

Ottawa Area United Church and Affiliated Refugee Sponsors Request for Action

We are a coalition of 21 Eastern Ontario Region United Church and affiliate sponsoring groups working through SAHs. Many have been sponsoring refugees for years, some for decades.

We are increasingly concerned with the long processing times for refugees and we ask if there are any ways to move these hopeful immigrants forward with our full support.

We note specifically in Minister Fraser's Mandate Letter this:

Reduce application processing times, including to address delays that have been impacted by COVID-19.

We ask the Minister:

1. What is being done to shorten wait times for refugees from other places than Ukraine?
2. What is needed in order to make that happen? Are you getting what you need?
3. What do you advise us, the public, to do in order to help your government to fulfil its mandate re: refugees and to help the people we are prepared to sponsor?
4. Could we'd meet with you again to discuss how things are progressing in terms of refugees?

To illustrate the excessive delays, we asked our sponsors who had active cases for demographics and progress - if any - of their applications. While we are a small proportion of the refugee cases IRCC is processing, we feel this wait time data is representative of most Private Sponsorships.

Of the 12 groups that reported, there are 77 cases currently open representing 226 individuals.

These refugees come from: Syria, Eritrea, Burundi, Palestine, Iran, Iraq, DRC (Congo), and Afghanistan; and are sheltering in Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Qatar, Kenya, Jordan, Rwanda, Indonesia, Turkey, Kuwait, Ethiopia, South Africa, Sudan, Israel, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, Saudi Arabia, Germany (they were in Ukraine until March 2022), and Pakistan.

60 of the 77 cases were accepted at ROCO but show no other progress. Four (4) more are waiting at ROCO for acceptance/G#.

Only **13** were contacted or had an interview or medical, were approved for travel or asked for a quarantine plan but have not had travel confirmed.

Here is a breakdown of cases still waiting, by date of acceptance by ROCO and transfer to visa post:

1st half 2018 – 1

2nd half 2018 – 3 (plus 3 arrived Oct. 2021)

1st half 2019 – 1

2nd half 2019 – 4

1st half 2020 – 6

2nd half 2020 – 15 (plus 1 arrived late 2021)

2020/2021 exact dates not reported - 14

1st half 2021 – 22

2nd half 2021 – 7

2022 – 1

There were also several in 2019/2020 that took an excessive amount of time to even get accepted by ROCO with changing forms and documentation that the refugees couldn't get. They arrived in late 2020 and early 2022.

Some examples of the IRCC posted processing times for the Refugee portion of our applications at visa posts/immigration offices that our refugees have been waiting since 2020 or longer:

Egypt – 27 months
Iraq – 27 months
Lebanon – 45 months
Rwanda – no data listed
Uganda – 33 months
Indonesia – 24 months
Israel – 34 months
Sudan – 27 months
Ethiopia – 30 months

These processing times are unconscionable and put extreme strain on people already in dire situations as refugees from their home country and sheltering in often hostile 'safe' countries. Some are precarious in countries that do not recognize refugees, have changed regulations regarding refugees, or are openly hostile to the refugee's nationality or faith. Many do not allow the refugee to earn a living, Other aid is spotty and, in some cases, non-existent. Health services are difficult to access and living conditions often deplorable.

We ask Minister Fraser, what can be done to reduce processing times and bring these qualified persons to Canada?

Thank you for considering our request,

Respectfully,

Norma McCord, Janet Nield, Tom Schwarzkopf, Lee Torvi, Henry Venema
for the Eastern Ontario and Outaouais Region Refugee Coalition

With information supplied by:

Barrhaven United Church
Emmanuel United Church
Interchurch Refugee Group (Orleans, Rothwell and Navan-Vars UCs, and Epiphany Anglican, and Community Pentecostal Churches – Anglican Diocese of Ottawa SAH)
Kanata Stittsville Refugee Sponsorship Group (eight-member Anglican, Presbyterian and United Churches – Anglican Diocese of Ottawa SAH)
Kitchissippi United Church
Refuge NOW (Knox UC & Bells Corners UC)
MacKay United Church
Renfrew Refugee Welcome Group (World Renew SAH)
Rideau Park United Church
Riverside United Church
South Nepean Muslim Community (SNMC SAH)
Wesley United Church Pembroke

*Unless otherwise noted, members work through the United Church of Canada SAH