure that the program treats all refugees fairly.



ENDNOTES

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² Barbara Treviranus and Michael Casasola, Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program: A Practitioner's Perspective of its Past and Future (2003): <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12134-003-1032-0>

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